TEACHER-CHILD INTERACTIONS IN VOLUNTARY PRE-KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS IN CHILD CARE SETTINGS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS

By

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We investigated barriers to and facilitators of effective teacher-child interactions in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings. An effective teacher-child interaction enables both teachers and children to actively engage in solving the problems they confront in their daily lives. The effective teacher-child interaction relies on their mutual respect rather than teachers’ dominant positions, and enables both teachers and children to make an effort to find the best way to change the status quo through critical thinking. However, several factors that impede effective teacher-child interactions in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings allow children few opportunities to solve their own problems and articulate their own needs by preventing teachers from effectively interacting with children. Thus, by investigating barriers to and facilitators of effective teacher-child interactions in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings, this qualitative research project ultimately aims to find ways to empower both teachers and children through effective teacher-child interactions.

Based on the theoretical orientation of critical theory and postmodernism, interviews and observations of three teachers were used in Florida’s voluntary pre-kindergarten (VPK) program in child care settings, and the data were analyzed using Gee’s (2005) method of discourse
analysis. The interviews were conducted in the teachers’ workplaces, and the observations focused on the teachers’ behavior and speech in their classrooms during whole-group, free-play, and meal time. According to the steps of discourse analysis, the interview data were organized into “stanzas,” several story lines were made, and then a number of building tasks were established. The results of data analysis demonstrate that the unique characteristics of the VPK program impede the three teachers’ most effective interactions with children, even though they are aware of the importance of their one-on-one interactions with children. The findings of the study show several barriers to and facilitators of effective teacher-child interactions, as defined from a critical perspective, in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings.

This study includes a number of strategies to enhance the internal validity, reliability, generalizability, and trustworthiness of the study, including “member checks.” In particular, my subjectivity statement shows why I am interested in this qualitative research project as well as why I believe that this study is important. By clarifying my assumptions and worldview based on my personal experiences, this subjectivity statement contributes to increasing the internal validity of this study. However, this study demonstrates several limitations resulting from the fact that the data were collected over a short period of time. Some recommendations for further research are suggested in order to address these limitations as well as to lead further research to focus on improving educational practice. As a first attempt to investigate the nature of teacher-child interactions in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings by using the theoretical orientation of critical theory and postmodernism, this qualitative research project offers some helpful suggestions to interested practitioners, including teachers, policy makers, and researchers.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Teacher-child interactions in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings reflect the characteristics of voluntary pre-kindergarten programs as well as of child care settings. Voluntary pre-kindergarten programs emphasize school readiness, instead of addressing a child-care service for four-year-old children. Nevertheless, voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings perform the function of taking care of children since the programs take place in child care settings. Also, teachers’ educational philosophies or teaching methods are influenced by the standards for voluntary pre-kindergarten programs as well as their own experiences developed in child care settings over the years.

Especially in the case of Florida’s voluntary pre-kindergarten (VPK) program, first offered in 2005, its short history indicates that the VPK program has minimally involved teachers in changing their own ways of teaching or interacting with children. Also, because of its unique characteristics that are distinguished from other state-funded pre-kindergarten programs, the VPK program in child care settings is strongly affected by the characteristics of child care settings. One of the unique characteristics of the VPK program is to allow VPK providers to have flexibility in creating curricula and philosophies, provided that they are accountable to the state. Such a characteristic enables VPK providers to depend on the VPK standards as well as their own guidelines on the organization and management of school curriculum. In particular, since most of the VPK providers have already prepared children for kindergarten before they offer the VPK program, they use the VPK standards as well as their own lesson plans that they have developed over the years. The VPK standards include several domains, such as health and social/emotional/motor development and emergent literacy, but they do not suggest a way of teaching or interacting with children. As a result, teacher-child interactions in the VPK program
in child care settings strongly reflect the characteristics of teacher-child interactions in child care settings.

Moreover, there is little research on the nature and quality of teacher-child interactions in pre-kindergarten programs, even though many studies show the positive effects of pre-kindergarten programs on children’s developmental needs. This lack of research makes this qualitative research project depend on the existing research on the characteristics of teacher-child interactions in child care settings. Thus, this qualitative research project examines teacher-child interactions in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings, based on the teacher-child interactions in child care settings that are characterized by the theoretical orientation of critical theory and postmodernism as teacher authority over children. In this chapter I will explain the unique characteristics of Florida’s voluntary pre-kindergarten (VPK) program and its limitations, such as an inadequate accountability system of the VPK program. Also, I will clarify the purpose of the study, along with a statement of the problem and the importance of the study. Finally, I will make my subjectivity statement in order to increase the internal validity of this study.

