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The Intersection of Young Children's Play Activities and Multimodal Practices for Social Purposes

Rebecca Rohloff Clough

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This dissertation, THE INTERSECTION OF YOUNG CHILDREN'S PLAY ACTIVITIES AND MULTIMODAL PRACTICES FOR SOCIAL PURPOSES, by REBECCA I. R. CLOUGH, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, in the College of Education and Human Development, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chairperson, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty.

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THE INTERSECTION OF YOUNG CHILDREN'S PLAY ACTIVITIES AND MULTIMODAL PRACTICES FOR SOCIAL PURPOSES

by

REBECCA IRENE ROHLOFF CLOUGH

Under the Direction of Dr. Peggy Albers

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined how children's play activities and multimodal practices intersected for social purposes. Mediated Discourse Analysis (Scollon, 2001) informed the theory and methodology. Four questions guided the study: 1) In what types of play do preschoolers engage? 2) What strategies do preschoolers use to navigate the social boundaries of playframes? 3) What are the various modes and resources preschoolers use to engage in playframes and how do they use them? 4) What social positionings do preschoolers take on and resist in playframes? Participants included two co-teachers and twelve of the children in their pre-kindergarten classroom. Data was collected over a five-month period using participant observations and field notes. Analysis focused on multimodal discourse that took place during free play time. Four findings emerged from the study: 1) Six types of play emerged across playframes; 2) Children used entry, invitation, sustainment, and protection strategies in their playframes; 3) Children used various modes and resources, including their bodies, props, and alphabetic print, to enact character roles and social roles; and 4) Children moved fluidly within and across insider and outsider social positionings in playframes. This study extends research

focused on the social dynamics of young children's classroom play experiences and argues for an extended conceptualization of multimodal literacy as analyzed in young children's play.

INDEX WORDS: Play, mediated discourse analysis, preschool, multimodality, literacy

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By

REBECCA IRENE ROHLOFF CLOUGH

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in

The Department of Middle and Secondary Education

in

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Danny Lynn Rohloff, who passed away during my first semester as a doctoral student. At the age of seventeen, he dropped out of high school and enlisted in the United States Marine Corps, shortly thereafter serving two tours in the Vietnam War. After his passing, for the first time, I read his letters home from Vietnam, which revealed a young man's introspection about his education and the origin of his lifelong proclamation to his children and grandchildren: "Do good in school." My father, who went on to earn his G.E.D. and Associates degree, instilled in me courage, grit, a strong work ethic, and the value of education. I am forever grateful for his love, support, and steadfast confidence in me.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Play is children's work. This sentiment has been expressed by a multitude of influential early childhood scholars, such as John Dewey and Maria Montessori, as well as by Fred Rogers, the decades-long host of the popular children's program, *Mister Roger's Neighborhood*. Play as children's work forms the foundation of the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education, which originated in post-World War II Italy. Reggio Emilia is an approach to early childhood education that positions young children as "powerful, active, competent *protagonists* of their own growth" (Edwards, 2012, p. 150). Within Reggio Emilia schools, educators stimulate children's learning through a playful, project-based curriculum (Edwards, 2012). Moreover, children's intellectual development is supported through a focus on symbolic representation (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2012). In other words, children are encouraged to express themselves through a variety of modes and mediums, including spoken language, written language, painting, clay sculpture, music, shadow play, and dramatic play. Reggio Emilia has gained popularity in the United States since the release of a 1991 *Newsweek* article touting the northern Italian school as one of the top ten in the world (Kantrowitz & Wingert, 1991).

I was first drawn to the Reggio Emilia approach more than a decade ago as a mother looking for a preschool home for my young daughter. I selected a Reggio Emilia-inspired preschool based in part on buzz phrases: *play-based*, *emergent curriculum*, and *child-centered* (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2012). Although my professional background was in secondary education, my understanding of inquiry-based learning for adolescents led me to believe that a play-based educational environment would serve my preschool-aged daughter well. I also made

this decision as an educational professional within the context of a broader accountability culture.

As a secondary teacher, I had over the years experienced a shift in the field towards high-stakes testing and standards, and then, as a mother of a preschooler, wondered about the consequences of this culture on early childhood education. The decision to enroll my daughter in a play-based preschool proved positive for my family, and she, along with her younger brother, were well-served by Reggio Emilia-inspired programs. Eventually, I joined the teaching staff at my son's preschool and began the second stage of my professional career, this time focusing on early childhood education. Later, as a doctoral student exploring research interests, I kept coming back to the concept of the play-based curriculum and my curiosity about children's social and learning experiences in such contexts. After proposing a research topic and securing the necessary permissions, I entered a Reggio Emilia-inspired preschool, not as a parent or teacher, but as a researcher.

Play is at Risk

In the United States, play in early childhood learning settings is at risk. Play has been marginalized in schools to the point that young children's play appears subversive in those settings (Genishi & Dyson, 2014). A once-mainstay in the early grades, recess is no longer an integral part of every child's school day. For example, a bill passed in Georgia only recently required elementary schools to schedule daily recess, but the bill not only failed to mandate a duration for unstructured play, but also allowed structured physical education programs to replace recess (Tagami, 2018). The shift over the decades towards structured academics and away from play in early childhood settings impacts children. Strauss (2015; 2018) argued that a decline in play in preschoolers is associated with a rise in sensory issues, while Christakis (2016)

used stronger language. In a recent *Atlantic* article that examined the tension between academic learning and developmentally appropriate practices that include play, Christakis argued that “the new preschool is *crushing* [emphasis added] children” (n.p.). This sentiment has been expressed elsewhere. In a recent *Washington Post* article, Strauss (2018) argued that children are being shuffled between activities at an alarming rate, with an average of 13 or 14 transitions per day in the typical kindergarten schedule, leaving little room for extended periods of child-driven inquiry and play experiences.

This shift towards academics in early childhood is framed by several key moments in early childhood education reform. In 2010, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) released the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) which outlined learning goals for K-12 students for the end of each grade in language arts and mathematics, and was subsequently adopted by most states. In 2013, President Obama, in his State of the Union address, proposed “working with states to make high-quality preschool available to every single child in America” (n.p.), thereby raising the question about the characteristics of a high-quality preschool. In 2012, the state of Georgia, which Obama referenced in his 2013 speech, instituted Quality Rated, a tiered rating system designed to improve the quality of early childhood learning and care (Ogbu, 2014). In 2011, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2017) announced the first recipients of the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge, a competitive grant program for states designed to improve outcomes for early childhood education that included an emphasis on developing common standards across the state and measuring outcomes to determine children’s kindergarten readiness. Since the release of the CCSS and the inception of Race to the Top, nearly all fifty states have developed comprehensive academic standards for the preschool age group. As a

result of a standards-based educational climate that emphasizes kindergarten readiness, early childhood educators have shifted their focus and teaching practices towards skills and assessment and away from play (Brown, 2011; Pyle & Bigelow, 2015). The time period from three years old to seven years old marks a transitional period for children from preschool to formal education, and, as a result, play has been implicated during this period due to the assumption that children need less play in order to become school ready (Wood, 2014).

The Importance of Play

Play and learning do not need to be dichotomized. Play is important to children's early learning experiences (Vygotsky, 1978), as is the quality of children's play (Broadhead & Burt, 2012; Stagnitti & Lewis, 2015). When children are supported in their play, many varied benefits emerge. Play provides a supportive context for the development of creative thinking and problem solving (Robson & Rowe, 2012; Whitebread, Coltman, Jameson, & Lander, 2009). Play also supports children's socio-emotional development, including perspective-taking, empathy, reflection, and emotional regulation (Ashiabi, 2007), and also benefits children's sense of self (Wood, 2014). Importantly, play supports the development of children's academic skills, including math and literacy skills, particularly when an adult supports their play. In line with this view, the National Association for the Education of Young Children ([NAEYC], 2009) described the developmental appropriateness of play and the benefits of incorporating play into the preschool curriculum.

Play-based classrooms have been shown to better benefit children than academically-oriented classrooms. In a longitudinal study examining how children's preschool experience related to later academic achievement, Marcon (2001) found that children who had attended academically-oriented preschool classes had lower grades in year six than peers who had

attended child-initiated classes. Marcon postulated that introducing formative learning experiences too early inhibited children's academic growth. Likewise, Whitebread et al. (2009) argued against formal education before the ages of four or five and for playful pedagogies during that time period. Broadhead and Burt (2012) argued that young children not only need to play, but need challenging play; during the transitional period from ages three to seven, children need play that challenges them towards "social and symbolic complexity" (p. 153).

Play provides academic benefits for young children, including the development of math and literacy skills, as well as creative thinking. Children engage with patterns and shapes during play, as well as enumeration and magnitudes, among other mathematical concepts. Block play and puzzle play has been shown to support geometry learning, numbering, and patterning, while game play has been shown to support number development and counting (Wager & Parks, 2014). Symbolic play, meanwhile, is related to developing phonological awareness (Bergen & Mauer, 2000), which is an important predictor for later reading ability. Pretend play, in which children use verbal and nonverbal modes to depict events, facilitates narrative recall and retelling (Stagnitti & Lewis, 2015) and is associated with children's abilities to provide more complex narratives (Kim, 1999). Likewise, Weisber, Zosh, Hirsh-Pasek, and Golinkoff (2013) argued that play promotes children's development of language skills, especially when adults not only guide play but prioritize children's interests and follow their lead. Play supports creative thinking and problem solving (Robson & Rowe, 2012; Whitebread et al., 2009). Robson and Rowe's (2012) analysis of the pretend play episodes of two- and three-year-olds showed high levels of hypothesizing and imagining, and pretend play episodes shared by peers showed even higher levels of articulating ideas and persuading others.

Play also crosses classroom contexts. Genishi and Dyson (2014) documented children in one classroom who regularly engaged in an outdoor game of chase called *Pine Cone Wars*. When snow on the playground one day prevented physical, gross motor play, the children continued the game indoors with the use of manipulatives. Soon after, the game carried over into the young children's drawings, where they used stick figures to represent people and buildings. Later, the *Pine Cone Wars* play theme appeared in their emerging alphabetic writings and contributed to the children's increased use of details in their writings. Genishi and Dyson's study illustrated how children's play activities can move across time and contexts, including into traditional academic subjects, such as writing.

Research Phenomenon

Play, like literacy, is a social practice (Street, 1984) couched in a particular context. Weisberg et al. (2013) define play according to three characteristics: 1) Play has no clear purpose or objective; 2) play is often exaggerated; and 3) play is joyful and voluntary (p. 41). They also consider the "locus of control" (p. 42), or who determines the direction of the play, the child or adult. For the purpose of this study, I focused on child-directed play or what Wood (2014) calls *free play*. Free play is marked by children's ability to select their own activities, playmates, themes, and learning. Definitions of play are varied, however, so the literature review will present additional conceptualizations of play.

This study extends previous research by exploring the nature of children's play, specifically examining how children's play activities and multimodal practices intersected for social purposes. Play has been conceptualized in the literature in many ways (e.g., Broadhead & Burt, 2012; Hughes, 2002; Marsh, Plowman, Yamada-Rice, Bishop, & Scott, 2016; Neitzel, Alexander, & Johnson, 2008; Wood, 2014), focusing on such things as interest orientations and

sociability. This study, which drew from multimodal perspectives (Hodge & Kress, 1988; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996), conceptualized children's play through a slightly different lens by focusing on how children used materials during play. Previous research has also examined the benefits of play, including how play supports the development of academic skills, socio-emotional skills, and executive function, which includes regulating thoughts and behaviors (e.g., Ashiabi, 2007; Robson & Rowe, 2012; Whitebread et al., 2009). Research has suggested that adult supports for children's play provide improved benefits (Bodrova, 2008; Cohen & Uhry, 2011), but it is not clear how exactly educators can support children's play when the nature of children's play is not well understood.

Children use various modes and resources during play to construct and interpret texts. For this reason, Wohlwend (2011a) argued that children's play practices are embodied literacy practices. In line with Wohlwend (2011a), this study considers the multimodal resources, such as alphabetic print, props, and body language, that preschoolers use for meaning-making purposes while engaged in play, including dramatic play. While engaged in play, children use resources to build shared meaning allowing their pretend worlds—their social worlds—to be read as texts they are co-authoring. When young children set the stage for dramatic play (e.g., moving furniture around, selecting items to include in the space), they use multiple processes necessary for conventional writing, such as “planning, classification, design, and display” (Kress, 1997, p. 98). Additionally, children engaged in dramatic play draw on narrative skills as they work together to clarify roles, plot lines, or the meanings of their concrete tools (Bomer, 2003), such as deciding whether a stick should represent a magic wand or a unicorn. Preschool classrooms that provide young children with opportunities to play, an inherently multimodal process, sets the context for them to engage in literate activities. Because this study examined preschool-aged

children who may not have been able to fluently read and write with alphabetic signs, a multimodal perspective positioned preschoolers as already literate, using the modes and resources available to them to interpret and construct meaning. Data was collected in a preschool in which teachers used a play-based curriculum and attended to the physical environment by providing the children with materials with the intention to foster multiple possibilities for meaning.

Young children's play practices are tethered to D/discourses (Gee, 2013). Big D Discourse functions as an "identity kit," while little d discourse refers to language, which allows people to *say* things, but also to *do* things and to *be* things (Gee, 2013). Gee explained the concept of an identity kit as the Discourse of a particular role, which includes how we dress, talk, carry ourselves, and often write in order to be recognized in that role by others. For example, the identity kit of a Starbucks barista may include a green apron, the gesture of smiling, the act of writing names on cups, and detailed knowledge about coffee types and preparation. In a preschool classroom setting, uttering the words, "abracadabra" may be a part of a child's identity kit. This kit may allow a young child to become a powerful wizard, but enacting this identity requires more than verbal language. To persuade others to accept the enacted wizard identity, the child may use the nonverbal mode to layer meaning. For examples, while saying "abracadabra," the child might carry a stick as a magic wand and address interlocutors with a serious glare. Gee's (2013) concept of an *identity kit* influenced how I approached this study. In other words, I considered not only the children's words and actions as they played, but also what social roles they were enacting. I considered how the modes and resources they used fashioned a particular social identity. Modal systems, including language and gestures, are tied to notions of "embodied actions and social activity" (Gee, 2013, p. 138), and, as a result, are always value-laden,

encouraging others to act or adopt certain perspectives. In other words, modal systems have no meaning outside of social and personal contexts. Therefore, I also considered the social context in which the children played.

Educational contexts, including preschools, are not value-neutral settings, but arenas where various groups compete for power (Marsh, 2006). Discourses, which are identity kits valued by different communities, have benefits and liabilities that vary depending on the context (Gee, 2011). Different contexts can constrain children by perpetuating dominant Discourses, such as stereotyped roles of gender, but children can challenge these norms. For example, in Wohlwend's (2011b) study of kindergarteners, she observed that a group of girls engaged in dramatic play struggled with the tension between an accurate reenactment of Disney princess characters and their desire to perform more empowered roles. For these girls, play ultimately served as a transformative tool, altering the meaning of the princesses from "damsels in distress" to "self-rescuing princesses" (Wohlwend, 2011b, p. 16).

Corsaro (2012) described transformative power of play as "plying the frame" (p. 499). That is, dramatic play is not a mere imitation of adult roles, but an elaboration of roles and challenging of roles. Play allows children to address their own concerns, which often deal with issues of status and power, such as when a child engaged in pretend play as an ice cream shop customer deliberately orders a flavor they know the shopkeeper does not have, creating a disequilibrium that children must work to balance (Corsaro, 2005; 2012). Corsaro's (2012) concept of *plying the frame* influenced my consideration of the social dynamics in the classroom. For example, I did not assume by default that children were imitating adult roles during dramatic play, but instead considered the possibility that they were elaborating and challenging these roles in ways that I might better understand by analyzing how they used available modes and

resources. In Wohlwend's (2011b) study of kindergarteners, a rocking chair, typically reserved for the teacher, at times functioned instead as the *author's chair* during the children's free play; during those times, the children would sit in the chair to share their writings and drawings with the class. However, she noted that calling on classmates took prominence over listening to their feedback. In this case, the children used the chair to mediate their ability to enact a teacher-like role and nominate speakers, an act that carries great weight in a classroom (Cazden, 2001). "Norms for talk tell which members can talk, when, and about what" (Lee, 2013, p. 281), and it is the teacher who typically facilitates the creation of these norms. The use of the chair in Wohlwend's study, however, allowed the children to upend these norms, at least momentarily. Wohlwend's conceptualization of the author's chair as a tool for the children to reposition themselves into roles of authority also influenced how I approached this study. For example, I considered how the children might have used play as a vehicle for trying on new identity kits (Gee, 2013), such as teacher-like roles. This study builds on Corsaro (2005; 2012) and Wohlwend's (2011a, 2011b) work and other past research by examining how children use play activities and available resources to participate in classroom communities and challenge social hierarchies.

Overview of the Study Design

This qualitative study, which used the tools of Mediated Discourse Analysis (Scollon, 2001), examined how young children's play activities and multimodal practices intersected for social purposes. Specifically, this study was guided by four questions: 1) In what types of play do preschoolers engage? 2) What strategies do preschoolers use to navigate the social boundaries of playframes? 3) What modes and resources do children use to engage in playframes and how do they use them? 4) What social positionings do preschoolers take on and resist in playframes?

This study builds on previous work, focused on children's literacy practices, in an urban, Reggio Emilia-inspired preschool (Edwards et al., 2012) in the urban Southeast from May 2014–December 2015. Within the data collected during this 18-month period, I analyzed broader trends in the video data collected from three classrooms through participant observations. I found that a) the nonverbal discourse between a teacher and child changed as the preschooler wrestled with emerging alphabet literacy skills, taking on a more-teacher-like role; and b) that preschoolers communicated with each other through their written and visual texts during morning meeting for social purposes, even though the teacher controlled the seating arrangement and nominated speakers. As part of this previous work, I examined the multimodal discourse of one three-year-old student as he elicited help from his teacher in writing his name on his artwork, and the multimodal nature of the children's communication with peers during morning meeting.

Two findings emerged from my analysis of the collected data. First, as the child began to direct the teacher in his intentions for her to write his name, the teacher's stance changed: She moved from a standing to squatting to kneeling position. I found that the teacher's nonverbal discourse, including open-palm movements and questioning gaze, deemphasized her authority as the child began to enact an increasingly agentic role. I also argued that this nonverbal discourse mediated the child's emerging alphabetic awareness by providing him with an increased sense of agency. Second, I examined the literary elements and genres preschoolers used during morning meeting time as they shared the writing and drawings they were currently composing. Even though the teacher assigned seats and nominated speakers, the children used depictions of a tiger in multiple modes (e.g., verbal, visual, gestural) in order to not only communicate with each other through their texts, but to socially align or distance themselves from their peers. These two

findings influenced how I approached the current study design and the theoretical lens for my dissertation research.

This current study was designed and based upon findings from this previous work in this same preschool in two distinct ways. First, I wanted to more closely understand child-child interactions as they engaged in play, what types of play emerged, and how these play frames illuminated the social positionings of the children. Second, I wanted to study more closely the role of multimodality in how children worked with, interpreted, and produced meaning through their embodied actions and class materials. To accomplish this, I examined the play of two focal children and six distinct play frames, and other children involved in these play frames. The study was conducted in one classroom that was shared by two co-teachers. Data was collected between August 2017 and December 2017. During this time frame, I conducted ten observations, many of which were video recorded, each at least one hour in length in accordance with teacher preferences and curricular schedules. Analysis focused on the nature of the multimodal discourse and took place as children engaged in free play. Within the data collected in this study, I chose two subsets of data for microanalysis in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of peer interactions.

Contribution to the Field

This study contributes to the discussion in research around preschool children and play in several ways. First, much of the previous research on preschool education focused on children's academic skills, such as letter-sound awareness. This research studied the social context of young children's academic development and their play experiences, an area underrepresented within the overall body of early childhood education research. Second, as researchers have suggested, young children draw upon multimodal resources during play, such as dialogue,

storyline, character, and movement (Bomer, 2003; Kress, 1997; Wohlwend, 2011a). Play is not value-neutral. Through play, children socially position themselves or others and conform to or resist various Discourses, such as gender stereotypes (Wohlwend 2011a, 2011b). The actions of children engaged in play is always linked to social capital and may have ramifications outside the classroom and in broader social institutions (Corsaro, 2005). Thus, this study examined how preschoolers' play activities and multimodal practices intersected for social purposes, with attention paid to power relationships and identities enacted. Third, previous research on children's play practices has focused on older children, especially concerning how Discourses (Gee, 2011) emerge. This study focused on the pre-kindergarten age group. Focus on a younger population is important because children begin enacting and internalizing Discourses before they can read and write by traditional measures (Heath, 1983). Fourth, play is inherently multimodal, so this study works from the stance that children are already actively literate. They often forefront modes other than the alphabetic, and that from traditional print-based perspectives, these same children may be considered only later emerging into literacy. Thus, this study broadens understandings of how young children actively make meaning by examining the multimodal resources that preschoolers draw upon during play.

Theoretical Framework: Mediated Discourse Analysis

This qualitative study is located in Mediated Discourse Analysis (MDA), a theory that focuses on discourse *in* action, rather than *as* action (Scollon, 2001). MDA views real-time social action as inherently discursive, both producing and reproducing social structures such as traditional gender roles. Significantly, MDA uses mediated action, rather than only transcripts of language, as the primary unit of analysis and focuses on “social actors *as they are acting*” (Scollon, 2001, p. 3) with cultural tools (Wertsch, 1991). Cultural tools may include writing

utensils, a child's body, dolls, costumes, or even the arrangement of furniture in a classroom. Cultural tools are always value-laden, embedded with histories that enable or constrain its users. For example, a Barbie doll historicizes the idyllic female form, a form that has for decades provided a basis for how young children understand female beauty. Likewise, young girls learn how to perform as females through play with cultural tools such as dolls (Wohlwend, 2011a). Yet, as Wohlwend has shown, play with cultural tools can not only function to assimilate children into Discourses, but also function as a form of resistance. Language is a cultural tool, but not the *only* cultural tool; thus, MDA places actions with non-linguistic tools on par with verbal discourse. MDA focuses on mediated action, such as children engaging with props in play, because it is in these moments that Discourses are instantiated as social action.

This theory is guided by three main tenets (Scollon, 2001):

- a) discourse as social action,
- b) communication as necessary for social action, and
- c) communicated meanings derived from shared histories.

Discourse as social action. Discourse is a type of social action. People bring with them historical and cultural understandings of language and literacy and play that are value-laden and not necessarily shared by others (Street, 1984). Because discourse is a type of social action, the best unit of analysis is the mediated action (Wertsch, 1991), or how people engage with cultural tools, such as pencils, language, clothing, architecture, or even institutions, in their real-world, tacit actions associated with these tools (Scollon, 2001). Consider, for example, how people engage with the discourse of academic standards. Norris and Jones (2005) argued that meaning is not inherent in discourse, but rather, meaning arises out of how we use discourse. Additionally, all social actions take place within intersecting practices that position people socially, as insiders

or outsiders, to various social groups, as well as offer opportunities to negotiate new positions (Scollon, 2001). Thus, preschool standards are not meaningful outside of social contexts; rather, within the context of classroom settings, for example, academic standards are used to categorize children as proficient or not, and therefore, as insiders or outsiders to accepted ways of “doing school” within those contexts.

Communication as necessary for social action. “To be social an action must be communicated” (Scollon, 2001, p. 7). According to Scollon, cultural tools, including language and material items, mediate the production of shared meanings, and the multiple cultural tools involved in mediated action are related to each other and to their sites of engagement. For example, academic standards, a cultural tool used by administrators and districts, are used to categorize children as proficient or not. This practice becomes a social action when results of assessments based on those standards are communicated via individual scores reports or school grade reports. Cultural tools in a preschool classroom include props in a dramatic play center, writing utensils, furniture, and language. Cultural tools in a mediated action do not carry equal weight; some tools may become more salient than others in varying contexts and help shape individual and social systems. For example, within an arts-based summer program, cultural tools such as academic standards may carry less weight than cultural tools such as dance or music.

Communicated meanings derived from shared histories. The nature of interdiscursivity positions multiple histories in relation to each other, so that histories may align or stand in tension with one other (Scollon, 2001). For example, educational discourse is interdiscursive with business discourse when college students are conceptualized as customers or clients (Scollon & Scollon, 2003). These histories are also intertextual, borrowing from past texts while also influencing in future texts (Scollon, 2001). For example, conceptualizing college

students as customers borrows from the discourse of advertisements and company branding, which is manifested in the college recruitment materials that position prospective students as consumers and diplomas as products.

From the perspective of MDA, “it is the constellation of linked practices which makes for the uniqueness of the site of engagement and identities thus produced, not necessarily the specific practices and actions themselves” (Scollon, 2001, p. 5). For example, when the action of handing a cup of coffee to another person in a Starbucks coffee shop intersects with other practices and actions, such as operating a cash register and verbally stating a price, it becomes a transaction and produces barista and customer identities. The action of handing a cup of coffee across a counter top alone does not produce these identities. As a result, MDA is sometimes referred to as *nexus analysis*. In other words, MDA examines the links between *multiple* intersecting practices and actions in order to understand the identities produced.

MDA as a theoretical and critical framework is apt for this study because it allows the researcher to move beyond a focus on isolated actions to the nexus of multiple simultaneous practices and how that nexus produces identity and power relations. In a preschool classroom, linked practices, such as handing, singing, dressing, and drawing, produce the identities of the children working with various cultural tools in any given moment, and these identities are not value-neutral. The intersection of shared practices may both bind and exclude group membership. Thus, the purpose of MDA is to illuminate power relationships and how even the smallest actions, such the actions of preschoolers engaged in dramatic play, can affect the broader Discourse community and social institutions.

Drawing from MDA, sociolinguistics (Gee, 2011; 2013), and social semiotics (Hodge & Kress, 1988), I define literacy as the social practice of meaning-making (Street, 1998). An

expansive view of literacy allows me to view preschool children not as pre-literate, but as already literate, using the multimodal tools available to them (e.g. voice inflection, gestures, crayons) to construct and interpret meaning. Literacy is more than a cognitive skill; it is a social practice (Street, 1998). As such, “literacy is something people *do* in particular social contexts, rather than something individuals *acquire*” (Serafini, 2014, p. 19; italics in original). Moreover, literacy is dependent on social context so that one may be considered literate in one context, but not in another. For example, one may be considered highly literate in a Shakespearean literature classroom, but not in a hip-hop recording studio, and vice-versa. There are different types of literacies that serve different purposes, tied to various identities and actions. In this study, I used the terms *reading* and *writing* to refer to meaning-making specifically with alphabetic signs, while using *literacy* more broadly as the social practice of meaning making with various modes and resources.

Epistemological Orientation

Meaning is neither objective nor subjective; we do not discover meaning or create meaning, but rather, “we construct meaning” from the world and its objects (Crotty, 1998, p. 44). As a researcher holding this view on the nature of knowledge, my epistemological standpoint for this project is constructionism. Constructionism is “the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). The social construction of knowledge played an important role in this study, which examined how children’s play activities and multimodal practices intersect for social purposes.

According to constructionism, meaning is couched in culture, and therefore, set within historical and social perspectives. “Our culture brings things into view for us and endows them with meaning and, by the same token, leads us to ignore other things” (Crotty, 1998, p. 54). This study questioned the Western, academic conceptualization of early childhood education and children’s play and literacy. As a constructionist researcher, I did not seek to discover a true definition or create a new definition of play or literacy. Rather, I was responding to “an invitation to reinterpretation” (Crotty, 1998, p. 51). According to constructionism, “there is no true or valid interpretation. There are useful interpretations” (Crotty, 1998, p. 47). Therefore, I hope that the meanings I have fashioned out of observations of children in their preschool classroom will prove useful to educators and our culture at large.

Additionally, because I was interested in examining children’s play activities and the resources and modes they used to mediate meaning, I found Vygotsky’s theories helpful. Vygotsky (2016) argued that play is not only an activity that children engage in, but that play, and particularly imaginary play, is central to children’s development. He went on to describe “the movement in the field of meaning” (p. 17) in children’s imaginative play. In other words, actions and objects stand in for other actions and objects during children’s play. This symbolic play carries with it messages that serve to include some and exclude others, and engages children in role play that convey community and societal values.

Significance

Kindergarten readiness is often seen as the end-goal for children’s preschool experiences, and the focus is often on children’s academic preparation, such as the acquisition of knowledge about letters, numbers, shapes, and colors. Although these skills are important, this focus has created a play/learning binary that has marginalized play in the preschool classroom. Yet, play is

an essential element of children's academic development, and in fact, a playful approach supports learning in core content areas by exceeding expectations outlined in the Common Core State Standards (Wohlwend & Pepler, 2015). Understanding play practices as multimodal literacy practices reprioritizes play in a narrow curricular environment that has become increasingly skills-based and assessment driven (Wohlwend, 2008). Play has been shown to support social and emotional awareness, which are important indicators for future academic performance, as well as facilitate deeper understanding of scientific concepts and literary text structures. When preschool educators understand the benefits of play and how play enables children to interpret and construct meaning with various semiotic signs, they can reprioritize play in the curriculum by providing time and materials to facilitate deep play. Additionally, when parents and policy makers understand play as a contributor to kindergarten readiness, they may be more likely to support preschool programs that center play in the curriculum, rather than position play as an optional add-on.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

“In play a child is always above his average age, above his daily behavior; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself.” (Vygotsky, 2016, p. 18).

The literature review situates this study within a broader context of early childhood education, considering what has already been learned about children’s play and literacy as well as opportunities for future exploration (Boote & Beile, 2005, 2006). The research presented in this chapter includes work that focused on the early childhood age group, defined by NAEYC (2009) as birth through age eight. Because this study included participants from a pre-K classroom, the literature review is weighted towards research that focused on the three- to five-year-old age group. This age range also marks the transitional period for young children from pre-kindergarten to formal educational settings. The literature review justifies the importance of this study and its design by explaining how this study builds on past research. It is divided into five main themes.

Each section of the literature review builds on the prior section in order to expand how children’s play and literacy is defined and understood. The first section, conceptualizations of young children’s play, describes young children’s play and its importance in learning. Various frameworks for describing children’s play are presented, along with a focus on terminology used to describe dramatic play. Second, play and children’s social world examine the social dynamics of young children’s play, including how children protect their play from disruption. The third section, young children’s reading and writing development, describes how children draw from multiple cueing systems to form and test hypotheses about print that changes over time. Fourth, multimodal literacy expands the concept of literacy to include modes other than the alphabetic,

such as images, sounds, and gestures. I present the research of several scholars who examined how children use different semiotic modes for meaning-making purposes. This section also examines the connections between classroom materials, children's play activities, and multimodal literacy practices. The fifth section, play and literacy connections, explores the relationship between play and literacy, ultimately arguing that play is a type of multimodal literacy (Wohlwend, 2011a). These areas of research in early childhood education allowed me to better view the preschool-aged participants in this study as agentic meaning-makers and literate actors.

Conceptualization of Young Children's Play

Play has often been called young children's work. Fred Rogers, the longtime host of the children's program, *Mister Roger's Neighborhood*, said, "Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But for children, play is serious learning." (Moore, 2014, n.p.). Children actively make sense of the world before formal instruction (Short & Harste, 1996, p. 12), and they do so in part through various forms of play. For very young children, there is no clear distinction between play and learning (Einarsdottir, 2011). Over time, however, children do begin to distinguish play from work, and they do so based on perceptions of freedom, choice, control, affect, and materials (Howard, 2010). Play in school contexts has been conceptualized by the adults in those settings in many ways—as a break from learning, as an add-on to learning, and as a vehicle for learning. Play has been defined in terms of its driving force, such as child-initiated, adult-guided, or curriculum-driven play (Wood, 2014); in terms of children's interest orientations, such as conceptual, procedural, creative, or social interest orientations (Neitzel, Alexander, & Johnson, 2008); along a social continuum (Broadhead, 2001); according to activity types (Hughes, 2002) and social roles (Rowe & Neitzel, 2010); and within digital contexts

(Marsh et al., 2016). This section of the literature review explores each of these conceptualizations of play and their relationship to young children's academic learning.

Johnson (2014) outlined three guiding orientations to the play and curriculum interface: 1) segregation; 2) juxtaposition; and 3) integration models. In the *segregation model*, play is separate from education and used to provide breaks from learning, such as a recess. In the *juxtaposition model*, play times and learning times are separate, but balanced, and may be aligned via themes. For example, concepts about sea life may be taught during learning times in order to support children's play time activities with ocean themes and materials. In the *integration model*, teachable moments are infused into play. In this case, play may be valued as a context for delivering curriculum, and teachers might interrupt play for teacher-determined goals, such as asking children engaged in grocery store play to categorize food props.

Wood (2014) considered how play and pedagogy are positioned in relation to each other and defined three modes of young children's play. In Wood's case, the categories were based on the driving-force behind the play: 1) child-initiated; 2) adult-guided; and 3) technicist/policy-driven play. *Child-initiated play* reveals children's interests and needs, which then influence teachers' curricular planning and implementation in order to expand and extend children's learning. Significantly, in child-initiated play, children have the opportunity to select their own activities, play partners, themes, and learning. Additionally, child-initiated play allows for children to not only explore materials and concepts, but also explore a sense of self. *Adult-guided play* overlaps with child-initiated play when teachers consider curricular goals but are responsive to children's goals and interests. In this mode, teachers link children's play activities to adult-directed activities. *Technicist/policy-driven play*, on the other hand, is structured towards defined

learning goals. This type of play privileges outcomes that can be assessed by teachers, while subordinating children's constructed meanings and intentions.

Teacher's beliefs about the play-pedagogy interface impacts how they structure their classrooms. Pyle and Bigelow (2015) conducted an observational and interview study in order to examine teacher's approaches to incorporating play into their kindergarten classrooms. They found that teachers' belief about play and learning fell into one of three profiles: "(a) play as peripheral to learning, (b) play as a vehicle for social and emotional development, and (c) play as a vehicle for academic learning" (p. 388). They also found that teachers supported and participated in play in ways that aligned with their thinking about play and learning. The teacher who saw play as peripheral to learning, for example, used play time to withdraw individual students for direct instruction, while the teacher who saw play as a tool for social and emotional development would join in the children's play and model problem solving strategies. In both instances, play was child-led. In the third classroom, the teacher modeled play and co-constructed play contexts with the children; she used play to introduce and extend academic concepts to the children. The children also perceived play in different ways in the context of each classroom, reflecting the teacher's orientations to the play-pedagogy interface.

Neitzel et al. (2008) defined play in terms of children's interest orientations. In their longitudinal study, they examined the activities of 109 four-year-olds at home and their later pursuits in the kindergarten classroom. They defined four interest orientations: 1) conceptual; 2) procedural; 3) creative; and 4) social. Children who reflected a *conceptual interest orientation* interacted with materials with a focus on concepts and their properties. These children might seek out information on topics, such as dinosaurs or outer space, and engage in activities in which they could organize information. Children who reflected a *procedural interest orientation*

often focused on skill acquisition and participated in structured activities. For example, these children enjoyed puzzles, games, and literacy, but during literacy activities, children focused on the processes involved in learning to read and write, rather than the content. Children who reflected a *creative interest orientation* enjoyed activities such as enacting character roles and engaging in artistic endeavors. These children focused on the transformational nature of materials and concepts. Likewise, engagement with literacy was focused less on the reading and writing processes and more on imagination and symbolic representation. Children who reflected a *social interest orientation* enjoyed dramatic play. For these children, dramatic play offered the opportunity for role-play and the enactment of roles that imitate, practice, and test structures and rules of society. Neitzel et al. found that children's interest orientations were important because they not only influenced what activities children chose during play in this study, but also how they focused their attention and understanding of materials, actions, and interactions.

Broadhead (2001) defined play in terms of children's sociability and cooperation. Broadhead's study charted the language and actions of four- and five-year-olds in English primary schools engaged in play using a tool developed and refined for this study called the Social Play Continuum. The continuum includes four levels: 1) associative play; 2) social play; 3) highly social play; and 4) cooperative play. *Associative play* is marked by little regard to proximity to peers, un-sustained eye contact, and little discourse. During *social play*, children may speak, but discourse is not always related to the play activity. Children may maintain proximity to children engaged in associative play and periodically return to associative play, at which point altercations requiring teacher mediation may become evident. *Highly social play* is marked by more cohesive social groups in which children share ideas that extend play themes, but the locations of play may shift. During *cooperative play*, players typically remain in one

location and sustain play until the completion of a shared goal. During cooperative play, children engage in dialogue related to the play theme, demonstrate high levels of concentration, and resolve altercations within the play. As children progress along the continuum from associative play to cooperative play, they seek out adult interactions less and interact more with peers. Also, Broadhead argued that as children progress along the continuum, “children’s play becomes more interactive, more challenging and potentially more satisfying where there are opportunities to build sequences of reciprocal action” (p. 30). While cooperative play may appear noisier and more chaotic, children in cooperative play engage in problem solving, joint goal setting and achieving, and rich language interactions (Broadhead and Burt, 2012). In order to progress along the continuum, children need *time*—time to become familiar with each other and their resources (Broadhead, Howard, & Wood, 2010).

Smith and Pellegrini (2008) described five play types: locomotor play, social play, object play, language play, and pretend play. *Locomotor play* pertains to physical play that focuses on gross motor skills. *Social play* pertains to children playing with parents, caregivers, or other children and facilitates children’s acquisition of social scripts. Smith and Pellegrini include *rough-and-tumble play*, which can look like actual fighting, in this category of play due to the social nature of the physical play. *Object play* pertains to children’s play with materials and can involve physical manipulation of materials or pretend play. In *language play* children engage in repetition, humorous language, and laughter. *Pretend play* occurs when children use an object to represent something else, such as pretending a stick is a horse. When pretend play includes a social component in which children engage in role play and narrative development, Smith and Pellegrini consider this type of pretend play *sociodramatic play*. Although Smith and Pellegrini described five play types, these categories of play are not strictly discrete and can overlap.

