RE-VISIONING NARRATIVE COMPETENCE: EXPLORING KINDERGARTNERS' COLLABORATIVE STORY CONSTRUCTION

By

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(ABSTRACT)

This qualitative study explored young children's narrative competence, i.e. sense of story (Martinez, Cheney, & Teale, 1993). It used a combination of videotaping and interviewing to examine multiple perspectives of spontaneous child-constructed stories in the context of classroom sociodramatic play.

Previous research of children's narrative competence was limited to a nearly exclusive focus upon children's individual mastery of skills such as recall and comprehension of adult-selected or elicited stories (Guttman & Frederiksen, 1985; Pellegrini & Galda, 1982; Williamson & Silvern, 1991). This study utilized an alternative approach based upon Vygotskian theory (1967, 1978) to "re-vision" narrative competence as a collaborative social process. Social pretense has been called collaborative when it engages two or more children in complementary, i.e., cooperative, interactions (Howes, 1992; Roskos, 1988).

For this research, children's story construction was videotaped in two settings in Southwest Virginia. First, a pilot study was conducted in a private day care center's kindergarten classroom of 16 children and two teacners. Nine children played stories and were interviewed about their videotaped play. Teachers and the center director were interviewed also. A subsequent study videotaped 127 kindergarteners, in a rural public school setting. From that population, a self-selected sample of 31 children participated in both story playing and focus group interviews about their videotaped stories. Nine teachers and aides were interviewed and had an opportunity to view the tapes and to discuss the process of story construction.

Using Strauss and Corbin's (1990) paradigm for analyzing qualitative results, the researcher built foundational assumptions related to conditions and properties. These assumptions were both challenged and confirmed by transactional concepts grounded in observational and interview data integrated by the researcher.

Results indicated that both adults and children offered responsive assistance by collaboration in the form of behaviors and language which were sustaining and distracting to child-initiated themes within the process of story construction. This study provided an opportunity for researcher reflection upon the nature of being "responsive", i.e., designing classroom experiences and building conversations around the expressed ideas of children (Stremmel, 1991; Tharp & Gallimore, 1993). A collaborative model of narrative competence was developed, and recommendations were offered for assisting child-constructed stories in classrooms.

In memory of

Ruth and Jess Reynolds,

parents who valued my stories.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

RE-VISIONING NARRATIVE COMPETENCE: EXPLORING KINDERGARTNERS' COLLABORATIVE STORY CONSTRUCTION

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview and Purpose of the Study

"I'll drive the truck
if you'll fight the fire.
I'll plunk the keys
if you'll be the choir.
I'll find the ball
if you'll call the team.
Let's put our heads together
and dream the same dream."

George Ella Lyon (1989)

These words from Together, an award-winning children's book, illustrate sociodramatic play. This type of play is collaborative pretense, which offers a rich opportunity for adults to study children's "sense of story" called narrative competence by Martinez, Cheney, and Teale (1991). This study, based upon Vygotskian (1967, 1978) sociocultural theory, explored the social nature of narrative competence. It valued classroom play where a common story is created to which everyone contributes a unique and necessary part.

Why is sociodramatic or "pretend" play especially important in kindergarten classrooms? Is there time to "dream the same dream" when there's so much work to be done?

The Significance of Narrative Competence

Recent research by a teacher of young children affirms the importance of sharing ideas in the form of "story playing"

(Paley, 1991). Children begin constructing life stories, both individually and collaboratively, as they perceive social transactions among themselves and others (Applebee, 1978, Goodman & Goodman, 1992; Howes, 1992). Narrative competence, as children's story construction, has been linked to children's developing literacy (Pellegrini, 1985), an important social process of "meaning making," or relevant learning (Bruner,1990; Heath, 1986; Wells, 1991).

The ability to construct and communicate meaning in the form of narrative is considered an essential component of the literacy learning "cycle" in which listening, speaking, reading, writing influence thinking in ways that are mutually reciprocal (Roskos, 1991). Pellegrini (1985) discussed children's narrative competence as one element of the theoretical link between literacy development and play, a natural learning medium for children. He noted that both literacy and play require similar mental processes involved in the mastery of symbolic representation, i.e., being able to represent ideas symbolically in gestures, words, or by transformations, such as substituting one object for another. Characterized by its nonliteral quality, this type of play involves pretense (Rubin, Fein, & Vandenberg, 1983), the ability to transform reality. Pretense, then, constitutes an essential component of children's narrative construction. (Paley, 1990; Preece, 1989). Pelligrini (1985) listed the following elements as common to both symbolic,

or pretend, play and literacy: decontextualized language, role playing, and object substitutions.

Linking children's play with literacy becomes especially significant for the scientific community as the need to attain a functional level of literacy increases. The technological sophistiocation of the 1990s requires mastery of increasingly complex "literacies" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). Therefore, within the educational community, curriculum planners must move beyond teaching isolated reading and writing skills to a global concept of literacy learning in which people construct meaning from their experiences (Goodman, 1987; Wagner, 1989).

Such an approach to literacy development is the whole language perspective (Stone, 1993), adopted by teachers who employ an "immersion view," of listening, speaking, reading, and writing into all areas of the curriculum (Goodman & Goodman, 1990, p. 225). Teachers and students collaboratively develop shared meaning, or intersubjectivity, through their reciprocal discourse in school settings (Stremmel & Fu, 1993). Shared construction of meaning has been linked to responsive teaching (Stremmel & Fu, 1993; Tharp & Gallimore, 1993) in which teachers use a variety of activity settings to engage students in conversations within small groups. My research utilized two small group settings, the classroom dramatic play center and the focus group, as instructional activities to facilitate responsive teaching based upon a shared classroom experience.

Responsive teaching allows teachers to observe and clarify children's intentions as a way to constructively assist children within the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky (1967, 1978) theorized that the play context became the zone within which children might reach optimal levels of cognitive development. His view of cognition was based upon social acquisition of knowledge in which children's language and thought were interrelated by social experiences.

Vygotskian theory (1967, 1978) related to responsive teaching, formed the theoretical basis for this exploration of children's narrative competence, i.e., sense of story (Martinez, Cheney, & Teale, 1991) in the context of classroom sociodramatic play. This research connected children's play with their literacy development by examining the social process of collaborative story construction, a literacy learning activity, in sociodramatic play. For this study, literacy was defined as an evolving social process of constructing meaning that is relevant to learners (Wells, 1991). Recent research suggests that literacy develops through a variety of activities, many within the context of play (Roskos & Neuman, 1994).

Martinez, Cheyney, and Teale (1991) noted the following ways that children's play may contribute to their literacy development: (1) by facilitating representational abilities; (2) by providing opportunities for children to explore functions of print and to practice print-related literacy skills; and (3) by

fostering children's emerging sense of story, i.e., narrative competence.

The Need to "Re-vision" Narrative Competence

Previous research of narrative competence has been limited to a nearly exclusive focus of children's individual mastery of skills such as story recall and comprehension (Galda & Miller, 1983; Guttman & Frederiksen, 1985; Pellegrini & Galda, 1982; Williamson & Silvern, (1991). By contrast, this study set forth an alternative research strategy for exploring children's "meaning-making" in classrooms. It envisioned a collaborative narrative competence, or sense of story, based upon a Vygotskian view of socially constructed pretense. To actualize this approach, it was essential to allow opportunities for children to be collaborators in narrative construction. Therefore, the classroom play center, where social pretense occurs naturally among children, was videotaped. Then the children viewed themselves during focus groups where conversations allowed them to reflect and clarify their intentions about the play scenarios. Children's collaboration, defined by Goodman and Goodman (1992) as "shared ownership", or reciprocal transactions, was noted among peers, with teachers, and with the researcher.

Two types of play: thematic fantasy play and sociodramatic play have been defined as significant for children's narrative competence (Galda, 1984). Yet, it is primarily thematic fantasy

play, in which stories are provided by adults for children's enactment, that has been used as a context for studying children's individual story construction in terms of recall and comprehension (Guttman & Frederiksen, 1985; Pellegrini & Galda, 1982; Williamson & Silvern, 1991). Sociodramatic play, or collaborative construction of stories, although advocated as a supportive learning context (Smilansky, 1968; Dyson 1990; Van Kleeck 1990), has not been directly related to research of narrative competence.

The study of narrative competence from an individual perspective is compatible with Piagetian (1950/1962) constructivist theory which emphasized the child as active constructor of knowledge. This important concept is, however, limited in that it fails to explore the social nature of mutually constructed knowledge.

Stremmel and Fu (1993) argued for an emphasis upon intersubjectivity, or mutual understanding, among people within classroom communities. This approach builds upon Vygotskian (1978) sociocultural theory and lends support for reciprocal transactions which occur in collaboration among peers and between children and their teachers. According to this transactive approach, "teachers learn and learners teach", (Goodman & Goodman, 1992, p. 235). Therefore, this study of narrative competence assumed a mutually constructed understanding among story players.

Similarly, Bloome (1991) emphasized the importance of considering community as a useful heuristic in classroom research. He used the term "community" to identify a group of people who share a similar identity, similar purposes, and a common language among themselves. Thus, espousing his view, classroom activities may be examined to identify motives and meanings shared by those who live in community.

Classroom researchers, Paley (1991), Roskos (1988; 1991), Warash and Workman (1993) have documented kindergarteners' stories. They described child constructed narratives as part of a repertoire of literacy learning activities. Fein's (1981) review of pretend play clarified research findings which described the kindergarten year as an optimal time for studying social pretense due to children's expanding language and cognitive development at that age. Of recent significance are naturalistic studies of kindergartners' story construction (Preece, 1987; Roskos, 1988) and classroom transactions (Tharp & Gallimore, 1992) which offer foundational support for a collaborative view of narrative competence appropriate for kindergartners.

Paley (1991), Schrader (1990), and Warash and Workman (1993) have described teaching approaches which seek to clarify and extend children's stated meanings through interactive conversations and classroom dramatizations of child constructed stories. Sutton-Smith (1981) noted the importance of listening to children's stories and, by questioning, attempting to learn

their intentions as a way of responding to their identified purposes and needs. Tharp and Gallimore (1993) argued for responsive teaching, in which shared understanding is "woven" between children and teachers.

The process of creating mutual meaning enlarges individual goals in terms of agreed-upon social purposes, i.e., intersubjectivity (Stremmel & Fu, 1993). Much remains to be learned about strategies for supporting literacy learning in terms of social processes. By exploring the social process of children's narrative competence, or story construction in spontaneous sociodramatic play, this study makes an important contribution to extant play and literacy research.

Research Questions

The following set of questions related to Vygotskian theory of socially constructed knowledge were used to guide this qualitative inquiry:

(1) What is the social nature of classroom story construction?

(2) What purposes, i.e., meanings and motivations, do children identify with classroom story construction?

(3) What purposes, i.e., meanings and motivations, do teachers identify with the process of classroom story construction?

(4) How do these purposes reflect responsive teaching (collaborative intersubjectivity)?

(5) What are practical implications for responsive teaching to build upon kindergarten children's literacy development?

Summary

In summary, the process of constructing narrative has a rich heritage, is action-oriented, related to both fantasy and life experience, and serves an important purpose for narrators who develop increasing competence in articulating their stories (Bruner, 1990; Heath, 1986; Heath & Chin, 1985; Paley, 1990). Multiple research perspectives may be constructed, as described by Goncu and Tuermer (1994), to obtain comparison views of a phenomenon. Perspectives of children and teachers integrated through the researcher "lens," offered increased opportunities for understanding the social process of narrative competence linked by responsive teaching to children's play and literacy development.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

> "As children grow as symbolic players and social beings, they paint the canvas of play collaboratively with their friends" (Dyson, 1990, p. 54).

This review of the literature "sets the stage" for considering how children "paint the canvas" of sociodramatic play collaboratively in the form of story construction, i.e. narrative competence. First, will be an introduction to the nature of child narrative. Next, narrative competence will be defined, and studies of narrative competence will be reviewed to illustrate the predominance of a constructivist theoretical perspective. Finally, an elaboration of Vygotsky's (1967, 1978) sociocultural perspective will provide the theoretical foundation for this study to "re-vision" narrative competence in the form of collaborative story construction related to responsive teaching.

The Nature of Child Narrative

Children begin constructing life stories, both individually and collaboratively, as they perceive an interaction between themselves and others (Applebee, 1983, Howes, 1992). Adults and peers provide experiences which affect the children's "storying" (Howes, 1992; Sachs, 1980; Wells, 1991).

Spontaneous collaborative story construction has been observed in both informal (Preece, 1987) and classroom (Paley,

1990) settings. Child constructed stories have been documented as early as two years of age (Applebee, 1978; Nelson, 1989). "Story playing" (Paley, 1991), a form of dramatization, has been used to encourage kindergarten children to construct their own stories, dictate, and enact them. Similarly, Warash and Workman (1993) have allowed children's experiences to become the plots for their classroom dramas which they videotaped. Classroom strategies such as these value children's story constructions, yet may be limited by the use of individually dictated stories which require teacher intervention.

Child narratives have been documented in both structured and spontaneous settings (Boggs, 1983; Galda & Miller, 1982; Heath, 1986; Libby & Aries, 1989; Miller & Yussen, 1989; Paley, 1990; Preece 1989). They have been used to identify cultural diversity such as specific forms of verbal constructions of 42 Hawaiian preschoolers (Boggs, 1983); "Skinwalker" stories unique to Navajo children (Brady, 1980); the use of narrative for bilingual children (Heath & Chin, 1985); and gender differences in preschool children's fantasy narratives (Libby & Aries, 1989).

Within the play context, child constructed narratives have often been used to assess children's psychosocial well-being, language competence, and cognitive developmental levels (Rubin, Fein, & Vandenburg, 1983; Schaefer & O'Connor, 1983). In educational settings, narratives have a rich heritage within

"shared book experiences" (Holdaway, 1979). Classroom narratives serve a variety of purposes for children, such as: telling personal experiences, sharing storybook reading, and providing themes for dramatic enactments (Galda, 1984).

Narrative Competence

Child development literature reflects several approaches to studying narrative competence. According to Galda, narrative competence was defined as a child's ability to "construct a story that combines an appropriate setting with characters who react to a central problem through a sequence of events that move to a logical conclusion as narrative competence (Galda, 1984, p. 105). This view builds upon the dominant theme that story elements had to be produced in certain sequences and to become more developmentally elaborate for an increasing competence to be demonstrated. Consistent with this approach is the construction of story grammars to map the complexity of plot structures, using various linguistic schemes (Botvin & Sutton-Smith, 1977).

During the 1970s and 80s, the study of narrative competence reflected Piagetian constructivist theory which focused upon elicited stories of individual children and their mastery of story reconstruction tasks. This view dominated narrative competence research until the 1990's when the term began to be associated with a more general "sense of story" than specific individual skill mastery. A socio-cultural emphasis, building upon Vygotskian theory, was foundational for this qualitative study to "re-vision" narrative competence as a collaborative process.

