RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHERS’ ROLES, TYPES OF LANGUAGE
AND CHILDREN’S RESPONSES DURING PLAY

by

Juana Gaviria-Loaiza

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science in Human Development and Family Studies

Spring 2015

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Juana Gaviria-Loaiza

Approved: __________________________________________________________________________
Myae Han, Ph.D.
Professor in charge of thesis on behalf of the Advisory Committee

Approved: __________________________________________________________________________
Rena Hallam, Ph.D.
Chair of the Department of Human Development and Family Studies

Approved: __________________________________________________________________________
Lynn Okagaki, Ph.D.
Dean of the College of Education and Human Development

Approved: __________________________________________________________________________
James G. Richards, Ph.D.
Vice Provost for Graduate and Professional Education
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to thank my advisor Dr. Myae Han, for her constant support, feedback, and advice during the process of writing my thesis. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Jason Hustedt, and Dr. Jennifer Vu for their valuable comments and suggestions. To my fellow graduate students Anna, Shan, and Kimmy, thank you for all your help with coding and revisions. Thanks to Laura Finan, who was always willing to discuss ideas, and provide feedback and support. Last but not least, I want to thank God for giving me the opportunity to be here, my family for always believing in me, and my husband for his patience, help, and encouragement through this process.
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ABSTRACT

Children’s play experiences in the early years have been linked to different domains of children’s development, including language. The preschool years are crucial for children’s learning and early experiences often predict children’s future success. Adults play an important role in children’s development. Teachers’ role in play has been documented, showing the important role of play in language development. The present qualitative study uses secondary data from videos of eleven teachers in community childcare settings to explore (1) the different roles that teachers use to facilitate play; (2) the way children respond to teachers’ behaviors within these roles, and (3) the relationship with teachers and children’s language use during play. Results suggest that specific teacher behaviors within the roles they adopt elicit three types of children’s responses: ignore/reject, resistance, and acceptance behaviors. The co-player and play leader role were often associated with children’s acceptance behaviors, and were considered more appropriate for teachers to support children’s language development.
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The preschool years constitute an important period in children’s lives. It is during these years that play and fantasy come naturally and represent the core of children’s activities, supporting their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development (Brown, 2010; Johnson, Christie, & Wardle, 2005; Vygotsky, 2004). Language and emergent literacy are also developed in the early years of life, and are crucial for children’s future success (Christie, Enz, Vukelich, & Roskos, 2014). For instance, it is during the preschool years that children learn more vocabulary than during any other stage of their lives (Farkas & Beron, 2004), and the foundation for future reading success is set (Dickinson & Porche, 2011). Play has been shown to enhance children’s language development, which contributes to children’s further literacy development (Connor, Morrison, & Slominski, 2006; Ilgaz & Aksu-Koc, 2005; Roskos & Christie, 2001). Adequately supporting children’s play in the early years is important since it could have potential benefits for children in both the short and the long term.

The role of adults in children’s early years is crucial. Children’s caregivers often define the different contexts and activities children will be exposed to, and provide support to enhance children’s development. For instance, parents and teachers play an important role in enhancing children’s language and literacy development, and promoting playful activities (Bowers & Basyleva, 2011; Dickinson & Porche, 2011;
During the preschool years, children often spend a substantial amount of time in childcare settings, interacting with teachers in the classrooms. Therefore, studying the different ways teachers can support children’s development through daily activities poses an important topic. When studying play in the classroom previous studies have looked at teacher-child interactions, and have identified different teachers’ roles that either enhance or disrupt children’s play (Johnson et al., 2005; Kontos, 1999; Meacham, Vukelich, Han, & Buell, 2013, 2014; Vu, Han, & Buell, in press). Johnson et al. (2005) divide these roles into two groups: precarious roles (i.e., uninvolved, director, and redirector) and facilitator roles (i.e., onlooker, stage manager, co-player, and play leader). The former group illustrates cases in which teachers are either not involved or overinvolved in children’s play often perturbing it, while the latter group seems to enhance the quality of children’s play. Although these roles emerged from teachers’ observations in the classrooms, they are often used as theoretical concepts with few empirical studies supporting them. While previous studies have looked at the facilitative roles teachers assume during play (Kontos, 1999; Meacham et al., 2013), to date, there is little research on the different responses that children have when teachers adopt these roles. The current study tries to expand this area by studying the functions of the facilitative roles in relation to the child’s responses in a more detailed way. It identifies specific behaviors that teachers use within these roles that elicit different responses from children.

As previously noted, teachers play an important role in supporting children’s language development, and play seems to be an alternative for them to do so. Few
studies have focused on teacher-child verbal interactions during play (Dickinson & Porche, 2011; Justice et al., 2013; Meacham et al., 2013, 2014; Tompkins et al., 2013). These studies have looked at the interactions mostly from the teachers’ perspectives, and have often focused on one specific play context (Meacham et al. 2013; 2014; Tompkins et al., 2013). Understanding the limitations of their own work, most researchers have noted the need for more studies to examine teacher-child conversations during play, in order to find better ways to support children’s development, and teachers’ professional development (Dickinson, Darrow, & Tinubu, 2008; Meacham et al., 2013; Tompkins et al., 2013). This study builds on the literature of teacher-child language interactions during play by exploring the relationship between the types of language teachers and children use during play and the facilitative roles teachers adopt during these interactions.

Furthermore, the current study takes place in community childcare centers that typically serve a large and diverse population of children. For instance, in the state where the present study was conducted, approximately 30% of children from low-income families attend Head Start programs or state funded programs (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2010). Many of the remaining children are likely to attend community-based childcare centers, which unlike Head Start programs, are open full-day and year round, therefore better meeting the needs of working families. Community-based childcare centers include both for-and non-profit centers and serve children from various family income levels (i.e., from low-income to high-income). Therefore, conducting this study in community-based childcare centers provides important perspectives for understanding diverse populations of children and teachers that have been understudied within the literature.
This study is informed by Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of the zone of proximal development, and the concept of scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). This theoretical framework allows emphasizing the way teachers could enhance children’s language and quality of play when adopting facilitative roles. It employs qualitative research methods using secondary analysis of video data.
Chapter 2
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The present study is guided by Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the zone of proximal development, and by the concept of scaffolding (Wood et al., 1976). These concepts set the stage to better understand the process of teacher-child interactions during play, and the way teachers support children’s language development within this scenario.

Vygotsky’s Zone Of Proximal Development

Vygotsky’s (1978) construct of the “zone of proximal development” constitutes an example of the person-context relation (Lerner, 2002). It also provides an example of the important role that adults can play in children’s development. Vygotsky (1978) explains that a child has some actions or abilities in his/her repertoire that allow him/her to achieve certain goals. Other goals, however, are out of reach of the child, and therefore, the child needs some instruction or education to accomplish these goals. These two scenarios illustrate two different “zones” of the child. The difference between what the child can do on his/her own, and what the child can do with some guidance is what Vygotsky called the zone of proximal development (Lerner, 2002). Furthermore, the guidance that the child receives from adults or more competent peers to reach his/her maximum potential is known as “scaffolding” (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). Regarding language, Bond and Wasik (2009) explain that children develop their language skills by verbally interacting with adults who
scaffold their language knowledge and provide opportunities for learning new vocabulary, syntax, and semantics. Play itself was also viewed by Vygotsky as a zone of proximal development, considering it as a tool for children to achieve higher cognitive functioning levels (Roskos & Christie, 2001).

The construct of zone of proximal development provides the basis to better understand the dynamic that takes place in teacher-child interactions during play. Through these interactions teachers can scaffold not only children’s language with their comments and questions, but children’s play as well. Teachers could adopt certain types of roles during play that would bring children’s play to a higher level of complexity.

**Play and Learning**

Play is an abstract concept that carries multiple meanings, and therefore, it is hard to define (Johnson et al., 2005; Roskos & Christie, 2001). However, researchers have defined play by identifying its characteristics, which include positive affect, nonliterarity, intrinsic motivation, process orientation, and free choice (Johnson et al., 2005).

Play has been studied in diverse contexts particularly linked to the childhood period. In childhood play often comes naturally, helping the child’s development (Brown, 2010; Johnson et al., 2005). Likewise, during play children get to express spontaneously specific needs that arise during the preschool years that are important for their development (Vygotsky, 1966). Play, free play in particular, has been shown to offer valuable opportunities to cognitively challenge children through playful activities (Gest, Holland-Coviello, Welsh, Eicher-Catt, & Gill, 2006). It has also been shown to promote social competence, academic performance, confidence, self
regulation, and management of emotions and behaviors (Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2008). Based on a Vygotskian perspective, Roskos and Christie (2011) argue that play itself becomes a tool that children use on their own to reach greater levels of cognitive functioning.

Although play is considered important in children’s lives and has been linked with multiple benefits, the role of play in academic learning is controversial (Roskos, Christie, Widman, & Holding, 2010). According to Roskos et al. (2010) there are three different positions concerning the relationship between play and academic learning. The first position, supported by empirical and practical findings, suggests that play is essential for children to learn and develop. Conversely, the second position argues that play is not necessary for children’s growth to advance. Learning has its basis on different influences, such as direct instructions and adult modeling. This position claims that even though play is good, it should not be an important focus at school and should be left to entertain children at home. The third and last position supports the notion of equifinality, which means that different paths can lead to the same outcome, showing that play is one of the multiple processes that influence learning and development (Lillard et al., 2013; Roskos & Christie, 2010).

Based on the three positions described above, Lillard et al. (2013) conducted a literature review of several studies related to play and different domains of development such as language, reasoning, executive function, and theory of mind, among others. Their findings suggested that there might be a causal link between play and reasoning, emotion regulation, language, and narrative. Language was the most likely to have this causal relation with play based on the consistency of the research findings in this area. Available research did not support causality in any of the other
areas that Lillard et al. (2013) examined in their study (i.e., problem solving, intelligence, executive function, conservation, creativity, theory of mind, and social skills). They conclude that the evidence found does not support the previous statements of the particular importance of pretend play for development. They also found methodological flaws in the literature and encourage further research to clarify this relationship.

There were multiple responses to Lillard et al. (2013) study. For example, Bergan (2013) explained how Lillard et al. (2013) focused on studies that did not use pretend play in a genuine way, but rather used “playful work.” They also noted that pretend play has its own value and should also be studied and considered independently from other areas of development. Walker and Gopnik (2013) argued that Lillard et al. (2013) did not provide the basis for future research on this relationship between pretend play and development. Walker and Gopnik (2013) suggest one specific relation between pretend play and the “counterfactual reasoning” (i.e., related to causality learning), by considering pretend play as a form of counterfactual reasoning. Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek, and Golinkoff (2013) critique some of the conclusions of Lillard et al. (2013) as well. They argue that play is a complex construct and therefore should be studied through different methods, not limited to experimental conditions. Also, to determine the effects that play could have on learning, studies should focus on multiple contents and contexts. Weisberg and colleagues (2013) also indicate that the literature review that Lillard et al. (2013) conducted might have dismissed a very important body of literature that could have provided a better understanding of the role of play on learning. This literature review only included quantitative studies, excluding qualitative research. These qualitative
studies could have included important exploratory information that may describe more
detailed patterns in the relationship between play and learning.