While play type categories, such as dramatic play or construction play, pertain to *what* children play, play action categories pertain to *how* children play. In their study of two- and three-year-olds, Rowe and Neitzel (2010) identified ten play action categories: 1) functional; 2) operational; 3) investigative; 4) transformative; 5) compositional; 6) relational; 7) enactment; 8) informational; 9) idea generation; and 10) skill practice. Table 1 describes these ten categories, which are not mutually exclusive, since children may engage in more than one action type during play. Additionally, each of these play actions reflect children's particular interest orientations: conceptual, procedural, creative, or social (Neitzel et al., 2008). Rowe and Neitzel (2010) found that the most common play actions observed by the children in their study were functional, investigative, and enactment.

Table 1

Play Action Categories as Defined by Rowe and Neitzel (2010)

Play Action Categories	Description
Functional	Exploration of conventional use of objects and mimicking real-world uses of objects
Operational	Exploring relations such as sequencing, sorting and categorizing, and balancing; attention to regularities or exceptionalities; and defining features of objects
Investigative	Exploring physical attributes or mechanical properties of an object, and what an object can do and how
Transformative	Use of objects to represent another object and creating new uses for objects
Compositional	Combination of materials, assembly of structures, and puzzle building
Relational	Focus on maintaining interpersonal connections and being with "another"

Enactment	Use of objects to enact familiar roles or routines and imitation or recreation of procedures in local or larger society
Informational	Seeking or sharing information and organizing and managing information
Idea generation	Brainstorming or concept listing, novel self-expression and imaginative thought, and fictitious role-play removed from everyday experiences
Skill practice	Practice for mastery

Adapted from Rowe and Neitzel, 2010, p. 176

In recent years, children's play has been considered within the contexts of digital environments. Marsh, Plowman, Yamada-Rice, Bishop, and Scott (2016) adapted an existing play taxonomy to digital play contexts, which often involves the use of tablets and apps. As part of a larger study in which they sought to identify apps used by children under the age of five and the features of those apps that supported play and creativity, they created a framework to analyze digital play types. They adapted all sixteen of Hughes's (2002) play type categories to digital contexts: symbolic play, rough and tumble play, socio-dramatic play, social play, creative play, communication play, dramatic play, locomotor play, deep play, exploratory play, fantasy play, imaginative play, mastery play, object play, role play, and recapitulation play. For example, *symbolic play*, when children use one object to stand in for another object, also occurs with virtual objects, such as when a child uses an avatar's shoe to represent a wand (p. 247). Likewise, *communication play* occurs in digital contexts when children use words, songs, poetry, etc. to communicate via text messages. In addition to adapting Hughes's (2002) sixteen categories to digital contexts, Marsh et al. also added a new category to the taxonomy called *transgressive play*: "Play in which children contest, resist and/or transgress expected norms, rules and perceived restrictions in both digital and non-digital contexts" (p. 250). This occurred

in their study when children used features of the app that were not part of the design. In one example, a three-year-old played a learning game in which the rules of the game dictated that he should place an image of an alphabet block under the word he was attempting to spell. However, the child used the mouse to drag the image of the block to the top of the screen until it disappeared and then, when he released it, the image bounced back onto the screen and he said, “Peek a boo” (p. 250). Marsh et al. found that Hughes’s (2002) taxonomy could be effectively applied to digital contexts with modifications because in digital contexts, the nature of the play, rather than types of play, changed when the context changed.

Wohlwend (2015) has also examined young children’s play within digital contexts, and argued that although the children’s play with a puppetry app appeared chaotic, the children produced a complex literacy text, which was built with a) embodied actions; b) the layering of modes (e.g., images and sound effects) and; c) a negotiation of ideas for shared pretense. First, Wohlwend pointed out that when reading and writing with digital devices, children use their bodies in new ways, such as using fingers to swipe or tap. Moreover, print concepts take on a new meaning in digital contexts, since children have to consider such things as cursor-screen relationships. Second, Wohlwend argued that the multimodal nature of digital apps provide children with multiple pathways into literacy beyond alphabetic print. For example, within the puppetry app, the children used visual images, movement, verbal dialogue, music, and touch to create a story. Third, Wohlwend argued that play is a collaborative literacy in which children negotiate meaning; therefore, digital play is also a literacy in its own right.

Dramatic Play: A Focus on Terminology

Researchers have used terms such as pretend play, make-believe play, dramatic play, socio-dramatic play, symbolic play, social play, and fantasy play in ways that converge and

diverge. This section examines those various terms and their uses and delineates the terms used in this study.

Barton (2010) created a taxonomy of *pretend play* for children with disabilities based on a review of the literature but argued that this taxonomy could also be applied to typically developing children. The taxonomy includes two categories: 1) functional play with pretense and 2) substitution. Substitution was further divided into three subcategories: 1) object substitution; 2) assigning absent attributes; and 3) imagining absent objects. Functional play with pretense is the “[n]onliteral use of actual or miniature objects in the manner in which they were intended without the reality-based outcome” (p. 253), such as stirring an empty pot with a spoon. Substitution, on the other hand, refers to using one object in a manner that represents another object, such as using a hairbrush to represent a microphone. According to Barton’s definition, role play is not an essential characteristic of pretend play, nor is social interaction. This definition of pretend play hinges on the materials children use and how they use them.

Symbolic play occurs when children use one object to represent another (Hughes 2002, Marsh et al., 2016), and Smith and Pellegrini (2008) used the term *pretend play* in a similar manner. Bomer (2003) uses the term *pivot* to describe children’s symbolic play with materials. Bomer said, “For any tool/sign to be used, it must act as a pivot that moves consciousness from one context into another” (p. 227). Vygotsky (1978) also described the concept of symbolic play with materials or pivoting through the example of a child using a stick as a horse during play. Vygotsky noted, “Play is a transitional stage in this direction. At that critical moment when a stick—i.e., an object—becomes a pivot for severing the meaning of horse from a real horse, one of the basic psychological structures determining the child’s relationship to reality is radically altered” (2016, p. 13). In this case, the child must detach the original meaning from both the stick

and a real horse, and the stick must then pivot towards new meaning, but within the constraints of its properties.

Vygotsky defined *socio-dramatic play* as having three characteristics: 1) an imaginary scenario; 2) role play; and 3) adhering to rules defined by those roles (as cited in Bodrova & Leong, 2015). Paley (2004) used the term *fantasy play* in manner that aligns with Vygotsky's conceptualization of socio-dramatic play, while Trawick-Smith (1998) used the term *make-believe play*. Paley (2004) argued that fantasy play is children's work as well as teacher's work; teachers should follow children up the "rungs of fantasy play" in order to understand the cognitive and social skills they draw from to construct their narratives. For the purpose of this study, the term *dramatic play* is used to refer to children enacting character roles and/or using props in ways that generally formed unfolding narratives, and when dramatic play included the participation of others, the term *socio-dramatic play* is used.

Much research on preschoolers' dramatic play focuses on interactions within the playframe during actual role play (Arnott, 2018; Björk-Willén, 2007; Corsaro, 2005; Cromdal, 2001; Griswold, 2007), but children sometime step out of character during play for various purposes. Trawick-Smith's (1998) study focused on the social interactions that took place outside of make-believe play. He termed these interactions *metaplay*. In this study, two- to five-year-olds were videotaped during "spontaneous play" over the course of eight separate half hour sessions in a special area of the classroom that included play props. They found that children demonstrated three types of metaplay behaviors: 1) initiation; 2) response; and 2) construction. Metaplay *initiations* occurred when children paused role play in order to initiation a new activity or converse with peers about the play theme. Metaplay *responses* often occurred after initiations. Children responded by agreeing or disagreeing with peers, offering clarification or maintaining

ownership. *Constructions* were predominantly nonverbal actions rather than verbalizations by children to construct play settings or arrange props.

Children's Conceptualizations of Play

Rarely have children been asked what play means to them. Lee (2015) examined how children conceptualize play through an interview study with pairs of first-graders in a Canadian classroom. The children understood a work/play dichotomy in the official world of school as one of hegemony versus freedom. However, their definitions of play in their unofficial worlds were not fixed, but rather contingent upon their own lived experiences and contextual factors. A critical facet of the children's collective understanding of play was tied to agency: "Play can be 'doing what you want.' Or, it can be doing what others want you to do, your way" (p. 261). For example, one child described how she shifted prescriptive curricular activities towards play by using a "funky" penmanship, embellishing her paper, or even playing with her pencil. The children often used popular culture references in their play, but they talked about how they transformed those references to fit their own needs, thereby shifting control from the makers of those images. Play enables children, providing them with space for agentic meaning-making.

Breathnach, H., Danby, S., and O'Gorman, L. (2017) conducted an ethnographic study in Australia that examined children's understandings of play and work in their classrooms. They asked five-year-olds about the activities they valued in school. First, they found that children defined their activities within adult agendas, which included how teachers managed the physical space and time. For example, the children in their study oriented to the weekly calendar to determine if it was a work day or play day, rather than forefronting the characteristics of the activity or the presence or absence of adults. Secondly, they found that children valued opportunities to exert agency in classroom activities, such as choosing which activities to

participate in. In their study, agency was defined as opportunities for children to construct or co-construct meaning with others. Lastly, they found that children frequently engaged in activities that they deemed work and did not prefer, such as writing, when the activity was child-initiated and had meaning for their current activity. For example, children freely chose to bring writing utensils to the playground to use without adult involvement. This study illustrates the how adult-agendas and issues of agency can influence children's perceptions of their activities as work or play.

Play and Children's Social Worlds

Corsaro (2005, 2012) argued that young children explore issues of life and power relations through their play as they engage in *interpretive reproduction*. Interpretive reproduction describes children as not separate from the adult world, but instead, as already members of that world, both reproducing adult culture and transforming adult culture through their play and participation. Within this view, peer culture in young children's worlds does not end with entry into adulthood or individual development. Rather, "individual development is embedded in the collective production of a series of peer cultures that in turn contribute to the reproduction or change in the wider adult society or culture" (p. 26). Play can be a solitary activity, but in the upper preschool age group, play is often a social activity, and children use their play experiences to mediate social provisions in their classroom settings and their place in the world. This section of the literature review examines play spaces as social contexts in which children form alignments with peers, while at other times position peers as outsiders. Children use a variety of strategies to protect and sustain play, and these strategies function to include or exclude children from the play. Also, children use a variety of strategies to establish social hierarchies and relationships with others during play.

Access, Withdrawal, and Sustainment Strategies

Play spaces are vulnerable spaces, so gaining access to established play by outsiders is difficult, requiring the use of various strategies (Corsaro, 1979, 2005). Children protect shared space, materials, and play from disruption by others, so when a child wishes to gain entry into ongoing play, he or she will likely face challenges in achieving that goal. When children wish to enter their peers' play, they might directly ask if they can join the play (Corsaro, 2005) or they might less directly ask what the playing children are doing (Wohlwend, 2011b). Children often resist permitting entry to newcomers, especially when children use these sorts of direct bids for entry (Corsaro, 2005). However, when children commit to a role that aligns with current play, they are more likely to gain entry into the play frame (Corsaro, 1979, 2005) and in the process gain social capital. We know little about how the social orders children create and resist during play relate to the broader school setting and adult culture (Evaldsson & Tellgren, 2009).

In his work, Corsaro (2005) found that preschoolers often resisted entry of peers into their play, and he argued that it is not the case that children did not want to share, but rather they wanted to continue to share the materials and activities that they were already sharing. He called such behavior the "protection of interactive space" (p. 53). He also found that children were often readily granted access into ongoing play when they first encircled the space in order to gain an understanding of the ongoing play and then verbally or nonverbally contributed to the play. Other strategies, such as directly asking to play or demanding that peers share their materials or activities were less successful for accessing ongoing play.

In his established study, Corsaro (1979) identified 15 verbal and nonverbal strategies preschoolers use to gain access to play as well as four withdrawal strategies children used once play was underway. Table 2 outlines these strategies. Because initial attempts at gaining access

to play were denied, children often tried multiple times to gain access and used different strategies across their attempts. He found that in order to gain entry into play, children often started with nonverbal strategies. Nonverbal strategies included circling the area where play was underway without comment or entering the physical play area without comment. Verbal requests, on the contrary, were higher-risk strategies that were often rejected and therefore employed as later attempts at gaining access. Verbal requests included requesting permission to join the play, questioning children about ongoing play, and referring to adult rules about access to the play space. Corsaro found that the most effective strategy for gaining entry into play was for the child to verbally and/or nonverbally produce a variation of the ongoing play.

Table 2

Children's Access and Withdrawal Strategies Identified by Corsaro (1979, 2005)

Corsaro's Access Strategies	Corsaro's Withdrawal Strategies
Non-verbal entry Producing variant of ongoing behavior Disruptive entry Encirclement Making claim on area or object Request for access Questioning participants Reference to adult authority Offering of objects Greeting Reference to affiliation Aid from non-participants Accepting invitation Suggest other activity Reference to individual characteristics	Verbal description or justification Ritual farewell Unmarked later return Unmarked without return
Corsaro's Responses	Corsaro's Responses

Positive response	Discourage withdrawal
Negative response	Acknowledge withdrawal

Adapted from Corsaro (1979)

Cromdal (2001) also examined children's access strategies during play. Cromdal's study used a dialogic approach to examine how children gained access to ongoing play in a bilingual preschool classroom in Sweden. Although children have been shown to protect playframes from entry by non-participants (Corsaro, 2005), Cromdal (2001) found that some play activities are not as heavily protected and therefore more easily accessed than others. Such activities often include tasks or roles undesirable to the participants of the play. For example, Cromdal found that children were easily granted entry into jumping rope provided that they initially accepted the less-desirable task of twirling rather than the more-desirable task of jumping. Even in such instances when entry into play was easily granted, the child still needed to utilize an access strategy. Cromdal also found that children need to employ appropriate procedures for access or face sanctions by the children engaged in ongoing play. One such procedure is that after a child uses a strategy to gain access into play, the child should not enter the ongoing play until the participants respond. Additionally, Cromdal found that children frequently used what Corsaro (1979) considered high-risk access strategies as initial bids and did so with a high level of success. For example, in this study, the children often used an English translation of a Swedish phrase, "Can I be with?" (Cromdal, 2001, p. 532), as an initial strategy to enter play, a type of direct, verbal strategy that Corsaro (1979) found to be less effective in his study. Cromdal (2001) noticed that children successfully used the phrase, "*Can I be with?*" on initial attempts for access when the speaker had reason to believe that access would likely be granted, such as requesting to be the twirler in a game of jump rope. In other words, Cromdal found that success rates for strategies employed depend on local social context and children's preferences.

Once children begin engaging in play with others, they use a variety of strategies to sustain play. Björk-Willén (2007) explored how three- to five-year-olds exploited multimodal resources to collaboratively create and sustain play in a multilingual classroom, and specifically examined two interactional phenomena called shadowing and crossing. *Shadowing* is “a specific instance of imitation” (p. 2134) in which a child replicates the actions of others, while *crossing* is “a form of language alteration” (p. 2134) in which the speaker adapts language associated with ethnic groups in which the speaker does not have in-group status. Björk-Willén showed in data analysis how children replicated the actions of participants, such as intonation or gestures, in order to gain access to the play without claiming the participants’ identity, and used language varieties (e.g., a Swedish speaker used Spanish, the native language of her peer) to take part in ongoing exchanges between children in the classroom. Björk-Willén’s study attuned to nonverbal discourse as well as verbal and demonstrated that very young children can understand and act within the contextual constraints of social interactions.

Social Hierarchies during Play

Corsaro (2005) argued that there exist two central themes in children’s peer cultures: “persistent attempts to gain control of their lives” and “attempt[s] to share that control with each other” (p. 152). In other words, children are concerned with challenging adult authority and social participation. As a result, Corsaro also argued that as young children resist adult authority, they develop a group identity, or “we-ness” (p. 207), and that along with group affiliation come issues of social hierarchies. Children work to both form hierarchies and resist hierarchies, and these concerns manifest in their play. For example, children make bids to enter play or invite others into their play, but once play is ongoing, children sometimes jockey for positions of authority, while other times preemptively accept subordinated roles. This section of the literature

review presents research related to the social dynamics in young children's peer cultures and play.

Evaldsson and Tellgren's (2009) ethnographic study in Sweden examined the communicative competencies used by preschool girls in the process of social exclusion during play in their classrooms. They found that the girls used cultural resources to create hierarchies, build alliances, claim authoritative stances, and subordinate and exclude peers. The girls did this by "(a) controlling the play boundaries; (b) deciding on and (re)negotiating pretend characters; (c) (re)defining the play agenda; and (d) shifting between the pretend and non-pretend play frames, to mitigate, postpone and justify social exclusion" (p. 17). In line with Corsaro (1979, 2005), Evaldsson and Tellgren (2009) observed that the phrase, "Can I join?" was used as a verbal strategy for gaining entry into play, but often rejected by the peers engaged in a shared activity. Their study expanded on prior work by examining the social hierarchies created during play and how children were excluded once play was underway. In their study, children used dramatic roles within their playframes to exclude children from play. For example, as several girls enacted dramatic play roles as cats, one child pretended to eat the cat mother and then announced that the cat mother was dead, thereby eliminating her role. In another example, one of the girls was forced into the role of a wild cat, and then her peers ran away from her. Evaldsson and Tellgren argued that using the logic and resources of the play frame allowed the girls to exclude peers from the play without outright rejecting them.

Griswold's (2007) ethnographic study examined how Russian girls ages six through nine used body orientation and linguistic action to establish social hierarchies during play and talk activities in public spaces near their homes. Specifically, this study examined how children displayed subordination to the authority of their peers, thereby legitimizing the social hierarchy.

She found that girls would demonstrate subordination by accepting a peer's dominance, but significantly, they would also preemptively place themselves in subordinated role to another child before that child claimed dominance by 1) assigning her a dominant role in play; 2) asking for her help in disputes; or 3) asking her to establish the boundaries of the playframe. Griswold found that the girls used verbal and nonverbal resources, including the physical environment to legitimize a peer's power.

Arnott's (2018) exploratory study examined how three- to five-year-olds used and transformed elements of "Pedagogic Culture" (p. 953) to negotiate their play experiences and socio-emotional responses in a preschool classroom and in a local science museum in Scotland. Pedagogic Culture is defined by Arnott as "an explicit conceptualisation, recognition and application of the ecological elements that frame the practice around play-based learning in early childhood" (p. 954). Arnott found children used and transformed four elements of Pedagogic Culture: 1) child-centered pedagogies and their autonomy within it; 2) structural hierarchies within the context; 3) rules and regulations of their play; and 4) agency and power of both adults and children. The transformation of these elements also transformed their classroom contexts. Arnott found that imaginary play functioned as a mediator for agency and power through the assignment of dramatic play roles. For example, when newcomers to a playframe were assigned less-desired or degrading roles (e.g., the burglar robbing a family), the newcomer was excluded from play in a manner that did not conflict with classroom rules related to inclusion in play.

Cobb-Moore, Danby, and Farrell (2009) examined how children understood and constructed rules in an early childhood classroom in Australia in order to negotiate ownership of places and materials. They found that the four- to six-year-olds in the study employed four interactional practices: The children 1) used available resources to claim ownership of materials;

2) developed or invoked pre-existing rules to manage interactions with their peers; 3) used language to construct a context that included “rule enforcement as an activity” (p. 1489); and 4) used “membership categorisation” (p. 1481) to include and exclude peers from their activities. Children used these practices to enact roles as “rule-makers and law-enforcers” (p. 1489) in order to negotiate the social order. Furthermore, although the children’s interactions took place in a classroom constructed by adults and imbued with adult expectations, the children co-constructed their own rules which they imposed on each other and co-constructed their own social order. This study is significant because it illustrates how children are not passive recipients of adult imposed social structures but are agentic meaning-makers of their own rules and social orders.

As part of Wohlwend’s (2011a) larger study of kindergarteners’ literacy practices that was informed by Mediated Discourse Analysis, she examined a group of boys who used media and sports to create a boys-only space in their classroom. When the children drew team logos on their classroom work, they used writing utensils as a mediational means; the act of making marks on a page overlapped with the act of wearing team logos on their clothing to form a practice around “doing sports fan,” which enabled the boys to form an *affinity group* in which they came together around the shared purpose of enacting the role of sports fans (Wohlwend, 2011a). Affinity groups are formed when people form affiliations through shared practices (Gee, 2013). Forming a cohesive social group created boundaries that in turn created insider and outsider identities, and the formation of the boys-only affinity group allowed the group insiders the opportunity to gain status within the group as they enacted scripts of masculinity (Wohlwend, 2011a).

Challenging Dominant Discourses

Children bring popular culture from the out-of-school world into the school setting to expand meaning-making potential (Dyson, 1993), while at the same time, they may challenge the dominant cultural Discourses that are disseminated through popular culture (Wohlwend, 2011a, 2011b).

Popular culture is value-laden; characters and storylines in popular media can convey “ways of ‘doing boy’ or ‘doing girl’” (Wohlwend, 2011b, p. 4) and function to socialize children into particularized gender identities. In Wohlwend’s (2011b) ethnographic study in early childhood classrooms, two kindergarten boys challenged hetero-normative discourse and gender expectations through their play with Disney princess dolls. Wohlwend used Mediated Discourse Analysis (Scollon, 2001) to analyze the actions and materiality of the boys’ princess play, which they layered with other popular culture characters and plot lines, such as Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Their play provided the boys with space for “accessing, improvising, and animating otherwise unreachable identity texts” (Wohlwend, 2011b, p. 607). Ideologies, such as gender norms, are sedimented in materials (Rowse & Pahl, 2007), so in the context of this classroom, princess dolls marketed to girls concretized normative binary gender expectations. In other words, the texts in the classroom reflect the identities of previous authors; these texts are constructed within a sociocultural context in relation to ways of doing and being in that context (Rowse & Pahl, 2007). In this classroom, the idyllic shapes of the Barbie dolls’ bodies reflected the heteronormative values of the creators in relation to the objectification of women within the cultural context. The boys in Wohlwend’s (2011b) study used play with Disney princess dolls as a form of critical literacy to interrogate cultural norms of gender. The children constructed identities through their play that both enforced and contested the cultural expectations for

“idealized ways of ‘doing boy’ or ‘doing girl’” (p. 4). Princess storylines, for example, often involve a passive female protagonist in distress being rescued by a male protagonist. The boys’ play, however, meshed traditional princess narratives with more masculine sports narratives from popular media and the playground to challenge gender Discourses.

In Vasquez’s (2014b) research in her kindergarten class, influenced by the Reggio Emilia approach (Forman & Frye, 2012), the children examined the topic of gender equity through a multimodal exploration of rain forests, which included song, dance, letter writing, and the production of a play. In one of the books the class read during their rain forest study, an image depicted a man cooking food on an outdoor fire, which prompted one of the children to ask why a man was cooking instead of a woman (Vasquez, 2014b). The child’s question led to Vasquez facilitating an interrogation of gender representation in other texts. The children considered such things as gender roles and how power or weakness was associated with gender in those texts. The children also considered who was telling each story and why. Although gender equity was a topic raised during rain forest study, it permeated the wider curriculum throughout the year. For example, at another point in the year, gender equity was taken up again in discussions about advertisements for Halloween costumes. The children considered the types of costumes worn by boys versus girls, the cost of these costumes, and representations of power. As a result of this study, children troubled the messages about traditional gender roles in the advertisements by designing their costumes that reflected counter-narratives.

The cultural resources that children bring from their outside worlds are often subordinated in the school sphere, yet children challenge this subordination (Dyson & Genishi, 2013). Dyson and Genishi argued that the modern classroom often leaves little space for childhood basics—playing, non-linear communication, and extended talk. As students construct

meaning dialogically with teachers in school settings, they learn through imperative teacher discourse that texts are linguistic, serious, and individual constructions, rather than playgrounds for co-constructed meanings or multiple semiotic modes (Dyson & Genishi, 2013). Students learn through declarative teacher discourse that they will be ranked as individuals in a social hierarchy, based on such things as the number of words they can spell correctly (Dyson & Genishi, 2013) or how quickly they can read a passage of text. However, peer interaction and play are not entirely lost in the official school world (Dyson & Genishi, 2013). Rather, they often operate as undercurrents or on the periphery of sanctioned school activities, mediating official learning. For example, in Dyson and Genishi's (2013) study, the children in Ms. Bee's class subverted the linguistic-based, individual, nonfiction dictates of a writing assignment through their visual texts and verbal conversations. As these children drew fanciful snowmen, dogs, and self-portraits in flight, they constructed meaning jointly by contributing to, borrowing from, and appropriating unofficial conversations in play.

Dyson (1993) argued that children draw upon their available resources, including folk traditions and pop culture, to participate in school and peer cultures. In other words, children do not treat home and school as discrete contexts, but rather, children cross boundaries so that the two contexts overlap. In a two-year ethnographic study, Dyson (1993) followed six urban, African American children in grades K-2, who spoke a non-standard variation of English and therefore arrived to school socialized into literacy practices that did not closely align with school-sanctioned practices. However, Dyson argued that the children deliberately intersected their unofficial and official worlds in order negotiate a home for themselves within the classroom space. For example, one child, Jameel, combined his interests in cartoons, jokes, and music with a unit on ocean study to craft a song that elicited appreciation from his peers. Dyson's work

illuminates that children's reading and writing development is not only a print process, but is also a multimodal process and a social process.

Young Children's Reading and Writing Development

This dissertation study explores how children's play activities and multimodal practices intersected for social purposes. Children's multimodal practices in preschool settings include the use of reading and writing materials and activities. For the purpose of this study, the terms *reading* and *writing* refer to meaning-making specifically with alphabetic signs, and the term *literacy* refers to meaning-making activities using various modes, such as images, sound, or movement (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). In other words, literacy is "the ability to convey, construct, and take meaning through representational forms" (Hawkins, 2013b, p. 4), and written language (i.e. reading and writing with printed text), therefore, represents one semiotic mode of many (Cope & Kalantzis, 2013). Historically, literacy has been viewed as "monolithic..., comprised of discrete sets of knowledge and skills to be internalized by the individual" (Hawkins, 2013b, p. ix), such as encoding and decoding print skills. However, within socially situated perspectives, literacy is not something people *acquire*, but something people *do* (Serafini, 2014, p. 19) and are socialized into (Heath, 1983). Thus, literacy is a social practice (Street, 1984), which utilizes multiple modes and is value-laden. Classroom play provides space in which young children can enact social practices that can help them become literate with alphabetic print, but also literate with each other. This section of the literature review examines traditional conceptualizations of young children's reading and writing, including the four cueing systems (Goodman, 1969; Goodman, 1989; Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984), emergent writing (Puranik & Lonigan, 2011), and reading-writing connections. Multimodal literacy will be discussed in a later section.

Reading: The Four Cueing Systems

Scholars such as K.S. Goodman (1969), Y.M. Goodman (1989) and Harste, Woodward, and Burke (1984) identified four cueing systems—graphophonic, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic—as central to reading with alphabetic signs and meaning making. These are interdependent systems, rather than hierarchal systems, working simultaneously as readers generate and test hypothesis about text in order to construct meaning.

The *graphophonic cueing system* refers to knowledge about sounds and their written, alphabetic representations, including spelling conventions (Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984). In the English language, there are more than 44 sounds, but only 26 letters, so sound-letter correspondence is not a one-to-one relationship. For example, the labiodental phoneme [f] can be represented in English using the letter *f* or the letter pair *ph*. Additionally, just as one sound can be represented in multiple ways in English, one letter can represent multiple sounds, depending on context. For example, the letter *t* represents the unvoiced interdental phoneme [t] in the word *pot*, but represents the voiced interdental phoneme [d] in the word *party*. Knowledge of sound-symbol correspondence is also referred to as alphabetic knowledge in the literature (Levin, Shantil-Carmon, & Asif-Rave, 2009). Also included in the graphophonic system is knowledge of print concepts. Print knowledge includes understanding the difference between words and images, as well as understanding linearity, directionality, and spacing in print. Print concepts is also referred to as conceptual skills in the literature (Puranik & Lonigan, 2014).

The *syntactic cueing system* refers to grammatical knowledge, how different words come together to form sentences that convey meaning (Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984). It is the syntactic system that is involved in understanding that two different sentences may have similar denotative meanings; for example, *The cop shot the unarmed man* is comparable in meaning to

The unarmed man was shot by the cop, although one uses an active verb and the other a passive verb structure. Grammatical knowledge includes understanding language specific rules about word order, subject-verb agreements, and tenses. For example, English is a subject-verb-object language, so the sentence *She chess plays* is nonsensical within the context of the language rules; other languages, however, do use the subject-object-verb structure, so such a sentence would be grammatically coherent in that context (Finegan, 2015). Grammatical knowledge helps readers predict the type of word that might come next in a sentence.

The *semantic cueing system* refers to the relationship between written text and the ideas it represents, including the meanings associated with words or grammatical structures (Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984). Consider the earlier example of two structurally different, but similar sentences: *The cop shot the unarmed man* versus *The unarmed man was shot by the cop*. The semantic system plays a role in understanding how the form of these sentences function differently in meaning-making. Although the denotative event described in both sentences is identical, the first sentence positions the cop as the subject of the sentence who performs the action, emphasizing the cop's role as the agent. The second sentence positions the victim as the passive subject, shifting the cop into the object position, and thus, subordinating the cop's role as agent and shooter in the sentence. The semantic system also includes understanding of metaphorical meanings, which requires tapping into prior knowledge and schemas. Additionally, the semantic system is involved in deriving meaning from context clues, such as using images in picturebooks to help understand the written story.

The *pragmatic cueing system* refers to how language functions within particular contexts (Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984). This system includes understanding various purposes for reading or writing, language variations, and genres. For example, readers have different

expectations depending on text type: Readers of an information text may expect titles and subheadings to orient them to subject matter and diagrams to describe processes, while readers of a narrative may expect the story to reach a climax with a resolution and images to illustrate plot points. Pappas (1993) examined twenty kindergarteners' repeated pretend readings of informational and narrative books in order to gain understanding of their strategies for dealing with the different text types. Pappas noted that stories are marked by co-referentiality, whereas informational texts are marked by co-classification. With co-referentiality, a character, such as a woodpecker, is introduced, and then pronouns and other descriptors (e.g., the bird) are used throughout the text to refer to that particular character. With co-classification, a woodpecker would not be introduced as a particular character, but as a class of animal. Pappas found that the children in her study were able to sustain both co-referentiality and co-classification in their repeated pretend readings of the story and information books, respectively. She argued that "learning the book language of these two genres is a meaning-driven, constructive process" (p. 125).

Reading: A Constructive Process

Clay (2001), like Goodman (1969) and Harste, Woodward, and Burke (1984), viewed reading as a constructive, rather than additive process. In Clay's (1982) longitudinal study of 100 New Zealand five-year-olds during their first year of school, she collected naturalistic data on their reading and writing behaviors and also administered standardized assessments three times to categorize degrees of literacy proficiency. She found varying levels of proficiencies and ways in which the children constructed strategies over time for reading and writing. In Clay's (2001) view, poor readers do not simply lack skills such as phonemic awareness; rather, these children are "failing to build a network of perceptual and cognitive strategies for decision-making" (p.

133). Since reading relies on interconnecting language and knowledge funds, reading requires a constructive process. Much of this constructive process works below the surface of the mind “so that fast and effective processing of the print is achieved and attention is paid to the message rather than the work done to get to the message” (p. 127). For this reason, Clay argued against instructional methods such as explicitly teaching metacognitive awareness or offering lengthy explanations of letter-sound relationships. She suggested teachers “avoid wordy monologues” (p. 21) and instead direct readers to devise and test their own hypotheses. Her prevailing view was that children build cognitive networks by struggling with text, not by internalizing teacher talk.

While decoding skills are critical for comprehension of print, meaning does not reside solely in a text, but rather is a transactional process (Rosenblatt, 1985). In her transactional view of reading, Rosenblatt focused on the transaction between the reader and text, couching both subject and object in a sociocultural context:

We need to see the reading act as an event involving a particular individual and a particular text, happening at a particular time, under particular circumstances, in a particular social and cultural setting, and as a part of the ongoing life of the individual and the group. We still can distinguish the elements, but we have to think of them, not as separate entities, but as aspects or phases of a dynamic process, in which all elements take on their character as part of the organically-interrelated situations. (p. 100)

Rosenblatt (1982) described the reader’s stance—or purpose for reading—as falling on a continuum between efferent and aesthetic. The efferent stance is reading to retain information; it concerns the future experience and has an outward orientation. The aesthetic stance is reading for pleasure; it concerns the present experience and has an inward orientation. Reading, for Rosenblatt, is more than a process of decoding and extracting meaning contained within a static

set of graphic data. Rather, readers' responses about their experience with text become "the source of human understanding and sensitivity to human values" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 276). A valid interpretation of a text becomes less quantifiable and testable in this context, but to mitigate this complexity, Rosenblatt drew from Dewey's (1988) epistemology to define knowledge through reading as "warranted assertibility." In other words, meaning is derived through a dialogic, public process (Connell, 1996).

Drawing from Rosenblatt (1982), Flint (2000) examined reading as a socially mediated process in her study of partnered literacy discussions in an elementary classroom. She found that the fourth graders in her study gained and lost interpretative authority from their peers. Group members interpreted the viability of each other's meaning-making, and children lost interpretive authority if their interpretations of the text did not align with any other group members. Interestingly, Flint found a potentially gendered way of participating in literacy circles. For example, two of the male participants gained interpretive authority through the judgement and evaluation of their peer's interpretations, and in the process, were afforded positions of power. Flint's study illustrates that reading is a value-laden and socially situated process.

Reading also involves the use of social imagination. Lysaker, Shaw, and Alicia (2016) define social imagination as "children's use of social understanding when it is applied *during reading*" (p. 247, italics in original). They used a semiotic perspective in their study that examined how kindergarteners used social imagination during wordless book readings. That is, in addition to literacy-specific events, they also considered talk, movement, and play as valuable meaning-making practices for young children. They also examined how the kindergartener's use of social imagination might relate to other aspects of reading comprehension. The children who more frequently used social imagination in their reading of the wordless picture books produced

“livelier readings with extensive use of inflection, emotion, and voicing of characters as well as a greater sense of continual investment in the narrative event as it unfolded” (p. 250). For example, one child, James, used social imagination to enter the mind of a male character in the book as he looks at his sick sister; shifts in James’ intonation as he narrated the story reflected the character’s feelings about his sick sister. Lysaker et al. argue that the children who more frequently used social imagination were able to better relate with the characters, reflecting more complex thinking about the text, and thus, deeper comprehension.

Writing: A “Seesaw” Process

Preschooler’s writing becomes more conventional over time by following unique trajectories. Rowe and Wilson (2015) developed an observational tool for assessing preschooler’s writing that provides descriptive information on forms, directional patterns, intentionality, and message content. In their longitudinal study of 139 low-income African American children, they found that the children’s writing changed over time in all four dimensions, but the timing of transitions to more advanced categories varied for individual children, and children at times “seesawed” (p. 282) in their progression towards conventional writing. Additionally, they found that the use of advanced conventional writing forms and sophisticated message content did not always correlate. In other words, some children used conventional letters in the writing task, but when asked to read aloud their messages, described content unrelated to the task, and vice versa. They found that children do not follow a fixed sequence of development in term of forms, directional patterns, intentionality, or message content.

One of the first words young children attempt to write are their names (Clay, 2001), and name writing ability correlates with later literacy outcomes (NELP, 2008). Children typically

learn to write their names by memorizing letter forms, rather than using knowledge of letter-sound correspondence (Ferrario & Teberosky, 1989). In Bloodgood's (1999) mixed-methods study of 67 preschoolers and kindergarteners in a Virginia school, she sought to understand how name writing functions in literacy acquisition. Literacy assessments included tasks related to such things as name, color, alphabet, and phonological awareness. She found that the children's ability to write their names were related to print concepts and alphabet knowledge.

Social dynamics in early childhood classrooms also mediate children's early writings. Flint and Fisher-Ari (2014) examined how professional development influenced teacher beliefs, namely their understanding of agency and their roles as teachers of bilingual students. Over the course of a four-year longitudinal study, the teachers altered their perception of their students through three practices: writing workshop, writing conferences with children, and author celebrations. The teachers' shifts in beliefs and practices not only reflected their increased recognition of the students' unique voices, but also encouraged the students to share more about their experiences, beliefs, hopes, and interests. Flint and Fisher-Ari's study reveals the social nature of young children's writing experiences, and how teacher beliefs and practices can support children's writing development.

Bingham, Quinn, and Gerde (2017) also found that teacher practices are associated with children's writing skills. In their study of preschool and pre-K teachers and their students, they examined teacher writing supports across handwriting, spelling, and composition. They found that the majority of teacher supports focused on handwriting, and to a lesser extent on spelling, while few writing supports addressed composition—generating ideas beyond the word level. Moreover, the majority of writing supports the teachers used were considered low-level. For example, Bingham et al. observed low-level handwriting supports such as asking children to

trace words or modeling letter formation to children without comment. In classrooms where teachers did focus on composition, the children demonstrated stronger writing skills, namely handwriting and invented spelling skills. They argued that there is a critical need for more pedagogical guidance for early childhood teachers on spelling and composition. They also argued that the practices of the teachers who provide composition supports may be qualitatively different from those who do not.