Theoretical Perspectives

Constructivist Views

A Piagetian (1950/1962) view of children as active constructors of knowledge, constructivist theory, underlies research of children's story construction from both psychological and linguistic perspectives. Pellegrini (1985) noted that both symbolic play and literacy activities required children to use similar mental processes for representing and interpreting experience by decontextualized language, role playing, and object substitution in pretense. Sutton-Smith (1981) concluded from a developmental analysis of 350 child-constructed stories that studying narrative was a way of exploring a model of the mind. He argued that if storytelling is "as old as human history . . . and the basic human mind is a storytelling one" (Sutton-Smith, 1981, p. 37) then it was reasonable to consider an analysis of storying as an analysis of mental constructions, a psychological perspective.

Other structural analyses of children's stories have used both psychological and/or linguistic theoretical approaches. Structural linguistic perspectives have been used to develop hierarchical constructions of story elements and plot structure (Botvin & Sutton-Smith, 1977) in order to evaluate narrative complexity. "Story grammars" (Stein & Glenn, 1979) have identified developing schemata for story organization. Still other researchers have used psychoanalytic approaches to analyze children's psychosexual themes in the form of Eriksonian issues

(Pitcher & Perlinger, 1963). Interesting examples of children's stories can be found in the research of Applebee (1978), Nelson (1981), and Sutton-Smith (1981) who have preserved collections of narratives from a developmental perspective. They documented the rhyming quality of first narratives, as early as two years of age, in which playing with language progresses to more complex stories involving generalized beginnings, characters in action-oriented problem-solving events that move toward resolution. These approaches to examining children's storying have left a legacy for others who seek to preserve the creative products of children and to examine how cognition is reflected in both story content and structure.

However, one must not view "mind", nor narrative competence, from an isolated structural approach without reflecting upon its social nature. Tharp and Gallimore (1993) advocate using sociocultural approaches to study meaningful discourse as a way to explore how "society creates minds" (p. 93). Thus, the structural view is limited without the integration of a sociological perspective.

Socio-cultural Theory

Socio-cultural theoretical approaches emphasize cultural practices affecting story construction (Howes, 1992). Recently this focus, which extends Piaget's extensive contributions to include Vygotskian (1978) theory of the social nature of language and thought, has been used to support research of children's emergent literacy in play (Paley, 1993); Schrader, 1990).

Vygotsky (1978) sought to unify social and psychological processes, emphasizing the importance of understanding how organized activities using language affect human thought. Vygotskian theory connected speech and language as interrelated mental processes which served to reinvent knowledge. By studying meaningful discourse in social situations researchers link the creation of concepts to social constructions. Building upon Vygotsky's theory, Scribner and Cole (1981) suggested that in order to study how literacy makes a difference in mental processes, researchers must join psychological analysis with analysis of the cultural. More recently educational researchers have linked classroom contexts to literacy learning (Moll,1990) in the form of "making meaning" or mutual constructions of knowledge among teachers and learners.

Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (1967; 1978) articulates a view of literacy that includes mutually active reciprocal relationships (Stremmel & Fu, 1993). It values children's play as an important context which nurtures their developing literacy skills. These concepts are foundational for this study which reconceptualized narrative competence by moving from an individual, constructivist view toward a social, collaborative model.

Studies of Narrative Competence

Generally, young children's narrative competence has been studied in relation to individual mastery of specific skills within the thematic fantasy play paradigm. Thematic fantasy

play, adopting fictionalized themes, has been used to assess children's literacy skills experimentally in the form of story recall and comprehension (Guttman & Frederiksen, 1985; Williamson & Silvern, 1991). Fantasy enactment of stories has been found to be an effective facilitator of story production and comprehension (Saltz & Johnson, 1974; Pellegrini & Galda, 1982) as well as a significant predictor of kindergartners' prereading, language, and writing achievement. However, experimental studies have not been able to attribute causal effects of literacy acquisition to play per se due to the complex nature of both play and literacy and to confounding effects of adult roles in children's play. Stremmel and Fu (1993) suggested a theoretical view of collaborative intersubjectivity (Vygotsky, 1978) for studying classroom communities, as a way to eliminate the need to debate adult roles in children's play, since child and adult activities are viewed as mutually reciprocal.

Previous research of narrative competence has concentrated upon elicited story construction and/or reconstruction in both formal and informal interview settings (Boggs, 1983; Brady, 1980; Galda, 1982; Miller & Yussen, 1982). Pictures or objects have been used to elicit stories around an adult-selected theme (Miller & Yussen, 1982; Guttman & Frederiksen, 1985). Story starts (Libby & Aries, 1989) have served to elicit storying responses, and classic tales, such as The Three Little Pigs, have been used to study children's ability to reconstruct stories.

Narrative competence has been measured experimentally through story construction tasks designed to document children's comprehension by recall of story elements such as: length, character motivation, or plot definition and elaboration (Botvin & Sutton-Smith, 1977; Galda & Miller, 1983; Miller & Yussen, 1982).

These approaches to studying narrative competence have documented children's individual story construction in response to adult cues. However, they have failed to explore the transactive process of children's mutually constructed stories which have been defined as social pretense and observed in naturally occuring sociodramatic play. It is the "sense of story", perceived and communicated among children, that this study defined as narrative competence, i.e. a collaborative competence evolving from children's socially constructed "meaning making" (Bruner, 1990).

A few exemplary studies have documented children's ability to construct stories spontaneously. Preece (1987) investigated how narrative thinking develops in childhood through her longitudinal study of taperecorded conversations among three children during their kindergarten and first grade years. She documented the range of narrative forms produced in spontaneous conversations as the youngsters rode together in their daily carpool. A total of 599 narratives were produced within naturally occurring conversations. All children collaborated to produce narratives.

Roskos (1988; 1991) used unstructured individual interviews with eight preschoolers combined with videotapes to explore their pretend play activity. She isolated pretend episodes in children's play activity and documented literacy behaviors such as pretend reading, storytelling, and inventive writing. She advocated studying pretend play as a valuable pivotal tool used to liberate thinking from the concrete to the abstract.

Naturalistic case studies of kindergartner's narrative construction have been documented by Vivian Paley (1991) as "story playing", a type of classroom dictated narrative construction followed by group enactments. Her research has offered profound insights from the teacher's perspective, illustrating the reciprocal nature of classroom experience and the importance of reflecting upon the teaching-learning process.

Martinez and colleagues' (1991) year-long observational study compared two kindergarten classrooms for occurrence of dramatic story enactments. One classroom utilized various activities designed to facilitate story reenactments while the other served as a comparison. From Fall to Spring, a 50% increase in dramatic enactments and spontaneous storying was noted with creative dramatics as the activity which had the highest percentage of story reenactments. This study provided empirical evidence of kindergartners' spontaneous story enactments or story construction in play and lent support to responsive educational approaches. Capturing the essence of the

spontaneous play narrative involves an elusive aspect since it occurs in various contexts and includes meanings known only to the child culture. Sutton-Smith (1980), Wallach (1988), and others have suggested that in order to discern the nature and purposes of children's stories, adults need to be trusted confidantes. Therefore, naturalistic case studies, in which adults observe and listen as children construct stories in their familiar play settings have the potential to provide a wealth of detailed analyses impossible to obtain in experimental settings. Roskos (1991) and others have noted the need for more descriptive data to examine the complex relationships involving children's literacy development in a variety of play contexts.

The research of Tharp and Gallimore (1993) documented the progress of the Kamehameha Elementary Education Program (KEEP), a system of educational activities based upon Vygotskian principles and involving 3,000 students. Their approach, engaging teachers and children in mutually supportive activities, was termed responsive teaching. Both teachers and learners were considered important to the social organization of "assisted performance" in which both may assist each other, i.e., to promote higher levels of cognitive development. According to their view, mutually constructed goals and concerns will be evident in the sensitive nature of teaching which responds to children's ideas and interests in developing the classroom curriculum. Tharp and Gallimore described teachers as designers of developmentally appropriate small group activities which allow children to

reflect upon experience by instructional conversations. The following tenets of responsive teaching are foundation to this research designed to "re-vision" narrative competence:

1. Teachers and students share conversations which design mutually shared plans around small group activity settings.
2. Assisted performance is grounded in shared experiences.
3. Both teachers and children assist each other and themselves in constructing concepts through shared discourse.

Summary

To summarize, child constructed stories have been documented in both structured and unstructured settings. In general, children's narrative competence, or sense of story, has been studied from a constructivist view employing an individual perspective to story construction along with adult selected stories or themes which children have recalled or reenacted. A recent approach to studying collaborative pretense has incorporated socio-cultural theory to document child constructed stories. More research is needed to extend the limited data which contribute to a collaborative model of narrative competence as spontaneous story construction in social pretend play.

The concept of responsive teaching has been articulated by researchers who have designed a model school project in Hawaii (Tharp & Gallimore, 1993) and who have documented its progress since the 1980's. It's Vygotskian principles of teaching within the zone of proximal development, require teachers to clarify and respond to child-identified needs. My study was designed to broaden extant research by applying concepts from responsive teaching to the study of narrative competence. It focused upon opportunities for children to construct collaborative stories in play and provided instructional conversations where children and adults could reflect together about their productions.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Overview

This research included two phases: a pilot study, which refined procedural modifications, and the subsequent study, both having the same general goal of exploring the phenomenon of narrative competence, i.e., children's story construction in the context of classroom sociodramatic play. Vygotskian socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1967; 1978) related to responsive teaching (Tharp & Gallimore, 1993; Stremmel, 1991; Stremmel & Fu, 1993) was foundational for linking kindergartners' and teachers' perspectives integrated through the researcher view.

Three qualitative techniques were used in this study: participant observation (Spradley, 1980), focus group interviewing (Krueger, 1988; Morgan, 1988) with both children and their teachers, and individual teacher interviews (Berg, 1990). The study utilized a combination of videotaping and child focus groups as an innovative approach to the study of narrative competence. Although videotaping children's play is a well-documented research practice, there has been little, if any, research related to opportunities for children to view themselves and to reflect upon their play (V. G. Paley, personal communication, March 11, 1994). In this study, children were videotaped and permitted to view their story playing in the context of focus group interviews. Teachers and the researcher

viewed segments of the children's play and their focus groups, which were taped also.

A process-oriented approach, which examined transactions, i.e., action and interaction in relationship, explored children's story construction as guided by grounded theory analysis techniques of Strauss and Corbin, (1990). In order to triangulate information from different data sources, multiple perspectives were obtained. The development of each perspective, i.e., the researcher's, the children's, the teacher's, was linked by data analysis to the Vygotskian notion of intersubjectivity, i.e., shared meaning. Observed actions and language of children engaged in story playing were compared to children's descriptions of their stories and to teacher views of story construction integrated by the researcher "lens".

Procedures

The Researcher Perspective

Assumptions. Initially, Marshall and Rossman's (1990) framework for designing qualitative research was used as a guide for reflecting about the researcher's perspective of children's collaborative story construction, i.e. narrative competence. I designed assumptions of conditions and properties to be preliminary coding categories (Appendix A) for the phenonmenon (as suggested by Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The genesis of pre-categories was based upon my 10 years of experience as a teacher and consultant in school settings and upon a review of child development literature. The assumptions suggested that story

playing was voluntary, involved the use of abstract symbols, incorporated pretense, and included episodes with characters, action sequences, and problem-solving in an active, constructive process.

In analyzing data from the pilot study, I realized that many of the pre-categories were related to various theoretical definitions of children's play. As with other socially constructed definitions, their meaning would be open to multiple interpretations. Therefore, I focused upon Roskos' (1988) procedure for isolating pretend episodes in a stream of children's social pretend play activity as a guide to revising the researcher's perspective of children's collaborative story construction. By combining information from the pre-categories with Roskos' (1988) checklist for locating pretend play episodes in children's social play, I reconstructed assumptions about story construction in classroom play.

Following are the reconstructed assumptions about the nature of children's collaborative pretense:

1. Social pretense is collaborative when two or more children communicate shared meaning either through language or actions.

2. Story construction involves understanding of abstract symbols and the substitution or transformation of objects, roles, and sense of time.

3. Story construction in sociodramatic play involves stated or implied themes about which children communicate.

4. Through instructional conversations, a component of responsive teaching, children and adults reconstruct understanding regarding the meanings of stories constructed in classroom play.

5. Sociodramatic play is a valuable context in which stories are constructed.

Within the researcher's perspective, based upon revised assumptions, my research questions were grouped into four themes related to Vygotskian theory. These themes reorganized my research questions. First, the children's, teachers', and researcher perspectives led to the constructing of answers to research question 1: What is the social nature of classroom story construction? The answers were elaborated by additional data analysis throughout the research process. Initial answers began in terms of child actions and language, then expanded to relate actions and language to classroom play rules, a topic discussed by teachers as important to story construction. Second, research questions 2 and 3 were combined into What purposes, i.e., meanings and motivations, do children and teachers identify with the process of classroom story construction? The children's perspective of classroom story construction was designed from analysis of observational and focus group data. The teacher's perspective was constructed by analyzing focus group and individual interview conversations.

Thematic headings were constructed when data were sorted and grouped by similar concepts which confirmed or challenged researcher assumptions related to Question 4: How are meanings and motivations related to responsive teaching, i.e., collaborative intersubjectivity? This question linked the data to Vygotskian theory of responsive teaching. By analyzing purposes related to children's collaborative story construction the answer was constructed to Question 5: What are practical implications of responsive teaching related to kindergarten children's literacy development? Therefore, concluding recommendations for responsive classroom practices were linked to key findings from the data analysis. Recommendations were developed from a comparison of teacher and child perspectives of classroom story construction.

Perspectives of story construction were constructed by the researcher from data obtained through two foundational qualitative research strategies: observation and interviewing (Denzin, 1989). Spradley's (1980) description question matrix guided my play center observations. Notebooks, coded for each classroom, were used for writing descriptive narratives related to observations of play centers. Memos were written concerning logistics, such as parental permissions and notes about children who played in centers. Notes were compiled into summaries of play centers which accompanied typed scripts of children's conversations transcribed from video and audio tapes. Strategies

from Berg (1989) Krueger (1988) and Morgan (1988) guided my individual and focus group interviewing as well as (Stremmel's, 1991 and Tharp & Gallimore's (1993) responsive approach to designing instructional conversations with children. A responsive design allowed interview questions to be structured within provisional guides which were then modified in accordance with participants' conversations (See Appendix C for Interview Guides).

As I had modified assumptions related to story construction in response to pilot study data, similarly, I modified observational procedures regarding my personal involvement in children's play. My intent was to adopt the investigator role of "passive participant" (Spradley, 1980), one who has minimal involvement, in classroom activities. Because this study involved the use of videotaping in kindergarten classrooms, my pilot study afforded valuable information about responding to participants.

