

SOCIODRAMATIC PLAY AND THE POTENTIALS OF EARLY LANGUAGE  
DEVELOPMENT OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

by

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the interactions of preschool children with literacy-related materials, peers, and adults as they engaged in sociodramatic play. A second purpose of the study was to identify subsequent effects, if any, of that sociodramatic play on oral language acquisition and literacy behaviors. Play allows children opportunities to try out different ways in which they can combine the elements of language without having to worry about the consequences of making errors. Thus, the sociodramatic play context is conducive to language acquisition. Researchers have indicated that oral language development is influenced by social interaction and the kinds of materials children use. The problem is whether or not teachers use social interaction and materials enough to sufficiently facilitate development and properly select literacy-related materials to promote the development of language acquisition. Therefore, three questions guided the study: (1) How does sociodramatic play with literacy-related materials create opportunities for language acquisition at the preschool level? (2) How does social interaction through sociodramatic play experience among preschool children foster language acquisition as they are interacting with their peers? (3) How do adults influence the language expression of preschool children during sociodramatic play?

The qualitative research design for this study utilized a case study approach to explore sociodramatic play in a preschool setting. Observations included interactions of children and the multiple functions of language they used while interacting with literacy-related materials, peers, and adults. Halliday's (1975) seven functions of language were used as coding categories. The findings of this study revealed that the children's interactions in sociodramatic play, with

literacy-related materials, peers, and adults provided an opportunity for children to use language for multiple functions within the context of their sociodramatic play while writing and speaking. Providing children with the needed support and exposure to materials encouraged literacy and language growth. In this play setting, adults assumed roles as scaffold, facilitator and mediator while children were actively involved with a variety of strategies such as modeling, designating, and coaching each other as they engaged in language activities.

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## CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iv
LIST OF TABLES .....	viii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	ix
I INTRODUCTION .....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	5
Purpose.....	6
Research Questions.....	7
Significance of the Study .....	7
Theoretical Framework.....	8
Philosophical Assumptions.....	10
Limitations of the Study.....	10
Definitions of Terms.....	11
Summary .....	14
II REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....	16
A Brief Comparison of the Theories about Play: Sociolinguistic and Constructivist Theories .....	17
Adult Interactions during Sociodramatic Play .....	22
Adult Roles during Play.....	23
Playful Experiences that Create Opportunities for Learning.....	25

Sociodramatic Play Defined .....	28
Sociodramatic Play and Language Development .....	30
Literacy-Enriched Play Centers: Incorporating Literate Roles in Sociodramatic Play .....	44
Building Language through Play .....	45
Building Language through Play Objects and Printed Materials.....	48
Enriching Dramatic-Play Contexts with Literacy Materials to Enhance Engagement.....	52
Chapter Summary .....	54
<b>III METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>58</b>
Qualitative Research and the Tradition of Inquiry .....	58
Setting and Participants.....	59
Sampling .....	63
Student Sample .....	63
Teacher Sample.....	64
Role of Researcher .....	64
Research Design.....	66
Recruitment Procedures, Access, and Permissions.....	68
Data Collection .....	68
Research Design.....	68
Types of Data Collected in This Study .....	69
Phase I Data Collection.....	70
Phase II Data Collection .....	71
Data Analysis .....	75

Verification Procedures .....	78
Summary .....	80
IV RESULTS OF DATA ANALYSIS .....	88
Introduction.....	88
Findings Related to the Research Questions.....	89
Research Question 1 .....	89
Research Question 2 .....	105
Research Question 3 .....	113
Summary of Findings.....	124
V DISCUSSION OF RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS.....	127
Findings.....	128
Research Question 1 .....	128
Research Question 2 .....	136
Research Question 3 .....	143
Summary of Questions' Findings, Conclusion, and Implications .....	146
REFERENCES .....	151
APPENDICES	
A LETTER OF RECRUITMENT .....	164
B CONSENT FORM.....	166
C SAMPLE OF RESEARCHER'S JOURNAL.....	170



## LIST OF TABLES

1	Demographics of Student Participants.....	61
2	Data Collection Phases and Methodology .....	70
3	Data Collection Schedule and Literacy-Related Materials.....	72

## LIST OF FIGURES

1	Significant national educational events impacting literacy .....	2
2	Thought and language connection .....	21
3	Framework for the study.....	56
4	Diagram of classroom.....	62
5	Data analysis cycle.....	78
6	Follow-up data analysis .....	85
7	Language functions.....	87
8	Total of each function used in children’s spoken words.....	102

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

*Play is the only way the highest intelligence of humankind can unfold.*  
*Joseph Chilton Pearce*

Cognitive development during early childhood, the period from birth to age 5, includes building skills such as pre-reading, language, vocabulary, and numeracy. Developmental scientists have found that the brain acquires a tremendous amount of information about language in the first year of life, even before infants can speak (Christie, Enz, & Vukelich, 2007). There is a strong connection between the development a child undergoes early in life and the level of success that a child will experience later in life. When young children are provided an environment rich in language and literacy interactions, and full of opportunities to listen and use language constantly, they can begin to acquire the essential building blocks for acquiring successful literacy and language skills (U.S. Department Education, 2002). A child who enters kindergarten without the essential building blocks runs a significant risk of starting, and then staying behind in literacy and language development.

Many significant events have brought the importance of literacy to the forefront (see Figure 1). Consequently, *No Child Left Behind* (2001) drew attention to the need to prepare children before they start school. Therefore, the George W. Bush administration developed a plan to strengthen early learning to equip young children with the skills they need to start school ready to learn. This initiative, known as *Good Start, Grow Smart* (2002), addressed three major

areas: strengthening Head Start, implementing the Early Reading First Initiative, and partnering the federal government with states to improve the quality of early childhood education.

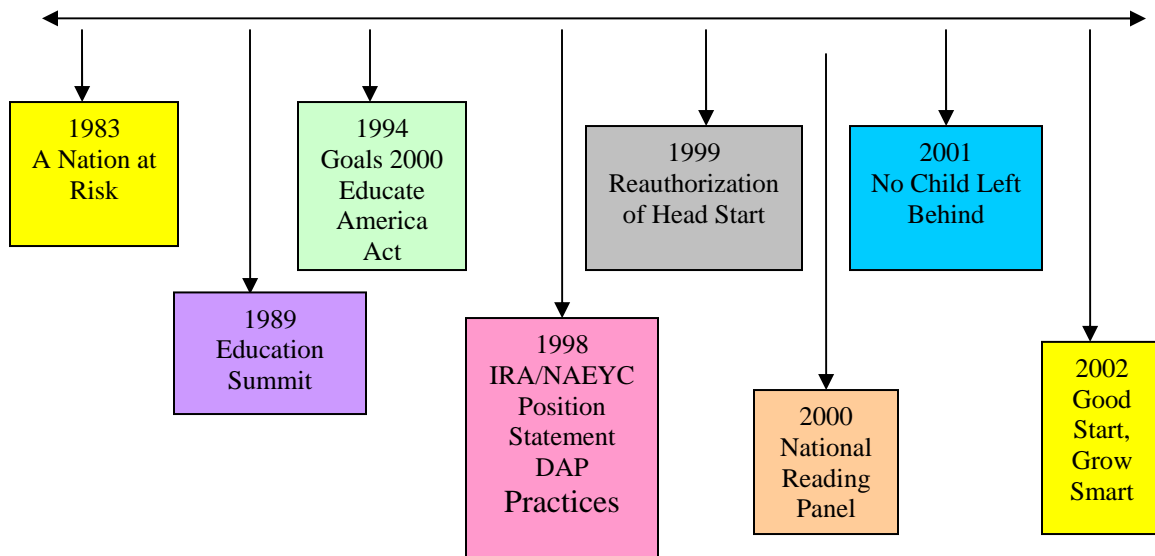


Figure 1. Significant national educational events impacting literacy (Christie et al., 2007).

In 1998, the International Reading Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children published a joint position statement, *Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices, for the Education of Young Children*. Susan Neuman, Sue Bredekamp, and Carol Copple, who represented the two organizations, spearheaded the statement. The position statement was based on a thorough review of research. The review had been conducted in order to define a set of principles to guide teaching practices and public policy for preschool children. The statement stressed,

For children to become skilled readers, they need to develop a rich language and conceptual knowledge base . . . although specific skills like alphabet knowledge are important to literacy development, children must acquire these skills . . . through meaningful experiences. (Christie, Enz, & Vukelich, 2007, p. 21)

The position statement is consistent with key language and early literacy skills identified in scientifically-based reading research. The position statement's focus is not the key skills themselves but the instructional strategies preschool teachers elect to use to teach literacy and language skills. Neuman and Roskos (2003) stated that pre-kindergarten teachers should use content and language rich instruction. The authors further indicate that such instruction includes time, materials, resources, and various group sizes structured to meet the needs of all students. This instruction provides opportunities for sustained and in-depth learning, including play.

In July 2004, the Office of School Readiness, a component of Alabama's Pre-kindergarten Initiative, adopted the current *Alabama Performance Standards for 4-Year-Olds* (Alabama Department of Children's Affairs, Office of School Readiness, 2004). The standards serve as a framework for programs, at chosen sites, for 4-year-olds in the state of Alabama. These standards were developed from an analysis of research on language and literacy, a review of best practices and standards used across the nation, and the incorporation of the early learning principles developed by National Association for the Education of Young Children (*Alabama Performance Standards for 4-year-olds*, 2004).

Those federal mandates, in many instances, have eradicated developmentally appropriate practices in many primary grade classrooms (Christie, Enz, & Vukelich, 2007). A withdrawal from developmentally appropriate practices such as dramatic play is now beginning to take place in preschool. The need for accountability has many educators feeling extreme external pressure to quantify evidence of growth in students; exploration and discovery learning by preschool children have been lost due to the perceived greater importance of checking off skills to meet

accountability criteria (Christie et al., 2007). The preschool curriculum is becoming void of meaningful literacy and language activities and is being altered dramatically as a result (Christie, et al., 2007). The challenge for early childhood educators, then, is to carefully plan and teach key elements of language and literacy instruction through meaningful experiences such as sociodramatic play. In preschools, sociodramatic play provides a way for children to develop language and early literacy skills, whereby the children's interactions are active, reciprocal, and systematic with peers and adults. While preschool children benefit from meaningful interactions with print rich environments, they need social interactions with their peers and teachers during literacy events. Sociodramatic play is an important component of preschool education because it supports appropriate ways for young children to learn literacy and language.

Through sociodramatic play children can gain the early language skills essential for success in our society (Paley, 2004). *No Child Left Behind* mandates that reading programs must be "scientifically based," and students must be assessed to achieve at a pre-determined level. This mandate has led to the promotion of language and literacy programs that are inappropriate for young children. Educators must avoid a fragmented curriculum that relies upon a hierarchy of skills and seem to de-contextualize literacy (Alabama Department of Children's Affairs, Office of School Readiness, 2004).

Currently, many educators of young children with whom I have spoken admit to seeing decreases in developmentally appropriate oral language instruction in preschools. Time is spent on academic concepts instead of on building and facilitating language growth; even assessment of young children's language is confined to vocabulary and letter names (Kirkland & Patterson, 2005). As a result of the increase in high-stakes testing and the narrowing of curriculum, sociodramatic play is forfeited among many preschool classrooms (Neuman & Roskos, 2005).

There is good reason for the concerns expressed by many early childhood educators and researchers that the role of play, including sociodramatic play, may be overlooked in the effort to ensure that children receive more explicit language and literacy instruction in the preschool setting (Morrow & Schickedanz, 2006).

Because of changes in the literacy curriculum due to federal mandates, there is an urgent need to explore sociodramatic play, oral language, and the interactions of both with literacy-related materials in order to add to the pool of scientifically-based reading research. In this research investigation, I seek to add to the pool of current findings on the role of sociodramatic play because much of the research examining the relationship between literacy and dramatic play and literacy and sociodramatic play was done in the early to late 1990s. There is limited research on sociodramatic play and the potentials of language development: this topic needs further exploration in a current preschool setting. The findings from this study may provide teachers with research-based information that assists them in combining literacy and language experiences with sociodramatic play to create a blended literacy program with meaningful experiences that encourage developmentally appropriate instruction through sociodramatic play. In my view and hence the view upon which this study was based, sociodramatic play is an important component of preschool in that it serves as a way children learn literacy and language.

#### Statement of the Problem

Bruner (1983) stated that (the first) language is “most rapidly mastered when situated in playful activity” (p. 65). Play allows children opportunities to try out different ways in which they can combine the elements of language without having to worry too much about the consequences of making errors. Thus, the sociodramatic play context is conducive to language

acquisition. Researchers have indicated that oral language development is influenced by social interaction and the kinds of materials children use (Christie, 1991). The problem of this study is whether or not teachers use social interaction and materials to facilitate sufficient oral language development. The question of what kinds of literacy-related materials will promote the development of language acquisition for preschool children, has not been thoroughly studied since the 1990s. My study addressed this gap. Because of the important relationship between sociodramatic play and language, early childhood and preschool classrooms should continue to provide the time, space, and materials for sociodramatic play. The role of sociodramatic play and language development, therefore, needs to be studied closely in the classroom environment through the observation of literacy behaviors among young children.

### Purpose

The first purpose of this study was to explore the interactions of preschool children with literacy-related materials, peers, and adults as they engaged in sociodramatic play. A second purpose of the study was to identify subsequent effects, if any, of that sociodramatic play on oral language acquisition and literacy behaviors. For the purposes of this study, literacy-related materials are all kinds of paper handled by children such as magazines and note pads (Morrow & Rand, 1991). Also, literacy-related materials are appropriate printed materials used naturally by children in their spontaneous play; real reading and writing items children may actually find in home, school and surrounding environments; and reading and writing materials that may serve a particular function in children's everyday life (Neuman & Roskos, 1991).



## Research Questions

Based on the problem identified, the research questions are:

1. How does sociodramatic play with literacy-related materials create opportunities for language acquisition at the preschool level?
2. How does social interaction through sociodramatic play experience among preschool children foster language acquisition as they are interacting with their peers?
3. How do adults influence language expression of preschool children during sociodramatic play?

## Significance of the Study

Patterns of oral language use are developed extensively during the preschool years, and lay the foundation for later literacy (Heath, 1983). Dickinson and Smith (1991) hypothesized that the oral language skills of primary importance to later school literacy tasks are decontextualized language skills, that is, language that conveys information distinct from context, and that children need such language skills in order to understand and discuss abstract concepts. In many preschool classrooms, decontextualized language exemplifies oracy such as explanations, personal narratives, and pretend play where children must verbally move beyond the immediate conversational context to create and re-create events, analyze experiences, and share opinions and ideas. During sociodramatic play, children use many cognitive processes such as making plans, finding ways to carry out their plans, and solving conflicts along the way. Children can take the initiative and make choices and decisions about the activities in which they will engage, and foster language learning.

## Theoretical Framework

Lev Vygotsky (1978) was a catalyst for the development of cognition as a social process. His suggestion that cognition was rooted in social interaction went far beyond the behaviorist notion of learning as a response to a particular stimulus. Instead, Vygotsky (1978) believed that development and learning are rooted and influenced by society and culture. “Cognition, when described as social and cultural, implies agency on the part of the learner; no longer is the learner simply acted upon, but acts, responds, and creates through the very act of learning” (Nieto, 1999). A Vygotskian perspective provides a hopeful framework for thinking about learning; that is, if learning can be influenced by social mediation, then conditions can be created in schools that can help most students learn. Significant in this regard is the concept Vygotsky described as the Zone of Proximal Development, or ZPD. The ZPD is “the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Vygotsky viewed learning as a profoundly social process, emphasizing dialogue and the varied roles that language plays in instruction and mediated cognitive growth. Vygotsky’s theory implies that teacher and child interaction within play settings in the form of teacher suggested ideas, posed questions, or noted observations can enable a child to progress in learning.

In Vygotsky’s work, dialogue between adult and child is a critical factor influencing language development and stimulating cognitive growth. Children learn names and language structures by talking with others, particularly adults. Although it takes a long time for language development to reach mature conceptual levels, the beginning of language and thought comes from the model provided by adults (Vygotsky, 1981). This model asserts Vygotsky’s social

context of learning theory in that children learn through socially meaningful interactions and language are both social and an important learning facilitators (Tompkins, 2000). Children's experiences, shaped by society, are organized, reasoned, and transformed as a dynamic part of culture. Children learn to talk through social interactions and to read and write through interactions with literate children and adults (Dyson, 1993).

Vygotsky's interest of the function of communication in childhood development led to his initial analysis of early communication about external speech and inner speech also called egocentric speech. External speech both in dialogue with others and in monologue communicates egocentric speech. Adults provide children who are just beginning to talk, with language models in dialogue. Children imitate, start to react to the dialogue, and later produce external speech monologues. Through imitation, response patterns become the recognized patterns that are present in external speech and are used to structure children's inner speech.

Vygotsky concluded that external speech is pre-requisite to the inner speech that precedes mature thought (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky described inner speech or egocentric speech as a sort of silent speech that occurs before real thought begins. Most importantly, inner speech leads to thought. The inner or egocentric speech composes a large proportion of the preschool and kindergarten child's speech, particularly that occurring in play situations. This obtains the form of a running monologue that accompanies the child's activities, whether he works alone or beside others. Vygotsky concluded that not only does the child think to speak, but what he says to himself influences what he then will think, so the two interact to produce together conceptual or verbal thought (Thomas, 1985).

## Philosophical Assumptions

Vygotsky (1978) believed that language develops in the context of social interaction and language use. As children experience the wide variety of functions and forms of language, they internalize the way language is used in the context of their surroundings to represent meaning. During this time, children make an internal effort to assign meanings to experience and to communicate with the outside world. The combination of the social context and language use work together to propel language learning.

According to Wilkinson and Silliman (2000), scaffolding provides opportunities for dynamic assessment, responsive feedback, and the opportunity to view the educational process as consisting of a community of learners. Scaffolds allow integration of dynamic assessment with teaching as the means for engaging in the on-line evaluation of students' comprehension needs and modifying the level and type of support "on the spot" (Pressley & Woloshyn, 1995). For example, scaffolds whether they are adults or children, can provide immediate support and feedback while the learner is actively engaged in the learning process. Scaffolding may be considered as a process for the appropriation of providing appropriate tools or instruction that mediates how to understand, remember, and express one's perspectives in more literate ways. Responsibility is gradually transferred from adults to students for task planning, strategy choices and selection, monitoring of effectiveness, self-correction, and the evaluation of task outcomes (Wilkinson & Silliman, 2000).

## Limitations of the Study

Due to the demographics of the population and the length of the study, generalizations of the findings from this study may not be applicable to other preschool settings. There were a few

challenges while video recording the sociodramatic play events in the classroom. Because the equipment was set up in another room and I chose to be onsite while children engaged in play, I needed an early childhood professional to monitor and operate the video camera while children were engaged in play events. A knowledgeable early childhood professional could have captured more close-up events of children engaged in play as well as zoomed in on play events that really addressed the phenomena. Also, this strategy would have made the transcribing of tapes much easier because the camera operator would have focused on specific play events to hear children's language more clearly.

#### Definitions of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions were used:

*Sociodramatic play*, which some researchers and expert writers variously call "social fantasy play," "social imaginative play," "social make-believe play," and "social pretend play," is used to refer to "voluntary social role-taking involving two or more children, an engagement where the children transform activities from their real objective and objects from their real counterparts" (McCune-Nicolich, 1981, p. 504).

*Sociodramatic play*, as referred to in this study, is a form of voluntary social play activity in which preschool children participate.

*Dramatic play* occurs when children take on roles and use make-believe transformations to act out situations and play episodes (Christie et al., 2003).

*Language* is a verbal system. It consists of words and rules for organizing words and changing them (Roskos et. al, 2004). "Language contains four systems: the phonological system deals with sounds; the semantic system deals with meaning; the syntactic system deals with word

order in sentences; and the pragmatic system consist of rules that affect how language is used in different social contexts. During speaking, reading, and writing, all three systems interact to produce meaningful communication” (Yellin, Blake, & Devries, 2004, p. 112).

*Expressive language* is the use of vivid language to convey feelings or attitudes. This is done orally or graphically (Roskos, Tabors, & Lenhart, 2004).

*Receptive language* is the receipt of a message aurally or visually. It is, also, the mental store of words and phrases (Roskos et al., 2004).

*Oral language comprehension* is the ability to listen to spoken language and respond with understanding (Roskos et al., 2004).

*Literacy* refers to reading and writing (communicating through print) (Christie, 1991). Literacy is a written system of marks that fixes language in place so it can be saved. Benjamin DeMott (1990) stated literacy--reading and writing--is what helps people to understand each other, to connect with each other, and to know the truth for themselves.

The National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association (1996) identifies a more ambitious definition of literacy that includes the capacity to accomplish a wide range of reading, writing, speaking, and other language tasks associated with everyday life. This definition of literacy will be used for this study.

*Reading* is defined by the National Council of Teachers of English and International Reading Association (1996) as the complex, recursive process through which we make meaning from printed texts, using semantics; syntax; visual, aural, and tactile cues; context; and prior knowledge.

*Speaking* is the act of communicating through such means as vocalization, signing, or using communication aids such as voice synthesizers (National Council of Teachers of English and International Reading Association, 1996).

*Talk* is the, means through which children's use of language occurs through speech with others (Roskos et al., 2004).

*Vocabulary* (receptive and expressive) is those words known or used by a person or group, including the specialized meanings that words acquire when they are used for technical purposes, regional usages, and slang (National Council of Teachers of English and International Reading Association, 1996).

*Word play* is a child's manipulation of words and sounds for the purpose of pleasure, language exploration, and practice (Roskos et al., 2004).

*Communication* is the meaningful exchange of ideas or information between a speaker and a listener (or a reader and a writer). Communication may be primarily functional (focusing on content and purpose) or primarily expressive or some combination of the two.

Communication is understood as an interactive process, in which both speaker and listener participate in the construction of meaning (National Council of Teachers of English & International Reading Association, 1996).

*Literacy behavior* is reading, writing, and paper handling (Morrow & Rand, 1991).

*Literacy-related material* is all kinds of paper handled by children such as magazines and note pads (Morrow & Rand, 1991). Such material is used naturally by children in their spontaneous play; real reading and writing items children may actually find in home, school, and surrounding environments; reading and writing materials may serve a particular function in children's everyday lives (Neuman & Roskos, 1991).

*Literacy materials* include puppets, flannel boards, and songbooks (Morrow & Rand, 1991).

*Literacy engagement* is a child looking at (viewing only), holding, talking about, or carrying any of the literacy or literacy-related materials (Morrow & Rand, 1991).

*Literacy behavior* is engagement with (actually manipulating) literacy materials; having literacy materials in hand, being attentive visually to literacy materials, or talking about literacy materials that somebody else holds (Morrow & Rand, 1991).

*Literacy event* refers to any occasion upon which a person produces, comprehends, or attempts to produce or comprehend or engage with written language (Teale, 1986).

*Language acquisition* is the theoretical perspective of how children learn language. Currently, there are four views: behaviorism, linguistic nativism, social interactionism, and the neurobiological perspective.

Before explaining the contents of this chapter, it is important to define the components of dramatic play and sociodramatic play because much research identifies them as separate forms of play. *Sociodramatic play*, as referred to in this study, is a form of voluntary social play activity in which preschool children participate.

### Summary

In summary, children need the time and opportunity for play, especially for sociodramatic play, which requires other children. Vygotsky (1978) concluded this type of play led to language use and symbolic thought. The bulk of children's language learning takes place as children work in centers of interest both indoors and outdoors. When children can take the initiative and make choices and decisions about the activities in which they engage, language learning is fostered.



When taking the initiative, children are the ones who use language to help organize the activities they have chosen, and who use words to plan what to do and how to do it. A central benefit of sociodramatic play is that it gives children a way in which to express their feelings. When pretending to be a mom or baby, children find they are able to experiment with different emotions, and find their way to better managing them.

This case study explored sociodramatic play and language development through qualitative measures. Chapter II explores the literature review studies about sociodramatic play and language development. Chapter III explains the research methodology and chapters IV and V share the results and provide discussion with implications for future research.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In dramatic play, the child takes on a role; he pretends to be somebody else. While doing this he draws from his first or secondhand experience with other persons in different situations. He imitates the person, in action and speech, with the aid of real or imagined objects. The verbalization of the child during play is imitative speech or serves as a substitute for objects, actions, and situations. The play becomes sociodramatic if the theme is elaborated in cooperation with at least one other role player; and the participants interact with each other both in action and verbally. Some of the verbal interaction is imitation of adult talk, and an integral part of the role playing; some is verbal substitution for objects, actions, and situations, directions to the co-players; and some of it constitutes discussions necessary to plan and sustain the cooperative play (Smilansky, 1968).

This chapter presents an extensive review of literature related to sociodramatic play and language development. The first section compares the theories of sociodramatic play according to Lev Vygotsky and Jean Piaget. Due to the nature of the content, references to these theorists occurred in other sections of the literature review as well. The second section defines sociodramatic play in depth and discusses studies on language and sociodramatic play. The third section of this review provides a discussion of studies concerning adult interactions during sociodramatic play, narrative language development through the use of sociodramatic play, children's incorporation of literate roles in sociodramatic play, and children's use of literacy-related materials to enhance engagement during sociodramatic play.

## A Brief Comparison of the Theories about Play: Sociolinguistic and Constructivist Theories

The constructivist's premise is that learning is an active process. Learners construct new ideas based upon their past knowledge and this knowledge is not just acquiring information, but is based upon what the child brings to the situation (Bruner, 1983). Because conflict and problem solving are essential to learning, children must be afforded opportunities to modify their current schemas to fit new ideas. Constructivists and many developmental psychologists agree that play is necessary for cognitive growth because it facilitates the accumulation of information (Poe, 2004). Knowledge comes from the information and background an individual brings to a situation. In like manner, language is built upon prior knowledge and increases through the active process of utilizing it.

Theoretical work by both Piaget (1962) and Vygotsky (1978) suggested a relationship between the process of symbolic use of materials in play and literacy activities. Since both literacy and symbolic play activities require the use of words, gestures, or mental images to represent actual objects, events, or actions, Piaget and Vygotsky theorized that representational abilities used in symbolic play activities provide the foundation for learning. Piaget was a cognitive theorist who focused on the internal development of the child. He believed that through the processes of assimilation and accommodation, children create their own knowledge. Assimilation is the process through which new information is added to existing thought patterns, while accommodation is the process that occurs when thinking structures or patterns are changed to make new experiences fit (Piaget, 1962). Piaget (1962) stressed the importance of play in the child's cognitive development as a way of assimilating new information and consolidating past experience through symbolic means.

Children benefit from social interaction needed to organize and sustain sociodramatic play. The accommodation and negotiation needed to resolve conflict during such social interaction leads to cognitive growth. For example, a child engaged in the home living center who pretends to cook a spaghetti dinner for the family is asked by a second child if she could join the play episode. The second child says she would like to add croissants to the dinner; the first child is unsure what this word means but assimilates this new word into the existing pattern of thought when the second child informs the first child that this is a kind of bread and it looks like dinner rolls you eat. Sociodramatic play helps children to organize their learning and promotes critical aspects of cognitive development.