Handwriting, spelling, and composition skills are critical to young children's writing development, and children develop these skills within social contexts. Rowe (2008) argued that not only does writing occur in social context, but writing is a socially-constructed process. Rowe conducted a nine-month ethnography in a preschool classroom in order to identify and describe some of the social contracts about writing that were negotiated by the two-year-old children and the adults as they interacted around the "writing table." Social contracts refer to the shared knowledge that communities use to construct meaning about reading and writing materials. She identified nine social contracts: a) boundary contract; b) message contract; c) distinctive forms contract; d) text-as-object contract; e) text-ownership contract; f) text-centrality contract; g) figure-ground contract; h) reader-text obligation contract; and i) distinctive-meanings contract. Table 3 provides descriptions of each contract as defined by Rowe.

Table 3

Social Contracts as Defined by Rowe (2008)

Social Contract	Description
Boundary contract	The edges of a piece of paper create physical boundaries of a text.
Message contract	Children's marks can represent messages.
Distinctive forms contract	Writing and drawing use different forms of marks.

Text-as-object contract	The goal of writing is the production of material texts.
Text-ownership contract	Texts are material property individually owned by the authors.
Text-centrality contract	Texts mediate social interaction in literacy events.
Figure-ground contract	Marks are the central focus in written texts; paper is the background.
Reader-text obligation contract	Texts require literate actions; texts should be read.
Distinctive-meanings contract	Writing and drawing use the same media but represent meaning in different ways.

Excerpted from Rowe (2008, p. 78)

The social contracts negotiated between the children and adults revealed that the young children understood texts as cultural objects. Moreover, the children understand that different marks are associated with different representational systems—writing and art—and that these marks carry different potentials. As the teachers valued the children’s written products throughout the year, the children began to pay attention to their products as well as the writing process and developed an understanding that texts mediate classroom literacy events. Rowe’s study positions literacy as more than a cognitive process; her work positions “literacy knowledge as social contracts that are socially performed, collective, and local” (p. 92).

Reading and Writing Connections

Children typically begin writing words before they can fluently read, and their early attempts include inventing spelling. Clay (2001) used a qualitative approach to her study of young writers. She found that children often progress from non-alphabetic marks to depicting the first sound in the word. As children begin to understand words as bounded units, they begin to depict both the first and last sounds of words in their writings, after which the middle vowels in words emerge. Children gauge their success based on feedback and then revise and retest their

hypotheses with new attempts. Over time, the phonological and orthographic elements of their writings begin to more closely resemble conventional spellings. The key to invented spelling is children's experimentation and feedback; they do not simply memorize spelling patterns, but instead draw from emerging knowledge of print, such as letter-sound awareness, to write words, adjusting their hypotheses about print along the way. Clay argued that as children work with their invented spellings, not only do their writing skills improve, but so do their reading skills, since the two processes overlap in many ways.

Oullette and Sénéchal (2008) conducted a study in Canada with three groups of kindergarteners to determine if there exists a causal relationship between invented spelling and reading acquisition. The first control group of children was given phonological awareness training, while the second control group was asked to draw pictures for words. Measures included invented spelling, word reading, letter-sound knowledge, phonological awareness, orthographic awareness, and learn-to-read tasks. The invented spelling group performed better than the two control groups in four measures: learning how to decode words, reading familiar words, phonological awareness, and orthographic knowledge. Oullette and Sénéchal argued that invented spelling facilitates the integration of orthographic and phonological knowledge and supports reading acquisition. They postulated that the exploratory nature of invented spelling, in other words, the analytic demand of the task, contributed to the results. This echoes Clay's (2001) theory that children build a network of perceptual and cognitive strategies as they form and test hypotheses about print.

Clay (2001) took a developmental approach to reading and writing by using a "lifespan paradigm" to describe how children change over time as writers. I used this lens to view the children in this study whom I observed over the course of five months. A lifespan paradigm

focuses on change, rather than stability, an analysis of the individual and the environment in tandem, and how multiple variables transact to change each other's properties. The perspective positions children as agentic meaning-makers, who are constantly evolving as they progress on their unique learning trajectories, rather than a one-size-fits-all timeline of stages. Clay outlined possible changes children may undergo as they progress in their literacy development during their first eight years, but she stressed that the changes are possibilities, not lock-step stages.

Multimodal Literacy

Comber (2016) argued that literacy is more than a skill, “always more than operational or functional matters” (p. 10). Rather, literacy is value-laden, reflecting particular views of the world, positioning readers and writing in particular ways. Moreover, all literacy is multimodal (Harste, 2010; Rowsell, Kress, Pahl, & Street, 2013), and all “[m]eaning is negotiated” (Hodge & Kress, 1988, p. 12). Multimodal literacy expands the notion of literacy beyond reading and writing with the alphabetic sign system; multimodal texts are assembled using various semiotic resources, such as images, music, and gestures. Semiotic resources are tools for meaning-making, or modes of communication, that are embedded in historical and social contexts and shared by a group, and each mode of communication, whether visual, aural, or somatic, is a resource with both affordances and constraints (Hodge & Kress, 1988). The modes work together, complementing or sitting in tension with each other, to convey new meaning not conveyed by a single mode alone (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Likewise, in a multimodal context, meaning is not a sum of signs, but the process of sign-making and order of signs (Hodge & Kress, 1988). Modes are represented through various mediums (Hodge & Kress, 1988). For example, a live cooking demonstration includes visual, aural, spatial, gestural, and somatic

modes. Fragrances of spices, the colors of various foods, and the clanking of pots are the mediums through which the modes are realized.

There exists a bidirectional relationship between semiotic resources and children: A wooden dowel, for example, that acts as a wand for a child enacting a wizard identity, offers constraints and affordances as a semiotic resource, while the child as maker manipulates the dowel according to his or her interests (Kress, 1997). The physical shape of the dowel limits the child's interpretations, so that it does not become a wizard's hat, but can instead become a wand for casting spells. The long, linear shape of the wand can also expand possibilities for the child in other ways: The wizard can use the magic wand to knock a desired item off a high shelf. Additionally, semiotic resources are meaning-making tools embedded in actions and social context and their meanings vary according to that context (Kress, 1997). For example, a child might hold the same wooden dowel during sharing time to assert "speaking rights" (Cazden, 2001, p. 82) in order to tell a story. Alternatively, the wooden dowel could stand in for a horse, linking the material to the motive of initiating a bid to enter classmates' farm-themed play frame. Materials, like language (Bahktin, 1981), are laden with ever-evolving cultural context and histories; as a result, the meanings of materials cannot be standardized (Bomer, 2003). Materials have mental dimensions that give them functionality as signs so that they can serve as *pivots* between contexts; the shift from a wooden dowel to a "talking stick" or horse involves detaching one meaning from the tool to introduce another meaning (Bomer, 2003, Vygotsky, 1978). In this sense, a wooden dowel is a semiotic sign that children may be leveraged for multimodal literacy purposes.

Harste (2010), a social semiotician, argued that there are many types of literacies and that all literacies are multimodal. An expansive view of what counts as literacy has implications for

how young children can be viewed. Traditional approaches to literacy consider young children as engaging in emerging reading and writing practices, a sort of apprenticeship into a later complete form of literacy, while a multimodal approach offers opportunities to explore what it means for children to already be literate, especially when they cannot yet read and write by traditional measures (Harste, 2010). Within a pedagogy of multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996), multimodal literacy is a transformative process, rather than a process of reproduction (Cope & Kalantzis, 2013), and within this view, children are “makers and remakers of signs and transformers of meaning” (p. 115). Non-linguistic modes in particular, such as art, provide opportunities for young children to actively develop strategies for communication (Albers, 2007). Because the participants in this study included preschool-aged children not yet reading and writing alphabetic texts by conventional standards, I employed a multimodal lens that positions the children as agentic meaning-makers who strategically draw from the resources available in their environment to communicate meaning.

Semiotic Modes

Cope and Kalantzis (2013), in line with Hodge and Kress (1988) and Kress and van Leeuwen’s work (1996), have identified various semiotic modes, including 1) written language; 2) oral language; 3) visual representation; 4) audio representation; 5) tactile representation; 6) gestural representation; 7) feelings and emotions; and 8) spatial representations (p. 119). *Written language* pertains to reading and writing on both the printed page and in digital contexts. *Oral language* refers to listening and speaking in either live or recorded contexts. *Visual representation* includes such things as images and sculpture, while *audio representation* includes music, sounds, ambient noises, and also intonation, tempo, and pitch. *Tactile representation* includes touch, smell, and taste, and forms of tactile representation are physical touch, sensations

on the skin (e.g. temperature and texture), and manipulatable objects. *Gestural representations* include such things as hand movements, facial expressions, gaze, body language, and fashion. *Feelings and emotions* are representations to oneself. *Spatial representation* includes physical proximity to other and layouts of rooms, cities, and landscapes. Cope and Kalantzis use the term *synaesthesia* to describe the re-representation of something from one mode to another; for example, action can be expressed by verbs in *oral language* or by vectors in *visual representation*. They also argue that the monomodal nature of traditional conceptualizations of literacy does not take advantage of the educational affordances inherent in *synaesthesia* because it limits itself to the mode of written language. A monomodal lens is problematic because so much of our everyday experiences are multimodal in nature; for example, oral language is closely tied to audio representations of inflection and intonation, while written language is closely tied to the visual representations of font styles, spacing, and layout (Cope & Kalantzis, 2013).

Children use multiple modes for meaning-making in early childhood classrooms, and an area of focus in the literature has been on the visual mode, particularly in the context of children's drawings and readings of picture books. Albers (2008) has pointed out that young readers often use illustrations to interpret a story. Art theory provides a rich lens for analyzing children's literature, in part because art comprises much of children's literacy learning, such as through picture books (Albers, 2008). Albers (2008) developed a theory of "looking and seeing" (p. 165), in which "looking" represents a focus on the more salient surface features of image, while "seeing" represents a meaning-making transaction between reader and image (p. 165). She continued by arguing, "Looking and seeing are always in relationship to something or someone" (p. 176). This perspective is important for recognizing that aesthetic objects, such as illustrations

in picture books, are derived from social practices and are value-laden, and thus, can be interrogated (Albers, 2008).

Kress's (1997) example a three-year-old's drawing of a car illustrates Albers' (2008) point about the transaction between a reader and image. The child drew what appeared to be seven circles on a page and then announced, "This is a car." The circles arose from the child's interest (Kress, 1997). For the child, wheels represented what he considered to be the critical aspect of the car, and Kress pointed out that from a three-year-old's point of view, wheels may be the prominent feature when physically walking up to a car. Additionally, the child had the motor control to draw the shape, so a circle also represented a semiotic resource available to him at the time. This child's drawing potentially illuminates multiple relationships, such as his physical relationship to a car, his relationship with print-based semiotic resources, or perhaps even his relationship to temporal and spatial concepts, since the car might represent quick movement.

Harste et al. (1984) studied three- to six-year-olds experiences with print. They use a semiotic lens to interpret the children's reading and writing acts, valuing the verbal, gestural, and visual modes as integral parts of the children's processes. To understand the hypotheses children make as the read, write, and draw, they talked to the children about their strategies. They argued that reading and writing are interconnected processes, each supporting the development of the other, but this development is also socially supported. For example, one child in their study, Odette, created written products accompanied by drawings based on a Christmas story that her mother had read to her. Her interactions with her mother and her past experiences shaped the perspectives Odette took in her writings and drawings. Harste et al. considered written and oral language to be part of a broader system of knowing, which includes music, math, art, and drama,

and that children, in their meaning-making endeavors, move fluidly between these systems, drawing on the affordances of each. For this reason, Harste et al. adopted a semiotic view of literacy” in which “the orchestration of all signifying structures from all available communication systems in the event have an integral part” (p. 208).

Multimodal Literacies and Self-Re-Creation

Multimodal literacy has both a technical component and relational component, or a way of belonging or connecting with others (Harste, 2010). Gee (2013) argued that learning works better as a Discourse practice than instructed process. In other words, learning works best when couched in the context of identity enactment rather than framed as a set of skills to be acquired. Cope and Kalantzis (2013) likewise argue, “Learning is a process of self-re-creation” and “Learning to write is about forming an identity” (p. 124). Because multimodal literacy has a relational component along with a technical component, things such as social class (Gee, 2013; Heath, 1983), gender (Tannen, 1996), as well as race and ethnicity (Michaels, 1981) can mediate the learning process and formation of a literate identity.

Children often use visual texts to communicate what they cannot yet express in written language. Children in early childhood classrooms use drawing to represent and interpret stories, both positive and negative, about their experiences and emotions. Fisher, Albers, and Frederick (2014) examined a first grader’s drawings within the context of a punitive mandate. They analyzed the visual texts he created in accordance with his disciplinary action plan, formed by the child and his school support team, and his misbehaviors over an eight-month period. The disciplinary action plan constrained how the child could represent and express his experiences on paper: The top of page represented the disciplinary incident, while the bottom of the page represented the “better choice,” in other words, how he could have chosen to behave differently.

Using the tools of Visual Discourse Analysis (Albers, 2007, 2014), Fisher, Albers, and Frederick (2014) examined how the child's visual representations changed over time. His drawings early in the school year, which were colorful and used lines indicating movement, depicting happiness and connection to both his peers and his teacher. His later drawings used less color and revealed a dramatically changed perspective, one that positioned himself as a boy who is "now resigned, weak and feels little agency in the control he has over himself" (p. 311). Fisher, Albers, and Frederick argued that the disciplinary action plan served as a means for facilitating a bad boy identity in the child, which he enacted, rather than facilitating better choice making.

Siegel, Kontovourki, Schmier, and Enriquez (2008) conducted an ethnographic case study in a kindergarten classroom to examine what counted as literacy in the classroom and how Jewel, a Bangladeshi immigrant from India, participated in school literacy. Jewel, who was labeled at-risk, did not use the pages set out by the teacher in a print-based writing workshop as intended. She composed entire sentences within the box on the page designated for illustrations, and due to the traditional structure of the workshop, these writings did not count as sanctioned practices, but instead positioned her as a struggling reader and writer. However, when the parameters of the workshop shifted to include digital tools, Jewel, who was fluent in digital literacy, positioned herself as an expert through not only spoken words, such as, "I know how to fix all that. Don't help us," (p. 96), but also through bodily movements and the manipulation of tools in her environment. For example, she adjusted the screen and keyboard for better view, physically and socially positioning herself as literate in her environment. This study illustrates how reading and writing practices can constrain children's identities, but also illustrates how a wider conceptualization of literacy, which included a multimodal digital medium, opened up opportunities for Jewel to enact an adept literate identity.

Wohlwend (2011a) described how a group of boys in her study of kindergarteners used the visual mode and the medium of drawings to both facilitate group cohesion and gain social capital within the group. The boys, through conversation, sometimes identified sporting events that two or more of the boys attended at the same time with their families, and these shared experiences in the home sphere contributed to their group identity as “real” sports fans in the school sphere. They layered their group cohesion by including drawings of football designs, such as logos and mascots, on their school work. The sports-related drawings provided the boys with group cohesion, but also opportunities for gaining stature within the group. One child, Marshall, for example, became the group “artistic expert” and leader (p. 58). These social provisions then mediated his visual literacy development; he often explored art supplies to develop his expertise further and continue to secure his social standing.

Vasquez (2014a), who employed a critical literacy lens, found that the children in her Canadian kindergarten classroom used multimodal literacy practices to mediate power dynamics in their classroom. One girl, Hannah, used drawing to dismantle bullying by the boys. Hannah composed a series of drawings titled, “so the boys will leave us alone,” and alternatively titled, “how to trap a boy.” Hannah used drawing as a tool for studying how to disrupt the bullying that she and other girls receive from the boys. Her drawings depicted various scenarios: Bait the boys with donuts, and trap the boys in a shark tank, among other things. As she drew, she began to qualify her drawings. For example, she said she did not draw curly haired boys because Kevin, the only curly haired boy in class, was nice to her and the other girls. As she used drawing as a way to explore solutions to the problem with the boys, she began to consider the feasibility of her traps. After sharing her drawings of traps with the class, the children, including the boys, wanted to look more closely at them, which opened up space to foreground the playground bullying,

pushing it to the center of their curriculum, where the issue was addressed full-on. The drawings mediated conversations about gender dynamics and struggles between the children. Hannah “used art as a literacy to construct meaning in her life and to attempt to change the conditions of her world, to redraw her existence and that of the other girls in her class” (p. 56). A multimodal perspective opens up possibilities to move beyond prescriptive standards for literacy and makes space in classrooms for children to use literacy for critical purposes.

Classroom Materials

Multimodal literacy makes use of various resources, including physical materials in the environment. “The ways we use everyday materials are shaped by discourses and histories of practices that underlie our shared expectations (e.g., who may use an object and how it should be used” (Wohlwend, 2014, p. 57). It has been shown that adult beliefs influence how play is enacted by children in classrooms as well as their perceptions of play (Pyle & Bigelow, 2015). Likewise, teachers’ management of the materials in the environments may also impact how children interact with each other in these environments. For example, it has been shown that when reading and writing materials are included in the classroom environment, children are more likely to infuse their play with literacy activities (Neuman & Roskos, 1992), and that when teachers introduced new materials into a sandbox, children changed the types of play they engaged in (Jarrett, French-Lee, Bulunuz, & Bulunuz, 2010). Reggio Emilia, a popular early childhood learning approach, labels the environment as the *third teacher*, and considers the materials, furniture, and design of the environment essential supports to children’s learning and development; in the Reggio Emilia approach, educators pay special attention to the aesthetics of the classroom environment (Forman & Frye, 2012). While adult choices for materials may frame children’s learning and play, children also exert agency in how they use these resources,

sometimes working with them in transgressive ways (Marsh et al., 2016). This section of the literature review draws connections between the materials in children's classroom environments and their play and multimodal learning.

Jarrett et al. (2010) found that the types of materials available in an outdoor classroom environment had an impact on the types of play that occurred. Their study examined the types of play that occurred in the sand area and the effects of adding new materials to the sand area. They noted functional, constructive, and pretend play. Functional play, for example, involved scooping and dumping sand, while constructive play involved children making roads. The most common type of play observed appeared to be functional play, but when cars and trucks were added to the sand area, constructive and pretend play were also observed. Construction play was *only* observed when children played with the vehicles. The pretend play observed involved road construction and trips, as well as a few instances of making birthday cakes. The sand area was dominated by girls and four-year-olds, but when new materials were added to the sand area, the boys and three-year-olds became increasingly interested. This study illustrates the effects materials have on children's play, and the authors argued that teachers should plan for outdoors spaces as they would for indoor spaces by varying the materials or making suggestions for their uses.

Neuman and Roskos (1992) study examined the impact of providing ample reading and writing materials in children's classroom environments on their literacy behaviors during free play. They videotaped three- to five-year-olds as they engaged in the kitchen, office, and library play areas in the classroom. They found that after the intervention the frequency, duration, and complexity of the children's literacy behaviors during play increased. For example, children in the intervention group engaged in reading and writing behaviors more than ten times the amount

of the control group. Additionally, over the course of the seven-month study, they also found that the literacy demonstrations by the children became more interconnected and sustained. This study is important because it demonstrates the effect that materials infused into the classroom environment can have on children's play as well as long-term impacts.

Broadhead and Burt (2012) conducted a year-long study in England in a classroom of three- to five-year-olds to examine playful pedagogies and playful learning, and they found that materials impacted the social nature of children's play. They used the tool called the Social Play Continuum (Broadhead, 2001) to examine children's sociability and cooperation during play. The continuum includes four levels: 1) associative play; 2) social play; 3) highly social play; and 4) cooperative play. To their surprise, Broadhead and Burt (2012) found that the fewest observed instances of cooperative play, the most intellectually challenging level on the continuum, occurred during role play. Through discussions with the teachers in that classroom, they found that the teachers had designed the themes in the role play areas. For example, the teachers designed a theme around a home, a store, a café, and a party. After they reworked the role play areas by replacing the existing materials with more open-ended materials, such as cardboard boxes, cable reels, and fabrics, the play they observed in those spaces changed dramatically: The children's play rapidly moved into the cooperative play domain on the Social Play Continuum.

Bomer (2003) examined the intended and unintended affordances of tools, such as staplers and pencils, in a readers/writers' workshop in a K-2 classroom. He identified ten categories of tools in his data: "environmental tools, pages, tools for making marks, tools for joining pages, tools for storing texts, tools for attention, mnemonic tools, personal proxies, text structures, and procedural tools" (p.231). Using field notes and video transcripts as data, with children interacting with tools as the unit of analysis (Wertsch, 1998), he coded for tool types,

motives, and pivots, with a focus on tools oriented towards literacy acquisition. Bomer found disjunctures between the children's use of the tools and the teacher's intentions; the children expanded the meanings of the tools beyond those sanctioned by the teacher. This is what Marsh et al. (2016) might call transgressive play. Tools are nested within value-laden social contexts, so semantic and pragmatic systems contributed to the children's understanding of the tools beyond how the tool works in a mechanical sense or how the teacher intended the tool be used.

Play and Literacy Connections

This section of the literature review examines the intersection of play and literacy. Wohlwend (2011a) argued that children's play is an embodied literacy and promoted this conceptualization in order to re-center play in the early childhood curriculum. As children develop towards conventional literacy—reading and writing with alphabetic texts—they are also already agentic meaning-makers, using other resources, such as gestures, props, and costumes as resources. Additionally, the meanings the children convey through the materials in the classroom and their own bodies are rooted in their social contexts.

In their ethnographic study, Worthington and van Oers (2017) examined social literacy practices and events in the play of three- and four-year-olds in a Southwest England inner-city preschool. The observations noted the talk, action, and artifacts the children used during play. They found that the children's play often included “embedded literacy practices,” (p. 149) adapted from home practices, such as making shopping lists, and that these literacy practices made wide use of writing materials and symbols. The affordances of the materials and symbols resulted from “the children's knowledge of ‘what works best’ combined with what was readily available” (p. 165). They consider this finding interesting since the children's pretend play and use of literacy were not planned or facilitated by adults.

Paley (2004) argued that “fantasy play is the glue that binds together all other pursuits, including early teaching of reading and writing skills” (p. 8). Children are natural-born authors, creating literature through play. When recording the conversations of children engaged in play in her kindergarten class, Paley noticed that the transcriptions resembled stage directions of a theatrical play. Additionally, the children worked with complex literary devices in their dramatic play, experimenting with flashbacks and flash-forwards in their renditions of fairy tales. This sort of children’s play is embedded in the social world of the classroom and can function as opportunities for identity enactment and literacy development. Paley also argued that fantasy play requires time. “We removed the element—time—that enabled play to be effective, then blamed the children when their play skills did not match our expectations” (Paley, 2004, p. 46).

Rowe and Neitzel (2010) observed the play behaviors of two- and three-year-olds in their preschool classrooms in order to investigate how children’s interests may shape their early writing experiences. Rather than focusing on the teacher’s role in shaping literacy experiences, they focused on children’s agency in shaping their own experiences to better align with their interests. Additionally, they focused on the link between children’s play patterns and writing activities. They identified play activities, material use, and play actions chosen by the children, and their findings suggest children’s interests mediate their interactions with people, materials, and activities, resulting in varying early writing profiles. Rowe and Neitzel found that children spent most of their time in sociodramatic or construction play. They also found that children adapted their activities to others, and as a result, all children participated in various writing and play activities, but patterns in children’s personal interests endured across the school year and their play and writing experiences were filtered through these interest orientations. Table 4

shows linkages between interest orientations (Neitzel, 2008), play types, and purposes for writing (Rowe & Neitzel, 2010).

Table 4

Linkages between Child's Interest Orientations, Play, and Writing Purposes

Interest orientation	Play Focus	Purposes for writing
Conceptual	Topic exploration	Exploring topics of interest and getting meanings on paper
Creative	Transformational	Experimenting with open-ended materials (e.g., markers, paper)
Procedural	Skills	Performing and reproducing conventional print
Social	Social roles	Social interaction, relational

Adapted from Rowe and Neitzel (2010)

In Summary

The literature review was divided into five main section: 1) conceptualizations of young children's play; 2) play and children's social worlds; 3) young children's reading and development; 4) multimodal literacy; and 5) play-literacy connections. These five sections, although summations of past research, framed an argument for this research study. Past research has demonstrated that conceptualizations of children's play are multifaceted, considering play types, play activities, children's sociability, and children's interest orientations. Research has also demonstrated that although play can serve academic functions, play is an essential feature of children's social worlds. Within play, children can position peers as insiders or outsiders to their social grouping and co-construct social hierarchies that they reinforce. Like play, children's reading and writing practices are also multifaceted. This study draws from the view of literacy as

an interactive process that does not follow a rigid set of stages. While preschoolers are often not considered literate by conventional standards when they cannot read and write using alphabetic signs, they are already agent meaning-makers. Children use their available resources to construct meaning. Multimodal literacy, which is meaning-making using various modes, such as verbal, visual, or gestural, positions children as already literate. The resources that children use to construct meaning include the material items in their classroom settings. The materials teachers choose to include in classroom settings impact how children play in those settings. This research study drew from the many concepts and ideas presented in this chapter in order to examine how children's play practices and multimodal practices intersected for social purposes in one preschool classroom.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In the prior chapter, I situated this study within research related to early childhood education to justify its relevance. In this chapter, I describe the design of the study, providing a rationale for my methodological choices. This qualitative study, which used the tools of Mediated Discourse Analysis (Scollon, 2001), examined how children's play activities and multimodal practices intersected for social purposes. Data sources included participant observations, and field notes. Four questions guided this study:

1. In what types of play do preschoolers engage?
2. What strategies do preschoolers use to navigate the social boundaries of playframes?
3. What are the various modes and resources that preschool use to engage in playframes and how do they use them?
4. What social positionings do preschoolers take on and resist in playframes?

In the sections that follow, I describe the methodological orientation of the study, the site context, my position as a researcher, the participants, data collection, data analysis, standards of quality, and dissemination plans.

Qualitative Methodology: Mediated Discourse Analysis

This qualitative study used the tools of Mediated Discourse Analysis (MDA) in its design (Scollon, 2001). Qualitative designs allow for researchers to examine participants in the open systems (Biesta, 2010) of naturalistic settings and are useful for examining complex phenomena, such as literacy development or children's play practices, embedded in their local social contexts. As Lincoln (2010) has argued, qualitative research is "fat with the juice of human

endeavor, human decision making, *zaftig* with human contradiction, human emotion, human frailty” (p. 6).

Mediated Discourse Analysis is a methodological and critical tool of analysis that enables researchers to focus on social actors as they are acting with cultural tools as the unit of analysis (Scollon, 2001; Wohlwend, 2008, 2009, 2011a). Wohlwend (2009) argued that MDA is a particularly useful approach for studying children because children often use actions instead of talk while interacting with the materials in their environment. In line with Wohlwend’s argument, I chose MDA as a methodological tool since I planned to examine children’s play activities and multimodal practices in their classroom. Scollon (2001) developed MDA during his study of a one-year-old who was learning the various meanings associated with exchanging objects with others, such as offering someone food or handing a cashier money. He argued that *handing* is more than the physical transfer of objects; handing is a social practice that can be unidirectional or bidirectional in nature and can be used for various purposes, such as gaining “topical dominance in conversation” (p. 65). I used this perspective in my data analysis to understand how the children’s actions during play formed social practices.

Scollon (2001) outlined five key concepts of MDA: mediated action, mediational means, site of engagement, practice, and nexus of practice. Social actions are mediated by *material means*, such as coins and cups during a coffee shop transaction. These mediational means include the materiality of the social actors, such as clothing, as well as body movements of the cashiers and customers. These mediational means carry with them value-laden histories (Scollon, 2001). *Mediated actions* occur in specific *sites of engagement* where social practices and mediational means intersect, bringing a focus to the participants in a real-time, irreversible moment in history (Scollon, 2001). As a result, a coin-cup transaction in a Starbucks on a

university campus is unique from a coin-cup transaction in a Starbucks in an international airport. Social practices, such as handing, are formed through the linkages of mediated actions and carry different meanings depending on context (Scollon, 2001). For example, a barista handing a coffee to a customer in a Starbucks has a different meaning than a woman handing a coffee to a friend in her home. The first may be interpreted as a transaction, the second as a gift. The *nexus of practices* are points of transformation, creating insider/outsider identities and altering the meanings of materials. For example, ordering practices and queuing practices may position a Starbucks customer as an outsider if the person does not understand that “tall” means the smallest cup size available or that after the order is placed, a barista will deliver the brewed coffee over a different counter. Over time, however, that same customer may transition to an insider identity after learning the differences between such things as a *latte* and *café au lait* and that condiments, such as half-and-half and honey, are not indicated with an order, but added by the customer at a separate counter.

Mediated Discourse Analysis relies on fine-grain multimodal analysis of mediated actions to illuminate these shifts in meaning.

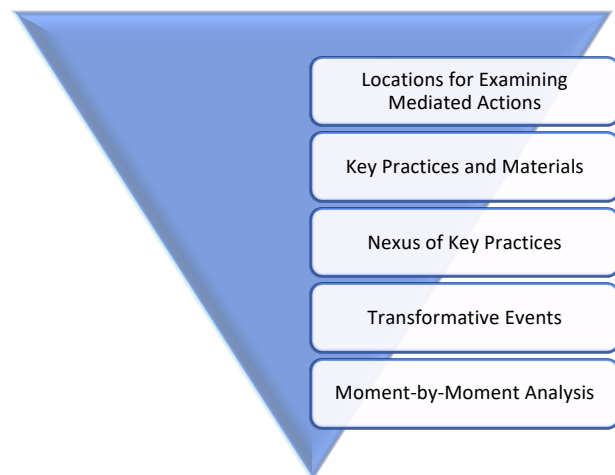


Figure 1: Mediated Discourse Analysis Adapted from Wohlwend (2009)

Wohlwend (2009; 2011) adapted the concepts of MDA to her own work using a filtering model that foregrounds affinity groups and transformational moments. *Affinity groups* (Wohlwend, 2011a) are formed by children who play together based on shared interests or activities. In other words, people within affinity groups form affiliations with one other primarily through shared practices (Gee, 2014). Within affinity groups, knowledge is both intensive and extensive; that is, each person in the group brings special knowledge and shares that knowledge with others (Gee, 2014). Moreover, knowledge within affinity groups is often “*tacit*, that is built up by daily practice and stored in the routines and procedures of the people who engage in the practices of the group...New members acquire such tacit knowledge by guided participation in the practices of the group, not primarily through direct instruction outside these practices” (p. 75).

Transformation moments occur when social practices combine to produce changes in meanings or participation (Wohlwend, 2009). Figure 1 depicts this process of identifying mediated actions as a funnel-shaped filtering system and builds on Scollon’s (2001) original

framework. The top layer of Wohlwend's (2011a) filter pertains to the locations for examining participants' mediated actions, which may include areas in the classroom set up by the teachers with particular materials, such a block center or a dramatic play center. The second layer involves identifying key practices and materials in these areas. In a dramatic play center, key practices may include handing scarves, twirling one's body, or gazing into a mirror. The scarves, bodies, and mirror represent potential mediational means. The third filter narrows to instances of intersecting practices that signal social identities. For example, play practices and reading practices may form a nexus to signal sanctioned ways of doing school. The fourth filter narrows the focus on the nexus of practices further by locating transformative events, moments in which meanings and identities are altered, such as when a child moves from outsider to insider status in a social group's play. The final filter pertains to a fine-grained analysis of those shifts in meaning, attending to children's verbal and nonverbal discourse, including gestures, physical environment, and materials. Although this hierarchal model suggests linearity, I conceptualize this process as recursive in nature with movement looping back to prior levels of the filter during analysis. Figure 2 illustrates the recursive nature of my analysis process, considering and reconsidering the children's resources, key practices, nexus of practices, and transformative events within a playframe. Using the resources of MDA (Scollon, 2001; Wohlwend, 2008, 2011a) within a recursive analytic process, I used multimodal transcriptions to identify and examine the mediated actions of the children during play to understand how practices intersected to create new meanings. Implicit in discourse are social history and power relations, and Mediated Discourse Analysis illuminates these factors, which are inherently critical (Wohlwend, 2014). In other words, Mediated Discourse Analysis involves critical discourse analysis.

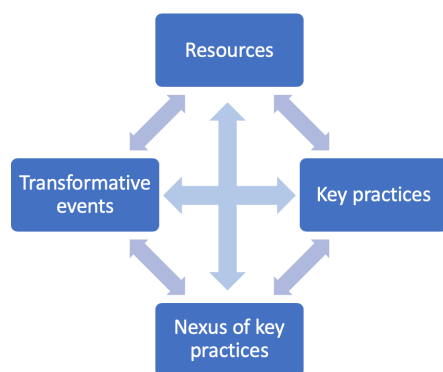


Figure 2: Recursive Process of Analysis Based on Wohlwend's (2009) MDA Filter

Research Setting and Context

This study took place in a private preschool in a large metropolitan area in the Southeastern United States. Since I had conducted previous research at the study's site, I wished to continue more nuanced understandings of literacy through young children's play. This preschool was a potential research site, in part, because the school valued research-based practices; teachers from this preschool not only attended national educational conferences, but also at times participated in those conferences as presenters, sharing their practice-based projects. Further, this collaborative learning school drew from both Reggio-Emilia (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2012) and place-based educational practices (Louv, 2008; Sobel, 2005). A Reggio-Emilia (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2012) approach to early childhood education positions children as agentic meaning-makers; the curriculum is based on the children's emerging interests and children learn through various mediums (e.g., writing, painting, dance, and music). A place-based practice (Sobel, 2005) roots the curriculum in the local community, including its culture, history, and natural environment. The preschool's philosophy could be seen, in part, by a large installation painted by a prominent local artist that framed a corner of the playground on their

south campus; the children had visited the artist's street murals in the community and engaged in collaborative painting with him. The educators employed at this school came from diverse backgrounds, including yoga instructors, musicians, and photographers, and they were encouraged to draw from their expertise for approaches to teaching and curricular ideas.

In addition to the school's play-based and place-based practices, the school employed an anti-bias curriculum (Derman-Sparks, LeeKeenan, & Nimmo, 2014), with attention to not only racial and ethnic diversity, but also to issues of gender identity and orientation. I gathered data in one classroom at this school with two teachers and twelve children between the ages of four and five years old. This is the same school where I conducted my previous research study that I discussed in Chapter 1.

Recruitment of Participants

Once I was granted permission to conduct this study from IRB, which included written approval from the director of the school to conduct my dissertation research at this site, I commenced the study by finding a school site and recruiting participants. Recruitment of teachers initiated with a scheduled time with the school director to speak about this study. I explained the study to the school director, and underscored that teachers were not obligated to participate.

Inclusion criteria for this study were as follows: Adult participants must be teachers at the preschool and child participants must be enrolled in the preschool as the students of those teachers. There were no exclusion criteria. Participation was voluntary, and data was not be collected on any teacher who did not consent or on any child who did not have parental permission to participate in the study. Additionally, I did not collect data on any child who did not provide assent for this study whenever seeking assent was appropriate.

To meet these inclusion criteria, I met with teachers at their convenience to discuss the study. The director was not present when I recruited teachers to avoid undue influence, and I reminded teachers that participation was voluntary and not an obligation of employment at the school. I talked with all teachers at the north campus. Because I was interested in observing children who are verbal and engage in deep social play, including dramatic play with props, I recruited teachers in pre-kindergarten classrooms at the north campus. After describing the study to them and giving them time to consider my request, two co-teachers in one pre-kindergarten classroom agreed to participate in the study. They then signed an Informed Consent form (Appendix A).

After successfully recruiting two teachers, I began to recruit the children in their classroom. I met with parents and guardians during drop-off and pick-up times to explain the study and seek their permission to recruit their child. I made myself available to parents and guardians if they had further questions. I explained to parents and guardians that if their child refused assent even though they gave parental permission, I would not collect data on their child. I also explained that they could remove their child from the study at any time and for any reason. Parents who agreed to have their child participate in the study signed an Informed Consent (Appendix B). I also sought verbal assent from children whose parents agreed for them to be in the study. I stayed attuned to the children's body language to gauge their willingness to participate in the study. For example, if a child began to turn his or her body away from me to block my attempt to interact, then I interpreted that non-verbal language as non-assent. Twelve parents gave consent to have their children participate in the study.

Participants

Participants in this study included two teachers from one classroom and twelve of their

students between the ages of four and five years old. All names used throughout this study are pseudonyms. The two adult participants were Ms. Nettie and Ms. Ashley. It was Ms. Nettie's third year at the school and ninth year in early childhood education. It was Ms. Ashley's second year at the school after more than a decade working in education including both early childhood education and secondary education.

Positioning of the Researcher

During this research project, I enacted a role as an interpretive *bricoleur* constructing data with the participants, rather than objectively observing subjects (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The interpretive *bricoleur* assembles the diverse tools and methods available to fit the questions and its complex research context, make-shifting as necessary; it is an aesthetic and mechanical process, and the resulting product, a *bricolage*, is much like a quilt fashioned from scraps. This process is also value-laden. "The interpretive *bricoleur* understands that research is an interactive process shaped by his or her own personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity, and by those of the people in the setting" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 6). This interactive process produces identities of not only the participants, but of myself. Within the theory of Mediated Discourse Analysis, a nexus of practice produces social groupings and positions participants as insiders or outsiders of those groupings (Scollon, 2001).

In this study, I enacted a researcher identity in the classroom, but also a teacher identity at times when I interacted with the children and commented on their work and activities, particularly if they approached me. As a result, I did not stand outside the sites of engagement that I sought to analyze, but instead became part of the context. I had to consider how my phone's camera, for example, served as a mediational means as well, and how the practice of video recording may have intersected with the children's play practices. My personal identity

and prior experiences undoubtedly informed this project in several ways, from when to begin recording in the classroom to what observations to include in my write-up to how I interpreted the data. “There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of—and between—the observer and the observed” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 21). As a researcher, I had to interrogate my relationship with my research: I was an interpretive *bricoleur* who self-identified as a middle-class woman with a working-class upbringing, as a white mother who gave birth to Latinx children, and as an educator-activist entangled with the research site and its urban-Southern setting. I was not separate from my research but embedded within it.