The relationship between play and learning, in practice (e.g., in the classrooms)
is also controversial. Early childhood teachers often have positive beliefs about play
and recognize that it is important for children’s development (Rothlein & Brett, 1987;
Sherwood & Reifel, 2010; Vu et al., in press). However, these positive beliefs are not
always enough to give play a main role in the classroom. For instance, Rothlein and
Brett (1987) pointed out the dichotomy concerning play and learning from teachers’
perspectives. In this study, even though teachers conceived play as an opportunity for
children’s social and cognitive development, most of them did not consider play as an
integral part of the curriculum. Sherwood and Reifel (2010) also found this dichotomy
in their study with pre-service teachers’ beliefs about the role of play in learning.
Participants perceived play as a “nice”, valuable, activity for children to engage in but
did not consider it essential to development and learning. Pre-service teachers seemed
to consider non-play activities more important than play activities when related to
learning. Although there are studies that have not found a direct relationship between
teachers’ beliefs and behaviors in the classroom (Wilcox-Herzog, 2002), some studies
about teachers’ beliefs concerning play and its relationship with learning have shown
that these beliefs may in fact impact their pedagogy (McInnes, Howard, Miles, &
Crowley, 2011).

In sum, although the relationship between play and learning is controversial,
some areas of development like language and literacy have been shown to benefit
from play (Lillard et al., 2013). There is a need for more research in this area to help
better understand the nature of the relationship between play and learning.


Language and Literacy Development in the Preschool Years

The development of language and literacy involves multiple domains and starts early in life (Rodriguez et al., 2009). These two aspects are linked in a way that oral language provides the basis for emergent literacy (Christie et al., 2014). In the early years, children learn new words by interacting with adults on a daily basis. The vocabulary learned allows children to recognize meaning from text words once they start reading. From that point on, the relationship becomes reciprocal with reading also providing new words for children to communicate via oral language (Christie et al., 2014, Vukelich, Christie, & Enz, 2012).

The preschool years are crucial for oral language development. They constitute the time in which the highest rate of vocabulary growth occurs, declining in the subsequent age periods (Farkas & Beron, 2004). Furthermore, it is known that the language development of children during the preschool years represents an important foundation for children’s later reading success (Dickinson & Porche, 2011; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2005). One key aspect for this reading success is linked to the fact that oral language support in the preschool years also has been shown to have long-term effects on reading comprehension (Dickinson & Porche, 2011; NICHD, 2005). These long-term benefits are some of the reasons why multiple studies have focused on the different factors that contribute to children’s language development at this early age (Bond & Wasik, 2009; Byrne et al., 2009; Connor et al., 2006; Cristofaro & Tamis-LeMonda, 2012; Neumann et al., 2012; Sheele, Leseman, Mayo & Elbers, 2012). For instance, Byrne et al. (2009) found in genetic influences the explanation for variability in literacy among children when everyone has the opportunity to read and write. In their study with twins, they found that spelling, word reading, and reading comprehension in second grade were
genetically influenced to a substantial degree, while vocabulary was moderated by genes and also by shared environment. Particularly, spelling and reading in second grade were genetically linked to preschool abilities and other genetic sources. Other studies have focused on the role of school (Bond & Wasik, 2009; Connor et al., 2006) and family (Cristofaro & Tamis-LeMonda, 2012; Neumann et al., 2012; Williams & Rask, 2003) as the sources of enhancement of children’s language development and literacy skills in the early years.

In sum, the early years in a child’s life constitute a sensitive period for children’s language and literacy development. Supporting language and literacy in childhood has shown to have long-term benefits for children’s reading and academic success.

**Play And Emerging Literacy**

Different studies have linked play and emerging literacy. For instance, research has shown that play provides an opportunity for acquiring the language and the vocabulary needed for literacy (Han, Moore, Vukelich, & Buell, 2010; Roskos & Christie, 2011). It is during play events when the most complex expressions in language appear for the first time (Bruner, 1983). Play creates a pressure-free environment for children to combine language without consequences for making mistakes, therefore pushing children’s language to its maximum limits (Bruner, 1983). Moreover, play emerges as a scenario for children to use language and literacy. It facilitates ‘hands-on’ experiences with language, helping children with the mental processes that support future internal processes needed for reading and writing (Roskos & Christie, 2001).
Vocabulary growth has been considered a mediator between play and emerging literacy, with play enhancing children’s new vocabulary, that predicts children’s literacy skills (Connor et al., 2006). Connor and colleagues (2006) found play to be an implicit meaning-focused activity associated with children’s vocabulary growth. Specifically, vocabulary growth was predicted by the time children spent engaged in play. This relationship was stronger in children who had weaker vocabulary skills when starting preschool, suggesting that play can help children catch up to their peers in terms of language development.

Roskos and Christie (2010) conducted a meta-analysis to find studies that examined the relationship between play and literacy in early childhood educational settings. They found that the existing literature of this field has focused primarily on two lines of research. The first line involves play settings with theme-related literacy materials and thematic props, and the second line does not use as many props, but instead uses an instructional design. A study by Ilgaz and Aksu-Koc (2005) is an example of the first line of research conducted on the topic. Ilgaz and Aksu-Koc (2005) examined the possible role of play as semiotic arena for narrative development by comparing play-prompted and direct-elicited narratives of monolingual children between 3 and 5 years old. The prompt-elicited narratives included two sets of toys used as play prompts, whereas direct-elicited narratives involved a coloring book and magic crayons. In the prompt-elicited play, children were asked to tell a story using the toys, while in the direct-elicitation session children used the coloring book to warm up and then were asked to tell their favorite story. The researchers found that actions during play served as a “symbolic arena” to promote narrative development and that, depending on the children’s age, their performance differed across elicitation
conditions. For instance, between 3 and 4 years of age, children’s narrative productions changed from non-causal structures to causal structures in their prompt-elicited narratives, while between 4 and 5 years of age this change was seen in their direct-elicited narratives. Hence, in this study, play provided the context for children to produce higher complexity structures and scaffold their narrative activity.

In sum, play and literacy are linked in multiple ways. They are both related to higher cognitive functioning levels. Furthermore, play has shown to be an important way for children to build new vocabulary and develop literacy skills.

The Role of Adults in Children’s Language Development and Play

Adults play an important role in children’s lives. Primary caregivers have a particular influence in children’s development, as they are the primary figures children have in their lives. Regarding language development, different studies have shown the important role that adults play in enhancing children’s language development (Dickinson et al., 2008; Huttenlocher, Vasilyeva, Cymerman, & Levine, 2002; Rodriguez et al., 2009; Tompkins et al., 2013; Weizman & Snow, 2001).

Research suggests that some strategies found useful at home may also be useful in classroom settings, given the similarities of some of the dynamics for language support by parents at home and by teachers in the classroom (Dickinson & Porche, 2011). For instance, Rodriguez et al. (2009) found three main aspects within the home environment which foster language and literacy development: (a) the frequency of children’s involvement in literacy activities (e.g., storytelling, book reading); (b) the quality of mothers’ engagement (e.g., sensitivity and cognitive stimulation); and (c) access to learning materials. The type of conversations and vocabulary children are exposed to also seem to play a significant role. These three
aspects have also been supported by different studies in the school setting (Dickinson et al., 2008; Huttenlocher et al., 2002; Tompkins et al., 2013; Weizman & Snow, 2001).

The use of diverse vocabulary (i.e., explicitly communicating the meaning), responses that are semantically contingent, cognitively rich topics of conversation, and extended talk on a single topic are different strategies that have shown association with improving language learning (Dickinson et al., 2008). The research finding that diverse vocabulary or sophisticated words used by adults account for vocabulary growth has been particularly a recurrent finding among studies (Bowers & Basyleva, 2011; Dickinson et al., 2008; Dickinson & Porche, 2011; Huttenlocher et al., 2002; Weizman & Snow, 2001). For instance, Weizman and Snow (2001) argued that both the amount of vocabulary and the quality or nature of the vocabulary input that children receive from adults are important for their vocabulary acquisition.

The relationship between teacher input and lexical growth in preschoolers has also been shown to be determined by the native language of the children. In a study with preschool children, conducted by Bowers and Basyleva (2011), the number of different word types (i.e., lexical diversity) used by the teacher had an impact on monolingual children’s receptive vocabulary, while the total number of words and the average of words per utterance was related to the English language learners’ receptive vocabulary growth. Likewise, Weizman and Snow (2001) suggest that based on their research, lexical sophistication and quantity, along with conversational support, should be elements of the vocabulary input to meet the needs of all children in diverse classrooms.
Conversational support from adults is another potentially fundamental component that could help emerging literacy among children. Taking into account the role that oral language plays in literacy development, Bond and Wasik (2009) advocate for implementing conversation stations (i.e., spaces in which children and teachers could start a conversation) as part of the center time in the class curriculum. These conversation stations would allow teachers to have one-on-one time with their children, getting to know them better while elaborating on children’s statements. Children would also have the opportunity to gain feedback from adults that are linguistically competent.

The role of adult has also been considered in the literature that focuses on the relationship between play and emergent literacy. Different studies have found that teachers’ talk during play helps children’s emerging language and literacy skills (Dickinson & Porche, 2011; Justice et al., 2013; Meacham et al., 2013; Tompkins et al., 2013). In a longitudinal study, Dickinson and Porche (2011) sought to identify features of teacher–child interactions that related to children’s language and literacy development. The sample consisted of 83 preschoolers from low-income families. They later assessed children in kindergarten and fourth grade. The use of sophisticated vocabulary words in the teacher-child interactions during free play in preschool was related to higher levels of receptive vocabulary and emergent literacy in kindergarten. Scores in fourth grade were also higher when kindergarten teachers tended to talk less, therefore allowing the children to talk more.

In a different study, Tompkins et al. (2013) focused on inferential talk (i.e., the use of abstract/decontextualized language that goes beyond the “here and now”) during pretend play in small groups in the classroom. They found that the level of
abstractions of children’s responses was linked to the level of abstraction of teacher questions. While Tompkins et al. (2013) looked at teacher-child inferential talk in particular, Meacham et al. (2013) sought to describe teachers’ language use in general during dramatic play. They found four kinds of teacher play-instruction talk during play: (a) play-embedded instructional talk in which the teacher used “pretend” talk, as a character of the play theme; (b) explicit instructional talk in which the teacher acted as a real teacher teaching vocabulary and literacy skills; (c) play language coaching in which the teacher prompted the child to adequately say an expression within the play context; and (d) play administrational talk in which the teacher was in charge of the set up and providing explanations in the play. Based on the studies described above, it is possible to see how play becomes a scenario for teacher-child verbal interactions, in which teachers could support different areas of children’s language (e.g., vocabulary, decontextualized language, pretend talk).

Adults have also been shown to have an important role in children’s play. “Facilitative” and “precarious” roles are the most popular roles adults can take on when playing with children. The facilitative roles have been shown to enhance the quality of children’s play, while the precarious roles are either too involved or uninvolved, and could perturb children’s play (Johnson et al., 2005). The facilitative roles include the onlooker, the stage manager, the co-player, and the play leader, whereas the precarious roles include the uninvolved, the director, and the redirector. The onlooker watches the children play and only provides sporadic comments; the stage manager helps children prepare for the play and helps the along the way; the co-player becomes a partner of the child during the play by actively participating, and the play leader participates in the play and makes decisions to enrich the play episodes.
On the other hand, the *uninvolved* adult does not get involved in children’s play, the *director* takes over the control of the play, and the *redirector* disturbs the play by asking questions out of the play theme (Johnson et al., 2005). Studies like the one conducted by Vu et al. (in press) have shown how the role that teachers adopt during play affects children’s play. They found that teachers with higher levels of engagement with the characters of the play had children that showed greater cognitive complexity and higher social levels in the play. This illustrates the importance for teachers to be informed of the different roles they can adopt to better enhance children’s development in multiple domains (e.g., cognitive, social, language) through interactions during play episodes.