Being Responsive. From the initial focus group with teachers, I was reminded of the significance of classroom research in that it involved careful explanation to both teachers and parents of the children who would participate. Concern was expressed by adults at the center that opportunities for questioning would be provided both to children and their parents. This concern was addressed by providing a detailed description of the study on parent consent forms (see Appendix B). They were

distributed at times when either the researcher or one of the teachers could be present to respond to parental concerns. Permission was obtained from parents of all kindergartners.

All 16 children eagerly signed their consent forms (see Appendix B) during my initial visit to their classroom. They, too, were given time for questioning during session one when they had a chance to meet me and to explore the videocamera.

Fortunately, I had obtained permission for videotaping from all parents, for on the first day I set up the camera, I modified my plan for minimal researcher involvement. The combined influence of researcher and camera captured the enthusiastic interest of all children who wanted me to demonstrate "how we all look". Therefore, my preplanned research was modified, as I scanned the room with the camera and then allowed all children a videotaped view of the class. This activity included many giggles upon recognition of themselves and each other. For me, it was a demonstration that I needed to be more reflective, i.e. self-evaluative, during the next study.

Carefully, I considered the nature of being too responsive to children. I wrote in my field journal:

> My plan to videotape children's housekeeping play suddenly turned into videotaping and viewing children's <u>preparation</u> for play. They had been taped before all was <u>ready</u>, from my viewpoint. Perhaps, from their perspective, the preparation was play!

In retrospect, I valued the opportunity to modify my initial plan by responding to the children's curiosity and allowing them

to view themselves early in the project. Experiencing the camera's potential for child interest and researcher distraction allowed me to reflect upon ways to maximize its effectiveness during subsequent research.

From the pilot study I learned: (1) the importance of responsive adult/child conversations; (2) flexibility in structuring research about children; (3) the need for careful planning for videotaping in classroom settings, (4) strategic camera placement in play centers, and (5) some responsive approaches toward instructional conversations with children. These principles informed my subsequent study as finding ways to increase " intersubjectivity", i.e., shared meaning, (Stremmel & Fu, 1993) became a researcher goal for interviewing both children and adults. The teachers and I discussed the children's enthusiastic response to being videotaped, and, responding to their conversations, I constructed recommendations regarding classroom videotaping (see Table 3.1).

TABLE 3.1 Recommendations for Responsive Videotaping of Children

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1. It is important to allow time initially for children to explore the camera through both guided exploration and discussion.
2. For research purposes, however, limited access to the camera is required after the initial exploratory experience.
3. For a view of their play which may be minimally influenced by the camera, do not allow children to view themselves until the research is complete.
4. The camera may never be accepted as an "ordinary" classroom object, yet its value lies in its "extraordinariness". As a multi-sensory tool to which children respond eagerly, the camera can be an invaluable asset for extending small group discussion in play and literacy research.

Denzin (1989) advocated combining research strategies in order to confirm or challenge the researcher's assumptions by triangulating data sources. The researcher's perspective of children's story construction was informed and transformed by the views of children and their teachers.

The Children's Perspective

The children's perspective was developed from descriptive summaries of the combined classroom centers as well as analysis of scripts of center play (see Table 3.2 for a listing of child-identified themes and roles) and conversations in focus groups. The perspective evolved as data were analyzed. Although each class group constructed unique stories, the children's perspective became a composite of common concepts illustrated by descriptions constructed from conversations with and observations of the children who played in six housekeeping centers.

Views of children were obtained from a combination of videotaping and focus group interviewing. The children's component of the research was completed during a three-session design for both the pilot and subsequent study. Similar methodology was used for both; although, the time line was necessarily unique to each setting. For the pilot study, three days were spent in observation, videotaping, and focus groups with children in one play center for five-year-olds. For the subsequent research, three weeks were spent conducting the same three-session design in six public school kindergarten classrooms.

TABLE 3.2 Themes and Roles Identified by Children

	Story Themes	Roles
Pilot -	"Momma Is Very Ill"	Mother, Sisters, Prince of All Fairies King of All Fairies
Center A -	"Church Service" "Family Dinner"	Ministers, Choir, Robber Mother, Mailman, Dog,
Center B -	"Storytime" "Superheroes"	Mommies, Babies, Animals Heropound, Batman, Robin
Center C -	"Alligators and Water Snakes" "Houses Being Stolen"	Mother, Daddy, Teenager Mothers, Robber
Center D -	"Cinderella" "Hospital & House"	Cinderella, Step-mother Sister, Prince Mommies, Babies, Nurses Teacher
Center E -	"The Beethovens: A Family of Dogs Who Became People"	Mother, Grandmother, Sisters, Wolf
Center F -	"Batman Flies Again" "Jurassic Park" "Father & Son" "Mommy & Baby	Batman Boy Father, Son, Mommy, Baby

Table 3.2 summarizes story themes and roles played in each classroom housekeeping center. These themes and roles were identified by children within the context of child focus groups. They illustrate how children designed their stories around themes reflecting events from movies and storybook fantasies as well as events from real life situations.

Descriptions of Child Participants

Children in the pilot study. Child participants in the pilot study were 16 five-year-olds, the kindergarten class of a predominately white private day care center in Southwest Virginia. They shared with two teachers the large open play room designed as a housekeeping center. The following description reflects a summary of my narrative, written in journal form, regarding the nature of story construction as demonstrated and articulated by children in the pilot study. It includes information that I learned from interactions with the children.

My introduction to the children began March 31,1994, and was structured in conjunction with suggestions from the center director and teachers. The first classroom session was observational. I sat in a child-sized chair collecting narrative data of children's activity in the housekeeping center during a half-hour of play activity. Children's images and words filled my pages and thoughts as I reconstructed scenes of pretend eating and drinking, cooking, reading, writing, singing, arguing, and occasionally hitting each other and crying. Carefully, I recorded my observations and later typed a descriptive summary guided by categories from Spradley's (1980) observational matrix focusing upon actions and language, which could be related to feelings and goals within an activity.

On the second morning, I set up my camera and responded to children's conversations about my intentions to videotape their

eager to view themselves, as previously described regarding the nature of being responsive to study participants.

My third session included videotaping nine children who chose to play in the center during the scheduled half hour of taping. Children were free to move in and out of centers. After taping, I conducted a focus group with seven children who participated in an attempt to clarify their motivations in the videotaped stories I had "captured". I focused upon one episode, "Momma's Very Ill", which included most of the nine children who had played in the center. As the children and I talked, I became aware that there were many concurrent themes which I would not have known without our conversations. Children in the pilot study alerted me to the complexity of the social nature of classroom story construction.

Six classes of kindergartners. Begun on May 17, 1994 and concluded on June 10, 1994, my subsequent study included a self-selected sample of 31 children from the 127 potential participants in six kindergarten classrooms of a predominately white public primary school in rural Southwest Virginia. Table 3.2 summarizes demographic data coded to provide information concerning gender and parental status of children from the six classrooms. Participants' ranged in ages from 5.8 to 6.5 years. Approximately one half of the children lived in two parent families, and one half lived in single parent families. Boys and girls were represented equally throughout the general classroom population and in the sample of housekeeping center players.

Confidentiality was maintained concerning identities of all participants. Only the researcher had access to names and code numbers of children. Videotapes were viewed only by the study's participants. Specifically, children viewed their own class groups, and teachers viewed selected segments of center play from all classrooms.

Coordination for the study was facilitated through initial meetings with the superintendent of schools and the principal of the primary school. An intiial focus group with teachers helped to construct the scheduling for videotaping children who played in housekeeping centers. Of the 141 potential child participants, 129 had parental permission and to be included in videotaping. On the days of taping, two were absent, so the actual number of children who were videotaped was 127. The original number of non-participants (24) was reduced by 50% after telephone follow-up of parents who had not returned permission forms.

A self-selected sample of 31 kindergartners chose to play in the housekeeping centers during the videotaping session in each room. Originally, my research design called for videotaping only those children who were center players. However, a responsive approach led me to modify the original design in response to children's enthusiasm for the project. The teachers and I valued the children's interest and willingness to be videotaped, and a modification was made so that as many children as possible had an opportunity to be videotaped and to view themselves with their classmates. With the modified design, all children who had

parental permission (129) were offered an opportunity to be videotaped in their classrooms. Others played in an adjoining classroom during the taping. This component, which was an event that concluded the third session in each classroom, was added, with permission from school personnel, as a way to thank teachers and children for inviting me to their school.

Children who had parental permission had an opportunity to play in the centers within the usual choice system set up by their teachers. Some had distinct markers, such as necklaces, to signify which center had been chosen for that day. Others allowed children in an ordered progression, such as alphabetically, to select their favorite center. They were free to move among centers also as long as they were open to the maximum number of players allowed. Most classes allowed four or five players at a time. Some rang buzzers or used timers to signify when it was time to change centers. Children seemed to know if it was their turn to be in different centers. They could ask someone in a center to trade with them also. They were told that whoever chose the center on the day of taping would be taped. However, they did not know which day I would be in their room. They were told that if their parents did not give permission to be taped, they would play in adjoining classroom centers. Class groups often shared rooms and teachers for various activities, and children were accustomed to moving within neighboring classrooms. Children were reminded that they did not have to participate, also. Two children who were videotaped

chose not to come to the focus groups, but rather to continue their classroom activities. The six videotaping sessions (one session in each of the six classrooms) lasted approximately 20 minutes each. Thirty-one students chose to play in housekeeping centers, and 29 were focus group participants.

By constructing the children's perspective, as I scanned videotaped center play, reviewed focus group conversations and transcribed selected segments to include in a composite tape for teacher viewing, I became increasingly aware of children's competence in: (1) defining topics; (2) negotiating roles; and; (2) elaborating themes within the process or story construction. I typed summary descriptions of each play center and transcribed scripts of stories identified by children in their videotaped focus groups. From these typewritten data sheets, I was able to integrate descriptions of children's actions with quotations from both play conversations and focus group clarifications. I identified segments of play illustrative of each classroom center and its accompanying videotaped focus group session. Segments were selected as examples of child identified themes and to illustrate child responses to viewing themselves. A 10-minute composite tape was developed which was viewed by teachers in a focus group designed to compare teacher views of story construction at the conclusion of the project with their initial focus group responses.

The Teacher's Perspective

The teacher's perspective evolved from data obtained in two focus groups and from conversations in follow-up individual interviews. Adult participants were: two teachers and the center director in the pilot study and six teachers and three teacher aides in the subsequent study. Focus groups were audiotaped. Individual 15-minute interviews were conducted as a follow-up to focus groups. Some interviews were scheduled at the end of the school day, some were conducted on the following day, and some were scheduled by telephone at the teachers' convenience. The initial focus group was used to organize and clarify preferences of scheduling and logistics and to gather data regarding teachers' views of story construction in classroom sociodramatic play. Comparison views were obtained from the concluding focus group and individual interviews. Valuable information was obtained from adults in both the pilot and subsequent studies. From their conversations in the initial and concluding focus groups, the teacher's perspective was constructed to include teachers in both the pilot and subsequent study as a composite. From the teacher's perspective I learned the importance of: (1) welcoming opportunities to share information about children; (2) coordinating logistics for classroom research; (3) considering teacher concerns regarding limitations of research concerning children in different settings; and (4) recommendations for using videocameras in future classroom research.

Description of Adult Participants

Teachers and center director in the pilot study. Three adults agreed to be participants in my research: the director or a child day care center in Southwest Virginia and the two teachers of the class of five-year-olds. This center was selected as the result of a contact made during a professional conference where I met the director. The center was accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and the director was interested in continuing research opportunities for herself and her staff. She was continuing her own graduate education in child development, and the teachers had professional degrees in early childhood education.

Teachers and aides in six kindergarten classrooms. Adult participants were 6 teachers and 3 aides who taught in the public primary school's kindergarten classes in this study. All were certified professional educators. Their individual work experience with kindergarten children ranged from 1 to 23 years.

By conducting initial and concluding focus groups with teachers, I was able to learn their views of children's story construction in their classroom settings. Conversations were audiotaped and review to select quotes from which comparisons were made between initial and concluding perceptions of story playing. Quotes were chosen to represent responses to children's themes and actions and were coded as confirming or challenging the researchers assumptions of story construction. Assumptions

linked children's story playing to responsive teaching by assuming a collaborative process of meaning-making among children and teachers. Teacher comments were grouped according to concerns and recommendations which were discussed as study findings related to kindergarten children's literacy development. Therefore information from teachers in both pilot and subsequent studies was combined to develop the teacher's perspective.

Combining the qualitative methods of focus group and individual interviewing was a valuable strategy for constructing multiple perspectives of classroom phenomena. The approach allowed adults to express diverse viewpoints within two formats designed to value sharing a common experience. From these methods came both challenges and confirmations of the researcher's assumptions about children's story construction.

Data Analysis

An alphabetical system was developed for coding videotapes and audiotapes from each classroom. A notebook for each classroom contained coding schemes, procedural memos (such as information about parental permissions returned), and descriptive narratives from three sessions of observations in each classroom's housekeeping center. Information from each notebook was transferred in summary form to a researcher's procedural notebook where lists of children's actions and language were compiled from videotaped observations. A journal was used to record personal impressions which were augmented by data to form the researcher perspective.

Audio and videotapes were initially scanned for clarity. I decided to eliminate audiotapes which supplemented videotapes of children's center play due to high leels of classroom noise. Audiotapes of children's focus groups supplemented the videotapes. All videotapes were viewed a minimum of three times. Many required multiple reviewing of specific segments to clarify questionable statements or concepts as the process of analysis proceeded. Story scripts were developed which incorporated themes and roles identified by the children in focus groups immediately following their center play. Selected quotes from the scripts were color coded by categories related to researcher assumptions based in child development theory. Quotes were selected to illustrate themes related to collaborative intersubjectivity, a researcher assumption which was both confirmed and challenged by observations of center play and conversations with children and teachers. As the dominant recurring theme, collaborative meaning making was used to construct teacher and child purposes related to their perspectives of story construction. These purposes were linked to responsive teaching strategies by considering how children and teachers were assistants and under what conditions they were distractors, a concept that was derived from analysis of actions and language demonstrated by children.

Summary descriptions of teacher focus groups were typed, and conversations were transcribed from audiotapes by the

researcher. Transcripts of focus groups and individual interviews with teachers were color coded according to categories. After categories were underlined within scripted summaries, color coded memos were attached, noting how teacher recommendations and concerns confirmed or challenged the researcher assumptions of collaborative intersubjectivity about children's story construction (See Appendix D for Coding Scheme). Key findings, in the form of concepts related to the social nature of children's story construction, were summarized in terms of a model constructed to illustrate the process of collaboration in story construction. The model was derived from and is illustrative of foundational concepts grounded both in sociocultural theory and in data from play center observations and interview conversations. Finally, recommendations were constructed for future research of children's collaborative story construction. They were based upon comments from children and teachers and reflective of the researcher's perspective grounded in experience which was analyzed in terms of principles of responsive teaching.