Another key aspect of Piaget's (1952) theory revolves around the idea that humans begin to develop intelligence through adaptation. Adaptation requires balance between the two complementary processes of assimilation and accommodation. Piaget suggested that symbolic play is an imbalanced state where assimilation dominates over accommodation thus freeing the ego from the demands of accommodation. He described the role of symbolic play as compensation and fulfillment of wishes and a means for dealing with conflicts (Piaget, 1962).

Smilansky (1968) argued that Piaget's (1952) theory of developmental stages may not be followed by every child. Smilansky's (1968) observations suggested that culturally deprived preschoolers with well-developed language did not develop the ability to engage in symbolic play. This finding is inconsistent with Piaget's theory, which suggested that language and symbolic play emerge simultaneously as a result of the semiotic (meaning and vocabulary) function. Piaget's theory also has been criticized because it was based on observations of symbolic play that occurred with objects or with individual children, which does not take into account the influence of the context in which play occurs. Piaget's view disregards the effect of

the sociocultural context on an individual's behavior at the very moment that it stresses the effect of the physical environment on these actions (Thomas, 1985).

Prior to the 1970s, psychoanalytic theory dictated the use of play in classrooms and, as a result, teachers limited their involvement in children's play so as not to interfere with children's emotional problem-solving and catharsis (Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 1987). Piaget's (1962) theory of play, which began to replace or dispute the psychoanalytic view by the 1970s, stressed play's relationship to cognition. The Piagetian view of play opened the door to consideration of the relationship between pretend play and overall cognitive and language development and play's potential role in furthering development in these areas. Many of Piaget's studies omitted content on the social context of early pretending, with the implication that pretend play develops regardless of whether a child interacts with anyone else. Unlike Piaget's theory, Vygotsky's (1978) theory of cognitive development gave a central role in play to a partner who tutors. Such a partner must be a more experienced other, often an adult or an older child, and sometimes a more skilled peer.

Language specialists have become increasingly attentive to aspects of the social context of development, concerning themselves with the contexts of adult-child interaction and child-child interaction in both in-home and out-of-home settings. "We call this focus on context sociolinguistic in order to establish that when studying children's language, we take into account both linguistic and social abilities" (Genishi & Dyson, 1984, p. 12). Sociolinguistic notions of fostering and assessing language development are based on the premise that the social situation can have powerful effects on the kinds of language a child produces. To learn how children use language one needs to see them in a variety of contexts, in which children are using a range of sociolinguistic abilities. Given the premise that language varies from situation to situation, adults

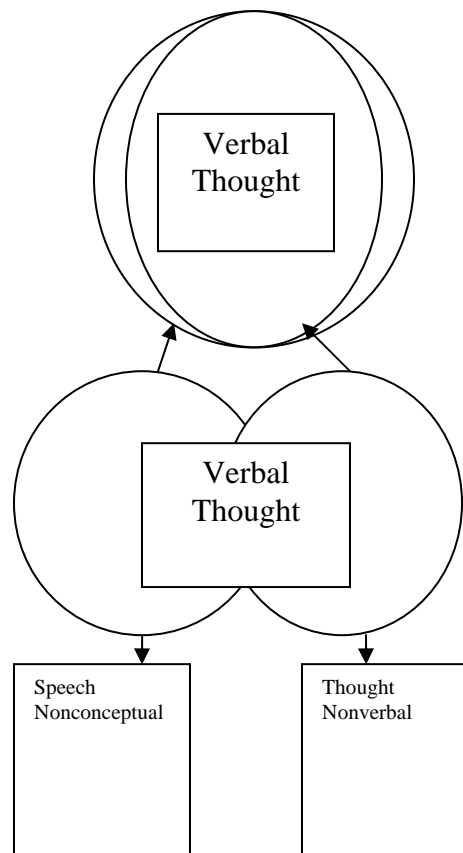
can facilitate versatility in children's language by providing opportunities for talk (and later, for reading and writing) by providing many different settings and activities. Fostering language, then, depends heavily on adults' willingness to arrange and change contexts for interacting and learning. Because children's language and concepts of literacy reflect their cultures and home communities, teachers must respect students' language and appreciate cultural differences in their attitudes toward learning and toward learning language arts in particular.

Sociolinguists, such as Vygotsky, emphasize the importance of language in learning and view learning as a reflection of the culture and community in which students live (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). According to Vygotsky, language helps to organize thought, and children use language to learn as well as to communicate and share experiences with others. Understanding that children use language for social purposes, teachers should plan instructional activities that incorporate a social component, such as having students share their reading and writing with classmates and increase interaction with peers.

Vygotsky further asserted that children learn through socially meaningful interactions and that language is both social and an important facilitator of learning. Children's experiences are organized and shaped by society, but rather than merely absorbing these experiences, children negotiate and transform them based on cultural or school experiences. They learn to talk through social interactions and to read and write through interactions with literate children and adults (Dyson, 1993; Harste, 1990). The learning community is important for both readers and writers as well. Students talk about books they are reading, discuss objects they manipulate, and they turn to classmates for feedback about their writing (Zebroski, 1994).

Vygotsky (1978) concluded, in general, that a child's thought and speech begin as separate functions with no necessary connection between them. They are like two circles that do

not touch. One circle represents nonverbal thought, the other nonconceptual speech. As a child begins to grow up, the circles meet and overlap (see Figure 2). The juncture of the two represents verbal thought, meaning that the child now has begun to acquire concepts that bear word labels. The two circles never completely overlap. Even though the common portion becomes more prominent as the child develops (particularly in a highly literate cultural setting), there always remains some nonverbal thought and some nonconceptual speech (Vygotsky, 1978).



*Figure 2.* Thought and language connection.

Vygotsky believed there was an obvious link between play and written language. He saw many parallels between what happens in children's play and what constitutes the very core of

cultural development. Repeated naming and renaming of toys in play help a child master the symbolic nature of words and eventually realize the unique relationship that exists between words and the objects they signify. In other words, play helps a child develop metalinguistic awareness, which is frequently associated by contemporary researchers with children's mastery of written language. Vygotsky found many indications that early drawings are linked to children's oral speech, from the frequent increases in self-directed speech observed as children were engaged in drawing, to the similarities between children's drawings and their verbal concepts. He concluded that young children's drawings are "a unique graphic speech . . . more speech than representation" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 138). Finally, Vygotsky explained that initial written symbols serve as a sign of verbal symbols. Understanding written language can be processed through oral speech, but gradually this path is shortened, the intermediate link in the form of oral speech drops away, and written language becomes a direct symbol just as understandable as oral speech (Vygotsky, 1986).

#### Adult Interactions during Sociodramatic Play

Through interactions with adults and collaboration with classmates, children learn things they could not learn on their own. Adults guide and support children as they move from their current level of knowledge toward a more advanced level. Vygotsky (1978) described these two levels as (1) the actual developmental level; the level at which children can perform a task independently, and (2) the level of potential development; that is, the level at which children can perform a task with assistance. Children can typically do more difficult things in collaboration than they can on their own, and this is why teachers are important models for their students and why children should work with partners or interact with children in small groups.



According to Vygotsky (1978), adult interactions can facilitate children's development within their zone of proximal development. A child's "zone of proximal development" is the range of tasks that the child can perform with guidance from others but cannot yet perform independently (Yellin et al., 2004, p. 123). Vygotsky believed that children learn best when what they are attempting to learn is within this zone. He felt that children learn little by performing tasks they can already do independently--tasks at their actual development level--or by attempting tasks that are too difficult or beyond their zone of proximal development. Bruner (1986) used the term scaffold as a metaphor to describe adults' contributions to children's learning. Scaffolds are support mechanisms that teachers, parents, and others provide to help children successfully perform a task within their zones of proximal development. Teachers create scaffolds when they model or demonstrate a procedure, guide children through a task, ask questions, break complex tasks into smaller steps, and supply pieces of information. As children gain knowledge and experience about how to perform a task, teachers gradually withdraw their support so that children make the transition from external social interaction to internalized, independent functioning.

### *Adult Roles during Play*

Seminal works of sociodramatic play research include Smilansky's (1968) large scale pretend play training study in Israel, where she used several training procedures to teach Israeli children from a low socioeconomic background the skills needed to engage in sociodramatic play. From her study, she concluded that the training significantly improved the quality of children's play. Smilansky also was one of the first to begin studies of play tutoring, which observed how teachers' suggestions, comments, questions, and demonstrations influenced play

episodes. The goal was to train children to reenact real life experiences. For example, after taking a trip to the fire station, children were encouraged to reenact their experiences. This investigation documented the effects of sociodramatic play for 140 children ages 3 to 6, from low-, middle-, and high-income populations on language abilities in young children. Using adult tutors, she trained low socioeconomic status children on sociodramatic play behaviors reflective of young children from higher income populations. After 67 hours of training, the results indicated that children from lower-income populations improved in pretend play and language behavior characteristics compared to play and language behaviors of children from higher income levels. In particular, these children showed significant increases in mean frequencies of words used in sentences, contextual words, and non-repeated words as compared to baseline language samples recorded prior to tutor training.

According to Dixon-Krauss (1996), the teacher's role as scaffold in guiding students' learning within the zone of proximal development has three components:

1. Teachers mediate or augment children's learning through social interaction.
2. Teachers are flexible and provide support based on feedback from the children as they are engaged in the learning task.
3. Teachers vary the amount of support from very explicit to vague, according to children's needs.

Adults can help children engage in activities that go beyond their current level of mastery, which the children could not do without adult mediation. Many opportunities for this type of adult scaffolding occur when children are engaged in sociodramatic play in literacy enriched settings (Roskos & Neuman, 1993). In Vygotsky's (1997) analysis of the development of writing in children, he emphasized that children learned to read and write only if literacy and

language activities were meaningful for them. Smilansky and Shefatya (1990) have attempted to understand strategies that adults can use to support children's engagement in play. Morrow (2001) summarized this work when she outlined what is required of the adult who hopes to foster pretend-play abilities in children. She stated that the adult should take the responsibility of activating a high level of curiosity and with the ability to withstand uncertainty. The adult must scaffold the play, but within the child's zone of proximal development. The adult also must keep in mind the characteristics of play and predetermine the roles, content, or the direction of play.

### *Playful Experiences that Create Opportunities for Learning*

Children's early experience with words at home or in school settings accumulate as a dictionary of meanings, synonyms, antonyms, and slang expressions to which later experiences add new entries or refine or elaborate old entries (Hart & Risley, 1995). New experiences are noticed and categorized because they evoke associations with remembered experiences and symbols. Children encouraged to work with language may seek new experiences or practice using words in order to qualify or clarify concepts and make more precise the meanings of existing dictionary entries. Children may feel a need to find words for what they see and feel and to store the unfamiliar words they hear. Children's early interactions set up an entire general approach to words as symbols for experience (Hart & Risley, 1995).

Hart and Risley (1975) used incidental teaching as a framework for their study. They analyzed a child's request into two types: verbal or nonverbal. According to Hart and Risley (1975), incidental teaching denotes a process whereby language skills of labeling and describing are learned in naturally occurring adult-child interactions. This interaction arises naturally in an unstructured situation such as free play, during which an adult transmits information to or gives a

child practice in developing a skill. An incidental teaching situation is child-selected: a child initiates interaction by requesting assistance from an adult. For example, a request could be a child stretching for an object beyond his reach; struggling with clothing; crying or calling the adult's name; or asking for play material, for food, or for information. When the adult responds to the child's request, a series of decisions ensues:

1. whether to use the occasion for incidental teaching and if yes, then
2. a decision concerning the language behavior to be obtained from the child, and
3. a decision concerning the cue to be used to initiate instruction, whether
  - a) the cue of focused attention alone, or
  - b) the cue of focused attention plus a verbal cue.

And, if the child does not respond to the cue,

4. a decision concerning the degree of prompt to be used, whether
  - a) fullest degree: a request for imitation,
  - b) medium degree: a request for partial imitation, or
  - c) minimal degree: a request for the terminal language behavior.

If the adult decides to use the child's request for assistance as an occasion for language learning, the adult then makes an immediate decision (1a), concerning the terminal language to be obtained from the child, which will terminate the incidental teaching occasion (2b). Due to various settings, the terminal language behavior will vary according to situations, age, personality, and language ability of the child. Then, the adult decides on the cue to be given the child in order to initiate instruction (3c). The language goal for this process is for the incidental teaching to focus on having the child learn spontaneous adult-like language responses to the cues of the adult world. The most natural cue for the child is the presence of the adult's attention (3a).

The focusing of another person's attention should be completed by using a cue for a language response from an individual needing assistance; this could be the child pretending to purchase an item in the store or even asking for information. If the child does not respond immediately to the cue of focused attention, the adult adds a verbal cue (decision 3b). In the incidental teaching process, these verbal cues should be explicit so that the child can learn the category of language response appropriate to the specific occasion. Maintaining a small number of verbal cues not only helps the child discriminate the nature of the language response called for, but helps the adult respond immediately and consistently to a child's initiation of an incidental teaching situation (Hart & Risley, 1975).

The child initiates the incidental teaching situation by requesting assistance, the adult responds first with the cue of adult presence and attention and then, if the child does not respond to this cue with spontaneous speech, the adult offers a verbal cue. In the incidental teaching situation, the child is in need of help, and may be lacking language skills, but the attention is fully focused on the assistance implicit in the adult's presence and attention. There are degrees of prompts that an adult uses with a child during incidental teaching. The fullest degree of prompt is always used when the adult expects the child to imitate the terminal language. The second, medium degree of prompt involves partial imitation by the child and reduction of the adult prompt until the child is spontaneously responding with the appropriate language. The third, minimal degree of prompt is when the adult prompts by directly requesting the terminal language behavior. This concept of language development guided Hart and Risley's (1975) study that explored the effects of incidental teaching in prompting children's regular use of compound sentences to describe their reasons for using preschool play materials for 3- to 5-year-old children.

Over a period of 8 months, 15-minute daily samples of the spontaneous speech of 11 Black children, 5 girls and 6 boys, were recorded. Speech recorded included to whom the child directed the verbalization such as the teacher, a child, or no observable person. Researchers' analyzed vocabulary used by children by coding children's compound sentences and teacher prompted sentences.

After incidental teaching, procedures were used to instruct children in the use of compound sentences directed to teachers. Children's compound sentences directed to teachers increased while the number of compound sentences they directed to children remained at the baseline level. This study revealed the number of compound sentences used by children more than doubled when teaching procedures were used to direct children to practice such language behaviors. Incidental teaching of compound sentences led to a variety of language use among the children by the end of the school year. There was no harmful effect of this method of language instruction on children's use of preschool materials. Hart and Risley (1975) concluded that incidental teaching was an effective means of increasing children's language skills through utilizing those occasions that are child-selected for individualized instruction and those materials and situations that occur frequently and naturally within the child's environment.

In conclusion, the adult behavior that supports the development of play behaviors in the sociodramatic play context shares essential features with adult behavior known to facilitate other aspects of development.

### Sociodramatic Play Defined

Piaget (1962) classified play into three different categories corresponding to different stages of cognitive development: practice play, which dominates the sensorimotor stage (from

birth to approximately 2 years of age); symbolic play that becomes prominent during the preoperational stage (from ages 2 to 7); and games with rules, which comes into prominence during the concrete operational stage (ages 7 to 11). Within this system, sociodramatic play falls under symbolic play. As the category “symbolic” suggests, sociodramatic play is very much associated with children’s growing ability to use symbols for a variety of functional purposes external to the symbols themselves: e.g., to represent an object absent from immediate physical context, to construct imagined social realities, and regulate communicative events typically happening in certain contexts (Musthafa, 2001).

Sociodramatic play variously is called, “social fantasy play,” social imaginative play,” social make-believe play,” and social pretend play” (Levy, 1986, p. 134). Sociodramatic play is used to refer to “voluntary social role-taking involving two or more children” (Levy, 1986, p. 134), an engagement where the children transform activities from their real objective and objects from their real counterparts (Farver, 1992, p. 504). Christie (1990) used Piaget’s and Vygotsky’s (1978) theories to define symbolic play as a representation of behavior under which sociodramatic play falls; it is a prerequisite for the development of abstract, logical thought. Two essential elements of sociodramatic play are role taking and verbal communication. Role taking refers to how children pretend to be someone other than themselves (Smilansky, 1968). Verbal communication is children’s ability to use speech to communicate meaning (Smilansky, 1968). In sociodramatic play, children attempt to communicate and integrate their everyday conventional or reconstructed knowledge of the social world with that of their partners (Farver, 1992; Garvey, 1990). That is, the language children use most frequently in the home and other social contexts scaffolds their ability to assimilate or accommodate (Piaget, 1965) their language for other settings or purposes

## Sociodramatic Play and Language Development

Language mediates experiences, especially those experiences that demand listening, speaking, writing, and reading (Seefeldt & Galper, 2001). Conversely, experiences give children something in common to talk about. For example, nearly every child in this country has eaten food prepared by a family member, and because students share this same experience, they have a foundation for communicating with one another about how to prepare meals or identify the names of various food items. From the common experience of going to a supermarket or some other place in the community, or to school, themes for sociodramatic play, murals, and other group projects emerge. These, in turn, give children still more to talk about, listen to, and express through play, drawing, painting, and writing (Morrow & Schickedanz, 2006).

Since the late 90s, the language development of young children has become the focus of organizations such as the National Association for Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the International Reading Association (IRA). In their joint position paper, NAEYC and IRA stated that language learning takes place in much the same way when children are in child care, preschool, kindergarten, or other early childhood settings. A curriculum built around shared, meaningful experiences has many of the same characteristics and the same social necessity as the common, everyday interactions between parent and child. For example, sharing books with children and reading environmental print are common components of preschool curriculum. This has shaped a different perspective in literacy in that language is acquired in real life settings as children engage in meaningful literate experiences. When children in real life settings are faced with a problem that requires the use of language, they are motivated to use and learn language. For example, when children see adults writing checks, making a grocery list, reading a menu,



reading a cookbook, or reading directions, they see through these experiences the necessity of literacy and language and find learning about both of these are useful for achieving daily goals.

According to Dewey's (1938), philosophy of education, language learning takes place not as a series of lessons or drills in isolated skills but as a social necessity. Vygotsky (1986), as well, believed language learning in every culture takes place through everyday interactions and shared experiences between adult and child. Obviously, in different cultures the interactions and words differ, but the process remains remarkably similar (Chomsky, 1986). As a mother dresses her toddler, she talks about what they are doing: "Put your arm here, in this sleeve. Now, the other arm." "Here is your hat," she says as she puts it on the child's head. The sounds made in saying "hat," "sleeve," and "arm," when repeated as mother and child share many different and varied experiences with the objects, soon come to have the same meaning for mother and child (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). After a while the child understands that the word "hat" stands for the thing on her head. Then, she can find her hat when her mother asks, "Where's your hat?" And, she can use the word "hat" to communicate her ideas of hats to others (Seefeldt & Galper, 2001).

In terms of linguistic production, or using language for a particular function, children, just by virtue of their involvement in this sociodramatic play, are required to engage in two forms of communication: (1) communication about the play while retaining their own real-life identities--the children negotiate the roles and scene or script to be enacted and (2) the communication held within the play mode, in which the children relate to one another in the roles they agreed to perform (Fein, 1979).

Sociodramatic play appears simple and frivolous at first glance, but close inspection reveals that it is quite complicated and places heavy linguistic demands on children (Fessler,

1998). Bruner (1983) reported that the most complicated grammatical and pragmatic forms of language appear first in play activity. When children work together to act out stories, they face formidable language challenges. They not only need to use language to act out their dramas, they also must use language to organize the play and keep it going. In addition to using language in their sociodramatic play, children also play with language. This intentional “messaging around” with language begins as soon as children have passed through the babbling stage and have begun to make words (Garvey, 1977).

Garvey (1990) suggested that life experiences serve as a source for children’s sociodramatic play. Given this generalization, some deliberate arrangement needs to be made so that children get the opportunities to experientially learn from real (social) life, such as going to a grocery store, hospital, fast food restaurant, etc. Using those real (social) life experiences as a basis for the development of themes and topics of sociodramatic play, the teacher can incorporate literacy acts and artifacts as a natural part of sociodramatic play. For example, before going to a grocery store, children might be asked to generate a shopping list, estimate the prices, and count the money they need to bring with them.

Children’s oral language development was studied by Halliday (1973, 1978) from the functional-interactional perspective of language in use. Attention was focused on what language can do and what the child can do with language. According to Halliday (1975), as researchers describe how children “learn how to mean,” the meaning potential of a language, as well as the supporting semantic system, are viewed as realizing a higher level relations system. Specifically, that of the social semiotic, in just the same way as it is itself realized in the lexico-grammatical and phonological systems. A child who is learning his mother tongue is “learning how to mean” as he builds up his own meaning potential in language, is constructing for himself a social

semiotic. The social semiotic, expressed through language is constantly modified and reshaped as the child's environmental sociolinguistic develops and shapes his identity within his socio-culture context. Halliday (1975) organized language development into three phases: Phase I, the child's initial functional linguistic system; Phase II, rapid advances in vocabulary, structure, and dialogue of the linguistic system; and Phase III, the learning of the adult language. These phases suggest a tentative framework for a functional or sociolinguistic account of the early development of the mother tongue.

In Halliday's (1975) study, a sociolinguistic coding scheme was used in the analysis of children's use of oral and written language development of which Halliday identified as having three phases. In Phase I there is no grammar, which means there is no level of linguistic form (i.e., syntax, morphology, and vocabulary) between the content and the expression. Phase I consists of the meaning of the words and concepts represented and the ability to discern the phonemes (individual units of sound) in language. Halliday (1973) proposed that a child defines language in terms of its meaning potential and its usefulness. He described the child's growing awareness of the significance of language as a series of seven stages that ultimately leads to adult language. The first four functions (instrumental, regulatory, interactional, and personal) help children to satisfy physical, emotional, and social needs. These four functions can be identified as egocentric functions. The other three functions, heuristic, imaginative, and informative, help a child come to terms with his or her environment. These last three functions are less egocentric and are used to enlarge the child's world. The following are seven specific functions of a child's developing language:

1. Instrumental ("I want"): This is language directed at satisfying material needs. This language function is likely to include a general expression of desire. This can be some element

meaning simply “I want that toy,” as well as other expressions relating to specific desires, responses to questions such as “Do you want pizza?”

2. Regulatory (“Do as I tell you”): This is language aimed at controlling the behavior of others. The difference between the regulatory and the instrumental functions is that, in the instrumental, the focus is on the goods or services required and it does not matter who provides them whereas regulatory utterances are directed toward a particular individual, and it is the behavior of that individual that is to be influenced. Other commands in the form of suggestions such as “Stop that,” or “Let’s play this game,” also can be identified as regulatory functioning.

3. Interactional (“Me and you”): This is language aimed at getting along with other people. This language is used by the child to interact with those around him. This includes meanings like generalized greetings such as “hello”, “yes,” “Anybody want to paint?” and “Let’s play with the blocks.”

4. Personal (“Here I come”): This is language aimed at identifying and expressing the self. This includes expressions of personal feelings of participation and withdrawal, of interest, pleasure, disgust, and so forth, and extends later on to more specific intrusion of the child as a personality into the speech situation. Examples are “I like red” and “I’m bored.”

5. Heuristic (“Tell me why”): This is language aimed at exploring the world around the inside self. This eventually develops into the whole range of questioning forms the young child uses. The heuristic use of language is the demand for a name, which is the child’s way of categorizing the objects of the physical world; but it soon expands into a variety of more specific meanings. Examples of these functions are “Why are the people walking?” and “Are we there yet?”

6. Imaginative (“Let’s pretend”): This is language aimed at creating a world of one’s own. As well as moving into, taking over, and exploring the universe a child finds around him. The child uses language for creating a universe of his own, a world initially of pure sound, but which gradually turns into one of story and make-believe and let’s pretend, and ultimately moves into the realm of poetry and imaginative writing. Examples are “This can be our airplane” and “You be the robber and I’m the police.”

7. Informative (“I’ve got something to tell you”): This is language aimed at communicating new information (Halliday, 1973). This function of language does not emerge in the life of a child until considerably after the others because it is more dominant in the adult’s use of language. Examples are “This is a rectangle” and “Today is Wednesday.”

A sociolinguistic viewpoint theorizes that the learning of language consists of mastering certain basic functions of language. Halliday (1975) hypothesized that the informative function would develop last and that all other functions would appear as discrete, with each expression (and therefore each utterance) having just one function. His study revealed that the first four functions preceded the last three. The informative function was the last to develop because it is a derivative function that presupposes various special conditions, that is the beginning phases of dialogue. The mastery of all of the functions, with the possible exception of the informative function, is considered by Halliday to be both a necessary and a sufficient condition for the transition to the adult system that he identified as components of Phase III. The implication of Halliday’s study is that these functions of language convey universals of human culture that may, in turn, have further implications for an understanding of the development of language. Halliday’s study in 1975 revealed how language functions unfolded as one participant developed

language acquisition. Due to the few participants in Halliday's study, the setting, and the number of years passed since his work, a replication of Halliday's study was needful and, in fact, timely.

Phase II is characterized by two main features: (1) a shift in the functional orientation of language and (2) major and very rapid advances in vocabulary, structure, and dialogue. During this stage, grammar emerges as a level of linguistic "form" or lexology. As explained in Phase I, much of children's speech is restricted to one language function. On the other hand, in Phase II, a combination of functions is used by children in a single instance. Halliday (2003) identified this usage of language functions as plurifunctional, demonstrating a child's ability to mean two things at once, which shows an impressive development in language acquisition. Plurifunctional signifies the learning of vocabulary that engenders new meanings within the seven functions that allows multiple functions of language to be combined. Plurifunctional then, will impose definite requirements on the nature of linguistic structure, since the principle role of structure, is that of connecting one functional meaning to another. It is during this stage that the child has learned in any use of language he is being the observer or intruder. This means the child has made a crucial discovery during Phase II because he can both observe and interact with the environment. A child may be the observer when he uses language to serve the means of encoding his own experience of the phenomena around him, but he remains apart. The child is an intruder as he uses language to participate as a means of action in the context of situation. The child can be observer or intruder at the beginning of Phase II, but he will learn to be both observer and intruder as he approaches the end of Phase II.

Halliday (2003) stated that, by the end of Phase II, the child has entered adult language, Phase III, identified by Halliday as "functions of the adult system." The beginning of Phase III describes a child who has built up a system that is multi-stratal (content, form, expression, and

multifunctional, ideational, interpersonal, textual). At this point, the child is adding to what he or she already knows. The child's language development now consists in broadening the range of his meaning potential to cultural settings.

The implications of the sociolinguistic view for early literacy teaching and learning also were addressed by Halliday (1978) as he indicated that literacy is an extension of the functional potential of oral language. In order for children to learn to read and write, Halliday believed they must make sense of the functional extensions that writing and reading provide. Halliday stressed that language cannot be disassociated from meaning in that systemic functional linguistics consider function and semantics as the basis of human language and communicative activity. Systemic functional linguistics begin with an analysis of social context and then look at how language acts upon and is constrained and influenced by a social context. A key concept in Halliday's approach is the "context of situation" (Halliday, 2004, p. 87), which obtains through a systematic relationship between the social environment on the one hand and the functional organization of language on the other (Halliday, 2004).