My relationship with this research site can be categorized in three broad strokes: mother, teacher, and researcher. During the preschool’s opening year, my son was a student in the four-year-old class, and I taught two days a week down the hallway in the early-two’s class. My family’s relationship with the school began before that first year in business: Both of my children attended another local preschool for several years where many administrators and educators were formerly employed. As a result, this new school that my son attended and where I taught felt a lot like the previous school due to our historical relationships with much of the staff. After my children graduated from preschool into the elementary school setting, and after I enrolled in a doctoral program, I returned to the preschool in a research capacity, collecting data in three different classrooms periodically over the next eighteen months. I returned to the preschool as a researcher because I was drawn to its strong play-centered philosophy in an era of high-stakes assessment. A sign that hung in the main hallway for several years offered a counter narrative to the accountability culture: *Childhood is a journey, not a race*. This sign referenced the Race to the Top grant initiative, a competitive grant program for states designed to improve outcomes for

early childhood education, developed by the Obama administration (U.S. Department of HHS, 2017).

As a parent and teacher at this school, I saw first-hand how the culture of this preschool privileged social acumen, self-regulation, and creativity as much as traditional academic skills. During this time as a mother and teacher, I personally struggled with the tension between a dichotomized notion of work and play that permeated mainstream educational discourse, at times unsure how hours of free play would adequately prepare my own children and my students for a mainstream public education. I decided to lean into this discomfort by returning to the preschool as a researcher to examine children's play experiences in their local context.

Study Procedures and Timeframe

Data collection for this study commenced August 2017 and concluded December 2017. I conducted ten observations during that time frame that lasted at least one hour each. The observation schedule was based in part on teacher preferences. During each observation, I recorded field notes in a notebook and recorded photos and videos using my iPhone. Before, during, and/or after the observations, I spoke briefly with teacher participants about what actions, materials, and social groupings I observed in the classroom. I had originally designed the study to include formalized member checks (Merriam, 2009) and two thirty-minute semi-structured interviews (Roulston, 2010) with teachers outside of classroom time; however, due to time constraints and teacher desires, we were unable to schedule those meetings. Therefore, I used the briefer moments with teachers before, during, and/or immediately after observations to check with them about the emerging findings and representations of participants.

During my classroom visits, as I observed the children, I sometimes spoke with them during their play, asking what they were doing or why they selected particular materials. While I

observed children at play, my presence in the classroom allowed me to track in real time the children's movements around the room and between affinity groups. To understand mediated action, I took video recordings of children at play. The video recordings allowed me to visually record sites of engagement, capturing locations of furniture, materials, and children's bodies. The ability to consider the physical environment of the classroom was an important part of my work with MDA, which uses children's real-time actions with mediating tools as the unit of analysis.

After each observation, I completed a methodological memo and analytic memo that informed future observations. Methodological memos included notes describing the steps I took during data collection, while analytic memos included notes describing my in-the-moment impressions of the data and emerging analyses. After data collection concluded, I selected excerpts for micro-level multimodal transcription and analysis. I coded and recoded data, collapsed codes into categories to find themes in the data, and generated theory. The timeframe for this study is outlined in Table 5.

Table 5

Timeframe for the Study

[illegible]

Researcher Role

For this study, I took on the role of *participant observer* (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011).

DeWalt and DeWalt define participant observation as “a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture” (p. 1). They go on to describe varying degrees of participation, including a) nonparticipation; b) passive participation; c) moderate participation; d) active participation; and e) complete participation. *Nonparticipation* does not require interaction with people and can be acquired outside of research settings through such things as reading diaries or documents. *Passive participation* occurs when the researcher is inside the research setting, but strictly observes people without interaction. *Moderative participation* occurs when the researcher occasionally engages with people inside the setting, while *active participation* occurs when the researcher almost always interacts with people inside the setting. During *complete participation*, on the other hand, the researcher becomes a temporary member of the group in order to integrate fully into the culture of the setting.

For this study, I observed twelve children in one preschool classroom as they engaged in play and various activities, and therefore chose to interact with the children through *moderative participation* (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011), since I would be identifiable as a researcher in the classroom and would interact with children when they approach me, but would not plan lessons, conference with parents, or perform other regular responsibilities of a teacher at this school. A common practice at this preschool was to invite guests into the classroom for various purposes, so my presence in the classroom as a moderative participant conformed to the established expectations of the children and teachers. While observing children at play, I identified as children’s action during play and the social dynamics.

Data Collection and Management

Data collected for this study included classroom observations, teacher debriefs, and field notes. Each of these data sources enabled me to investigate the study's research questions. Because I chose to examine children's play activities and multimodal practices in a naturalistic setting in order to provide descriptions of how children use modes and resources for social purposes, I chose participant observation as a data collection tool. DeWalt and DeWalt (2011) argued that participant observation facilitates new understandings and theories through "moments in which the 'scales fall from our eyes'" (p. 15). In other words, participating in the setting in which we wish to study forces us to consider our narrow research interests within a broader context and challenges our assumptions. The teacher debriefs allowed me to test my emerging thoughts about the children's play experiences by providing an opportunity for teachers to validate, challenge, and expand my understandings of the children (Merriam, 2009). Because DeWalt and DeWalt (2011) argued, "*Observation is not data unless it is recorded*" (p. 157, italics in original), I chose to video record most observations and record field notes. *Field notes* provide researchers with the opportunity to capture details that could be easily forgotten in order to visit and revisit during later analysis (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011).

Classroom Observations

Over the course of the five-month data collection window, I conducted ten observations of children at play. Although ten observations over the course of five months may seem like a limited data set for examining how children's play actions and multimodal practices intersected for social purposes, I justify that decision based on my approach to data analysis. For data analysis, I used Mediated Discourse Analysis (Scollon, 2001, Wohlwend, 2009), which was time-consuming, given that both verbal and nonverbal interactions were coded and analyzed in

fine-grain detail, considering such things as momentary verbal pauses and quick shifts in visual gaze. I chose Mediated Discourse Analysis in order to conduct analysis at a more focused micro-level. For example, within one nineteen-second interaction during clean-up time after free play, Lillian interacted with three separate people—Ms. Ashley, Ms. Nettie, and Nora—and used a variety of modes and resources within this brief timeframe to resist Ms. Ashley’s directive to clean up the art area and sustain her play with Nora. Within this nineteen-second window of time, Lillian used shifts in gaze, body orientation, physical movement, proximity, verbal declarations, and print, as well as concrete materials such as the table, markers, and paper in order to navigate classroom social dynamics, namely challenging adult authority and protecting her playframe.

The complexity of data analysis in part justified my decision to conduct only ten observations, but in addition, I considered my familiarity with the site setting as a factor in study design. DeWalt and DeWalt (2011) outlined the importance of first contact with participants and establishing rapport. Because I had familiarity with the preschool as the parent of a former student, as a former teacher, and as a researcher, I had observed many classrooms in this school over the years and came to this project with a strong understanding of the site context. Additionally, Ms. Nettie and I were familiar with each other prior to this research study within the school context, so we had already developed rapport with each other. Therefore, I needed less time to acquaint myself with the setting and gain familiarity with the teachers and children. I understood many of the Reggio Emilia-inspired practices used in the classroom and was able to quickly immerse myself into the setting.

For classroom observations, I took video recordings, which I watched within three days of the site visit to expand my field notes. These recordings were transcribed, reviewed, and

coded. The teachers in this school used Reggio Emilia inspired documentation techniques (Forman & Frye, 2012) and recorded videos and photos of the children throughout the day as a routine part of their documentation process, so my use of a recording device blended with the already established practices of data collection at the school. Like the teachers, I used my phone to record the videos and photos. Video recording allowed me to capture the complexities of social interactions in a way that field notes and photographs alone could not have. I transferred the videos and photos to a password protected computer after each observation and deleted the recordings from my phone. As I collected data, I chronologically organized all videos, photos, transcriptions, field notes, and methodological and analytic memos. I also indexed data by keyword descriptions that included date, classroom context, materials, focal children, and play themes.

Filtering Process for Observations. Initially, observations included arrival, outdoor time, morning meeting, transitions, snack time, and free play. At the beginning of data collection, I focused on all consented children in all areas of the classroom in order to get a broad sense of classroom activities, play types, and affinity groups (Wohlwend, 2011a). I identified locations for observing mediated actions, key practices and materials, and the nexus of practices (Scollon, 2001; Wohlwend, 2011a, 2014). Over the course of the ten observations, I began to refine my focus to two main areas: I began to focus on the carpet area during morning meeting time and the dramatic play area during free play time, in part because morning meeting often preceded free play time in the daily schedule during the morning period of the day when the teachers welcomed me into their classroom to observe, but also because each activity type offered different affordances. During morning meeting, I was able to better observe teacher-guided interactive episodes in a large group context. I was able to see the teachers facilitating

discussions and managing children's behavior. During free play, I could better observe child-initiated interactive episodes, which included the establishment and sustainment of playframes. In this classroom, children engaged in free play after morning meeting in a manner that fit Wood's (2014) conceptualization of free play: child-initiated play in which children select their own activities, playmates, themes, and activities.

Over the course of the ten observations, I also began to refine my observations during free play further. During free play time, children were able to engage with materials at any of the more permanent centers, such as the literacy area, book nook, or dramatic play area, as well as the *invitations* that rotated every few days, if not daily. Invitations refer to areas of the classroom, typically tabletops, arranged with materials selected by teachers in a manner to encourage children's exploration (Gandini, 2012). I began to focus my attention on the dramatic play area during free play time and the children who participated in this location in the room. Rowe and Neitzel (2010) found that the two- and three-year-olds in their study spent most of their time in socio-dramatic or construction play. During data collection, I noticed that children in this classroom also spent a lot of time in socio-dramatic play, and although I also noticed children engaged in construction play at times, based on my in-the-moment impressions, that play type did not seem to dominate with the consented participants. Several of the children gravitated towards the dramatic play area each day, sometimes engaging with other children and sometimes playing alone. The social dynamics as well as the children's use of materials that took place in this area of the room interested me and seemed to provide rich data for exploring how children's play actions and multimodal practices intersect for social purposes. Over time, I began to focus on a core group of children, or employed what Fanger, Frankel, and Hazen (2012) called a *focal child* approach. I used a focal child approach for two main reason. First of all, some of the

participants had formed affinity groups (Wohlwend, 2011a; Gee, 2014) with other children in the classroom who were not participating in the study, so I chose not to focus on those participants for practical reasons: Because their play activities were so intertwined with non-participants, collecting data that would allow me to examine social interactions proved difficult. I started to focus on Sam, Joseph, Lillian, and Nora because these children often played with other participants or engaged in solitary play. Therefore, I was able to collect data on these children with more focused attention. Secondly, I selected Sam, Joseph, Lillian, and Nora over other participants because these children appeared to engage in sustained play, sometime revisiting themes or play activities from prior days. Joseph, for example, appeared interested in literacy-related activities and could often be found at the art center or literacy invitations. Nora and Lillian, on the other hand, both appeared to enjoy dramatic play and spent more of their time in the dramatic play area of the classroom, sometimes working with materials across more than one observation, such as a pizza-shaped hat and a collection of bowls and baskets. Further, selection of these children allowed me to study more closely play actions (Rowe & Neitzel, 2010) and play strategies (Corsaro 1979, 2005). I remained attuned to the other participants and did collect further data on some of those children, but my focus narrowed to Sam, Joseph, Lillian, and Nora.

Teacher Debriefs

Member checking is common strategy in qualitative research for ensuring trustworthiness (Merriam, 2009). Member checking, also known as respondent validation, refers to the researcher seeking feedback from the participants on emerging findings (Merriam, 2009). The purpose of member checking in qualitative research is to verify that the researcher's interpretations align with the participants' experiences. It provides an effective way to identify biases and adjust findings to better reflect multiple perspectives (Merriam, 2009). In the original

design for this research study, I had allotted time for two interviews with each teacher for member checking, but due to scheduling challenges on the teachers' part, I was unable to schedule these interviews with them. Instead, I relied on less formal teacher debriefs before, during, and after observations. These moments, albeit brief, helped illuminate my subjectivities and expanded my understanding of the children. For example, my emerging analysis of the classroom dynamics positioned Sam as a frequent social outsider to his peers. When I shared my impression of Sam with Ms. Ashley, she validated my impression by saying that she, too, had noticed Sam's social challenges. She furthered my understanding of Sam by revealing that she thinks it might be possible that he struggled with social challenges due to an undiagnosed condition.

Researcher Field Notes

DeWalt and DeWalt (2011) argued that memory is unreliable, so field notes provide an important tool for capturing data during observation for later review. During site visits, I recorded *field notes* in a style that DeWalt and DeWalt (2011) called *jot notes*. *Jot notes* are comprised of words, phrases, and occasionally sentences written in a small notebook as memory aids. When I first arrived in the classroom, I recorded in my jot notes things that video recordings of the observation might not capture clearly. For example, I recorded in my jot notes the date, time, and general information about the setting, such as materials in the room or participants present, as well as the daily schedule. During observations, I primarily documented the children's activities through video recording, but used field notes as a memory aid for drafting post-observation memos. My *jot notes* (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011) also indicated my passing impressions, questions, and concerns. Participant observation and field notes allowed me to identify emerging Discourses (Gee, 2011) as well as the materials and semiotic tools children

use during play.

Table 6

Data Collection and Connection to RQs adopted from Bloomberg and Volpe (2008)

Research Question	Data Sources	Connection to Research Questions	Connection to Theoretical Perspectives
1) In what types of play do preschoolers engage?	Observations Field notes	Participant observations and field notes helped me identify the various materials children used in the classroom and how they used them to play.	Play is an embodied literacy (Wohlwend, 2011a). The best unit of analysis is the mediated action (Wertsch, 1991), or how people engage with materials, such as pencils, language, clothing, architecture, or even institutions in their real-world, tacit actions (Scollon, 2001).
2) What strategies do preschoolers use to navigate the social boundaries of playframes?	Observations Video-recordings	Participant observations and video-recording enabled me to create multimodal transcripts to analyze. These transcripts helped me identify the physical and social boundaries of the sites of engagement.	A site of engagement is a “real time window” opened through the intersection of social practices and mediational means that enables a mediated action to occur” (Norris & Jones, 2005, p. 139). Interpretive reproduction describes children as not separate from the adult world, but instead, as already members of that world, both reproducing adult culture and transforming adult culture through their play and participation (Corsaro, 2005, 2012).

3) What are the various modes and resources preschool use to engage in playframes and how do they use them?	Observations Video-recordings	Participant observations and video-recordings helped me identify the various modes and resources children used in the classroom and how children transformed meanings of classroom materials during play.	Literacy is more than a cognitive skill; it is a social practice (Street, 1984). As such, “literacy is something people <i>do</i> in particular social contexts, rather than something individuals <i>acquire</i> ” (Serafini, 2014, p. 19; italics in original). Cultural tools mediate the production of shared meanings. (Scollon, 2001).
4) What social positionings do preschoolers take on and resist in playframes?	Observations Video-recordings Teacher debriefs	Observations and video-recordings allowed me to see how children used multiple modes, including reading and writing within social settings. Teacher debriefs with helped me challenge and expand my understandings of the children.	All social actions take place within intersecting practices that position people socially, as insiders or outsiders to various social groups, as well as offer opportunities to negotiate new positions (Scollon, 2001).

Data Analysis

Data collection and data analysis functioned as an inter-dependent iterative process (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). In other words, while conducting classroom observations, the act of selecting children, activities, and materials to focus on functioned as real-time analysis. These in-the-moment decisions were based on my emerging understandings of the classroom culture as I collected the data. Also, early findings shaped future inquiry, including how I approached future classroom observations, while later findings shaped how I reinterpreted earlier data. For this reason, I considered the jot notes, expanded field notes, video-recordings, and transcriptions

through a process of continual review. Frequently, during data analysis, I returned to various data sources to consider and re-consider my emerging findings.

Unit of Analysis

As I was interested in children's interactions through play, I used Cook-Gumperz and Corsaro (1977)'s *interactive episode* as a unit of analysis. *Interactive episodes* are "sequences of behavior which begin with the *acknowledged presence* of two or more interactants in an ecological area and the *overt attempt(s)* to arrive at a shared meaning of ongoing or emerging activity. Episodes end with physical movement of interactants from the area with results in the *termination* of the *originally initiated activity*" (p. 416-417). Interactive episodes include children's play, but they may also include teacher-led activities, such as large group discussion during morning meeting.

Playframes

Wohlwend (2011a) described a play frame as "a framework that shifts a physical reality into a pretend situation that then must be actively maintained through player negotiation" (p. 21). It is important to note that this definition specifically includes pretense, such as in dramatic play. Because I wanted to also focus on children's interactions around other types of play, including construction play and artistic play, I defined playframe more broadly. Drawing from Wohlwend's (2011a)'s concept of a *play frame*, Cook-Gumperz and Corsaro's (1977) concept of *interactive episode*, and Wood's (2014) concept of *free play*, for the purposes of this study, I defined the term *playframe* as an interactive space in which children select their own activities, playmates, themes, and learning and sustain their engagement through player negotiation. Moreover, I chose to use the compound form of the word playframe to emphasis the function of the two terms—play and frame—as a unit. *Playframes* are primarily child-initiated and child-led

spaces, although adults may participate, but not dominate. Children's actions are mediated by cultural tools (Wertsch, 1991) in these spaces. Playframes, likewise, have both social and physical boundaries, although the lines that delineate them may be blurry. For this study, I focused on the playframes children established during *free play* time. Free play is marked by children's self-initiation, "making choices and decisions; expressing and following interests; exercising agency and ownership; and managing materials, self and others" (Wood, 2014, p. 146).

Steps in Data Analysis

DeWalt and DeWalt (2011) argued that analysis is an iterative process, in which the "fundamental techniques are reading, thinking, and writing; and rereading, rethinking, and rewriting" (p. 179). After forming an insight about the data, it is important to return to the data to build an argument to verify and support the insight (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). Overall, data analysis included three broad steps: 1) post-observation analysis, in which I expanded my field notes (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011); 2) a macro-analysis of the entire data set (Saldaña, 2013); and 3) a micro-analysis of focal scenes (Scollon, 2001; Wohlwend, 2009).

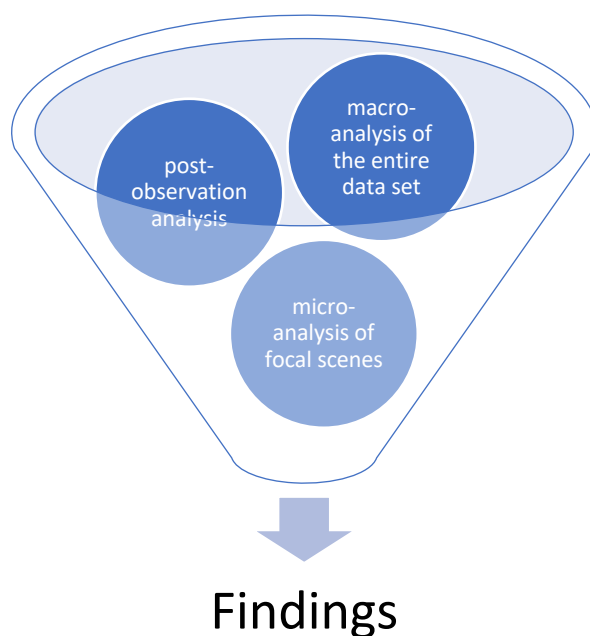


Figure 3: Steps in Data Analysis

The sections below outline each step of the process.

Post-observation Analysis

DeWalt and DeWalt (2011) described the painstaking process of translating jot notes into field notes and the importance of not allowing the jot notes to get “cold” (p. 165). That is, they stressed the importance of expanding field notes soon after an observation in order to capture as many details as possible before memory fades. Drawing from DeWalt and DeWalt’s perspective on this process, after each classroom observation, I expanded my field notes through a five step-process: 1) Draft methodological and analytic memos; 2) expand jot notes; 3) describe photos; 4) roughly transcribe videos; and 5) code field notes. This stage of analysis allowed me to contemplate each observational experience and make decisions for future observations. For

example, during the seventh observation, children engaged in dramatic play around the theme of food preparation, making cookies and pizza for each other. During the eight observation, I focused my attention on these same children to see if they might again engage in dramatic play around similar themes. This time, Nora joined the play and invited me to place an order from her menu. Because of my sustained interactions with Nora during the eighth observation, when I returned to the classroom for the ninth observation, I spent a great deal of time following and interacting with Nora in order to collect more data on her as a focal child. The model below shows my process of data analysis.

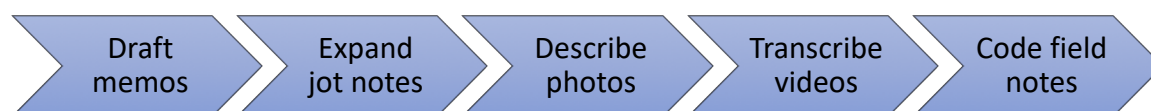


Figure 4: Post-Observation Analysis Process

Draft Memos. The first stage of data analysis was drafting methodological and analytic memos (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). The *methodological memos* explained what I did while observing the teachers and children. DeWalt and DeWalt described methodological memos as an aid for later analysis and interpretation. For example, while in the classroom, I had to make real-time decisions regarding which group of children to record, since recording all children's play simultaneously during free time would be difficult if not impossible. The memos documented my rationale for focusing on certain children and moments in the classroom. For example, during the eighth observation, I was video recording children engaged in dramatic play around a feast theme in which children enacted character roles as hosts. The video recordings abruptly terminated, and my methodological notes reflected the fact that a child whose parents had not

returned a consent form joined the playframe, making it impossible for me to capture the group social dynamics. The *analytic memos* functioned as a place to document my emerging thoughts and questions about the data; these post-observation analyses informed future data collection in terms of which children I might choose to focus on during observations or which play themes to follow. For example, during the eighth observation, Nora engaged in dramatic play around a restaurant theme, enacting the role of a server and/or owner. My analytic memo reflected my emerging thoughts about how Nora used materials and the playframe resources to position herself socially:

“Nora used the small box to control the restaurant playframe, and when the restaurant became a store by other children, and I was standing at the entrance, she used her box to pull me back into the restaurant playframe. She also used her box to assert her role within the children’s playframe, saying she is not a little customer, but a worker.”

Expand Jot Notes. After writing methodological and analytic memos, I then moved into the second stage of analysis, expanding these analytical notes by expanding jot notes. First, I typed my handwritten jot notes (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011) that I had recorded in a notebook during observations into a Word document. I then reviewed the words and phrases I had written down as memory aids in order to expand my notes.

Describe Photos. Third, I reviewed all the photos I took during the site visit and provided written descriptions about them. DeWalt and DeWalt (2011) argued that a component of effective observation includes the ability to “see” a space (p. 81), including the physical arrangement of the space and the people and materials within it. Wohlwend (2011a), likewise, recommends creating classroom maps to capture the arrangement of space and children within it. As a participant observer, I interacted with the children a great deal, so it was difficult for me

pause long enough while in the classroom to do more than write down words and phrases in my field notes. Therefore, I decided to take photos of the space in order to capture a visual representation of the space that I could revisit post-observation. I chose to primarily take photos of materials that captured elements of classroom culture and materials that children engaged with as mediational means during play. After each observation, I reviewed each photo and drafted a written description. Descriptions identified the materials in the photos, the location in the classroom in which the photo was taken, how the materials were used by children during play, and which children engaged with the materials. For example, in order to capture a visual representation that reflected classroom culture, I took a photo of a poster that contained group-generated classroom agreements with each child's signature. To capture a visual representation of children's mediational means, I took a photo of Joseph's series of drawings that depicted various geometric shapes. In this photo, I could identify various iterations of the shapes which revealed Joseph's process of revision as well as the tools he used, such as markers.

Transcribe Video Recordings. Fourth, I watched the video recordings of the observation in order to create a rough multimodal transcription (Wohlwend, 2011) that captured both verbal and nonverbal discourse, such as children's gestures, handling of tools, and movement around the physical space. Drawing from Wohlwend's (2009) formatting style for transcriptions, I placed descriptions of actions in the first column and utterances in the second column. Wohlwend (2009) argued that this approach challenges traditional transcription approaches that privilege spoken discourse. Because this study uses MDA and therefore uses the mediated action as the unit of analysis, it was important to privilege children's nonverbal discourse in my transcriptions in order to highlight it. At this stage of the data analysis process, I did not attempt to capture every pause, body movement, etc., in the transcriptions. Instead, I tried

to capture a comprehensive, big-picture impression of the children's experiences in the classroom.

Code Field Notes. Lastly, I reviewed the expanded field notes, including the descriptions of photos and transcriptions of videos, and added codes to the document in red font. These codes in red font represented my first thoughts about the data, so I did not limit codes to particular formats or ideas. Saldaña (2013) argued, "Coding is not just labeling; it is *linking*" (p. 8, italics in original). That is, coding links data and ideas. During this stage of coding, I intended to generate ideas and thus did not restrict my coding style. For example, the expanded field notes included diverse codes such as, *bodies in circle*, *independence*, *letter-sound*, *math*, *sense of place*, *nature*, *behavior management*, and *othering*. These early codes informed the later macro-analysis of the entire data set.

Macro-Analysis of Entire Data Set

After all observations were completed, I then completed a recursive macro-analysis of the entire data set. Saldaña argued that coding in an "interpretive act" and that codes do more than reduce data; codes can "*summarize, distill, or condense data*" (p. 4). For this process, I chose three primary types of codes: 1) *In Vivo* codes; 2) descriptive codes; and 3) process codes (Saldaña, 2013). (See Table 7.) Saldaña used the term *In Vivo* to refer to the process of coding by using participants' actual words as codes. *In Vivo* coding is particularly useful for research with young children, whose voices are often underrepresented in social science research, by helping researchers better understand children's perspectives and worldviews. *Descriptive codes*, on the other hand, are researcher-generated nouns that describe data segments (Saldaña, 2013) and are useful for answering the fundamental question, "What is going on here?" For that reason, I chose descriptive coding to document the modes and resources used by the children during play as well

as their classroom environments. Summarizing an interaction with one word or phrase helped me distill the topic of that excerpt. *Process coding* uses gerunds (i.e. –ing words) to capture activity (Saldaña, 2013), and this approach was useful for coding preschooler’s actions during play and other activities. By using these types of codes, I was able to gain a more layered understanding of the preschoolers’ mediated actions during play and how the children positioned themselves and others socially. The *In Vivo*, descriptive, and process codes informed the later micro-level analysis of focal scenes.

Table 7

Macro-Analysis Coding Methods and Rationales

Coding Method	Description	Rationale
In Vivo	Direct quotes from video	To capture participants’ own words as data; especially helpful for privileging children’s voices who are often marginalized in research
Descriptive	Nouns	Useful for identifying physical items in the environment, including the cultural tools children use
Process	Gerunds (i.e., -ing words)	To capture actions and states of being of the children as they play; useful for capturing children’s movement

Adapted from Saldaña (2013).

Table 8

Examples of Macro-Analysis Coding

Coding Method	Example Transcript Data	Example Codes
In Vivo	Sam said, “Why did you decide to paint the bike?” Aiden replied, “We wanted to paint it for the fall festival”	paint; bike paint fall festival
Descriptive	Mallory said, “I saw a scarecrow in Curious George.”	pop culture
Process	Lillian said, “Pizza’s done,” while holding up pretend pizza. Mallory walked over to take pizza, but Lillian shook her head no and pulled the pizza into box.	holding up prop; shaking head

Adapted from Saldaña (2013).

Using a recursive process described by Saldaña (2013), a codebook was developed by refining codes across the data set and developing categories of codes (see Appendix C). In line with Saldaña’s (2013) description of the coding process, some early codes were subsumed under other codes, relabeled, or deleted. For example, an early code, *fear*, was later dropped because the code was applied to only two excerpts that were not used as focal scenes, while another early code, *othering*, was later expanded into several subcodes under the parent code, *denies bid*. The primary categories developed included Classroom Climate, Independence, Behavior and Body Management, Teacher Literacy Supports, Teacher Cognitive Supports, Curriculum Themes, Focal Children, Location in Classroom, Play Types, Bodies in Play, Children Draw/Make Art, Children Read or Write, Dramatic Roles, and Dramatic Play Materials, and Social Dynamics. Each of the categories included related codes. For example, the category *Social Dynamics* included several codes, such as a) Bid to Play or for Materials, b) Accepts Bid, c) Denies Bid,

Micro-Analysis of Focal Scenes

After completing the macro-analysis of the entire data set, I then moved into the micro-analysis, which required me to first identify key scenes to transcribe in detail. Drawing from Wohlwend's (2009) and Scollon's (2001) filtering process, I selected focal scenes for micro-analysis by reviewed the coded data, along with the developed codebook in order to find trends in the data related to the focal children, Sam, Joseph, Nora, and Lillian. I also rewatched many of the videos that include the focal children. Using the filtering process depicted in figure 3 (Scollon, 2001; Wohlwend, 2009), I identified key practices and materials in the data set, points where various practices intersected, and transformative moments. That is, I identified moments when it appeared that the focal children were positioned as outsiders or insiders to various playframes. At this point, I made the decision to narrow my focus to Sam and Nora. Both Sam and Nora engaged in play in which they appeared to either make attempts to enter other children's playframes or protect their playframes. Their data was tagged with codes and subcodes, such as Denies Bid, Defines New Role for Self, Dramatic Play Roles, Restaurant Server, Dramatic Play Materials, and Cardboard Box. It was evident based on the macro-analysis, both Nora and Sam engaged in dramatic play in which they enacted character roles, handled materials as props, and navigated social dynamics within their play spaces. I eliminated Joseph because his play activities centered primarily around the art table and literacy invitations. He appeared more focused on the processes related to drawing and literacy and less focused on the social dynamics of play. His data was tagged with codes such as Name Writing, Artistic Play, Letter Pieces, Literacy Table, Letter-Sound Knowledge, and Process vs Product. At no point during data collection, did I observe Joseph engage in sustained dramatic play with other children or enact a character role. In fact, I observed Joseph decline offers to join other children's

sociodramatic play. For example, when a child was walking around the room, handing out invitations to a feast in the dramatic play area, Joseph said, “I don’t want one,” and continued working with literacy materials. Since Joseph was an outsider to Sam and Nora in regard to his play activities, I eliminated him as a focal child for micro-analysis. I also eliminated Lillian at this point. Although Lillian, like Sam and Nora, appeared to enter other children’s established playframes and protect ongoing playframes, the video data of Lillian’s play was often truncated. For that practical reason, I eliminated Lillian as a focal child for micro-analysis.

After selecting Sam and Nora as focal children, I then had to select focal scenes from each child’s play for micro-analysis. I again watched the videos of Sam and Nora and reviewed the codes applied to their data subsets. I identified Sam’s interactions with children around the fort constructed of bedsheets in the dramatic play area as a key scene. I also identified Nora’s interactions with me around a restaurant play theme in the dramatic play area as another key scene. Both focal scenes appeared to contain sustained interactive episodes (Cook-Gumperz & Corsaro, 1977), established playframes, and complex social dynamics in which children used materials in the room to mediate the social positionings of themselves and others.

I multimodally transcribed the selected excerpts and used the tools of MDA, drawing from both Scollon (2001) and Wohlwend’s (2008, 2011) work. I first created a table that included four columns: 1) mediated actions; 2) spoken discourse; 3) sites of engagement; and 4) social positionings. An example is provided below in Table 9.

Table 9

Sample Coding Table using MDA

Mediated Actions	Spoken Discourse	Site of Engagement	Social Positioning
Sam crawls out of tent, stands up, and	Sam: So try to, try to speak, try to speak	Sam and I are engaged with each	Sam requests that I take on his identity by

walks over to me. Looks at me, and then walks closer to me.	like me and pretend you're me. Me: Okay. Pretend I'm you?	other outside of the fort in the dramatic play area. The girls inside the fort continue to play together.	verbally mimicking him. He seems to want to play with the girls, who were ignoring him.
Sam looks at me. Sam then crouches down momentarily.	Sam: Try to speak like me. Get as small as I am. Me: Okay. I'm small as you are. Sam: And try to talk like me.	Sam and I continue to engage with each other on the periphery of the girls' playframe.	Sam requests that I deepen my identity by layering nonverbal on top of verbal—He tells me to position my adult body into a smaller child-like pose. He crouches down in order to model how I should manage my body. He reiterates the use of voice as an identity marker.
[Video shows the floor as recording an interaction in which I'm a participant becomes difficult.]	Me: Okay, um, (pause). My name is Sam. Sam: Actually, you don't talk. Me: Oh, I don't talk?		Sam reclaims part of his identity by directing me not to speak.
Sam looks towards the fort, where the girls are sitting just inside near its entrance.	Sam: Now look at, now look at that, now look at our fort. Me: Okay, I'm looking at our fort.	Sam asks me to observe the site of engagement where the girls play inside the fort. We remain on the periphery together as observers to their space.	He has directed my body into the girls' line of sight and my gaze towards them. He seems to want to play with them and is using me to help him access their playframe. He uses the word "our" to claim the fort as his too.

In the *mediated actions* column, I transcribed the children's actions during play with material resources. I included descriptions of body language, gaze, proximity, and use of materials. In the *spoken discourse* column, I transcribed the children's verbal utterances, noting marked changes in intonation or exclamations. In the third column, I described the *site of engagement* for the

associated nonverbal and verbal discourse transcribed in the first two columns. The descriptions included such things as the pseudonyms of the children who formed the sites of engagement, the apparent affinity groupings, the location in the classroom, and the description of the playframe. In the *social positionings* columns, I described from my perspective the social positionings of the children or what Wohlwend (2009) might call *transformative moments*. For example, I considered such things as whose voice was silent or which child appeared to direct the actions of others. I also considered what and how children offered, requested, imposed, took up, resisted, or rejected ideas and materials within the space. For example, I made a notation if it appeared that a child was making a bid for play with peers. Likewise, I noted the child's strategy, such as a direct verbal request or nonverbal encirclement (Corsaro, 1979, 2005). I also noted the response from the peers, such as acceptance or resistance, as well as the strategies those children employed as well. For coding both the site of engagement and social positionings, I rewatched the videos and returned to the In Vivo, descriptive, and process codes (Saldaña, 2013) for each of these scenes and contemplated how those codes connected to this deeper analysis using MDA.

I then narrowed the selected focal playframes for Sam and Nora even further to a few key minutes in length. These are the playframes that are presented in Chapter 4 as narrative vignettes. At this point, I expanded the coding table to include *primary modes*, such as vocalizations and light, and *resources*, such as flashlights and bedsheets. I added modes and resources to the chart in order to highlight them. This would allow me to better understand how children use modes and resources to navigate playframes. I considered how these elements—site of engagement, modes, and resources—functioned together to comprise a practice, and how multiple practices intersected to transform meanings. Transformations occurred when children obtained insider or outsider status to affinity groups or changed their social roles within the classroom. Data coding

tables are provided in Chapter 4 in order to support the discussion of the findings.

Standards of Quality

Rigor in qualitative work can be achieved despite its complexity (Lincoln, 2010). For this research project, I used multiple data sources, recursive coding, and member checking to ensure data collection and analysis was methodologically strong. As a qualitative researcher, it is imperative that I acknowledge that my findings report on other people's stories through my lens. As such, I do not view the participants in this study as subjects that can be reduced or aggregated, but as complex, unique social actors embedded in value-laden social contexts. I sought both validity and reliability in my findings. Validity in qualitative research refers to how accurate the findings are based on the procedures used and accounts of the researcher, participants, and readers (Creswell, 2014). Reliability refers to how replicatable a research study is, which is problematic for research in naturalistic educational settings because "human behavior is never static" (Merriam, 2009, p. 220). Qualitative social science researchers attempt to describe particularized human experiences rather than manipulate the setting to yield the same results across contexts. Merriam (2009) argued that the "more important question for qualitative research is *whether the results are consistent with the data collected*" (p. 221, italics in original).

In order to determine if my findings are consistent with my data, I used several strategies for validity and reliability for qualitative work: thick descriptions, prolonged time in the field, an interrogation of researcher bias, and member checking. *Thick descriptions* are detailed descriptions of field experiences. Because this study examined the intersection of children's play practices and multimodal practices in a naturalistic setting, rather than controlled treatment, thick descriptions communicates the nuanced context of the study so that readers can find possible applications to their own unique settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). *Prolonged engagement*

involves spending enough time in the field to understand the context and gain rapport with participants. This study took place over the course of several weeks and built upon previous work conducted from May 2014 –December 2015. Through this prolonged engagement, I gained a strong understandings of classroom culture and observed the children in different classroom contexts on different days. Prolonged engagement allowed me to build trust with the participants and facilitate comfort between us. The length of time a qualitative researcher needs to spend in the field is best determined by saturation; “that is, you begin to see and hear the same things over and over again, and no new information surfaces as you collect more data” (Merriam, 2009, p. 219). Prolonged engagement is important because in qualitative work, the researcher attempts to get as close as possible to the experiences of the participants, which requires time (Merriam, 2009). *Interrogating researcher bias* required that I consider and challenge my own subjectivities as the parent of a former student at the school, as a former teacher employed at the school, and as a researcher. Understanding the researcher’s point of view better enables readers to understand how the researcher arrived at particular interpretations (Merriam, 2009). *Member checking*, also known as respondent validation, refers to when the researcher seeks feedback from the participants on emerging findings (Merriam, 2009). The purpose of members checking in qualitative research is to align the researcher’s interpretations with the participant’s experiences. It is an effective way to identify biases and fine-tune findings to better reflect multiple perspectives (Merriam, 2009). In this study, I used opportunities for informal member checking with the preschool teachers to help ensure internal validity and illuminate my subjectivities.