Summary

Qualitative methods of participant observation and interviewing were utilized to facilitate the development of multiple perspectives of children's story construction, i.e., narrative competence. A researcher perspective developed from initial assumptions which were incorporated into a process of modification by responding to theory grounded in data.

Children's and teacher's perspectives were constructed from methods which allowed the linking of data to research questions related to a Vygotskian (1967; 1978) approach to responsive teaching (Stremmel, 1991; Tharp & Gallimore, 1993). All views developed from my reading and writing about the data to actualize my goal of constructing a "picture of reality that is conceptual, comprehesible, and, above all, grounded" (Strauss & Corgin, 1990) in practical experiences of "meaning making" (Wells, 1986).

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Overview

Results of this study were organized by using children's and teacher's perspectives of story construction interpreted through the researcher "lens". Foundational to the interpretation is Vygotskian (1967, 1978) theory of socially constructed knowledge applied to the exploration of a process, i.e. children's story construction in sociodramatic play.

Results were framed within selected themes and conversations of children and teachers, illustrating the children's and teacher's perspectives. From these perspectives, I constructed stated or implied purposes which children and teachers ascribed to story construction in play. Purposes of children were: Making and Breaking the Play Rules. Purposes of teachers were: Guarding the Play Rules. Designing purposes allowed the researcher to link children's story playing to Vygotskian theory of socially constructed meaning (1978) by analyzing views of children and their teachers for responsive assistance in instructional conversations (Tharp & Gallimore, 1993).

Children's Purposes: Making and Breaking the Play Rules

Excerpts from both center play and focus group conversations illustrated children's purposes termed making and breaking the rules, as derived from their actions and interactions. They initiated themes which required peer acceptance or rejection of concepts within the process of story playing. When they accepted

each other's ideas and actions, they were described as confirming each other to make the rules of their play. They designed the setting, chose their roles, and elaborated themes within the context of the housekeeping center. Story construction in play allowed a freedom to create the play rules within the special place allowed in classrooms. The housekeeping center in each of the six kindergarten classrooms was well equipped with child-sized furniture varying from room to room only slightly, such as by color or placement in different corners or along one wall of the room. There were cupboards, doll beds, stoves, sinks, rocking chairs, stuffed animals, mirrors, telephones, and flowers, as well as numerous objects inside cabinets and on shelves. A few dress-up clothes such as hats, scarves, and aprons hung within children's reach. There were books, i.e., cookbooks, storybooks, telephone books, and catalogues. Writing materials were available also. The general tone of the housekeeping center was one of cheerful, unfinished business waiting for each day's occupants.

In play centers, children were permitted to pretend to be a variety of imaginary creatures and to tease and struggle toward having each one's ideas accepted or rejected. Sometimes children resorted to distractive tactics which could be described as breaking the rules. This portion of their play was characterized by a distraction, created by one of the players. The distraction introduced new information, and children had to reconstruct the story, either accepting the information and thereby modifying the

original theme or refusing to modify the theme they had constructed collaboratively. In either case, children collaborated to accept or refuse the distraction. Thus, the process of distracting and being distracted in collaborative story construction energized children to re-invent the story in play.

Superheroes and nurturing characters were included in their themes along with menacing animals, and people who hurt children, robbed churches, and "puked." (See Table 3.2 for a listing of themes and roles defined by children in all centers.) They used multiple actions (such as reading, writing, cooking, eating, driving, care giving, hiding, struggling/chasing and kissing) and conversational strategies (such as: explaining, complying, teasing, and arguing) to elaborate their story themes. For this study, the term distractive will be viewed in the sense of behavior or language that required reconstruction, or modification, of the existing play theme. Distractive, then, will not be considered the opposite of collaborative, but a component of collaboration. For clarification, actions and interactions that sustained a story theme were considered sustaining. Actions and interactions that were interruptive to the ongoing theme, were considered distractive. If an interruption caused children to re-invent or reconstruct the story, i.e. to modify it in a new way, then it moved toward elaboration of themes. It led to group acceptance of new information and, through reconstruction, demonstrated agreement to re-invent the story.

Sustaining and distractive language and actions of children are illustrated in excerpts from stories constructed in center play and from focus group conversations. The data challenged the initial literature-based researcher view of collaboration, i.e. two or more children demonstrating cooperative actions and language in story construction. This view was limited to the consideration of collaborative pretense as solely cooperative actions and language. By analyzing the results, the researcher's view was modified to include within collaboration an element of distraction.

Themes Derived From Observations of Play Centers

> A Church Service. "I'm sinking. I'm sinking. God help me! I will. I will. It's from the Devil! The scripture says, 'In the Beginning, In the Name of the Father' ".
> These words were shouted by a boy wearing a blanket around his shoulders, holding an object like a microphone. Other children joined him, holding similar objects. They stomped and shouted, "AMEN! AMEN"!
> Another boy joined the play and said, " I stole your microphone, the church's microphone." They went on singing, "OH YEAH! OH YEAH"! until play time for them was over and, at a signal from the teacher, other children moved into the housekeeping center.

Sustaining elements of collaboration were illustrated by children who confirmed the implied theme of a church service. They joined to collaborate by modeling the leader's behavior.

A distractive element came from one child, the robber, who initiated a new turn of events which could modify the original theme. The children had to either accept or refuse the new suggestion, to sustain or modify the existing theme. These children seemed to ignore the new idea, that someone was stealing

the church's microphone. By responsive assistance to refuse the distraction, continuing to sing, the children collaborated to sustain the original theme until the end of center time.

> Family Dinner. A girl and boy arranged objects on a table. They got cups, saucers, and toy food from cabinets. Another girl brought a baby bottle for her doll. One child crawled around and barked. "I'll be the dog", she said.

This action interjected a distractive element, changing the story to include a new player. Children's actions and language were assisting by modifying their theme to incorporate the new role.

> Another girl patted her on the head saying, "I'll fix you something to eat". She gave the empty bowl to the "dog", patted her again, and said, "Eat 'em. Here's your food". "Dinner is served"! announced a girl. Others came to sit and eat pretend food, after which they left, except for two children: the girl who was a dog and a boy. The boy said, as if to himself, "That dog must know everything".

Responsive assistance was demonstrated by actions which elaborated the theme of a family dinner to include the interruption of " dog" who wanted to join them. In their collaborative pretense, children designed the space, prepared the food, and gathered to share the meal, extending their actions to include a new role with thematic modifications.

Babies Are Born. Four girls occupied the housekeeping center. One said,"Let's play doctor!"

> One of them sat in the rocking chair.
> Another brought a blanket and held it in front of her.
> Another brought a doll, and they helped the child
> in the chair to stuff the the doll under her shirt.
> The child pushed with great effort and they pulled the doll out. The "nurse" handed the "baby" to the "new mother" who kissed the doll. The girls discussed who would be next to have a baby. One said "Now you have another baby and say 'UHHH' "! A child who wanted to switch roles announced, "Now I'm the nurse." However, the one who was the nurse refused to accept the change. They seemed to compromise for

a time, and the first child said, "OK." Later, she tried again by saying, "I'm the nurse. It's my turn." This time she was accepted as the nurse, for the former "nurse" sat in the birthing chair and another "baby" was born.

Sustaining elements of collaboration in responsive assistance were illustrated by the girls' actions and words which confirmed the theme of giving birth. Renegotiation, when two children wanted to play the same role, could have led to distraction, or modifying the original theme. However, the renegotiation was accepted without changing the theme. Another player simply assumed an already existing role; therefore, the theme was sustained within collaboration.

Story excerpts illustrate a difficulty in interpreting children's stories without clarification from the children themselves. Therefore, excerpts from focus groups conversations are used to demonstrate how the children helped the researcher to clarify themes in the stories they played.

Themes Identified and Clarified by Focus Groups

Observations of videotaped center play were supplemented through conversations with children in focus groups. The focus group conversation was considered assistive when it helped to identify or clarify story themes. If the conversation lead to the destruction of the original theme and reconstruction of a new theme, it was considered distractive. Some comments were unclear, and impossible to interpret. When I was unable to clarify themes, they were coded additional to cue me to recheck data for more information by reviewing videotapes and scripts.

Examples of assistive focus group conversations illustrate how children's words helped to identify and clarify play themes.

> A boy entered the center, tiptoeing around with a bookbag in his hand. He took all objects off the table, which was set for a meal, stuffing cups, plates, table cloth and flowers into his bag. Then he rushed out to an adjoining desk, got in, used keys as if in the ignition of a vehicle, made sounds of a motor, and pretended to drive.

The following focus group conversation clarified that the child was, indeed, a robber. The children defined the theme for this story as, "Houses Being Stolen". The boy said, "I was playing 'bad guy'.

> Two girls talked as they concentrated on feeding and burping a baby doll. After a time they entered the kitchen area, opened the refrigerator and put the doll inside.

In the focus group conversation, a child informed me, "I wanted to make her an ice cube doll. I said she smelled bad after she crapped."

> Another boy moved to the sink where he put a long string of beads in a measuring cup and turned it up to his mouth.

Focus group data enlightened the researcher concerning his actions. A boy stated, "I was making coffee out of the water snakes."

> A child climbed up on the kitchen counter and sat in the sink.

Upon viewing this scene, a child said, "Baby went potty."

Much of the conversation was devoted to explanations from children in response to a comments or questions about what we were viewing.

A girl said," When we played house, I fell out of the baby bed, so I had to go to the hospital. I fell and broke my leg. K. came to see how I was. She was my teacher. She came to see how I was. She wanted me to come to school."

The corresponding transcript from the video did not reflect positive comments related to the teacher's visit. It was an obvious distraction, according to the child's comment to "teacher":

"Good-bye Forever. Have a good day, and don't come back until you hang yourself on a doornail!"

Following are examples of focus group conversations coded distractive and additional, respectively.

Over there in the corner we were playing house.
She was the mama and the nurse.
We were getting sick, and I think I'm gonna puke.
Made choking sounds in a teasing way.

This attempt to reconstruct the focus group around a theme of vomiting was rejected by the group and the researcher when they noted that they wanted to see the rest of the video theme.

I was trying to stop J. from hitting him with the spoon.
We weren't playing house. We were playing Jurassic Park.
We were making the baby's food.
I was Batman. (Singing batman theme).

These conversations were not connected in a way to elaborate a coherent theme. Instead, children seemed to focus upon their own perception of what was happening and did not collaborate in a way that either constructed a mutual theme or distracted an existing theme. Therefore, additional clarification was needed.

From the focus group videotapes it was possible to capture a sense of excitement and pleasure from the children at being able to view their own story playing. Some comments were:

"That's me! Oh yeah, now I remember. I look so cute."

"I look cute too!"

"I was being the step-sister. Now I was Cinderella. Remember what we played?"

"That's me with that towel on my head. Baby pulled my wig off. Oh, he pulled my head off!" Laughter from group.

"Watch this! Now we're playing hospital."
"Then she had a baby, and it was ME!"

"Hey, Momma, You're sticking your butt out!" Laughter.

"We're playing dollhouse and she was calling me, and I think I'm going to puke!"

When children were asked if they would change anything about their stories, most expressed satisfaction with what they played.

"We called our dog show the Beethovens."
"Hey, dog. I'd do it again
I'd be a puppy too." (Started barking.)

One child said, "I would be an alligator, and another said, teasingly, "I would be the stove!"

A final excerpt illustrated children's role confusion in play, which was clarified, somewhat, by focus group conversation.

One boy had a large spoon and paddled another boy on the rear. A girl put her hands on her head and ran around.

From the researcher's perspective there seemed to be little communication among children, but much running around.

In the focus group conversation, a girl explained that she was

Batman and stated, "I was trying to keep them from being so wild." In defining roles, both boys explained that they were "Daddies".

Then one said, "Oh, No you weren't. You were the little boy." "I was a Daddy too," said the first child. From focus group information, it was evident that neither of the boys knew that Batman was trying to stop them.

A perceived benefit of the focus group for these children was its function of motivating and modeling dialogue with children who were playing together, especially since their conversation had been minimal during play. These children agreed that they could change their stories and that they could switch roles. The boy who was being paddled in the story turned to his play partner and stated emphatically, "Next time I'm gonna whip you!"

Summary of the Children's Perspective

By analyzing many examples of children's conversations both in play and in focus groups, I constructed the children's perspective of story construction, defined by the implied purposes of: Making and Breaking the Rules. Their collaborative language and actions in play were characterized as both sustaining and distractive to child initiated themes. Children responded to each other by confirming or challenging a variety of suggestions to sustain or elaborate their themes within the process of story construction.

At times it was impossible to suggest children's meanings from play observations alone. The focus groups, which immediately followed the group's story playing, helped to clarify concepts which could be easily misinterpreted from an adult view. Even in the focus group conversations, meaning was confusing at times. In this context children were both distractive and assistive of the researcher's pre-defined purpose of clarifying their story themes. From analysis of children's language and actions within the focus groups, related to child/peer and child/researcher conversations, I noted many instances of children who questioned, who initiated, who teased, who offered help, and who "de-constructed" my planned interview questions. The ability to modify instructional plans, in response to children's actions and language was essential to the clarity of information obtained. A research benefit from the use of focus groups involved linking instructional conversations with children to inform adult views of children's story playing by using a responsive approach (Stremmel, 1991; Tharp & Gallimore, 1993). Such a research strategy allowed questions to build upon child-invented topics. Focus group discussion provided examples of children's use of distraction and assistance within the collaborative process when responsive teaching was utilized. At times, children's topics led to new information which the group accepted and incorporated into the conversation. At other times, the group, with assistance from the researcher, challenged a distraction by not allowing it to be dominant and instead pursued

a researcher-introduced topic which related to the pre-planned theme of discussing the children's story playing. Child/ researcher collaboration through distraction and assistance, i.e., challenging and confirming original group themes, was utilized within the focus group context. (See Appendix C for the Children's Focus Group Interview Guide).

Teachers' Purposes: Guarding the Play Rules

Interview data provided information for the construction of a teachers' perspective. The teachers' perspective is the composite view of six teachers and three aides who taught the kindergarten children in this study. Data were obtained from initial and concluding focus group interviews and follow-up individual interviews. They were organized by coding categories of concepts related to research questions as well as the research context in which information was obtained.