Bessell-Browne (1985) made some use of Halliday's (1977) categories of language functions. Bessell-Browne used them to guide her in choosing appropriate literacy-related resources, and to examine the written language functions of children's writing during play. During the observations of the use of literacy in sociodramatic play areas in five kindergarten classrooms, Bessell-Browne (1985) recorded 10 types of literacy usage. The 105 observed children used literacy as follows:

1. an oral language substitute (mark-making followed by an explanation of the message),
2. a source of information (cookbook for ideas),

3. a tool for extending and exploring personal relationships (sharing feelings while exploring books or objects),
4. a tool for self-expression (to express sorrow at of a death),
5. a way to confirm identity (writing their names on things),
6. a means of presenting information (writing captions),
7. a tool for supporting memory (list-making),
8. a way to meet economic and business needs in their play (ordering from catalogs),
9. modelling (copying names from labels), and
10. a reflection of the official status of an activity (writing carefully because it was meaningful work).

Bessell-Browne concluded that children used literacy in a variety of ways that were meaningful to them in the play setting. The children also showed knowledge of many of the ways adults use literacy in a wider social context and incorporated them into their play indicating a developing understanding of the many uses of literacy in the real world.

Schrader's (1989) naturalistic study was based on assumptions derived from sociopsycholinguistic research: first, written language development occurs before schooling and second, written language develops in ways similar to oral language. The question guiding the research was, "In what ways do pre-kindergarten children use written language within the context of their spontaneous symbolic play?" The participants were children between the ages of 3 and 6 years old, attending a childhood education center. All children shared similar literacy experiences and were from middle-class families. For 3 weeks, the researcher recorded and videotaped children's naturally occurring behaviors (oral language, writing behaviors, and corresponding actions) in the housekeeping, post office, and animal hospital centers. Schrader



used a particular coding scheme due to the sociolinguistic theoretical approach to the study that analyzed the children's uses of written language according to Halliday's (1978) seven functions of oral language use. During data analysis, categories of language were coded according to Halliday's language functions. The results of this study demonstrated that children's use of written language functions was demonstrated not only as they wrote for real-life purposes, but also as they read their writing and discussed the meaning of their written language with their classmates and teacher. In addition, the researcher was to identify and categorize the children's written language productions according to Halliday's seven functions of language. The children in this study wrote for instrumental, regulatory, interactional, personal, and informational purposes.

According to Schrader's (1989) study, the data indicated that when literacy materials were available in a dramatic play center, children were able to use five of Halliday's (1978) seven functions of language for writing within the context of their play situations. Most importantly, the findings from this study provided empirical support for Halliday's contention that written language learning is an extension of the functional potential of oral language development. The data also supported Halliday's theory that the context of discourse (field, tenor, and mode) is influenced directly by the social context in which language is produced. In Schrader's study, in the housekeeping center, the subject matter or topic of the children's written discourse pertained to grocery shopping, bill paying, and personal letter writing. In the animal hospital, the children discussed illnesses, injuries, and prescriptions. The field, or topic of discourse, and the tenor, or relationships, between children can be easily manipulated by the play settings and props available. In conclusion, the data from this study demonstrated that dramatic play centers such as those described in this study, can elicit functional uses of language from

preschool children. This study provides support for teachers who choose to engage their young students in play experiences to enable them to learn how written language is meaningful and useful.

It is increasingly apparent that literacy is a complex social practice, deeply rooted in ways of interacting and using language that takes multiple forms and varies depending on the traditions and needs of particular speech communities (Gee, 1992; Heath, 1983). Heath (1983) stated that patterns of oral language use are developed extensively during preschool years, and lay the foundation for later literacy. Dickinson and Smith (1991) hypothesized that the oral language skills of primary importance to later school literacy tasks are decontextualized language skills, that is, language that conveys information distinct from context or that children need in order to understand and discuss concepts that are abstract. In many preschool classrooms, decontextualized language is exemplified in talk such as explanations, personal narratives, and pretend play where children must verbally move beyond the immediate conversational context to create and re-create events, analyze experiences, and share opinions and ideas.

Dickinson and Smith's (1991) study examined teacher-child interchanges at the level of single utterances with hopes of identifying types of interaction that encouraged or supported the development of decontextualized language skills. Participants were 4-year-old children enrolled in a Head Start program and other early childhood classrooms that serve children from low-income families. Data sources included teacher interviews, curriculum observations, child audiotapes, and teacher audiotapes. This work suggested that certain activity settings within preschool classrooms may function as maximally supportive contexts for literacy-related oral language development which are group times, free play, and at meals when teachers are present. The researchers noted that any setting could provide opportunities for facilitative language

interactions, but structural constraints increase the chance that interactions would occur during certain events. Other variables included in this study were teacher-specific variables such as level of education, years of experience, pedagogical beliefs, and classroom circumstances such as class size, age range of children, and languages spoken by children. Using a sociocognitive model of learning, researchers Dickinson and Smith (1991) hypothesized that particular classroom circumstances, pedagogical orientations, and activity settings would facilitate the types of talk (e.g., pretending, cognitively challenging interactions) known to be predictive of children's language and literacy development.

In conclusion, Dickinson and Smith, (1991), were able to improve their understanding of the factors that relate to the language environments created and sustained in classrooms. They found that the three general areas of classroom life (length of school day, number of students, and specific qualities of teachers) influence interaction in positive or negative ways. Teacher pedagogy that is centered on facilitating children's social and emotional development through interaction (e.g., pretending with children) and through facilitating literacy development contributes positively to the overall classroom language environment. There is a need to recruit more highly educated teachers because of high quality interaction that students may experience. Preschool teachers should become aware of the particular types of talk that are known to be facilitative of later language and literacy development; the teachers in this study who reported spending more time in small group activities engaged in more cognitively challenging conversations with children.

Developmental trends in young children's use of communicative strategies to structure and create shared meaning in spontaneous social pretend play were investigated by Farver (1992). Although many studies pertaining to pretend play have clearly documented children's

communicative abilities in play (Farver, 1992), it is unclear how such communication develops with age. Developmental differences in the type of communicative strategies children use to structure play as they become older, more experienced players and how they fit those messages into sequenced episodes to coordinate complex social pretend play had not been studied to this point. Farver (1992) investigated social pretend play dialogues of 40 children ranging from ages 2 to 5 years to understand how the use of communicative strategies developed with age, and to examine how these strategies related to children's social pretend play experiences. The sample was homogeneous and all subjects came from intact, White, middle-class families. The guiding question was "How do children of different ages use communicative strategies to establish, structure, and sustain social pretend play?"

Children were observed and audiotape-recorded for 20 minutes in same-sex and same-age dyads while playing with a *Fisher Price*<sup>TM</sup> camping set, a 15-piece toy designed to stimulate fantasy play. Transcriptions of children's play dialogues were audiotaped and transcriptions were segmented into play episodes. An episode was defined as an interactive sequence occurring between two children containing three or more exchanges of continuous discourse with a shared theme or topic. An episode began when either child verbalized about an object, action, activity, or feeling state, and terminated when the partner failed to address the topic of the preceding turn; either partner's attention was directed away from the play activity for longer than 30 seconds; or either child physically moved away from the play activity. One hundred pretend play episodes were randomly selected and examined for duration of children's use of communicative strategies. Duration was coded for the number of conversational turns within an episode. Seven communicative strategies identified by Corsaro (1986) framed the investigation. Eight strategies

were scored for the number of times each occurred during a specific turn at talk within each episode.

1. Paralinguistic cues: Changes in intonation and pitch to mark fantasy and the animation of objects.
2. Descriptions of action: Statements accompanying ongoing activity or describing past action or future action.
3. Elements accompanying ongoing activity or describing past or future action.
4. Repetitions: Repeating partner's prior utterances.
5. Semantic tying: Adding new semantic elements to partner's previous contribution.
6. Calls for attention: Utterances used to gain partner's attention.
7. Directives: Declarative statements used to control partner's action.
8. Tags: Verbal devices placed at the end of a conversational turn to elicit a response or acknowledgment.

Each pretend play episode was coded using a three part scale adopted from Howes and Unger (1992).

1. Simple social pretend play was coded if children engaged in social play and both children performed pretend acts.
2. Associative social pretend play was coded if the children engaged in social play and there was a script, but no complementary pretend roles.
3. Cooperative pretend play was coded if the children engaged in social play; there was a script, and complementary pretend roles.

A Scheffe test (Farver, 1992) used to compare the age groups showed that 2-year olds used repetitions more often than all other age groups. Three-year olds used paralinguistic cues

more often than 4- and 5-year olds. Two- and 3-year olds used more calls for attention than 5-year olds. Three-, 4- and 5-year olds used more semantic ties than 2-year olds. Four and 5-year olds used more descriptions of action and tags than 2- and 3-year olds. All groups used directives. The Scheffe test further indicated that children used descriptions of action and semantic ties more frequently in cooperative social pretend play, whereas directives and repetitions were more common in simple social pretend play. Children used tags in associative and cooperative pretend play more often than in simple social pretend play. The findings of this study demonstrated that children across the four age groups used communicative strategies to structure pretend play episodes. All children were able to create shared meaning spontaneously during interactive play episodes from the shared knowledge about everyday activities they brought to the play situation, and by responding to, and building on, their partner's ideas and actions as the play unfolded.

#### Literacy-Enriched Play Centers: Incorporating Literate Roles in Sociodramatic Play

Language, pretend play, and learning have a complex relationship. Social pretend play contexts provide unique opportunities for young children to become adept at communicating their ideas. Clarke (1983) explained that in pretend play, young children acquire new words to convey meaning that is often beyond their existing repertoires. Because pretend play is representational, children learn how to use gestures and words to designate real events and/or persons (Pellegrini, 1983). In pretend play, Pellegrini (1982, 1984, 1991) explained that children used elaborated language. They define pronouns linguistically, modified nouns with adjectives, and used causal and temporal conjunctions in order to make their imaginative suggestions intelligible to their play partners. Thus, social pretend play provided experiences for children to

practice and master their communicative competence. In play, children are continually refining social-cognitive concepts. Children's play ideas often conflict with those of their peers. In the process of negotiating pretend scripts and incorporating their partner's suggestions, young children learn to accommodate different perspectives. Thus, social pretend play provides an educational setting for young children to refine their ideas and communicative skills to create shared meaning.

### *Building Language through Play*

Play is a time in which much fantasy and collaborative spontaneous story-telling occurs (Ahn & Filipenko, 2007). By using language during play to describe other worlds, events, and characters, children begin to experiment with “decontextualized language, how to assume multiple perspectives, and how to resolve the conflict between what was meant, what was said, and what was understood” (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 62). Ahn and Filipenko explored narratives told by 5-year-old kindergarten children in their classroom environment, both individually and with their peers. The researchers attempted to understand how children think and act in the contexts in which they live through their stories; they posited that narrative inquiry provides the dynamic and interactive process needed to explore the experiences of children. Specifically, they considered how young children represent themselves, their relationships, their experiences, and their environment in the narratives they create; the themes, issues, or concerns that emerge from children's narratives; and, how young children represented themselves and others in the roles and scripts that they created in their imaginary play and visual texts. The researchers collected data through video taping and audio taping the children as they engaged in narrative talk. The researchers attended the kindergarten classroom every day as participant observers for a period

of three months. During that time, 30 narratives were recorded. Narratives were collected in two different categories: child descriptions of his or her visual texts, and episodes of imaginary play. Field notes were recorded and visual texts were collected. Three themes emerged from the children's narratives: (1) engendering, (2) crossing texts and re-configuration, and (3) reconstruction and re-imagination. The theme of engendering emerged from observations of the ways in which children's narratives focused on self or I. Children created an image of self as a social and moral human being through interactions with peers both in imaginary play contexts and in their visual texts. The crossing texts and re-configuration theme concerned the ways in which children negotiated their roles (self) with others. Such negotiations may not go smoothly and thus during these contested negotiations, the children must reconstruct their notion of themselves, that is, the children must begin to see themselves in relation to others (re-configuring the I to We) (Ahn & Filipenko, 2007). The third theme (re-construction/re-imagination) is concerned with the ways in which children used narrative both in imaginary episodes of sociodramatic play and in their visual texts to grapple with abstract, philosophical, and moral questions.

In Ahn and Filipenko's (2007) study, the narratives of imaginary play, created by children revealed the complex journey children take in the process of forming self-identity. Children used cultural themes to construct meaning about themselves as individuals and about themselves as social beings. The narratives described children's ways of seeing and thinking and offered insight into their meaning-making processes in a natural setting. Ahn and Filipenko utilized children's play and drawings, partly on the basis that children often chose to draw and seemed to enjoy the act of drawing, and the drawings ensured that the interpretation of data such as drawing was based on the children's perceptions. Ahn and Filipenko (2007) stated that future



research needs to look more closely at what children contribute to the narrative and how children's contributions influence their way of constructing the world.

In recent years there has been some controversy regarding whether children from low-income homes have deficits in sociodramatic play or simply exhibit differences in play (Cortez, 2000). As mentioned earlier in the review of literature, interest in this topic is due in part to Smilansky's (1968) work in which she indicated that children who lived in low socioeconomic status homes in Israel displayed lower levels of sociodramatic play than did middle-class children. Cortez mentioned there are two paramount factors that arise when children engage in a sociodramatic play episode. First, as children organize the play episode, they use language. The second factor includes the shared knowledge that the participants in sociodramatic play must have in order to maintain the play episode. Cortez (2000) studied the language of Mexican American children during sociodramatic play in a pre-kindergarten classroom. The principal sources of data included videotaped observations, written field notes, a field diary, and informal interviews with the children's parents. The researcher videotaped children during free play or center time for an average of 45 minutes daily. The learning center chosen or other areas chosen to videotape was dependent on the development of sociodramatic play episodes.

One of the major findings in this study by Cortez (2000) was when Mexican American children had the opportunity to engage in sociodramatic play, the richness of their language was revealed in their play. As the preschoolers in this study participated in sociodramatic play, they learned to establish better relationships with each other, to solve problems with their imagination, and to expand their language. As children created stories during sociodramatic play, they learned to use different functions of language such as sequence of events, which also means the creation or elaboration of a story line related to literature that is required of children in

school. Children's dialogue during sociodramatic play reflected the classifications of language, such as reporting on present and past experiences, logical reasoning, predicting, projecting, and imagining. The results of this study showed that Mexican American children, when given the opportunity to engage in sociodramatic play, can display different language functions that are needed for the development of early literacy skills and also encompass their cognitive development. In this study, Mexican American children were able to use their funds of knowledge to create elaborate sociodramatic play episodes.

### *Building Language through Play Objects and Printed Materials*

It generally has been acknowledged that the availability of certain play objects and props will, to some extent, determine the kinds of play in which children engage. An empirical study by Neuman and Roskos (1990) examined the effects of literacy-enriched play centers on children's literacy demonstration and showed that sociodramatic play in the place where literacy acts and artifacts are made available and readily accessible to children is dominated by literacy demonstrations. The teacher can enrich children's sociodramatic play for the promotion of literacy by providing sufficient, functional, relevant literacy-promoting play objects and props such as stationary and envelopes, mailboxes, stamps, appointment books, assorted forms, and stationary. Even provision of prop boxes may be of great help (Mayhre, 1993).

When print becomes an integral part of children's sociodramatic play, literacy development is promoted in a number of ways. These ways can be defined as categories of prior knowledge that have been constructed at home that children bring to their sociodramatic play experiences. The first category is children's knowledge of written registers. During sociodramatic play episodes, children have a chance to consolidate and demonstrate what they

have learned about the everyday uses of written language. The language one reads when reading books and written texts of different genres is not the same language one speaks or hears. Written language differs in specific and identifiable ways from oral language (Chafe & Danielewicz, 1986). Developing readers and writers therefore need to learn the different linguistic registers of the written texts they will read and write. Written language differs from oral language along a continuum reflecting degree of decontextualization and formality as well as genre-related style. Different syntax patterns and vocabulary are found in written texts as compared to the oral texts of speech. Some research has been done that records what others have claimed: that young children learn these registers from being read to (Pappas, 1991; Pappas & Brown, 1988; Sulzby, 1985).

In their study of 25 linguistically precocious children, Crain-Thoreson and Dale (1992) found significant relationships between exposure to home and school instruction in letter names and sounds and children's knowledge of print conventions and invented spellings. Similarly, Hess, Holloway, Price, and Dickson (1982) found that children who received instruction from parents in letter naming score higher on tests of letter recognition than those who did not. This play involves the phonological, syntactic, and semantic aspects of language. By age two, language play becomes quite sophisticated. Recent research in early literacy and peer culture suggested that sociodramatic play is of special importance to the development of children's social as well as language learning, as its symbolic, abstract, social nature is compatible with the cognitive operations in literacy behavior in a literate society of today (Christie, 1980; Pallegriani, Destefano & Thompson, 1983; Roskos, 1988).

According to Dewey's (1938) interpretation of development, language learning takes place not as a series of lessons or drills in isolated skills but as a social necessity. Vygotsky

(1986), as well, believed language learning in every culture takes place through everyday interactions and shared experiences between adult and child. Obviously, in different cultures the interactions and words differ, but the process remains remarkably similar (Chomsky, 1986). From the common experience of going to a supermarket or some other place in the community or school, themes for sociodramatic play, murals, and other group projects emerge. These, in turn, give children still more to talk about, listen to, and express through play, drawing, painting, and writing (Morrow & Schickedanz, 2006).

Naturalistic observations (Neuman & Roskos, 1991) of children's spontaneous sociodramatic play indicated that children often incorporate literate behaviors as part of the play scripts they invent. However, as Morrow (1991) found in her study of 35 middle-class kindergarten classrooms, many school settings in the early 1990s were not well designed to facilitate literacy behaviors. In her sample, few literacy materials were easily available for children's use, and teachers did little to promote voluntary literacy activities during play. Taken together, these findings evoked considerable interest on the part of educational researchers in developing literacy-enriched play centers by adding general literacy materials such as pencils and paper, as well as theme-related literacy props (e.g., stamps, envelopes, appointment books, and phone books for an "office" play center). A major premise underlying this work is that play interventions can have a direct impact on written language development by providing opportunities for children to read and write in contextualized situations (Christie, 1991; Hall, 1991).

Naturalistic observations of children's play in literacy-enriched play centers indicate that children display considerable knowledge of literacy functions and strategies (Neuman & Roskos, 1993, 1997; Shrader, 1991). Children's use of functional knowledge and strategies is impacted,

however, by factors such as age (Stone & Christie, 1996), the familiarity and complexity of the literacy routine being played out (Neuman & Roskos, 1997), the specific roles taken by peers (Stone & Christie, 1996; Vukelich, 1993) and by adults (Neuman & Roskos, 1993). Process-oriented research in relation between emergent writing and other sign systems such as drawing, constructive art, and drama has received increased attention over the years. Several researchers (e.g., Dyson, 1995; Galla, 1994; Leland & Harste, 1994; Rowe, 1994, 1998) argued that emergent literacy should be broadly conceptualized as the ways children make meanings in a variety of sign systems. Although the multimodal nature of emergent writing is not a new area of study, Kress (1997) argued that it is now more important because of the advent of new communication technologies where written language is less central--a point underscored by Labbo's (1996) description of the multimodal texts generated by emergent writers on the computer.

Process-oriented studies of literacy enriched play centers have demonstrated that there is considerable variation in the nature of play (Neuman & Roskos, 1993; Stone & Christie, 1996) as themes, materials, and adult intervention change. "Play centers are not a single consistent intervention day after day, but instead are complex ecological niches where the context of play activity is socially constructed by participants in face to face interaction" (Christie, & Roskos, 2000, p. 63). Neuman and Roskos's (1997) analyses suggested that these play centers provide support for literacy learning through (a) the presence of people who share expertise and provide assistance, (b) feedback from others, (c) access to literacy tools and related supplies, (d) multiple options for activity, and (e) problem-solving situations.

## Enriching Dramatic-Play Contexts with Literacy Materials to Enhance Engagement

According to Rowe (1998), the link between literacy and play is a topic that has been investigated from a number of perspectives by both literacy researchers and psychologists. In some sense, the significance of research on play lies in its pervasiveness in our culture. Though data addressing the actual frequency of play for children in the United States is limited both by the small number of studies and by the methodology used, existing research (Dunn & Dale, 1984; Haight & Miller, 1993; Miller & Garvey, 1984) estimates that 2- and 3-year olds spend somewhere between 10 and 20% of their time engaged in dramatic play at school.

A number of studies have documented the positive relationships between home environment and IQ and language development. According to Christie (1990), dramatic play occurs when children adopt roles and use make-believe transformations to act out stories. For example, several children may take on the roles of family members and go on a pretend picnic or they may become superheroes and act out fantasy adventures. This type of play, which reaches its peak between the ages of four and six, has long been used by preschool and kindergarten teachers as a means for promoting children's social and emotional adjustment (Christie, 1990). Previous research on emergent literacy has revealed sociodramatic play can also make important contributions to children's early reading and writing development. Looking at the emergent literacy research through a sociocultural frame (Purcell-Gates, 1986, 1995), researchers have documented that what young children learn about written language before schooling is constrained by the ways in which important others in their families and social communities use print (Clay, 1976; Heath, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Teale, 1986).

As young children participate in literacy events within their homes and communities, they learn that print is a language signifier, about the ways in which print represents meaning, the

code, and the conventions of encoding and decoding the print (Clay, 1975; Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982). Within this, young children learn about the natures (e.g., different levels of decontextualization of language), the characteristics (e.g., the genre-related linguistic features of written text like syntax and wording), and the language forms (e.g., the form of personal letters, grocery list, or written stories) that are used within their cultural environments (Butler & Clay, 1979; Goodman, 1984; Holdaway, 1979).

Several studies note differential vocabulary knowledge as it was used in the rendering of written registers (i.e., pretend reading or rereading familiar text). Also, many studies have noted positive relationships between vocabulary knowledge and home literacy practices, especially shared reading (Snow et al., 1991; Whitehurst & Angell, 1994). Exposure to low-frequency words found in books and participation in the oral language that surrounds book reading is suggested as the operative factors in the positive relationship between being read to and vocabulary knowledge. Many studies have examined qualitative aspects of the shared-reading event for various effects on children's language development. Senechal et al. (1995) found significant effects for the level of involvement by the child during reading. Children who only listened scored lower on comprehension and on production of new words than those children who participated actively by pointing and/or labeling. Senechal et al. (1995) found that children of parents who asked more open-ended questions, function/attribute questions, and expansions, responded appropriately to children's attempts to answer these questions, and decreased their frequency of straight reading and questions that could be answered by pointing and had significantly higher mean length of utterances, higher frequency phrases, and lower frequency of single words.

Print knowledge, which describes what children know about environmental print, produces experiences with scribble writing, invented spelling, and emergent reading in contextualized situations. The documentation of young children's developing print knowledge during the preschool years comprises a substantial amount of emergent literacy research (Bissex, 1980; Goodman & Altwerger, 1981; Lomax & McGee, 1987). Most researchers suggest that print knowledge results from explicit focusing on and/or teaching by parents within the context of home literacy activities (Baker et al., 1998). Findings of research completed by Purcell-Gates (1996) concluded that children's print knowledge was significantly related to the frequencies with which others in their home read and wrote texts at more complex written discourse levels and to the frequencies with which parents focused their children onto print during such activities as writing out invitations or greeting cards, reading stories, or helping their children learn to write their names or individual letters.

### Chapter Summary

Children need the time and opportunity for play, especially for sociodramatic play, which requires the involvement of other children. Vygotsky (1978) believed this type of play led to language use and symbolic thought. The bulk of children's language learning will take place as children engage in centers of interest both indoors and outdoors with the help from teachers, adults or other children. When children can take the initiative and make choices and decisions about the activities they will engage in, learning is fostered. Children use language to help them organize the activities they have chosen, and who use words to plan what to do and how to do it.

Rowe (1998) described four lines of research investigating the connection between dramatic play and literacy, each differing in focus. In one line of research, educational



researchers interested in emergent literacy development (e.g., Hall, 1987; Morrow & Rand, 1991; Neuman & Roskos, 1991; Vukelich, 1991) used naturalistic observations to describe the ways children take on the literate roles of readers and writers during dramatic play. These researchers were interested in the ways that children pretend to read and write as part of their dramatic play. A second line of research, rooted in psychology, explored the global relationship between the basic representational abilities used in play, reading, and writing by correlating measures of representational ability in play settings with measures of children's literacy behaviors (Galda, Pellegrini, & Cox, 1989; Pellegrini & Galda, 1991). A third line of research rooted in cognitive psychology investigated the role of adult-directed, dramatic play training for improving children's comprehension of the texts they read or heard (Pellegrini & Galda, 1982). The fourth approach studied the play-literacy connection and used ethnographic research techniques to investigate the manner in which one group of well-read-to-preschoolers spontaneously made connections between sociodramatic play and the meanings they encountered in books. Consequently, Rowe (1998) went on to investigate the literate potentials of book-related dramatic play and its connection to literacy-learning processes. This fourth line of inquiry informs the present study. This study utilized the case study approach to explore young children's self-selected sociodramatic play and how various literacy-related materials impacted children's language and social interaction. Although there have been many studies on literacy and dramatic play, few studies have explored sociodramatic play and the potentials for oral language development among preschool children. This current study involves observing preschool children's use of language while engaged in sociodramatic play. Observations will focus on the social context of learning, literacy-related materials used by children and adults

during sociodramatic play, and the presence of Halliday's functions of language in children's dialogue as they play (see Figure 3).

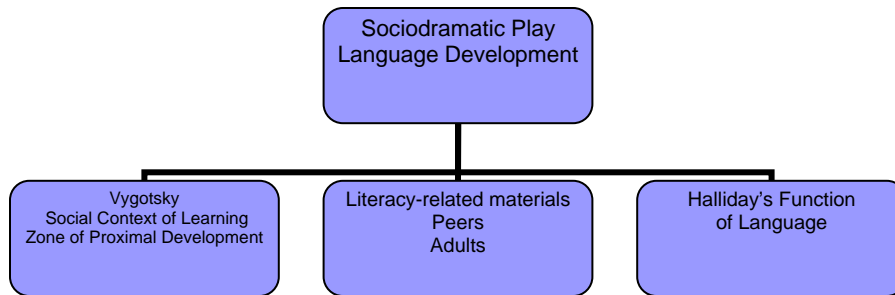


Figure 3. Framework for the study.

The theories support the theoretical framework and central focus of literature review of this study in three ways. First, Vygotsky's theory that learning is a social process, therefore, a qualitative approach would capture children's language in a natural setting. During this social process of learning, dialogue and the various roles of adults and language plays in instruction and cognitive growth can be observed. Also, the talk between the adult and child is a critical factor influencing language development. Secondly, literacy-related materials, adults, and peers provide the support needed to produce language that serves as many purposes in a playful setting. Last, Halliday (1978) stated function and semantics are the basis of human language and communicative activity. When exploring children's language, Halliday (1975) suggested to first analyze the social context then look at how language acts upon, is constrained and influenced by the social context. Whatever is taking place in the social environment is connected to the language functions used.