Writing up the Study

Holley and Colyar (2009) argued that writing-up research is composing a narrative. How the researcher constructs a narrative influences how readers interpret its meaning. In other words, as the researcher, I selected the focal children, determined which of their activities on which to focus, as well as which excerpts to micro-analyze, and each of these decisions is value-laden. Research articles can be thought of as stories: the researcher as storyteller, the research question as the problem, the participants as characters, the data collection as plot, and the findings as resolution. The researcher as storyteller is an uncomfortable metaphor, and it is important to consider because the decision-making authority of the researcher as both scientist and storyteller is laden with power (Holley & Coley, 2009). When writing the story of the participants, I used pseudonyms to maintain the privacy of the participants and I attempted to minimize judgment when presenting the findings, stopping often to reflect on how my subjectivities may be influencing how I interpret the data. I have been afforded the power and privilege as a researcher to tell the story of the participants, and as such, I moved beyond merely carrying out methodological steps to generate findings to “questions of consequence” (Holley & Colyar, 2009, p. 684). I drafted this dissertation with my advisory committee as both audience and evaluator and will also write up parts of this study to submit to peer-reviewed national and international academic journals, both research-based and practitioner-based. As I continue to write for different audiences, I will consider the implications of my work for future research, policy, and pedagogy.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

“Our image of the child is rich, strong, powerful, and competent, and most of all, connected to adults and other children” –L. Malaguzzi

Over the course of one academic semester, I spent ten mornings in one preschool classroom in order to examine how young children’s play practices and multimodal practices intersected for social purposes. I approached these observations through a Reggio Emilia lens that positions the child as an agentic meaning-maker (Edwards, 2012). I collected data for this study as a participant observer. My role involved moderate participation (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011), since I often interacted with children much like a teacher—answering their questions, assisting them with materials, and engaging with them in dramatic play. Other times, I tried to remove myself from a teacher-like role in order to observe the children as an outsider looking into their playframes. My observations spanned a variety of activities, such as outdoor play, transitions, and hygiene routines, but the bulk of my observations took place during *morning meeting*, a teacher-guided activity, and *free play*, a child-initiated space.

This study examined how children’s play activities and multimodal practices intersected for social purposes. Four questions guided this study:

- 1) In what types of play do preschoolers engage?
- 2) What strategies do preschoolers use to navigate the social boundaries of playframes?
- 3) What modes and resources do children use to engage in playframes and how do they use them?
- 4) What social positionings do preschoolers take on and resist in playframes?

As my observations of the children deepened over the semester, I began to narrow my focus from all consented children to a handful of children as they engaged in free play: Nora,

Sam, Joseph, and Lillian, as well as the children who formed their shifting *affinity groups* (Wohlwend, 2011a). Affinity groups were formed by groups of children who shared space and activities, but these groupings were not fixed. Lillian, for example, engaged with Sam, Nora, and Abigail, as well as other children across the observations. The rationale for narrowing my focus from the four focal children to Sam and Nora was discussed in more detail in chapter 3, which addressed methodology. The two playframes presented in this chapter focus on the two children I selected for micro-analysis: Sam and Nora. My analytic memos reflected my in-the-moment impressions of these children. Sam seemed to be a somewhat solitary player who had trouble entering other children's playframes, while Nora seemed to be a more gregarious player who took leadership roles within playframes. The excerpts selected for micro-analysis reflect typical instantiations of these differing classroom social experiences for these two children.

Based on the micro-analysis of Sam and Nora's excerpts rooted within the broader data set, I identified the following findings:

- 1) Children engaged in six categories of play across the playframes: artistic play, sensory play, manipulative play, construction play, dramatic play, and language play.
- 2) Children used access, invitation, sustainment, and protection strategies to navigate the social boundaries of their playframes.
- 3) Children used various modes and resources, including their bodies, props, and alphabetic print, to mediate character and social roles within the playframes.
- 4) Children moved fluidly within and across insider and outsider social positionings in playframes.

This chapter is organized into several sections. First, I present a description of the classroom context to position the focal children, Sam and Nora, within the broader classroom culture. Each

of the next four sections aligns with one of the four research questions and describes a) categories of play in which children engaged; b) strategies children used to navigate playframes; c) children's use of various modes and resources, and d) the identities children took up within playframes. The next section presents two narrative playframes that are based on videos, photos, and field notes of Sam and Nora as they engaged in free play. The purpose of the playframes is to look at the four findings through extended examples that show children engaged in sustained play and complex social work. A micro-analysis accompanies each playframe in order to illustrate how the four findings emerged within the playframes. The playframes also illustrate how the findings are interconnected. The final section summarizes the findings that emerged from this study.

Descriptive Findings of Classroom Context

The adult participants, Ms. Nettie and Ms. Ashley co-taught a classroom of four- and five-year-old's in a Reggio-Emilia inspired preschool in the urban American Southeast. Influenced by the Reggio-Emilia approach to early childhood education (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2012), Ms. Nettie and Ms. Ashley's classroom reflected a child-centered, play-based approach rooted in the local community context. Likewise, in line with the Reggio-Emilia approach, Ms. Nettie and Ms. Ashley used the term *educator*, rather than teacher, to describe their roles within the classroom and their relationship to the children. Although this study did not focus on teacher language and behaviors, teachers' words and actions do set the tone for classroom culture (Cazden, 2001; Johnston, 2004) and may have an impact on how children engage with materials and peers during play. Wood (2014) argued that even in environments that provide a great deal of freedom, it is the teachers who provide choices, set rules and boundaries, and govern the behavior of the children. In this sense, play is constrained by the classroom

context. In this section, I include an overview of the educators' supports in order to offer a rich description of the context to frame the analysis of the children's play.

The Daily Rhythm. The educators in this classroom used the term *daily rhythm* to describe the classroom schedule. For this study, all observations were conducted during the morning portion of the day, in accordance with educator preferences since the latter portion of the day included lunch time and nap time. The typical daily rhythm for this classroom for the morning portion of the day included four main segments: 1) outdoor time; 2) personal hygiene; 3) morning meeting; and 4) *invitations*/snack time. The educators used the Reggio-Emilia term *invitations*, rather than centers, to describe the spaces in the room arranged with materials to encourage children to explore particular concepts (Gandini, 2012). The day typically began with *outdoor time*, depending on weather conditions, followed by a transition indoor for *personal hygiene*, which included toileting and handwashing. The children then typically gathered on a large carpet for *morning meeting*.

Corsaro and Molinari (2000), who discuss priming events in routines in classroom culture, identified morning meeting as central routine in their study. They defined priming events as events that orient children to upcoming changes in their lives, such as the transition from kindergarten and first grade, which was a focal point of their study. Likewise, in this study, morning meeting was a central daily routine and also functioned as a sort of priming event for the children, albeit on a more localized scale. Morning meeting functioned as a space in which the educators oriented children to the particular rhythms of the day, to classroom materials, especially if new materials were introduced into the environment, and to *invitations* (Gandini, 2012) set up in the classroom for their exploration, which changed sometimes daily. Morning meeting also functioned as a time in which educators directed children's behaviors and

classroom discussions more explicitly. Much of the educator-related data presented below comes from morning meeting.

After morning meeting, the class then moved into *free play*, during which time children could self-select invitations to explore. Free play time overlapped with *snack time*. In this classroom, during this time of the day, children selected their own activities, moving freely between invitations, and choosing their own playmates and focus for learning (Wood, 2014). During this time, the educators also used the term *work*, rather than *play* to describe the children's activities. Likewise, as a participant observer, I adopted the language used in the classroom context and would ask children, "What are you working on?" rather than "What are you playing?"

Classroom space and materials. Children frame their understandings of their classroom activities, including what counts as play versus work, within adult agendas; adult agendas included how the teachers organized the physical classroom space and managed time for those spaces (Breathnach et al., 2017). Since the physical environment may influence how children use the space and perceive their activities within that space, materials and spatial aspects of the classroom were critical in this classroom space.

The classroom in this study was divided into six main areas: art/writing center, book nook, block center, dramatic play area, morning meeting carpet, and tabletops, and children were observed engaged in activities in every area of the room across the ten observations. The art/writing center was generally stocked with an assortment of materials: markers, colored pencils, chalk, miniature chalkboards, paper, water colors, eyedroppers, and brushes. The book nook was stocked with an assortment of narrative and informational texts that reflected the preschool's values around diversity including titles such as *It's Okay to be Different* (Parr, 2009),

Mama Panya's Pancakes: A Village Tale from Kenya (Chamberlin, Chamberlin, & Cairns, 2006), and *Heather has Two Mommies* (Newman & Souza, 1989). Although children engaged with the books in the book nook during free play, I did not observe any large or small group readings facilitated by educators during any of the ten observations. The educators used the Reggio-Emilia term *invitation* (Gandini, 2012), rather than *provocation* or *center*, to describe areas of the room, typically tabletops, arranged with various materials to encourage children's exploration. Invitations included tables set up with word puzzles (e.g., a picture of a dog accompanied by cut-out letters for d, o, and g) and tables set up for art activities. For example, one invitation was set up by the educators with white and orange paint, an assortment of brushes, printed images of scarecrows, as well as a large white button-up shirt; the painted shirt was then used on a later day to dress a life-size scarecrow created by the children. The classroom also contained a sensory table that was used daily; sensory tables are often tables with a plastic bin fashioned into the top in order to contain objects. The sensory table in this classroom was at times filled with a giant pumpkin and various tools, such as tweezers and hammers, while at other times it contained flour, small containers, and plastic figurines. The dramatic play area included a puppet stage, costumes, and open-ended materials, such as rocks, sea shells, and baskets. On some days, this area contained several large cardboard boxes, and other days it contained sheets draped over chairs and tables to create a fort lined with string lights. The classroom walls also featured a varied collection of art and print, such as child-made artwork and adult-made signs. Educators also engaged children in whole group writing in the form of classroom agreements, such as "We walk inside, but can run outside," and a class-generated story written on large white paper and posted on the walls.



Figure 6: Sensory Table with Pumpkin



Figure 7: Literacy Table with Puzzles

Classroom climate. Educators facilitated a positive classroom climate through modal interactions, both verbal and nonverbal, such as calling children by their given names, as well as physical proximity and eye contact with the children. The educators used the verbal mode to greet children and modeled expressions of gratitude with the children, such as thank you and please, which they often layered with gesture, proximity, and gaze to convey a welcoming and grateful stance. The educators often addressed the children and their peers as *friends*, rather than using other names, such as students, kids, or children. The use of *friends* was typically in group contexts, rather than in individual interactions. The educators used the term with the purpose of facilitating a sense of comradery between the children. For example, during one observation, an

educator said to the children during free play, “Okay, friends, I see that snack is now open,” in order to indicate the transition into snack time, which is a communal activity. Although educators did use “friends” with children in group contexts, they avoided the use of pet names, such as “sweetie” or “honey” when addressing children directly and on an individual basis, rather than using children’s given or preferred names. The educators typically used nonverbal modes, such as kneeling, as their primary way of communicating to children a sense of comradery or community with the children. For example, educators would kneel when speaking to a child. During morning meeting, the educators would also sit with the children as part of their circle. Educators’ nonverbal communication was then interpreted by the children in the contexts in which they were used.

The educators used *revoicing*, a common teacher practice (Cazden, 2001; May, 2011), to facilitate a positive classroom climate. In May’s (2011) study of interactive read-alouds in an upper elementary classroom, she argued that the teacher in her study “used her talk to prioritize and give credence to other voices” by restating children’s words for the entire group (p. 14). Revoicing occurred in the classroom when an educator repeated a child’s statement or question in order to acknowledge the child or draw attention to the child’s response for a larger audience often comprised of other children. For example, during morning meeting, when a child suggested that the class turn the scarecrow that they had constructed into a float for an upcoming Fall festival, Ms. Nettie revoiced his suggestion, “Did y’all hear what Aiden said? He said we could turn it into a float,” by using Aiden’s terminology, float. During morning meeting discussions, it was a common practice for an educator to revoice a child’s contribution before writing it down in a journal she used for the purpose of documenting the discussions. Ms. Nettie’s and Ms. Ashley’s practice of revoicing was intended to give credence to children’s voices. For example,

after Ms. Nettie revoiced the child's idea to construct a scarecrow float for the Fall festival, she then asked the group of children follow-up questions to define the concept of a float and develop a plan to create a float. When another child suggested that they could put lights on the float, Ms. Nettie repeated the child's statement verbatim, saying, "We can put lights on it." Revoicing typically occurred during morning meeting and transitions, such as clean-up time, rather than free play. However, it is important to note that data collection during free play focused almost exclusively on children engaged in play, so the educator's interactions with children during that period of the day were less frequently video recorded.

Behavior and body management. The educators in this study facilitated a positive classroom climate, and the strategies the educators used to manage children's behaviors and bodies aligned with the classroom culture. Educators' most frequently used strategies included the following: 1) stating the behavioral expectation in a positive manner; 2) posing a question to the child in order to elicit a statement from the child that described the behavioral expectation (e.g., "Do we splash water [in the sensory table]? Where does the water stay?"); 3) orienting the children to future events and/or the physical space; and most frequently 4) using I-statements or noticings to draw attention to a behavioral expectation without the use of a verbal directive. I-statement and noticings were often marked by "I see" or "I hear" tags followed by a declarative statement that described a situation. Cazden (2001) would consider such statements indirect imperatives. She argued that teachers must make demands on students, but conventions of language provide speakers options other than "bald imperatives" (p. 39) that they take advantage of. In other words, teachers softened blunt commands through language conventions that implied that the child take action without explicitly demanding they do so. For example, during one observation, Ms. Nettie said, "I see a lot of markers on the floor," instead of issuing a verbal

directive for the child to pick up the markers. In other example, Ms. Ashley said, “Joseph, I hear that you’re excited, but I also see that you’re inside,” instead of issuing a verbal directive to the child to lower his voice. At other times, the educators would call a child’s name as a strategy, such as calling the name of a child talking over peers during morning meeting or not complying with directives. For example, during one observation, Nora was not complying with the teachers’ request to clean up the space, so Ms. Ashley used the verbal mode to get her attention by simply saying, “Nora.” Ms. Ashley then used the nonverbal mode, placing her hand on Nora’s shoulder and kneeling next to her, to convey her expectation that Nora begin to clean up the space. In this case, Hodge and Kress (1988) would argue that calling the child’s name as a strategy not only functions as a directive, but “asserts power more persuasively” (p. 174). Educators did use verbal directives to manage children’s behavior, but these directives were almost entirely framed using positive language. For example, Ms. Nettie said, “Pause your bodies!” when a glass shattered on the floor. In another example, she said, “Make sure we’re using our indoor voices,” in order to lower the classroom noise level during free play. Across the ten observations, educators used fourteen strategies for behavior and body management. Table 10 identifies and describes these strategies.

Table 10

Teacher Strategies for Managing Children’s Behaviors and Bodies

Behavior and Body Management Strategy	Description and Examples
Calming Techniques	Teacher used calming techniques to manage children’s behavior. For example, at the beginning of morning meeting, the teacher encouraged children to "take deep breaths." She also played soft music in the classroom to transition from

	outdoor play to morning meeting.
Calls Child's Name	Teacher called a child by name in order to get their attention to address an issue, such as a child talking over peers during morning meeting.
Assigns Child Leader or Role	Teacher appointed a child leader or assigned roles to children to manage their behavior. For example, the teacher said, "We need to work together to clean up. I would like Ines and Ethan to clean up markers at the blue art table."
Lines and Circles	Children were required to stand in lines or sit in a circle or other specified location. For example, the teachers assigned seats to children in a manner that formed a circle on the carpet for morning meeting.
Orients to Future Events or Physical Space	Teacher oriented children to future activities or oriented children to the arrangement of the classroom or materials. For example, the teacher reminded the children that they had yoga later in the day after morning meeting. Additionally, during morning meeting, the teacher described the various invitations set up around the room.
Routines	Teacher reminded children of classroom routines, such as stacking notebooks in a basket after morning meeting.
Body Modes	Teacher placed her body close to a child's body in order to manage behavior. For example, the teacher placed her hand on a child's shoulder, so the child would stop talking out of turn during morning meeting.
Poses Question to Define Expectation	Teacher posed a question to define a behavioral expectation. For example, the teacher asked a child who was talking out of turn during morning meeting, "Did you hear what X said?" Additionally, the teacher managed children's use of materials, by asking, "What's the agreement for the dice?"
States Expectation	Teacher stated a behavioral expectation. For example, after free play, the teacher said, "We need to clean up. We need to work together to clean up." Additionally, when children were talking out of turn during morning meeting, the teacher said, "If I'm talking, you're listening."
States Problem Behavior	Teacher stated the problem behavior. For example, the teacher said to a child, "You're making very loud noises."

Explicit Directive or Modal	Teacher issued a directive to the child and/or used a modal verb to manage children's behavior. For example, Ms. Nettie said, "You shouldn't also put it [the clip] on people's bodies. It might pinch you."
I-Statement or Noticing	Teacher used an I-statement or indicated that she notices something in particular in order to guide the children's behavior without the use of an explicit directive. For example, the teacher said, "I see our line is right here," to a child that was wandering around the space. Additionally, the teacher said, "Morning meeting isn't over" when children started talking over each other.
Natural Consequences	Teacher stated the natural consequences of certain behaviors. For example, the teacher said, "If you aren't quiet, you won't hear what we have for snack today."
Reward Compliance	Teacher rewarded compliance by calling on children who were conforming to expectations, such as raising hands to speak during morning meeting.

Independence. Another key aspect of the classroom context was the educators' support of children's independence. Children were expected to demonstrate independence related to personal hygiene, but they were also encouraged to manage their own bodies and materials in other ways during play. Children were encouraged to find their own materials, manage their own materials, and clean up their own materials. For example, when Sam asked Ms. Ashley to place his artwork on a counter for safe-keeping, she handed the materials back to him and asked, "Why don't you put it on the counter, so you don't forget?" Also, children were permitted flexible movement during free play. For example, children were not assigned centers or activities during free play but could move around the room and enter and leave activities as they wished. Additionally, children were allowed to move materials to new locations, such as moving blocks from the construction area into the dramatic play area.

Types of Play in which Children Engaged

The first question that guided this study examined the types of play in which preschoolers engaged. Different types of play were identified within my observations of their *free play* (Wood, 2014). During free play time in this classroom, in line with Wood's (2014) definition, children selected their own activities, playmates, themes, and learning focus. Free play time occurred as an official part of the daily schedule in this classroom. The children's choices were made in the context of the classroom environment, including the materials and themes the educators provided in the more permanent centers as well as in the rotating Reggio-Emilia inspired *invitations* (Gandini, 2012). Over the course of ten observations, I noticed that children engaged in six main categories of play during free play in the classroom: artistic play, sensory play, manipulative play, construction play, dramatic play, and language play. I drew from the conceptualizations of play presented in the literature review, but adapted them to fit this particular classroom context. The categories below were based on what was observed in this classroom over the course of the ten observations during free play time. Since this study examined, in part, the various modes and resources children used to engage in playframes, the definitions of play presented below are framed in terms of children's use of resources, particularly material resources. Table 11 lists the six types of play and is followed by description of each. These six types of play were identified across the ten observations.

Table 11

Types of Play Engaged in by Children

Play Type	Description and Examples
Artistic Play	Children engage in play with art materials to paint, draw, glue, shape

	clay, or cut materials, generally for the purpose of creating a product.
Construction Play	Children engage with materials to construct or design a structure.
Dramatic Play	Children engage in play by enacting roles other than the self, often using materials to represent other objects. When playing with other children, the dramatic play may have a social component.
Manipulative Play	Children engage in play that focuses on the manipulation of materials, rather than the sensory experience or finished product.
Sensory Play	Children engage in <i>look, listen, touch, feel, taste</i> experiential expressing, often emphasizing process over product.
Language Play	Children explore language, such as storytelling, sometimes to sustain interaction with others.

Artistic play. Artistic play included painting, drawing, gluing, shaping clay, and cutting materials generally for the purpose of creating some sort of product. Marsh et al. (2016) used the term *creative play* in their study in a manner that includes children's artistic endeavors. Artistic play was associated with a creative interest orientation (Neitzel et al., 2008) when children appeared to focus on the transformative nature of the materials, while artistic play was associated with a procedural interest orientation (Neitzel et al., 2008) when children appeared to focus on the processes involved in creating an artistic product, rather than transformation. For this reason, I selected the broader term, artistic play, rather than creative play for use in this study.

Joseph, one of the initial four focal participants, often engaged in artistic play at the art table and often seemed focused on the processes involved in drawing geometric shapes. On one particular day, he sat at the art table using crayons and markers to create a specific product, in this case a geometric shape, but was unhappy with the final product (figure 8). So, over the course of free play time, he made several revisions. In one instance, Joseph pointed to marks on the page and said, "I accidentally drew that and thought it would be a shape." I asked him if he

had known what he wanted to draw when he had started. He explained, “I was thinking of something like a heptagon or pentagon. Those are shapes.” During this interaction, Joseph appeared pensive, so we discussed his next steps. He then explained, referencing the marks on the paper, “If I put more lines on the—there, and there will be two shapes messed up.” Later, he again said, “I’m trying to fix this shape.” By the end of the allotted free play time, several drafts of colorful geometric shapes on paper were scattered on and around the literacy table as he tried different strategies to work and rework his drawing.



Figure 8: Joseph’s Geometric Shapes



Figure 9: Beading and Bracelet Making

Nora expressed interest in using the beads to create jewelry and appeared more focused on creating a product than the process (figure 9). For example, she said, “I need help [cutting the twine]. I need to cut out a bracelet for me.” Although threading the beads onto string required motor skills to manipulate the material, in Nora’s case, because she focused on the transformation of loose parts into a bracelet, rather than the motor skills involved, her play was coded as artistic play.

Sensory play. Sensory play emphasized the experiential nature of the materials. In other words, sensory play was coded when the experience of looking, listening, touching, or smelling seemed to be prioritized over the production of a tangible product. Sensory play often took place around the classroom’s sensory table, a table with a clear plastic bin fitted into its cut-out top,

which was filled each day with a variety of materials. During one observation, the sensory table was filled with a giant pumpkin cut in half, tweezers, spoons, a coring tool, and magnifying glasses. The children did not work together to create a tangible project using these materials, but instead, they seemed focused on the experience of jabbing the pumpkin rind with the sharp end of the tweezers and feeling the wet seeds and stringy pulp with their fingers.

Manipulative play. During manipulative play children often used materials in a manner that emphasized motor skills. This type of play often reflected a procedural orientation (Neitzel et al., 2008) in which the children appeared focused more on motor skill acquisition or practice than on the creation of a product. For example, during one observation, Joseph threaded multicolored beads onto twine, but did not appear interested in creating a product, such as a bracelet or necklace. In another example, Lillian and Sam each worked with droppers and watercolors. In each case, the children did not appear focused on the product they were creating so much as the physical act of transferring the small drops of paint from a cup to a coffee filter. Other activities that were coded as manipulative play included puzzle play. Although the children at times worked with puzzles that spelled out words, such as *dog* and *bus*, which therefore added a language element to their play, when the physical act of fitting the puzzle pieces into the correct cut-out on the board seemed to dominate, those instances were considered manipulative play.



Figure 10: Art Table

Construction play. During construction play children typically used materials to create structures. Sam, who was one of the two focal participants central to this dissertation, often engaged in construction play in the block area. His work at times carried a symbolic element (Marsh et al., 2016) because he used one object to represent another. For example, during one

observation, Sam used square magnetic tiles to represent walls and a roof, and stacked the tiles into a tower, which he explained represented his mother's former office building. On other days, children were observed using wooden blocks to make various structures. Although construction play is common in preschool classrooms (Rowe & Neitzel, 2010), this type of play did not appear to dominate in this classroom during my ten observations.

Dramatic play. Researchers have used terms such as pretend play (Smith & Pellegrini, 2008), make-believe play (Trawick-Smith, 1998), dramatic play, socio-dramatic play (Bodrova & Leong, 2015), symbolic play (Marsh et al., 2016), and fantasy play (Paley, 2004) in ways that overlap. In this study, the term *dramatic play* is used to indicate moments when children enacted character roles and/or used props in ways that generally formed unfolding narratives. A key aspect of dramatic play was when children focused on creative skills and the “transformative aspects of processes and materials” (Neitzel et al., 2008). In other words, a key aspect of children's dramatic play is symbolic representation, such as using one object to stand in for another. When children engaged with peers or adults, the dramatic play reflected a social orientation (Neitzel et al., 2008) and was considered *socio-dramatic play* (Smith & Pellegrini, 2008). Character roles enacted by children in this study included tigers, chefs, servers, customers in restaurants, party planners, party guests, automotive designers, drivers, ghosts, magicians, manicurists, robots, and superheroes. While in these roles, children often transformed classroom resources into props to support their enactments of various characters. For example, in one playframe, children used sea shells and blocks as food which then became a meal to be served to a customer in a restaurant. In another instance, children used a cape as a bib to protect a customer's clothes.



Figure 11: Joseph Works with Letter Tiles

Language play. Smith and Pellegrini (2008) used the term *language play* to describe when children used words, songs, poetry, and rhymes to play. In this study, the participants did not typically engage in word play with songs or rhymes, but they did use language to play in other ways. Because this study examined children multimodal practices, I chose to use an expanded definition of language play that includes both verbal and nonverbal resources. For example, during one observation, Joseph used materials in the room, such as letter tiles, to form words that he would try to sound out himself or ask others to read (figure 11). Neitzel (2008) described a procedural interest orientation for preschoolers as one in which children focus on

skills. At times, language play in this classroom reflected a procedural orientation. When working with the letter tiles, Joseph appeared less concerned with composing messages and more focused on letter identification and how the letters could be arranged in particular linear orders to spell words. For example, at one point, Joseph tried to spell *mom* with the letter tiles and said to me, “This is actually a W but I flipped it,” drawing attention to the letter forms for W and M. Knowledge of letter forms is what Puranik and Lonigan (2014) consider an early writing *procedural skill*. When I asked Joseph why he wanted to spell the word *mom*, he replied, “I just knowed the word mom.” As he continued working with manipulatives, this time the *n*, *l*, and *i* tiles, I followed up with the question, “Do you ever write messages to your mom?” In this case, he did not answer my question about message content, a *generative skill* (Puranik & Lonigan, 2014), but instead turned to another child and asked a question focused on procedural skills. He said, “What does this spell?” referring to the new arrangement of letter tiles. Children also engaged in language play in other ways. Sometimes, language play carried a social interest orientation (Neitzel et al., 2008). Children sometimes used language play to sustain interaction with others, often by sharing stories with one another, which Hughes (2002) and Marsh et al. (2016) might call communication play. During language play, children sometimes foregrounded verbal resources over material resources in the classroom.

Overlapping of Play Types

In this study, I found that the six categories of play types were not discrete, but at times overlapped. For example, at one invitation, when children used orange paint to transform a white button-up shirt into scarecrow clothing, they engaged in artistic play, which foregrounds product, but the children’s experience of squishing paint between their fingers could also be considered a form of sensory play, which foregrounds the experiential nature of the materials. Also, when the

children used eye droppers to deposit droplets of water color paint onto coffee filters, they engaged in both manipulative play and artistic play. For Lillian, this activity appeared to fall under the manipulative play category because she seemed to focus on physically handling the dropper in order to fill it with paint and deposit drops on the paper, a motor skills activity. All types of play, at times, also carried a symbolic element. Marsh et. al (2016) defined *symbolic play* as instances in which children used one object to stand in for another object. I did not include symbolic play as a separate category for this study because all of the play types described in Table 11 contained symbolic elements.

Strategies Children Used to Navigate the Social Boundaries of Playframes

The second question that guided this study examined the strategies children used to navigate the social boundaries of playframes. In the ten observations, I found that children used four distinct strategies using verbal and nonverbal resources: *access*, *invitation*, *sustainment*, and *protection* (Table 12). Their use of strategies often included play with materials and the resources of their particular playframes, including literacy materials and character roles. The two playframes presented later in this chapter illustrate the strategic moves by the children engaged in play and how they used available resources for social purposes.

Table 12

Strategies for Navigating Social Boundaries of Playframes

Strategy Type	Description
Access	Children attempted to enter a playframe that involved other children engaged in ongoing play.
Invitation	Children invited a child not participating in their playframe to join them.

Sustainment	Children engaged in ongoing play attempted to continue their play and sustain the playframe. These strategies were used in response to an access attempt by an outsider but also used to encourage current players to not exit the playframe.
Protection	Children attempted to protect their playframe from intrusion of outsiders. Protection strategies often made use of exclusionary tactics.

Children often used multiple strategies in succession and/or layered strategies simultaneously. The two playframes at the end of the chapter illustrate how the children's attempts at access, invitation, sustainment, and protection were interpreted by others. These strategy types, like play categories, are not discrete units, but at times overlap. For example, offering another child a prop could serve as an invitation to play in one context but as a sustainment strategy in another context. Thus, I write about the strategies in the collective rather than in isolation.

Access, invitation, and sustainment strategies. During free play time, children formed shifting affinity groups (Wohlwend, 2011a) as they moved between social circles in the classroom and engaged in various categories of play with each other. When a child encountered one or more children engaged in ongoing play, the child sometimes attempted to gain access to the play using one or more of the strategies identified below. Children responded to attempts at access either by granting access or resisting access (Corsaro, 1979, 2005). Less commonly observed, children invited peers or adults into their ongoing playframes, and these invitations were also made using the strategies identified below. The strategies made use of both verbal and nonverbal resources, including the materials in the classroom as well as children's own bodies. Fifteen access and invitation strategies were identified in the macro-data set: 1) announces own role in play; 2) enters play in character; 3) directly assigns/suggests role to peer while not in

character; 4) assigns/suggests role for peer while in character; 5) produces variant of ongoing play; 6) comments on ongoing play; 7) directly requests; 8) enters physical space using body; 9) enters physical space using materials; 10) directive for action; 11) elicits third-party assistance; 12) encircles playframe; 13) makes personal statement; 14) requests materials; and 15) offers materials. These strategies did not stand alone. Rather, children at times used multiple strategies simultaneously. For example, a child might *enter the physical space with their body* and simultaneously *request materials* from the children engaged in ongoing play.

Corsaro (1979) identified fifteen strategies children use to gain access to other children's play. (See Table 2 in chapter 2.) In this study, children used many of those same strategies or similar strategies, such as *encirclement*, *producing variant of ongoing behavior*, and *non-verbal entry*. For example, Corsaro defined *encirclement* as a nonverbal strategy that occurs when a child circles the physical space where other children are playing but does not speak. *Encirclement* was a strategy used by the children in this study as well. For example, Sam, one of the focal children, crawled into a fort constructed from chairs and bedsheets in the dramatic play area and navigated through the back passageway of the fort to an area where several girls were sprawled on their stomachs in a circle and engaged in communication play. Because Sam remained on the perimeter of their playframe and did not speak, this event was coded as *encirclement*. Corsaro (1979; 2005) also defined *producing variant of ongoing behavior* as a strategy that occurs when a child enters the physical space where other children are playing and verbally or nonverbally produces behaviors that are similar to the ongoing play. In this study, children also *produced variants of ongoing play*. For example, Joseph was working at a table arranging letter tiles in various patterns and sounding out his invented spellings with Ms. Nettie's assistance. As he was sounding out a word, Greta approached and said, "It goes *Greta*," in a

sing-song voice. Then she said, “I’m going to try to spell my name,” as she made marks using a marker.

In line with Corsaro (1979), children in this study also offered objects to others as an access strategy. For example, during one observation, a child engaged in dramatic play as the host of a feast asked a peer, “Would you like an invitation?” Sometimes, the offer of a prop carried additional connotations, such as the assertion of directorial authority within the playframe. During another observation, Lillian was working at a table with dough, rolling pins, and cut-outs, when she said to me, “I’m making cookies. For you.” Her offer of a prop—flattened dough—functioned as an invitation to me to enter her playframe, but also functioned to assign character roles within the playframe. That is, Lillian used the prop to suggest she play the baker role and I play the role as a customer or guest. Because I noticed nuances in how children offered props, I expanded on Corsaro’s (1979) code “offering an object” (p. 321) by adding the code, *assigns/suggests roles to peer while in character* in order to capture children’s use of the playframe resources when employing access or invitation strategies. Sometimes children assigned roles more explicitly. For example, at another point, Lillian turned to Sam, who had approached the area where she was playing, and said to him, “You’re the ghost.” In this instance, Lillian took a directorial stance while out of character to explicitly assign Sam a role in her playframe. Likewise, I added the code *assigns/suggests roles to peer while not in character* to capture children’s directorial moves from outside symbolic play.

The children in the macro-data set used many of the access strategies identified by Corsaro (1979; 2005). Yet, during my analysis of data, I delineated other nuances in their strategies. For example, in the macro-data set, children employed what Corsaro defined as *nonverbal entry* as a strategy. To extend Corsaro’s work, I delineated two types of nonverbal

entry in my dataset: 1) entering physical space using their body; and 2) entering physical space using materials. During one observation, several girls were inside a sheet fort in the dramatic play area talking amongst themselves. Sam, who wanted to join their play, kept his body outside the sheet fort in a manner similar to *encirclement* but entered the playframe, not with his body, but by shining a beam from his flashlight into the sheet fort. This event provides an example of *entering the physical space using materials*. Delineating the nonverbal strategies can provide insight into how children use resources, such as their bodies or materials, when making attempts to gain access to ongoing playframes.

Table 13

Access Strategies Unique to this Study

Strategy	Example
Nonverbal entry: entering physical space using body	A child entered the space where children were playing with large cardboard boxes, and without comment, looked inside one of the boxes where a peer was sitting.
Nonverbal entry: entering physical space using materials.	Sam did not enter the sheet fort where several girls were playing, but instead shined his flashlight into their space without comment.
Announces roles in play	A child who was sitting inside a cardboard box said to a peer, "I'm a tiger."
Enters play in character	Several children were gathered in the dramatic play area, using the puppet stage as a restaurant counter. Sam walked over and said to the girl behind the counter, "I want a hot dog and a burger."
Assigns/suggests role to peer while not in character	Lillian said to Sam, who entered her space near a sheet fort, "You're the ghost."
Assigns/suggests role to peer while in character	When I approach a table where Lillian was working with dough, she said to me, "I'm making cookies. For

you.”

Directive for action

As several girls played together inside a sheet fort, Sam directed his light beam the ceiling of the fort and said, “Look up.”

Protection strategies. Playframes are fragile spaces, and children work to protect their play from disruption by outsiders (Corsaro, 2005), and they often do so in ways that are nuanced and draw from the resources of their playframes (Evaldsson & Tellgren, 2009; Fanger et al., 2012). In his study, Corsaro (1979) found that children responded to peers’ access strategies either positively or negatively. That is, children engaged in ongoing play either accepted the child into their play or rebuked the child’s attempt and refused entry. Like Corsaro, in this study, I found that children responded to peers’ bids for access positively and negatively as well; however, I built on Corsaro’s (1979) binary responses by delineating seven strategies children used for resisting peers’ bids for access (Table 13). The seven strategies that children in this study used to sustain and protect their playframes included the following: 1) defines role for self; 2) direct verbal decline; 3) directs peer away in context of playframe; 4) takes away prop; 5) continues play without pause; 6) engages with peer within existing playframe; and 7) relocates playframe.

Table 14

Protection Strategies Unique to this Study

Strategy	Example
Defines role for self	Nora turned in the child’s direction and said firmly, “Um, did you know what? I’m one of your little not customers? I’m someone who <i>works there!</i> ”
Direct verbal decline	Lillian asked to enter the cardboard boxes that several girls were

	using to represent a house, one child said, “Actually you can’t, Lillian. I don’t think I can skootch.”
Directs peer away in context of playframe	Several girls were inside cardboard boxes that represented houses. Lillian approached, one child said, “No more kitties.”
Takes away prop	Lillian was engaged in dramatic play, preparing pizzas. When a child walked over to pick up a pizza that was ready, Lillian shook her head no and pulled the pizza back toward her and placed it in a box.
Continues play without pause	Several girls were sprawled on their bellies in a semi-circle inside a sheet fort talking. Sam tried to access their play, the girls continue talking amongst themselves, ignoring him.
Engages with peer(s) within existing playframe	Jonah approach a group of boys engaged in artistic play, the boys continued painting and talking amongst themselves.
Relocates playframe	Lillian who has a hat in her hand, asked a peer, “Want to try the hat?” but the child walked away, relocating her play.

Sometimes children were direct in their use of protection strategies. For example, Lillian used a *direct verbal decline* when she said to a peer, “No, don’t listen to Sam!” This type of decline is what Fanger et al. (2012) might call an *unmitigated exclusion*, or direct exclusion of a peer. Other times, children were less direct. In line with Fanger et al. (2012), I found that children indirectly excluded peers through “partial exclusion” (p. 235). That is, children permitted a newcomer into play but resisted entry by assigning the child an inferior role that limited participation (Fanger et al., 2012) or excluded the child once play was underway (Evaldsson & Tellgren, 2009). For example, a group of girls engaged in dramatic play and used cardboard boxes to represent houses. Lillian approached the girls who were sitting inside one of the boxes and attempted access. After some negotiation, Lillian protested, “You are making no room for me, Abigail.” Abigail at this point relented and said, “I know. I have an idea. Let’s get a new box along the wall of our box.” In this example, Abigail permitted Lillian’s entry into the

playframe on the condition that she occupy a different box adjacent to their box, rather than occupy the same box in which the girls were gathered, thereby permitting, but limiting her ability to participate.