Initial Focus Group

The initial focus group was conducted in the large school library where I had set up refreshments at the end the school day. All teachers seemed to welcome an opportunity to share information about their children. After our mutual introductions, I presented an overview of my study. All teachers invited me to schedule three research sessions in their classrooms, and adult participant consent forms were signed. (See Appendix C)

A primary goal, which was accomplished by the one-hour session, was a mutual sharing of information among teachers and

researcher. Teachers were interested in the purposes of my project, and I wanted to understand how story construction was structured in their classrooms. These two purposes were complementary in that we found ways to share information which seemed beneficial. Together we coordinated the logistics of scheduling three research sessions in each of the six kindergarten housekeeping centers.

Additional conversations addressed the nature of story construction in kindergarten classrooms and teacher concerns regarding this research. Their comments were organized into concepts related to my research questions. Transcribed audiotaped conversations from interviews with teachers allowed me to select teacher quotes which described children's story construction from their view. It was possible to compare teacher views before and after their participation in this project as a way to note how their perceptions of story construction changed by discussing the topic and viewing the story playing in their classrooms. By analyzing memos constructed from reading transcripts of interview conversations, I linked teacher descriptions of story construction to my research questions in the form of narrative descriptions supplemented by examples of teacher quotes. Concerns and recommendations were discussed in the context of research questions which linked them to responsive teaching and implications for kindergartners' literacy development in play.

Children's story construction: Play as learning. Teachers acknowledged that they facilitated children's play by stocking their centers with props appropriate to certain themes and by permitting play in the housekeeping center. They noted that they didn't get very involved in it unless they needed to intervene for child safety. They listed the following child benefits of story construction in play: (1) language development; (2) cooperative social interactions; (3) planning, and (4) "just play". They stated: "Kids learn so much from play". In their view, play was valuable as a learning medium for children.

Teacher concerns: Equity. Teachers addressed the rights of both teachers and children. They implied a need to to know if they were being evaluated: "You're not going to tape US are you?" They seemed reassured by my response that I was going to study the process rather than individuals.

Teachers were concerned about children who might not have permission to be videotaped. Together, we constructed a plan in which children who could not play in the center (children who did not have parental permission) would go to adjoining classroom centers. They seemed comfortable that children would be happy with that plan, since they moved among classrooms frequently.

Concluding Focus Group

The concluding focus group lasted approximately one hour and was designed to share the 10-minute composite videotape of play and follow-up focus groups from all classrooms. Segments were

chosen to illustrate: (1) that play from all groups was valued; (2) that multiple themes were happening simultaneously; (3) that focus groups allowed us to learn more about the children's concepts of the stories they constructed in play; and (4) that observations of children's actions and language gave us examples of their perceptions of being videotaped.

Concluding focus group comments of teachers focused upon the themes which they had addressed in the initial focus group: the nature of children's story construction in housekeeping play and teacher concerns. Comparisons are drawn between teachers' perceptions of children's stories before and after viewing the play and focus group tapes.

Children's story construction: Play as challenging.

> "I worry that they are safe."
>
> "Aggression is a problem. Don't you think children's play focuses too much on violence. I know it doesn't necessarily reflect what is actually happening at home. I used to think that until I had children."

We concluded that children's play was a mixture of real life and imagination, as evidenced by the children's play themes, (see Table 3.2 for a listing of themes and roles identified by children) and that it could be dangerous at times. They noted an advantage ofplay is that children deal with feelings safely by playing about them in the safety of pretense.

Some teacher coomments reflected pleasure and surprise in viewing their class groups.

> "It's just fascinating! He was stealing! I thought he was washing the table. I wouldn't have known that!"
>
> "They have sustained long periods of play about one theme. They switch roles too. It sounds like they were making it up when they got there in front of the camera. When they start sharing, they make up another story!"
>
> "We haven't set aside time to see them play like this. If we had a camera in our rooms, we'd have to have it turned on all the time, cause you never know when they're gonna do something!"

Individual Interviews

Additional valuable information was obtained in conversations with individual teachers and aides as a follow-up to the focus groups. Comments are organized by research categories to include: teacher perceptions of children's story construction in play, teacher concerns, and a new category: recommendations.

Children's story construction: Learning opportunity for adults.

In individual conversations with the researcher, teachers tended to use the interview as a chance to reflect upon the value of play in the classroom. Some identified increased awareness of children's story construction as a result of this project. Others, who "weren't surprised" by the nature of children's stories acknowledged that the study helped to confirm their views of valuing classroom play. All teachers seemed appreciative of the opportunity to gather more information about their

children. Following are quotes which illustrate teacher perceptions of story construction at the conclusion of the project.

> I like to play too.
>
> I don't think I saw enough of their play. You can get more information by asking them. Like those little girls who were so inactive. I thought they were just reading. I didn't know what they were really doing.
>
> I think this experience seemed to help them to pretend even more. They made up stories as they heard other children. The small group was good. They'll often split up into small groups on their own anywhere whenever they can.
>
> This was enlightening. When I first started teaching, we were more observant. Took more time to be tuned in to the children. You could play more and do more interacting with them.
>
> After 23 years of teaching, there aren't too many surprises. My view of story construction haven't really changed. However, I was interested in the use of technology in the classroom, in the videocamera.
>
> My views haven't changed. However, it has been interesting to see the children on tape. Sometmes we don't stop to think about what they are doing in the play area. We just don't take the time.
>
> I don't think my views have changed. I've always known that children were quite imaginative. I knew their stories would change--I guess I probably didn't know their stories would change as frequently as they did. I thought what you did was really fascinating. I wish I had the time just to sit back and observe them. It's really neat to have that chance.
>
> I think it would be interesting to see more, to have time to see them when they're with the group, to see how the children's roles all fall together. I have a hard time pre-planning. The camera gave a way to preserve their play so we could see it again.
>
> The main think I noticed, it brought to light and refreshed the idea of children's stories. I'm not sure it changed my views, but it made me a little more aware.

Earlier comments from teachers in the initial focus group seemed like textbook descriptions, reporting the expected answers. At the completion of this project, when they had a chance to be more reflective, i.e. self-evaluative, perhaps, in the individual setting, teachers' became more personal.

Teacher concerns: Limitations of the rules. Teachers acknowledged their concerns about policies that limit their involvement in children's play. Their frustration was evident.

> There are so many "have to's" for the teacher. The administrative aspects involve so much time.

> You know we're limited in what we can and cannot do.

To my follow-up question, "What are some the limitations?" , the teacher responded:

> Class size and testing. We do individual assessments during their group play time, so we can't spend time observing their play.

Similar comments included:

> It's hard to keep up with all 24 of 'em. I agree with helping small groups, definitely. We do that in centers with literacy props: menus, phone pads, and catalogues. The writing center is where I spend a lot of time with them. They would talk on the phone, and I would get on the other phone. We made menus and phone pads in the writing center, and they would use them in their play.

> We have time limitations and so many activities to do.

> It gets to be a pain. We do assessment so much. SOL's testing--these things take up so much time.

They focused also on a need for children to play within defined school rules.

> Of course they have fun making up things, but they have rules in the classroom. I try to talk with them about how they act.

> The particular thing we want them to do is pretend in the housekeeping center. Yet, I notice pretense in every center.
>
> They are allowed to play within the rules, such as not hitting, running in the classroom.

From the teachers' perspective, the advantage of a play center seemed to be its function as a place to guard the play, where it was kept safely. The perception seemed to be that too much pretense can get out of control, or too much play can be dangerous. Therefore, in their classrooms the teachers became benevolent guardians, protecting all for safe play. Within that role, then, teachers became designers and enforcers of the rules of play.

They were acutely aware of limitations regarding their involvement in classroom play. Some teachers seemed nostalgic that they didn't have enough time to play with their children. Play was reserved for a limited time and space within the requirements of a structured schedule of events. Even so, they were aware that children continued to pretend, i.e., to invent stories, and to converse about them after center time throughout the day. They valued conversations with children, and demonstrated concern that the school day was so crowded with planned activities there was little time left for small group discussion among teachers and children. One teacher noted that when she became busy, and children needed to interrupt, they sometimes <u>demanded</u> to be heard.

> It's really interesting how some children are more demanding. They force you to be receptive, to listen, when they need to know.

Teachers expressed appreciation for the time to talk with others and to view the children's focus group conversations.

Teacher Recommendations

Following is a listing of teacher recommendations for future classroom research with kindergartners' in play. Comments were selected from individual interviews.

> Maybe you need to think of ways to prevent them from making up things in the discussion time.
>
> Perhaps you would want to choose another time of year. Their end of the year excitement may have affected the way they reacted to the camera. You might want to be more discreet.
>
> The camera was not an obstacle with today's children. The majority have seen themselves on videotape. I think it would be great if we could use a camera in the classroom so the children would be able to see themselves periodically.
>
> It didn't seem to affect my children, but this was a hectic time of year for us. Probably a month or six weeks earlier would have been easier for you.
>
> The camera gave a way to preserve their play and let us see it again. It might be useful for special events and for documenting students' progress. I wonder how parents would feel about it. I think most students are used to the camera by the time they come to school.
>
> I think we as teachers would have enjoyed this more at another time of the year. Spring is ideal. Kids have matured so much. Their stories have changed. Yet it would be good to tape them in the Fall and in the Spring to see how they change.

Teachers seemed to guard children in play: concerned for their safety; valuing their play yet remaining at a distance, relatively uninvolved and uninformed as to its meanings for children. Generally, they were the enforcers of school rules, such as: no running or hitting, which were routinely broken by children in the housekeeping center.

The researcher's perspective re-visited: Questioning the rules

As I analyzed the videotapes and summaries of taperecorded conversations in children's and teachers' interviews, I narrowed my assumptions of story construction, moving to a focus upon collaboration. Within that focus, the researcher's perspective, my literature-based assumptions of collaboration in story construction were both confirmed and challenged by data. Child actions and conversations confirmed a view of play as a valuable context in which shared meaning could be constructed. However, the process of constructing meaning was filled with a variety of experiences, some of which were confusing and dangerous both to individuals and to the preservation of a shared story. The element of distraction was noted to be used by children as a device for gaining group attention to some new concept. As individuals accepted and rejected information, children sometimes hurt each other and chose to reject ideas and actions which did not fit into the existing play theme. Group confirmation and challenge seemed a part of the social nature of collaborative story construction. At times individual children may have chosen to leave the story rather than join a theme they did not confirm, or individuals who had a leadership role may have dominated play themes, causing some story themes to be delayed or reinitiated for reconsideration by the group. The data leave many unanswered questions regarding the nature of child assertion and rejection within the play context.

Teachers alluded to the dangerous element of story playing by noting the necessity for limits and playing within "the rules". Their term rules was used to conceptualize children's acceptance and rejection of ideas and actions within play as "making and breaking the rules", for, within the play center, children seemed to find a freedom to negotiate their own "rules" of social conduct. This finding regarding rule negotiation points to a partial or limited collaboration in which the theoretical ideal of all children joining in a common story, the original researcher perspective of collaborative story construction, was modified to accept collaborative efforts, in the form or multiple stories being negotiated and reconstructed during play opportunities.

Questioning continues, from the researcher perspective. This study has initiated provocative questions which remain to be explored further. How children accept adult limitations of play, and how adults structure within limits for safety are two important issues that affect the nature of classroom story construction. New understandings of how children collaborate to construct stories in play will afford insights into their struggles within power structures which both assist and distract their attempts to make sense of the world.

Children responded to adult questions, at times with explanations, at times, with their own questions. They demonstrated the ability to generate and challenge ideas within the focus group context also. From reciprocal

conversational interactions, with both children and their teachers, I am more aware of the need to attend to children's behavior and language in small group settings. From my analysis of mutiple perspectives of children's story construction, I modified assumptions to address conclusions and to construct a collaborative model of narrative competence (see Figure 1) as a model of the meaning-making process.

A MODEL OF THE MEANING-MAKING PROCESS
OF
COLLABORATION
WITHIN
STORY CONSTRUCTION
Responsive Assistance by Children & Adults

"Narrative Competence"

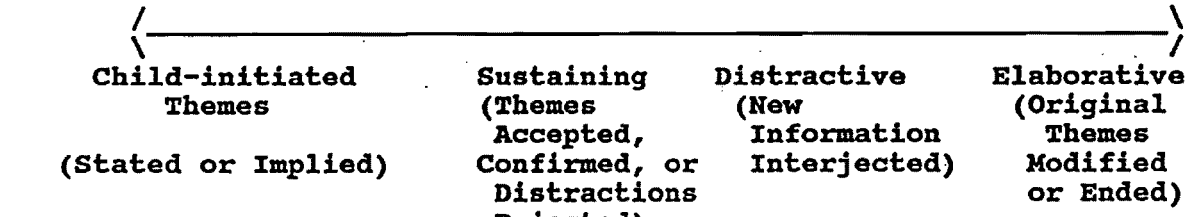

FIGURE 1

The model was developed as a graphic representation to assist myself and others in clarifying the process of collaborative intersubjectivity, or meaning-making, through narrative. According to my sense of the social process of meaning-making in story construction, children initiate story topics or themes which may be stated overtly or implied. Child themes may be assisted by group confirmation of themes or rejection of interruptions to theme development. Distraction to group themes may come in the form of new information interjected by

individuals whose new ideas may then be confirmed. In that case, the original theme is modified to include the new information. If the new information is rejected by the group, then the new theme ends and the group returns to its original theme, or themes, which may, in turn be sustained or distracted leading to further elaboration and development of new child themes. Therefore, the collaborative story construction process continually develops along a continuum as various adults and children assist and influence each other in reciprocal ways to share new information,to interrupt and challenge each other, and to confirm behaviors and ideas within a context of sociodramatic play. Thus, the researcher perspective developed throughout the data analysis phase as the children and teachers' perspectives informed and transformed my view.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Overview

This exploration of kindergarten children's narrative competence focused upon the linking of actions and interactions in relationship, i.e., the process, of story construction (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). For this study, children's collaborative interactions were related to a Vygotskian view of responsive teaching (Stremmel, 1991; Stremmel & Fu, 1993; Tharp & Gallimore, 1993) in the following ways:

(1) The play context was considered an optimal context for studying children's narrative competence, i.e. " sense of story" (Martinez, Cheney, & Teale, 1991). In accordance with Vygotskian theory, play was considered the zone of proximal development for kindergartners, i.e. a theoretical area in which their developing intellectual processes could progress from assistance by others to self-assistance.

(2) Children's thought and language were considered interrelated processes used for self-assistance as well as communication with others. Through shared conversations, both in play and focus group activities, the possibility for "intersubjectivity", or shared meaning, was established as collaborative narratives were constructed.

(3) "Meaning-making" (Bruner, 1990; Wells, 1991) in the form of story construction was linked to children's developing literacy.

As children used language to build collaborative stories, involving two or more "story players" (Howes, 1992; Roskos, 1988; 1991; Paley, 1992) they transformed information to suit their own purposes. This research was designed to explore child identified or implied purposes for story construction and to analyze their perceptions in comparison to teachers' and researcher views of the process.