Pinnell (1985) suggested that what we can do with language is worth observing, assessing, and teaching. Pinnell maintained that teachers should have a productive way to monitor language development and observe their children in a systematic way to determine the range of language functions used in the classroom. The opportunities to create multiple forms of language expression are influenced when preschool children are provided literacy-related materials, time and space to use in a variety of ways during sociodramatic play. Chapter III describes the methodology used to set up this study whereby literacy-related materials, interactions with peers and adults during sociodramatic play initiated the creation of opportunities for language acquisition among preschool children.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this case study was to explore the interactions of preschool children with literacy-related materials, peers, and adults as they engage in sociodramatic play. Research questions were the following:

1. How does sociodramatic play with literacy-related materials create opportunities for language acquisition at the preschool level?

2. How does social interaction through sociodramatic play experience among preschool children foster language acquisition as they are interacting with their peers?

3. How do adults influence language expression of preschool children during sociodramatic play?

#### Qualitative Research and the Tradition of Inquiry

The term qualitative research encompasses several approaches to research that are, in some respects, quite different from one another. Yet, all qualitative approaches have two things in common. First, they focus on a phenomenon (in this setting it is sociodramatic play) that occurs in a natural setting, that is, in the “real world.” Second, they involve studying those phenomena and a somewhat possible complexity of subject matter. Qualitative researchers recognize that the event studied has many dimensions and layers, so, instead of simplifying what they observe, they attempt to portray the issue in its multifaceted form (Guba & Lincoln, 1988). A case study is one method used in qualitative research, as mentioned by Creswell (1998),

A case study is an exploration of a “bounded system” or a case (or multiple cases) over time using detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context. This bounded system is bounded by time and place, and it is the case being studied--a program, an event, an activity, or individuals. (p. 61)

The rationale for conducting the study reported here using a qualitative research approach was to reveal the nature of multiple perspectives held by different individuals, with each of these perspectives having equal validity, or truth. A case study may be suitable for learning more about situations that have been poorly understood. Case studies may assist with providing information concerning periods of change due to certain circumstances or interventions that may prove to be useful for generating or providing support for a hypothesis.

Hatch (2002) revealed that “defining the boundaries or specifying the unit of analysis is the key decision point in case study design” (p. 30). In this study, the case or bounded system is preschool children engaged in sociodramatic play in a preschool setting. The observations capture snapshots of time during a 6-week period in which I observed the interactions of children and the multiple functions of language they used while interacting with literacy-related materials, peers, and adults. As mentioned in chapter I, overall, there is a strong connection between the development a child undergoes early in life and the level of success that a child will experience later in life. When young children are provided with an environment rich in language and literacy interactions, and full of opportunities to listen and to use language constantly, they can acquire the essential building blocks for successful literacy and language skills (U.S. Department Education, 2002).

### *Setting and Participants.*

The setting of this study was the Child Study Center (CSC) located on the campus of a 4-year public liberal arts university of about 3,000 students. The university is located in a suburban

area of a mid-sized city in the southeast. The quiet community surrounding the campus includes a population of about 5,000 people. The Child Study Center, accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), acknowledges developmentally appropriate practices as the cornerstone of instruction as well as active engagement in hands-on learning, literacy activities, and play. I was granted several opportunities to observe students engaged in sociodramatic play because play is a major component of the NAEYC curriculum and CSC. At the center, children were busy exploring their indoor and outdoor environments and interacting with other children and adults. Parents, as well as student observers, were welcomed at any time to the Child Study Center, except during naptime, to observe, interact, and complete course assignments.

This project included 21 children between 43 and 62 months of age who attended CSC part- or full-time (see Table 1). All children in the study were identified by letter initials and were recorded in videotapes. Based upon annual household incomes, the teachers reported that children were of middle class (MC) families of which all were very involved with classroom activities at the CSC and in the community. According to the teachers, most of the parents attended the school meetings and often discussed community events and promoted community involvement and attendance. The demographic information about each student informed my knowledge of the participants.

Table 1

*Demographics of Student Participants*

Name	Age in Months	Gender	# of Siblings	Birth Order	Ethnicity	SES
JB	46	F	0	Only Child	White	Middle Class (MC)
AK	64	F	2	1 <sup>st</sup>	White	MC
CC	66	M	2	2 <sup>nd</sup>	White	MC
CD	70	M	3	3 <sup>rd</sup>	White	MC
HD	56	F	2	1 <sup>st</sup>	White	MC
CJ	55	F	0	Only Child	White	MC
TE	45	M	2	2 <sup>nd</sup>	White	MC
RF	55	F	2	2 <sup>nd</sup>	White	MC
OG	44	F	2	2 <sup>nd</sup>	White	MC
FG	46	F	2	1 <sup>st</sup>	White	MC
JG	65	F	3	3 <sup>rd</sup>	White	MC
MJ	43	M	4	4 <sup>th</sup>	Black	MC
WL	66	M	2	2 <sup>nd</sup>	White	MC
McM	64	F	3	2 <sup>nd</sup>	White	MC
MM	73	F	0	Only Child	White	MC
OP	62	F	0	Only Child	White	MC
CR	52	M	0	Only Child	White	MC
FB	57	F	0	Only Child	Hispanic	MC
WS	58	M	0	Only Child	White	MC
KW	53	F	0	Only Child	Asian	MC
BW	62	F	3	2 <sup>nd</sup>	White	MC
Average	57.2					

The center consisted of two large classrooms. One classroom was located to the left after entering the front entrance and a second, larger classroom, was located at the back of the building. Other rooms in the building were a restroom, a kitchen, and a large closet area for storage. The uniqueness of the building design is the open view provided by large windows that make up most of the building's structure. Next to the building is a huge, fenced-in playground that includes a sandbox, swings, a slide, and a sidewalk so that children may ride scooters and bicycles. The children's cubbyholes in the hallway always were stuffed with different shapes and

colors of papers that included an array of drawings, objects such as binoculars and musical instruments created from empty toilet tissue rolls and tissue boxes, and items such as sticks and rocks collected while taking a nature walk

This research study was conducted in the large classroom of the facility. Figure 4 is a diagram of the room's design. The classroom included a variety of centers, including those for dramatic play, blocks, exploration, sand play, manipulatives, art, writing, and a computer. The large open rug area (16.5 feet x 14.6 feet) was a favorite spot for shared reading, instruction, student interaction, and sociodramatic play.

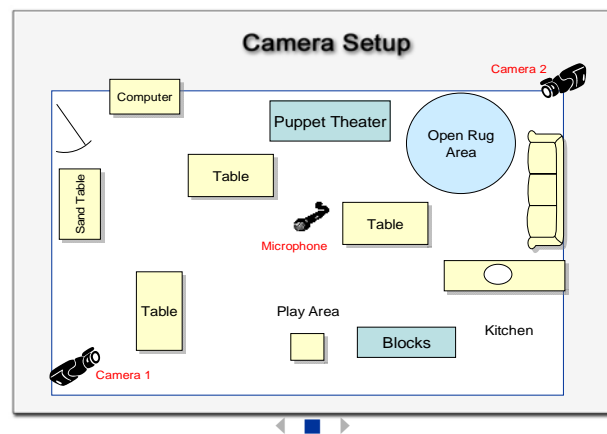


Figure 4. Diagram of classroom.

Except for the hours between 12:30 and 2:00, which was naptime, anyone was able to see children at CSC actively playing with blocks, singing, listening to read-alouds, drawing, and even cooking. Much of the morning schedule, from 7:45 a.m. until 10:20 a.m., consisted of approximately 20 children gathering in the larger classroom to engage in various centers, with sociodramatic play being one of those. Later in the morning, whole group instruction for each age group took place from 10:30 a.m. to 11:15 a.m. The children were separated so that learning



activities were appropriate for the various ages. The curriculum emphasized the importance of children's ability to express creativity in a variety of ways. Any type of worksheet or activity sheet was considered by the teachers to be inappropriate in this learning environment. In order to capture sociodramatic play among participants of multiple ages, I visited the center before the children separated for instructional time. Data were collected 3 days a week (Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday) for 6 weeks between the hours of 8:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.

### Sampling

Two samples were involved in this study, a student sample and a teacher sample. All student participants were selected from CSC.

#### *Student Sample*

The sociodramatic play events recorded in the videos for this study were snapshots of time during which children were fully engaged in their play seeming to do what children do best, playing and pretending. Roskos and Christie (2001) revealed sociodramatic play as a time when educators can view how play enables children to make sense of their world, develop social and cultural understandings, and express their thoughts and feelings. The student sample consisted of children who engaged in sociodramatic play events during the morning hours of center time and free exploration (8:00-10:00 a.m.) on Tuesday, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. All students were from middle-class families; initials were used for student participants of whom 14 were females and 7 were males. Children's ages ranged from 43 months to 73 months with the average age of the children being 57.2 months of age. The ethnicity of the participants was 18 White, 1 Hispanic, 1 Asian, and 1 Black. Out of the 21 participants, 8 children had no siblings, 8 had one

sibling, 4 had two siblings, and 1 had three siblings (see Table 1 for demographics of participants).

### *Teacher Sample*

Two female teachers of the preschool classroom participated in one structured interview and collaborated with me concerning literacy-related materials to be placed in the dramatic play center during Phase I of the data collection. Both teachers were Caucasian and held degrees in child development from the university supporting the center. Both participated in continuous professional development by attending state, local, and national meetings. Mrs. S. Fancher (SF) was the teacher of the 3- and 4-year-old children and had taught at the center for 6 years. She was less than 30 years of age. Mrs. B. Walton (BW), a veteran teacher with 25 years of teaching experience, was the teacher of the 4- and 5-year-old children. She was over 50 years of age. Pseudonyms were used for all participants.

### Role of Researcher

While conducting this study, I was an instructor of language arts and early childhood methods courses at the university where the CSC was located. Prior to my employment at the university, I was a first grade teacher for 9 years at a local elementary school. As a teacher, I valued children's active learning styles and allotted much time for exploration in my classroom. When I transitioned to higher education and began doctoral studies, my focus on teaching methods and strategies began to address the theoretical constructs of teaching and developmentally appropriate practices in elementary classrooms. While some of this conversion

in my thinking was credited to my doctoral studies most of it stems from the birth of my child, Nylah.

During Nylah's preschool years, I observed and recorded her engagement in sociodramatic play activities in her preschool classroom (Nylah attended CSC for 2 years) and at home. It was also during this time that I began to finalize my dissertation topic on sociodramatic play. I realized that communicating through spoken and written language was one of the most important skills a child can ever achieve. Children develop and maintain social attachments that will support them a lifetime--first within the family, then beyond--that help them learn to understand themselves as well as others. My experiences led me to believe the home environment plays a vital role in helping students develop language, vocabulary skills, and the ability to articulate effectively. As a result, I have made a conscious effort to surround Nylah with authentic literacy activities since birth. While searching for preschool facilities for Nylah it was important for my daughter to be actively involved in literacy activities similar to those emphasized in the home; likewise, these activities were salient during several visits to CSC. In my quest to provide literacy rich experiences in the home, however, one experience was not noticeable in the home prior to enrollment at CSC.

Shortly after attending the CSC as a 3-year-old, Nylah was observed on several occasions at home, and at school, acting out sociodramatic play events. The dramatic play center was her favorite center at preschool and dramatic play was Nylah's favorite playtime event at home. I enjoyed watching Nylah at school and at home pretending to be a princess or a bride in a wedding, and even calling the doctor about the doll that was sick. Most of all, I was astonished by the vocabulary Nylah used to express her thoughts and feelings and the idea that she was

encouraged to talk and explore language during sociodramatic play moments; a time during which I saw and heard Nylah's most creative expressions of language.

Nylah, at the time of this study, was 6 years of age and in first grade. I often remember when I had to help her put on dress-up clothes before she had a tea party with her dolls and me. That has changed somewhat. Sociodramatic play now reflects how Nylah pretends to be the teacher, and the dolls and I are the students. Nylah tells us, "Okay class, read with expression and fluency." For the past 3 years, I have tried to pinpoint what elements are vital for encouraging, enhancing, and developing language during sociodramatic play. The interest in sociodramatic play, unfortunately, does not last forever, and I am committed to sharing with the education community the importance of sociodramatic play in early childhood settings. It is a pleasant feeling to know that Nylah engaged in sociodramatic play prior to attending kindergarten because current changes in accountability and assessment in public schools discourage sociodramatic play in most elementary school settings. This research study attempts to shed some insight in the area of language development to indicate that sociodramatic play is a natural way for children to build early language skills and so, its implementation in the classroom is important.

### Research Design

I developed a pilot study to explore how various tools (play objects, props, etc.) and materials might enhance language development during sociodramatic play. The purpose of the study was to explore the interactions of preschool children with literacy-related materials as they engaged in dramatic play centers. Participant selection was based on those students who acquired a consistent interest in the play theme and play tools presented at that time of the study. I focused

on eight children who interacted with those tools during morning and afternoon times of sociodramatic play.

Due to the need to continue current research on the topic of sociodramatic play and language and to guide eventual dissertation research, the pilot study utilized the case study approach to explore the relationships between language development and young children's sociodramatic play. The findings from the pilot study were as follows:

- children engaged in various types of dialogue in the form of questions, statements, and commands that were linked to oral and receptive languages exchanged during sociodramatic play episodes.
- adults took on major roles while interacting with children during sociodramatic play.
- the language children used during sociodramatic play was influenced by play tools included in the dramatic play center.

During the pilot study, I discovered the importance of being selective in choosing various play tools and objects as “tools for talk” to be included in preschool dramatic play centers. For the pilot study I utilized case study methodology to explore sociodramatic play with literacy-related materials. Multiple sources of information were compiled. Information obtained was presented in an effort to better explore and interpret themes of literacy events as well as to provide additional perspectives in regard to theories for creating sociodramatic play centers valuing interactions among students. After reading several examples of case studies, one should conclude that the uses of the term *case* convey the intensity and depth of inquiry involved in case study research. Qualitative researchers strongly suggest that a case study researcher begins to analyze the data during the data collection process (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). For this reason, I began the dissertation study with “wide open eyes.” The research design for this project

describes an environment that shows how children use their language and literacy-related materials in their play situations. The design also investigates how sociodramatic play, and interaction with adults, peers, and literacy-related materials provide opportunities for children's language development.

### Recruitment Procedures, Access, and Permissions

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this research study prior to data collection. Each participant or parent received a letter of recruitment explaining the research study in detail (See Appendix A). After agreeing to participate in the research study, consent forms were signed by the parent before collecting data. Other ethical procedures such as the right to privacy (pseudonyms used instead of participants' and school site's actual names) and honesty with professional colleagues were addressed in consent forms (See Appendix B). The researcher visited the research site according to the schedule discussed with the teachers of the school. The data, including videotapes and transcriptions, were stored in a locked metal cabinet and will be destroyed later. Participants were identified by pseudonyms in all transcripts, and participants' names were not stored or noted on the data. The investigator was the only person to whom the data was accessible.

### Data Collection

#### *Research Design*

Qualitative researchers often use multiple forms of data in a single study; such was the method for this current study. They might use observations, interviews, objects, artifacts, audiovisual materials, electronic documents, and anything else that can help them answer their

research questions. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), “Many qualitative studies are characterized by an emerging design. Data collected early in the investigation often influence the kinds of data that the researcher subsequently gathers” (p. 143). A characteristic that most qualitative studies share is the reliance on observations and interviews as types of data collection. Because this study focused on young children and their interaction in “play settings,” observations were instrumental aspects of the data collection. By observing children’s sociodramatic play, I was able to record field notes for later analysis. I also observed children’s demonstration of unique talents, intelligences, peer interactions, relationships, interests, thinking abilities, and oral language patterns.

#### *Types of Data Collected in This Study*

The rationale for a single case of this nature is the representative, or typical, case. The objective here was to capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday or commonplace situation (Yin, 2003). The everyday situations for this study actually were snapshots of times during which children engaged in sociodramatic play. Due to the nature of research questions, clarifications of the boundaries of the case, and the fact that a pilot study revealed what procedures to revise for the this study, 6 weeks were allocated to collect data and answer research questions:

1. How does sociodramatic play with literacy-related materials create opportunities for language acquisition at the preschool level?

2. How does social interaction through sociodramatic play experience among preschool children foster language acquisition as they are interacting with their peers?

3. How do adults influence language expression of preschool children during sociodramatic play?

This study was divided into two phases of data collection (see Table 2) as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Table 2

*Data Collection Phases and Methodology*

Phase	Duration	Purpose	Data collection method
Phase I	5 weeks 3 days per week 8:00 – 10:30	Establishing myself as a researcher, observing students engaged in dramatic play	Field notes, journal, teacher structured interviews, observations
Phase II	6 weeks 3 days per week 8:00 – 10:30	Add literacy-related materials Conduct focus exploration	Field notes, video tapes, journal, student interviews, artifacts, observations

*Phase I Data Collection*

The first phase of data collection lasted 5 weeks. During this phase, I was in the classroom on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from 8:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. The purpose was to observe children engaged in sociodramatic play and to monitor play behaviors. I recorded field notes in my researcher’s journal. I also conducted structured interviews with both teachers about the students engaged in sociodramatic play. These questions included: “What is the teacher’s role while children are engaged in sociodramatic play?” “How often do you change play materials and themes?” “How does sociodramatic play foster language development?” “How do literacy-related materials enhance language use during sociodramatic play?” “What do you notice the children do most during dramatic and sociodramatic play?” The teachers also were asked to describe the student’s academic ability. The responses to the questions were



recorded in my researcher's journal. To enhance a sense of collaboration among teachers and myself, I met with the preschool teachers to discuss the research questions and design, and the list of developmentally appropriate literacy materials to be added to the dramatic play center during the study.

I recorded observations in a dated field journal in an effort to keep data organized. Field notes targeted play behaviors in the dramatic play center and sociodramatic play throughout the classroom. After leaving the research site, an ongoing series of analytic notes were recorded in my researcher's journal in order to keep findings organized. In summary, during Phase I data collection my purposes were as follows:

- establish myself as a researcher to the children,
- familiarize myself with the students and the classroom setting,
- observe children engaged with objects and materials in the dramatic play center.

### *Phase II Data Collection*

Phase II of the data collection lasted 6 weeks. During this time, I was in the classroom on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, from 8:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. This phase was a time of more focused examination. Each day I added literacy materials to the dramatic play center and videotaped (2.5 hours) all play episodes. This process enabled me to cross-reference and check data in the field notes. Field notes and observations continued to be recorded while observing children's engagement in play. Field notes were expanded upon by writing in my "researcher's journal" after I left the research site (See Appendix C)

The dramatic play center in the classroom allowed the children to create unrestricted play episodes and centers not confined to weekly themes. Also, there was no teacher modeling of how

to use the literacy-related materials or other play tools prior to children’s interaction with them. The basic set-up resembled a home living area with a stove, refrigerator, sink, table, chairs, dress-up clothes, and dolls. A list of literacy-related materials (Neuman & Roskos, 1991) to be added to existing play items was constructed (see Table 3 for a complete list of materials and the days on which they were used). From this initial list, selection of literacy-related materials to be used in the dramatic play center was based upon two criteria. The first criterion was authenticity. To determine authenticity the following question was asked, “Is this a real object that children might naturally find in their home, school, and everyday environments?” The second criterion used was the characteristic of utility. This criterion addressed the question, “Will the material serve a particular function for children in their everyday life, at school, at home and current surroundings?”

Table 3

*Data Collection Schedule and Literacy-Related Materials*

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Tuesday- note pads, pencils, pens	Tuesday- Telephone (cell phone) and phone books	Tuesday Clip boards and assorted stationary and envelopes	Tuesday- Assorted colored paper, envelopes of various sizes, pencils, pens and markers	Tuesday- Children’s books ( a selection of books shared previously with class)	Tuesday Assorted paper, envelopes, cell phone, children’s books
Wednesday- food coupons, grocery store food ads	Wednesday- Message pads and pencils	Wednesday- stamps and stamp pads	Wednesday- Small tote bags for mail delivery	Wednesday- Magazines and book marks	Wednesday Message pad and pencils, stamps and stamp pad
Thursday- play money	Thursday- signs i.e. open/closed, please, thank- you, exit, enter	Thursday- hand calculators	Thursday- Small mailbox for sorting letters	Thursday- Library cards, file boxes, paper and pencils	Thursday- Restaurant menus and clip boards

When considering items to satisfy the two criteria identified above, I incorporated literacy-related material selections into the classroom during 3 days a week for 6 weeks. During week 1, notepads, pencils, pens, food coupons, food ads, and play money were introduced to the children. Week 2 was a time when children interacted with cell phones, phone books, and signs of environmental print. During week 3, students were given the opportunity to use clip boards, assorted stationary and envelopes, stamp pads, and calculators. During week 4, children used assorted colored paper, envelopes, a tote bag, markers, pens, and a mailbox. Week 5 literacy-related materials included children's books, magazines, library cards, file boxes, pencils, and pens. Some of the literacy-related materials I incorporated during week 6 were assorted paper, envelopes, cell phones, children's books, message pads, restaurant menus, and notepads. (See Table 3 for a complete list of literacy-related materials and the data collection schedule.)

Another form of data collection included in Phase II was the collection of artifacts in the form of written pieces children created when using notepads, stationary, and writing utensils. After children completed written pieces, the message was transcribed to convey by conventional writing children's dictations on the written pieces.

In summary, the following set of methods of data collection was utilized for Phase II:

1. Observations with field notes. During observations, I kept a record of what actually took place in the dramatic play center and throughout the classroom. Each observation included a dated page divided into columns that contained the headings (field notes, preliminary interpretations, methodological notes, and personal notes). During the observations, I completed the first column only (field notes). The other three columns were completed immediately after the observations away from research site.

2. Informal conversations with each student. Because students were given the opportunity to use notepads, writing utensils, and other literacy-related materials in the dramatic play center, many written pieces of text were created. I asked all of the students to tell me about their written pieces in order to hear the language they used, to encourage talk, as well as to note any connections to other literacy materials or themes during the course of the data collection. All responses were recorded in field notes.

3. Videotapes. Videoconferencing technology was used to record play episodes in Phase II. This form of technology included two cameras in the CSC and a view station in the Master Classroom (a classroom located in the College of Education) so that I could unobtrusively view the students and any other activities in the classroom while videotaping was in progress. While video recordings were in session, however, I chose to be present at the CSC to obtain a more accurate account of children's play and interaction with literacy-related materials. Prior to visiting the CSC, I inserted videotapes and positioned cameras to capture the play episodes. During one videotaping, I had a student worker zoom in on my interaction with the children during sociodramatic play. Having access to a viewing station prevented the possibilities of distractions of videotaping that previously occurred during my pilot study when video equipment was in children's view in the classroom. The purpose of recording play episodes in Phase II was to capture sociodramatic play events during which those participants in this study interacted with literacy-related materials. A total of eight video recordings were documented that included all participants of this study. The duration of each recording was 2.5 hours.

4. Researcher's journal. After each observation I reflected on what occurred during the times I visited CSC to observe sociodramatic play events. The journal entries included detailed narrative accounts of observations, personal comments, and questions. The journal was a

necessary tool for recording categories and emerging themes during the data collection. In other ways, the journal helped me to stay on track with the research project and to tease out what was not important by defining those themes which converged. The journal is where I recorded notes as I analyzed data.

5. Artifacts. Work samples (drawings, scribbles, and written pieces) created by children in the dramatic play center and during sociodramatic play as they interacted with literacy-related materials were collected. I collected 42 work samples; each child had least one sample

### Data Analysis

Data analyzed during the data collection process involved triangulation of the data: many separate pieces (videotapes, field notes, observations, artifacts, and interviews) of information all pointing to the same conclusion. Each video tape was viewed several times. Because the classroom was open with self-selecting centers, the children roamed from place to place. They talked with themselves and other children as they changed areas and topics with adults in the classroom. On first view of the videos, the scenes appeared to be chaotic and loud, but after the second viewing, I began to see what was happening and what was said.

After the third viewing with each video, I was able to take notes in longhand of the children's language. Once the longhand notes were done, I returned to the videos with a finger on the pause and play buttons to get a more accurate account of the children's words. This method was very time consuming, but once done I was able to transcribe the events and language of the children. Getting accurate interpretation was difficult at times because many children talked at once in different settings. It was not unusual for several play scenarios to be going on at

the same time. This required the researcher to view the video scenes over and over again focusing in on just one scene of activity then replaying the tape to view another scene.

The manuscript pages were transcribed and the sentences of the children and adults numbered. After several transcriptions were completed, an objective outside reader who was familiar with Halliday's functions and I coded transcriptions according to the functions. A 90% rate of interrater reliability was established over time. When the coding did not match, the outside rater and I would discuss why the sentence was coded as such by each reader. Then both of us would then agree on the best choice. Early on, it was apparent that most of the recorded sentences were coded with more than one function. This was not surprising due to the age of the children and the education backgrounds of most parents.

The analysis procedure continued with the following: organization of data, interpretation of single instances, identification of patterns, synthesis, and generalization (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005) as follows:

1. Triangulated data were organized according to data strands. After all videos were coded the sentences were entered into an *Excel* data spread sheet. Specific strands of information were identified and also entered into the spread sheet. The strands included the line identification or sentence number, date of the video, initials of the students, students age in months, gender, function columns 1 – 4, literacy materials used, spoken words and the area or center in which the action took place. The spread sheet information helped in organizing data and making relationships among the strands.

2. Interpretation of single instances. Field notes, videotapes, artifacts, and the researcher's journal were examined for specific meanings they had in relation to the case. I color coded data that related to or answered, the research questions:
  - a. How does sociodramatic play with literacy-related materials create opportunities for language acquisition at the preschool level? Any data that related to, or answered, this question were coded in yellow.
  - b. How does social interaction through sociodramatic play experience among preschool children foster language acquisition? Any data that related to, or answered, this question were coded in blue.
  - c. How do adults influence language expression of preschool children during sociodramatic play? Any data that related to, or answered this question were coded in green.
3. Identification of patterns. The data and their interpretations were scrutinized for underlying themes. The themes that emerged were literacy knowledge, literacy behavior, gender roles, and teacher roles during play.
4. Synthesis and generalizations. A discussion of conclusions and implications from the data that answered research questions and purpose of the study.

In summary, this study was designed to present a rich description of participants and a detailed analysis as a basis for understanding the phenomena, sociodramatic play, and language acquisition. (See Figure 5 for data analysis cycle; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005.)