In sum, there are different kinds of support that adults can provide to children during play that enhance their language development. Verbal interactions during play seem to be a useful way to support children’s play and language development.

Overall, the literature suggests that the early years are a sensitive period for children’s language development, which seems to impact children’s academic performance later on. Linkages between play and emergent literacy suggest play as a way to enhance children’s language and literacy. Teachers have the opportunity of supporting children’s language and literacy development by adopting facilitative roles during play. This allows teachers to set adequate scenarios to scaffold children’s language.
Chapter 3

METHOD

Present Study

The present study is a secondary video analysis using data from a previous study that sought to examine teachers’ beliefs about play (Vu et al., in press). Data were collected from three community childcare settings: two private centers located in suburban areas, and one non-profit childcare center, located in an urban area. These centers served low, middle, and high-income families from a state in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States.

The purpose of the present study was to explore the functions of different roles that teachers assume to facilitate children’s play. It also sought to examine the children’s responses to teachers’ behaviors within these roles, as well as the language children and teachers used when teachers adopted specific roles.

Previous studies have examined the different facilitative roles teachers assume during play (Kontos, 1999; Meacham et al., 2013). The current study tries to expand this knowledge by studying the functions of each of those roles in relation to the child’s responses more in depth. It identifies specific behaviors that teachers enact within these roles that elicit different children’s responses, providing a thorough review of these responses. Studies have also examined teachers’ language use during play (Dickinson, et al., 2008; Meacham et al., 2013; Tompkins et al., 2013), generally focusing on the teachers rather than the children. This study will contribute to the literature by identifying the type of language used by teachers and children when
teachers assume a specific role, which has not been frequently examined. Another novel aspect of the current study is that it takes place in community childcare centers, whereas most of the studies described previously were conducted at public preschools or Head Start centers. This qualitative study addressed the following research questions:

1. What roles do teachers adopt to facilitate children’s free play and how are they used?
2. How do children respond to teachers’ facilitation during free play and what kinds of teacher behaviors elicit those responses?
3. What types of language do teachers and children use during free play and how are they related to the teachers' roles?

Participants

Participants were eleven teachers working in childcare community centers and their students. The original study recruited 30 early childhood educators who were interested in participating in a training program about play in a Mid-Atlantic state in the United States. Subjects were recruited statewide by advertising the training through the state’s professional development registry system. For more information on the training and the original study see Vu et al. (in press). Eleven early childhood educators were randomly selected from the 30 original participants to be videotaped in their classrooms during free play time. The random selection led to observations of five teachers from one center, four from a different center, and two from the last center. These eleven professionals constituted the sample of the present study. The sample consisted of six teachers, two administrators who were certified teachers and were also teaching at the time, two teaching assistants and one intern. Participants had
between 3 and 28 years of experience teaching early childhood, and were all female. The children observed in these classrooms were preschool aged children between 3 and 5 years of age.

**Procedure**

The present study used data from videos and corresponding transcripts for each teacher. Teachers were videotaped during free play or/and free center time. They were asked to behave as they normally would during this period of time. Teachers were asked to wear a wireless microphone for videotaping, so that their speech could be heard clearly. The use of the microphone allowed for capturing the teacher’s voice as well as the voices of children with whom the teacher verbally interacted. All audiovisual data were collected in similar play contexts (i.e., sociodramatic play, constructive play, manipulative, pretend, and functional play). Teachers and parents signed the appropriate consent forms before the videotaping and the study was approved by an IRB.

In the original study (Vu et al., in press), the length of time each teacher was videotaped ranged from 30.8 to 44 minutes. However, in order to standardize video lengths across teachers the current study selected 30 continuous minutes for each of the eleven teachers. These 30 minutes represented the most active period of teacher-child interaction for each teacher, as identified by the researcher. Only one teacher had a video length of 29 minutes and 30 seconds. Interactions representing a total time of 329.5 minutes were examined. The number of children present in the classroom during the 30 minutes ranged from 4 to over 15. However, the actual number of children teachers interacted with during each play event was usually four or fewer at a time.
This was something observed in the videos and not stipulated by the research team at the time of data collection.

All videos were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. These transcripts were later reviewed by two graduate students for accuracy purposes. In cases where the researcher or graduate student was not able to comprehend audio content, utterances were transcribed as inaudible content.

**Data Analysis**

A qualitative method using grounded theory analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to explore the proposed research questions. This method entails discovering theory from the data in a process that involves two types of concepts: (a) a combination of pre-existing concepts that might be useful for answering the research question, and (b) concepts and hypotheses that emerge from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Wertz et al., 2011). Generating theory therefore comes from the process of research. The researcher’s job is to develop a theory that could account for much of the relevant behavior. The theory generated by this method could consist of an ongoing theoretical discussion or of an established set of propositions. It could be a process that contributes to social contexts and interactions and it does not have to be a complete product (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The present study used grounded theory as the method for analysis because this study was exploratory, given that little is known about children’s responses to teachers’ involvement and roles during play, as well as the type of language that is linked to those roles. Grounded theory was used in a way that allowed the researcher to develop codes that capture what emerged from the data to better describe the
phenomenon (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The process of coding for each research question is described below.

Function of Teachers’ Roles During Free Play

In order to answer the research question concerning the teachers’ roles, an event-sampling technique (Reis & Gable, 2000) was used to capture the events in which teachers were interacting with children during play. Each video was broken into play and non-play events. A play event consisted of a period of time (in seconds) that met two criteria: a) the episode presented a combination of the Johnson, Christie and Wardle (2005) indicators of play (i.e., nonliterality, free choice, process orientation, and positive affect); and b) the teacher assumed one of the categories of teachers’ roles during play (i.e., onlooker, stage manager, co-player, play leader, director and re-director). An event started when the teacher assumed a specific role and ended when the teacher transitioned to a different role or if the situation no longer met the play indicators. Once the teacher assumed a different role a new event started.

The non-play events consisted of periods of time in which either the indicators of play were not present (e.g., academic activity taking place), and/or the teacher was doing a different activity that did not involve being engaged in children’s play. After the videos were broken into preliminary events the researcher watched them several times until the teacher roles, the transition between roles, and the duration of the events were identified. The teacher’s role codes were assigned to each event and the principal characteristics of teachers in each role were identified.
Children’s Responses To Teachers’ Behaviors

To answer the second research question about children’s responses, video data was analyzed through the constant comparative method of analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and the coding phases (i.e., open, axial and selective coding) described by Corbin and Strauss (2008). More information about the coding phases is described below.

**Open coding.** Videos were observed to find the type of behaviors teachers were having and the responses they were eliciting in the children they were interacting with. From these observations a list of responses that illustrated the way children acted when interacting with the teachers was developed. The identified responses included behaviors such as resisting teachers’ input, accepting and incorporating teachers’ ideas, and ignoring teachers’ comments, among others. This list constituted the initial concepts from the open coding process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), and was followed by a categorizing process. This process involved grouping similar concepts, developed from different teacher-child interactions, into categories that explained the phenomena. Three different behaviors (i.e., ignore/reject behaviors, resistance behaviors, and acceptance behaviors) were identified as the main categories. The list of original concepts and final categories is presented in Figure 1.
Axial coding. In this phase, data from the videos was coded with the categories that emerged from the open coding. While in this process, subcategories were developed from the data. These subcategories allowed the researcher to better capture the details of the different behaviors children showed when interacting with
teachers during play. Relationships among categories, as well as the context in which the responses took place, were identified. Since teachers’ roles in play events had been identified in the first stage of coding, behaviors of the teachers and responses of the children were linked to those roles. Figure 2 describes the subcategories that were developed in this process.

![Diagram of subcategories](image)

**Figure 2** Subcategories that emerged in the axial coding phase

**Selective coding.** In this phase a core category (i.e., a continuum) was identified to explain the phenomena illustrated by the data, based on the previous two
phases of coding. Children’s responses were conceived as a continuum of receptiveness toward the different behaviors teachers adopted when involved in their play.

Types of Language Used by Teachers and Children

The third research question concerning the types of language used, required that all video content were transcribed verbatim. A line-by-line analysis was conducted to identify teachers’ and children’s utterances. These utterances consisted of simple and complete sentences, including one-word sentences that were followed by a pause or a silent period. In order to better capture the roles in which teachers and children produced more utterances, it was necessary to consider not only the total amount of utterances produced but also the time teachers spent in each role. This distinction was important given that the total amount of utterances was often greater in the role teachers spent most time on, and did not actually reflect the role in which teachers and children were more likely to have verbal exchanges. Therefore, the amount of utterances produced by teachers was analyzed by looking at: a) the total number of utterances spoken in the play events, and b) a partial total number of utterances produced based on the time teachers spent in each role.

Subsequently, the coding procedure for the utterances consisted of three stages. In an initial stage utterances were analyzed with pre-established codes the researcher chose based on findings and suggestions from current research (i.e., questions, comments, and prompting). In a second stage, new codes were developed during the analysis of the utterances based on the grounded theory approach, using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The reason for developing new codes arose from the different functions of the utterances found in the data that were not
being captured by the initial codes. The properties of the final categories were developed in a way that could be mutually exclusive. In a third phase, transcripts of the videos were matched with the different events identified in the first research question and therefore assigned to a specific teacher’s role. An analysis of frequencies was performed to identify the number and type of utterances teachers and children used in each teacher’s role.

**Credibility.** To increase the credibility of the qualitative analysis different strategies as specified in Mertens (2010) were implemented. First, the researcher showed a prolonged and persistent engagement with the data (i.e., looking at the videos multiple times over a one-year period), which contributed to better knowledge and understanding the play events. Second, there was an effort of auditing progressive subjectivity by keeping a journal and memos as a way for monitoring the process. This allowed the researcher to keep notes of the coding criteria to be consistent across the teachers and events being analyzed. Third, there was a continued member check with an expert on the topic that supported the process of grouping categories and stating final categories and codes (i.e., biweekly meetings with a professor to define and redefine codes, evaluate content, and make decisions about the analysis process). Finally, there was a process of inter-coder reliability in which two graduate students were trained to independently code 25% of the data. Training material included a sample of videos and transcripts from the original study that were not selected for this study. The training consisted of an approximately one-hour session to explain the purpose of the study, the different codes developed, and the coding process. There was also a joint coding practice that allowed the researcher to better explain the process to the graduate students. The first student was charged with reviewing the data for the
first and second research questions, while the second assistant was in charge of assigning codes for the third research question. If there were discrepancies in the analysis between the researcher and the student, the events were analyzed together until a consensus was reached. The researcher was able to calculate inter-coder reliability between herself and each research assistant for the selected questions using ReCal2, a web-application for inter-coder reliability calculation. The Kappas for teachers’ roles and types of language use levels were .83, .82, respectively. These Kappas met the standards of good agreement (i.e., .65 or higher) as suggested by Landis and Koch (1977).
Chapter 4

RESULTS

Function of Teachers’ Roles During Free Play

A total of 261 play events and 78 non-play events were identified. On average, teachers spent 66.9% of the 30 minutes involved in children’s play. All teachers were engaged in non-play activities (between two and ten non-play events) at some point during the 30 minutes. The non-play events included episodes in which teachers were observed doing the following activities: talking to another adult (e.g., talking to a parent that comes into the classroom), doing academic activities (e.g., patterns at a center table), helping children with routine activities (e.g., washing hands, going to the bathroom), having conversations or discussions with children about the day or things not related to play, organizing material and planning activities, talking on the phone, and eating or doing paperwork.