In some cases, children's resistance strategies appeared indifferent, rather than distinctly positive or negative. Children would *continue play without pause*, seemingly ignoring peers who were attempting to access their playframes. *Ignoring* is an exclusionary tactic marked by "a *lack* of a response," which stands in contrast to all other forms of exclusion which involve the excluder taking verbal or nonverbal action (Fanger et al., 2012, p. 233). For example, several boys were gathered around an art invitation set up with a white button-up shirt, brushes, and paint. While they worked together to cover the entire shirt in paint, they ignored Jonah as he circled the space, looking for a free paintbrush to use to join their play. When I finally interjected, asking the Jonah what was wrong, one of the boys said to me, "There are no more left," and continued to not acknowledge Jonah.

Modes and Resources Used by Children to Engage in Play

The third question that guided this study examined the modes and resources children use to engage in play and how they use them. Within the ten observations, I found that modes included both verbal and nonverbal, and children often layered modes to create meaning that neither mode could convey alone (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). When layering modes, the modes at times were in tension with one other and at other times provided what Hodge and Kress (1988) call *redundancy*. Redundancy suggests that if one sign system fails, the other can convey the meaning. In other words, children simultaneously used several modes, including oral language, visual representation, audio representation, gestural representation, and spatial representation to convey meaning. For example, during one observation, Abigail layered various

semiotic modes when employing access strategies; she used 1) gestural representation, 2) visual representation, and 3) oral language (Cope & Kalantzis, 2013). First, she turned her body slightly towards her peer so that they now sat side-by-side. Second, she shined her flashlight on the walls of the sheet fort where her peer's light was directed to create shadows. Third, she said, "It's spooky," in a voice seemingly directed at her peer and referencing the shadows they were making on the interior wall of the fort. Each semiotic mode provided redundancy for the others, each conveying her interest in joining her peer's playframe.

Children used features of oral language, such as declarative sentences as indirect imperatives (Cazden, 2001) to manage the actions of peers and myself, a practice that reflected the behavioral management strategies of the teachers in this classroom, and they also layered other modes for redundancy over the verbal discourse. During one observation, I noticed Abigail playing by the puppet stage and asked, "What is she making? What is she cooking?" Nora quickly said, "She not cooking anything," and then she handed me a piece of folded cardstock and said, "Here's your menu." Nora's statement, "Here's your menu," was formed as a declarative sentence, but functioned as an implicit directive for me to enact the role of a customer and place an order with her, not Abigail. Nora layered the oral language mode with the gestural mode and visual mode through the action of handing me a visual representation of a menu. Her nonverbal actions also functioned as an implicit directive for me to enact the role of a customer, echoing the meaning of her oral discourse. This multimodal directive—which produced verbal and nonverbal redundancy—likewise functioned as an invitation strategy. Materials children used as resources for meaning-making included folded cardstock, cardboard boxes, dice, flip phones, markers, receipt books, wooden bowls, sea shells, capes, and flashlights, among many other items, including reading and writing materials. In this particular classroom,

teachers filled the environment with materials that encouraged open-ended meanings rather than toys or materials designed for specific uses. Additionally, children were free to move materials around the room and were free to use the materials for various purposes. These details are important because the material factors of the classroom environment influence children's explorations (Gandini, 2012). Gandini (2012), a leading Reggio Emilia scholar, argued that the physical environment is an essential element of children's education. She continued to say that spaces in which children learn convey meaning and values to those in it. In other words, the environment is a form of communication. The arrangement of the rooms, the postings on the walls, and the choice of materials function as invitations to children to explore. In this data, children often used materials to fluidly move into and between different meanings, rather than using materials for prescriptive purposes. Bomer (2003) and Vygotsky (1978) might describe this process as *pivoting* (Bomer, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978) the meaning of materials according to children's interests (Kress, 1997). Within this perspective, the term pivot carries the suggestion that meaning resides within the object. Although materials afford and constrain meaning for children according to their physical properties and shared histories, meaning resides within the children. Therefore, in line with Mediated Discourse Analysis (Scollon, 2001; Wohlwend 2014), I consider not how children *pivot* the meanings of materials, but how children use materials to mediate meaning. In this data, for example, children used materials to create props to support the embodiment of new character roles during dramatic play. Children used colored markers as nail polish, cardboard boxes as vehicles, magnetic blocks as office buildings, and shadows from flashlights as animate creatures.

Across the ten observations, children enacted a variety of character roles while engaged in dramatic play, enacting characters such as tigers, chefs, servers, customers in restaurants, party

planners, party guests, automotive designers, drivers, jockeys, ghosts, magicians, manicurists, robots, and superheroes. Children mediated meanings within these roles through their use of materials, contextualizing their play in a space and time, often reimagining these roles as they enacted these various dramatic play characters. Character roles often appeared to support children's enactment of social roles, namely insider and outsider identities, which is explained further in the next section of this chapter.

Social Positionings Enacted by Children During Play

The fourth question that guided this study examined the social positionings that children took on and resisted during play. In the data, children moved fluidly within and across insider and outsider social positionings in playframes. That is, these insider and outsider social positionings were never binary in nature, and certainly not fixed, but rather, children moved across, within, and between the permeable boundaries between the social positionings in ways that were not always distinctly one or the other. Additionally, children often explored issues of authority and agency in their play (Arnott, 2008; Corsaro, 2005), and socially repositioned themselves and others in ways that sometimes ran counter to the traditional teacher-student classroom culture (Arnott, 2018). In other words, children used play to transform elements of the classroom context, including structural hierarchies (Arnott, 2018). In the playframe below, Nora transformed elements of what it means to do school by enacting “nurturing but powerful play identities” (Wohlwend, 2011a, p. 44) that opened up possibilities for demonstrating competence as a student in a classroom setting.

Wohlwend (2011a) argued that the affinity groupings children form during play create issues of insider and outsider status. However, these positions are constantly negotiated by participants. It is common for children engaged in play to use exclusionary tactics with their

peers (Corsaro, 1985, Corsaro & Eder, 1990; Fanger et al, 2012), but to also resist these positionings. Peer exclusion refers to “naturalistic situations in which one peer intentionally tries to prevent another from engaging in a social interaction” (Fanger et al., 2012, p. 226). Peer exclusion has often been studied as a subcomponent of social aggression, “a method of intentionally harming others by using relationships, friendships, or social status.” (Fanger et al., 2012, p. 225), but in practice peer exclusion is not always employed by children to explicitly harm peers (Corsaro, 2005; Evaldsson & Tellgren, 2009). For example, in the data, when Jonah approached a group of boys engaged in artistic play, the boys ignored him and continued to work together to paint a white shirt orange for a scarecrow the class was constructing. Although it was evident that the boys were ignoring Jonah, it was not clear that they purposely intended to exclude him. Rather, Jonah could not join the play because there were no extra paint brushes available. Children often use exclusionary tactics for purposes other than to explicitly exclude peers, but rather to protect their interactive spaces and sustain play (Corsaro, 2005, Corsaro & Eder, 1990). In this example, the boys protected the flow of their artistic play, since allowing Jonah into their space would have meant one of the boys giving up a paintbrush, thereby shifting the composition of their affinity group.



Figure 12: Masks Decorated by the Children



Figure 13: Painting the Scarecrow's Shirt

Children often took on various character roles during dramatic play. Sam used a facemask to mediate his ability move fluidly among different characters, including a “blood superhero” and the identity of another child in the classroom. For example, Sam put on a mask

that he had created and explained, “I drew it. It makes me look like Adam,” another classmate. The mask, created from a cardboard template common in craft stores, was decorated rather simply with scribbles from green, blue, purple, and red markers and two glued-on plastic jewels. Using the mask, Sam was able to take on the identity of his friend, a child who in that moment was engaged with other children in the classroom, a member of their affinity group, and was positioned as an insider to the playframe. Moments later, Sam used the mask to take on a new identity as a “blood superhero.” Significantly, instead of only enacting a fictional character as a “blood superhero,” Sam also chose to enact a role based on his friend, a real person in the classroom. Sam also later asked *me* to take on *his* identity. During that interaction, several girls were engaged in language play inside a sheet fort, and Sam wished to join. As an access strategy, he asked me to pretend to be him. In that case, Sam engaged in what Cromdal (2001) calls *agent work*. That is, Sam used me to advocate indirectly for his entry into other children’s ongoing play by pretending to be him, and I, too, became a resource for Sam.

The prior section identified various character roles children enacted during dramatic play, but children also enacted various social positionings in the classroom, and sometimes children used the resources of their dramatic playframes to mediate those social roles. Influenced by Rowe and Neitzel (2010), I wanted to be open to the different roles children take on during play, but with a focus on how these roles were mediated by the children’s use of materials items, verbal discourse, and actions during free play. Children use multiple modes during play, and as a result are producers of messages that create social identities for themselves and their peers (Hodge & Kress, 1988). Rowe and Neitzel (2010) identified 22 roles that participants enacted during their observations of two- and three-year-olds, and included performer, audience, caretaker of materials, inventor (e.g., experimenting with the materials), provisioner (e.g.,

providing access to materials), reader, writer, enforcer of rules, and dramatic player (p. 179). Rowe and Neitzel's study focused on children's participation at the writing table in the classroom and the shifts that took place during the children's interactions with their teachers. They argued that "interactive shift analysis identified children's choices of activity at the points where they actively shaped their own participation or that of others" (p. 181). Likewise, I also wanted to stay attuned to the shifts that occurred in children's character and social roles in order to gain insight into how children actively shaped their own participation and other's participation in playframes. In this data excerpt, children enacted social roles as readers, writers, artists, directors, and performers. Children used the resources of their playframes to mediate these social roles. For example, in Nora's case, examined in detail below, she used the resources of a restaurant-themed dramatic playframe to negotiate a role not only as a director, but also as a reader. The significance of these shifts and how these shifts positioned children socially are examined further in the analysis of the two playframes. The tables that accompany the playframes are formatted according to the interactive shifts that occurred within the sites of engagement.

Play Types, Strategies, Modes/Resources and Social Positionings:

A Micro-analysis of the Free Play of Two Focal Participants

This section presents two playframes focused on two children, Sam and Nora, as they engaged in free play primarily in the dramatic play area of the classroom. These children were selected for micro-analysis because each child represented a different sort of social experience. Sam was a child whom I had observed attempting to enter into other children's playframes, while Nora was a child whom I had observed protecting and directing her own playframes from outsiders. Sam and Nora at times interacted briefly during free play time, but generally, over the

course of the ten observations, they did not play together. The excerpts selected for micro-analysis and depicted in the sections below exemplify each child's experience during free play time.

Sam

Sam was a child whom I had observed on several occasions struggling to make successful bids to play with his peers. That is, he would try to initiate play with others, but was often rejected. For example, one day, as he engaged in construction play alone with magnetic tiles, he said aloud to no one child in particular, "Who is going to help me build a jail?" A nearby girl quickly replied, "No one." Another time, a group of children engaged in dramatic play around a dinner party theme and invited various children in the classroom to their feast by handing out plastic postcards that represented invitations. When Sam asked the girl handing out invitations, "Can I have some mail?" she ignored him, and he continued solitary play. Sam at times turned to adults, including myself, to engage with him.

Although Sam's peers resisted his bids to enter their playframes, he persisted. For example, during one observation, several girls were engaged in language play inside a sheet fort, and Sam wished to join them. Despite their resistance to his access strategies, Sam persisted, applying strategies in succession and layering strategies. He used the same access strategy—*issuing a verbal directive for action*—in succession, but modified how he applied it with each iteration. First, he shined his flashlight onto the ceiling of the fort to create shadow and used the *oral language* mode (Cope & Kalantzis, 2013) to direct the girls to "look up." When his attempt did not succeed, he again used the same access strategy, but layered the *gestural mode* (Cope & Kalantzis, 2013) over the verbal mode by pointing his finger to the ceiling while telling the girls to look up. The layering of modes intensified his message, creating a sense of enthusiasm.

Although he used the same access strategy several more times, he then shifted how he used a single mode, *audio representation* (Cope & Kalantzis, 2013), with each successive attempt. He repeated the same directive, “Look up there,” but the intonation of his voice dropped with each iteration, suggesting a growing acceptance that his access strategies were not working and foreshadowing his eventual retreat.

During observations, Sam primarily engaged in two play types, construction play and dramatic play, respectively in the block area and dramatic play area, although he moved rather freely around the room. He often infused construction materials such as colorful magnetic tiles, wooden blocks, and cardboard boxes with symbolic meaning, transforming the materials into museums, jails, office buildings, and flying vehicles. He also often worked alone as he engaged in these activities. Table 15 illustrates how Sam use the cardboard box five different ways across the observations in order to mediate his enactment of different character roles.

Table 15

The Cardboard Box as a Resource for Sam's Meaning-Making

Material	Verbal/Action	Mediated Meaning	Dramatic Play Character
Cardboard box	Sam is sitting inside box, moving flaps. “I made a spy vehicle without a cabinet or a steering wheel or a backseat...It’s a self-driving vehicle.”	Spy vehicle	Engineer
Cardboard box	Sam says, “It’s a flying car...It’s goes up into the air, and then when it gets all the way up into the clouds, it just goes straight to Disneyland, and then it drives me to the Tower.”	Flying car	Passenger
Cardboard box	Sam folds the flaps of the box inward while sitting inside it. “Then fold this	Jet	Engineer

up to make the jet, and this up to make the roof, and this up to make the cabin.”

Cardboard box	Sam is standing inside the box, and says, “Ahoy Captain,” to a child nearby inside another box. “Ok, Captain, I will charge.”	Boat	Captain
Cardboard box	Sam is standing inside the box. “Horsey, horsey. horsey, come on.”	Horse	Jockey

The cardboard box represented a spy vehicle, flying car, jet, boat, and horse, depending on Sam’s accompanying verbal or nonverbal discourse. During one observation, Sam was standing inside a cardboard box, and said, “Ahoy Captain,” to a child nearby inside another box. When the child did not respond, Sam said, “Ok, Captain, I will charge.” In this example, the cardboard box represented a boat and supported Sam’s enactment as the captain of a ship. Likewise, Sam used the resources of his playframe, namely his character role as a captain at sea to employ an *invitation strategy*, specifically *assigning/suggesting a role to peer while in character*. In this case, he addressed the child as “captain” in two separate utterances, inviting the child to take on that character role to engage in play. That same cardboard box, during another observation, represented a horse. Sam stood inside the box, and said, “Horsey, horsey. horsey, come on.” In this example, the box represented a horse, which supported Sam’s enactment as a jockey in a race. In each instance, various modes and resources intersected so that the cardboard box transformed its meaning from a container into a mode of transportation, and Sam used each mode of transportation to mediate his enactment of a different dramatic play character—designer, passenger, captain, and jockey—according to his interests.

The playframe below occurred in the dramatic play area and portrays a sustained interaction between Sam, Paul, and Katie. The analysis that follows this section illustrates the interconnected nature of the strategies, modes and resources, and social positioning that children negotiated during play.

Playframe 1: Sam's Shadow Puppets

Sam kneels alone in the dramatic play area just outside the first entrance of a sheet fort holding a flashlight in his hand. The elaborate fort, constructed from bedsheets draped over cardboard boxes and chairs, had remained erected for several days. Paul and Katie are sitting just inside the entrance of the fort. Paul also holds a flashlight, and he is shining his beam of light on the interior wall as Katie looks on. Sam lifts his flashlight and directs the beam onto the same interior wall. Katie places her hand into Paul's beam of light, not Sam's beam of light, opening and closing her fingers to make a creature-like shadow. While staring at Katie's shadow puppet, Paul says, "Let's go somewhere else," and then quickly shifts his gaze towards Katie. Sam starts to speak, but his words are muffled and truncated by Katie's response to Paul.

"Yeah," Katie answers, turning her head towards Paul. She rises to her knees and leans in the direction of the entryway, giving the impression that she is in fact going to go somewhere else, as Paul suggested.

Sam, still kneeling just outside the entryway, continues to shine his beam of light on the interior wall of the sheet fort for a moment without comment. Paul and Katie also remain silent, and then Sam rises to his feet and takes a couple steps towards his left, moving his body out of Katie's anticipated exit path.

Katie rises to her feet and walks behind Sam in order to exit the tent. Paul remains sitting inside the fort with his gaze on his flashlight for several moments after Katie leaves the fort. A

couple of seconds pass and then Paul follows her, also exiting the tent. Sam stands at the entrance of the fort alone.

The Shadow Puppet Site of Engagement

In this playframe, there were 12 distinct shifts in the sites of engagement and the children used a range of different strategies to mediate these shifts. (See Table 16.) Scollon (2001) described *sites of engagement* as windows where social practices and mediational means intersect to bring into focus participants in a real-time moment in history. The site of engagement in this playframe is more than the location in the sheet fort where Sam, Paul, and Katie sat; rather, the site of engagement is a window in which the children appropriated resources for mediated actions. Within this site of engagement, Paul and Katie had established a playframe in which they used a flashlight to make shadow puppets on the wall of the sheet fort. In this playframe, the site of engagement altered as the children employed various access, sustainment, and protection strategies in order to navigate the social boundaries of the playframe. Table 16 is organized by the various shifts that occurred in the shadow puppet site of engagement along with the primary modes, resources, and strategies that the children used to communicate and position each other within the playframe.

Table 16:

Shifts in the Shadow Puppet Site of Engagement

Shift	Transcript Data	Primary Mode(s)	Resources	Site of Engagement	Strategies
	Katie and Paul sat next to each other inside fort.	Proximity	Sheets	Paul and Katie only	
1	Sam sat down outside fort and looks at Katie and Paul.	Proximity Gaze	Sheets	Paul and Katie inside; Sam outside	Accessing by encirclement
2	Sam shined light beam onto	Proximity	Sheets	Paul, Katie, and	Accessing by

	wall of fort.	Light	Flashlight	Sam as unit	producing variants of ongoing play; by entering physical space using tools
3	Katie placed hand in Paul's light beam	Proximity Light Nonverbal	Sheets Flashlight Hand	Paul and Katie inside; Sam outside	Protecting by engaging nonverbally with other peer
4	Looking at wall of tent, Paul said, "Let's go somewhere else."	Proximity Gaze Vocalization	Grammar Metaplay	Paul, Katie, and Sam as unit	Protecting by relocating playframe
5	Paul glanced at Katie.	Proximity Gaze		Paul and Katie inside; Sam outside	Protecting by engaging nonverbally with other peer
6	Sam said, "[indecipherable]—"	Verbal		Paul, Katie, and Sam as unit	Accessing by unidentified strategy
7	Katie turned her head towards Paul and said, "Yeah."	Proximity Gaze Vocalization	Grammar Metaplay	Paul and Katie inside; Sam outside	Protecting by verbally affirming other peer
8	Sam shined light beam on wall of fort.	Proximity Light	Sheets Flashlight	Paul, Katie, and Sam	Accessing by producing variant of ongoing play
9	Katie rose to her knees and leaned in direction of entrance.	Proximity Body orientation	Sheets	Paul and Katie inside; Sam outside.	Protecting playframe by relocating playframe
10	Sam shined light beam slightly left of Katie's body and looked at shadow.	Proximity Light Gaze	Sheets Flashlight	Paul, Katie, and Sam	Accessing by producing variant of ongoing play
11	Sam shifted his body out of Katie's path and stands up outside of fort.	Proximity Posture	Sheets	Paul and Katie inside; Sam outside.	Protecting by relocating playframe with Paul
12	Katie and Paul leave the fort and walk away.	Proximity	Sheets	Dissolves	Protecting by relocating

Children's Use of Free Play Strategies

In this playframe, Sam used access strategies to bid for play while Paul and Katie used protection strategies. In an attempt to enter Paul and Katie's established playframe, Sam used

several access strategies outlined in Table 13 that relied almost entirely on the nonverbal mode. The one time he used the verbal mode, his comment was not only indecipherable, but truncated by Katie's response to Paul. Sam used access strategies in succession and also simultaneously, but these attempts were not ultimately successful, since Paul and Katie moved the physical boundaries of their playframe, thereby dissolving the site of engagement. Initially, Sam moved into the site of engagement using what Corsaro (1979) calls *encirclement*. He sat down at the entry of the sheet fort, moving his body near Paul and Katie's physical playframe, but not directly inside it. Through his proximity and gaze, Sam entered the site of engagement, but did not directly engage in Paul and Katie's play. He used both his body and a flashlight as resources to gain access to Paul and Katie's play, and in that instance, he layered two strategies: *entering the physical space using materials* and 2) *producing a variant of ongoing play* (Corsaro, 1979). Sam entered the physical space using the beam of a flashlight while his body remained outside the sheet fort. Sam mediated the use of the light beam to gain access inside the fort. As Sam shined the beam of light on the wall of the fort in a manner that mimicked Paul and Katie's play with the materials, he produced a variant in which he could continue play with Paul and Katie. Sam used the latter strategy two more times in succession in this playframe at shift 8 and shift 10, each time shining his beam of light into the fort. Although Corsaro (1979, 2005) identified producing a variant of ongoing play as the most effective strategy for gaining access into a playframe, this strategy did not easily succeed in Sam's case, since the Paul and Katie resisted Sam's entry using a variety of strategies described in the next section.

Protection Strategies. As Sam attempted to access their playframe, Paul and Katie used several protection strategies outlined in Table 14 to resist Sam's bid for entry into their playframe. While Sam communicated his bid for access almost entirely through nonverbal

modes (flashlight, light beams, proximity to tent opening), Paul and Katie layered both verbal and nonverbal modes to resist his entry. In Shift 3 outlined in table 16, Katie resisted Sam's entry by ignoring Sam and using the nonverbal mode to *engage with a peer within the existing playframe*. Sam nonetheless entered the playframe with the flashlight. To dissolve the current playframe, Paul proposed *relocating the playframe* when he said to Katie, "Let's go somewhere else." The contraction let's "realizes a suggestion, something that is at the same time both command and offer" (Halliday, 2004, p. 166). This statement functioned both as a suggestion to Katie and rebuke of Sam, since Paul wished to create a new playframe with Katie and without Sam. Katie was amenable to this idea and used gaze and vocalization to affirm her interest in this new playframe. Over the next several shifts in the site of engagement, the children volleyed their use of strategies: As Sam persisted by shining his beam of light onto the sheet fort, *producing a variant of ongoing play*, Paul and Katie persisted by working together to *relocate the playframe*. Although Katie and Paul worked together to preserve the social boundaries of their playframe and resist Sam's entry, the physical boundaries remained permeable as Sam shined his flashlight on the interior wall of the fort next to Paul's light. In the final two shifts, the site of engagement dissolved when Sam, Paul, and Katie all moved their bodies to shift the physical boundaries of their playframes.

Insider and Outsider Social Positionings within the Shadow Puppet Site of Engagement

Within the Shadow Puppet site of engagement, Sam made successive nonverbal attempts using flashlight beams and proximity to access Paul and Katie's playframe. The beam of light allowed him to enter their physical and social space, but Katie and Paul they resisted Sam's attempt to become an insider. They deliberately positioned Sam as an outsider. At first, they ignored Sam's light beam and continued their play. Sam added proximity, he moved closer and

kneeled into to the entrance of the tent while continuing to use the light beam. Both modes were intrusive for Katie and Paul. Their strategies to protect their playframe and ignore Sam did not work. To completely keep Sam outside their playframe, they ultimately refused by relocating their playframe. By the end of these interactions, Sam shifted from insider to outsider. He conceded that he was not allowed to bid for play with Paul and Katie. He rose to his feet and moved from the entrance. This concession allowed Katie to bypass him and turn to another space to play with Paul. Sam's nonverbal body modes reflected concession that his strategies had failed, and the site of engagement dissolved. The shifts in how these children jockeyed for ownership of the shadow play involved several critical strategies, and these strategies produced insider and outsider social positioning that the children continually renegotiated with each strategic move. The children's production of insider and outsider positionings relied on a variety of modes and resources. The sheet fort set up in the dramatic play area provided the children with a physical space to create a playframe. Paul's light that penetrated the sheets provided Katie and Paul a canvas whereby they could create their shadow puppets, and seemingly, they wished to play alone in their space using their flashlight.

Paul and Katie formed what Wohlwend (2011a) or Gee (2014) might call an *affinity group*. An affinity group creates social boundaries and thus issues of inclusion and exclusion (Wohlwend, 2011a). Sam, wishing to join Paul and Katie's play, drew on the resources of their playframe, namely their use of light, in order make a bid for access. Sam's flashlight served both to integrate play and to interrupt Paul and Katie's play. The crossing of both beams of light served as a literal and figurative confrontation. When Paul and Katie rebuked his invitation to play with this light, Sam crossed his beam of light with Paul's, thereby interrupting—stopping the shadow puppet play.

Sam attempted to establish himself as an insider to Paul and Katie's playframe. He initially used *encirclement*—bounding the playframe site with his body in close proximity to the fort itself without actually entering into it. Sam's use of encirclement made use of modes that Cope and Kalantzis (2013) termed *gestural representation* (i.e. gaze) and *spatial representation* (i.e. physical proximity). However, this strategy did not explicitly demand a response from Paul and Katie, in part because Sam remained a physical and social outsider to their playframe as an observer. Sam then encroached on the physical boundaries of the playframe when he cast his beam of light onto the wall of the sheet fort in a manner that mimicked Paul and Katie's play. Like Paul and Katie, Sam made use of the mode of *visual representation* when he used the flashlight as a resource to cast shadow images inside the fort (Cope & Kalantzis, 2013). When a child produces a variant of ongoing behavior (Corsaro, 1979, 2005, p. 321), or what Björk-Willén (2007) calls *shadowing* (p. 2134), the child is not merely imitating peers. Rather, *shadowing* is a social exchange in which a child brings him or herself into alignment with peers (Björk-Willén, 2007). In this instance, Sam used the bedsheets, beam of light from his flashlight, and proximity to nonverbally display competence of the ongoing activity and align himself with Paul and Katie as a fellow puppeteer. Paul and Katie, however, resisted this nonverbal bid for access.

Paul and Katie responded to Sam's bids for access by protecting the boundaries of their interactive space (Corsaro, 2005), which in turn functioned to strengthen their affinity group (Gee, 2014; Wohlwend, 2011) and reinforce Sam's negative affiliation as an intruder (Evaldsson & Tellgren, 2009). Katie, who had formed an affinity group with Paul, layered two modes to position Sam as an outsider. She used *gestural representation* (Cope & Kalantzis, 2013) when she placed her hand in Paul's beam of light, rather than Sam's, opening and closing her fingers.

This action then created a creature-like shadow on the wall of the fort. The resulting *visual representation* (Cope & Kalantzis, 2013)—the shadow puppet—was created by the intersection of her hand, Paul’s beam of light, and the sheet that formed a wall of the fort. The intersection of these nonverbal resources not only produced a shadow puppet, but functioned to strengthen *group cohesion* (Kyratzis, 2004; Wohlwend, 2011) between Paul and Katie, thereby positioning Sam as an outsider to their group.

Paul responded to Katie with a verbal invitation to move the physical boundaries of the playframe in order to protect its social boundaries. Paul’s vocalization, “Let’s go somewhere else,” utilized the contraction *let’s* for *let us*. Paul’s use of the pronoun *us* invoked a “positive category affiliation” (Evaldsson & Tellgren, 2009, p. 12) between himself and Katie, which was reified by his gaze, which he directed towards Katie, but not Sam. Kress (1997) argued that meaning emerges from the interaction between modes, and in this case, *gestural representation* (Cope & Kalantzis, 2013)—Paul’s nonverbal glance towards Katie—clarified his verbal vocalization “us” as excluding Sam.

Moreover, Paul formed his invitation as a *metaplay initiation* (Trawick-Smith’s, 1998). Trawick-Smith’s (1998) described the social interactions that take place outside of character roles during dramatic play as *metaplay* and identified three types of behaviors: 1) initiation, 2) response, and 3) construction. Paul used *initiation* in order to pause play and issue a directive outside of the shadow puppet play theme to initiate a new activity with Katie in a new location. Hodge and Kress (1988) discuss issues of power and solidarity in tandem: A sense of solidarity between interlocutors can mediate power relations. In other words, although Paul issued a directive to Katie, he framed it within solidarity. Katie used *response* by agreeing with Paul. Katie complied with Paul’s invitation, which he framed grammatically as a directive, by using

the verbal and nonverbal modes during metaplay: She affirmed his request by saying, “yeah,” and complied by rising to her knees and leaning in the direction of the entryway. Griswold (2007) argued that when children comply with the authority of peers within the boundaries of their play spaces, they legitimize the social hierarchies within those spaces. Likewise, by complying with Paul’s directive to move the location of their playframe, Katie in essence displayed subordination to his authority as the director and legitimized his social hierarchy within their playframe. By the end of these interactions, Sam affirmed the shifting boundaries of the site of engagement by no longer overlapping his beam of light with Paul’s beam of light and by shifting his body out of Paul and Katie’s path.

All three children used the same resources—flashlights, bedsheets, bodies, nonverbal gesture, and gaze—however, how they mediated these resources was different. Paul used his light to create a space in which he and Katie could create shadow puppets and engage in imaginary play around these puppets. A similar beam of light from Sam’s flashlight was used to disrupt and interrupt play. In this particular playframe, while Sam attempted to use his light to perhaps offer a resource to encourage shadow puppet play, Paul and Katie saw this same beam of light as an interruption, one that prompted Paul to “go somewhere else,” affirmed by Katie. When their nonverbal and verbal strategies did not work to protect their playframe, Katie resorted to physically stopping play—standing up and moving out. This physical move signaled to Sam that he was not welcome into their play.

As the children applied various strategies for navigating the playframe, the site of engagement oscillated between a socially unified one including all three children, and a site of engagement that was fissured, with Paul and Katie in social cohesion and Sam positioned outside their unit. Table 16 outlines the various shifts in the site of engagement that took place as the

children navigated the social boundaries of the playframe. The table also outlines the various modes and resources the children used to mediate meaning and identities within the playframe.

Nora

Over the course of the ten observations, Nora was most frequently found in the dramatic play area or art area working with an assortment of materials that she would transform into props, such as markers, rocks, shells, bowls, receipt pads, boxes, and capes. In the art area, she transformed art materials into props and engaged in dramatic play, rather than artistic play. For example, during one observation, Nora used colorful markers to enact the character role of manicurist by painting her peer's fingernails. When I asked her what she was doing, she spoke with confidence: "I'm doing a manicure. I can do anyone who waits." She then held up a glue stick and said, "Or we can glue stuff to your nails," positioning me as a potential customer in her playframe. Table 17 describes various materials Nora use to mediate her dramatic play characters.

Table 17

Materials Used by Nora to Enact Character Roles

Material	Verbal/Action	Mediated Meaning	Dramatic Play Character
Receipt pad	Nora makes marks on the paper and says, "I'm writing it down so I know what you want."	Order pad	Server
Cardstock with print	Nora opens the folded cardstock and says, "What do you want from my menu?"	Menu	Server
Colorful blocks	"That is what you ordered," Nora says, handing me a woven plate covered with colorful geometric wooden shapes repurposed from the construction area.	Food	Server/cook

Rocks, shells, wooden bowl	"Sit right here. This is your food," Nora says to me and hand me rocks and shells in a wooden bowl.	Restaurant meal	Server/cook
Cape	I am pretending to eat a meal that I ordered from Nora when she brings me a cape. She says, "I brought you a bib so you don't get hot chocolate on you."	Bib	Server
Black box with words "All you need is love" printed on top	Nora points to the marks on the box and says, "Suh-prise," drawing out sounds in word.	Menu item	Server

Like Sam, Nora also used multiple materials, such as shells, cardstock, and a cape, in which she was able to fluidly move within her dramatic play, to pivot her intentions, as she enacted the different roles of a restaurant server. A folded piece of cardstock became a menu; a receipt pad became a form for taking restaurant orders; wooden blocks, shells, and tumbled rocks became food; and a child-sized cape became a bib. Like Sam, Nora used the character roles she enacted for social purposes, namely to protect her playframe from disruption by peers (Table 17).

It was not uncommon for Nora to experiment with reading and writing materials during morning meeting as well. During morning meeting, a daily routine in this classroom where children used black markers as "thinking pens" to reflect in their unlined journals, Nora engaged intently with the materials. For example, at the conclusion of one morning meeting, she asked me, "Do you like my drawing?" She happily explained that she was drawing diamonds, dragons, cats, and kites in her journal. Even after morning meeting concluded and other children had put away their journals and markers, she continued drawing. Nora also used reading and writing

materials as resources for social purposes during dramatic play in the dramatic play area of the classroom, which is illustrated in a playframe below.

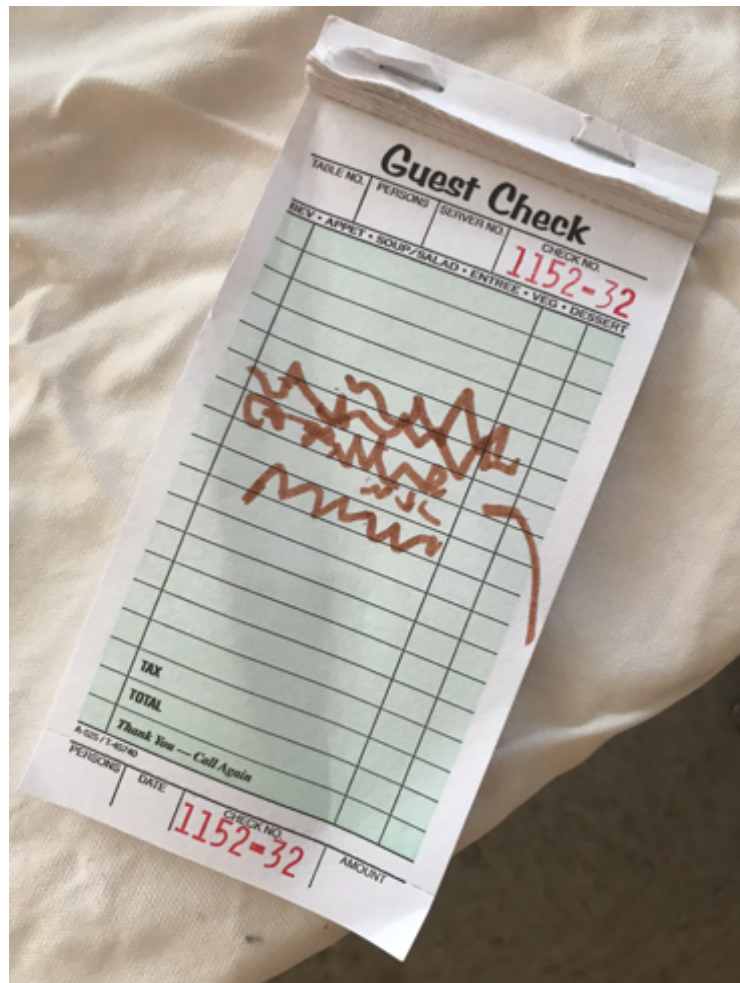


Figure 14: Nora's Recording of my Food Order

Nora, like Sam, also layered her use of semiotic modes. During one observation, as I was engaged with a child at the puppet stage in a toy store play theme, Nora used voice to enter our site of engagement even though she was physically standing several feet away from us next to the classroom windows, when she shouted the phrase, “A *surprise* menu,” which I soon learned referred to the box set atop an overhead projector. Her loud voice, her body orientation, and a

small black box intersected to create an invitation to play. Her bid took the form of an implicit offer of a prop. She named her prop, emphasizing the word *surprise*, and this inflection seemed to function as a form of enticement. In other words, the offer was not explicitly evident in the mode of *oral language*, but was instead evident in the *audio representation* of those words. By naming her prop, “a surprise menu,” Nora made her bid in character as a restaurant server. As children play with materials, they imagine and name objects as they see them in their play context. According to Johnstone (2008), in Western culture, “naming something can be seen as a way of establishing dominion over it” (p. 14). In this sense, by naming her prop, Nora has enacted a role of authority within the play context that she invited me to join.

Although Nora invited me into her playframe, she also worked to protect her playframes. In one playframe, Nora was engaged in dramatic play when a child entered the physical space of her restaurant-themed playframe and began touching her props. The child attempted to access Nora’s playframe by *entering play in character* as a customer, but when the child started to place an order, Nora, who was enacting the character role of a server, pointed across the classroom and quickly interrupted the child, “It’s in the middle shop. It’s right over there.” By remaining in character as a server in a restaurant, Nora resisted the peer’s entry by *directing peer away within the context of the playframe*. In other words, she negotiated the child’s exclusion within the role play context, rather than outright excluding the child (Evaldsson & Tellgren, 2009). Her character role as a server in a restaurant positioned Nora within the playframe as person with authority to direct other characters, and in this case, she drew on the affordances of her dramatic playframe to send the child to another location in the classroom and protect her space.

In another example, Nora used the logic and resources of the playframe to resist another child’s entry into our restaurant playframe. When a child approached, Nora stated that she was

not a “little customer,” but instead an employee at the restaurant. Another strategy to protect a playframe is what Sheldon (1996) calls “double-voiced discourse.” In other words, Nora’s statement mitigated the intrusion from a peer without disrupting the playframe because she stayed in character. Also, Evaldsson and Tellgren (2009) argue that by using the resources of the playframe, *double-voiced discourse* has the effect of softening rather than escalating conflict related to social hierarchies within play. Nora used the resources of the playframe, namely the dramatic play roles, as a resource for excluding her peer from play without outright rejecting the child (Evaldsson & Tellgren, 2009). She maintained her participation status by both defining what she *is not* –a little customer, and what she *is*—someone who works there. She also used the phrase “do you know what?” when addressing her peer to position herself as a person possessing the right to teach others (Evaldsson & Tellgren, 2009).

The purpose of the playframe below and accompanying analysis is to more closely analyze the inter-connectedness of the strategies children used for navigating the boundaries of the restaurant playframe, as well as the modes and resources they used, and how they intersected to produce the social positionings during free play.

Playframe 2: Nora’s Restaurant

Several children are engaged in dramatic play, using variations of restaurant and feast play themes as they enact various characters such as cook, host, or party guest. Nora is walking around the classroom near the dramatic play area too, although she is not participating in the children’s play.