# Data Analysis Cycle

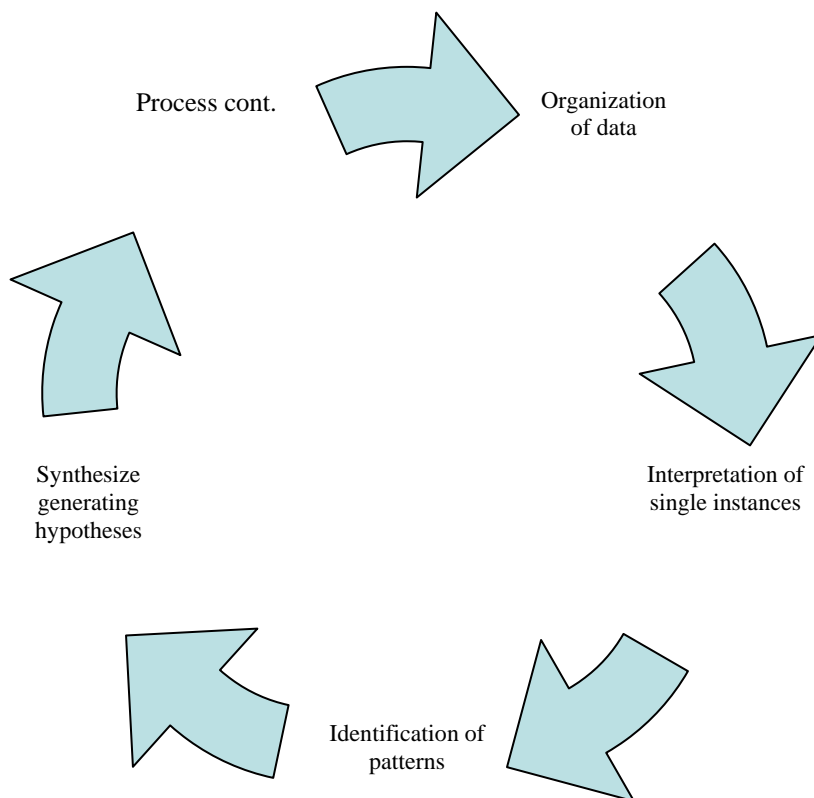


Figure 5. Data analysis cycle.

## Verification Procedures

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), when considering the validity of a research study, two questions need to be asked: Does this study have sufficient controls to ensure that the conclusions drawn are truly warranted by the data? Can one use what has been observed in the research situation to establish credibility about the world beyond that specific situation? As a result, “The internal validity of a research study is the extent to which its design and the data it yields allow the researcher to draw accurate conclusions about cause and effect and other



relationships within the data” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005, p. 97). To ensure the internal credibility of this research study, several strategies were used.

The first strategy was member checking which established the accuracy of qualitative findings. Creswell (1998) stated, “In member checks, the researcher solicits informants’ views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations” (p. 202). This technique, also known as respondent validation, is considered to be the most crucial for establishing credibility (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). To assure the accuracy and credibility of the artifacts, I asked the children to tell me what they had created by using the literacy-related materials (notepads, pens, markers) and I recorded the student responses in my journal.

The second strategy used was feedback from others. This is a procedure used when seeking the opinion of colleagues in the field to determine whether they agree or disagree that the researcher has made appropriate interpretations and drawn valid conclusions from the data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). According to Creswell (1998), this process also is known as peer review or debriefing. Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined the role of the peer de-briefer as an individual who keeps the researcher honest; asks difficult questions about methods and meanings, and listens to the researcher’s feelings. Consistent reviews with two early childhood colleagues in my department and one mentor were conducted after each site visit to discuss field notes, and agree upon data collection and findings throughout this research project.

The third strategy used was triangulation. It established the trustworthiness of the findings. Triangulation involved using multiple sources of data collection with the hope that they will all converge to support a particular hypothesis or theory (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The different sources used to shed light on the theme of this research project were as follows:

- Observations with field notes
- Informal interviews and conversations with children after the children created written pieces
- Structured interviews with two classroom teachers
- Videotapes
- Artifacts: work samples created by children in the dramatic play center and during sociodramatic play (drawings, scribbles, written pieces)
- Researcher's journal

Data were stored and locked in a metal file cabinet. Audio recordings and videos will be destroyed at a later date.

### Summary

According to Stake (1995), the aim of research is not to discover, for that is impossible, but to construct a clearer reality and a more sophisticated reality. The purpose of this study was to explore the interactions of preschool children with literacy-related materials, peers, and adults as they engage in sociodramatic play. Research questions were the following:

1. How does sociodramatic play with literacy-related materials create opportunities for language acquisition at the preschool level?

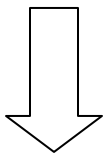
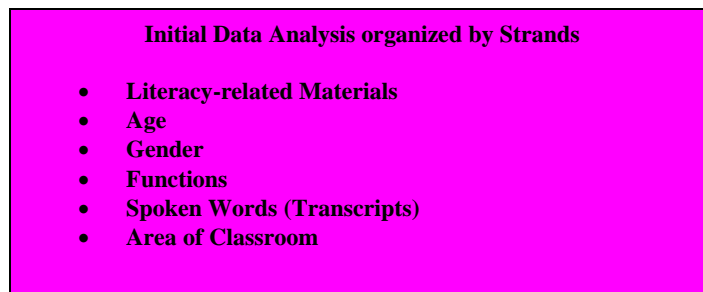
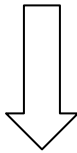
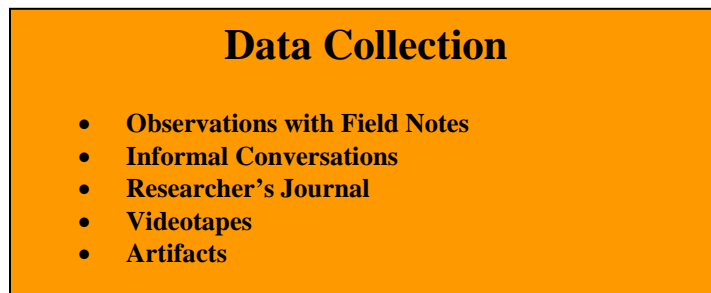
2. How does social interaction through sociodramatic play experience among preschool children foster language acquisition as they are interacting with their peers?

3. How do adults influence language expression of preschool children during sociodramatic play?

*Figure 6* presents the process used as a follow-up data analysis. While further analyzing data, I designed a procedure to use the research questions as a basis for organizing results and findings for chapters III, IV, and V. This sequence began with research questions followed by data collection. Next, strands that stemmed from data analysis were recorded. Last, Halliday's Phase I and Phase II of language development framed the findings to support research questions, conclusions, implications, and future research.

## Follow-up Data Analysis

1. How does sociodramatic play with literacy-related materials create opportunities for language acquisition at the preschool level?
2. How does social interaction through sociodramatic play experience among preschool children foster language acquisition as they are interacting with their peers?
3. How do adults influence language expression of preschool children during sociodramatic play?



Follow-up data Analysis organized by Research Questions

**Follow-up data analysis organized by Research Questions**

**How does sociodramatic play with literacy-related materials create opportunities for language acquisition at the preschool level? Coded in yellow**

**Phase I**

- Literacy-related Materials
- Age
- Gender
- Functions
- Spoken Words (Transcripts)
- Area of Classroom

**Phase II**

- Literacy-related Materials
- Age
- Gender
- Functions
- Spoken Words (Transcripts)
- Area of Classroom

**How does social interaction through sociodramatic play experience among preschool children foster language acquisition as they are interacting with their peers? Coded in blue**

**Phase I**

- Literacy-related Materials
- Age
- Gender
- Functions
- Spoken Words (Transcripts)
- Area of Classroom

**Phase II**

- Literacy-related Materials
- Age
- Gender
- Functions
- Spoken Words (Transcripts)
- Area of Classroom



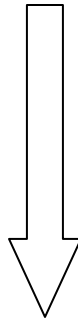
**How do adults influence language expression of preschool children during sociodramatic play? Coded in green**

**Phase I**

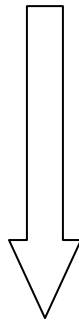
- Literacy-related Materials
- Age
- Gender
- Functions
- Spoken Words (Transcripts)
- Area of Classroom

**Phase II**

- Literacy-related Materials
- Age
- Gender
- Functions
- Spoken Words (Transcripts)
- Area of Classroom



**Discussion of the Data: Chapter 5**  
**Phase I and Phase II**



**1. How does sociodramatic play with literacy-related materials create language acquisition at the preschool level?**

- Conclusions, **(Compare to other studies)**
- Implications **(Having learned this, therefore)**
- Future Research

**2. How does social interaction through sociodramatic play experience among preschool children foster language acquisition as they are interacting with their peers?**

- Conclusions, **(Compare to other studies)**
- Implications **(Having learned this, therefore)**
- Future Research

*Subheadings:*

- Literacy knowledge and Literacy Behavior (Question 1)
- Gender roles, classroom area, class schedule (Question 2)
- Teacher Roles (Question 3)

**3. How do adults influence the language expression of preschool children during sociodramatic play?**

- Conclusions, **(Compare to other studies)**
- Implications **(Having learned this, therefore)**
- Future Research

Figure 6. Follow-up data analysis.

This case study research was conducted in a preschool setting that involved 21 children and two teachers. Data collection was divided into phases and triangulated data were analyzed. Verification procedures were issued to ensure internal validity. While using Halliday's functions of language to assist with coding children's language for my study, it was very apparent that this collection of data revealed an extension of language behaviors in older children. Halliday's (1975) study included one participant's development of language functions from 6 months to 2 years old and due to the age of Halliday's participant, he used the functions to code only utterances. In Figure 7, the first two columns name and explain the functions of language identified by Halliday's. I used these explanations to identify and code children's language in this study. Completion of the third column is the majority of chapter four whereby many examples of children's language were coded according to Halliday's functions of language and analyzed. Since the participants in this study were older, the findings reveal sequences of preschool children's language and how these sequences of language were linked to the context of the learning environment. Although I used the same system as Halliday to code children's language, my research has gone beyond Halliday's earlier work when he studied the utterances of a young child. My study extends because the children studied are older, their language has matured and therefore sequences of language are analyzed, not language utterances.



Language Function	Example	Sequences of children's language from this study
1. Instrumental Function	"I want"	
2. Regulatory Function	"Do as I say"	
3. Interactional Function	"Me and you"	
4. Personal Function	"Here I come"	
5. Heuristic Function	"Tell me why"	
6. Imaginative Function	"Let's pretend"	
7. Informative Function	"To inform"	

*Figure 7. Language functions (Halliday, 1975).*

Chapter IV is organized by research question showing how each question was investigated and communicating the findings addressing each research question.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS OF DATA ANALYSIS

#### Introduction

This case study explored the interactions of preschool children with literacy-related materials, peers, and adults as they engaged in sociodramatic play. The theoretical framework posited that children actively build their own knowledge and can develop language in a play setting by interacting with others and objects. The research questions specifically targeted the presence of language acquisition during sociodramatic play in 4-year-old and 5-year-old participants. This chapter presents the analysis of the study's data. All data collection came from the participants during their usual classroom activities. Examples of sequences of children's language extracted children's application of language functions and the context in which it was being used. Halliday's study, and the study reported here, identified similarities of the seven functions of language children used in oral and written language activities. Differences in the age of the participants reported in this study, revealed that the coded language functions used by children were examples of Phase I and Phase II development of Halliday's language theory discussed in chapter two. Some examples were identified as Phase III of Halliday's language development theory. In short, two phases of Halliday's theory supported by the data presented in this chapter attempt to describe how the process of "learning how to mean" extends into the preschool years.

Video cameras recorded children when they were actively engaged during sociodramatic play and center time. Play events were video-taped and I collected field notes of sociodramatic

play events while students interacted with literacy- related materials, peers, and adults. Selected examples from the vast data collected are presented in the text. The most important component of this data collection and analysis is the spoken words of the children.

What follows is a collection of children's spoken words categorized by Halliday's seven language functions. Each question is investigated and the analysis of the data results, as they relate to Phase I and Phase II, are categorized according to the research questions. Many of the examples from the data answer all research questions. For the purpose of organization of the results, some specific children's language samples are used multiple times to support each research question to which they are applicable. The research questions are as follows:

1. How does sociodramatic play with literacy-related materials create opportunities for language acquisition at the preschool level?

2. How does social interaction through sociodramatic play experience among preschool children foster language acquisition as they are interacting with their peers?

3. How do adults influence the language expression of preschool children during sociodramatic play?

### Findings Related to the Research Questions

#### *Research Question 1*

How does sociodramatic play with literacy-related materials create opportunities for language acquisition at the preschool level?

*Phase I: Adaptation of Halliday's analysis.* The implementation of the cell phones revealed opportunities for language acquisition. The participants between the ages of 65 months to 73 months interacted with cell phones most frequently, and most of the pretend conversations I observed were children mimicking adult language and older individuals (teenagers). For example, JG stated repeatedly, "Boyfriend, I told you six times not to call me." During this study, I discovered that telephone play was a valuable tool in young children's development of oral and symbolic thinking. While talking on the phone, children demonstrated communication skills that may not be developed by talking with others in person. On the phone, the children had to compensate for not being able to see the person with whom they were talking, which means the nonlinguistic cues, such as body language, were missing. As a result, children discovered that they had to use more specific language, voice intonations, and body language.

The interactions with the plastic cell phones clearly outnumbered the interactions with the rest of the literacy-related materials. During the 6-week implementation of carefully selected literacy-related materials, the students wanted to consistently interact with one material, the plastic cell phones. Although the telephone is a major part of adults' lives but a common prop in most dramatic-play centers, the design of the cell phone captivated children's interest. The cell phone was a plastic "flip phone" and, with the touch of a button, there was a ring tone. Had I known the cell phone was going to be this popular, I would have introduced it toward the end of the study since there was such a variety of materials for children to explore and they chose not to engage with them as frequently. On days when new materials were introduced, the children always asked, "Did you bring cell phones today?"

Paper, stationary, and writing utensils were the second most frequently used literacy-related materials in play centers throughout the classroom. Boys and girls enjoyed writing on

notepads. The engagement with notepads, pens, and other written materials was an extension of children's functional oral language. Although most of the participants who interacted with this set of literacy-related materials were between the ages of 52 months to 55 months, the children in this study used role-appropriate oral and written language, which they derived from everyday life, while interacting with these materials. The language the children used while interacting with literacy-related materials was influenced by the social context in which the language was produced. When the notepads and pens were used, for example, the children's written language showed functional uses such as making a shopping list, writing letters, or creating signs, while the cell phone language was about planning or discussing events, vacations, or meetings. Providing the writing materials during sociodramatic play encouraged children to use the written mode of discourse and functions of language.

Non-verbal activities during pretend phone conversations seemed to differ between boys and girls. Boys showed little movement of other body parts while holding the phone. Girls cradled the phones to their ear with their shoulders, held the phone to their mouths as if they were speaking into a "walkie talkie," and girls crossed their legs as they sat in chairs on the open rug area during pretend cell phone talk. The girls in this study made the majority of their pretend calls to friends, families, and doctors while the boys made most of their calls to friends and fire stations. These children demonstrated an understanding of the mechanics of telephone use and all children who interacted with cell phones showed they knew how to dial and receive phone calls, but the majority of the observations of cell phone usage involved children making calls, not receiving calls.

Another interesting aspect of the implementation of literacy materials was how the children extended and applied the materials beyond the current sociodramatic play episode. A

good example of this extension occurred when children created a sign for the block center. Three children, RF, CR, and WS completed this sign after I introduced the literacy-related materials on environmental print. Opportunities for the creation of language acquisition were observable while children used functions of language to communicate to others.

Halliday (1975) noted that the informative function would be the last of all functions to develop but in this study, the informative function was evident in children's spoken language. These findings support the idea of encouraging the "show and tell" strategy in the preschool classroom. This concept of "show and tell" allows children to tell about objects and adhere to a particular subject matter to inform peers or the teachers. In doing so, children are building the informative function by practicing their abilities to create complex sentences. This reminds educators that pre-school children are not empty vessels; they really do have much to tell us and many opportunities should be provided for them to do so.

Halliday said Phase I is identified by a child's ability to use at least one of the seven functions in his/her spoken words. What follows are explanations and examples of the functions of language when children used them in a single instance.

*Functions of language: Phase I.* As explained in chapter II, Halliday identified seven functions of language development; the first four functions develop first and then the latter three. In the examples of children's language recorded in the videos, I identified all seven single functions. Findings will be presented in order of developing functions. Like Halliday, I observed the following four egocentric functions (instrumental, regulatory, interactional and personal).

*Instrumental function.* The instrumental function was used to satisfy a basic need or to satisfy a wish. This function was observed the least amount of times; it is seen quite early in life during a time when a child discovers that language is a way of satisfying basic needs. An example of the instrumental function in this setting was during the sociodramatic play event with the mailbox materials. AK expressed her wish to participate in the play episode:

AK: "I want to be the mail girl--boy."

Ms. B: "You do? Okay. Okay, we'll take turns. Oh, look. There's the mailman." (CD is still behind the puppet stage. Children take envelopes to him.)

AK: "I want to make another one."

One of the literacy-related materials was environmental print. I introduced the children to some examples while we gathered on the open rug area. While later using the signs in the housekeeping area, OG stated "I need a closed." OG requested the "closed" sign to be used for a pretend restaurant.

*Regulatory function.* The observations in this setting clearly revealed children's ability to give orders or even regulate others. This was particularly evident while children were gaining new information and later implementing this information in a play scene. During the observations, I introduced environmental print that included common signs seen in various buildings and roadways such as "stop," "exit," and "enter." I asked the children to identify the words, and JG led the conversation. JG helped the other children to identify words that seemed to be difficult for the majority of the children to read and define. Later in the conversation, RF noticed two words (exit and enter) posted in the classroom that had been previously identified from the stack of cards. Also, MM mentioned that the words "stop" and "go" were posted in the room and was careful to point out the N in "open," was a letter in her name. Other observations of the regulatory function included children who made attempts to share space on the open rug

area and in the house keeping area. While OP and RG were pretending to be in a wedding, OP tells RG, “You’re the flower girl. I want you to listen.” RF, not listening to OP shouted, “Look at mine!”

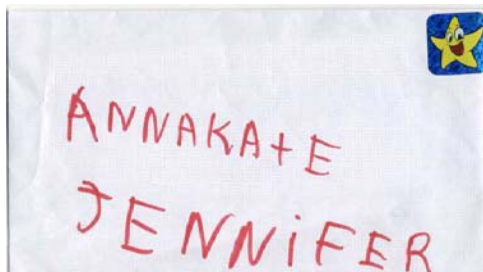
*Interactional function.* This function was observed as children played with each other and used their language to build and maintain relationships. Several times, it was noted that children were using this function as they were reaching out to each other. Perhaps, FB said it best in the kitchen area of the House Keeping Center. HD asked FB who was going with her on her pretend trip to Mexico. She replied, “me and you.” Another salient observation was when TE pretended one day to be an ice cream vendor and asked the same question aloud for 23 minutes: “Who wants ice cream?” The children in the classroom did not respond to TE’s question. When the teacher intervened by giving TE some suggestions, two children became TE’s “first customers.” On another occasion, JG crawled around on hands and knees in the open rug area and asked, “If you want a ride, I’ll give you a ride.” While CR and RF interacted in the block center, they began to discuss the toys they had at home. CR was not sure about RF’s toys as she stated in a loud voice, “You are not telling the truth.”

*Personal function.* In this preschool setting, children demonstrated ways to form and express individuality. Through this personal function of language, children were able to express their opinions, feelings, attitudes, and emotions. Examples of personal functions in children’s language were observed when CJ, RF, AK, and JG shared personal disagreements about dress-up clothes and choices of literacy-related materials. As a teacher assisted, CJ and RF wrote letters to each other (Examples 1-3). AK simply placed names on the outside of the envelope and

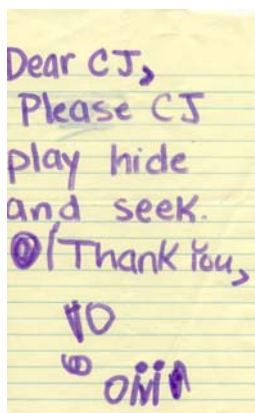


explained that there was a picture for JG inside the envelope. The children created the letters to convey their personal thoughts and to extend apologies about the disagreements during the play event.

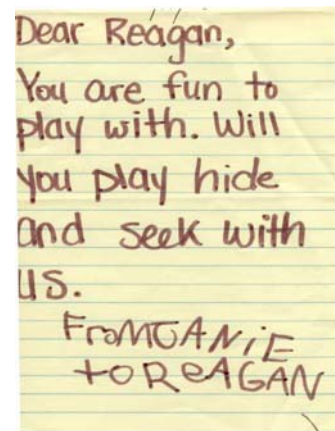
*Example 1*



*Example 2*



*Example 3*



During the final week of data collection, the children dressed as their favorite characters. While the children ate cupcakes for snack that day while sitting at the tables, MM explained that she was Alice in Wonderland, and OP said she was a princess. WL exclaimed, "I am Santa," as he pretended to put frosting from the cupcakes on his cheeks and chin. During this time the personal function was interpreted through nonverbal actions displayed by a group of boys:

CC: I think I'm gonna be sick. (Gets up from chair and then stands on it. CD, next to him also gets up on his chair. WL then gets up on his chair and copies actions by boy and boys in chicken TV commercial by standing up on chair and couch--a way of thanking Mom for her food. In this scenario, the boys have no language to go with action. CC and boys go to other areas. Children at table finish eating and go to wash hands.)

The block center in this classroom setting was always busy with children constructing and exploring the multiple possibilities of a variety shapes and colors of materials. This area was

a place where social skills were challenged continuously because children really had to make efforts to share and to know how to use appropriate language to keep the play scene orderly. If the children did not directly use the materials to build something, the materials were used as some sort of symbolic object to enhance the literacy-related materials that children had previously used. For example, WS had used blocks to construct an unknown object. WS used a notepad and pencil to draw the object first while he was sitting at the writing table, then used this drawing as a guide to construct the object. OP asked, "What is it?" The personal function was obvious as he replied, "I don't know what it is called, but it is cool." Because the materials in the block area were sometimes used by the children for purposes other than building things, children's personal expressions of feelings often were heard in their language as they played. Being able to use the right words to express their emotions was a good source of settling conflicts that sometimes escalated. TE expressed to MJ, "You hurt me for real," as MJ threw pieces of blocks onto the shelf. MJ preceded to throw the blocks back onto the shelf and while doing so, the blocks were falling off and hitting TE on the head while he sat close by. TE, said..."OW!" in a loud voice, and at this moment MJ began to place the blocks on the shelf without them falling to hit TE on the head. This is an example of how TE's personal function response changed the inappropriate behavior of MJ without the intervention of an adult.

On the open rug area, another incident involved JG when she stated, "I don't want any boys playing with me." JG made this statement while playing with two other girls while they were involved in a conversation using the plastic cell phones. JG walked in a circular motion on the huge red rug to move as quickly as possible from MJ. At this time, JG perceived this area to be off limits to males and wanted only the three girls involved in this play scenario.

*Heuristic function.* The last three functions (heuristic, imaginative, and informative) identified by Halliday were considered to be less “egocentric” and were used to enlarge the child’s world. The heuristic function investigated when the children desired to seek information. The observations revealed children’s desire to acquire knowledge and their growing sense of awareness of the larger environment. Sometimes this growing sense of awareness led to asking questions of others. The analysis of the sentences revealed very limited singular examples of the child’s desire to acquire knowledge. I found very few examples in the data whereby children used only the heuristic function in a sentence or phrase. The level at which the children used this function involved more of Phase II because the heuristic function was often used simultaneously with other functions. For example, “What are you doing?” and “Where are you going?” were frequently expressed phrases during sociodramatic play events. When girls interacted with cell phones with hands-on hip, they would ask each other, “Whatcha doin?” “What in the world are you doing?” was also heard as children became curious enough to join play scenes that were already in motion. “What do you got?” “What’s in here?” “What’s your secret?” were other questions used during sociodramatic play as children attempted to seek answers to questions. During one observation, MJ asked CC “What kind of dog are you drawing,” as he watched CC create a picture while sitting at the table in the house keeping center. While MJ was admiring the picture, CC asked MJ, “How do you spell save?” MJ replied, “I don’t know” so CC proceeded to ask the teacher for assistance with spelling the word so that he could complete the task.

*Imaginative function.* The imaginative function occurs as children use language to create their own environment of “let’s pretend” and make-believe by inventing a unique world of fantasy, of princesses and dragons, and of dreams. At first it seemed easy to identify this function

in Phase I because the words “let’s pretend” were usually in the children’s spoken words. For example, OG explained to another child, “I’m pretending I’m a princess. I’m a magic princess.” However, what OG was really doing was saying to the other child an unspoken, “Look at me,” an example of the regulatory function which, combined with her pretending, would put this interaction in Phase II. I discovered that very few language examples consisted of the imaginative function being used alone. Except for examples of onomatopoeia: “Bam, Bam, Bam!” “Pow!” and “Oink, oink!” The example below is of a play scenario when children used these words as they pretended to be robbers and a kitty. In this play event, it was very apparent that children were using their own language to create a world of fantasy and pretend without the use of any literacy-related materials. The children moved back and forth from the open rug area to the block center. Because one child was twirling and another was crawling, the open space and children’s broad imagination were the only things needed to create this play event. The entire play scenario is included to show how children used imaginative actions and language to keep the play scene moving.

CC: “Robber! Robber in the house!”

TE: “Pow! Hey, Real power! Boys in here! Real power!”

CC: “Wow, I’m going to kill you.”

CJ : “A cat robber!”

TE in Harry Potter cape twirls on rug. TE runs around. OP sings out loud. CD by Block Center: “Bam! Bam! Bam!”

CJ: “Our cat robber is outside.” “AK in cat costume leaves center meowing loudly.

OP: “My kitty is outside. Kitty’s outside.”

OP: “Kitty, Kitty, Kitty.” “Hide quick!”

JG crawling on open rug area: “If you want a ride, I’ll give you a ride. (OP gets on her back. JG crawls around rug on hands and knees. JG says: “Who wants to ride?” “A girl.”

OP: “The cat robber is gone!”

Because sociodramatic play was a the vehicle for the majority of activities and events in the classroom, the imaginative function utilized so pervasively by the children was intertwined with other identified functions. These functions will be discussed later in Phase II.

*Informative function.* It was apparent that the literacy materials (mailbox, envelopes, paper, etc.) used by children during sociodramatic play were strongly connected to the informative function. On the days I was present in the classroom, the informative function was identified as most prevalent in the coding. Also, the informative function was coded frequently on the days when there was much adult interaction. On the occasion when I introduced post office literacy-related materials to the children on the rug near the block center, many children responded from their past experiences with postal information. While using literacy-related materials, children were able to make connections with prior knowledge and even answer my questions. Although I initiated most of the questions, the children were successful with informing me as well as the other children using accurate knowledge about the postal system. I entered the room walking to the block center saying: “Gather around the carpet.” MJ, CD, TE, and JG used the informative functions as they responded to the questions.

MJ.: “What do you got?” Ms. B takes silver mailbox out of box.

Ms. B: “It looks like a mailbox. How do you know it is a mailbox?”

MJ: “Cause it is a mailbox.” “Can we play with it?”

Ms. B: “I have something . . .”