The play events were characterized by the teachers’ play role (i.e., onlooker, stage manager, co-player, play leader, director, and redirector) which supports the Johnson et al. (2005) categories of the roles teachers assume during play.

The number of events and the time teachers spent in each role are presented in Table 1. There was a consistent pattern between the percentage of time and the percentages of events for each role, as can be observed in the table. The most popular role among the teachers was onlooker ($N = 11$). They adopted this role at some point in 42.5% of the events. Most teachers ($N = 10$) were also engaged in the stage manager role, which accounted for 24.2% of the events, and many teachers ($N = 7$)
adopted the co-player role that was present in 15.3% of the events. Although more than half of the teachers ($N = 6$) adopted the play leader and director roles at some point during the play session, they did not take these roles as often with only 6.5% and 8.8% of the total number of events, respectively. Only four teachers got involved in the redirector role with 2.7% of the events. Each of the roles is described in more detail in the following sections.
In the onlooker role, teachers were not actively involved in children’s play. However, they assumed an observer position that seemed to be interested in what children were doing. By observing the children, teachers were able to monitor children’s play, intervene, and transition to a new role when necessary. While in this role...
role, some teachers gave directions to children from a distance while others sought verbal interaction with children by getting close to them and asking specific questions about the play or general questions. The following passage illustrates this situation. While observing children play Ms. Elise gets closer to the group and the following verbal interaction takes place:

Ms. Elise: what are you guys making?

Eva: I'm making ice cream.

Ms. Elise: ice cream? Very cool, very cool!

Eva: [Inaudible] looks like this!

Ms. Elise: oh it looks like a yummy ice cream. Those are cool!

In this situation, it is possible to see how without entering children’s play Ms. Elise is able to find out about what children are doing and provide positive comments about their play.

In many events, teachers started having verbal interactions with children when a child came to the teacher to ask play-related questions to seek the teacher’s approval or to ask her to join her/him in the play. Other types of behaviors teachers showed in this role included making sure everything was under control, that children were having fun, and providing directions such as “don’t touch that” or “be careful” to address safety concerns. These were more typical with children who were farther away from them. Most behaviors of the onlooker role among these teachers were verbally related and therefore will be discussed in more depth with the findings of the second research question.
Stage Manager

Most of the stage manager events were either preceded or followed by an event in which the teacher adopted the onlooker role. This means that teachers often first observed the situation and then assisted the children with their play. Once this task was accomplished they frequently went back to observing.

While in this role, most teachers helped children prepare play props and materials, as well as introduced theme ideas. These behaviors illustrated the description provided by Johnson et al. (2005) of the stage manager role. The following excerpt exemplifies the assistance the teacher is providing in the stage manager role. In this situation the children are making tickets to go to the carnival with pieces of paper and Ms. Kelly is helping them. Previous to the vignette below, Anna asked the teacher how to spell Ferris wheel and to write it on the ticket. Since that moment they have been writing what each ticket should be used for:

Ms. Kelly: What is this ticket for?
Anna: That is for [pauses for a moment] to go eat food.
Ms. Kelly: So, should this ticket be for what?
Anna: Food.
Ms. Kelly: Food? Tickets write food? Should I write food?
Anna: That’s what you have to do. See! You write what it's for.
Ms. Kelly: Just be one ticket, write food. [Writes something on the piece of paper] There you go! [Hands the ticket to Anna]

Unlike the onlooker role, the stage manager is playing an active role by helping the children, but she is still not involved in children’s play itself. It was also frequent to see teachers in the stage manager role dealing with conflicts between players or helping a child resolve a problem. For instance, in the following excerpt,
Ms. Gabrielle is helping the children find the right pieces for playing house. Gia asks Lara multiple times if she can have a person and Lara does not want to share. It is at this point when Ms. Gabrielle intervenes:

Gia: Can I have that please? [Lara ignores Gia]

Ms. Gabrielle: Is there other people? Lara, you can’t have all the people. Can you share a couple people with Gia? … Lara, you can’t have all four. Wouldn’t it be nice if you share?

Lara: I have the people.

Ms. Gabrielle: Lara, wouldn’t it be nice if you share with Gia the people?

Lara: I have the people.

Ms. Gabrielle: Lara, you need to share. Okay? Let Gia have a person.

Gia: You need to share.

Ms Gabrielle: If you don’t share Ms. Gabrielle is gonna have to take all the people and then you won’t have any. [Lara gives the person to Gia]

Ms Gabrielle: There you go! What do you say Gia?

Gia: Thank you

Ms Gabrielle: Good job!

Ms. Gabrielle then continues to find more people and pieces for them to play with. By intervening in possible or actual conflicts teachers were able to help the play flow and prevent children’s possible breakdowns. Cases like this were observed often across teachers in the stage manager role.

Multiple conversations between children and teachers happened while teachers were serving as stage managers. Conversations usually were related to the play material or play theme and in many cases were transferred to another context. For
instance, a child brought up that he had a dog at home while they were looking for animals to play in the pet shop. This led the teacher to start a conversation about the different pets children had at home while continuing to organize the pet shop toys.

Co-player

This type of role was most frequent in the sociodramatic play context, followed by manipulative pretend play, and functional contexts. The teachers often played a minor role within the sociodramatic play such as being the customer when playing restaurant, or the patient when playing doctor’s office. However, teachers did not control the play plots but rather followed the children’s lead. In manipulative pretend play they often adopted equal roles with the children by being similar characters (e.g., students and teachers were all dinosaurs, or trucks). The following excerpt illustrates how a teacher adopted a co-player role in a sociodramatic play context while playing restaurant. Ms. Deb is sitting on a table and Rose has been cooking for her and serving the food. After Ms. Deb finishes eating Rose brings her a drink and goes back to the kitchen. When Rose comes back to the table she asks:

Rose: Where is the tea?

Ms. Deb: I don’t know. Where did my sweet tea go?

Rose: You get sweet tea. [Grabs a new cup, and looks at it in detail] It’s a coffee cup! Do you want coffee?

Ms. Deb: Umm

Rose: That’s the only thing we have.

Ms. Deb: Well, can you put ice in it?

Rose: We don’t have any ice

Ms. Deb: You don’t have ice? All right, I’ll drink it hot.
Rose: Yeah, we do. But the ice is not [inaudible]. There’s no ice in the coffee.

There’s no ice in the coffee.

Ms. Deb: All right. I’ll drink it warm.

In the above excerpt, Ms. Deb is actively involved in children’s socio-dramatic play in a minor role (the major role of the scene is being played by the child). Although the child leads the episode, the teacher takes an active role and makes comments and demands within her character. In some other cases it was possible to see teachers breaking character to provide some suggestions for the play, which the children either accepted or rejected. However, most of the time they were engaged in conversations within the play context, like the one in the excerpt above.

It was also observed in some events that as soon as the teacher stopped engaging as a co-player, children engaged in less verbal interactions and the level of social and cognitive play was also lower. When teachers assumed a co-player role they usually caught the attention of other children who were not interacting with them, who asked to join the play or tried to get the teacher involved in their play. These behaviors were also seen when teachers adopted the play leader role.

Play Leader

In this role, teachers tried to influence children’s play by providing ideas and themes that helped their play. In many cases teachers still adopted a minor or equal role in the play. Usually the ideas suggested by the teachers were novel and attractive to the children and in many cases they were related to real life experiences (e.g., being stuck in traffic, going through a drive-thru, doing an x-ray). By doing this, teachers were able to introduce specific vocabulary that was soon used by the children.
The following example shows how teachers adopting the play leader role introduced a little twist to the play that opened the possibilities of a new plot, and therefore, kept the play alive. The children and Ms. Lauren are pretending the chairs are cars. They had been playing for a while when Ms. Lauren transitioned from the co-player role to the play leader role.

Cait: We have to go pass the gate so we can go back home.

Ms. Lauren: Oh! We’re going back home? Ok, good, cause I’m hungry, I’m hungry. Who’s cooking? Who’s cooking tonight?

Cait: Me!

Ms. Lauren: Cait you’re cooking for us? Oh, good! Cause we’re coming over. [To Cynthia] I hope she makes something good.

Cynthia: She is gonna make cupcakes.

Ms. Lauren: Are you making cupcakes? Oh! Thank goodness! I love cupcakes

Cynthia: That’s good! We can take a piece of the cupcake.

Ms. Lauren: I wonder what kind she is making.

Cynthia: We’re making yellow cupcakes.

In this episode the teacher followed the child’s lead but added a new idea that changed the course of the play and got the children excited again. As seen with the co-player role, the teacher’s play leader role was observed most often in the sociodramatic play context, followed by manipulative pretend play, and functional contexts. In a few events in which the play leader role was assumed it was also observed how the teacher used this role to suggest interactions among children. For example, Ms. Amber is playing doctor with Kaley who is making an x-ray of Ms. Amber’s hand on a chalkboard. After playing the patient character for a while Ms.
Amber suggests Kaley to make an x-ray of Lucas, a child who is also drawing on the board.

Ms. Amber: Now, how about we do an x-ray of his hand? Check him too!

Kaley: Oh, yeah, let me check you! [Tries to check Lucas’ hand]

By inviting the child to make an x-ray of Lucas’ hand the teacher was trying to promote interaction between the children, however, Lucas did not engage in the episode.

**Director**

This type of role was more frequent among the teachers than the play leader role. Teachers who adopted this role were often overinvolved in children's play. They tended to control children's actions, and sometimes the play scripts, by telling them exactly what to do or say. For instance, in one of the events Ms. Danielle was asking Michael to come on the table to play with her: “I need you to come and sit with me buds, you have to help me build a roller coaster. Let me get these pieces over here”. In this case the teacher explicitly told the child what to do, therefore limiting his “free-choice” options.

It was also often observed among teachers adopting the director role, that they did not take into account children’s signs or answers, resulting in little or no room for children’s suggestions or improvisations. The following selection illustrates this situation.

While playing with play dough Ashley offers something to the teacher:

Ms. Lilly: What’s this?

Ellie: a pancake

Ms. Lilly: thank you. Can you flip it?
Ellie: I already did

Ms. Lilly: oh! Okay. Flip it again! You got to flatten it out like a pancake.

Where is your rolling pin? Ask Ella for the rolling pin.

Ellie: [to another Ella] can I have the rolling pin?

Ellie had already flipped the pancake, but that was not enough for the teacher, who asked her to do it again and started giving her directions. This is an example of a teacher in a director role not taking into account the child’s response.

Redirector

The redirector role was the least frequent role assumed among teachers. In this role teachers usually interrupted children’s play by shifting their attention to other topics or activities. For instance, in one of the events a teacher interrupted children’s play to ask them how did their dads like the fathers’ day presents they had made for them. This topic was not related to anything going on in the play context. In another event, a teacher interrupted a play episode in which children were pretending crayons were keys to show them a real key. Although in this case the key was actually related to the play topic it disrupted the play plot and turned the discussion to that of the different qualities of the key. Children did not go back to the story they had built with the pretend keys.