**Florida’s Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) Program**

Florida’s voluntary pre-kindergarten (VPK) program, as the result of a constitutional amendment passed by 60% of Florida voters in November 2002, began in the 2005-2006 school year. As an early childhood development and education program, the VPK program is voluntary, high quality, and free for eligible children regardless of family income. Similar to other states’ pre-kindergarten programs, the VPK program is based on its own early learning standards, which reflect its own organizations, structures, and resources. First of all, unlike many other state-funded pre-kindergarten programs, the VPK program is independent from public school systems (Finn Jr., [http://www.teachmorelovemore.org/PDF/ktf_florida_book_229.pdf](http://www.teachmorelovemore.org/PDF/ktf_florida_book_229.pdf)). That is to say, the
VPK program allows public, private, and faith-based providers to deliver the VPK program depending on whether they meet the minimum standards required in law. VPK providers have flexibility in creating curricula and philosophies, providing they follow a few basic rules for staffing and accounting and submit to results-based accountability. For example, one of the three teachers who participated in this study teaches children in the VPK classroom in a private child care center, and the others do so in a faith-based child care center. All of the participants use their own classroom curriculum based on both the guidelines for the VPK program and the school curriculum that has developed over the years.

In addition, VPK providers flexibly structure the hours per day and days per week, as long as they meet the required instructional hours (State of Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation, http://www.floridajobs.org/earlylearning/VPK/FAQs.html). For example, if a VPK provider offers a school-year program, it would offer 3 hours of instruction each day to meet the 540-hour requirement. In the case of the three teachers who participated in this study, their workplaces provide children with 3-hour instruction in the morning from 9:00 to 12:00. By and large, the VPK program in child care settings is offered through two different types of pre-kindergarten classrooms. One type of pre-kindergarten classroom as a half-day program offers only the 3-hour instruction of the VPK program; that is, children stay only from 9:00 to 12:00 and have only snack time. Since they leave the classroom at 12:00, they have no meal time. The other type of pre-kindergarten classroom as a full-day program is open before 9:00 and offers both the 3-hour instruction of the VPK program and other activities, including meal time. Children in the classroom stay all day and usually spend the rest of the day, except for the 3 hours of instruction, eating, free-playing, and sleeping. The three-hour-a-day instruction of the VPK program is considered realistic and efficient considering staff supply, facilities, and cost.
However, the three-hour-a-day program has been faulted by national groups and experts, who strongly suggest that children need a longer day and stronger staff credentials than the VPK standards for lasting positive effects on their development.

Another unique characteristic of the VPK program is aiming at results-based accountability (Finn Jr., http://www.teachmorelovemore.org/PDF/ktf_florida_book_229.pdf). That is to say, the VPK program judges the quality of a VPK provider by how well pre-kindergarten graduates fare in kindergarten. This point of view is different from the conventional opinion on how to measure the quality of preschool programs, which focuses on inputs, ratios, expenditures, and staff credentials. Thus, the results-based accountability of the VPK program contributes to increasing diversity and creativity of VPK providers, since VPK providers are able to be freed from different regulations related to money and time, providing they meet the VPK standards. The diversity of VPK providers gives all parents an opportunity to consider different conditions related to their family’s own needs and then select the most appropriate provider for their child. The fact that the VPK program gives all parents a chance to have their child participate in a high-quality learning experience is related to the fact that the VPK program is universal but voluntary. The VPK program is available to every four-year-old child residing in Florida and does not require the child’s citizenship. Since the VPK program remains optional, parents are told about the program but have no obligation to enroll their child. Thus, parents are able to choose a high-quality pre-kindergarten provider that has a positive effect on their child’s learning. This indicates that all VPK providers make an effort to meet the state’s high-quality prekindergarten standards. As a result, the state expects that a voluntary universal pre-kindergarten program leads to high participation rates as Oklahoma’s and Georgia’s pre-