Research questions which guided this study could be grouped into three themes: (1) exploring the social nature of children's story construction by analyzing multiple perspectives of the process, i.e. teachers', children's and researcher's views; (2) linking identified purposes of story construction to responsive teaching; and (3) developing implications for teachers and researchers which relate responsive teaching to kindergarten children's literacy learning.

It was my goal to use these questions in a responsive manner with both teachers and children. Initially, being responsive meant clarifying the research procedures to adult and child participants and being able to modify my design according to requests and demonstrated needs of participants. Two strategies proved especially useful for clarifying and modifying procedures: the pilot study and the combination of videotaping with focus groups.

The concept of being responsive influenced the development of researcher assumptions to guide the collection and interpretation of data. Questioning assumptions, the process of

data analysis, became a means of self-assistance (Tharp & Gallimore, 1993) which documented the research process and demonstrated the nature of its evolution.

Discussion of Findings

In correspondence with my research questions, using procedures previously described in Chapter 4, I have grouped the following findings: (1) The Paradoxical Nature of Children's Story Construction in Classrooms; (2) Conflicting Teacher's and Children's Perspectives; (3) Responsive Teaching as Conflict Resolution; and (4) Implications for Kindergartener's Literacy Development. Each will be discussed and summarized.

The Paradoxical Nature of Classroom Story Construction

Children's language and behavior seemed both sustaining and distractive within the process of collaboration as responsive assistance. The combination of videotaping both play and focus groups of children allowed two sources of rich information about children's perceptions of their own story playing. The data challenged my initial view of story construction, based upon a review of the literature, such that "players needed to cooperate, 'stay tuned'. . . so that the fragile and vulnerable story line could be maintained, " (Roskos, 1988, p. 17). By contrast, the data in this study seem to suggest that children need opportunities to distract, or interrupt existing themes and to reconstruct them as they play. This is consistent with research of "meta-play", or playing with ideas about play while playing (Williamson & Silvern, 1991).

The process of collaboration in story playing included distractive elements which, at times, served to modify the original theme, and to reconstruct new concepts in play. Children used multiple strategies to gain attention of their peers who either accepted the interruption or rejected it. They collaborated, to support the process of dissent: to change ideas in mid-story. This process was sometimes destructive to established themes; however, it allowed the introduction of new topics, different roles, and the reconstruction of themes. Therefore, both sustaining and distracting seemed to be complementary components of collaboration in children's classroom story construction.

Conflicting Teachers' and Children's Perspectives

The Teacher's Perspective: **Guarding the Play Rules** seemed in conflict with The Children's Perspective: **Making and Breaking the Rules.** In school settings, adults work within the limits of established policies requiring certain activities, tests, and curricula. From conversations with teachers, a dilemma was apparent. They recognized and valued classroom play. However, within the structured system of student and teacher evaluations, their use of play was perceived as limited.

As a result of this study, teachers expressed appreciation of children's story playing, and of the opportunity to discuss its value. They seemed interested in innovative ways to allow more opportunities for small group conversations with children concerning their story construction in play.

Responsive Teaching as Conflict Resolution

Within the conflicting loyalties of teachers, to both school policies and the child's right to play, the opportunity to utilize responsive teaching may serve the function of conflict resolution. It's principles allow adults to take an innovative approach to designing classroom activity centers, and to participate with children in conversations. The responsive teacher is not directive but responding to child behavior and language, through assistance within the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978; Tharp & Gallimore, 1993). This teaching strategy allows children to assist themselves and each other by building upon their developing skills. In constructing stories, a responsive approach encourages teachers to observe children's spontaneous story playing in order to learn about individuals within the group process. Then, as needed, to intervene for safety, or as requested by the children. Discussion of the play would follow, according to responsive teaching, perhaps involving periodic opportunities for children to be videotaped and to view their stories. In instructional conversations with small groups of children, teachers would used limited questions, following the lead of children who would interpret their story.

Story construction builds upon other literacy learning opportunities to encourage conversational skills, appreciation of narrative, and playful collaboration. By responsive "storying" teachers can assist themselves and each other to resolve the

seemingly conflictual position of whether to support school policies or children's play. Through the use of strategies which integrate play with literacy learning activities, perhaps the conflict can be resolved toward equity and learning opportunities for all children, issues identified as concerns for teachers.

Implications for Kindergarten Children's Literacy Development

Based upon responsive teaching, adults set the stage for instructional conversations through several suggested strategies: (1) providing small group activity settings where students may gather for conversations; (2) using conversational techniques such as modeling, questioning, giving positive feedback in order to encourage student participation; (3) developing a sensitivity to children's perspectives through observing their behavior and language (4) building conversations around child-identified interests and needs.

When these strategies were practiced over time, Tharp & Gallimore (1993) documented improved literacy skills with Hawaiian children in their study. My research supported their findings by confirming the usefulness of small group activity settings, i.e. both a play center and a focus group, for child/peer and adult/child conversational interactions. This study's key findings point to collaboration in the form of responsive assistance in both play and focus group settings. The teachers and I helped to sustain children's existing themes and also to distract their play and conversations. Both types of collaboration seem to be components of these classroom

housekeeping centers where sociodramatic play was allowed. From an integration of findings from both adults' and children's conversations, I have constructed the following recommendations for collaborative story construction in sociodramatic play.

Recommendations for Teacher/Researcher Collaboration in Children's Classroom Story Construction

(1) Teachers/researchers are responsive to young children's needs by designing a classroom activity center where small group sociodramatic play is encouraged, and where children are permitted to choose among a variety of centers.

(2) Equity for all children is an important issue regarding children's right to play. Each child needs to be given an equal opportunity to choose among a variety of play options. Centers are needed which contain developmentally appropriate items for play regarding age appropriateness and appropriateness to the interests and abilities of all children in the class. Teachers demonstrate regard for children's interests and abilities by continual assessment of child skills and by attending to their expressed desires and concerns.

(3) Videotaping of center play demonstrates an interest in their story playing and preserves the experience for discussion.

(4) Instructional conversations can build upon children's collaborative experience of story playing by using their videotaped story as a motivational tool for stimulating interest and discussion.

(5) Responding to child initiated actions and story themes gives teachers/researchers new information for planning group events and instructional topics.

(6) By extending conversations through modeling, questioning, and giving playful feedback, the responsive teacher or researcher contributes to the collaborative story.

(7) Collaborating with children about story construction may mean intervening to assist them when they play in an unsafe manner. Collaboration permits psychological safety: a place for playing diverse stories where someone takes the time to listen.

Limitations of the Study

This study provided a brief overview of children's collaborative story construction as perceived by children and teachers. It was limited to a three-week interval at the end of the school year. Its construction of multiple perspectives was based upon class groups in two settings of Southwest Virginia. In other schools, different perspectives might be noted, and varied concerns might be generated from interviews. Substantive findings of a descriptive nature may not be generalized to all children of kindergarten age, but may be translated to similar play contexts. Videotaping and focus groups offered numerous opportunities for interactive conversations which could be compared periodically with additional data related to the same children. By using a longitudinal perspective, in which children's center play stories could be compared periodically

throughout the year, this data could be supplemented with a developmental view of story construction.

The presence of researcher and videocamera contributed a distraction within classrooms. Therefore, children's play may have been influenced in ways that might be different from typical experiences of their classroom play. However, one of the purposes of the study was to use the camera in order to consider its value in allowing children to view their play. The camera was a motivational tool which seemed to encourage interest in the process of story construction. This study demonstrated that the camera's use must be guided by careful consideration of equity and choice for children and of the purposes for taperecording. Its use creates a special challenge for classroom researchers.

Suggestions for Additional Research

Defining a theoretical view of a social process, such as children's narrative competence, i.e., story construction, will continue to raise issues for future research. To allow narratives regarding children's experiences, and classroom discussion about their perceptions opens the way for many opinions and concerns. The nature of the research will necessarily be determined by each group of participants, their needs as perceived from their culture as relevant. This approach is especially applicable to multicultural research, where small group dialogue centered on child-constructed stories offers wide ranging possibilities for shared understanding of diverse views.

In housekeeping centers, or other areas where children have freedom for sociodramatic play, similar research strategies may be explored as additional questions about children's storying are generated. At issue will be the concerns from policy makers regarding its practical value in classrooms. From a literacy-learning perspective alone, there are many valuable opportunities for children to transform knowlege in the form of asserting new ideas within their own play and discussion. A collaborative approach permits safe distraction by which elaboration, or reconstruction, encourages new concepts that can be challenged by responsive research in which teachers and children join the research process.

Summary and Conclusions

When life is considered as narrative (Bruner, 1987), then developing narrative competence is sharing life in classroom communities. This study has allowed me to share briefly the child-constructed stories in six kindergarten classrooms. The teachers and children were collaborators in constructing this document. It has been my challenge to create an account of our experiences which is representative of the concepts we developed together.

While studies of children's literacy learning in play contexts have identified a variety of purposes for children's story construction, none have constructed a children's perspective of their own videotaped story playing. This study

explored the social nature of kindergartners' narrative competence. A collaborative model of children's story construction, i.e., narrative competence, was proposed as a way to integrate the study's key findings (see Figure 1). The integration of a children's perspective with those of teachers and researcher allowed recommendations which have implications for responsive teaching in kindergarten classrooms.

Children's play was valued, by the use of a Vygotskian theoretical orientation which considered play as the zone of proximal development, an optimal context for literacy learning. Within this zone, children could assist their own and others' developing abilities to converse about topics of relevance to them. A variety of themes and roles were introduced, negotiated, accepted, and rejected within the process of collaborative story construction grounded in a theoretical framework of responsive teaching.

To conclude this chapter, I have chosen two groups of comments (from both teachers and children) after viewing a story. Teacher comments reflect spontaneous discussion about the "best features" of this project. Then, an example of responsive teaching is demonstrated in the form of a researcher/child focus group conversations.

One teacher's comments about her class' participation in the study:

> This project gave opportunities for the children to have creative freedom. One of the best features is taking the time, giving them free time, it's so valuable.

Following is an example of a responsive instructional conversation structured as a focus group. It was designed as an immediate follow-up activity to story playing in the classroom housekeeping center. Illustrations of one of the study's central concepts, distractive elements, noted in statements by both researcher and children, are underlined. At times distractions led the group to elaborate conversational themes in a manner similar to children's elaboration in story playing. Discussing play became playful.

Researcher: Tell me about the story you played.

Child: We called our dog show "The Beethovens". This one lasts a long time cause our story was long.

Child: Are we going to have snacks around here?

Researcher: No

We like snacks.

Researcher: Let's see what you did. Here goes.

(The tv was turned on.)

Giggles from the group.

Child: Me and A. were on the puppy team.

Child: We were on the wolf team.

Child: Look at us!
She was the mommy dog and she was in the living room and J. broke in and she couldn't hear anything. So he started fighting.

Researcher to J.: Do you want to tell us who you were?

J.: I was a wolf.

Researcher to child who introduced J: And who were you?

Child: I was the grandma?

Researcher: And whose grandma were you?

Chorus: OURS!

Researcher: And was she a dog too?

Chorus: YES.

Child: Now she's playing the grandma and she's wrapping a present.

Researcher: What was the present?

Child: It was a heart. A heart cake.
They have to ask me all the time if they can marry me!

Child: Tell her about the part where we sang.
(This distractive element was accepted by the group of children and incorporated into the conversation.)

They began singing,
"L and J sitting in a tree,
K I S S I N G"

Child: L Loves J, that's what we're putting on the cake.

J. That makes me want to throw up!

Researcher: We're almost to the end of the story on the tape. One more thing, if you could, would you change anything about your story, or play the same story again?

(This distractive element was an instructional strategy chosen to refocus the conversation toward clarification of story themes.)

Children accepted the question and responded.

Child: Change it.

Researcher: How?

Child: Turn back into dogs.

Child: Hey, dog!

Child: I'd be a puppy too.

They started barking, then looked at the researcher, and giggled. In the words of one of the teachers, "It was their moment to shine!"

By structuring responsive instructional conversations with children about their own story playing, this study offered an innovative forum for child ideas which was enhanced by the use of videotaping both play centers and focus groups. The key findings enlarged current literature-based views of a nearly exclusive individual approach to research of narrative competence. This information extended the current view of collaborative intersubjectivity by adding elements of distraction to a construct previously defined in terms of cooperative interaction. It focused upon responsive assistance which incorporated distractive elements of collaboration into playful conversations. Recommendations were offered for adults to be collaborators in children's classroom sociodramatic play, integrating multiple perspectives of kindergartners' story construction.

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APPENDIX A

Appendix A

Collaborative Story Construction

Causal Conditions	and	Properties
1. It is voluntary. 2. It involves abstract symbols. 3. It is dynamic, active, constructive and reconstructive. 4. It involves pretense, decontextualization, self/other transformation and object substitutions. 5. It includes events or episodes which have characters, action sequences, problem solving, and may include a formal beginning and/or end. 6. It is a process which is idosyncratic, experienced differently at different times, yet is available for interpretation and reinterpretation by participants.		Action scenarios include language and gestures, objects, and people in both fictionalized and real life experiences. Players understand a goal or purpose of the activities, and are able to move in and out of the play frame, communicating their mutually negotiated story. Meta-play becomes "playing about play" when. constructing the story becomes part of the story.

APPENDIX B

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent Form for Adult Participants
Title of Project: Pilot Study - Videotaping Children
(Follow-up to Initial Teacher Focus Group)
Concluding Teacher Focus Group and
Individual Interviews at Child Care Center

Principal Investigator: Mary Ruth Reynolds Hawkins

I. PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

You are invited to participate in the continued study of kindergarten children's story construction in classroom play centers. The adult portion of this pilot study involves a concluding focus group and individual interviews to be conducted with the child care center director and two teachers who participated in an initial focus group on March 31, 1994.

This research examines the social nature of narrative competence, i.e., children's "sense of story" (Martinez, Cheyney, and Teale, 1991). Multiple data sources will be utilized and linked by a Vygotskian (1967, 1978) theoretical perspective of collaboration to create shared understanding, or intersubjectivity. This project is planned as a component of my class in educational research at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and will inform my dissertation research.

II. PROCEDURES

Three qualitative methods: participant observation (Spradley, 1980), focus group interviewing (Morgan, 1988), and individual interviews (Berg, 1990) will be employed for this study. A director and two teachers from a surburban Virginia child care center have previously participated in an intial focus group on March 31, 1994. The same teachers and the center director will be invited to participate in a follow-up focus group and individual interviews.

A unique feature of this study is the use of videotaping of children's play as a way to permit them to reflect together about their stories. Three mornings will be spent in the kindergarten classroom as a way to observe children's center play and also to allow children to become accustomed to the presence of the researcher who has a video camera. I will actually begin taping on the third day in the classroom. The children's portion of the project is projected to be completed after three mornings.