In some cases, teachers tried to reinforce some academic concepts such as numbers, colors, language (e.g., prepositions), or others in a way that was not opportune for the moment. For example, while building a roller coaster with a child a teacher asked the child to count the pieces. Then she started going over prepositions by making emphasis on up and down with the marbles. These marbles were supposed to be cars but the teacher broke the pretend context (i.e., marbles were no longer the
roller coaster wagons) to reinforce academic concepts. The child’s play was disturbed and they did not go back to the original plot.

As described above, each role the teachers adopted when involved in children’s play corresponded with specific behaviors. These behaviors were deeply linked to teachers’ verbal interventions, since most of these behaviors contained verbal components. This connection will be shown when examining results related to research question number two. These behaviors also elicited different types of responses from children that are presented in the next section.

**Children’s Responses to Teachers’ Behaviors Within Facilitative Roles**

The following section describes the different responses children showed when teachers became involved in their play. These responses were linked to the behaviors teachers adopted while playing with the children. The results for the three phases of coding are presented below starting with the open coding phase, followed by the axial coding phase and finishing with the selective coding results.

From a first screening of the data, general teachers’ behaviors that elicited some kind of children’s response were identified. Teachers were usually asking questions; providing comments, suggestions, and directions; evaluating children’s behaviors and ideas; introducing new material; helping children organize their play; and resolving conflicts. These behaviors were linked to one or multiple roles as described in detail in the previous section. In general, the onlooker role was linked to passive behaviors with more verbal interventions including questions, comments, commands, or directions. Teachers engaged in the stage manager role tended to actively assist children in their play with behaviors like presenting material, providing theme suggestions, and helping resolve conflicts. In the co-player role teachers were
more likely to follow children’s lead and act as a peer in the play. Sometimes they provided suggestions and evaluations. In the director role teachers adopted directive behaviors, telling the children what to do and when and how to do it. Lastly, deflecting children’s attention to something different than the play itself, often with academic purposes, was the main characteristic of the redirector role.

These behaviors were coded in three major categories with their respective subcategories. In the following section a description of each category and its subcategories with illustrations, relationships between categories, and their context is provided. Table 2 summarizes teachers’ behaviors (i.e., behaviors that elicit children’s responses), children’s behaviors (i.e., the three categories of behaviors identified), and the roles in which these were observed more frequently. It is important to note that although certain behaviors are associated with specific roles, it does not mean that they were not present in the other roles at some point. As will be mentioned in the description of the categories, most of the behaviors were observed in all roles at some point, but more frequently in some roles than in others.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Teachers’ behaviors, elicited children’s behaviors and association with teachers’ roles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Onlooker Stage manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reject/Ignore</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Asking many questions</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Not being physically close to the child</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Being overinvolved</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Providing multiple directions and commands</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Providing ideas of no interest of the child</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resistance</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Providing ideas not convincing to (?) the child</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Providing substantial input in a short period of time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Acceptance</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Showing interest in children’s play</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Taking an active role</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Providing input related to children’s play</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Incorporating real life experiences into play</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Letting children take an active role</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Catching children’s interest and attention</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reject/Ignore Behaviors

These behaviors implicated the lowest level of receptiveness from the child towards teachers’ behaviors or suggestions. Children either showed no response to the teacher or turned down their input or actions. Based on the events observed some of the possible reasons for these responses include:

1. Teachers asking multiple different questions in a short period of time.
2. Teachers not being physically close to the child when making comments or asking questions.
3. Teachers being overinvolved in children’s play.
4. Teachers giving directions and commands that required children to stop playing in the way they were doing it.
5. Teachers presenting materials or ideas that were not of the child’s interest.
6. Teachers’ inputs having no apparent relevance for children.
7. Children not being very focused on their play.

Although these behaviors were perceived in all the roles at some point, some of these behaviors were observed more frequently in certain roles: behaviors (1), (2), (4), (6) and (7) were present in the onlooker role; behaviors (1), (5) and (6) were observed in the stage manager role; behaviors (3) and (4) were part of the director role; and (5) was seen in the redirector role.

The reject/ignore behavior had two subcategories – reject and ignore.

**Reject.** These behaviors consisted of children verbally turning down teachers’ input or disapproving of teachers’ actions. Some non-verbal expressions of rejections
such as saying “no” with head shaking were also observed. In this example a child verbally rejects the teacher’s comment:

Ms. Kelly: We need more pieces, don’t we? Like mouths and stuff.

Ryan: No we don’t.

**Ignore.** Children who presented these behaviors often continued playing without paying attention to what the teacher was doing or saying. This occurred even if the teacher was asking questions or making comments directed to the specific child.

Although reject/ignore behaviors were observed in all the teachers’ roles at some point, most of them occurred when the teacher was adopting the onlooker role, asking questions or making comments from an observer perspective. They were also more frequent in the directive role when teachers were trying to convince children to do something.

Teachers approached various children who either rejected or ignored their input. However, they often ended up finding a different child that did not engage in reject/ignore behaviors with whom they could start an active interaction. It was also seen that teachers did not give up easily when children ignored them; they tended to keep repeating questions or comments until a child answered them. Rejection was sometimes accompanied by anger and frustration from children.

**Resistance Behaviors**

These behaviors were not observed as often as reject/ignore or acceptance behaviors; however, they were seen in some events. Children who presented these behaviors were more receptive to the teachers’ involvement than children with reject/ignore responses. However, they still did not completely accept teachers’ input or actions or it took them time to incorporate teachers’ suggestions into their play.
Two subcategories were identified for this category: children either resisting or questioning teachers’ behaviors. Some of the possible observed reasons for these responses include:

1. Children taking some time to process the information that led to a discrepancy between the verbal response and their actions
2. Teachers’ ideas seeming not to convince the children
3. Teachers’ ideas or actions not being aligned with children’s play plot
4. Teachers providing many types of input in a short period of time

These behaviors were more frequently observed in roles in which the teacher took an active role, especially in the co-player and director role.

**Resist.** Children with this type of behavior resisted doing what the teacher asked or suggested they do. Resistance behaviors often were resolved in acceptance or rejection behaviors. In the case of resolving as acceptance behaviors, some children provided a verbal negative response to the teacher’s input but still performed the action suggested, with some level of initial resistance. In the case of resistance behaviors resolving in rejection behaviors the initial resistance turned into a clear rejection. In the passage below a teacher in a director role is imposing an idea that the child does not want to incorporate into her play. The child starts responding with some resistance behaviors that end as rejection. This episode was accompanied by anger and frustration as the teacher insists:

Ms. Diane, Rachel and Jane are playing with little dolls. They are pretending their dolls are going to the pool when Ms. Diane starts asking:

**Ms. Diane:** Did you put her sunscreen on?

**Rachel:** No. [Barely touches the doll’s face]
Ms. Diane: Did you rub some sunscreen on her?
Rachel: No
Ms. Diane: Pretend?
Rachel: I said no
Ms. Diane: So she doesn’t get sunburned
Rachel: I said NO!!
Ms. Diane: She said no?
Rachel: No!
Ms. Diane: I say, well you have to put some sunscreen on or you can’t go outside and play

In this example the child starts being resistant to what the teacher is saying, as she express disagreement, but seems to think about it by touching the doll’s face. However, as the teacher insists the child clearly starts rejecting the teacher’s input. As the teacher adopts a directive role the child gets more upset after being told what to do. It is therefore possible to see how different behaviors that are often linked to specific roles (e.g., telling the child what to do in the director role) elicit some kind of reject/ignore response in children.

**Question.** The child questions the teacher’s idea by asking her something back (e.g., repeating the teacher’s idea in a tone that is actually a question). The next lines illustrate the case of a child who is questioning the teacher while she adopts the directive role:

Ms. Amy: Come here Brick let’s make your elephant a house
Brick: Oh! We… we got to make him a house?
Ms. Amy: Yeah
Brick: This is the house we’re gonna make?

T: Yeah, put it on the [inaudible]

Instead of rejecting or accepting the teacher’s idea Brick starts asking questions with a tone that suggests he is still not convinced about what the teacher is suggesting. The resistance behaviors usually resolved after children questioning or resisting teachers’ input, with the child adopting either rejection or acceptance responses.

Acceptance Behaviors

In these behaviors children showed a high level of reception by following teachers’ directions; responding to their questions, comments and suggestions; and incorporating ideas. In some cases they went even further by building on the teachers’ input and proposing new ideas, or assuming roles connected to the teachers’ input. Some of the teachers’ behaviors that were often linked to these responses included:

1. Teachers showing interest in children’s play
2. Teachers taking an active role in children’s play
3. Teachers’ questions, comments, and suggestions being related to children’s play plot
4. Teachers providing ideas and materials aligned with the play
5. Teachers incorporating real life experiences related and pertinent to the play
6. Teachers letting children take an active role
7. Teachers catching children’s interest and attention

These behaviors were present in all the roles, but were observed more frequently in the co-player and play-leader roles (with all of the above present at some point). Behaviors (1), (3), (5), and (7) were observed in the onlooker role; (1), (3), (4),
(5), and (7) were seen in the stage manager role; and (1), (2), (7) were identified in the
director role. Although teachers changing the focus of attention from play to
something else characterized the redirector role, children often accepted the teachers’
role in these events and followed the teachers’ lead in the directions they proposed.

Three subcategories were identified in this category: response, incorporate, and
build on.

**Response.** Children provided either a verbal answer or a non-verbal
expression accepting or validating teachers’ input or behavior. This response was not
followed up by an action related to the input. An example of this subcategory includes
children expressing that the teachers’ idea was a good idea but then not incorporating
it in their play.

**Incorporate.** The child could either provide or not provide a verbal answer,
but they reacted with actions. These children often incorporated teachers’ ideas to
their play and followed teachers’ directions. An example of a child incorporating the
teacher’s input without a verbal response is presented in the following excerpt:

While playing with houses and little people (in a manipulative/pretend play
context) Emma is looking for furniture for her house. Ms. Amy is helping the children
to find the different elements for their play. When Emma grabs a chair Ms. Amy asks:

*Ms. Amy: “Why don’t you try one of your persons to sit on that chair Emma?* See if one of your people could sit in that chair”.

*Emma, without looking or saying anything to the teacher, grabs a person and
sits it on the chair.*

The presence of a verbal response in the acceptance behaviors was often seen
with excitement, happiness, and enthusiasm from children. On the other hand, in cases
when children incorporated a teacher’s ideas without a verbal response, positive responses (e.g., enthusiasm, excitement) were not as evident. For instance in the example of Emma, her face and expressions did not change while she followed the teacher’s suggestion.

**Build On.** In this subcategory the children accepted the teachers’ input or behavior and went beyond that with a proactive response. For instance, based on the teachers’ input, children went further by providing new ideas for the play or alternative uses for the material. It was often the case in which children not only adopted the roles implied by the teachers, but also incorporated novel vocabulary. The following situation is an example of this subcategory.

While playing cars the teacher introduces a new truck. The tow truck:

Ms. Lilly: does anybody need a tow?