The results-based accountability of the VPK program demands assessments that are well aligned to its standards. The state uses two assessment instruments: one instrument aims to assess children’s early literacy skills, such as letter naming and initial sounds; the other instrument is used by kindergarten teachers in order to measure children’s school readiness in a number of domains, including social, emotional, and cognitive domains. Thus, the VPK program particularly emphasizes literacy readiness, instead of addressing a child-care service for four-year-olds. In detail, the VPK program includes a curriculum that is developmentally appropriate, focuses on early literacy skills, and gets children ready for kindergarten based on standards adopted by the State Board of Education (Florida’s voluntary prekindergarten program, http://www.fldoe.org/earlylearning/vpkparent.asp). The VPK standards include seven domains, including health and social/emotional/motor development, language and communication, emergent literacy (reading readiness), cognitive development, and general knowledge. Also, the results-based accountability of the VPK program requires VPK teachers to be well educated and of good moral character. The VPK program demands that all lead VPK instructors must have a minimum of a Child Development Associate for the school year program and successfully complete an emergent literacy training course approved by the department. Emergent literacy training courses provide teachers with instructional strategies and techniques to develop pre-kindergarten children’s emergent literacy skills, including oral communication, knowledge of print and letters, phonemic and phonological awareness, and vocabulary and comprehension development. In order to examine all VPK instructors’ moral character, the VPK program
requires all instructors to be screened before employment and re-screened at least once every 5 years.

Moreover, the VPK program places strict limits on teacher-child ratios and class sizes. Based on the notion that low teacher-child ratios and small group sizes lead to a high-quality pre-kindergarten program, the VPK program requires one teacher to be responsible for at most 10 children, with a class size not to exceed 18 children. If one VPK class has 11 or more children, the class must have at least one additional instructor who is not required to have a Child Development Associate or complete an emergent literacy training course (State of Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation, http://www.floridajobs.org/earlylearning/VPK/FAQs.html). Thus, the VPK program usually takes place in the classroom where two teachers are responsible for 18 children. All of the three teachers who participated in this study teach 18 pre-kindergarten children with an assistant teacher or a co-teacher in the classroom. Also, the VPK program aims to provide the necessary resources to ensure that every class offers a high-quality learning environment that prepares children for kindergarten. That is to say, the VPK program expects that VPK providers provide pre-kindergarten children with well-equipped facilities suited to the needs of preschool-age children as well as sufficient toys, books, and materials.

Limitations of Florida’s Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) Program

This is the third year that the state has offered the VPK program, which provides every four-year-old child in Florida with free, publicly funded education in the year prior to kindergarten. However, the VPK program still shows many limitations even though many parents are putting their child in the program. Most of all, the VPK standards are poor; that is, among ten minimum standards that have been developed by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) for state-funded pre-kindergarten programs, the VPK program meets only four standards: early learning standards, maximum class size, staff-child ratio, and
monitoring (Barnett, Hustedt, Friedman, Boyd, & Ainsworth, 2007). Florida is among only seven states that meet less than half of NIEER’s quality benchmarks, and the VPK program is considered to have serious problems by NIEER (NIEER, 2008). The poor VPK standards are likely to result in a poor-quality VPK program, especially in the case of private VPK providers that are located in the area where the majority of the population lives in poverty. Since the VPK standards do not require the provider to improve the quality of its facilities, teachers, curricula, and other support services, the provider tends to use its poor facilities or curricula. Thus, children from low-income families are likely to learn in a poor-quality VPK program, even though they are taught the necessary skills for kindergarten.

Another limitation of the VPK program is its inadequate accountability system. The National Institute for Early Education Research (2006) points out that the Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screener – a tool for assessing the school readiness of all entering kindergarteners – is not classified as a rigorous evaluation design because “the Screener may or may not prove to yield accurate information about what children know when they start kindergarten” (NIEER, 2006). Thus, the NIEER states that it is unfair and unwise to link children’s Kindergarten Screener scores back to what children learned during the VPK year or to the VPK provider’s accountability. In addition, the VPK law requires that the state Department of Education must assess the school readiness of all entering kindergarteners according to state readiness standards and must “establish kindergarten readiness rates” (Wilkins, 2005, p. 4). Under the Florida system, a VPK provider is put on probation and is subject to intervention, if the provider does not meet its school readiness targets for two years. If a VPK provider fails to meet its targets for four years, the provider loses its eligibility to participate in the VPK program. This accountability system might lead VPK providers to prefer children from upper- and middle-
income families to children from low-income families. This is because those economically advantaged children are likely to have sufficient academic skills and be already prepared for kindergarten, and a VPK provider is able to easily meet its school readiness targets by enrolling those advantaged children.