Nora then turns to me and holds up a piece of cardstock that has been folded in half; a white page printed with a simple menu is glued onto the cardstock. The children engaged in dramatic play are also using the menu props. Nora makes eye contact with me, opens the folded

cardstock, and says, "What do you want from my menu?" Her gaze shifts from me to the menu, her eyes scanning the menu as though she is reading it.

I reply, "I saw that Abigail was making pizza, so I'm wondering if you have pizza on your menu?"

"Let's see." Nora pauses briefly while gazing at the open menu in her hands. "Yes, we do. See?" She points to an image of a pizza, makes eye contact with me with a smile, and then turns her gaze back to the print.

"Can I order the pizza please?"

Nora directs her gaze towards the menu as though momentarily consulting it, then looks back up at me. "It will be fifty hundred dollars."

"How did you know that it was fifty hundred dollars?" I ask, maintaining eye contact with her.

"Because I can see," she says as she turns her gaze back towards the menu and runs her finger over marks on the left-hand page. She looks back up at me with a self-assured smile.

"Oh, where do you see it?" I ask.

Nora looks at the open menu again and then points to an image of a dollar on the menu. Nora holds out one hand. I pretend to hand her money, and she pretends to take it. After we carry out our transaction, Nora walks over to another child and holds out her hand as though passing along money. "Here's the fifty hundred dollars." Nora again points to the image of the pizza on the menu, and says to the child, "She wanted pizza."

After a brief interaction with children in the area, Nora takes a step back in my direction and stretches her hand out to me. "Here's your ginormous pizza."

I pretend to take the pizza from her empty hand. "Thank you," I say. "This is a really giant one. No wonder it cost fifty thousand dollars."

A child then approaches me, and while we interact briefly, Nora wanders around the room alone with the menu in her hands. "Ok, so," she says to no one in particular as she walks in circles, her gaze outward. After the child who was talking to me walks away, Nora then walks back over to me and opens the menu so I can see too. She turns her head and gazes towards the menu as if she were reading it too. She says to me, "Ok, so, what else do you want?"

"Can I order a glass of juice please?" I ask.

"What kind of juice?"

"Do you have orange juice?" I ask.

Nora looks at the menu that she is holding, as though consulting the marks on the page for her answer. "Orange juice? No ma'am."

A child who wandered over places his finger on Nora's menu where there is a picture of a cup of orange juice. With a scowl on her face, Nora pulls the menu away from the child, closes it briefly, and turns her body orientation away from him and more towards me.

Nora relaxes her visage, and while holding the menu with both hands, gazes at the marks on the page. She says to me, "If you want orange juice, it's going to be 153 dollars." She states the price while keeping her eyes firmly fixed on the menu as though she were reading it. She then holds out her right hand as if to collect money from me.

Nora uses her left hand to hold open the menu, while she opens and extends her right hand towards me. I say, "153 dollars? That's a real pricey cup of orange juice. Can I get maybe a cup of milk instead?"

"Yes," Nora says, "Let me see."

A second child who has wandered over to where we stand places her hand at the top of Nora's menu. Nora directs her gaze towards child and pulls the menu towards herself while twirling her body in a semicircle in order to shift her body orientation away from the child and more towards me. As she makes these movements away from the child, Nora says to me, "300 dollars."

At this point, I decide against the 300 dollar cup of milk and revert back to my original order for orange juice. Nora and I negotiate my order when third child approaches. Nora folds up menu, holds it over her right shoulder, and scowls, while taking several steps backward while directing her gaze to the child.

Nora then walks back over to me, reopens the menu, and while holding it firmly with two hands, says, "Ok, the thing is three hundred. Three threes." She keeps her gaze directed to the page as she states the total with authority.

The Restaurant Site of Engagement

In this playframe, several children engaged in dramatic play around the related themes of a restaurant and a feast. Nora was not playing with the other children when I entered the dramatic play area in the classroom, but rather, she was walking around, carrying a piece of cardstock that was folded in half and had a printout of a menu glued to it. After I entered, Nora approached me and we formed what Cook-Gumperz and Corsaro (1977) might call an *interactive episode*. That is, we created shared meaning around the cardstock that mediated our play. Wohlwend (2014) described a site of engagement as "a social space where practices come together along with mediational means to make a mediated action the focus of attention (e.g., a baby swiping an iPad screen at home on a wooden deck)" (p. 63). She continued to describe sites of engagements as a moment in time where histories and discourses converge. In this playframe, the sites of

engagements mostly center on Nora as she manipulated the piece of folded cardstock—opening, closing, handing, and reading it—within the context of a restaurant-themed dramatic playframe in the classroom environment. The histories and discourses of classroom culture intersected with her enactment of the character role as a server in a restaurant. Namely, we formed an adult/child dyad, which in the context of a classroom setting, also functioned at times as a teacher/student dyad. The histories and discourses of what it means to “do school” or “to play” intersected with our mediated actions to form a nexus of practices (Wohlwend, 2011a). These intersections transformed Nora’s actions, such as the handling of the cardstock, into social practices that included invitations to play and displays of academic competence.

Table 18

Shifts in the Restaurant Site of Engagement

Shift	Transcript Data	Primary Mode(s)	Resources	Site of Engagement	Strategies
	Several children engaged in dramatic play. Nora was walking around the area, not playing with others.	Proximity		Children inside; Nora outside	Access attempt by encirclement
1	Nora made eye contact with me, opened a piece of folded cardstock, and said, “What do you want from my menu?” Her eyed scanned the cardstock.	Gaze Visual Vocalization	Body Cardstock Interrogative	Nora and me Nora: server Me: customer	Invited by suggesting role to peer while in character; implicit directive for action
2	I said, “I saw that Abigail was making pizza, so I’m wondering if you have pizza on your menu?”	Vocalization Visual	Cardstock Interrogative	Nora and me and Abigail	Accepted invitation in character
3	Nora said, “Let’s see.” Nora looked at menu. “Yes, we do. See?” She pointed to an image of a pizza, made eye contact with me with a smile, and then looked at print.	Written language Vocalization Gaze Gestural	Body Image of pizza Interrogative	Nora and me	Directive for action (in character)

	I said, "Can I order the pizza please?"	Vocalization	Interrogative		Directive for action (in character)
	Nora looked at menu, then me. "It will be fifty hundred dollars."	Vocalization Visual Written language	Declarative Cardstock Image of pizza		Directive for action (in character)
4	"How did you know that it was fifty hundred dollars?" I asked, maintaining eye contact with her.	Vocalization Gaze	Interrogative Body	Me: Teacher Nora: Student	Metaplay IRE discourse
5	"Because I can see," she said and looked at menu, ran her finger over page, and looked back up at me with a self-assured smile.	Vocalization Gaze Visual Gestural	Declarative Body Cardstock Smile	Nora: server and/or student	Metaplay
6	"Oh, where do you see it?" I asked.	Vocalization	Interrogative	Me: Teacher Nora: Student	Metaplay IRE discourse
7	Nora looked at the open menu again and pointed to an image of dollar on menu. Nora held out one hand. I pretended to hand her money, and she pretended to take it.	Gaze Visual Gestural Gestural	Body Cardstock Finger Dollar sign Hand	Nora: server Me: Customer	Directive for action Directive for action
8	Nora walked over to another child and held out her hand as though passing along money. "Here's the fifty hundred dollars." Nora pointed to the image of the pizza on the menu said, "She wanted pizza."	Proximity Gestural Vocalization Visual	Bodies Hand; finger Declarative Image of pizza	Nora and Girl Nora: server Girl: Cook	Entering physical space with body; Offering (invisible) prop; Suggests role to peers in character
	Inaudible exchanges				
9	Nora stepped back to me, stretched out her hand, and said. "Here's your ginormous pizza." I held out my hand to receive the pizza. "Thank you," I said. "This is a really giant one. No wonder it cost fifty thousand dollars."	Proximity Gestural Vocalization Gestural Vocalization	Body Hand Declarative Hand Declarative	Nora and me Nora: server Me: Customer	Directive for action
10	While I spoke to another child, Nora walked around with the	Proximity Vocalization	Body Cardstock	Me and child	Encirclement

	menu. "Ok, so," she said, looking outward.	Gaze	Eyes	Nora	
11	<p>Nora walked over to me, opened the menu, turned her head, looked at menu, and said, "Ok, so, what else do you want?"</p> <p>I asked, "Can I order a glass of juice please?" Nora said, "What kind of juice?" I said, "Do you have orange juice?" Nora looked at the menu and said, "Orange juice? No ma'am."</p>	Proximity Gestural Visual Vocalization	Bodies Cardstock Interrogative	Nora and me Nora: server Me: Customer	Entering physical space with body; Suggests role to peers in character
12	A child approached and placed his finger on a picture of orange juice.	Proximity Gestural Visual	Body Finger Picture of orange juice	Boy and Nora	Entering physical space with body; takes control of prop
13	Nora scowled, pulled the menu close, closed it briefly, and turned her body orientation away from the boy and towards me.	Gestural Visual	Body Cardstock	Nora and me inside; Boy outside	Metaplay Takes away prop
14	<p>Nora relaxed her scowl, looked at menu, and said with eyes on menu, "If you want orange juice, it's going to be 153 dollars." She held out her right hand.</p> <p>I said, "153 dollars? That's a real pricey cup of orange juice. Can I get maybe a cup of milk instead?"</p> <p>Nora said, "Yes. Let me see."</p>	Gestural Visual Vocalization	Bodies Cardstock Declarative; conditional	Nora and me Nora: server Me: Customer	Suggests role to peers in character; Directive for action
15	A second child approached and touches top of menu.	Proximity Gestural Visual	Bodies Cardstock	Child 2 and Nora	Entering physical space with body; takes control of prop
16	Nora looked at child, pulled the menu away, twirled her body, and said to me, "300 dollars."	Gestural Vocalization	Bodies Declarative	Nora and me; Child 2 outside Nora: server Me: Customer	Takes away prop; Engages with peer(s) within existing playframe

17	Nora and I negotiate my order.	Vocalizations		Nora and me	Engages with peer(s) within existing playframe
18	A third child approached.	Proximity	Bodies	Child 3, Nora, and me	Entering physical space with body;
19	Nora folded up menu, held it over her right shoulder, scowled, took several steps backward, and stared at child.	Gesture Visual Proximity Gaze	Bodies Cardstock	Nora and me inside; Child 3 outside	Takes away prop
20	Nora walked over to me, reopened menu, and said, “Ok, the thing is three hundred. Three threes,” as gazed at page.	Proximity Visual Gaze	Bodies Cardstock	Nora and me Nora: server Me: Customer	Engages with peer(s) within existing playframe

Children’s Use of Free Play Strategies

Invitation and sustainment strategies. In the above playframe, Nora applied a variety of invitation and sustainment strategies, most of which were directed towards me. Initially, Nora appeared to be *encircling* (Corsaro, 1979, 2005) the playframe where the children engaged in dramatic play, making use of the *spatial* and *visual* modes (Cope & Kalantzis, 2013). As she moved around the space near the children, she carried with her a visual representation of a menu, a prop similar to what the children were also using. By carrying the menu, Nora was *shadowing* Björk-Willén (2007) her peers by replicating their actions and coming into alignment with them and demonstrating knowledge of their play. Rather than further attempt to access the other children’s play, when I entered the dramatic play area, Nora approached me and used a verbal strategy to invite me to play: *suggested role to peer while in character*. In other words, when Nora said, “What do you want from my menu?” in character as a restaurant server, she was suggesting that I enact the role of a customer, and the tangible cardstock functioned as a prop representing a menu to support her enactment of a server.

Nora and I sustained play for the duration of the playframe, and only twice did she extend invitations to other children. In the first case, Nora layered strategies: *suggesting role to peer in character* and *offering a prop*, although in this case, her prop was invisible (i.e. extending her empty hand as though she held money). In this case, I had placed an order from Nora for pizza, after which, she approached a nearby child and said, “Here’s the fifty hundred dollars,” extending her empty hand. Nora pointed to the image of the pizza on the menu and said, “She wanted pizza.” Nora layered multiple modes to employ the invitation to the child: the *spatial* mode (i.e., physical proximity), *oral language* (i.e., declarative sentences), *visual* representation (i.e., the cardstock), and the *gestural* mode, in the form of pointing (Cope & Kalantzis, 2013). In the second case, while another child momentarily engaged with me, Nora walked around the room, holding the cardstock, looking outward, and saying, “Ok, so.” Again, Nora layered multiple modes to employ an invitation strategy, which in this case appeared to be an open invitation to any child nearby, rather than to a particular child. She used the *spatial* mode as she walked around the space where children played, the *visual* mode as she held the cardstock that functioned as a prop, *gestural* mode as she gazed outward, and *oral language*, as she vocalized filler words. These modes intersection in a manner that suggested that Nora was not highly motivated to find new playmates while I spoke to another child.

Protection strategies. In this playframe, Nora worked to protect our playframe from disruption from outsiders (Corsaro, 2005). In shifts 12, 16, and 18 in table 18, a child entered into the site of engagement at each point, and Nora quickly responded with the same protection strategy: *taking away prop*. In the first case at shift 12, a child approached and placed his finger on the image of orange juice on Nora’s menu. In this case, because Nora had just told me as a customer that orange juice was not available at her restaurant, the child’s act of pointing

functioned as an access strategy into the playframe, but also functioned as a confrontation. He was, in fact, correcting Nora and attempting to gain an *authoritative stance* by redefining a facet of the play agenda (Evaldsson & Tellgren, 2009), namely the availability of orange juice in Nora's restaurant. Nora primarily used the *gestural* mode as she *took away the prop* to resist his entry. In other words, she scowled, pulled the menu close, closed it, and turned her body orientation away from the boy and towards me. Her body orientation reflected her existing affiliation with me, rather than the child. In this case, she paused and waited for the child to leave before continuing play with me. In the second case at shift 16, Nora again used the *gestural* mode to employ the protection strategy of taking away the prop, but this time she added a new strategy: She layered a second verbal strategy, *engaging with peer in existing playframe*, by telling me the price of the drink I had ordered prior to our interruption by the child. This time, Nora did not pause and wait for the child to leave before continuing our play. In the third case at shift 18, Nora again protected our playframe from an approaching child by *taking away the prop*, but instead of continuing play with me, Nora this time took several steps backwards and glared at the child. Although she again used the same strategy of *taking away the prop*, she added a different mode to intensify her resistance to this child's entry. In other words, she layered the *spatial* mode over the *gestural* mode when she took several steps backwards away from the child as she glared at him. In this case, Nora used the gestural mode a resource to protect our playframe and to nonverbally confront the child. Only after the child left did Nora continue her play with me.

Insider and Outsider Social Positionings within the Restaurant Site of Engagement

All social actions take place within intersecting practices that position people socially, as insiders or outsiders to various social groups, as well as offer opportunities to negotiate new

positions (Scollon, 2001). Possible social roles that children take on within classroom cultures include those of good readers and writers (Rowe & Neitzel, 2010). In this playframe, Nora positioned herself as a fluent reader, even though traditional academic assessments might position her as not yet reading or as an emergent reader. Nora used the piece of folded cardstock that had a printout of a menu glued to it as a resource to mediate her academic identity. The menu included alphabetic print, but also images of food and symbols, such as dollar signs, and she drew on her conceptual knowledge about print (Puranik & Lonigan, 2014) and Discourse knowledge (Gee, 2011) related to ordering food in a restaurant to interpret the menu within our playframe. Wohlwend (2011a) has argued that play can mediate literacy development by allowing children to enact roles that empower them, such as pretending to be a teacher reading a book aloud to a class, when in fact, traditional assessments would position those same children as illiterate. In Nora's case, she used play to interpret and explain the marks on the cardstock, and therefore, position herself as a reader within the playframe, even though she had not yet developed letter-sound awareness, which is a common measure of preschooler's literacy knowledge.

Nora's play included an embedded literacy practice adapted from home practices (Worthington & van Oers, 2017). Worthington and van Oers (2017) argue that literacy is not simply a school subject, but rather, that literacy is *embedded* in everyday practices, and that meaning-making and signs extend across time, space, and contexts. They provide an example from their study of three- and four-year-olds' literacy practices in both home and school contexts: Two of the mothers frequently made shopping lists at home, and their children, likewise, frequently made shopping lists when engaged in dramatic play in their preschool classrooms. Worthington and van Oers (2017) found a significant relationship between the home

literacy practices of the three- and four-year-olds in their study and the literacy events during their pretend play at school. In this case, Nora demonstrated her restaurant-related literacy knowledge in her dramatic play at school, namely how to order food in a restaurant from a menu. Nora did not acquire this knowledge within the school setting, but rather, brought this knowledge into the classroom setting from her home context. In another observation, Nora used a receipt pad to take an order as we engaged in dramatic play, further revealing her understanding of how servers in restaurants use writing to record customers' food orders. In that scenario, Nora said, "hamburger," which was my order, as she used a brown marker to make marks on a receipt pad. When I asked her what she was doing, she said, "I'm writing it down so I know what you want," articulating her pragmatic understanding (Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984) of how writing functions within an order-taking context.

Nora used the resources of this playframe, including the menu, for social purposes related to issues of authority. Corsaro (2005) argued that children explore issues of adult authority in their play, and in Nora's case, she at times attempted to use the resources of the playframe to claim what Evaldsson and Tellgren's (2009) might consider an *authoritative stance* over me, her play partner and the adult in the dyad. From the onset, Nora used an invitation strategy that included an implicit directive. Rather than asking me to join her play, she *suggested a role to a peer in character*. In other words, Nora, who was enacting the role of a restaurant server, held up the cardstock that represented a menu and asked me, "What do you want from my menu?" This mediated action functioned as an invitation to join her playframe, but also as an implicit directive that I enact the role of the customer. Griswold (2007) discusses issue of power and subordination in children's play and found that girls will sometimes preemptively assign peers a dominant role in play. Cromdal (2001) similarly found that children could more easily gain access into ongoing

play when they accepted roles within the playframe that were less desirable or subordinated, such as taking on the role as the twirler rather than jumper in a game of jump rope. Within Nora's playframe, she enacted the role of the server, and I accepted the role of the customer. Although at the time I did not explicitly consider the social dynamics of our play, after analyzing the transcripts, it appears that in fact, as the newcomer, I did use the features of *oral language* to defer to Nora's authority within the playframe. For example, I said, "I'm wondering if you have pizza on your menu." In this sentence, the word *if* denoted the conditional existence (Halliday, 2004, p. 323) of the pizza, the word *you* positioned Nora as the actor of the clause, and the determiner *your* indicated Nora's ownership of the materials. Nora determined that indeed, the restaurant did serve pizza by referring to the menu. Nora pointed at the menu and said, "Yes, we do. See?" In this instance, the layering of the *gestural* mode and *oral language*, specifically Nora's user of the interrogative, functioned again as an implicit directive for me to adjust my gaze to the marks on the page. Paradise, Mejia-Arauz, Silva, Dexter, and Rogoff (2014) describe two patterns that teachers use to support children's learning: supportive guidance versus strategies to control children's attention, motivation, and behavior. The common preschool rhyme, "one, two, three, eyes on me," which is incorporated into the title of their article, demonstrates how teachers attempt to control children's gaze, and therefore attention, within classroom settings. From this perspective, Nora, at least for a moment, used the resources of the playframe (e.g., the menu printed on cardstock and her role as a restaurant server) to adjust the structural hierarchy of the adult-child relationships in classroom culture (Arnott, 2018) by managing my gaze, the adult in our dyad.

Trawick-Smith (1998) uses the term *metaplay* to describe the social interactions that take place outside of dramatic play contexts. In other words, metaplay refers to interactions that take

place when children step out of character, and these interactions include initiating a new activity, clarifying character roles, or arranging props. In the playframe with Nora in which I enacted a customer role, I ordered a pizza from her restaurant, and she told me it would cost “fifty hundred dollars.” At shift four in table 18, I then stepped out of my character role and into *metaplay* to ask Nora how she knew the price of the pizza. In classroom culture, the teacher is the one who makes demands on children (Cazden, 2001), and likewise, my question, “How did you know that it was fifty hundred dollars?” may have functioned as part of an Initiation-Response-Evaluation discourse sequence common in classrooms (Cazden, 2001). My question functioned to shift the composition of our site of engagement by shifting the casting of myself from customer to teacher, and Nora from server to student.

In Wohlwend’s (2011) study, “children learned to access, interpret, and transform literacy as a way to gain status in print-value school culture” (p. 41). When I asked Nora to justify how she knew the price of the pizza was “fifty hundred dollars,” Nora, having already demonstrated her pragmatic knowledge (Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984) about how print on menus function in restaurant contexts, said, “Because I can see.” She looked at the cardstock, ran her finger over the marks on the page, and looked back up at me with a self-assured smile. Who gets to name what is or is not reading alphabetic print is an issue of power, and in this case, Nora positioned herself as a confident reader by layering the verbal mode with three shifts in the *gestural* mode (Cope & Kalantzis, 2013): 1) gazing at cardstock, 2) running finger along cardstock, and 3) smiling at me. These actions mediated by the cardstock intersected to form the social practice (Scollon, 2001) of reading that positioned her within the classroom context as academically competent. I retained my teacher-like role by again posing a follow-up question in shift 6 that required Nora to again justify her answer: I said, “Oh where do you see it?” Nora

pointed to the image of a dollar sign on the cardstock to justify her answer and immediately afterwards held out her hand, as though asking for the fifty hundred dollars. At the time of this observation, Nora was not yet reading and writing alphabetic print by conventional standards. That is, she had not yet demonstrated an understanding of letter-sound correspondence or the ability to form letters on paper, much less invented spellings or conventional spellings (Puranik & Lonigan, 2014). However, Nora was a reader of alphabetic print in the sense that she understood that marks on paper have meaning and could interpret the marks on the page to actively make meaning within her play context. Specifically, Nora understood the genre of restaurant menus and Discourse of transactions (Gee, 2011; Scollon, 2001), and she drew on those resources to form a literate identity with the playframe.

Summary of Ideas

This study examined how children's play activities and multimodal practices intersected for social purposes in one preschool classroom. The purpose of this chapter was to present the findings to the four research questions and provide thick descriptions to contextualize those findings. As a strategy for providing thick description, I included a comprehensive description of the classroom context to position the focal children, Sam and Nora, within the broader classroom culture. In this classroom, the classroom culture reflected the play-based approach of the Reggio Emilia philosophy of early childhood education in how the teachers managed the children's behavior and supported their independence and play.

The next four sections each aligned with one of the four research questions and described a) categories of play in which children engaged; b) strategies children used to navigate playframes; c) children's use of various modes and resources, and d) the social positionings children took up and resisted within playframes. Children engaged in a variety of play types that

do not represent distinct categories. Rather, the boundaries between the types of play overlap, but although the play types are permeable categories, children in this study did tend to forefront one type over the other during play. For example, working with paint was an artistic activity for children creating a painting, while for children who enjoyed squishing paint with their fingers, it was a sensory activity. As children engaged in various types of play, they used a variety of strategies to navigate the social boundaries of their playframes. They used identical strategies in succession and/or layered strategies to access, invite, sustain, and protect playframes. Likewise, children used a variety of modes and resources to execute these strategies. Again, children layered modes at times, or altered the use of a single mode in order to transform meaning within their play contexts. Lastly, as children utilized various resources and materials as they played, they positioned themselves and others as insiders and outsiders. Like play categories, identities are not discrete categories. Children moved within and across various identities during their play and negotiated and renegotiated their positions.

The final section presented two playframes that were based on videos, photos, and field notes of Sam and Nora as they engaged in free play. An analysis that accompanied each playframe illustrated how the four findings manifested in the data in an interconnected manner. Sam, for example, used a flashlight as a resource to bid for entry into other children's playframes, while Nora used a piece of folded cardstock to position herself as a competent reader within the classroom setting. These findings have several implications for research and practice, which are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

In recent years, there has been a shift away from play towards academics in early childhood education (Brown, 2011; Pyle & Bigelow, 2015), and as a result, play has been marginalized in schools to the point that it appears inappropriate in those settings or is disappearing (Elder & Obel-Omia, 2012; Genishi & Dyson, 2014). A shift towards academics and away from play has created a work/play dichotomy even in early childhood education settings. Play is an essential element of children's academic development, and a playful approach to education may support young children's learning in a way that exceeds national standards (Wohlwend & Pepler, 2015), and lays a foundation for future academic success (Marcon, 2001). Reconceptualizing play as a multimodal literacy repositions it within the academic curriculum and signals to teachers, administrators, and policy makers that it is worthwhile to provide resources and time to support young children's play. Moreover, reconceptualizing play as a complex interplay of strategies and modes/resources enables researchers and educators to understand how children imagine an array of social positionings, dramatize character roles, experiment with concepts and ideas, and develop strategies for working with others.

This study examined how children's play activities and multimodal practices intersected for social purposes in a preschool classroom. The study was guided by four questions: 1) In what types of play do preschoolers engage? 2) What strategies do preschoolers use to navigate the social boundaries of playframes? 3) What modes and resources do children use to engage in playframes and how do they use them? 4) What social positionings do preschoolers take on and resist in playframes? Data collection for this qualitative study spanned the course of one academic semester and took place in one preschool classroom. Videos, photos, and field notes

were recorded primarily during *morning meeting*, a teacher-led activity, and *free play* (Wood, 2014), a child-initiated period of the day when children selected their own activities, materials, play partners, and learning. Based on the ten observations, four findings emerged from the data:

1) Children engaged in six categories of play: artistic play, sensory play, manipulative play, construction play, dramatic play, and language play. 2) Children used access, invitation, sustainment, and protection strategies to navigate the social boundaries of their playframes. 3) Children used various modes and resources, including their bodies, props, and alphabetic print, to mediate character and social roles within the playframes. 4) Children moved fluidly within and across insider and outsider social positionings in playframes.

These findings reveal the importance of paying attention to young children's play because play provides a space for children to develop relationships with each other and themselves. The resources children use when they play and how they use them reveal aspects of peer culture and children's positions within it. Positioning play so that it is not a mere add-on to the regular curriculum legitimizes children's play—spaces where children explore different ways of being in order to expand what they know about who they are. Harste has said, “curriculum is a metaphor for the lives we want to live and the people we want to be” (Collopy, 2013, p. 26). A play-based curriculum, then, suggests a life of imagination—in other words, a life of possibility and constant improvisation. Understanding play as a multimodal literacy expands meaning-making potential for children beyond print. Everything children read, touch, and manipulate helps them understand who they are, and that is how they live literate lives as embodied beings. From this perspective, literacy is a social practice—a dynamic, creative process rooted in particular contexts. It is important then to also consider the places where children play and what these environments reveal about adult intentions and beliefs about children. The materials, the

arrangement of space, and the management of time send cues to children that are all value-laden and shape children's understanding of play and its function in their academic development and broader lives.

Categorizing Young Children's Play to Illuminate Purposes for Play

In this study children engaged in a range of activities and types of play. They engaged in painting with watercolors, cutting, bracelet making, puzzling, building structures using magnet tiles and wooden blocks, shadowing puppeteering, and dramatic play around a variety of themes, including restaurants, space vehicles, and nail salons, among many other play activities. Categorizing children's play was a complex process, but drawing from conceptualization of play in the literature, I identified six primary categories of play in the data based in part on how children used available resources: artistic play, sensory play, manipulative play, construction play, dramatic play, and language play. The boundaries between these categories are permeable, rather than discrete, since children's play is complex, at times reflecting multiple purposes and interest orientations as they utilize the modes and resources available to them. Although children's play does not fall neatly into discrete categories, it is important to delineate the characteristics of children's play. When not delineated, play becomes consolidated into a single activity with no clear purpose. There is much that we do not yet understand about children's play, but what is evident is that play constitutes more than structured games or movement activities for young children in preschool settings. Rather, play provides children with a space a) to engage in social communities, including negotiating their position within particular contexts; and b) to develop their own interests and learning.

Play has been framed in terms of what children play, how children play, and who children play with (Barton, 2010; Broadhead & Burt, 2012; Marsh et al., 2016). For this study,

which examined children's multimodal practices, definitions of play were based in part on how children used available materials to mediate meaning—for the production of tangible works, as vehicles to explore their senses, as tools for designing and constructing edifices, as props to support the enactment of imaginary character roles, and so on. The children's play involved the physical manipulation of materials but was also infused with their interests and mediated by complex social dynamics that both reproduced and transformed adult culture. During artistic play, children used materials to create artistic products, such as paintings, while during construction play, children used materials to design and create structures and spaces, such as buildings or race courses for cars. Evidence from this study suggests that children use materials during play to not only engage in particular actions, but also mediate their understandings of place and space and their position within those contexts. Sam, for example, used colorful magnetic blocks to reconstruct his mother's former office building located in New York (figure 15). The materials mediated his ability to imagine and reimagine a sense of place. While working with the magnetic blocks, he said, "I don't know what her old New York building looks like, so I built it like this because I think it looks like this." He then flipped down triangular blocks placed on the top of the rectangular tower and said, "This is where the police helicopter lands," thus exploring issues of access. Sam continued to use the blocks to mediate his understandings of space and place over the span of several weeks. During another observation, he constructed a neighborhood, while on yet another day, he constructed a museum. The magnetic tiles mediated his explorations of sense of place, but also issues of access to particular places. When I asked him what he was building, he said, "a regular museum and it's closed on Sunday and Saturday and Friday." As I tried to identify which days the museum would be open so I could visit, he changed the schedule: He added Monday to the closure schedule, then added Tuesday through

Thursday, and finally, Wednesday. On yet another day, Sam used the same materials to build a jail, a highly restrictive space within the broader local community.

Although Sam's manipulation of the materials allowed him to explore academic concepts, such as design, balance, patterning, and shapes, he also used the materials to engage in complex social work. At one point during the semester, the teachers engage in construction play with the children as they helped the children design and build an elaborate life-sized fort using bedsheets draped over tables, chairs, and large cardboard boxes. This sheet fort came to represent a space for Sam within the classroom community with restricted access. The playframe in chapter 4 illustrated his multiple attempts to enter the physical and social space bounded by the sheet fort. During dramatic play, children used materials to enact roles other than the self, often using the materials as props. For Sam, his flashlight functioned as a material item to animate shadow puppets, but more importantly, it functioned as a mediational means for access into the sheet fort, a restricted space. He used the flashlight in order to gain access to Paul and Katie's play in the playframe presented in chapter 4, and other children's play inside the sheet fort as well (figure 16).

During language play, children used materials to explore oral and written language, such as storytelling. Language play was the one type of play in which children sometimes relied on non-material resources, such as verbal discourse or gesture to sustain their play. However, play is more than an activity with concrete materials. Rather, play is an embodied literacy (Wohlwend, 2011a) that allows children to exert control over their own lives and make sense of their place in the world. Materials, then, provide children with affordances and constraints which they use to interpret and construct meaning, as do semiotic modes.

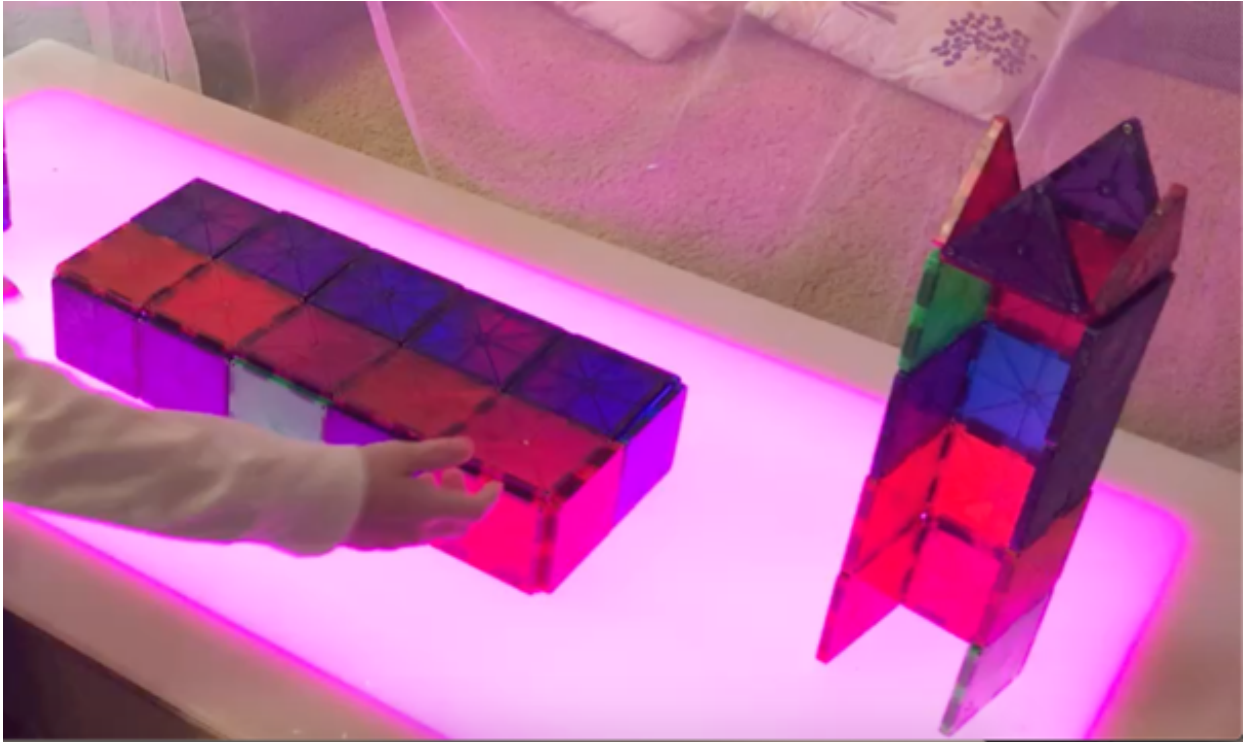


Figure 15: Sam's Office Building



Figure 16: Sam Outside the Sheet Fort

Play can provide children with the opportunity to make sense of academic concepts, and in this study, children explored reading and writing concepts during play. Moreover, free play provided children with opportunities for authentic learning experiences in a way that teacher-directed activities could not have replicated. Although name writing is one of the most commonly observed activities in preschool classrooms (Bingham et al., 2017; Pelatti et al., 2014), in this study, free play provided a context for more varied writing experiences. Children did practice name writing; for example, Joseph used letter tiles to write his name, while Greta wrote her name on a stick that represented a wand in order to indicate ownership of her prop.

Children's learning derives from their interests and needs within their play contexts, so Nora's engagement with reading and writing materials reflected those interests and needs. For example, Nora engaged with reading and writing materials in a manner that tied to the broader goal of sustaining play. Nora explored print-based skills within the context of a restaurant playframe by reading from a menu and writing down my food order. The playframe provided her with a safe space for forming and testing hypotheses about print. However, Nora's exploration of print concepts was mediated by her desire to sustain our play. Children work to protect their playframes, and Nora's motivation to sustain our interactions played a part in her use of the reading and writing activities. To sustain our play, Nora used the resources available to her at the time, which happened to be a menu printed on cardstock, markers, a receipt pad, as well as the shells, rocks, and blocks that she used to represent food. As a result of the nexus of practices (e.g., making marks on paper, pointing to marks on paper, handing me props that represented food), Nora did more than explore print-based skills; she enacted the social practice of taking and fulfilling restaurant orders. Evidence from this study suggests that play provides children with authentic contexts for learning in part because play is often built on relationships in a way that traditional academic activities are not.

Free play provides children with opportunities for authentic engagement. In Joseph's case, he chose to work with procedural concepts of print, exploring letter combinations and spelling patterns, asking peers at times to test his hypotheses about the words he had created, thus creating an authentic context for revision. Joseph used *language play* to mediate his understanding of letter-sound relationships. His play often reflected a procedural interest orientation (Neitzel et al., 2008). That is, when engaged in literacy play, he appeared focused on the processes of print, rather than the content of the message, as he arranged and re-arranged

letter tiles and wooden slices with letters printed on them in various orders and then asked himself or others to sound them out. What this data suggests is that Joseph used play as a safe venue for forming, testing, and revising hypotheses about print (Clay, 2001). Moreover, Joseph not only voluntarily chose these activities during successive observations, but also spent a significant portion of free play time engaged in these activities, suggesting an intrinsic motivation for exploring print concepts. This data supports the possibility that play can provide a space where children can experiment with academic concepts in a sustained manner that promotes deep thinking, which stands in contrast to the call-and-response activities often used in preschool settings to facilitate the learning of such things as letter-sound correspondence.

How Children Use Strategies to Navigate Playframes

A central focus in this study was on strategies preschoolers used to navigate the social boundaries of playframes. In this study, the term *playframe* referred to an interactive space in which children were able to select their own activities, playmates, materials, and learning. These spaces are primarily child-initiated and child-led spaces, in which their actions are mediated by various resources, such as flashlights, body language, and verbal language. The boundaries of playframes are both physical and social, and as children engage in play, they use a variety of strategies to navigate these boundaries. In this study, children used access, invitation, sustainment, and protection strategies to navigate the social boundaries of their playframes, and this finding corroborates much of the existing literature on the social dynamics of young children's play (Broadhead & Burt, 2012; Cromdal, 2001; Dyson, 1993), but expands on the literature by examining more closely how children use semiotic modes and the resources within their sites of engagement to mediate strategy use. Like categories of play, these strategies are permeable. For example, the same strategy, such as *suggesting a character role to a peer*, could

function as an invitation in one context and a protection strategy in another, particularly when the suggested role is subordinated within the playframe. For example, Nora allowed a child to enact the role of a customer in her playframe, but then limited the child's participation by immediately sending the child to shop at another store across the classroom. Children used these strategies in sophisticated ways. That is, children used strategies in succession and/or layered strategies to access, invite, sustain, and protect playframes, constantly negotiating and renegotiating their social positions and those of their peers. Identifying children's strategies is significant because it provides a deeper understanding about a) how children are included and/or excluded from play; and b) and how social dynamics and hierarchies function during play.