CD: “Mail! Everybody can play with it.”

Ms. B: “Yes, everybody can play. Look at this. We are all going to share. Where do you see these?”

OG: “Outside.”

CD: “By your house.”

TE: “By your house.”

Ms. B: “You open it up and who puts things in it?” (Ms. B opens the mailbox.)

JG: “The mail lady.”

Ms. B: “The mail lady or who?”

JG: “The mailman.”

Ms. B: (Holds up red flag part.) "Now, this flag. Do you know what this flag means?"  
AK: "It means that mail's in it."

The next example of children's language was evidence of the informative function during a shared reading experience. The following scenario took place when I gathered the children around me in the kitchen area of the housekeeping center. I held up Laura Numeroff's *If You Give a Pig a Pancake* (1999) in big book format. As the big book was shared, the students were afforded opportunities to make text-to-text and text-to-world connections. JG, almost sitting in my lap, read: "*If You Give a Pig a Pancake.*" CR and JG used the informative function as they provided titles of other books written by the same author. In this example, children's prior knowledge of other texts helped them to provide informative responses before the researcher asked any questions.

Ms. B: "One second. Time out."  
HD: "We have that book at home."  
Ms. B: "JG mentioned that she read this. (Ms. B hold up the Big Book.)  
What's so unusual about this book? Do you notice something different from your other books?"  
Children as a group: "It's bigger."  
Ms. B: "It is called a Big Book."  
CR: "If you give a mouse a cookie."  
Ms. B: "A cookie. If you give a mouse a cookie. If you give a pig a pancake."  
JG: "If you give a pig a popcorn."  
Ms. B: "If you take a mouse to the . . ."  
JG: "Movie!"  
Ms. B: "What would you do if I gave you a pancake?"  
CR: "Milk."  
Ms. B: "Who would eat it?"  
Children: "Me!"

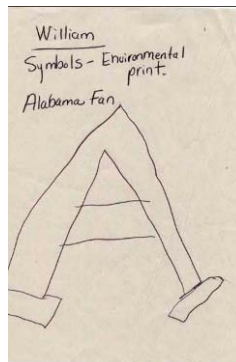
Examples four to six illustrate the informative function as children used the literacy-related materials to convey messages. Playing the mother's role, Example 4 is a note MM wrote to her dad. MM is reminding dad that mom wants him to remember to take out the trash. In this example it is obvious that MM often observes notes written to family members. The child knows

that written language can tell people things to do such as taking out the trash. In example 5, WL used the correct logo and symbol to express his favorite team. Example 6 shows the adult's writing to dictate the message of the child's writing. This example is somewhat of a public service announcement and due to the subject area, is a powerful sample of a child's written informative function.

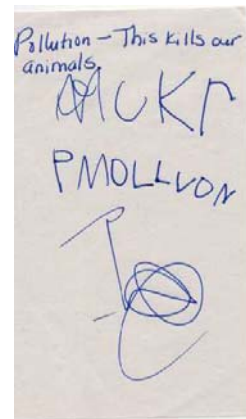
*Example 4*



*Example 5*



*Example 6*



In summary, for several weeks I observed a group of active preschoolers expand imaginary situations that ranged from reenactments of media roles to play scenes that incorporated knowledge of literacy skills and preparation for future adult roles such as moms, dads, and teachers. Children established explicit roles and responsibilities with other peers during this time of sociodramatic play, a time when thoughts became visible. Limited singular functions may be that unlike Halliday's very young child who was the only participant in his 1975 study, the children in this study were years older and were operating at a higher, more sophisticated

level of function usage. Figure 8 is a summary of the number of all functions used in children's coded language.

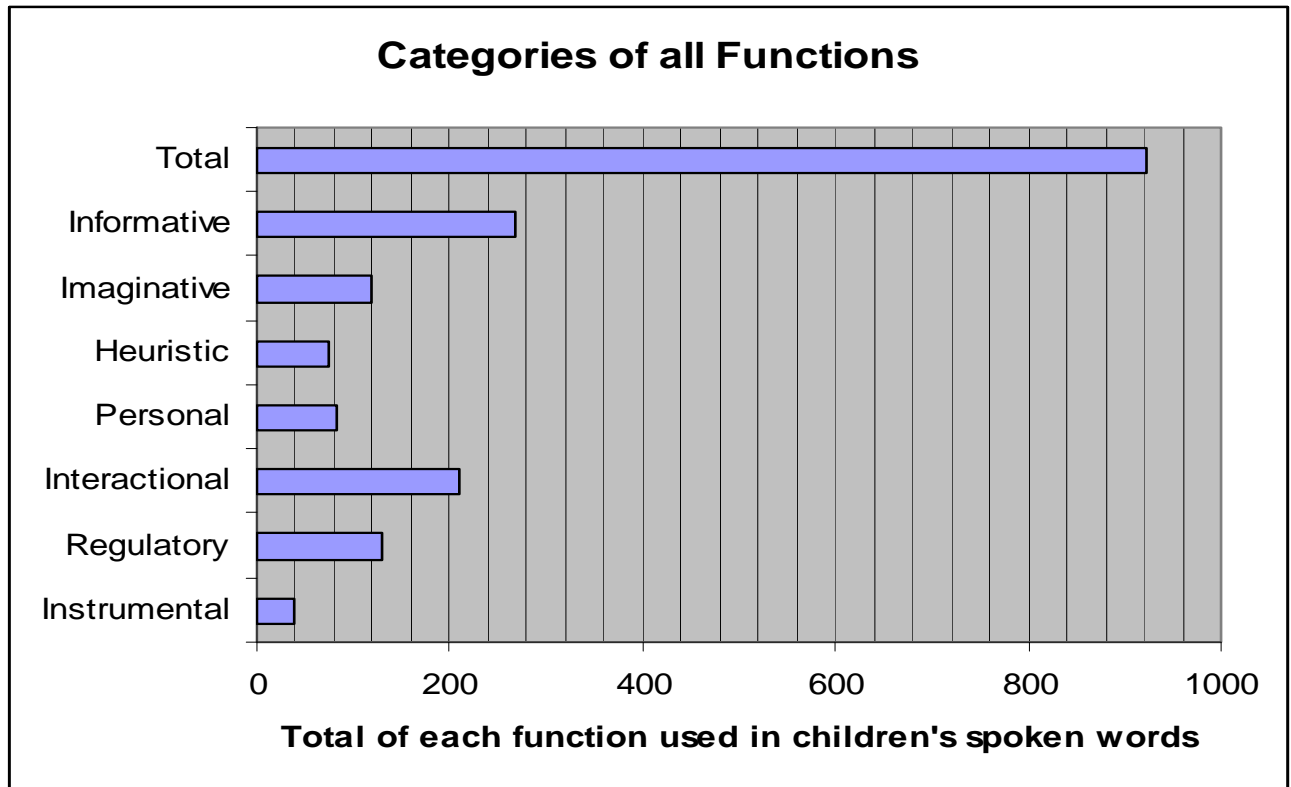


Figure 8. Total of each function used in children's spoken words.

*Phase II: Adaptation of Halliday's analysis.* As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this phase is characterized by two main features: a shift in the functional orientation of language and major and very rapid advances in vocabulary, structure, and dialogue. During this stage, grammar emerges as a level of linguistic "form" or lexology. The children's examples in this preschool setting indicated they were not seeking knowledge about their unknown world but were establishing relationships through the combined use of their heuristic and personal



functions. During Phase I, much of a child's speech is restricted to one language function. Phase II occurs when a combination of functions used by children in a single instance as well as their ability to use language as an observer or use language as an intruder. It must be noted that the imaginative function was the most used function in the children's language. In this section, examples of children's spoken words are included along with numbers (at the end of phrases or sentences) to indicate the language function (s). Overall, all of the children were able to use at least two of the language functions in their spoken words during a single instance. The following play event occurred when children interacted with a mailbox, envelopes, and stationary. This particular example of children's spoken words includes a variety of functions of language with the imaginative function (6) being predominant. Although initiated by the teacher, in this play event the imaginative function helped children to create a world of imagination while using other functions to ask questions (heuristic), and give commands (regulatory). Also, this example of children's language shows the children's ability to be both an observer and intruder. The role of intruder occurs when MJ says, "I am the mailman" and when JG says, "It's been a long time since I got mail." The children are using language to show their desire to participate in this setting. OG is an example of taking the role of observer because she asks, "Are you making more mail?" She is not directly involved at this point, but is observant of what is going on around her.

MJ: "I want to be the mailman." (1, 6)

AK (looking of from puppet stage window): "More mail!" (6, 7)

OG: "Are you making more mail?" (3, 5, 6)

JG: "Give it to me." (2, 6)

AK: "RF, I made some mail for you." (3, 6) "Open it." (2, 6)

Ms. B: "When you finish your letters, give them to OG. She will give them to AK."

AK: "RF, hurry up. RF, hurry up." (2, 6)

Ms. B: "You want to give your mail to AK. AK are you at the post office? Go back to the post office and they will bring their mail to you."

JG: "It's been a long time since my mail got to the post office." (4, 6)

JG: "Can I be the mail girl now?" (1, 5, 6)

Ms. B: "It's time to clean up now."

AK: "Get your mail out now everybody." (2, 6)  
MJ: "I'm the mailman. I'm the mailman." (Takes mailbag and runs to the post office.) (2, 6)  
Ms. B: "It's time to clean up. Clean up and get ready for snacks."  
Ms. B: "JG, I'll get that in here and bring it back."  
JG: "Where's my mail?" (Grabs letter and goes to wash up for snack.) (1, 5, 6)

While playing in the open rug area, the children used more than one function when they interacted with the plastic cell phones. A play scene parallel to the larger group, that really captivated my attention, involved JG leading pretend conversations and the influence she had with other females who soon began to use the same spoken words and the same body language as were originated by JG.

JG in loud sing-song voice: "I told you six times, not to call me!" (6, 2)  
"Regan, do you want to play that game?" (3, 5)  
CJ: "I want to play it. Boyfriend, I told you six times, not to call me!" (6, 2)  
JG: "Come on, CJ" (2)  
Teacher (SF): "Is that the way to talk to people on the phone?"  
JG: "It's my boyfriend." (6, 3)  
CJ "I told you six times not to call me!" (6, 2)  
JG: "I told you six times not to call me!" (6, 2)  
Teacher (SF): "JG if you called your grandmother on the phone, how would you talk to your grandmother?"  
JG: "Hello. Goodbye! Boyfriend, I told you six times. I told you not to call me." (2, 4, 6)  
Teacher (SF): Hold up phonebook and asks: "What would you look up in here?"  
JG: "Boyfriend, I told you six times." (2, 6 "Boyfriend, I told you six times, not to call me." (2, 6)  
JG: (Puts cell phone down and claps numerals) "One . . . two . . . three . . . four! . . . Like ever!" (2, 6)  
RF: "One . . . two . . . three . . . four! . . . Like ever!" (2, 6)  
JG and RF together: "Boyfriend, I told you six times not to call me. (Both put cells down.) "One . . . two . . . three . . . four! . . . Like ever!" (2, 6)

The above example shows how the children used the regulatory and imaginative functions together. While the children were using the cell phones to create a world of make believe and pretend, the regulatory function of language was an example of how children used instructions to control the behavior of others. FG also incorporated the imaginative, heuristic,

and personal functions with her use of the cell phone on the open rug area. FG says: “What are you doing?” “What in the world are you doing?” “What cha doin?”

Another example of how children combined the heuristic and personal functions was when AK found a set of keys on a table and AH asks MM: “Hey MM is this your mom’s key or real key?” AH says. “Do you use it for your house like to unlock?”

### *Research Question 2*

How does social interaction through sociodramatic play experience among preschool children foster language acquisition as they are interacting with their peers?

*Classroom area.* After carefully analyzing the organized data strands, the classroom floor plan and class room schedule provided many opportunities for children to interact with their peers throughout the day and for large blocks of time. Children were always talking, shouting, or playing quietly on the “open rug area.” Other areas throughout the room that were always busy with children interacting with each other and/or materials included the home living center, the sofa by the kitchen area in the home living center, the block center, the writing table, and the puppet theater center. These areas were open and spacious enough for children to roam from area to area forming and disbanding. Using a video camera to capture play events occurring beyond the housekeeping area was very vital to this study as it played a key role in providing the means of collecting data to answer each research question.

Phase II of Halliday’s language development theory was most observable in this setting because the opportunities children were given to interact with peers were self selected, and without unreasonable time constraints. Peer interaction encouraged language functions and

increased length of play events. Although the children were observed using language as an observer or intruder, there were a few occasions when extended dialogue among the children occurred. There were some unexpected observations of children's behaviors and language use in regard to issues of gender roles and stereotypes. During many visits, I observed children using gendered language to create boundaries during play events and to reenact implicit behaviors of gender roles possibly observed in places beyond the classroom. As children interacted in areas throughout the classroom, they were observed using the heuristic, imaginative, and informative functions; the last three functions to develop according to Halliday's language development theory. The observation of these functions revealed a significant development in children's language in that they were able to interact with peers to use non-egocentric language to keep the play scene moving. The following examples include instances of language functions used as children interacted with peers and materials in areas throughout the classroom.

To begin, the open rug area was a large space near the puppet stage. The dimensions of the open rug area were 197 x 176 in length and width. Because this area allowed the children to be very creative and spontaneous with play events and conversations, children were always bringing some objects or literacy related- materials to this area to "set" up a play theme. I recall having to quickly adjust the way in which I introduced the materials to the children during the first week of data collection. During the first week of the implementation of literacy-related materials, I placed the materials in the home living center because I assumed that this was the most popular place for children to interact when engaged in sociodramatic play. Only three children visited the center and interacted with the materials while I was present. Due to the noise level and what appeared to be useless data from the video observations, the second visit to the center and the third viewing of video tapes caused me to examine the open rug area more

carefully. On my second visit, I decided to sit and place the materials on the open rug and suddenly, children began to gather on the rug and ask about the materials. As I introduced the materials, the children were excited and wanted to use them. Not only was my introduction to the materials an important factor, but the activities in this area were always visible. The classroom area and schedule allowed the children to engage in a play setting that sometimes included implicit rules and the children were not obligated or told to visit or rotate to centers chosen by the teachers. Due to the implicit rules established by the children, sometimes it was necessary to follow their lead. As I followed the implicit rules, children's participation increased while they still had the notion of choice and control. The data strands revealed that the open rug area was the most frequently visited area by the children and the adults. The examples that follow reveal how the functions of language were observed as children interacted with peers on the open rug area. Children were able to use more than one function in their spoken words, but they also were able to operate in various roles of language as observer and intruder, which are all components of Phase II of Halliday's language development theory. For example, the children below are using the heuristic, imaginative, and informative functions. At the same time, both children are using language as an intruder (to participate) and as observer (to encode his experience of the phenomena).

TE: "It's the police."

MJ: "It's the police."

T.E says to MJ: "What is the number?"

MJ: "Yo, Bro, You shut up in your house."

TE: "Please help me."

Another example of children interacting with peers and using the regulatory, imaginative, and informative functions was when a group of females pretended to be going on a trip. The role of intruder is very observable in that the children are using multiple functions of language to

participate as it relates to the context of situation. Also, this is an example of how children brought items (three chairs) from other areas in the classroom to create a play scene on the open rug area. The latter part of this play scenario shows how the children were able to use areas in the classroom as boundaries while creating the play scene. The open space attributed to the children's ability to use the space needed for sociodramatic play. The following is students' talk as they pretended to create their own "worlds:"

OP: "You have to be our big sister."

JG: "I'll drive." (3 chairs in a row). (Three girls sitting in a line of chairs). .

RF: "We're on the plane."

OP: "Where are you going?"

FB: "To Mexico."

JG: "Have you been to Mexico?"

RF: "We're going to our hotel." "Come on."

OP: "I want 3 beds."

JG: "Come on,". "I want 3 beds." "This is the boy's room." (Waves arms around rug area.) "This is the girl's room." (Waves arms around housekeeping area and goes back to the rug area.) "This is a restaurant." "Let's go."

JG says to MJ: "I'm sorry we're going to eat and this is a girl's room."

There were times when I (researcher) was involved in children's play events when literacy-related materials were introduced. The following play event describes adult and child interaction as they manipulated postal literacy materials. The informative function was evident in children's response to my questions about the literacy-related materials. As the play scene continued to develop, the children used the imaginative function to participate or intrude in the play scenario. After children talked about the jobs of a mail carrier, they were eager to use the literacy-related materials in their play, and the interactional function became present as children assigned themselves play roles and even the gender roles described by JG and MJ. The following is an example of children's language when they used a mailbox, envelopes, and a mail bag during a play scene.

TE, looking into mailbox: “No, mail.”  
 Ms. B (researcher) to CD as he nears the mailbox: “CD, there is a sign on the mailbox.”  
 “JG, what does this say? Who can tell me what this says so CD can know?”  
 JG: “Mail!”  
 Ms. B: “Beware of the dog. Be careful when you put mail in the box. “  
 CD puts mail from mailbag into mailbox. Children are gathered close around.  
 AK grabs mail and looks through letters one by one.  
 Ms. B: “There’s TE’s mail. That is for TE. That’s for OG.” (AK tosses envelop across children to OG and steps back with arms folded across her chest. She then goes to look again in mailbox for more mail.)  
 MJ: “I mailed you a package, TE.” “I mailed you a present.”  
 Ms. B: “Do you know who that is from?”  
 TE: “The mailman.”  
 TE looking into the mailbox: “Whoa, There’s some mail.”  
 AK: “Let’s make some letters.”  
 MJ: “I want to be the mailman.”  
 JG: “Can I be the mail girl now?”  
 MJ: “I’m the mailman. I’m the mailman.” (Takes mailbag and runs to the post office.)

The block center area was located near the housekeeping center and the open rug area.

Children often wandered in and out the block area and constantly were changing play partners when they reentered the block area. By consistently changing play partners, positive interaction with peers and building friendships were both common. The following is a dialogue among three boys as they worked together to build a ramp. In the following example children use the regulatory, interactional, personal, and informative language functions. Numbers represent each function.

CC: “Don’t!” (Throws block at WL) (2)  
 WL: “Ow!” (Continues to build track and ramp) (4)  
 CC: “Now let me try this.” (Shoots car along track and ramp.) “I’ll let you.” (2, 3) (Shoots car along ramp again and leaves area.) “Hey! Towels!” (Picks up beach towels from rug area.) WL runs with towel cape around Block Center and to table. Both boys watch teacher (SF).  
 CC: “Hey, let’s get back to the ramp. (Goes back to Block Center.) “And a straight line crash” (2, 3)  
 CD: “Launch like that.” (Joins Boys at Center) (2)  
 WL: “I’ll show you, jump in slow motion.” “It can go like that.” (2, 3, 7)  
 CD: “A crazy man thing.” (4)  
 WL: “It can crash into the wall.” (7)

The knowledge of print was later transferred to the block center when the teacher assisted a group of children with making a sign to prevent the blocks from being knocked down. The words on the sign were “No Touching it, No Knocking it Down.” The conversation with the teacher and child that generated the sign follows:

Teacher (SF): “We might try to build it again. You know what CJ, we put all of our buildings in the hall way on the table. If we build it on the floor we might knock it down.” To RF: “We can still make signs. (RF sits down and hands the crayon to SF) “What should it say?”

RF: “No touching it! No knocking it down!”

SF writing as she repeats: “No touching it! No knocking it down! You know what could we do?” (CJ comes to the table.) “Have you ever seen a circle around something?” (Draws a circle around text.) What else can we do?”

CJ: We could write “Sorry.”

SF: You could write “Sorry,” but I was going to make a symbol. Have you ever seen a sign like that? (Holds up paper for girls.) With a circle and a line through it? That means, “No touching it.” “No knocking it down.” We could draw a hand on it so people would know that we talking about touching. (Draws hand.)

No touching! Have you ever seen that sign before? Sometimes you’ll see a picture of a bicycle. (CJ takes sign and goes to Block Center.) Want some tape?

Do you think everybody will know what the sign says?”

CJ: “Yes.”

During “Class Pajama Day,” teachers BW and SF interacted with the children as they cleaned materials and equipment in different areas. The following scenario is a discussion children had about football teams. As the children created and cut out team logos, they discussed the number of times particular football teams won their games. The conversation suddenly shifted when CC pondered the meaning of one of the popular phrases associated with a football team. This example of childrens’ conversation shows maturity in their ability to use the heuristic, informative, and interactional functions as they talked and created artwork at the writing table in the writing center. This ability to multi-task was observed as children were able to focus on the conversation with their peers and teacher as well as focus on creating a picture. Several functions were coded as children engaged in rich discussion among peers and teacher (SF):



During all of this, CD, RF, CC and JG are still at the art table. RF shows CD the piece she has been working on.

CD to RF: "Let's go cut them out. I'm going to cut all the Auburn signs down. All the Auburn signs down." (2, 3, 5)

RF, CD and CC cut out signs/logos.

JG: I'm going to find the glue. (Gets up from the table.) (7)

RF: My dad. . . My dad, he likes Auburn. (7)

CC: Yeah, he goes to Auburn. My dad does for Auburn. My mom's for Auburn. We all have to go for Auburn. (3, 7)

CD: Noooooo! I say Alabama! My whole family is for Alabama. (3, 7)

CD taunting CC about Auburn's team: "Whoaa and then they punted!" (3, 7) (Very noisy as both CD and CC are talking.)

RF cutting her sign out: Auburn won two times. (3, 7)

CC: "Auburn won a thousand times. Actually, Auburn won eighty thousand six times." (3,7)

CD gets up and goes to SF: Teacher, do you go for Alabama? (Follows her to kitchen area.) SF explains that she is not a football fan and relates her experiences growing up at the University of Georgia.

SF: "What are you working on, RF?"

RF: "Cutting this out." (7)

SF: "Wow! Look at this! (Picks up CC's drawing.) You could have a book of Auburn things. Couldn't you?"

CC: "Fighting Tigers." (7)

SF: "You need the eagle, don't you CC? The eagle is a bird. "War Eagle" as they say." (SF walks on to kitchen area. CC looks at SF, turns back to his table and sits still a few seconds. He then turns to SF in the kitchen again.)

CC very seriously: "I think all war is wrong!" (4, 7)

SF: "They call it "War Eagle". That is just something they say for the team. Just like for Alabama, they say "Roll Tide". They say "War Eagle" for Auburn. The only football team that I paid any attention to was the Georgia Bulldogs and They say, "Go, Georgia Bulldogs! (sings as she walks to CC at his table.) "Go, Georgia Bulldogs."

CC turns back to his work.

Other examples of children's talk and play that involved the imaginative and informative functions as children interacted with each other occurred in the home living area. The children demonstrated their abilities to create worlds by pretending, asking questions to get information, and being able to manage the social environment during interaction. While playing in the housekeeping center, AK asked:

“Who wants to be the dad?” “Who wants to be the sister?”

RF: “I do.”

AK: “What food would you like?”

OP: “Daddy, Daddy.”

AK: “I’m the baby’s Mommy.” “It’s nap time.”

OP: “Okay, Mom.”

AK: “This is a restaurant.” I’m at home cooking.” Would you like potatoes, bacon, and salad?”

The following is an example of the regulatory function used to create the play scene and give information as different genders interacted. :

MM: “I’m the queen.” (Girls continue to roam around the room in a threesome--bride with bouquet followed by two attendants).”Look at that” “No, you are the flower girl, I am the bride.”

CD: “No, RF, You’re not supposed to do that.”

JG says, “Please watch our babies.”

MM: “Hurry, JG is having a baby!” “Don’t say that to me.”

JG says, “Get in the bed while I get dressed.” “Get away from my house.” “FB . . . come on. Stop following me MJ.”

The puppet stage area welcomed children to the numerous possibilities of acting out various play scenes and stories. One day, the children acted out the story, *The Three Little Pigs*. In this example the heuristic, imaginative, and informative functions were present as children used characters from the story to create the play scene.

JG: “I’m locking the door.”

CC: “Let me in little pig.”

JG: “Not by the hair on my chinny, chin, chin.”

OG: “I’m not going to let you in wolf.”

CC: “Let me in little piggy.” “I want to buy some bricks.”

JG and OG: “Not by the hair on my chin, chin, chin.”

Children used this function to indicate their personal desires while interacting with others during sociodramatic play. The use of this function indicated negotiation during play events and language to keep the play event moving. The following is an example of how children used literacy materials and language when they pretended to mail letters:

MM: "I want to make another one."

MJ: "May I have a stamp?" (Hangs on window of puppet theatre.)

JG: "Can I be the mail girl now?"

In conclusion, the play areas helped to increase peer interaction, encouraged language functions, and increased the length of the play scenes as children were afforded risk-free opportunities to play and explore materials. The examples of children's language presented so far support the fostering of language acquisition while children interacted with peers. As children used the literacy-related materials to create their own play scenarios, multiple functions of language were observed in children's verbal interaction with others:

### *Research Question 3*

How does interaction with adults influence the language expression of preschool children during sociodramatic play?

*Adult roles during play.* In this research setting, both teachers and the researcher encouraged language learning among children by participating in active conversations during play events. This was done as the teachers and researcher acted as facilitators, scaffolds, and mediators of language to encourage opportunities toward building language acquisition. The following detailed examples from the data show how adults built upon children's personal experiences, oral language skills, and listening skills. As the adult operated in various roles, all functions of language were used in children's responses and written pieces. This section includes detailed sequences of language shared by the children and adults as they interacted.

*Adult as facilitator.* Opportunities for the adult to facilitate language often occurred when the adult initiated responses from children during read alouds. For example, the literacy-related material (big book, *If You Give a Pig a Pancake*) provided multiple opportunities for children to make text-to-self (making personal connections with elements of the text) connections as it was read aloud. Children's responses about personal experiences and prior knowledge created strong language expression. Children were able to make various connections as the adult asked questions from the content of the text and, the informative function was prevalent in their responses. The children's responses to questions were very short and to the point. This was likely due to the Socratic nature of the questions rather than to asking open ended questions. In addition, children received information while the text was read, responded to any questions, and even added additional comments to help make sense of the story. This interactive shared book experience was an appropriate way to support emergent literacy, book knowledge, and comprehension skills. For example:

Ms. B: "You cook them? Do you eat them at a restaurant?"

JG: "We don't cook at Cracker Barrel." "We go to our house to cook them."

Ms. B: (reading): "If you give a pig a pancake--

Look at this. Do you think this is something that a pig would actually do?"

Children all together: "No!"

Ms. B: "Now, you'll give her some of her favorite maple syrup.

You would probably get all sticky. She will want to take a bath.

So why would you give a pig a bath? If she gets sticky and when I get sticky

I want to wash it off. (Reading) She'll ask you for some bubbles.

Why would she want some bubbles?"

JG: "Bubble bath."

Ms. B: (reading): "When you give her the bubbles she'll probably ask you for a toy. You

will have to find a rubber ducky. Who has a rubber ducky that they put in the bath tub?"

Children responding together: "Me! I don't"

Ms. B: (reading): "The duck will remind her of a ----- . She might go hunting.

Where is the pig going?"

HD: "To the farm."