As a result, both the poor VPK standards and an inadequate accountability system of the VPK program are likely to negatively influence the school readiness of children from low-income families. In particular, the VPK program, unlike most of the state-funded pre-kindergarten programs that make an effort to decrease the achievement gap between disadvantaged children and their advantaged peers, does not state clearly or specifically how to improve disadvantaged children’s school readiness. For example, New Jersey and Kentucky aim to provide children in poverty with free preschool education, and New Jersey law especially mandates free, high-quality preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds living in the state’s highest-poverty districts in order to remedy their socioeconomic disadvantages (State of Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation, http://www.floridajobs.org/earlylearning/VPK/WhyPreKimportant.html). However, the VPK program requires parents to be responsible for their child’s transportation. This is likely to prevent low-income families from choosing a high-quality pre-kindergarten provider that has a positive effect on their child’s learning. This is because the families might not be able to give their child a ride or to afford a car. This indicates that improving disadvantaged children’s school readiness needs more intensive and extensive services as well as more resources. Moreover, this indicates that the state needs to make a larger investment in the VPK program even though “money is not an adequate proxy for high quality” (Wilkins, 2005, p. 3). Thus, the school readiness of children from low-income families is unlikely to be significantly
increased by the VPK program that does not make a clear statement about how to improve disadvantaged children’s school readiness and is not supported by the state’s larger investment.

**Definitions**

In this research project “effective” teacher-child interaction is defined as the process that leads both teachers and children to solve their own problems through critical thinking. Also, “unilateral” teacher-child interaction is defined as the opposite of “effective” teacher-child interaction, and means that teacher authority over children prevents both teachers and children from critically thinking and independently solving problems.

From a traditional view of teacher-child interaction, effective teacher-child interaction means that teachers help children effectively learn and practice a set of skills and a body of knowledge to use in the wider society. Teachers determine what children must study, and children wait for teachers to tell them what to do. Thus, effective teacher-child interaction enables teachers to have children successfully follow the teachers’ directions and get good test results in school.

However, this traditional definition of effective teacher-child interaction is likely to lead children to passively accept what teachers utter and practice discipline without being aware of what is really happening. That is to say, children think and behave according to the teachers’ values and ideologies, which are deeply rooted in their own past experiences and reflect particular ideological patterns or social structures. This prevents children from being conscious of the world and themselves through their feelings and desires as well as from developing their abilities to realize and seize the world with their own intentions.

Thus, children need to develop their own critical-thinking and problem-solving skills in order to actively seek a better understanding of and improvement in the aspects of their schooling experiences in a collaborative and collegial way. Teachers need to help children
develop their critical-thinking and problem-solving skills through effective teacher-child interactions and eventually take their places in a participatory, democratic society. That is to say, effective teacher-child interaction contributes to developing the kinds of critical-thinking and problem-solving skills that are needed for children to eventually take their places in a participatory, democratic society. As a result, in this project “effective” teacher-child interaction is defined from a critical perspective, and the definition of “effective” teacher-child interaction – the process that leads both teachers and children to solve their own problems through critical thinking – is different from the traditional definition of effective teacher-child interaction.

The Problem

Using a feminist /critical theory interpretation, Edward and Westgate (1994) pointed out that the interactions between teachers and children in classrooms were normally “high in power and low in solidarity” (p. 28), and concluded that most of the conversations between teachers and children showed power relations between them. That is to say, teachers exercise unilateral teacher authority over children in order to force children to passively learn a body of knowledge through unequal communication between teachers and children.

In particular, DeVries and Zan (2005) characterize the unilateral teacher-child interactions as “coercion or constraint,” which indicates that children must follow “ready-made rules and instructions for behavior” set by teachers (p. 136). Teachers control children’s behavior and force children to respect them by using authority to socialize and instruct children. Thus, such respect is considered “a one-way affair,” since children’s behavior results from the values and beliefs of others rather than their own motivations or interests (DeVries & Zan, 2005, p. 136). Within the unilateral teacher-child interactions, teachers frequently use teacher-directed statements, such as “You need to sit down” or “You need to wait until I call your name” (Katz & McClellan, 1997).
In the case of traditional whole-class instruction, teachers mostly lead classroom talking, decide who is to talk, and normally evaluate what children are required or permitted to say. Also, teachers ask children a lot of questions and children answer very briefly, and most communication occurs within a “central action zone.” This kind of structured, teacher-directed instruction leads children to comply with what the leaders of society think as well as the status quo, since teachers force all children to move through “the same learning sequence” (Westwood, Knight, & Redden, 1997, p. 227). In addition, children have trouble getting opportunities to communicate their own thoughts, ideas, and feelings as well as to share their own stories and experiences with others.