At the conclusion of the day on which videotaping is completed, you will be invited to reflect upon and discuss your perceptions of the process of children's story construction in a concluding focus group. As a part of this focus group, the videotape will be viewed. Individual interviews will be offered also at the convenience of each participant.

II. RISKS and BENEFITS

RISKS

Your participation is strictly voluntary. There are no known risks to you as a part of this research. Discussion will center around perceptions of the process of children's story construction in sociodramatic play, rather than focusing upon individual children or teachers. You may decline to participate, or you may withdraw from the project at any time.

BENEFITS

As a participant in the study you will have an opportunity to reflect with your colleagues about views of children's story construction in classroom play. This study values your opinions and ideas about the process of children's story construction in classrooms. Your perceptions will contribute additional data to research of children's play and literacy development.

IV. EXTENT OF ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

For reporting purposes, the center, its director, and teachers will be identified by pseudonyms only. Videotapes will be viewed by child participants and their teachers, the center director, and by the researcher. Videotapes may be used by the researcher for future research of children's literacy development as well as for teacher training in educational settings. For example, teachers or future teachers of young children might participate in a workshop designed by the researcher to describe the use of videotaping and follow-up focus groups as a responsive teaching strategy to be used in classrooms.

Audiotapes of teacher focus groups and individual interviews will be treated confidentially. The researcher will transcribe the tapes and will be the only person who hears them. Audiotapes will be erased after the study is completed.

Your participation in this project is greatly appreciated. Please contact me if you have further questions or need information related to this research. Copies of any reports related to this study may be obtained by contacting me at the following address:

Mary Ruth R. Hawkins
Route 2, Box 2J
Richmond Avenue
Rural Retreat, VA 24368
(703) 686-5975

My faculty advisor for this project is:

Dr. Jim C. Fortune
Department of Educational Research
Virginia Polytechnic Institute
and State University
Blacksburg, VA 24060
(703) 231-9731

The University Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Chairman is:

Dr. Ernest R. Stout
Associate Provost for Research
306 Burruss Hall
Virginia Polytechnic Institute
and State University
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061-0244
(703) 231-9359

I have read the above information, and I give my voluntary consent to participate in the concluding focus group and individual interview for this project.

Signature:_____.

Date: _____.

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent Form for Parents of Child Participants

Title of Project: Pilot Study - Videotaping Kindergarten Children's Story Construction
Principal Investigator: Mary Ruth Reynolds Hawkins

I. PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

Your child is invited to participate in this study of kindergarten children's story construction in classroom play centers. Classroom research has affirmed the importance of "story playing" (Paley, 1990) in which children have opportunities to construct stories of their own.

This project is planned as a component of my class in educational research at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and will inform my dissertation research exploring narrative competence, or children's "sense or story" (Martinez, Cheney and Teale, 1991). It values children's play and their discussion of its meaning for them.

A unique feature of this study is the use of videotaping of children's play as a way to permit them to reflect together about their stories. I will spend three consecutive mornings in the kindergarten classroom as a way to observe children's center play and also to allow children to become accustomed to the presence of the researcher who has a video camera. I will actually begin taping on the third day, during which the project will be completed.

Children will be <u>invited</u> to participate in videotaping of both play centers and child focus groups. They will give permission by discussing and signing (in their own way) the child's consent form (Appendix A). First names of children will be printed on the form by the researcher. For purposes of reporting, children and their teachers will be identified by pseudonyms only. Due to the voluntary nature of this study, only those children who <u>choose</u> to play in the center on the day of taping will be participants in this study. Children who are not participants will be offered regular opportunities for classroom play of their choice as usual. Children may withdraw from the study at any time, or may choose not to participate.

Videotapes will be viewed during the study by the child participants and their teachers as well as by the researcher. They may be used by the researcher for purposes of additional research regarding children's stories and may be viewed by other adults in teacher training settings related to children's play and their literacy development.

II. RISKS and BENEFITS

RISKS

Your child's participation is strictly voluntary. There are no known risks as a part of this research which differ from children's regular voluntary participation in daily classroom play and discussion activities. Children who do not participate in this study, because they choose not to play in the center during videotaping, will be offered opportunities to continue their own play in the classroom.

Focus group discussion will center around perceptions of the process of children's story construction in sociodramatic play, rather than focusing upon individual children or teachers. Children may decline to participate, or may withdraw from the project at any time.

BENEFITS

As participants in the study, children will have the opportunity to view themselves as story players. They will be allowed to reflect upon this activity and to share ideas in conversation. These activities build upon well-documented literacy learning strategies used by researchers and early childhood teachers in classrooms where children's play is considered a learning medium (Christie, 1991; Paley, 1990; Roskos, 1988; Schrader, 1990). Children's play and their related conversations are valued and clarified by this study which considers that children are collaborators in their own learning.

IV. EXTENT OF ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

For reporting purposes, the center, its director, and teachers will be identified by pseudonyms only. Videotapes will be viewed by child participants and their teachers, the center director, and by the researcher. Videotapes may be used by the researcher for future research of children's literacy development as well as for teacher training in educational settings.

Your child's participation in this project is greatly appreciated. Please contact me if you have further questions or need information related to this research. Copies of any reports related to this study may be obtained by contacting me at the following address:

Mary Ruth R. Hawkins
Route 2, Box 2J
Richmond Avenue
Rural Retreat, VA 24368
(703) 686-5975

My faculty advisor for this project is:

Dr. Jim C. Fortune
Department of Educational Research
Virginia Polytechnic Institute
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Blacksburg, VA 24060
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The University Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Chairman is:

Dr. Ernest R. Stout
Associate Provost for Research
306 Burruss Hall
Virginia Polytechnic Institute
and State University
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061-0244
(703) 231-9359

Please sign this form giving written consent for your child to participate in videotaped play and a child focus group which will be videotaped. Not all children will choose to play in the center on the day of videotaping; therefore, not all children will be participants. Due to the voluntary nature of this study, only those children who choose to play in the center on the day of taping will be participants in this study.

I have read the above information, and I give voluntary consent for my child to participate in the videotaped play and follow up videotaped focus group designed for this study.

Signature: _____.

Date: _____.

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent Form for Parents of Child Participants

Title of Project: Pilot Study - Videotaping Kindergarten Children's Story Construction

Principal Investigator: Mary Ruth Reynolds Hawkins

I. PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

Your child is invited to participate in this study of kindergarten children's story construction in classroom play centers. Classroom research has affirmed the importance of "story playing" (Paley, 1990) in which children have opportunities to construct stories of their own.

This project is planned as a component of my class in educational research at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and will inform my dissertation research exploring narrative competence, or children's "sense or story" (Martinez, Cheney and Teale, 1991). It values children's play and their discussion of its meaning for them.

A unique feature of this study is the use of videotaping of children's play as a way to permit them to reflect together about their stories. I will spend three consecutive mornings in the kindergarten classroom as a way to observe children's center play and also to allow children to become accustomed to the presence of the researcher who has a video camera. I will actually begin taping on the third day, during which the project will be completed.

Children will be <u>invited</u> to participate in videotaping of both play centers and child focus groups. They will give permission by discussing and signing (in their own way) the child's consent form (Appendix A). First names of children will be printed on the form by the researcher. For purposes of reporting, children and their teachers will be identified by pseudonyms only. Due to the voluntary nature of this study, only those children who <u>choose</u> to play in the center on the day of taping will be participants in this study. Children who are not participants will be offered regular opportunities for classroom play of their choice as usual. Children may withdraw from the study at any time, or may choose not to participate.

Videotapes will be viewed during the study by the child participants and their teachers as well as by the researcher. They may be used by the researcher for purposes of additional research regarding children's stories and may be viewed by other adults in teacher training settings related to children's play and their literacy development.

Children's Consent Form

My name is Mary Ruth Hawkins.

I am making a videotaped collection of stories that children play, so I can learn more about children.

I'd like to videotape some of the stories you pretend here. If one of your stories is videotaped, I will ask you to tell me about it.

If it's ok for me to videotape you, please sign your name on this paper.

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent Form for Adult Participants

Title of Project: Revisioning Narrative Competence: Exploring Kindergartners' Story Construction

Principal Investigator: Mary Ruth Reynolds Hawkins

I. PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

You are invited to participate in a study of kindergarten children's story construction in classroom play centers. The adult portion of this pilot study involves two focus groups and individual interviews to be conducted with kindergarten teachers who invite the researcher to videotape children in their classroom play center.

This research examines the social nature of narrative competence, i.e., children's "sense of story" (Martinez, Cheyney, and Teale, 1991). Three research perspectives: teachers' childrens' and researcher's will be linked by a Vygotskian (1967, 1978) theoretical view of collaboration to create intersubjectivity, or shared understanding. This project is planned as a component of my class in educational research at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and will inform my dissertation research.

II. PROCEDURES

Three qualitative methods: participant observation (Spradley, 1980), focus group interviewing (Morgan, 1988), and individual interviews (Berg, 1990) will be employed for this study. Six kindergarten teachers from a Southwest Virginia school district will be invited to participate in this research project. Their invitation has been made possible because of the researcher's previous employment as a school psychologist in that school system and because of the administration's concern for children's literacy development.

A unique feature of this study is the use of videotaping of children's play as a way to permit them to reflect together about their stories. Three mornings will be spent in the kindergarten classroom as a way to observe children's center play and also to allow children to become accustomed to the presence of the researcher who has a video camera. I will actually begin taping on the third day in the classroom. The children's portion of the project is projected to be completed after three mornings.

At the conclusion of the day on which videotaping is completed, you will be invited to reflect upon and discuss your perceptions of the process of children's story construction in a concluding focus group. As a part of this focus group, the videotape will be viewed. Individual interviews will be offered also at the convenience of each participant.

II. RISKS and BENEFITS

RISKS

Your participation is strictly voluntary. There are no known risks to you as a part of this research. Discussion will center around perceptions of the process of children's story construction in sociodramatic play, rather than focusing upon individual children or teachers. You may decline to participate, or you may withdraw from the project at any time.

BENEFITS

As a participant in the study you will have an opportunity to reflect with your colleagues about views of children's story construction in classroom play. This study values your opinions and ideas about the process of children's story construction in classrooms. Your perceptions will contribute additional data to research of children's play and literacy development.

IV. EXTENT OF ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

For reporting purposes, the school, its administrators, and teachers will be identified by pseudonyms only. Videotapes will be viewed by child participants and their teachers, by the researcher, and possibly by the principal and/or superintendent. Videotapes may be used by the researcher for future research of children's literacy development as well as for teacher training in educational settings. For example, teachers or future teachers of young children might participate in a workshop designed by the researcher to describe the use of videotaping and follow-up focus groups as a responsive teaching strategy to be used in classrooms.

Audiotapes of teacher focus groups and individual interviews will be treated confidentially. The researcher will transcribe the tapes and will be the only person who hears them. Audiotapes will be erased after the study is completed.

Your participation in this project is greatly appreciated. Please contact me if you have further questions or need information related to this research. Copies of any reports related to this study may be obtained by contacting me at the following address:

Mary Ruth R. Hawkins
Route 2, Box 2J
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My committee chairman is:

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The University Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Chairman is:

Dr. Ernest R. Stout
Associate Provost for Research
306 Burruss Hall
Virginia Polytechnic Institute
and State University
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061-0244
(703) 231-9359

I have read the above information, and I give my voluntary consent to participate in the focus groups and individual interview for this project.

Signature: _____.

Date: _____.

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

To: Parents of Kindergarten Children

From: Mary Ruth Hawkins

Your child is invited to participate in a study of kindergarten children's story construction in classroom play centers. This research project is planned as a part of my doctoral dissertation at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. It explores children's "sense or story" by valuing children's play and their discussion of its meaning for them.

A unique feature of this study is the use of videotaping of children's play as a way to permit them to reflect together about their stories. I will spend three consecutive mornings in the kindergarten classroom as a way to observe children's center play and also to allow children to become accustomed to the presence of the researcher who has a video camera. I will actually begin taping on the third day, during which the project will be completed.

Children will be <u>invited</u> to participate in videotaping of both play centers and child focus groups. They will give permission by discussing and signing (in their own way) a child's consent form. First names of children will be printed on the form by the researcher. For purposes of reporting, children and their teachers will be identified by pseudonyms only. Due to the voluntary nature of this study, only those children who <u>choose</u> to play in the center on the day of taping will be participants in this study. Children who are not participants will be offered regular opportunities for classroom play of their choice as usual. Children may withdraw from the study at any time, or may choose not to participate.

Videotapes will be viewed during the study by the child participants and their teachers as well as by the researcher. Your child's participation is <u>strictly voluntary</u>. Children may decline to participate, or may withdraw from the project at any time.

There are no known risks as a part of this research which differ from children's regular voluntary participation in daily classroom play and discussion activities. Children who do not participate in this study, because they choose not to play in the center during videotaping, will be offered opportunities to continue their own play in the classroom.

Children's play and their related conversations are valued and clarified by this study which considers that children are collaborators in their own learning.

For reporting purposes, the school, its administrators, and teachers will be identified by pseudonyms only. Videotapes will be viewed by child participants and their teachers, and by the researcher, and possibly by the school principal and/or superintendent. Videotapes may be used by the researcher for future research of children's literacy development as well as for teacher training in educational settings. For example, teachers or future teachers of young children might participate in a workshop designed by the researcher to describe the use of videotaping and follow-up focus groups as a responsive teaching strategy to be used in classrooms.

Your child's participation in this project is greatly appreciated. Please contact me if you have further questions or need information related to this research. Copies of any reports related to this study may be obtained by contacting me at the following address:

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(703) 686-5975

My committee chairman is:

Dr. Jay Mancini, Chair
Department of Family
and Child Development
Virginia Polytechnic Institute
and State University
Blacksburg, VA 24060
(703) 231-6110

The University Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Chairman is:

Dr. Ernest R. Stout
Associate Provost for Research
306 Burruss Hall
Virginia Polytechnic Institute
and State University
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061-0244
(703) 231-9359

Your signature on this letter gives written consent for your child to participate in videotaped play and a child focus group which will be videotaped. Not all children will choose to play in the center on the day of videotaping; therefore, not all children will be participants. Due to the voluntary nature of this study, only those children who choose to play in the center on the day of taping will be participants in this study.

Please sign this page and return it to your child's school tomorrow. I appreciate your willingness to allow your child to participate in my study.

Sincerely,

Mary Ruth Hawkins

May, 1994

- -

I have read the above information, and I give voluntary consent for my child to participate in the videotaped play and follow up videotaped focus group designed for this study.

Signature: _____.

Date: _____.