Pete: I need a tow

Ms. Lilly: I’ll be right back to get your car

Ryan: I’m a tow track

Ms. Lilly: Alright, it’s park right here. Oh there’s another tow truck out here. Where is your car c? I came to get it

Ryan: now I’m a tow car

Ms. Lilly: Okay

Ryan: We’re tow cars

Ms. Lilly: John, I’ll look and see if your car is fixed and I ‘ll bring it back to you

Ryan: here, I’m bringing that one

Ms. Lilly: Oh! You wanna bring it back to him? All right, go ahead
Ryan: I’m bringing the car back to you

The child not only accepts the teacher’s input but also builds on it. He adopts a role and is able to assume a function of a tow track while adopting the vocabulary. He takes advantage of the teacher’s role and functions as a play leader, follows the lead and builds on this new play idea.

In the selective coding process, children’s responses were conceived as a continuum of receptiveness toward the different behaviors teachers adopted when involved in their play (see Figure 3). Children’s responses range from low receptiveness in which they reject or ignore teachers’ behaviors to a high level of reception. On the highly receptive end of the continuum, children not only accept teachers’ behaviors but extend teachers’ input and build upon this input. In the center of this continuum are resistance behaviors in which children neither reject nor accept teachers’ behavior right away. Rather, children take some time to process and evaluate teachers’ inputs and behaviors before either accepting or rejecting them. The reject/ignore child behaviors represent low levels of receptiveness towards teachers’ input.

![Figure 3](#)  Continuum of children’s receptiveness to teachers’ involvement during play
Although teachers’ roles elicited the different responses along the continuum at some point, some behaviors were observed more often when teachers adopted certain roles. For instance, the acceptance behaviors were observed more often when teachers adopted the play leader and the co-player role, while the onlooker role seemed to be linked to more ignoring behaviors from children.

Teachers’ involvement in children’s play consisted of verbal input most of the time. Therefore, children’s responses were influenced not only by the teachers’ behaviors but also by the verbal input that teachers provided. The types of language teachers used when providing input, and the types of language elicited in children when teachers were engaged in children’s play are described when addressing the research question about the types of language used.

**Types of Language Used by Teachers and Children**

A total of 4638 utterances were identified, 3022 from teachers and 1616 from children. In total, teachers produced more utterances while serving as onlookers than in other roles (see Table 3). However, when the time spent in each role was considered, it was possible to see that the onlooker role was actually the role in which teachers produced fewer utterances. Teachers seemed to talk more during the redirector role followed by the play leader, co-player, director, and the stage manager roles, respectively (see Table 4).

In the case of children, the production of utterances was higher when teachers assumed the stage manager role (see Table 3). When the time teachers spent in each role was considered, children actually produced more utterances when teachers adopted the play leader role, followed by the redirector and co-player roles, respectively. When teachers assumed the stage manager and onlooker roles, children
tended to speak fewer utterances (see Table 4). The different categories used to code each utterance are described in Table 5, and the total number of utterances coded within each category is described in Table 6 for teachers, and Table 7 for children.

Table 3  Percentages of total utterances produced

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Onlooker</th>
<th>Stage manager</th>
<th>Co-player</th>
<th>Play leader</th>
<th>Director</th>
<th>Redirector</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>30.10%</td>
<td>22.56%</td>
<td>8.10%</td>
<td>7.97%</td>
<td>2.22%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>31.03%</td>
<td>30.43%</td>
<td>19.77%</td>
<td>5.93%</td>
<td>10.40%</td>
<td>2.45%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4  Percentages of utterances produced when accounting for the time spent in each role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Onlooker</th>
<th>Stage manager</th>
<th>Co-player</th>
<th>Play leader</th>
<th>Director</th>
<th>Redirector</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>8.73%</td>
<td>14.26%</td>
<td>18.66%</td>
<td>23.15%</td>
<td>12.66%</td>
<td>22.55%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>9.48%</td>
<td>14.65%</td>
<td>16.63%</td>
<td>17.23%</td>
<td>16.78%</td>
<td>25.24%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5  Examples of final categories for coding teacher and child language during play

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open-ended Question</td>
<td>Questions that have multiple options of answers and the person who asks usually doesn’t know the answer</td>
<td>“What are you doing guys?” “What is that supposed to do?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed-ended Question</td>
<td>Questions that lead to a determined list of choices from where the child/teacher who is being asked can choose to answer the question. The person who asks may or may not know the answer.</td>
<td>“Will I reappear at the beach or at Disney?” “Would you like bacon and cheese?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directive Statement</td>
<td>Encompasses statements that give a specific direction or command to do something</td>
<td>“You need to make a house” “Tom get all your trucks”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptive Statement</td>
<td>Provides a description of a situation or an object Includes explanations and suggestions</td>
<td>“I’m making a snack shack” “We’re trying to put the baby to bed”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluative Statement</td>
<td>Provides an evaluation to the action or verbal intervention of the other person they are interacting with</td>
<td>“You’re painting good lines” “That’s perfect”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pragmatic Language</td>
<td>Utterances by teachers or children asking questions that are not structurally considered a question, repetitions with different intentions, emotions are expressed</td>
<td>“Wow” “You’re making your car high?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete</td>
<td>Utterances that either the child or the teacher do not finish, making it hard to retrieve the meaning from them</td>
<td>“Did you hear a … “So I can be a …”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Any other utterance that does not fall into any of the previous categories</td>
<td>“Yeah” “Thank you”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Onlooker</td>
<td>Stage Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-ended questions</td>
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<td>83</td>
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<td>Closed-ended questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Descriptive statements</td>
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<td>Evaluative statements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Directive statements</td>
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<td>137</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incomplete</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pragmatics</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>937</td>
<td>919</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7  Children’s total utterances by language type and teachers’ role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Onlooker</th>
<th>Stage Manager</th>
<th>Co-player</th>
<th>Play leader</th>
<th>Director</th>
<th>Redirector</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open-ended questions</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed-ended questions</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptive statements</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluative statements</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directive statements</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>138</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incomplete</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pragmatics</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>487</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1616</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Open-Ended Questions

**Teachers.** The use of open-ended questions was limited compared with the other types of language. These questions were found more frequently when teachers adopted the onlooker role. Open-ended questions within the onlooker role were primarily general questions that allowed teachers to find out more about children’s play without getting involved. Some examples of these general questions include: “What are you doing?” “What are you making?” “What is that for?” and “What’s the problem?” Other open-ended questions used in the onlooker role were specific to the theme of children’s play. Some examples of these questions were: “Where is your garage at?” “What are we building?” “What am I gonna do with a tea cup?” and
“What did you do with the cars when you had them the other day?” Teachers posed these questions from the observer perspective and they were frequently used to start verbal interactions with the children.

When teachers assumed the stage manager role they asked fewer open-ended questions than when they adopted the onlooker role. Similar to the onlooker role, open-ended questions were observed as general questions, or specific to children’s play. For example, some of the general questions are illustrated in the following examples: “Why are you crying?” “Why?” “What’s that?” “What is this?” “What are you doing then?” “What did you change your mind about?” Unlike in the onlooker role, these questions were asked when teachers were helping children with their play materials or general plot ideas, not from an observant status role. Most of the open-ended questions within the stage manager role were therefore related to the toys and materials of children’s play. Some examples of these open-ended questions include: “What would happen if the seatbelt wasn’t there?” “Why is it important to have it at the carnival?” “What would be a better choice to do with that Lego?” “Where is the bed?” These open-ended questions seemed to be more complex than the questions asked by teachers in the other roles.

Contrasting with the onlooker and stage manager roles, the uses of open-ended questions in the co-player and play leader roles were often specific and linked to children’s play. Many of these questions were also made using pretend language (i.e., within the script of a character of the play). Some of these questions included: “Where are we going?” “What’s in here?” “What do we need to do first?” “What kind of soup did you make?” “How are your dinosaurs?” Although teachers in the director role also used open-ended questions linked to the play, most of the time, these questions were
more focused on the teachers’ interests and ideas. For instance, a teacher wanted a girl to flatten the pancakes so she asked, “Where is your rolling pin?” That question was made in the context of the girl following the directions of the teacher.

The use of open-ended questions within the redirector role was not linked to children’s play; instead these questions were used to address children’s attention away from the play. These are some of the example questions observed in this role: “How did your dads like your presents?” “What’s that?” “What is it?” and “What are we missing?”

**Children.** Open-ended questions were not very frequent among children. These questions were made more often when teachers adopted the stage manager and the co-player role. When the teachers’ role was the stage manager, children’s open-ended questions were often made to get suggestions for the play from the teacher. Some examples include: “What could we do?” “What could we build?” “What else do we do at the carnival?” Some questions were also related to the play material and props: “What is this?” “What are you making?” “Where is the mice?” Instead, when teachers adopted the co-player role, open-ended questions were usually made within the character children adopted during play. For instance, while pretending to be a waitress, a girl asked the teacher: “What would you like?” “Where is the tea?” Pretending to be a potato head character, a boy asked the teacher’s potato head character: “And why your hat is the same way than me?” “What are you doing today?”

When teachers were in the play leader and director role children only asked one or two open-ended questions. In the case of the director role both questions were inquiring about the teacher’s comments (i.e., “why?” and “for what?”). When teachers assumed the redirector role children did not ask open-ended questions.
Closed-Ended Questions

**Teachers.** Closed-ended questions were the second most used type of language, after descriptive statements (described below). The amount of teachers’ utterances coded as closed-ended questions was similar in the onlooker, stage manager, and co-player roles. In the onlooker role, teachers asked general questions such as “Are you okay?” “Was it on purpose?” “Did you use your words?” “Are you having fun?” as well as play-specific questions like “Are you making the chocolate donut?” “Are you all done with the restaurant?” “Are you playing house keeping?”

As seen with the open-ended questions most of the closed-ended questions teachers made in the stage manager role were related to play materials or the play plot. Some examples include: “Where do these go?” “Who got the tow truck?” “Did you find a home for it?” “Is that where the mix goes?” In a similar way, many closed-ended questions within the co-player and the play leader roles were made using pretend language (i.e., voice of the play’s character) and were often yes/no questions. For example: “Is this the parade?” “Can I have a spoon?” “Should I spread it again?” “How about we make an x ray of his hand?” “Did you leave the gate open?” Although questions in the director role did not include as much pretend language, they were primarily yes/no questions such as: “Are you stuck?” “Is that the false start sound?” “Is it still pouring out?” Most of the redirector closed-ended questions were related to academic concepts, including numbers (e.g., “Can we count the pieces?”), prepositions (e.g., “Is the marble going up or down?”), properties of objects (e.g., “Do they look alike?” “Are they both long?”), and colors (e.g., “What color is this?”) among others.

**Children.** Although children did not use closed-ended questions very often, they were observed more frequently than open-ended questions. When teachers assumed the onlooker role, children’s closed-ended questions were likely to be related
to asking permission to do something (e.g., “Can I play lego?” “Can we go to the bly bly?”). On the other hand, when teachers adopted the stage manager role, children’s closed-ended questions occurred more frequently and were related to play props and materials. Some examples include: “Can I have a yellow ticket?” “How do you spell Ferris wheel?” “How many friends are we gonna have?” “Can you make one of those for me?” As noted, children used closed-ended questions when teachers adopted the co-player role and these questions were mostly in pretend language (e.g., “Do you want extra sugar?” “Do you want coffee?” when the teacher was a costumer in a restaurant). When teachers adopted the play leader or redirector role, children did not use any closed-ended questions. While teachers adopted the director role, children’s questions were often limited to those with yes/no answers (e.g., “Is this the house we’re gonna make?” “Can I see this one?”).