Ms. B: "Why is she going to the farm?"

HD: "Because a pig would be there."

Ms. B: "So the things you would find on a farm would be a pigs, ducks, cows."  
CR: "Horses and ducks."

It was apparent that the literacy-related materials (mailbox, envelopes, paper, etc.) used by children during sociodramatic play were strongly connected to personal knowledge and experiences. The Socratic responses were observed in this interaction as the children and I (researcher) discussed the postal materials. As a facilitator, the adult was purposeful in creating opportunities for children to build language acquisition in the grand conversation. As a facilitator, I set the stage for imaginary play with the mailbox. First, I (Ms. B) gathered prior knowledge from children about mail, mailboxes, and mail carriers. Later, I distributed paper, markers, and envelopes and invited the children to write letters. Stickers were used as stamps. The visibility of concrete objects assisted children with making connections to their prior knowledge as seen in this example.

Ms. B: "gather around on the carpet."  
MJ: "What do you got?" Ms. B takes silver mailbox out of box.  
Ms. B: "It looks like a mailbox. How do you know it is a mailbox?"  
MJ: "Cause it is a mailbox." "Can we play with it?"  
Ms. B: "I have something . . ."  
CD: "Mail! Everybody can play with it."  
Ms. B: "Yes, everybody can play. Look at this. We are all going to share. Where do you see these?"  
OG: "Outside."  
CD: "By your house."  
TE: "By your house."  
Ms. B: "You open it up and who puts things in it?" (Ms. B opens the mailbox.)  
JG: "The mail lady."  
Ms. B: "The mail lady or who?"  
JG: "The mailman."  
Ms. B: (Holds up red flag part.) "Now, this flag. Do you know what this flag means?"  
AK: "It means that mail's in it."

The following example is a continuation of the use of the mailbox materials that involves both the teacher (SF) and the researcher assisting the children with letter writing and sealing

envelopes. Girls and boys interact as the mail carriers while using the puppet theater area and the open rug area as the post office.

Ms. B: "There's mail in it and maybe Mom puts something in it and wants the mailman or lady to what? To take it out." (Ms. B attempts to put flag onto mailbox.)

WL: "What's in here?" (Opens box.)

Ragan: "It's empty."

CD: "Somebody got it."

Teacher (SF) comes to area: "What do you think we should put into it?"

Several children respond: "Mail!"

SF: "Mail call! Mail call! We should make something to put inside."

SF to Ms. B: "Oh, there is a diagram."

Ms. B: We need to read this. (Ms B is trying to attach the flag.)

Now, CD noticed that it's a square and you take this and put it on the square part. "What we'll do is work on fixing this while you all work on other things and you can write some letters."

Ms. B: "What are these?" (Holds up a package of envelopes.)

"We also have a mail bag." (Holds up a cloth bag with straps.)

"Do you ever see a mail lady or mailman that puts their letters in a bag?"

(Holds up box of small envelopes): "I have some short ones and some big ones and we'll pretend these are stamps." (Holds up pages of stickers.)

The next example shows how the adult facilitated language opportunities to support children's efforts in distinguishing reality from fantasy when they were asked questions during the shared reading book. However, some of the children's experiences with their own pets expanded the conversation. The children made even more connections when they observed pictures of the pig (character in book) dancing. For example,

Ms. B: "What would she put in her suitcase? What would she put in a suitcase?" Clothes. Do pigs wear clothes?

Children: "No!"

CR: "My dog sometimes." "Sometimes we dress her up with clothes."

Ms. B: "Yes, sometimes you can put pets in clothes."

HD: "One time we had a tea party at our house and we dressed our little dog as a ballerina."

Ms. B: "You did?" (Reading.) She will look under the bed and she finds her old tap shoes. What are tap shoes?"

JG: "Shoes you can tap dance in."

Ms. B: "She'll try them on and she will probably need something special to wear with them. What would she wear with them?"

HD: "A dress."

*Adult as mediator.* The adult as mediator was observed when teacher (BW) asked children about the imaginary trip they were taking to Mexico. When the teacher asked child FD had she ever visited Mexico, the child's response did not address the question. Having observed this, it is important to know the right moments to mediate during play so that the interruption does not disband the play event. Child FD appeared to be too focused on the play event to address the teacher's question. The heuristic, imaginative, and informative functions of language continued to be present as occurred in the following exchange.

(Three girls sitting in a line of chairs.) Teacher (BW) sitting at a table nearby. OG: "We're on the plane." Teacher (BW): "Where are you going? FD says, "To Mexico." Teacher (BW) says: "FB, Have you been to Mexico?" FB says, "We're going to our hotel."

In the next example, teacher (BW) assigned roles to children to assist with the retelling of the story, *The Three Little Pigs*. This shared book experience was joined with creative dramatics providing opportunities for the expansion of book knowledge, comprehension, recall of details, prediction, use of dialogue, and even conflict resolution. Teacher (BW) was a mediator when she encouraged responses from all of the children and suggested changing the story so that all children could participate.

RF whining: Yes, we can. (3, 6)

BW: "The little pig built a house of sticks. And then he went to rest. Along came the Big Bad Wolf and he knocked on the door of the little pig."

TE: "Hey, I can knock the wolf out!" (3, 6)

BW: And he said -----What did he say?

OG: "Little pig, little pig let me in. Not by the hair of my chinny, chin, chin." (7)

BW: "What did the wolf say?"

MJ: "I will huff and puff and blow your house down. (6, 7)

BW: "So he huffed and he puffed and he blew the house down and the little pig went away to find his brother."

JG: "Find his sister." (6, 7)

BW: "And the wolf went home. Okay, you are going to sell the bricks? Okay, FB, will sell the bricks. The next little pig, the third little pig.

J\_\_\_\_\_, you are the 3rd little pig . . . came along and met a lady selling bricks."

AK: "I want to sell the bricks." (1,6)

BW: "J\_\_\_\_\_ is buying some bricks from OG. (to J\_\_\_\_\_ ) What do you say?"

J\_\_\_\_\_: "I want to buy some bricks." (1,6)

BW: "So she built her house of bricks and went to rest. Her sister , her two sisters went to her house. Along came the BBW and he said ----- What did he say? Little pig, -----"

MJ. "Little pig, little pig let me in." (1, 3, 6)

JG: "Not by the hair-hairs of our chinny, chin, chin." (6, 7)

MJ.: "I'll huff and puff and blow your house down."(6, 7)

BW: "So he huffed and puffed and he huffed and he puffed and what happened?"

The following scenario presents a discussion children had about football teams. This example provides evidence of research question one. It is used again to provide examples for research question three to emphasize the role of the adult as mediator as teacher (SF) addressed a child's comments about "war." Several functions were coded as children engaged in a rich conversation that later included teacher (SF). During this observation in the study, the presence and support of the adult was vital. As CC entered a phase of dis-equilibration, teacher (SF) was able to quickly transition CC back to a state of equilibration when she explained the phrase "War Eagle." During this particular interaction with children, the teacher extended knowledge of the language systems (specifically the semantic system) by explaining the multiple meanings of words.

RF cutting her sign out: "Auburn won two times."

CC: "Auburn won a thousand times. Actually, Auburn won eighty thousand six times."

CD gets up and goes to SF: Teacher, do you go for Alabama? (Follows her to kitchen area.) SF explains that she is not a football fan and relates her experiences growing up at the University of Georgia. She moves to the dishwashing area and can be heard explaining how to wash dishes.

SF to RF as she goes by Art Table to kitchen area: What are you working on, RF?

RF: "Cutting this out."

SF: "Wow! Look at this! (Picks up CC's drawing.) You could have a book of Auburn things. Couldn't you?"

CC: "Fighting Tigers."

SF: "You need the eagle, don't you CC? The eagle is a bird. "War Eagle" as they say." (SF walks on to kitchen area. CC looks at SF, turns back to his table and sits still a few seconds. He then turns to SF in the kitchen again.)

CC very seriously: I think all war is wrong!"

SF: They call it "War Eagle". That is just something they say for the team. Just like for Alabama, they say "Roll Tide." They say "War Eagle" for Auburn. The only football



team that I paid any attention to was the Georgia Bulldogs and they say, “Go, Georgia Bulldogs! (sings as she walks to CC at his table.) “Go, Georgia Bulldogs.”  
CC turns back to his work. SF walks back and forth from kitchen area to the washing area with materials to be cleaned.

The next example presented was a play scene during the implementation of the literacy-related materials (mailbox, envelopes, mail bag, etc). As a participant observer during this play scene, I also was a mediator while introducing the mailbox materials to the children. I also asked the kinds of questions that supported language growth. By setting up the play scene, the children were able to execute the rest of the events as they assisted with putting together the mailbox and assigning roles of play. I was the mediator up to the time during which I began to ask questions about the “Beware of Dog” sign. It was at this point that my role changed to facilitator. This play scene, in which the adult takes on dual roles, shows the importance of the adult’s monitoring of the play event and of children’s language in order to provide the support that was needed.

Ms. B (researcher): “Now, who else needs help?” “TE, did you write your letter?” CD says, “Why don’t you stand behind the puppet stage? That’s the post office. (Shows newspaper flyers again.) This is something else, CD. Do you get these at your house, too?”

TE, looking into mailbox: “No, mail.”

Ms. B: “Wait until the mailman delivers it. CD “Are you in the post office?”

TE: “Hey, this fell off! This fell off!” (Gives flag to Ms. B.)

Ms. B: “Oh! It’s okay.”

CD in post office: “This needs another new stamp.” (Puts mail in bag.)

Ms. B: “CD is collecting the mail. (To the students) Did you give it to CD? Give it to CD and he will deliver it.”

AK: “I want to be the mail girl--boy.”

Ms. B: “You do? Okay. Okay, we’ll take turns. Oh, look. There’s the mailman.” (CD is still behind the puppet stage. Children take envelopes to him.

KW: “I want to make another one.” Children continue to take envelopes to post office.

.MJ: “May I have a stamp?” (Hangs on window of puppet theatre.)

Ms. B: “CD are you ready to deliver the letters?”

CD: “Now.” (He walks across room to mailbox on top of block shelf.)

Ms. B to CD as he nears the mailbox: “CD, there is a sign on the mailbox.” “JG, what does this say? Who can tell me what this says so CD can know?”

JG: “Mail!”

Ms. B: “Beware of the dog. Be careful when you put mail in the box.”

CD puts mail from mailbag into mailbox. Children are gathered close around.

AK grabs mail and looks through letters one by one.

Ms. B: “There’s TE’s mail. That is for TE. That’s for OG.” (AK tosses envelop across children to OG and steps back with arms folded across her chest. She then goes to look again in mailbox for more mail.)

MJ: “I mailed you a package, TE.” “I mailed you a present.”

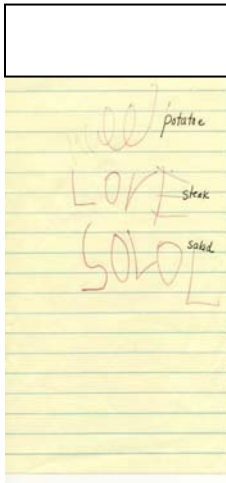
Ms. B: “ Do you know who that is from?”

TE: “The mailman.”

Ms. B: “Someone had to send it to her so the mailman could bring it to her. Do you know who? Now, CD, give the mailbag to AK. She wants to be the mailman. You may be able to help her though.”

*Adult as scaffold.* The role of the adult as a scaffold was observed when the teacher had to assist children with more complex tasks such as writing. Sometimes, the teacher assisted with writing messages if the child solicited help. There were times when the child made some attempt to write the message and the adult added the conventional language to the piece for clarity. Vygotsky believed there was an obvious link between play and written language. He saw many parallels between what happens in children’s play and what constitutes the very core of cultural development. Repeated naming and renaming of toys in play helps a child master the symbolic nature of words and eventually realize the unique relationship that exists between words and the objects they signify. Words develop metalinguistic awareness, which is frequently associated by contemporary researchers with children’s mastery of written language. While pretending during a “restaurant” play theme, MM, the server in the restaurant, recorded the food order from teacher (BW), the customer. Example 7 shows what the child wrote when the teacher placed the order. Later, the teacher recorded the language in conventional spelling when the child was asked to read her written work.

### Example 7



Child TE, pretended to be an ice cream vendor and asked the same question, “Who wants ice cream?” for over 23 minutes. I used this example to support findings in regard to research question one because of the presence of the interactional function. However, this example also shows how the teacher was a scaffold while interacting with the child. The sustained minutes of asking “Who wants ice cream?” ended after TE received a notepad on which to write ice cream orders. The teacher suggested that TE take orders for ice cream and that CC write a check (Example 8) to pay for the ice cream. The teacher was supporting language development by showing the relationship of words such as money, buy, check, and orders.

TE: “Who wants ice cream?” Roams to table with writing and SF (teacher). SF: (to boy at table): “You’ve got to give him money for ice cream.” CC’s going to write you a check (see Example 8). “He would like to buy some ice cream. The teacher (SF) says, “If you look around you’ll find pieces on the ground. People forgot to eat their ice cream. I love strawberry ice cream if it has real pieces in it.” TE: Who wants ice cream? The teacher asks, “Are you taking orders for ice cream?” “If you write it down you can remember what the people want.” Teacher (SF) asked KW “You need some ice cream?” “Okay.”

### Example 8



Teacher (SF) assisted a group of children with making a sign to prevent the blocks from being knocked down by others as they played with them in the block center. Teacher (SF) encouraged RF to sit at the writing table near the block center where teacher (SF) helped RF and then CJ to produce a sign for the block center. This idea about creating a sign was the result of the researcher sharing environmental print on the open rug area earlier that morning. The words on the sign were, “No Touching it, No Knocking it Down” (See Example 9). This is an example of the teacher as scaffold of vocabulary and meaning. The conversation with the teacher and child who generated the sign follows.

Teacher (SF): “We might try to build it again. You know what C J, we put all of our buildings in the hall way on the table. If we build it on the floor we might knock it down. To RF: We can still make signs. (RF sits down and hands the crayon to SF) What should it say?”

RF: “No touching it! No knocking it down!”

SF writing as she repeats: “No touching it! No knocking it down! You know what we could do? (C J comes to the table.) Have you ever seen a circle around something? (Draws a circle around text.) What else can we do?”

CJ: “We could write “Sorry.”

SF: You could write “Sorry,” but I was going to make a symbol. Have you ever seen a sign like that? (Holds up paper for girls.) With a circle and a line through it? That means, “No touching it.” “No knocking it down.” We could draw a hand on it so people would know that we talking about touching. (Draws hand.) No touching! Have you ever seen

that sign before? Sometimes you'll see a picture of a bicycle. (C J takes sign and goes to Block Center.) Want some tape? Do you think everybody will know what the sign says?"

*Example 9*



Another opportunity for a teacher to scaffold language development was when FB attempted to explain what she had for dinner. Teacher (BW) was as a scaffold when she provided written dictation of the child's language. After the teacher wrote the message on the notepad (see Example 16), FB talked to the children in the play group about quesos. In this scene, the cultural dimensions of sociodramatic play, literacy-related materials, and assistance from the adult created language expression.

*Example 10*



The dialogue in the following example demonstrated the support students and teacher provided to a child who was a second language learner. The teacher explained to the child about friends and instead of telling the child the meaning of friendship, the teacher used children in the class as examples and visual representations. Next, the teacher counted in Spanish and used fingers to coordinate verbal language with concrete representations. When teacher (SF) asked FB about a picture on her shirt, FB verbally responded. The conversation was as follows:

FB, OG and MM walk over to kitchen area holding dolls and stuffed animals.

FB: "I'm sorry, MM."

SF back in kitchen area to FB: "That is a nice thing to say when accidents happen. You know what? You could have a lot of friends. You and MM are friends."

FB: "Me and you" (to MM).

SF: "And you know what? OG is your friend, too. How many friends to you have now?"

FB: "Four. Two." (Holds up four fingers.)

SF: "One, two, three. (Counts girls with FB.) Tres. Tres amigos. We can add AK as a friend." (Points to AK who is watching from the couch.) "You could have quatro amigas. Uno, dos, tres, quatro, cinco. It's good to have friends, FB. I love my friends. This is awesome though! (Touches FB's stuffed Triceratops that FB is holding.) . . . What is that dinosaur wearing, FB? What does he have on?" FB: "Payama!"

### Summary of Findings

1. How does sociodramatic play with literacy-related materials create opportunities for language acquisition at the preschool level?

While Halliday's (1975) study revealed the seven functions of language were present in the home environment between a mother and a child, the analysis from this study shows that all seven functions existed in the language generated by preschool children during sociodramatic play. The literacy-related materials were used as tools to help create and extend the functions of language, thus fostering language acquisition at the preschool level. Most of the children's spoken words were categorized using all functions. The analysis of data indicated that the children's interaction of sociodramatic play, literacy-related materials, peers, and adults provided

an opportunity for children to express multi-functions of language. Because children had varied opportunities to play, use literacy-related materials, and interact in a risk-free environment, the expression of language and language acquisition were fostered as they used the seven functions of language in their spoken words.

2. How does social interaction through sociodramatic play experience among preschool children foster language acquisition as they are interacting with their peers?

As children interacted with each other and used the seven functions of language, the play scenes were able to “keep moving.” At times, some children were peer helpers and even scaffolds for other children. The seven functions of language created expressions in the form of commands, statements, and even questions. Again, these language forms and functions helped to keep the play scene active and progressive. Although the children interacted well with each other it was still surprising to see the gendered language use among preschool children.

3. How do adults influence the language expression of preschool children during sociodramatic play?

Vygotsky (1978) described how adult interaction can facilitate children’s growth within the zone of proximal development. This facilitation of development in the area of language was observed here as the adults encouraged children to incorporate literacy-related materials into their ongoing play episodes. Adults provided children with needed support and exposure to materials encouraging opportunities for literacy and language growth. In this study, the adults assumed a variety of roles when interacting with children during sociodramatic play. Those roles included facilitator, mediator and scaffold while supporting and encouraging dialogue, gathering materials, assisting with props, and asking questions of which some were literal nonplay-related

questions. A discussion of results, conclusions, implications, and recommendations for further research will be included in chapter V.



## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION OF RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 led to a renewed commitment to ensuring all children are educated and, as a result of this legislation, there has been a substantial increase in attention given to testing and the accountability that comes from those tests. Both formalized curriculum and standards have shifted preschool settings so that the environment of play, once commonplace among early childhood classrooms, is disappearing. A child who enters kindergarten without the essential building blocks of literacy runs a significant risk of beginning a cycle of academic struggle in literacy and language development that will continue through subsequent grades.

The current study supports Halliday's (1975) findings that the important systems of language involve the functions or purposes that oral and written language serve. These functions are products of sociodramatic play, thus creating language acquisition. In a sociodramatic play setting, the children in this study used their spoken and written language in functional ways that revealed the complexity and the multiplicity of the functions as they interacted with literacy-related materials, peers, and other adults. The findings from this study support Vygotsky's (1978) theory that a child develops the early stages of language acquisition through a more knowledgeable other, as well as in a group setting.

This study, furthermore, supports Vygotsky's social context of learning theory in that these children demonstrated learning through socially meaningful interactions. Children learn to talk through social interactions and to read and write through interactions with other more literate

children and adults. The purpose of this study was to explore the interactions of preschool children with literacy-related materials, peers, and adults as they engaged in sociodramatic play. Each of the three questions in the study have been organized and discussed around the following format: findings, conclusions, and implications.

## Findings

### *Research Question 1*

How does sociodramatic play with literacy-related materials create language acquisition at the preschool level?

The participants in this study, in contrast to Halliday's (1975) work, revealed their use of the seven oracy functions and written language functions during the sociodramatic play interactions with other students, adults, and literacy-related materials.

*Literacy knowledge and behavior.* Language acquisition consists of four language systems humans develop over time to communicate ideas and express their wants and needs. These systems of language developing simultaneously are: phonology, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic (Tompkins, 2007). Phonology is the learning of words and sounds. The syntactic system consists of the rules for arranging words into sentences or grammar. The semantic system is the part of language that assigns meaning to words and sentences. The pragmatic system consists of the rules that affect language usage in different social contexts or culture (Christie et al., 2007). To use language for pragmatic purposes, children must first develop in the semantics and syntactic systems. The semantic and syntactics of language demonstrates the complexity of language development because these systems consist of multiple functions and meanings of

words and rules for sentence structure. Language acquisition is developed as the four systems operate and interact together. How does this process of developing language link to sociodramatic play?

*Functions of language and language systems.* Sociodramatic play allows children to explore the language without boundaries at young ages. The ability to build knowledge of language in sociodramatic play settings allows children to take risks and learn through exploration. During the first week of data collection when I displayed literacy-related materials in the housekeeping area, I quickly noticed that very few children seemed interested in the materials. After viewing the first set of tapes, I noticed the presence of sociodramatic play throughout the classroom and the popularity of the open rug area. Something was always happening. The next week, I introduced the materials at the open rug area and participation greatly increased. Throughout the observations, I recognized that the open rug area attracted mixed genders who became involved in play, and children of all ages interacted well with each other. Unlike the traditional incorporation of centers in classrooms whereby time and choice are directed by the teacher, children in this preschool classroom were encouraged to openly explore their choice of centers and classroom areas.

The data gathered in this study indicated that when literacy-related materials were introduced to preschool children, Halliday's (1975) functions were facilitated within the context of their sociodramatic play for writing and using language. Although the informative function is the last to develop, it was the most frequently used function, specifically as children engaged in shared book experiences. This was a time during which adults and children interacted with text by sharing thoughts and responding to questions while reading a big book. The interaction

seemed almost Socratic in nature. The findings for research question one support the importance of story-book reading toward building preschool children's language development. Storybook reading exposed children to more complex grammar and to vocabulary (syntactic and semantic systems) that are not used in everyday conversations. Storybook reading contributed to children's understanding of literary elements. Storybook reading familiarized children with story grammar; story comprehension such as characters, plot, action, and sequence ("Once upon a time"); and helped children associate oral language with printed text. Storybook reading strengthened children's content knowledge. The high quality of the picture storybooks that were chosen enlarged children's lives, stretched their imaginations, and enhanced their background experiences. Reading to children was a way to build their vocabularies and background knowledge about the world.

Because of the context of this study and because sociodramatic play is comprised of playing with others, it was interesting to notice that the interactional, "me and you," function was the second most frequent function recorded. The children enjoyed socializing and negotiating with each other while they created their own play themes with various literacy-related materials. As children engaged in play situations, they used language to manipulate and extend the play scenario. The play situations had strong learning potential because they provided opportunities for children to use language to build and extend meanings, especially as they were initiated by the children. As recorded in this study, children gained important language practice from sociodramatic play and by entering into play events that represented real world situations. Children were encouraged by their peers and by the adults to use language in order to elaborate and explain. For example, children created letters and mailed them to classroom friends, and the teacher assisted students with creating a regulatory sign for the block center.

On observations days, the children demonstrated their anticipation as they scrambled to pick their favorite color of notepad, cell phone, pen, clipboard, and a host of other materials. Children took the literacy-related materials and created their own play theme. For example, one of the themes created by children was the restaurant play theme. Children used notepads to take food orders and used the restaurant menus to order their pretend meals. It generally has been acknowledged that the availability of certain play objects and props will, to some extent, determine in what kind of play children will get themselves involved (Christie, 1991).

Neuman and Roskos (1990), examined the effects of literacy-enriched play centers on children's literacy demonstration, showing that sociodramatic play in the place where literacy acts and artifacts are made available and readily accessible to children was dominated by literacy demonstrations. The teacher easily can enrich children's sociodramatic play for the promotion of literacy by providing sufficient, functional, relevant literacy-promoting play objects and props such as stationary and envelopes, mailboxes, stamps, appointment books, and assorted forms.

Play advocates can argue for a "materials intervention" strategy that involves making play areas resemble the literacy environments that children encounter at home and in their communities (Christie, 1998). Since not all families offer equal opportunities for young children to engage in rich literacy events, it is especially important that child care and other learning settings provide these play-based experiences for equal access to literacy building skills. Children are more likely to engage in play-related reading and writing activities if available materials invite these types of activities.

While children interacted with the cell phones, "Boyfriend, I told six times not to call me," was the favorite choice of words used by several preschool females during the observation period. This phrase was initiated by child JG and soon four other females began to use the same

words in their pretend phone conversations. The frequent occurrence of this phrase is one of the reasons why the regulatory function, “do as I tell you,” was the third most frequently used function by the children. An assumption was that the phrase about the “boyfriend” was language children heard someone else use, but no other adults were sure. Due to my role as researcher, I did not want to ask about the origination, but teacher (SF) asked the group of girls if this was the most respectful choice of words they would use in a conversation with family members. The girls stated it was okay to say this to a “boyfriend.” During the next observation day, I decided to ask JG about this phrase, and she said they were words from a favorite T.V. character. Children reenact what they hear and see from media sources without knowledge of empathetic boundaries.

Due to the frequency of the cell phone use in this study, I concluded the following: While children had the option of using the plastic cell phone with the phone books during sociodramatic play events, they chose to only use the cell phone. The popularity of the cell phone clearly showed how technology, in this setting a cell phone, was recognized as a literacy source. Cell phones are instruments of “new literacy” having multiple purposes. One of those purposes is that the cell phone has the ability to store numbers, addresses, and even directions, and in doing so it takes the place of actually looking for information in a phone book. Also, children perceive that cell phones are tools for communicating systems of language that may produce statements, “I need the police” or commands, “boyfriend I told you not to call me.” The children observed in this study understood the essential features of telephone usage. Nearly all of the children demonstrated knowledge of picking up the phone, dialing, pausing for another’s conversation, and then hanging up when finished. All children saw the cell phone as a tool to disseminate information through oral or written language, obtain assistance, and share conversations. All of the children were knowledgeable about the essentials of telephone discourse. They were

observed using a conversational opening and closing and correct pauses, as if waiting for the imaginary person on the other end to answer and respond to them. Although this observational study is limited by sample size, it illustrated the potential importance of the cell phone as a significant dramatic-play tool. Pretend calling was considered by this researcher to represent a mature level of thinking and talking, since there was no interaction from the imaginary receiver of the call. Also, spontaneous phone talk showed that children's oral language practices in this type of communication provided an understanding of their symbolic meaning-making practices in relation to literacy and language systems, versus an isolated realm of activity.

Observing children using the telephone during sociodramatic play was an effective way of exploring children's language and literacy learning in this study. Early childhood educators can build on this finding by making certain that phones are a part of sociodramatic play, not just in dramatic play centers, but perhaps throughout the classroom. For example, cell phones might be placed in the block area, to see if they stimulate children to call for emergency equipment when building roads and so forth. They can be placed in the book corner or puppet stage area so children can read to someone else and perhaps as aids to retell stories. . The incorporation of cell phones into sociodramatic play may help teachers to recognize and appreciate the complex language and thinking skills children employ during this specialized communication process. To avoid the idea that the cell phone popularity was a temporary event among the children, further studies should be conducted to observe what happens when cell phones are integrated in various play centers over an extended period of time.