As a result, the conversations between teachers and children resulting from the unilateral teacher-child interactions prevent young children from developing their abilities to solve problems; from recognizing and dealing with their own problems in their daily lives; and from articulating their experiences, thoughts, needs, ideas, and problems in classrooms.

**Importance of the Study**

The unilateral teacher-child interactions in child care settings allow children few opportunities to engage in developing their different abilities independently and actively by preventing teachers from effectively interacting with children. Taking into account the fact that effective teacher-child interactions in child care settings significantly contribute to children’s early learning and development, this problem is considered a threat to improving the quality of child care and other early childhood programs.

In particular, voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings tend to focus on children’s academic competence rather than the whole of essential skills for successful school readiness, such as self-regulatory skills. This tendency leads the conversations between teachers and children to aim at improving children’s academic outcomes rather than ranging over various
topics, including children’s own interests or problems. This indicates that children have few opportunities to develop their problem-solving skills. Furthermore, qualitative research methodologies have been rarely used for describing the teacher-child interactions themselves in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings. This allows teachers few opportunities to reflect on how they interact with children and what the nature of the teacher-child interactions is.

Thus, this study is important today because of (1) the possibility that teachers have scant knowledge of the nature of teacher-child interactions resulting from the characteristics of voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings; (2) the possibility that teachers are unaware of the unilateral teacher-child interactions or are incapable of changing the status quo; and (3) the lack of studies that explore the nature of teacher-child interactions and describe the detailed moment-to-moment encounters between teachers and children by using qualitative research methodologies.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research project is to investigate barriers to and facilitators of effective teacher-child interactions, as defined from a critical perspective, in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings. This ultimately aims to help teachers find ways to overcome the unilateral teacher-child interactions in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings and empower both themselves and children through effective teacher-child interactions.

**Guiding Research Question**

Based on the theoretical orientation of critical theory and postmodernism, the guiding research question is, “What kinds of barriers to and facilitators of effective teacher-child interactions do teachers face in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings?”
question is based on the notion that teachers as the oppressors force children to learn the
dominant culture and ideology via the interactions between themselves and children, and
teachers as the oppressed are forced to contribute to maintaining the social inequalities within the
hierarchical structure of schools.

Subjectivity Statement

I was born and grew up in the Korean society, which was extremely homogeneous in
terms of ethnicity, culture, and history, and was apt to be easily dominated by the ideology of the
mainstream society. Its homogeneity makes people follow dominant rules or viewpoints rather
than pursuing their own opinions or life styles, since people are afraid of being isolated from the
majority group by disobeying the norms of the dominant group. For example, I have been taught
to respect and not disobey seniors, including teachers, parents, and administrators. Especially
when I was a student in Korea, I could not imagine the possibility that teachers’ instruction was
wrong or that I could ask a teacher something before being called on by the teacher.
Furthermore, my parents absolutely supported teachers’ instruction as well as school directions
and made their children follow these directions without any exceptions. For instance, my parents
bought me whichever books teachers recommended and always let me participate in inside as
well as outside classroom activities. As a result, I totally trusted teachers’ one-sided perspectives
and one-way instruction in classrooms and learned conformity and passiveness rather than
critical thinking skills.

Contrary to my strong beliefs about teachers and schooling, I was sometimes
disappointed that teachers frequently expressed their complaints about the teaching profession in
classrooms. In particular, teachers complained that their salaries were lower than those of other
jobs and that they suffered from a lot of miscellaneous duties. I heard these kinds of complaints
more frequently when I attended the private high school than when I attended the public middle
school. This is because Korean private schools are controlled by both their foundations and the Korean government, while Korean public schools are dominated only by the Korean government in terms of teachers, textbooks, physical environments, facilities, equipment, and curricula. This means that these school systems are very hierarchically structured and prevent teachers from thinking creatively and critically as well as expressing their thoughts and opinions freely. Thus, I felt that teachers were identified as the lowest persons in the hierarchical organizations of schools even though they were classified as the highest position in each classroom.