Descriptive Statements

Teachers. Descriptive statements were used very frequently by teachers. In fact most of teachers’ utterances were coded as descriptive statements. Teachers used more of these statements when adopting the stage manager role. Within this role, teachers provided description of the different material children could play with (e.g., “They have a bedroom over there” “We need another big one” “It looks like it’s something for hamsters”), as well as described ideas that children could incorporate into their play plot (e.g., “You should put it in the house” “We can’t forget the popcorn” “You could be neighbors”). Some other descriptive statements were associated with aspects that transcended the play into real life (e.g., “We have to wear seatbelts because that keeps us safe” “We’re going to the carnival on Friday”), or with logistics of the play (e.g., “Carl wants to play with that”). When teachers adopted the
onlooker role their descriptive statements were linked to general logistics of the play that teachers could catch from observing such as “There’s more space over there” “You left the carpet all messy” “You dropped some food on the floor” or “Scott wants to play with you”. They also used these statements to describe children’s play episodes (e.g., “She’s hungry and she is cooking for her daughter”) or to comment on the different things children said to them (e.g., Alex: “It’s cold” -Ms. Amy: “It’s supposed to be cold kiddo”; Emily: “Look Ms. Danielle” -Ms. Danielle: “that’s a shower”; Alice: “Do you hear that Ms. Deb” -Ms. Deb: “I do hear the stuff in the computer”). In some occasions teachers also used descriptive statements to make comments about real life situations (e.g., “You should always put your seatbelts on when you get in your car” “I saw your mommy’s car is orange”).

The descriptive statements teachers made when adopting the co-player role occurred most of the time in pretend play situations. Some examples include: [referring to crayons] “These keys are all over the floor”; [when playing with play dough] “Here is the other elephant, we got a family”; [referring to a pretend gate] “I think Tom left it open”; [playing restaurant] “I would like a chocolate donut with sprinkles”. These statements were similar to the ones teachers made when adopting the play leader role; however, the production of descriptive statements within the play leader role occurred less frequently than within the co-player role. In the play leader role, teachers also used pretend talk most of the time (e.g., “I think I left my key home” “She made cupcakes for us”). In some cases, these statements reflected the lead teachers took within this role (e.g., maybe we can drive there; “The truck is here now” “I’m gonna do construction on the road”).
The amount of the descriptive statements made in the director role was similar to the amount made within the play leader role. Teachers did not use much pretend speech when adopting this role. Some examples include: “The car is in the middle of the, of the road” “You’re stuck” “He held on to it the whole way”. In the redirector role these statements were related to academic concepts, such as numbers (e.g., “There are thirteen”), colors (e.g., It’s called silver), or properties (e.g., I think they look alike) among others.

**Children.** Descriptive statements were by far the most typical type of language children used while playing. The amounts of descriptive statements in the onlooker and stage manager role were similar. However, when taking time into account, results suggested children actually produced a greater amount of these statements when teachers adopted the play leader role. When teachers performed the play leader role, children often used descriptive statements in pretend talk. This situation was similar to what was observed when teachers adopted the co-player role. This suggests that children’s descriptive statements were associated with both roles (i.e., co-player and play leader) in similar ways. Sample statements made by children while teachers were adopting the play leader role included “I could open the door for you” “You can borrow one of my keys” “I have my tow truck here” and “I got these guys out to help us”. When teachers adopted the co-player role, descriptive statements included: “I’m making pepper with cake” “That’s the only thing we have” and “I’m gonna bring you home”. Some pretend talk was also observed when teachers adopted the onlooker role. In these cases children approached teachers to describe the situations that were taking place in the play (e.g., “He’s in jail” “I see some marching band” “I’m gonna go to my friend’s house”). In other cases children approached the teacher to involve her in the
play episode (e.g., “Ms. Diane, this is your stomach”) or to talk about other children’s behaviors (e.g., “He’s messing it up” “Everybody keeps mashing it up”). When teachers adopted the director role children’s descriptive statements did not have a specific pattern. Some examples include: “It’s dinner time” “I want to be the false alarm” “I got my car high!”. In the redirector role these statements were linked to the topics the teachers initiated (e.g., “the longer is your key” “That’s black”). Many simple descriptive sentences were also observed with this role (e.g., “A circle” “Another piece”).

**Evaluative Statements**

**Teachers.** Evaluative statements were the least common statement type among teachers. In most utterances coded as evaluative statements teachers were praising children’s actions, qualities, and comments (e.g., “Nice” “You’re so strong” “Very good” “Good job”). This was especially true when teachers adopted the onlooker, the director, and redirector roles. Some evaluative statements within the roles just mentioned, were negatively assessing children’s behaviors (e.g., “That’s not okay” “That’s not cool” “That’s a little dangerous”). Teachers who adopted the co-player, play leader, and stage manager roles not only provided general evaluative statements like the ones described above but also offered evaluative statements specific to play. For instance the stage manager evaluated children’s play ideas and material use (e.g., “I think she fits just perfect” “Telling you that’s genius” “Good place for it” “That’s very important”), while teachers in the co-player and redirector roles also provided evaluation statements within pretend talk (e.g., [Playing restaurant] “That looks good!” “It’s delicious” “That’s my favorite”)
Children. Children’s evaluative statements were more likely to be about their play partners and play related issues. When teachers adopted the onlooker role, children’s evaluative states were in consideration of teachers’ comments. For instance, the teacher is describing that the child made a garage: Ms. Elise: “Pete made a garage”, Pete: “I didn’t make a garage”. In many cases they were limited to “Yes” and “No” statements (e.g., Ms. Anna: “This could be her bed” Milly: “Yeah”). In this case Milly is evaluating the teacher’s idea. Another case of evaluative statements in children consisted of a child approaching the teacher to talk about what she was doing in the play and evaluating the play’s characters (e.g., “they are so bad” [Referring to the little people]). Within the stage manager role evaluations were linked to play material uses and suggestions for the play. Some examples include: Ms. Kelly: “He is at Ms. Kelly’s shower, Katie”, Katie “He’s not getting a shower” and utterances such as “I don’t want it like that” [Referring to a suggestion for some material the teacher gave to the child]. When teachers adopted the co-player and play leader roles children also made evaluative statements in pretend talk (e.g., [referring to the dessert Ethan made for her] Ms. Danielle: “It looks good” Ethan: “No it doesn’t”). Likewise, children validated teachers’ ideas within the play (e.g., Ms. Gabrielle: “I’m at Disney”, Ryan “All right!”, Ms. Elise: “Check Bradley too” Grace: “Oh, yeah!”). In the director and redirector roles children’s evaluative statements were more general, similar to the onlooker role (e.g., “All right” “Yeah” “Good” “No”).

Directive Statements

Teachers. Most of the teachers’ directive statements were observed when teachers assumed the onlooker role. Within this role teachers gave directions to the children from the observer perspective (e.g., “Put the blocks on the carpet” “Don’t
step on the basket” “Let somebody else play on it” “Don’t play with that”). In other cases these directions were made when children approached the teacher with an inquiry (e.g., “Go over and ask him” “You gotta wait” “Say can I play with you?”). Some other directive statements made by teachers within the onlooker role were linked to children’s play (e.g., “So go get baby” “Make some yummy food”). In the stage manager role, teachers often made directive statements about the material (e.g., “Give me this” “Move those to the side” “Cut it” “Color in”), about play ideas (e.g., “You have to make a racetrack”), or about logistics (e.g., “Wait until the end” “You have to wait until he’s done”).

While adopting the co-player and play leader roles, teachers’ directive statements looked similar. Some statements were about general logistics of the play episode (e.g., “We need to wait our turn” “Give him back the cupcakes” and “Let him do something”), while others were in pretend talk (e.g., “Pour me some tea” “Buckle up” “Put it in the stove” and “You need to put your lights on so nobody comes down…to the dirt here”).

Many of the teachers’ directive statements were made when teachers adopted the director role. Some were about general instructions for the play (e.g., “Grab that one” “Throw them in the air and then catch them” “I do these two you do those two”), some others involved the teacher telling the child what to say (e.g., “Say ‘It’s a microphone’” “Say ‘thank you’” “Say ‘who’s there’”), while in other cases these statements were linked to the play’s plot (e.g., “You got a make me my breakfast” “You need to make a house” “It gotta go through the finish line right here”). Teachers did not make many directive statements within the redirector role and most teachers
directed children’s attention to what the teacher wanted to show (e.g., “Look what I have” “Look at this”).

Children. Most of children’s statements were made when teachers assumed the co-player role. In that case, children used directive statements most of the time within the play, in pretend talk. Some examples include: “Go upstairs go take your medicine” “You’ll be the police” “Then we have to paint” and “You have to put dirt over the mix”. The amounts of children’s directive statements when teachers adopted the onlooker and stage manager roles were similar; however, the content when teachers took the former role was children trying to get the teachers’ attention (e.g., “Look at me” “Look” “Look at my finger”), while the content when teachers took the latter role was linked to play props and materials (e.g., “Write her name in it” “Make a ticket for me, or a hard ticket, let’s make a ticket” “That’s what you have to do”).

When teachers adopted the play leader and director roles children’s directive statements were general and similar. When teachers adopted the play leader role children also made some directive statements in pretend talk (e.g., “Let me check you”). Children did not produce any directive statements when teachers engaged in the redirector role.

Incomplete Utterances

Teachers. Teachers’ incomplete sentences were seen more often in the onlooker and the stage manager roles. Within these roles teachers’ attention was divided across multiple children in the classroom. The transition from one child to another frequently resulted in teachers leaving sentences unfinished, because they were trying to talk to different children at the same time. In the co-player, play leader, and director roles teachers were involved with fewer children simultaneously, and...
therefore produced fewer incomplete utterances. Teachers produced more incomplete questions than incomplete statements. Unlike questions and statements, the content of incomplete utterances was not specific for each role. Some examples include: “Does this go on a…” “So, what are…”, and “It does have a…”.

**Children.** Children had similar amounts of incomplete utterances when teachers were adopting the onlooker, stage manager and co-player roles. They had fewer when teachers were serving as a play-leader, director, and redirector. Children often had an incomplete utterance followed by a complete one, or had incomplete utterances that were followed by a teacher’s utterance. Teachers frequently repeated the question while the child was answering, therefore interrupting the child with a new question or moving to a different child before the first child had a chance to answer. Most of children’s incomplete utterances were sentences. Similar to the case of the teachers, the content of children’s incomplete utterances was not specific to the roles. Some examples include: “You’re gonna be…” “Next to…” “It’s a …”.

**Pragmatics**

**Teachers.** The use of pragmatic language among teachers was frequently observed when teachers adopted the onlooker and stage manager roles. One common use of pragmatic language consisted of repeating the children’s utterances in form of a question. For instance if a child said, “I’m graduating” the teacher will respond, “You’re graduating?” This case was often observed among all roles, but was more frequent in the onlooker and co-player roles. Pragmatics also included utterances linked to non-verbal expressions such as “Uh-uh” “Mm-hmm” “Wow” “Oh” that were present among all the different roles teachers adopted during play.
Children. The amount of children’s pragmatic utterances was very consistent across the different roles teachers adopted during play, with no relevant differences observed. Unlike teachers, children’s pragmatic utterances consisted mostly of those utterances linked to non-verbal expressions such as “Huh?” “Oh” “Uh-uh” “Ugh”.