Identifying the strategies children use to navigate the social boundaries of playframes provides a deeper understanding about how children are included and/or excluded from playframes and other social situations in the classroom. When Katie and Paul ignored Sam, who desperately wanted to engage with them, an educator could have mediated the conflict. The educator could have discussed with Katie and Paul the ramifications of their actions on Sam, and how they could reimagine their play to include him. Reflecting upon my own techniques for mediating young children's social conflicts as a former teacher, I, at times, suggested a straightforward strategy, "Did you ask them if you could play too?" However, Corsaro (2005) has argued that such a strategy for access is often ineffective, and rather, children are more likely to gain access by producing a variant of ongoing play. Nora, for example, who did not use direct requests, was effective at inviting others into her play. She used material resources to mediate her role as a restaurant server/owner across several observations to both sustain ongoing play within her playframe while also integrating newcomers, such as myself. Her invitation strategies

that elicited a positive response from myself or peers often made use of the resources of the playframe, including props and character roles.

While this study supports Corsaro's (1979, 2005) finding that producing a variant of ongoing play is often an effective strategy for gaining access to play, in order for children to produce similar play, they must first understand the dynamics of that play, including the players, activities, and social hierarchies. Gaining access into the play is not so much a matter of imitating other children's actions, but a complex social process that requires understanding social hierarchies in order to strategize angles of entry. For example, when Sam attempted to gain access into a playframe in which a group of girls were engaged in language play inside a sheet fort, he used verbal directives (e.g., "look up") to draw their attention to the shadows he created on the ceiling of the fort. Moreover, despite being ignored, he doubled down on this strategy by repeating the directive with clarifications that specified the location where the girls should direct their gaze (e.g. "Look up there" and "the ceiling"). He layered semiotic modes for emphasis, such as pointing to the shadows, which functioned as a nonverbal directive to manage the girls' gaze. Sam's access attempt may have failed because he did not understand the dynamics of the girls' playframe and did not try to integrate seamlessly into their play. Rather, his strategies functioned as an attempt to enter the playframe, as well as claim an authoritative stance within the girls' playframe by "(re)defining the play agenda" (Evaldsson & Tellgren, 2009, p. 17). That is, he attempted to redefine the play agenda from language play to play with light and shadows, which the girls' ignored.

Understanding the strategies children use during play provides insight into what are highly complex peer cultures. Children resist the entry of newcomers into their playframes, but their intentions are not always that of exclusion so much as that of protection as Corsaro (2005)

suggested. My choice of the term *protection strategies* rather than *exclusion strategies* suggests that children always share their spaces, and may not have the choice to exclude. Sam's use of the flashlight beam is a case in point. He was not excluded from the playframe; he pushed his way into the playframe using the beam of light. Katie and Paul could not exclude Sam from this space; they could only protect their own play between themselves. They had to share their playframe regardless of their own intentions in their play, and ultimately, they moved the location of the playframe in order to dissolve the site of engagement that included Sam. Nora also protected her play with me from outsiders on numerous occasions, such as in playframe 2 presented in chapter 4, where she resisted the entry of outsiders on three different occasions within a few minutes. Children's free play is a nexus of protection and invitation, which alters the social composition and the social positionings of children in their playframes that may bring out tensions in that play (Corsaro, 2005).

While conflict may emerge from such social interactions, which Corsaro (2005) described as an opportunity to develop language and social skills, Johansson and Emilson (2016) described conflict as the opportunity to develop skills necessary for democracy and social justice. From this perspective, young children's social conflicts are reconceptualized from issues of behavior, often viewed as problems in need of correction, and into opportunities for them to make sense of these conflicts, how to resolve/address them, and how they adjust their place in these free play worlds.

Modes and Resources Produce Social Positionings

In order to understand how children engaged in free play, a central focus of this study was the examination of how and why children use a range of modes and resources in playframes. In this study, children made use of several modes, including oral language, visual representation,

audio representation, gestural representation, spatial representation, and written language (Cope & Kalantzis, 2013, p. 119) and did so in complex ways. Sam and Nora, for example, both layered semiotic modes, such as gesture and oral language, for emphasis. This finding aligns with Kress's (1997) argument that young children move between modes of representation quite fluidly. When children, like Nora, use physical objects in symbolic ways, for example, a cape for a bib, they mediate meaning between the object, the actors (customers), the environment (play area), and the imaginative scenarios engendered in the classroom. How children communicate through their imaginative use of objects produced shared meanings. Once named, the object becomes that symbol, such as a cape becoming a bib. Children in this playframe did not question this symbolism, but moved into the play fully, embodying what they understand as "bib-ness" through a cape. Moreover, the children used modes and resources for social purposes in what Kress (1997) might consider a continuous transformatory process. That is, children used modes and resources available to them to make meaning based on what they wish to say while constantly revising their messages as new elements were brought into their free play. Sam's use of the flashlight beam, a semiotic resource, mediated his bid for play; however, when Katie and Paul ignored this bid, Sam revised his approach for a bid to play. Understanding children's use of semiotic modes and resources is important because it enables educators to a) position children as agentic meaning-makers who use available resources to mediate their communications, and b) conceptualize children's play not as a set of actions with toys, but as a literate practice (Wohlwend, 2011a) and a social practice (Scollon, 2001).

Children in this study used semiotic modes in complex ways and demonstrated an awareness of how a slight shift in how a mode is used can change its meaning. For example, gesture can convey invitation or confrontation. Nora used gaze as both invitation and

confrontation by layering different hand movements using a piece of cardstock to convey different meaning. When gaze was accompanied by her holding up an open menu in my direction, it functioned as a social practice—what servers do in restaurant spaces—and an invitation to play. When gaze was accompanied by her holding up a closed menu over her head, it functioned as a different social practice: a confrontation and warning to a child attempting access into her playframe. What this tells us is that children are nuanced meaning-makers, and in this case, Nora adjusted her use of semiotic modes to mediate the meaning she wished to communicate. In other words, she adjusted her gaze to communicate to her peer how he should act.

Identifying and understanding how multimodality in playframes works is important because within a print-based conceptualization of literacy, these same children are positioned as not yet literate by measures of letter-sound awareness and/or knowledge of letter forms. Children's literacy development is often viewed in terms of a print-based lens—first an awareness that marks on paper have meaning, then to an understanding of purposes for writing (e.g., grocery lists, signatures), then to recognition of the first letter in their name, and so on through invented spelling to conventional writing (Clay, 2001; Puranik & Lonigan, 2011, 2014). These skills are important, and written language is a critical meaning-making mode for children to master in their academic development. But for young children, a print-based view of literacy positions them as not yet literate, as deficient. Conceptualization play as a multimodal literacy provides an opportunity to view children as already agent meaning makers, and moreover, as the findings of this study illustrate, quite sophisticated meaning-makers capable of nuance. Although Nora used reading and writing materials in order to sustain her playframe, she relied on multiple modes and resources for meaning making. The rocks and sea shells became food in a restaurant,

as did the colorful blocks that she had fashioned into a sandwich. Nora transferred the meanings across modes—between visual representation and oral language (e.g., “What do you want from my menu?”) as well as written language via the marks she interpreted from the menu and marks she made on the order pad. Nora transferred meanings across modes, a process Siegel (1995) might call *transmediation*. Although Nora engaged with reading and writing concepts, play provided her with multiple modal entries into literacy, as well opportunities for improvisation. Understanding how children move across modes and use available resources during play makes visible their complex meaning-making and legitimizes play as a context for learning.

What children play and how children play are connected to the materiality of a play space Jarrett et al. (2010). Like Jarrett, in this study, I found that materiality mattered in the playframes in which children engaged. For example, when the teachers introduced menus into the dramatic play area, many of the children took up these materials in their play, including Nora, in ways sustained across multiple days, and how the children used these materials reflected different purposes. This finding corroborates Jarrett et al.’s (2010), Neuman and Roskos’s (1992), and Broadhead and Burt’s (2012) research in which they found that materials that children use to play shift the ways in which they play, the roles they imagine, and the social spaces that they create from these materials. In Jarrett et al.’s study, they found that the types of play children engaged in during outdoor play in a sandbox changed when the teachers changed the materials. For example, the introduction of cars and trucks prompted more construction play. Neuman and Roskos found that the introduction of literacy materials into a play space increased the frequency, duration, and complexity of children’s literacy activities, while Broadhead and Burt found the changing the type of materials in the dramatic play area changed the sociability of the play—the introduction of more open-ended materials facilitated more collaborative play.

Children in this study used reading and writing materials such as pens, paper, and markers during play in a manner that reflected different interests, even though play themes were not initiated or facilitated by teachers. Yet both Nora and Joseph used these materials in their free play to mediate their understandings of what it means to “do school” in a classroom context in different ways. Nora’s use of the mode of *written language* reflected a creative interest orientation—she transformed the meaning of a piece of folded cardstock into a menu, and in the process, transformed herself into a competent and confident restaurant server. Joseph’s use of *written language* reflected a procedural orientation—he used the individual letter form materials to mediate his growing knowledge about the *graphophonic cueing system* (Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984). In free play (Wood, 2014), children select their own activities, playmates, and materials, but they also select their own learning. In this study, Joseph and Nora used reading and writing materials to mediate their understanding of how print works. Joseph used letter tiles to mediate his learning of linearity and directionality, letter forms, letter-sound awareness, and spelling. Nora used print to explore linearity and directionality of print, purposes for print, genres of print (e.g., menus versus invitations), and how print functions in different contexts. Through play, Joseph and Nora explored several reading and writing concepts outlined in most preschool standards, and did so in an authentic, sustained context. Play provided both of these children with a space to form and test hypotheses about print, and moreover, particularly in Nora’s case, an opportunity to *do* literacy rather than *acquire* literacy (Serafini, 2014) as she enacted a role as a restaurant server taking a meal order.

While a great deal of research exists on young children’s verbal discourse and visual discourse practices, less research exists on how young children make use of other modes, such as the gestural, aural, or spatial. This study extends the literature by examine children’s meaning

making practices in the context of play using the multiple mode available to them beyond the verbal or visual. Children's identities can be instantiated in the multimodal texts they create—written notes, paintings, wooden block structures, or costumes fashioned from scarves and ribbons—and reflect the histories and cultures of the child's space (Rowse & Pahl, 2007). Children's multimodal practices are important because they reveal something about who children are and how they are learning.

Social Positionings as Negotiated

This study brought to light the range of social positionings preschoolers take on and resist in playframes. In this study children moved fluidly within and across insider and outsider social positionings in playframes in ways that were not clearly binary or fixed. Sam, for example, resisted his positioning as an outsider by Katie and Paul, as he renegotiated an insider status through repeated attempts at accessing their playframe. This example illustrates how social positioning are not clear insider/outsider binaries, but rather how social positioning are entangled and fluid. The flashlight functioned as a semiotic resource through which Sam mediated his desire to secure entry into Paul and Katie's playframe, and thereby forced them to respond to this bid for access by inviting himself into their play. In line with Corsaro (2005) and Arnott (2008), children in this study explored issues of authority and agency in their play and socially repositioned themselves and others who wished to gain entry into their playframes in ways that sometimes ran counter to the traditional teacher-student classroom culture. Nora, for example, used the resources of the playframe to resist my teacher-like questions related to her use of reading and writing materials, instead positioning herself as the director of the playframe that empowered her to manage my actions. Understanding children's social's positionings during play conceptualizes play as a space for children to explore different social roles, how they shift

when materials and actors in the play are introduced, and as a space for children to negotiate their developing social identities.

Within traditional print-based standards of preschool literacy assessments, children also developed their academic identities. Nora would be positioned as a child who was not yet reading print because she had not fully developed knowledge of letter forms, letter-sound awareness, or other decoding skills. However, within the boundaries of a restaurant themed playframe, she enacted an identity as an astute reader. For example, when she took my order as I enacted the role of a customer, she made scribble marks on a receipt pad. When I asked her what she was doing, she said, “I’m writing it down, so I know what you want...so we remember.” Nora used the resources of the playframe, including the print materials, such as the marker and receipt pad, as well as her character role as a server to mediate a position of competence; in other words, Nora was not pretending to write, but was instead taking my order. The action—making marks on paper—intersected with other aspects of our context to form the social practice of order taking. When Nora engaged in dramatic play and enacted the role of a restaurant server/owner, she transformed her position in the classroom culture. She took on a directorial role to manage the actions of others and craft her own imaginary world. Evaldsson and Tellgren’s (2009) might consider Nora’s directorial actions as taking an *authoritative stance*.

This finding is important because it raises questions about how children’s free play may mediate their learning of academic concepts, but also how children’s developing academic identities may mediate learning. Gee’s (2011) work explores the relationship between identity and learning for older children, as well as play-based learning contexts, such as digital gaming communities, but more research is needed to understand the relationship between identity,

learning, and play for preschool aged children, who are beginning to make sense of their worlds, include their school-based worlds, and their place in it.

Implications for Practice

In this study, the educators positioned children to play to learn, play to imagine, and play to socialize. The teachers in this study drew from the Reggio Emilia approach which positions children as competent and capable, the curriculum as negotiated, and the environment as a co-teacher (Gandini, 2012). Quotations reinforcing this perception of children could be found throughout the school as reminders to parents and teachers that children were valued in this setting. Young children define their activities within adult agendas (Breathnach et al., 2017), so how teachers perceived children and frame play in their classrooms matters. In other words, teachers' perceptions can constrain or expand opportunities for children's learning.

Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

Teacher practices are shaped by their beliefs (Bingham, 2017; Pyle & Bigelow, 2015; Pyle, Priolella, & Poliszczuk, 2018), so it is important to consider how teachers conceptualize play and its place in school settings. Because the teachers in this study drew from the Reggio Emilia approach, they considered the environment a teacher and intentionally planned the space with the children's interests in mind. Although this study did not focus on teacher practices, it is evident from the data that Ms. Ashley and Ms. Nettie did consider the materiality of the space and planned accordingly for multimodal experiences. For example, around Halloween, they introduced pumpkins into the classroom through print images, and then a few days later, they placed an actual pumpkin in the sensory table as an invitation for the children, allowing the children to expand from visual representation to the tactile and aural modes. Initially, the pumpkin was intact, so the children could feel the tough, smooth rind of the pumpkin and tap on

it with tools to produce sounds, exploring the pumpkin through the aural mode. Then on a later day, they cut the pumpkin in half and again placed it in the sensory table so the children could now explore the wet and sticky pumpkins innards, forefronting and deepening their tactile experiences with the pumpkin. Ms. Ashley and Ms. Nettie also facilitated conversations during morning meeting around the topic of pumpkins and designed other invitations that included pumpkin images and sculptures so that over the course of several days, children were able to explore the topic of pumpkins using various resources, including spoons, tweezers, and hammers, as well as paint, markers, beads, oral language, and their hands. The teachers' intentionality positioned the children to play with pumpkins to *learn*, to *imagine*, and to *socialize* through various semiotic modes. As play becomes repositioned with the academic curriculum as a multimodal literacy, teachers will need professional development and support in order to understand the bidirectional nature of children's play and multimodal learning.

Policies that Support Play

Play is not merely an activity in which children engage, it is also an essential space for development and learning. As such, understanding free play and playframes from a policy position is critical in early childhood education. When free play is conceptualized as a significant space of learning, other spaces of free play, like recess, play after lunch, or play in classrooms, must also be positioned as curriculum-building spaces. Free play designed with specific materials in mind is curriculum design. Material choices are not happenstance when free play is centralized as spaces of social and academic learning. Curriculum design arises from watching children engage in free play, how they use the material resources, and what they imagine through this play. Thus, legislation and local policies passed to remove or limit recess and other spaces of

play in school settings ignores the critical social and academic learning that free play and playframes elicit.

The shift away from play and towards academics is based in part on how educators perceive standards and recommendations for best practices. Standards in education outline what children should know and do at each grade level. These standards often, then, translate into a checklist of concepts children should know and discrete skills children should be able perform. Teachers are expected to teach to a checklist rather than observe children and make curricular decisions based upon these observations. Further, imagined play often becomes “fringe” learning and less actualized in early childhood classes. As a result, various organizations have published kindergarten readiness checklists that outline isolated tasks, delineated by domain, that children should be able to perform before entering kindergarten (AFT, 2006; NELP, 2008). While checklists can provide succinct guidance for educators, checklists fail to capture the complexity of children’s developmental and social contexts. Additionally, educational checklists are often described in short phrases that can be confirmed or denied with a simple yes or no, while ignoring the many cultural competencies children bring to their classroom landscapes. This simplicity is also often reflected in how children are tested and assessed. In this classroom, the significance of the interaction between Sam and his classmates would have been lost if checklists guided teachers’ decisions and assessments of children’s development. For example, Nora constructed and interpreted meaning across multiple modes, adjusting her strategies, to sustain social interaction, which traditional reading and writing checklists would not have captured. This study, then, provides evidence that learning is not something to be “checked off.” Rather, learning is complex, interdisciplinary, and multimodal.

Other standards have similar influence on teacher practices. Teale, Hoffman, and Paciga (2010) argued that the NELP recommendations exist within a deliberate perspective that prioritizes skills over context, which impacts how teachers take up the recommendations in their classrooms. They also argued that because the NELP does not focus on how teachers might embed instructional activities within meaningful contexts, educators might interpret the NELP recommendations as a mandate for narrow skills-based approaches. Additionally, learning standards for preschool and early grades are delineated by separate domains, such as literacy, math, and science, and this discreteness of the standards is evident in the typical kindergarten daily schedule, which is marked by more than a dozen transitions, breaking the day into segments focused on academic domains, leaving little time for extended periods of free play (Strauss, 2018). This study provides evidence that extended periods of time are critical to children's social, emotional, and intellectual development, as well as to their imaginative experiences in the classroom. In this classroom, the teachers provided children with extended periods of time each day to engage in free play, allowing them to explore multiple academic domains, self-selecting their learning focus within authentic contexts. This study, then, calls for early childhood education to understand how essential play is to children's development within and across various academic domains.

Professional development and/or pre-service teacher education must include the value of free play, playframes, and the many facets of learning that occur in these spaces. Educators should be encouraged to *kidwatch* (Goodman & Owacki, 2002); that is, educators should make note of what resources children use and how they use those resources to engage in learning and then use those observations to guide differentiated instruction. Edwards (2012) described the role of the educator in Reggio Emilia settings as more than an observer, but as a “*documenter* and

researcher” (p. 148, italics in original). Documentation practices based on educators’ intentional kidwatching and research make visible children’s learning within play contexts and therefore legitimize those contexts as spaces for learning. In this way, administrators and educators can articulate rationales and provide evidence for why free play, like recess, is a vital part of early childhood curriculum.

The findings provide evidence to suggest important implications for classroom practice, including designing places that support children’s play, making conscious decisions about semiotic resources for children’s play, and understanding the significance of children’s use of these semiotic resources to engage in social and academic learning.

Places that Support Children’s Play

In this study, the educators created an environment in which children could play with purpose—to learn, to imagine, and to socialize—and the materiality of the space mattered. The children engaged with a multitude of materials—paint, markers, dough, medicine droppers, puzzles, beads, string, rocks, sea shells, blocks, and paper, among many other things. Evidence from this study suggests that access to materials as well as sanctioned uses for materials shaped the children’s play experiences. The children used these materials rather freely as the teachers permitted children to move materials from one center to the other as it suited their interests. For example, Nora repurposed colorful wooden blocks from the block center as ingredients for the items on the menu in her restaurant, bringing a pile of blocks into the dramatic play area that she combined with sea shells, rocks, dice, and dried flowers. In some classrooms, materials are relegated to their assigned centers, and in addition, for use in particular ways, such as using needles to thread burlap, but not to thread any other material. Ms. Nettie and Ms. Ashley created a different sort of environment as evidenced through how the children played with the available

materials in varied ways. In order to foster children's multimodal meaning-making endeavors, it benefits children to have access to a variety of resources.

This study forwards the criticality of semiotic resources in early childhood spaces. This study suggests that teacher-selected materials in free play spaces encouraged a range of different experiences. Yet, how these materials were used were not teacher-selected. Rather, they encouraged children to explore, extend, and build upon what they could imagine these materials to become. If children have only print-based materials to use or if print-based materials are limited to reading and writing activities, their imaginations may be limited by what they can do. More importantly, however, children take on assumptions that print-based materials are those that matter—assumptions around which legislation around literacy is made. That print-based materials encourage reading and writing is an assumption that then is taken up by test-makers who value such resources. Print-based resources should be one set of materials in playframes. Nora's use of these resources as a menu were apt for this playframe. However other semiotic resources like flashlights, large swaths of material, blocks, etc. also shape how children imagine ways to learn, how to make bids for play, and how to negotiate social spaces with others.

This study provides evidence that teacher education programs should help educators consciously design spaces in the classroom, make deliberate choices around materials with which children play, and teach them become teacher researchers and kid-watchers (Edwards, 2012; Goodman & Owacki, 2002), studying carefully how children use these resources to learn. In this way, teachers will be more attuned to such things as the arrangement of furniture; materials provided to children, and classroom cleanliness and aesthetics. Educators will also be conscious of which materials are considered to be more “academically” oriented, such as literacy and math materials, but they will also be aware that these materials are not the only ones that

support children's academic growth. Other semiotic resources provide this learning also and are crucial in a more digital and modal world. As play is repositioned in the early childhood curriculum, teachers need guidance in how to structure the classroom environment in a manner that facilitates mature play.

Teachers Supporting Children's Play

In this study, the children were observed during free play. During this time, the children chose their own activities, play partners, materials, and learning, moving freely around the room. The teachers, albeit present, did not actively engage with the children during play, but were observed supporting children's play by providing them with materials, asking them about their work, and mediating social conflicts. Free play does not necessarily equate with unstructured play. Rather, Vygotskian perspectives position play as space in which educators can meet children in their zone of proximal development and support their growth (Bodrova, 2008). By supporting children's play, teachers can guide children into deep play, or what Bodrova might call *mature play*, play in which children engage in multimodal symbolic representation, enact specific roles, follow the rules associated with an imaginary scenario, and do so in a sustained manner over a period of several days or months. In this classroom, sustained play did occur over time. The sheet fort, for example, remained erected and occupied by children for several days, while the pumpkin topic carried across time and spaces within the classroom centers. Joseph engaged in literacy play across more than one observation, while Nora carried her restaurant playframe for three observations in a row.

Dramatic play provides a space with rich opportunities for children's growth through experience (Dewey, 1997). An important feature of dramatic play is to support children's play without interrupting the flow and appropriating it for curricular purposes. This study suggests

that educators see the potential of how children imagine and use materials that might be considered benign (swaths of cloth, flashlights). From a semiotic perspective, all materials have potential to make meaning in a range of different ways—bib-ness, cape-ness, etc. Thus, educators should be open to bringing in a range of materials to support children’s dramatic play within the available semiotic resources.

When encouraging children’s play, teacher education must understand the importance of expanding play, rather than constraining play. Educators in this study provided the spaces for opportunities for children to expand their imaginations through the resources they brought into the classroom. Courses in both inservice and preservice programs could offer ideas and rationales behind strategies identified in this study (e.g., construction play, dramatic play, artistic play, language play) and embed them into play that include open-ended questions requiring children to think deeply about concepts and ideas. When teachers are aware of the significant—or nuanced differences—between and among the range of strategies that children use in free play and in playframes, teachers can begin to understand how to encourage children to think about their roles in social and academic learning.

Play as Multimodal Literacy

By positioning play as a multimodal literacy within the academic curriculum, issues of assessment arise. In this study, the teachers used Reggio Emilia documentation techniques to understand and assess the children’s play (Forman & Frye, 2012). Understanding a child’s zone of proximal development requires a teacher to assess the child’s current level of development as well as the supports the child will need to grow. While Carr (2014) argued that play should be assessed using formative assessments, such as conversation with children and documentation, and that these assessment practices can be embedded into play, such assessment requires time. In

today's early childhood classroom environments, time allocated for children's play rarely exceeds one to two hours (Bodrova, 2008). Teachers need "time and space to be professional observers—to listen, watch, sense, and make sense of the children's spoken and written texts" (Dyson & Genishi, 2013, p. 178). In order to support teachers' ability to scaffold and assess children's play, they not only need professional learning opportunities, but also need the ability to reprioritize play within the daily schedule.

Implications for Research

The study was designed to answer a particular set of questions, and Mediated Discourse Analysis (Scollon, 2001; Wohlwend, 2011a) was selected as the methodology for examining the children's classroom experiences, primarily while engaged in free play. Mediated Discourse Analysis was chosen to prioritize both actions and speech in order to highlight what would have been backgrounded in a verbal-only transcript (Wohlwend, 2014). This perspective was important because young children do not always prioritize the verbal mode in their communications. In the shadow puppet playframe, Sam wished to join Katie and Paul's play, but during their interactions, Sam only made one verbal utterance, which was truncated by Katie and indecipherable, yet he communicated with Paul and Katie through other modes. MDA considers social actors as they are acting with material objects and how those mediated actions interact with other aspects of the context to constitute social practices; this perspective allowed me to view Sam's actions with the flashlight as both an invitation to play and confrontation. Children's mediated actions transform the meaning of materials and relationships in their classrooms. MDA illuminates shifts in shared meanings of materials and actions, as well as shifts in relational identities of participants, such as teacher/student or director/actor (Wohlwend, Peppler, Keune, & Thompson, 2017). The use of MDA in this study illuminated insider/outsider relationships,

among others, and how these relationships are not binary, but instead constantly shifting and overlapping positions that are negotiated and renegotiated by participants.

As with any study design, there were affordances and limitations. The thick descriptions afforded by the video recorded observations and micro-analysis of focal children reflected the complexity of children's play. Nuanced understandings of the children's mediated actions came to light during the transcription and analysis process. However, because the children were recorded in a naturalistic, open system (Biesta, 2010), data collection was complicated, rendering it impossible to capture every interaction of the children as they engaged in free play. To remedy this concern, I used a focal child approach, following only a few children as the observations progressed in order to get a deeper, localized understanding of only a handful of children. More studies of this type are needed.

Future research could examine children's play activities and multimodal practices through a critical lens, with attunement to certain factors such as gender, race, social class, gender identity, and ability. Critical literacy is about "disrupting, critiquing or thinking deeply about texts," as well as their "production and redesign" (Vasquez, 2014, Kindle location 344). A critical literacy perspective is useful for analyzing children's play, because as Corsaro (2012) argued, children do not merely imitate adults through play, apprenticing into the adult world, but instead, are already agentic members of the adult world as they engage in interpretive reproduction, producing and redesigning meaning for their own purposes. A critical approach focuses on "unpacking the relationship between meaning systems (i.e., language, art, math) and power" (Vasquez, 2014b, Kindle location 346), identifying points of tension and congruence. A critical lens could interrogate how adult perceptions of children's abilities mediate their

experiences in the classroom and how they use resources available to them to mediate tension and congruence with adult expectations.

More research is also needed to understand how teacher's beliefs about play and the classroom environment intersect to influence children's classroom experiences. In this study, the educators drew from Reggio Emilia concepts in their approach to classroom design, creating themed *invitations* (Gandini, 2012) and providing accessible materials to promote multiple possibilities for meanings. However, while materiality of a space matters, how teachers mediate children's experiences with the resources is important to consider as well. Gerde, Bingham, and Pendergast (2015) found that teachers included a variety of writing resources in their classrooms, including a well-stocked writing center, but the teachers rarely modeled or scaffolded writing. Further, the instructional supports they did provide were considered low-level. While their study focused specifically on writing, it does raise a question about teacher supports that can also apply to play. Providing children with open-ended materials to facilitate multiple possibilities for meaning may not be enough if teachers are not modeling or supporting children's play in ways that provoke them to move into *mature* play (Bodrova, 2008). This study focused on the experiences of the children actively engaged in play, but more research is needed to understand how teachers support children's play and how changing their supports impacts the duration, depth, materiality, and sociability of children's play. Teacher supports can potentially expand, but also constrain children's play, particularly when materials are presented for prescribed uses. In this study, the teachers used morning meeting as a venue for introducing the children to new invitations and materials in the classroom and may have influenced children's experiences with them. More research is needed to understand teacher's multimodal interactions with children in

various classroom contexts, including large group meetings and free play. Also, more research is needed to understand the impact of free play experiences on future academic achievement.

Understanding play as a multimodal literacy is critical for repositioning play in the early childhood curriculum. Past research has focused on how children use the verbal and visual modes, but more research is needed to understand how children come to understand the affordances and constraints of other modes as well, such as aural, gestural, and spatial modes, and how they understand the function of and use these modes in particular contexts. Also, more research is needed to understand the bidirectional nature of children's multimodal practice, namely how their practices reproduce and transform adult culture as well as their environments through play.

Reflections on an Education Approach to Early Childhood Education

Schools are arenas where various groups compete for power (Marsh, 2006). Like literacy, children's play is always socially situated, value-laden, and tied to issues of social justice (Gee, 2011). Gee (2013) argued that "learning works better as a Discourse process than as an instructed process" (p. 65) and offered this example: Children learn to play video games not through direct instruction, which they would likely resist and which is inefficient, but instead learn to play video games by becoming members of the gamer Discourse community, thereby enacting gamer identities. Gee's work primarily focuses on older children, but the lesson for younger children, who are already developing identities and developing academically is worthwhile. From this perspective, learning, then, is more a process of identity development than a process of skills development. Skill acquisition is critical, certainly, but it is identity that perhaps underpins skill acquisition. An early childhood educational approach that values identity development is one rooted in free play (Wood, 2014), a context in which children can select their own activities, play

partners, materials, and learning. Play provides a space for experimentation, failure, revision, and success. Even unstructured play in early childhood classrooms is never truly unstructured. The beliefs of the teacher, the materials they select and provide, how they arrange the space, and how they manage time all function to structure children's play. Likewise, teachers also influence children's academic identity development through their talk and actions.

A close study of play allows researchers a way to view literacy as more than a cognitive, skills-based activity, but as an embodied, meaning-making practice that makes use of various modes, including, but not limited to reading and writing. Embodied practices are harder to assess with standardized measurement and require time to observe, understand, and document. However, the implications of viewing play as a multimodal literacy are far reaching in terms of children's developing social competence and communication skills.

Comber (2016) coined the term *pedagogies of belonging* to describe the ways in which the social goal of belonging drives curriculum design and negotiation (p. 40). She argued that place and space afford teachers opportunities to support students' learning by building relationships and community. "Children learn *about* spaces and places, *from* spaces and places, *in* spaces and places, and in the process learn about their obligations for the care of spaces and places" (p. 97). Comber's concept of *pedagogies of belonging* aligns well with play-based early childhood educational approaches. Relationships may be the missing component in the scaffolding metaphor (Cazden, 2014, p. 78). Within a pedagogy based on relationships, collaboration is privileged over tutoring. Forman and Cazden (2013) described the *tutoring* relationship as one in which the tutor informs, guides, and/or corrects the tutee's work (p. 188), which very much resembles traditional view of the teacher's role. Cazden (2013) described *collaborating* as "a mutual task in which the partners work together to produce something neither

would have produced alone” (p. 188). Collaboration provides a space that welcome cognitive conflict, which supports the development of logical reasoning (Forman & Cazden, 2013). Within a *pedagogy of belonging*, children are members of a community that supports their academic identity development by allowing them to take risks, challenge and be challenged, and synthesize their ideas and experiences in order to grow. For young children, play provides a space for a *pedagogy of belonging*.

Young children construct and interpret meaning using a variety of modes, but multimodal meaning-making is often positioned as mere play, “detering serious investigation” (Rowse, Kress, Pahl, & Street, 2013, p. 1183). However, even what might be considered mere play is quite complex. Children are always engaged in decoding the world around them and encoding meaning using the resources available to them. In this sense, literacy is a multimodal process, and written language is one mode of many. Play, as Wohlwend (2011a) has argued, is an embodied literacy. Value children’s play as a multimodal literacy repositions it with academic curriculum, and that can function to encourage serious investigation.

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Appendix A

Georgia State University Department of Education **Informed Consent**

Title: How Children Come into Literacy through Play: Play, Discourse, and Identity Enactment
Principal Investigator: Peggy Albers, Ph.D.
Student PI: Rebecca Rohloff Barria

I. Purpose:

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to investigate how preschoolers enact their identities through writing. You are invited to participate because you are a faculty or staff member at Turning Sun School. A total of four faculty or staff members will be recruited for this study. Participation will require up to two hours of your time outside of regular classroom activities for interviews between August and December 2017. Participation will also require about ten hours of your time during the regular school day for observations.

II. Procedures:

If you participate, you will be videotaped during normal classroom activities in your classroom and interviewed in a private location, such as the administrative office or art studio. You will interact with the student investigator. All research will be conducted on the campus of Turning Sun School during normal school hours. You may be observed and recorded during normal classroom activities for approximately ten hours and you may be interviewed up to two times by the student investigator for approximately thirty minutes per interview.

III. Risks:

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

IV. Benefits:

Participation in this study may not benefit you personally. Overall, we hope to learn about how verbal language and body language influence the classroom culture and how children experience writing and develop literate identities in that culture.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any

benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

VI. Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. Dr. Peggy Albers and Rebecca Barria will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, the Office for Human Research Protection, OHRP). We will use a pseudonym rather than your name on study records. The information you provide will be stored in a locked cabinet and on password and firewall protected computers. The video/audio tapes will be stored in a locked cabinet and on password and firewall protected computers for five years. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. You will not be identified personally.

VII. Contact Persons:

Contact Dr. Peggy Albers at malbers2@gsu.edu or Rebecca Barria at 404-435-6327 or rbarria1@student.gsu.edu if you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this study. You can also call if you think you have been harmed by the study. Call Susan Vogtner in the Georgia State University Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu if you want to talk to someone who is not part of the study team. You can talk about questions, concerns, offer input, obtain information, or suggestions about the study. You can also call Susan Vogtner if you have questions or concerns about your rights in this study.

VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Subject:

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be audio or video recorded, please sign below.

Participant

Date

Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent

Date

Appendix B

Georgia State University Department of Education **Parental Permission Form**

Title: How children come into literacy through play

Principal Investigator: Peggy Albers, PhD
Student PI: Rebecca Rohloff Barria

I. Purpose:

Your child is invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to look at how preschoolers come into literacy through play. Your child is invited to participate because he or she is a student at Turning Sun School. A maximum of 32 children will participate in this study. The study will take about ten hours of your child's time during the regular school day. The study will place between August and December of 2017.

II. Procedures:

Your child will be video recorded during the regular school day. Your child will interact with the student researcher. The student researcher will observe your child for approximately ten hours. All research will be conducted on the campus of Turning Sun School during normal school hours.

III. Risks:

In this study, your child will not have any more risks than he or she would in a normal day of life.

IV. Benefits:

It may not benefit your child personally to participate in this study. Overall, we hope to learn about how children come into literacy through play. This knowledge can help teachers use play to support children's early literacy growth in the classroom.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Your child does not have to be in this study. If you allow your child to be in the study and change your mind, your child can drop out at any time. Your child may stop participating at any time. A child cannot be forced to participate even if the parent gives permission.

VI. Confidentiality:

We will keep your child's records private to the extent allowed by law. Dr. Peggy Albers and Rebecca Barria will have access to your child's information. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, the Office for Human Research Protection, OHRP). We will use a pseudonym rather than your child's name on study records. The video tapes will be stored in a locked cabinet and on password and firewall protected computers for five years. Your child's name and other facts that might point to your child will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. Your child will not be identified personally.

VII. Contact Persons:

Call Rebecca Barria if you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this study. Her phone number is 404-435-6327. Or email Peggy Albers at malbers2@gsu.edu. You can also call if you think you have been harmed by the study. Call Susan Vogtner if you want to talk to someone who is not part of the study. She works in the Georgia State University Office of Research Integrity. Her phone number is 404-413-3513. Her email address is svogtner1@gsu.edu. You can talk about questions, concerns, offer input, obtain information, or suggestions about the study. You can also call Susan Vogtner if you have questions or concerns about your rights in this study.

VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Subject:

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer your child for this research and allow him/her to be video recorded, please sign below.

Child's Name

Parent or Guardian Signature

Date

Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent

Date

Appendix C

Codebook Excerpt

Parent Category	Subcategory	Codes	Description
Social Dynamics	Bid to Play	Announces own role in play	Child verbally states character role that he or she intends to enact in playframe
		Enters play in character	Child enters the playframe verbally and/or nonverbally enacting a character role
		Directly assigns/suggests role to peer while not in character	Child assigns/suggests a character role to a peer while not enacting a character role (i.e. metaplay)
		Assigns/suggests role to peer while in character	Child assigns/suggests a character role to a peer while not enacting a character
		Produces variant of ongoing play	Child verbally and/or nonverbally produces a variant of ongoing play
		Comments on ongoing play	Child comments on ongoing play, including the materials, actions of other children, or theme
		Directly requests	Child verbally requests access to the playframe through a explicit request
		Enters physical space using body	Child physically enters the playframe using his or her body
		Enters physical space using materials	Child enters the playframe by using materials to mediate entry; the child's body may or may not also enter the space

	Directive for action	Child directs a peer to take a particular action either within role play or outside of role play
	Elicits third-party assistance	Child directly or indirectly elicits the help of a peer or adult for accessing a playframe
	Encircles playframe	Child encircles the physical boundaries of a playframe without entering into it physically
	Makes personal statement	Child makes a personal statement that connects to the ongoing play
	Requests materials	Child request materials, including resources used as props
	Offers materials	Child offers materials to a peer, including resources used as props
Bid Directed To	A particular child	Child directs bid to a particular child, rather than broadly to a group of children
	An adult	Child directs to an adult, rather than a child, including an educator and/or researcher
	Anyone	Child directs the bid broadly, to anyone within earshot
	Anyone in a group of children	Child directs bid to a group of children, rather than to a specific child