- -

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Justification of Project

Title of Project - Re-visioning Narrative Competence:
Exploring Kindergarteners' Story Construction

Principal Investigator - Mary Ruth Reynolds Hawkins
Doctoral Candidate - Child Development
Department of Family and Child Development

I. PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

Narrative competence, or "sense of story" (Martinez, Cheney, and Teale, 1991), is an important educational concept linking children's play with their literacy development. Both play and literacy contribute to children's ability to understand their world through the use of symbols (Bruner, 1990; Heath, 1986; Pellegrini, 1985; Wells, 1991). Classroom research has affirmed the importance of "story playing" (Paley, 1990) in which children have opportunities to construct stories of their own.

Previous research of narrative competence has been limited to a nearly exclusive individual focus upon children's ability to reproduce adult selected or elicited stories. This study, however, is designed to enlarge the view of children's narrative competence by considering it as a collaborative process of story construction in sociodramatic play. Perceptions of children and teachers will be compared, leading toward a grounded theory of children's story construction (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

An initial pilot study was conducted at a child care center in a surburban community. From data gathered in that study, this doctoral dissertation proposal has been designed.

II. PROCEDURES

Three qualitative research techniques will be used in this project: participant observation (Spradley, 1980) (see descriptive matrix, Figure 2), focus group interviews (Morgan, 1988) with children and teachers, and individual interviews with teachers (Berg, 1990). Data from all sources will be related to Vygotsky's (1967, 1978) socio-cultural theory which supports collaboration for responsive teaching (Tharp and Gallimore, 1993). Collaboration will be examined in child-peer story construction, among children and researcher in a focus group, and among teachers and researcher in a adult focus group.

A unique feature of this study is the use of videotaping of children's play as a way to permit them to reflect together about their stories. The convenience sample consists of kindergartners from all classrooms in one elementary school in Southwest Virginia. Three mornings will be spent in each kindergarten classroom as a way to observe children's center play and also to allow children to become accustomed to the presence of the researcher who has a video camera. I will actually begin taping on the third day in the classroom. Taping will begin when two or more children are in the dramatic play center. It will continue as long as those children are engaged in sustained conversational planning about or enactment of play activity defined by Roskos' (1988) checklist (see Figure 3). Play must last for at least five minutes or more. Segments of pretend play, which meet the defined criteria, will be selected for viewing by children and teachers during follow-up focus groups. The children's portion of the project is projected to be completed after three mornings.

Children will be invited to participate in videotaping of both play centers and child focus groups. They will give permission by discussing and signing (in their own way) the child's consent form (Appendix B). First names of children will be printed on the form by the researcher. For purposes of reporting, children and their teachers will be identified by pseudonyms only. Children may withdraw from the study at any time, or may choose not to participate.

Videotapes will be viewed during the study by the child participants and their teachers as well as by the researcher. They will provide a multi-sensory stimulus for collaborative conversations among children and the researcher, and among teachers and the researcher.

III. RISKS and BENEFITS

RISKS

For Children

There is no known risk involved which differs from children's regular voluntary participation in daily classroom play and discussion activities. If some children choose not to participate in the study, they will be offered opportunities to continue their own play in the classroom.

For Teachers

There is no known risk for these individuals. Focus group conversations will center upon the process of children's story construction, not on individual children or teachers. (see Appendix B). Participation in this study is voluntary, and adults may decline or withdraw at any time.

BENEFITS

For Children

Children will have the opportunity to view themselves as story players. They will be allowed to reflect upon this activity and to share ideas in conversation. These activities build upon well-documented literacy learning strategies used in play research and whole-language classrooms where children's play is considered a learning medium (Christie, 1991; Stremmel, 1993; Stone, 1993). Children's play and their conversations are valued and clarified by this study which considers children as collaborators in their own learning.

For Teachers

As a result of this study, teachers will have an opportunity to reflect upon their views of children's story construction in classroom play. By professional collaboration with colleagues, such as this project, teachers opinions and ideas are valued and their views are documented for additional research on children's play and literacy development.

IV. EXTENT OF ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

For reporting purposes, children and teachers will be identified by pseudonyms only. Videotapes will be viewed by the participants and their teachers as well as by the researcher. They may be used for purposes of additional research regarding children's stories and may be viewed by adults in educational settings related to children's play and their literacy development. For example, teachers or future teachers of young children might participate in a workshop designed by the researcher to describe the use of videotaping and follow-up focus groups as a responsive teaching strategy to be used in classrooms.

Transcriptions of audiotapes from teacher focus groups will be treated confidentially. The researcher will transcribe the tapes and will be the only person who hears them. Audiotapes will be erased after the study is completed.

Copies of any reports related to this study may be obtained by contacting me at the following address:

Mary Ruth R. Hawkins
Route 2, Box 2J
Richmond Avenue
Rural Retreat, VA 24368
(703) 686-5975

My committee chairman is:

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VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Justification of Project

Title of Project: Pilot Study - Videotaping Children
(Follow-up to Initial Teacher Focus Group)
Concluding Teacher Focus Group and
Individual Interviews at Child Care Center

Principal Investigator: Mary Ruth Reynolds Hawkins

I. PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

This pilot study explores kindergarten children's story construction in classroom play centers. It examines the social nature of narrative competence, i.e., children's "sense of story" (Martinez, Cheyney, and Teale, 1991) and will inform my planned dissertation research on this topic. Multiple data sources will be utilized and linked by a Vygotskian (1967, 1978) theoretical perspective of collaboration to create shared understanding, or intersubjectivity. This project is planned as a component of my class in educational research at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. (See Appendix A for research questions.)

II. PROCEDURES

Three qualitative methods: participant observation (Spradley, 1980), focus group interviewing (Morgan, 1988), and individual interviews (Berg, 1990) will be employed for this study. A director and two teachers from a surburban Virginia child care center have previously participated in an intial focus group on March 31, 1994. The same teachers and the center director will be invited to participate in a follow-up focus group and individual interviews.

A unique feature of this study is the use of videotaping of children's play as a way to permit them to reflect together about their stories. Three mornings will be spent in the kindergarten classroom as a way to observe children's center play and also to allow children to become accustomed to the presence of the researcher who has a video camera. I will actually begin taping on the third day in the classroom. Taping will begin when two or more children are in the dramatic play center. It will continue as long as those children are engaged in sustained conversational planning about or enactment of play activity defined by Roskos' (1988) checklist (see Appendix G). Play must last for at least five minutes or more. Segments of pretend play which meet the defined criteria will be selected for viewing by children and teachers during follow-up focus groups. The children's portion of the project is projected to be completed after three mornings.

Children will be <u>invited</u> to participate in videotaping of both play centers and child focus groups. They will give permission by discussing and signing (in their own way) the child's consent form (Appendix A1). First names of children will be printed on the form

by the researcher. For purposes of reporting, children and their teachers will be identified by pseudonyms only. Children may withdraw from the study at any time, or may choose not to participate.

Videotapes will be viewed during the study by the child participants and their teachers as well as by the researcher. They will provide a multi-sensory stimulus for collaborative conversations among children and the researcher, and among teachers and the researcher.

III. RISKS and BENEFITS

RISKS

If some children choose not to participate in this study, they will be offered opportunities to continue their own play. There is no known risk involved which differs from children's regular voluntary participation in daily classroom play and discussion activities.

The center director and teachers who have participated in the initial focus group have invited the researcher to videotape classroom play activities. These individuals will be asked to sign the attached consent form for the concluding focus group and individual interviews also (see Appendix B). There is no known risk for these individuals. Focus group conversations will center upon the process of children's story construction, not on individual children or teachers.

BENEFITS

Children will have the opportunity to view themselves as story players. They will be allowed to reflect upon this activity and to share ideas in conversation. These activities build upon well-documented literacy learning strategies used in whole-language classrooms where children's play is considered a learning medium (Stremmel, 1993; Stone, 1993). Children's play and their related conversations are valued and clarified by this study which considers that children are collaborators in their own learning.

Teachers will have an opportunity to reflect upon their views of children's story construction in classroom play. This study offers a chance for professional collaboration with colleagues. In both focus groups and individual interviews, teachers' opinions and ideas are valued by this project which contributes their views to research data on children's play and literacy development.

IV. EXTENT OF ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

For reporting purposes, children and teachers will be identified by pseudonyms only. Videotapes will be viewed by child participants and their teachers as well as by the researcher. Videotapes may be used for future research of children's literacy development as well as for teacher training in educational settings. For example, teachers or future teachers of young children might participate in a workshop designed by the researcher to describe the use of videotaping and follow-up focus groups as a responsive teaching strategy to be used in classrooms.

Audiotapes of teacher focus groups and individual interviews will be treated confidentially. The researcher will transcribe the tapes and will be the only person who hears them. Audiotapes will be erased after the study is completed.

Copies of any reports related to this study may be obtained by contacting me at the following address:

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My faculty advisor for this project is:

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The University Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Chairman is:

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APPENDIX C

Child Interview Guide

Based upon research question no. 2:

What meanings and motivations do children identify related to classroom story construction?

The following initial interview probes will guide focus group discussion with kindergarten children. These questions will be modified according to child responses.

Introductory Greeting

"Hi, I enjoyed watching you play your stories."

"Let's make a circle and talk about them".

1. Do you remember the story you played today?
   What were you doing? Tell me about it.
2. What do you think is the most important thing that happened in your story?
3. What else happened?
4. How do you feel about your story?
5. Would you change anything about your story? (If Yes) How would you change it?

Now let's look at it.

After viewing

6. How do you feel about your story now?
7. Would you change anything about your story now?

Thanks for helping me understand what you meant. I'm going to write a book about children's stories. May I put your story in my book?

Teacher Focus Group Interview Guide

Based upon Research Question No. 3:

What meanings and motivations do adults identify related to the process of classroom story construction?

the following initial interview probes are designed to be used with kindergarten teachers. Additional questions and further probing responses will be modified according to participant responses.

Introductory Statement:

"I appreciate the chance for us to share ideas about children's story construction in kindergarten. First, tell me a little about yourselves -- how you came to teach, and how long you have been here."

"I'm interested in learning about how your kindergartners coordinate their pretend stories in your dramatic play center. Tell me, how is it done in your classroom?"

Length of time in center ------

How is the center chosen by children?_____

Additional Probes:

Related to Child Actions

1. How would you describe children's actions in the play center?

Related to Child Language

2. How would you describe children's langauge in the play center?

Related to Story Content

3. Tell me about any themes you have noticed that the children include in their story playing.

   Related to the child-teacher relationship

4. How do the children include you in their story playing?

"Would it be possible for me to visit and videotape what happens?" "I would like to collect videotapes from all kindergarten rooms in this school in order to gather information about children's story construction. I'd like to be able to show these tapes to other children and teachers as I discuss what happens in classrooms. How do you feel about that?"

(Later)

Let's look at the tapes.

After viewing the tapes

Has your view of children's story construction changed since seeing the tapes? If so, how?

How do you feel about children's story construction in play?

What features of the video stand out for you?

Thank you so much for your participation in my research.

Individual Teacher Interview Guide

1. I wonder if your views of children's story construction have changed after our discussions and videotaping. How would you describe your impressions before and after this project?

2. Are there recommendations you have for other teachers who may want to be supportive of children's story construction in play?

3. What recommendations do you have for me reagrding future research with children and teachers in classrooms?

4. Is there anything else you would like to add that I haven't asked you?

Thank you so much for your participation in this project.

APPENDIX D

CODING CATEGORIES

Child Action and Language were coded descriptive summaries of videotapes of children in two contexts: Center Play, coded as CS for Child Script and Focus Group, FG.

Typed scripts were color coded.

CS or FG 100 Definition of Theme:

Stated - Green
Implied - Brown

CS or FG 200 Negotiation of Roles:

Acceptance - Green
Refusal - Brown

CS or FG 300 Elaboration of Themes:

Sustaining - Green
Distractive - Brown
Additional - Red

Sustaining = elaborated original theme
Distractive = modified original theme

301 Explaining
302 Accepting/complying
303 Asserting/Directing
304 Teasing
305 Arguing
306 Struggling/Fighting
307 Expressions of Pleasure
308 Teacher Intervention

Teacher Comments were coded in typed summaries of Focus Groups and Individual Interviews.

FG1 = Initial Focus Group
FG2 = Concluding Focus Group
I = Individual Interview

Confirming - Pink
Challenging - Orange

100s - Descriptions of Story Construction
200s - Concerns
300s - Recommendations

Each summary was color coded according to confirming or challenging the reseacher's assumptions about the collaborative process of meaning making in children's story construction.

APPENDIX E

VITA

MARY RUTH REYNOLDS

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EDUCATION

Ph.D in Child Development, 1994
Department of Family and Child Development
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University,
Blacksburg, Virginia

Summer Institute - Attention Deficit Disorder
University of Virginia, 1989

Ed.S. in School Psychology, 1986
M. S. in Psychology, 1985
Radford University, Radford, VA

B.S. in Elementary Education, 1966
Longwood College, Farmville, VA

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Consultant - Virginia Department of Social Services, 1993, 1994

Adjunct Faculty - Wytheville Community College, VA 1985,present

Headstart Trainer - Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University, Department of Family and Child Development 1991

School Psychologist - Practicum at Wythe Co. VA
Smyth Co. VA, 1985-1989

Private Tutor for Children with Learning Disabilities -
University of Richmond Summer Program, 1977
Carlisle School, Martinsville, VA, 1977

Elementary Teacher - Henrico Co., VA, 1968-1971
Patrick Co., VA, 1967

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS AND HONORS

Nationally Certified School Psychologist
Virginia Association of School Psychologists
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association for the Education of Young Children
Phi Delta Kappa (National Honor Society for Educators)
Phi Upsilon Omicron (National Home Economics Honor Society)
Psi Chi (National Psychology Honor Society)
Who's Who of American Women
Who's Who of American Educators

PROFESSIONAL AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

Member Smyth County Early Intervention Team
Former Delegate - State Advisory Committee for Gifted Education
Past-President - American Association of University Women, Wythe County, VA
Member Education and Tourism Committees - Chamber of Commerce Smyth County, VA

PRESENTATIONS:

"Children's Play" - Human Development Conference
University of Florida

"Enhancing Playfulness" - Virginia Association
for Gifted Education
Richmond, Virginia

"Preschooler Evaluation" - Virginia Association
for Early Childhood Education
Richmond, Virginia

"Playfulness in Young Children" - VPI&SU
Graduate Student Forum
Blacksburg, Virginia

"The Teacher's Voice" - Virginia Psychological
Association
Richmond, Virginia

"Helping Young Children Cope with Stress"
Headstart Teachers
Galax, Virginia

"A Collaborative Evaluation to Improve
Educational and Client Services at a Family
Resource Center"
Women's Conference Sponsored by
Virginia Tech Women's Research Institute
and at Mid-South Educational Research
Association, Knoxville, Tennessee

"Revisioning Childhood Sexuality"
Virginia Psychological Association and
Virginia Association for Early
Childhood Educators
Richmond, Virginia

"Exploring Kindergartners' Story Construction"
Southeastern Symposium on Child and
Family Development
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

September, 1994