Other Utterances

The other utterances were the same for teachers and children. Most utterances coded as other in children and teachers’ speech were one-word sentences such as “Yes” “No” “Hello” “Thank you” “Okay” (when it did not have an evaluative function), and “Sorry”, among others. For teachers these utterances were used more often within the co-player role, followed by the onlooker and stage manager roles. In the case of children, they were observed more often when teachers adopted the onlooker role, followed by the stage manager and co-player roles.
Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

The current study sought to explore the relationship among the different functions of teachers’ roles, the way young children respond to the teachers’ behaviors within these roles, and the type of language used by young children and teachers when teachers assumed facilitative roles during play. Results provided a detailed description of various roles for teachers, as well as identified teachers’ behaviors and language use that elicit different responses in children. Results from the current study are explored and discussed using Vygotsky’s (1978) zone of proximal development theory and the concept of scaffolding (Wood et al., 1976) as frameworks for interpretation.

Function Of Teachers’ Roles During Free Play

According to Johnson et al. (2005), adults may adopt facilitative or precarious roles during play. The facilitative roles (i.e., onlooker, stage manager, co-player, and play leader) seem to enhance the quality of children’s play. Precarious roles (i.e., uninvolved, director, and redirector) on the other hand may disrupt children’s play. Findings from this study support this description. In the present study, teachers spent more time engaged in roles that were considered to facilitate children’s play, and teachers within these roles engaged in specific behaviors that supported children’s play. For instance, teachers in the onlooker role were able to monitor children’s play and switch to an active role when necessary in order to facilitate children’s play. Teachers in the stage manager role assisted children with their play props, themes and
materials, and helped resolve conflicts between players. Johnson et al. (2005) present these teachers’ roles in a continuum of engagement with the onlooker role being the role with least engagement in the involvement category. In the current study, most teachers spent the majority of their time in the onlooker role. This suggests that teachers had a relatively low level of engagement in children’s play. This finding is different from what Kontos (1999) found in her study with teachers from Early Head Start. Findings from that study suggested that teachers spent most of their time in the stage manager role during free-play time. Perhaps, this variation between findings might be linked to subsequent changes in educational context such as standards movement in early childhood education, lack of emphasis on play, differences between community childcare centers and Head Start, or personal characteristics of the teachers in this study.

Another important aspect to note is that when teachers assumed the co-player and play leader roles, children tended to have more social interactions with peers, and produce more utterances. Vu et al. (in press) found similar results in regards to teachers’ roles. When teachers assumed the play leader, stage manager, and co-player roles, children showed greater cognitive complexity and higher social levels in the play. These findings illustrate the way the different roles teachers can adopt during children’s play might be a way for teacher to scaffold children’s language, social, and cognitive performance.

One aspect to consider is that too much engagement instead of being linked to positive outcomes is more likely to be associated with disruption of children’s play (Johnson et al., 2005). In the current study, teachers adopted the director role (a precarious role, with overinvolvement) more than adopting the play leader role (a
facilitator role). This suggests that in some cases when teachers take an active role in children’s play they get overinvolved, disrupting the play instead of enhancing it. Higher levels of engagement are not necessarily the best way to support children’s play. This reflects a potential need to educate teachers in the way they can interact with children during play, and the roles they can assume to better support children’s play while enhancing their learning.

**Children’s Responses To Teachers’ Behaviors Within Facilitative Roles**

The current study described the different responses (i.e., behaviors) children showed towards teachers’ behaviors within facilitative roles during play. These responses were proposed in a continuum of receptiveness that ranged from low receptiveness, with reject/ignore behaviors, to high receptiveness with acceptance and proactive behaviors. The highest level of receptiveness in this continuum involved children going beyond the teachers’ input to accomplish something specific (e.g., engaging in higher levels of cognitive and social play, producing more utterances). These behaviors were often associated with the play leader and co-player roles. This suggests that when teachers adopt these roles, they are able to enhance children’s zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). The teacher’s role during play is helping the child reach some levels that he/she might not be able to achieve without this guidance. This is consistent with the Johnson et al. (2005) concept of facilitative roles, since these roles should be a way for teachers to support children's play.

Some aspects to consider when examining children's responses are the child's personal characteristics and temperament. Although these aspects were not considered in this study, they should be taken into account in future studies, since they could
make children more or less likely to show receptiveness towards teachers' behaviors, within specific roles teachers adopt during play.

**Types Of Language Used By Teachers And Children**

Multiple studies have examined the role of adults in children’s language development (e.g., Bowers & Basyleva, 2011; Dickinson & Porche, 2011; Justice et al., 2013; Tompkins et al., 2013). In the case of teachers, the amount of speech they direct to children has shown to predict children’s vocabulary skills and performance on standardized language tests (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2000, 2002).

The present study found that teachers produced more utterances when adopting the play leader role, among the facilitative roles, when the time teachers spent in each role was considered. This was also the case for children’s production of utterances. Children and teachers also tended to use more pretend talk in descriptive statements when teachers adopted the co-player and play leader role. This kind of talk has been linked to higher levels of cognitive function and to symbolic thinking. Teachers also used these roles to introduce what seemed to be new vocabulary such as *x-ray*, *driver’s license*, *tow truck* and some other words. These words were eventually used by children, in descriptive statements illustrating the scaffolding process of language that can take place during play. This is consistent with Connor and colleagues’ (2006) findings, suggesting that play constitutes an implicit meaning-focused activity associated with children’s vocabulary growth. Both the quantity and the quality of vocabulary input that children receive from adults are important for their vocabulary acquisition (Weizman & Snow, 2001). Based on the findings from this study the play
leader and the co-player roles seemed to be the more appropriate roles to produce more verbal input and to introduce novel and complex vocabulary to children.

One particular aspect to consider from the findings is the amount of children’s incomplete utterances when teachers adopted the onlooker, the stage manager, and the co-player roles. In these cases teachers’ attention was divided among multiple children. Teachers did not provide enough time for children to think and respond before moving to the interaction with the next child. They also were seen to ask multiple sequential questions that seemed to overwhelm the child, who responded with incomplete utterances or no answers. Children’s incomplete utterances could also work as a practice process for children, since in many cases these utterances were followed by the complete version of the utterance. This is consistent with Bruner’s (1983) conception that it is during play that the first complex forms of language occur, because play creates a pressure-free environment for children to combine language without consequences for making mistakes. Furthermore, a possible explanation for the amount of other utterances (e.g., yes, no) used by children when teachers adopted the onlooker role, could be the constant teachers’ use of closed-ended questions (“are you having fun?” “Are you feeding the baby?”).

**Limitations**

The primary limitation of this study was related to the sample size. Although it was a qualitative study, a larger sample may help identify the different functions of the teachers’ roles more accurately. Another limitation was that the videos used for this study represented only one observation of the teachers. It is important to have more than one observation to make sure that the behaviors found characterized the teachers, and were not specific to the day they were recorded. The potential for reactivity was
also a limitation. The fact that teachers were conscious that they were being recorded may have affected their behaviors, and therefore should also be considered as a limitation. There was also variation in the type of teachers’ qualifications, which may have influenced teachers’ knowledge and ability to interact with children during play. The lack of demographic data for children and teachers also represented a limitation. In particular, race and ethnicity could be important factors to considered when looking at teacher-child interactions during play. Different ethnic and race groups may bring different cultural contexts that may influence their behaviors during the interactions. However, consistent with Thyssen (2003) this limitation was addressed in the current study by considering play as a cultural context for children. Within play episodes, children set their own values and beliefs and the play becomes their major cultural context. One last limitation included the possible bias that comes from the subjectivity of the researcher, although multiple steps were conducted to reduce this bias.

**Conclusions and Implications**

Findings from this study provide a rationale for exploring teachers’ behaviors associated with specific roles, that elicit certain types of children’s responses during play. Results showed that facilitative roles were linked to play-sensitive behaviors (e.g., providing verbal interventions related to the play plot, showing interest for children’s play, helping with materials and ideas, and supporting children’s active participation, among others). These play-sensitive behaviors were related to acceptance behaviors in children. These facilitative roles were also found to be linked with higher utterance productivity in teachers and children, and more use of pretend talk for both, which has been related to children’s higher cognitive functioning.
Current findings contribute to the field of play and education, in an area that has not been frequently studied. Furthermore, results may inform future in-service and pre-service teacher education on how various roles and behaviors are linked to positive responses and outcomes for children. This might be especially important in the area of language development.

Future studies could address the different teachers’ behaviors identified that elicit responses in children. Focusing on these behaviors and the frequency of children’s responses may lead to a more accurate description of the teacher-student relationship in play. Furthermore, a more detailed analysis of these teachers’ behaviors and children’s responses could lead to the development of a model that could explain these dynamics. Also, the development of an instrument to identify and classify these behaviors and responses may be useful in future research.

A replication of the study in different context, such as Head Start centers, may help provide clarity to the particularities of the community childcare setting. Differences and/or similarities found across distinct types of childcare settings would help generalize findings or provide insights into the unique needs of certain centers. In regard to the type of language used, future studies should look at the length of the utterances as well as their quality to provide a better picture of the language used by teachers and children during play, and the related roles. It would be advantageous to link the child’s utterances to the teachers’ to find specific relationships that show the dynamics of this phenomenon. Lastly a comparative analysis among the teachers, looking at the number of years of experience, and their different educational levels could reveal possible relationships between these aspects and teachers’ behaviors during play.
It is important to continue to explore this area of study that could help teachers identify different ways of supporting children’s learning through interactions during play. There is also a need to conduct more research in different childcare settings (e.g., community and family childcare programs) that serve a substantial population of children.
REFERENCES


Appendix A

IRB LETTERS
DATE:  March 5, 2010

TO:  Jennifer Vu
FROM:  University of Delaware IRB

STUDY TITLE:  [160902-1] The Play’s the thing: Deepening teachers’ understanding of the power of play to enhance school success

IRB REFERENCE #: 
SUBMISSION TYPE:  Amendment/Modification

ACTION:  APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE:  March 5, 2010
EXPIRATION DATE:  March 4, 2011
REVIEW TYPE:  Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY:  Expedited review category # 7

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this research study. The University of Delaware IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

Please report all NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this study to this office.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years.

- 1 -
Based on the risks, this project requires Continuing Review by this office on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate renewal forms for this procedure.

If you have any questions, please contact Elizabeth Pelosi at 302-831-8619 or epeloso@udel.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.
DATE: February 24, 2015

TO: Jennifer Vu
FROM: University of Delaware IRB

STUDY TITLE: [160902-6] The Play's the thing: Deepening teachers' understanding of the power of play to enhance school success

SUBMISSION TYPE: Continuing Review/Progress Report

ACTION: Approved for Data Analysis Only

APPROVAL DATE: February 24, 2015

EXPIRATION DATE: March 4, 2016

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # (7)

Thank you for your submission of Continuing Review/Progress Report materials for this research study. The University of Delaware IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

Please report all NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this study to this office.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years.
Based on the risks, this project requires Continuing Review by this office on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate renewal forms for this procedure.

If you have any questions, please contact Nicole Famese-McFarlane at (302) 831-1119 or nicolefm@udel.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.