In addition, in the 1970s and 1980s, I had been taught subjects with sixty or seventy students in the classroom in Korea. This physical environment forced teachers to consider one-way, cramming methods of teaching as the best way of instruction; for example, teachers had students memorize everything in textbooks, and students were not allowed to ask their teachers questions about the content of the textbooks. Teachers always said something in order to transmit knowledge, and students only listened to their instruction in order to get a good grade. I had never experienced or imagined teachers’ instruction based on dialogue, reflection, and communication. I had only written down teachers’ lectures from the beginning to the end. Some of the teachers regularly checked if students took notes and considered students’ abilities to write down clearly and accurately as one of the excellent students’ talents. I made every effort to exactly write down teachers’ lectures in class and spent a lot of time organizing and rewriting the lectures at home after class. Moreover, I was sometimes able to contact teachers in order to talk about my future like entering my next school, but rarely got in touch with teachers in order to discuss personal matters. When I was called on by teachers, I expected that I would be rebuked or warned rather than praised or encouraged.
In short, I had experienced distorted teacher-student relationships resulting from the characteristics of the unique Korean history and culture, and had no doubt about the relationships since they were taken-for-granted assumptions of society. Even though teaching in Korea is considered one of the most respected and competitive positions like a doctor or lawyer, teachers are unique in that they can be simultaneously classified as the “oppressed” and “oppressors” within the distorted teacher-student relationships. This is because teachers in the lowest position of the school organization have little power to solve the problems of schooling systematically and fundamentally, but as the most authoritative people in the classroom, they control students. Within the relationships, students as the oppressed have no opportunity to learn how to respect others’ diverse opinions and life styles, nor how to engage in a struggle against all forms of social injustice. Thus, from my experience, I am deeply conscious of the importance of the effective teacher-student relationships that empower both teachers and students.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter I will review the literature on teacher-child interactions as well as on pre-kindergarten programs, especially state-funded pre-kindergarten programs, by using the theoretical orientation of critical theory and postmodernism. By examining the effectiveness and limitations of state-funded pre-kindergarten programs, this literature review shows the general characteristics of state-funded pre-kindergarten programs that voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings are based on. This literature review includes how teacher-child interactions in child care settings play a significant role in children’s early learning and development. Also, this review presents how teacher-child interactions are influenced by different factors of child care settings and mainly consist of talk between teachers and children. In addition, this review looks at how teacher-child interactions are characterized as unilateral, as well as how the unilateral teacher-child interactions prevent children from being aware of their social reality and taking action to make changes in that reality. Finally, this review considers how teachers as the oppressed and oppressors are able to overcome the unilateral teacher-child interactions in child care settings by taking account of the causes and problems of the unilateral teacher-child interactions.

Critical Theory

Critical theory examines “the patterns and meanings enacted within and among people in specific social locations at specific points in history” and expresses “particular relations of culture, power, and identity” (Keenan, 2004, p. 540). It also assumes that “the relationship between concept and object and between signifier and signified is never stable or fixed and is often mediated by the social relations of capitalist production and consumption; that certain groups in any society and particular societies are privileged over others; that mainstream
research practices are generally, although most often unwittingly, implicated in the reproduction of systems of class, race, and gender oppression” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 304). From this perspective, all social interactions between teachers and students are characterized as hierarchically structured, since students want to be rewarded for exhibiting discipline, intellectual behavior, or hard work (Giroux, 1988). Teachers, as experts “possessing knowledge of and judgmental power over children,” transmit information to their children through structured curricula and specialized textbooks as well as interactions with children, and this professional behavior is guaranteed by “the existence of power as infused, as located within the knowledge and methods that we choose, and as potentially dangerous” (Canella, 2005, p. 30).

Thus, the interactions between teachers and children are considered one of the examples of “the conflicting relationship between social classes within an economy based on the exchange of commodities” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 23), involving how teachers maintain and exercise power as well as how children are resilient and resist that power (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999). This perspective looks different from a traditional view of teacher-child interaction, which is concerned with the most successful ways to learn a particular body of knowledge, to produce common moral judgment, and to provide school structures that reproduce the existing society (Giroux, 1988). From this traditional viewpoint, teachers are characterized as people who help children effectively learn a set of skills and a body of knowledge to use in the wider society, and children are mainly taught curriculum packages through teacher-child interactions as well as formal instruction in school as an instructional site.