Teachers should provide adequate time for children to play and be sensitive to matching authentic play-based literacy materials to the cultural and developmental characteristics of the children. The rationale for this recommendation comes from the findings in this study, in which

children seemed to have a more meaningful idea of the role they could play and the language they could use with the aid of literacy-related materials, such as notepads, menus, clipboards, and writing utensils.

When print becomes an integral part of children's sociodramatic play, literacy development is promoted in a number of ways. These ways can be defined as categories of prior knowledge that have been constructed at home that children bring to their sociodramatic play experiences. The first category is children's knowledge of written registers (Pappas, 1991; Pappas & Brown, 1988; Sulzby, 1985). During sociodramatic play episodes, children have a chance to consolidate and demonstrate what they have learned about the everyday uses of written language (Neuman & Roskos, 2003). The language one reads when reading books and written texts of different genres is not the same language one speaks or hears. Written language differs in specific and identifiable ways from oral language (Chafe & Danielewicz, 1986). Developing readers and writers, therefore, need to learn the different linguistic registers of the written texts they will read and write.

Incorporating literacy-related materials with sociodramatic play is a broad-spectrum instructional strategy that may offer children many opportunities to learn a variety of different skills and concepts. Much of the play observed while children interacted with literacy-related materials offered opportunities for them to be social and to create opportunities for peer collaboration. Children observed became actively involved with a variety of strategies such as modeling, designating, and coaching each other as they engaged in language activities. This play was determined to involve the phonological, syntactic, and semantic aspects of language. Recent research in early literacy and peer culture suggested that sociodramatic play is of special importance to the development of children's social as well as language learning, as its symbolic,



abstract, social nature is compatible with the cognitive operations in literacy behavior in a literate society of today (Christie, 1980; Pallegriani et al., 1983; Roskos, 1988).

Vygotsky (1986), as well, believed learning, in every culture, takes place through everyday interactions and shared experiences between adult and child. Obviously, in different cultures the interactions and words differ, but the process remains remarkably similar (Chomsky, 1986). Dewey's (1938) interpretation of development stated that language learning takes place not as a series of lessons or drills in isolated skills but as a social necessity. From the common experience of going to a supermarket or some other place in the community or school, themes for sociodramatic play, murals, and other group projects emerge. These, in turn, give children still more to talk about, listen to, and express through play, drawing, painting, and writing (Morrow & Schickedanz, 2006).

In conclusion, this study provides evidence supporting linguist theories indicating that linking literacy-related materials and play provides a well-equipped setting that may promote literacy activities and develop language skills and strategies. Findings from this study revealed that sociodramatic play creates opportunities for language acquisition in preschool children through the following activities: use of literacy-related materials such as sociodramatic play props, books, markers, signs, paper of many types, mailboxes, menus, and cell phones accompanied with adult modeling and encouragement, fosters greater print awareness, verbal expression, and social interactions. Literacy-related materials, especially developmentally appropriate books and writing tools, placed in learning centers beyond the traditional reading and meeting areas (such as blocks, puzzles, manipulatives, dramatic play, and science) appeared to increase both the quality and quantity of early literacy play-based experiences. The study also found that providing literacy experiences to build connections between oral and written modes of

expressions provided these children with assistance in incorporating those experiences into their play, thus these children indicated they viewed reading, writing, and building language acquisition as enjoyable communicative skills. However, the benefits of linking play, language, reading and writing with literacy-related materials might be beyond fun. Play serves literacy and language development by providing opportunities to teach and learn literacy and language.

### *Research Question 2*

How does social interaction through sociodramatic play experience among preschool children foster language acquisition as they are interacting with their peers?

*Gender roles.* Just as young children acquire an understanding of language through social interactions with parents, peers, and even the media, so, too, do preschoolers acquire gender knowledge. Different beliefs about learning lead to various perspectives on how children acquire gender knowledge. From the perspective of *biological theory*, (Christie et al., 2007), children are born with inherent gender-oriented roles which are innate and therefore unchanging. This school of thought argues that girls are born with feminine, care-giving identities and are naturally suited to the roles of mothering and housekeeping, whereas boys are born with hunter and protector tendencies which lead to roles of dominance. For example, in this study females were often observed cuddling baby dolls and males were often observed engaging in rough play with other males and many times acted in a very callous manner with materials and objects. Biological theorists would anticipate that the play of young children, as well as the language they use during play, would be reflective of the static nature of inborn tendencies. A different perspective is held by *social learning theorists* (Christie et al., 2007) who believe that the acquisition of the concept

of gender occurs as children observe the world around them. The following example was observed as girls interacted with cell phones. In this example of girls' interaction while pretending to use cell phones, the language exhibits gender dominance:

JG in loud sing-song voice: "I told you six times, not to call me!"  
RF: "Do you want to play that game?"  
CJ: "I want to play it. Boyfriend, I told you six times, not to call me!"  
JG: "Come on, CJ."  
Teacher (SF): "Is that the way to talk to people on the phone?"  
JG: "It's my boyfriend."  
C J: "I told you six times not to call me!"  
JG: "I told you six times not to call me!"  
SF: "JG if you called your grandmother on the phone, how would you talk to your grandmother?"  
JG: "Hello. Goodbye! Boyfriend, I told you six times. I told you not to call me."

Through watching sex-typed behaviors and observing these behaviors reinforced through attitudes and examples in the world around them, children in this study began to imitate and eventually adopt gender specific behaviors. In contrast, *cognitive developmental theorists* (Christie et al., 2007) suggest that children participate in the process of gender role acquisition by constructing their own understanding of the gender models they see around them, rather than being uncontrollably shaped by biological or social forces. An example of this occurred when OP said "Boys play with trucks and girls play with dolls." This perspective acknowledges the active participation of children in making sense of the gendered messages they receive. All three perspectives offer insight into the acquisition of gender knowledge and the potential of dramatic play and oral language in minimizing sex-role stereotyping. Starting around age 2 and increasing throughout the preschool years, children begin to demonstrate gender awareness and gender-role stereotypes (Christie et al., 2007).

Accurately or inaccurately, preschoolers construct culturally sanctioned messages regarding which gender-related behaviors are and are not acceptable (Scott, 2000). Children

develop deeply engrained beliefs about what boys and girls should and should not do (Scott, 2000). Often these beliefs are reflected in the oral language used, as well as in the toys and activities selected for play. For example,

JG: *"I am the bride." You are the flower girl. "Can you help me put on my dress?"*

MM: *"Okay. Hey, can Zach be in the wedding?"*

JG: *"No, this is for girls only."*

MM: *"But boys are in weddings, too!"*

The entrenchment of gender-specific expectations and behaviors was noted by Martin and Fabes (2001) in their observations of same-gender play groups. They found that children who play more frequently with same-sex peers tend to demonstrate more gender-typical behaviors than children who play with opposite sex peers. Girls, for example, who play most often with other girls tend to be less active during play and boys who play primarily with other boys tend to be more aggressive during play. In this current study, same-gender play episodes revealed patterns of verbal exchange that reinforced gender schemes. For example, children were observed while engaging in pretend conversations using toy cell phones, and differences in oral language among genders were noted. One male began his conversation with another male by saying, *"What are you doing, butt head?"* The two continued to talk in a manner that mimicked the language of older teens. In contrast, a girl greeted another girl with a singsong, *"Whatcha' doin?"* and the two engaged in a friendly exchange of language similar to mature adult women.

Play situations have strong cognitive and social learning potential because they provide natural opportunities for children to use language in developing an understanding about their world (Perlmutter & Burrell, 1995). Not surprisingly, language is a significant factor in social play scenarios in which children take on the gender roles of others. In the following example a boy and a girl negotiate roles while interacting:

OG: *“May I take your order?”*  
MJ: *“Yes, I would like coffee.”*  
OG: *“With or without sugar and cream?”*  
MJ: *“With sugar and cream, please.”*

In the context of play, language is used as children negotiate the scene and learn to cooperate with each other. It is the means by which children manipulate and extend the play scenario, as well as construct gender schemes (Guddemi, 2000; Heidemann & Hewitt, 1992; Van Hoorn 2003). Attending to the language children use during play may offer hope for helping children develop more androgynous ways of thinking and interacting.

Children have been shown to acquire gender knowledge and stereotypes at a young age, and teachers will have no easy task in erasing these deeply held ideas (Van Hoorn, 2003). Today’s teachers need a toolkit of effective strategies for intervening in the play of young children. Below is a list recommendations to promote effective intervention strategies.

1. During play, help young children recognize the limitations of exclusive language and develop the skills of inclusive language.

Because language plays an important role in the way in which gender is represented in our society, how a child uses language during play can reveal much about his or her notion of gender. The attentive teacher will listen for the use of exclusive or inclusive language as children playfully interact with each other. If a teacher hears a child say, “Only boys can play with trucks,” then he or she might gently counter with, “In our classroom boys and girls can play with trucks.” It could be that teachers, as well as students, need direct instruction in the use of appropriate examples of inclusive language versus stereotypic language. What does it mean to use gender appropriate language? “Let’s all line up,” rather than “Line up guys.” In daily dialogue and conversation, young children learn to model questions as well as how to respond to them. Sociodramatic play provides children an opportunity to experiment with dialogue.

2. Use mixed gender groups during play to demonstrate the integration of behaviors traditionally thought to belong exclusively to one sex or the other.

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003), suggest that “Gender segregation in childhood almost certainly plays some role in the development of gendered verbal practice” (p. 25). When children are limited in their interaction with opposite sex peers, this is reflected in the language they use. Teachers can guard against this tendency by ensuring that both play and learning groups include boys and girls.

Within the groups teachers should make sure that girls and boys are provided equal access and time with toys that are typically reserved for the opposite sex. In addition, teachers should, on occasion, quietly intervene to reorganize groups that segregate themselves by sex. Cross-sex interaction among children that is guided by a sensitive teacher can help minimize the gender stereotypes children bring to school. Children begin to see that both sexes are capable of engaging in similar activities and accomplishing similar tasks. When children cooperate in groups to accomplish specific tasks, teachers should make sure that both girls and boys have an opportunity to lead. Both may take on a variety of roles within the group.

3. Provide opportunities to practice flexible gender roles in the classroom through dramatic play.

Teachers can foster productive, literate play by designing classroom physical structures and play tools that are conducive to playful learning. Play episodes, such as the post office event in this study, were observed to allow children to take more defined roles in their play. It is important to consider how classrooms are structured so that spontaneous, literate language interactions can thrive. Scott and McCollum (2000) suggest that teachers should “eliminate the assignment of sex-stereotyped tasks and provide opportunities for all children to participate in all activities” (p.

186). In this current study, it was evident that both genders used language to “test” or even “fix” problems that occurred in play episodes or to keep the play episodes moving, so teachers should consider watching how children are able to use language to solve problems. For example, JG told MJ, “I do not want boys following me.” During instances of this nature, teachers often reminded children to “use their words” if emotions became too strong during play interaction.

4. During play, handle the management of inappropriate behaviors equitably.

Teacher expectations about appropriate classroom behavior can either serve as a positive role model for gender equity or can inadvertently reinforce unhealthy stereotypes. Teachers should discourage the same inappropriate classroom behavior equally in boys and girls. Whether dealing with loud and boisterous behaviors or quiet, deferential behaviors, teachers should hold similar classroom expectations for both girls and boys. Inappropriate aggression should not be tolerated, and extreme passivity should be challenged equally for both girls and boys. “Teachers should provide all children with opportunities for engaging in and receiving praise for such behaviors as curiosity, cooperation, assertiveness, and helpfulness. In this manner, the teacher demonstrates appropriate school behavior, not gender behavior” (Scott & McCollum, 2000, p. 177).

Growing up in a diverse society makes it imperative for children to develop gender equity schemes. Preschool teachers have a responsibility to foster language development and social interactions of their young students. Genishi and Dyson (1984) reported that language specialists have become very aware of the social context of development including adult-child interaction and child-child interaction in home and out-of-home settings. Genishi and Dyson (1984) point out that “when studying children’s language, we take into account both linguistic and social abilities” (p. 12).

Social situations and interactions can have tremendous effects on the child's language development and the kinds of language the child produces, such as non-gender stereotypes. If children can learn to use language in varied situations, adults can facilitate that versatility by providing opportunities for play and talk (and later reading and writing).

Research on play and its relationship to social and language development has been conducted by many (Pellegrini, Vulkelich, & Neumon, 1998). Current research on early literacy outcomes shows a relationship between active socially engaging play and early language development. Social skills, oral language development, and sociodramatic play go hand in hand. Children who are provided with play opportunities in multi-age settings broaden their own understandings of the social world and of language diversity (Roskos, 1995). The growing emphasis on the teaching of early language and literacy skills in child care, preschool, and other learning settings stems from important research linkage (Neuman & Roskos, 1993). Social play is a significant contributor to early language development and later literacy indicators (Christie, 1998; Morrow, 2001; International Reading Association, 2002; Strickland, 1997). A noted group of early literacy specialists (Christie, 1998; Morrow, 2001; Neuman & Roskos, 1993; Strickland & Strickland, 1997) documented the significant effect of hands-on socially engaging early literacy experiences on the literacy readiness and prereading skills of young children in preschool and kindergarten settings. Although not always regarded as "reading" in a formal sense, acquisition of these print meaning associations is viewed as an important precursor to more skilled reading (Goodman, 1986).

*Classroom area.* In this study, the classroom area and classroom schedule were key factors providing opportunities for play and language development. The literacy-related



materials in conjunction with large blocks of time and well defined areas in the classroom created opportunities for children to explore, manipulate, and interact. Field (1980) compared the effects of large open spaces and smaller portioned spaces within the same overall area. Field (1980) found that smaller partitioned spaces facilitated more optimal school behaviors than did large open spaces. Those behaviors included peer and verbal interaction, fantasy play, and associative /cooperative play. Moore (1986) found similar results in a study of the effects of well-defined and poorly defined spatial setting on the social and cognitive behavior of children. Children in the well-defined settings exhibited more engaged and exploratory behaviors and more social interaction and cooperation than did children in moderately or poorly defined settings. Pellegrini (1982) also examined differences in children's use of language in various activity areas. Engaged in the dramatic play area, children encoded ideas more explicitly into language and depended less on contextual assumptions to convey meaning than when they played in the block center. In further research, Pellegrini (1983) found that both the housekeeping and the block areas elicited more individual and multifunctional uses of language than did other activity areas in the classroom. In an experimental setting, however, playing with drama props elicited more imaginative language than playing with blocks alone (Pellegrini 1983).

### *Research Question 3*

How do adults influence language expression of preschool children during sociodramatic play?

*Teacher roles.* The teachers in this study exhibited an in-depth understanding of child development and expressed their understanding that sociodramatic play is a developmentally appropriate practice. They viewed learning as an active process (Bredekamp, 1987). When the teachers interacted with children during sociodramatic play, they served as scaffolds to build language as they create reciprocal dialogue by questioning. The teachers fostered productive, literate play by designing classroom physical structures and choosing literacy-related materials that were conducive to language learning. While adult intervention may serve as a meaningful scaffold to assist children with progressing in their language, knowing when to include adult intervention is vital. For example, when children were discussing football teams and child CC had a question about “war,” the adult intervention caused the child to shift between disequilibrium and then equilibrium as the meaning of “War Eagle” was explained.

During a play scenario when teachers were involved with students, teachers accepted invitations from the children to eat at the pretend restaurant. At the child’s command, adults followed play rules established by the child. Those rules included entering play events when invited and if invited the adult submitted to the desires of the child. The children took on the roles of adults while adult behaviors conveyed a sense of submission to the one in charge of the play theme, the child. The children were servers and completed the food orders as the adults pretended to eat whatever was served to them by the children. While adults engaged in the restaurant play theme, conversation between the adult and child was interactive in that the items from the menu were discussed, but the child continued to lead the conversation.

This study suggests that teachers fostered productive, literate play by designing classroom physical structures and play tools that were conducive to playful learning. Play episodes, such as the post office and restaurant themes, allowed children to take more defined

roles in their play. Adults and children seemed to have a more meaningful idea of the role they could play and the language they could use with the aid of literacy-related props, such as notepads, menus, clipboards, and writing utensils. In order to teach students successfully, it is necessary for students to know how to use language to learn; and also how to use language to participate as an individual in the learning situation (Vygostsky, 1986). The ability to operate effectively in all functions of language is learned; it does not follow automatically from acquisition of the grammar and vocabulary of the mother tongue (Halliday, 1978). It is not always the questions of which words and structures the child knows or uses, but of their functional language significance and interpretation.

The implication from this study for a teacher is that his or her own model of language should at least not fall short of that of the child. If the teacher's image of language is narrower and less rich than that which is already present in the minds of those he or she is teaching, it will be irrelevant to her as teacher. A minimum requirement for an educationally relevant approach to language is that it should take account of the child's own linguistic experience, defining this experience in terms of its richest potential, and noting where there may be language gaps, with certain children, which could be educationally and developmentally harmful (Halliday, 1977).

Dickinson and Smith, (1991) were able to improve their understanding of the factors that relate to the language environments created and sustained in classrooms. They found that the three general areas of classroom life (length of school day, number of students, and specific qualities of teachers) influence interaction in positive or negative ways. Teacher pedagogy that is centered on facilitating children's social and emotional development through interaction (e.g., pretending with children) and through facilitating literacy development contributes positively to the overall classroom language environment. There is a need to recruit more highly educated

teachers because of high quality interaction that students may experience. Preschool teachers should become aware of the particular types of talk that are known to be facilitative of later language and literacy development. Teacher educators need to know that a Vygotskian perspective provides a hopeful framework for thinking about learning; that is, if learning can be influenced by social mediation, then conditions can be created in schools that can help most students learn. Integration of social interaction, literacy-related materials, and teacher intervention may serve to develop language acquisition. Such integration might help to transition students toward the last function of language (informative), which is a time where dialogue and vocabulary begin to rapidly develop.

#### Summary of Questions' Findings, Conclusion, and Implications

One of the major findings by Cortez (2000) was that when Mexican American children had the opportunity to engage in sociodramatic play, the richness of their language was revealed in their play. As the preschoolers in this study participated in sociodramatic play, they demonstrated they were learning to establish better relationships with each other, to solve problems with their imagination, and to expand their language. As these children created language during sociodramatic play, they demonstrated they were learning to use different functions of language such as sequence of events, which also means the creation or elaboration of a story line related to literature that is required of children in school. Children's spoken words during the sociodramatic play observed reflected the classifications of language, such as reporting on present and past experiences, logical reasoning, predicting, projecting, and imagining. The results of this current study showed that these preschool children, when given the opportunity to engage in sociodramatic play, could display different language functions that are

needed for the development of early literacy skills and also encompass their cognitive development. In this study, children were able to use their funds of knowledge to create elaborate sociodramatic play episodes.

Parlakian (2004) argued that the ability to communicate with others is a powerful achievement for young children, stating that children's language progression may be connected to their conversations to peers and adults. He defined dialogue as an exchange of talk between adult and child or child and child in the form of questions, commands, and statements. Parlakian used these as categories to code the kinds of talk children use as they interacted with adults, children, and play tools. In this current study, receptive and expressive languages were evident in children's ability to use questions, commands, and statements in their functional speech.

Hall (1991) recommends that classroom play areas be subjected to a print flood, an abundance of reading and writing materials that go along with each area's play theme. The goal is to make these play centers resemble the literacy environments that children encounter at home and in their communities. For example, a restaurant center might be equipped with menus, wall signs, pencils, and notepads (for taking food orders). These props would invite children to incorporate familiar restaurant-based literacy routines into their play. In this current study, children were surrounded with a print flood as they interacted with various literacy-related materials. A different type of literacy materials not only encourages language development, but stimulates different kinds of literacy during sociodramatic play as well. Morrow and Rand (1991) reported that unthematic literacy materials, such as pens, pencils, markers, and books, encourage children to practice and experiment with the form and structure of print. In this current study, when literacy-related materials were implemented during sociodramatic play, children were presented with opportunities to learn a variety of different literacy concepts and skills. In

addition, children learned language in a variety of ways such as observation, experimentation, collaboration, and instruction. As a result, there were greater opportunities for children at different levels of development to learn new language skills and to consolidate newly acquired skills that may be partially mastered. Unlike narrowly focused skill-drill activities, opportunities exist for every child in the classroom to advance his or her language development during sociodramatic play.

In this current study, children engaged in oral language while engaged in the sociodramatic play. Some children took on major roles while interacting with materials and others, and the language children used during sociodramatic play was based upon the various tools implemented during the play event. If teachers desire children to engage in various types of dialogue it is important that they investigate the effects of including tools and objects that connect to children's prior experiences as well as those that are products of literacy. For example, the notepads, clipboards, and pens were items that children used at school, but the children recognized how these items are used beyond the school environment. Child OP used his notepad and pencil to write a speeding ticket and child CH used the notepad and pen to write a grocery list. With these observations teachers should study the effects of including items that are developmentally appropriate for small children, and varying the amount of print that students view at one time. When teachers interact with children during sociodramatic play, they serve as facilitators, mediators, and even scaffolds to build language that creates a cycle of dialogue exchange through questioning and responding.

When children are engaged in play situations they use language to manipulate and extend the play scenario. Play situations have strong learning potential because they provide opportunities for children to use language to build and extend meanings, especially when it is

initiated by the child. As recorded in this study, children gained important language practice from sociodramatic play, and by entering into play events that represented abstract situations, children were required to use language in order to elaborate and explain.

There are many possible implications to be studied because language, pretend play, and learning have a complex relationship. Social pretend play contexts provide unique opportunities for young children to become adept at communicating their ideas. Clarke (1983) explained that in pretend play, young children acquire new words to convey meaning that is often beyond their existing repertoires. Because pretend play is representational, children learn how to use gestures and words to designate real events and or persons (Pellegrini, 1983). In pretend play, Pelligrini (1982, 1984, and 1991) explained that children use elaborated language. They define pronouns linguistically, modify nouns with adjectives, and use causal and temporal conjunctions in order to make their imaginative suggestions intelligible to their play partners. Thus, social pretend play provides experiences for children to practice and master their communicative competence. In play, children are continually refining social-cognitive concepts. Sometimes, children's play ideas may conflict with those of their peers, but in the process of negotiating pretend scripts and incorporating their partner's suggestions, young children learn to accommodate different perspectives. Thus, social pretend play provides an educational setting for young children to refine their ideas and communicative skills to create shared meaning. For future studies, I would like to explore how participation in dramatic play centers during preschool prepares children for successful reading achievement.

In conclusion, the spoken words of children documented throughout chapters IV and V illustrated how the nonliteral nature of play makes language activities significant to children. Maybe some of the children's language and writing pieces would seem meaningless in some

situations but, this make-believe orientation enabled children to demonstrate their growing awareness of the practical functions of print and language. Children in this study demonstrated that printed language can grant access to experiences such as movies, creating signs and can be used to leave messages for other people. The low-risk atmosphere of sociodramatic play encouraged children to experiment with emergent forms of reading, writing, and language. When children engage in sociodramatic play, their attention is focused on the activity itself rather than on the goals or outcome of the activity. This means-over-ends orientation promotes risk taking. If outcomes are not critical, then mistakes are inconsequential.



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APPENDIX A  
LETTER OF RECRUITMENT

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am requesting permission to complete a research project at the Child Study Center. This research project is designed to be an interpretive study using video and audio recording to gather data about children's play and its effects on language development. This study will take place within 6 weeks. The data collection for this project will consist of videos and observations of preschool children engaged in dramatic play centers of their preschool classroom. The results from this data will be analyzed in an effort to generate categories of emerging themes according to the central research question how does a preschool dramatic play center enhance language development during dramatic play? During informal interviews, which will be audiotaped, preschool children will be asked open-ended questions about written pieces or drawings created while engaged at the play center. Also, two classroom teachers and the researcher will collaborate and choose various play objects and tools to be placed in the play center and the teachers will participate in informal interviews as well. Thank you for your time and consideration of this project.

I \_\_\_\_\_ have read a brief description of the research project entitled Dramatic Play and the Potentials of Early Language Development of Pre-school Children submitted by Tarsha Bluiett. I am supportive of this research and approve for the research to be conducted at University of Montevallo Child Study Center.

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Director of The UM Child Study Center

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Signature

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Date

APPENDIX B  
CONSENT FORM



## Parental Consent Form

**Title of Research:** Dramatic Play and the Potentials of Early Language Development of Pre-school Children

**Investigator:** Ms. Tarsha Bluiett

For Minors (persons under 19 years of age) participating in this study, the use of the term “You” refers to “You or Your Child” and addresses both the participant and the parent or legally authorized representative.

### **Explanation of Procedures:**

To begin the research, the teacher and researcher will choose various literacy related materials (e.g. paper, pencils, menus, and notebook, etc) to be placed in the home living dramatic play center. For approximately 10 weeks, preschool children will be observed and videotaped while they engage in dramatic play centers in their classroom. The researcher also will ask the children about pictures and drawings they created in the play centers using various literacy related materials and perhaps ask students a few questions concerning events that took place during the center. The interviews will be audio-taped and the tapes will be secured in a locked filing cabinet to be accessed only by the researcher. The interviews will be conducted in the child’s school setting.

### **Risk and Discomforts:**

The risks and discomforts associated with participation in this research are not greater than those encountered in day-to-day living.

### **Benefits:**

Your child may receive no direct benefit from participation in this research. However, the results from this study will be used as a tool to identify the strengths and weaknesses within the dramatic play center in terms of supporting children’s oral language development .

### **Alternatives:**

You have the right to not give permission for your child to participate in this research.

Page 1 of 3

Revised January 8, 2008

Participant’s Initials \_\_\_\_\_

### **Confidentiality:**

The data, including audio tapes, videotapes and transcriptions, will be stored in a locked metal cabinet until all data is destroyed. Participants will be identified by pseudonyms in all transcripts, and participants’ names will not be stored or noted on the data. The investigator is the only person to whom the data is accessible. The results of this research may be published in a professional or practitioner journal, or presented at a conference. The Institutional Review Board for Human Use may review the research records for auditing purposes.





APPENDIX C  
SAMPLE OF RESEARCHER'S JOURNAL

March 14

Journal Entry #4

I arrived @ the CSC around 8:15 a.m. Two children were in the center, more joined when I took out the notepads, writing utensils & menus. About two students quickly scribbled & rapidly made through the stacks of paper. All students want stacks of paper; one sheet will not do.

Question - Do certain play tools prompt the dialog, question, or other functions of language. Will the language change based on the tool, the student interacts with?

I mentioned earlier that students were using all kinds of words, but I was not hearing "menu." When I showed the students 2 menus - adult & children's - they immediately knew how to identify the objects. Therefore they were able to identify/use the words but not

\* until the concrete object was made visible. \* Tools do promote language!

Q. Now I'm beginning to perhaps see them in dialog questions & commands of language. Has much of this language mimics personal language use of an adult in play use? I did not plan for the notepads, clipboards, menus, writing utensils to mimic a "restaurant dramatic play theme," the students came up with this theme/idea. They certainly had the dialogue to develop pretend situations!

Answer  
Q. \* Question - How much of student's personal experience helps to develop/encourage language use with play tools in the dramatic play area?

Q