In particular, the interactions between teachers and children play an important role in reproducing ideology, which contributes to maintaining the power of a dominant group by characterizing the interests of this dominant group as universally true beliefs (Brookfield, 2005).
According to Giroux (2001), ideology “digs beneath the phenomenal forms of classroom knowledge and social practices and helps to locate the structuring principles and ideas that mediate between the dominant society and the everyday experiences of teachers and students” (p. 161). Also, ideology is always produced, expressed, and accepted through particular social practices within a specific social context such as teachers’ daily routines in classrooms: making curricula, planning and teaching lessons, testing students, and communicating with students (Giroux, 2001). In particular, the interactions between teachers and children play a significant role in reproducing the dominant ideology, which values the knowledge and practices of the mainstream and devalues the knowledge of socially and culturally different groups. This is because the dominant ideology governs almost all the social practices in classrooms, including “gestures, body postures, seating arrangements, facial tics, and phrases that learners and teachers commonly utter” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 125), and children who spend most of the time in schools interacting with other children or teachers experience these social practices through the interactions with other children or teachers (Roselli, 2005). As a result, the interactions between teachers and children provide children with opportunities to learn the beliefs, values, and practices of a dominant class or group and to be acculturated to existing social structures, systems, and relations that mainly serve the interests of the dominant class or group.

Postmodernism

Critical theory explains that teachers, as experts privileged over children, exercise power in the classroom; that is, teachers transmit the dominant ideology of any society to their children through curricula and the interactions between teachers and children. By considering the relationship between teachers and children to be incompatible, critical theory clarifies the characteristics of the relationship between teachers and children. However, critical theory does not give details about how teachers’ power over children is exercised through teachers’ and
children’s activities or routines within different classroom settings. In child care settings, the organization and management of daily routines reflect teachers’ power over children and are very differently implemented by each teacher’s and school’s characteristics. For example, a teacher may allow children to spend more time playing outside rather than learning academic subjects, even though other teachers in the same school focus on children’s educational competence. This situation raises many questions, including why the teacher focuses on children’s free-play or how the teacher can use his or her own classroom schedule different from that of other teachers. Those questions are influenced by several elements in which the effects of teachers’ power over children are articulated. In particular, teachers currently interact with children from much more diverse ethnic, racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds than in the past (Zimiles, 2000). These children come to school with much different learning experiences and varied developmental needs. Within the situation when teachers need to work with children who are very different in many ways, the effects of teachers’ power over children are very different and need to be examined by considering differentiated interactions between teachers and children. Thus, in order to explain how teachers’ power over children is exercised differently within a specific classroom setting, this qualitative research project uses postmodernism as another theoretical orientation.

Postmodernism includes plural voices and narratives, which “emerge from historically specific struggles,” and emphasizes specific knowledge within “particular configurations of space, place, time, and power” (Giroux, 1988a, p. 15). Postmodernism includes “diversity, complexity, subjectivity, and multiple perspectives” (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p. 106), and it prefers “a process-driven” approach to education to “a product-driven” one (p. 184). That is to say, postmodernism assumes that “there are no fixed or value-free facts,” “no one interpretation is the
authoritative truth,” and “no one method is the method for understanding” (Leavitt, 1994, pp. 22-23). From this perspective, childhood as a social construction is always contextualized and socially determined in relation to time, place, and culture, rather than being natural or universal. Also, early childhood institutions and pedagogy are socially constructed rather than resulting from any objective, context-free, power-free, value-free, or universally true knowledge (Dahlberg et al., 1999). Knowledge is produced through a variety of experiences, which are constantly constructed and reconstructed. Thus, our knowledge of the past and the present is always relative and incomplete because the meanings of our experiences are differently interpreted according to when and how we understand our experiences. The postmodernist perspective pays attention to the relations between power and knowledge and emphasizes the notion that power and knowledge are correlative and always found together in “what is accepted as rational and truthful” (Usher & Edwards, 1994, p. 87). This is because the exercise of power itself results in emerging new bodies of knowledge and, in turn, “knowledge constantly induces effects of power” (Foucault, 1980, p. 52).

From this postmodernist perspective, the interactions between teachers and children play a vital role in how the relations between power and knowledge are produced, exercised, and resisted in classrooms. This is because power is exercised, reproduced, mediated, and resisted through discourses, which are articulated in the forms of knowledge that constitute the formal curricula as well as the social interactions between teachers and children in classrooms (Giroux, 1988). In other words, the interactions between teachers and children include a variety of discourses, and the discourses are governed by the power that determines “what counts as knowledge” and “what can be said and done by whom” (Ryan, 2005, p. 101), as well as by the power that controls such knowledge; for example, teachers’ authority makes text interpreted
through the storylines of their culture (Davies, 1993). Therefore, the interactions between teachers and children are characterized as social relations in which the relations between power and knowledge are continually exercised, produced, and articulated with “submissive subjects” and “a dependable body of knowledge” (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 295). This postmodernist perspective on the interactions between teachers and children indicates that the interactions are not “an actively negotiated set of social relations,” which enables children as co-constructor of knowledge, identity, and culture to participate in socially constructing and determining their own lives (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p. 49). Thus, the postmodernist perspective provides teachers with an opportunity to think about their own understanding of the discourses between themselves and children, as well as helps children to aggressively solve their own problems as active subjects by giving them a chance to construct and articulate their own knowledge.

**Rationale of Pre-Kindergarten Programs**

Pre-kindergarten programs aim to ensure that all pre-kindergarten-aged children, usually 3- and 4-year olds, have access to early learning for school success or school readiness. That is to say, pre-kindergarten programs enable children to experience school readiness skills, including physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, cognition and general knowledge, approaches toward learning, and language and communication. Thus, pre-kindergarten programs aim at helping all children get ready for formal schooling by providing social systems that affect children’s development and readiness for school, such as the health care system, education system, or child care system. In particular, pre-kindergarten programs pursue improving the school readiness of at-risk children by providing them with enriching learning experiences. This is related to the fact that children from chronically poor families are more seriously and consistently disadvantaged than those in transitory poverty and have the lowest scores on tests of language and school-readiness skills (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2001).
Research Network, 2005; Votruba-Drzal, Coley, & Chase-Lansdale, 2004). This is because they have rarely experienced adequate stimuli during the critical period of their cognitive development. In the case of the combination of low-quality child care and poor home learning environments, including maternal education and cognitive stimulation, children display serious externalizing behavior problems and low-level cognitive development. Thus, by providing at-risk children with opportunities to develop their readiness for school, pre-kindergarten programs prevent at-risk children from experiencing adverse outcomes resulting from childhood poverty, for example, low self-esteem, underachievement, and antisocial behavior.

The emphasis of pre-kindergarten programs on school readiness is based on the notion that the learning that takes place before the formal schooling significantly influences the learning that takes place afterward (Zigler, Gilliam, & Jones, 2006). In other words, individual children’s success throughout schooling and in adult life is critically affected by the type and quality of learning experiences provided during the preschool years. According to cost-benefit analysis (CBA), preschool attendance has short- and long-term positive effects on a variety of academic and social competencies, such as educational achievement and economic well-being into adulthood (Reynolds & Temple, 2006). In detail, preschool programs lead to a large reduction in grade retention, special education placement, and high school dropout rates. Thus, preschool programs contribute to reducing the need for future remedial school services including special education and grade retention as well as costs for administration and processing of crime cases or incarceration by preparing preschool graduates for less delinquency and fewer arrests in adulthood. In particular, high-quality child care positively affects the developmental outcomes of at-risk children and is likely to have a lasting impact on academic performance of the children. This is because high-quality child care allows at-risk children to have an opportunity to make up
for their poor learning experiences resulting from their poor home environments, even though high-quality child care does not directly lead to children’s positive developmental outcomes. For example, high-quality child care can help ethnic minority children to develop different skills to handle the current and unpredictable problems resulting from racism or discrimination in the society as well as to reinforce their racial and personal identities (Johnson, Jaeger, Randolph, Cause, Ward, & NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2003). As a result, pre-kindergarten programs are rooted in the notion that preschool programs play an important role in helping children expand their developmental outcomes through enriching learning experiences and, in particular, helping disadvantaged children enter school as well prepared as their advantaged peers.

School readiness needs multidimensional support as well as the abilities of children themselves, such as age-appropriate motor skills, emotional and behavioral regulation, adult and peer interaction skills, communication skills, and cognitive and academic skills (Neuman & Roskos, 2005; Zigler, Gilliam, & Jones, 2006). The multidimensional support includes family resources like good physical and mental health, school resources such as professional development for teachers, and community resources including high-quality child care (Zigler, Gilliam, & Jones, 2006). For example, children’s language and cognitive skills, which are important predictors of their school readiness, are linearly associated with child care quality, including teacher-child interactions. (Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Bryant, & Clifford, 2000; Burchinal, Roberts, Nabors, & Bryant, 1996; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2000; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2003; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2004a; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2004b; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network & Duncan, 2003; Parke, 2004; Peisner-Feinberg, Burchinal, Clifford, Culkin, Howes,
Kagan, & Yazejian, 2001). That is to say, caregivers’ language stimulation strongly influences children’s language and cognitive development, and high-quality child care is likely to provide children with more opportunities to verbally interact with caregivers. However, “more high-quality care does not lead to better outcomes and more low-quality care does not lead to worse outcomes in any simple linear way,” and early and extensive child care, in and of itself, is neither deleterious nor advantageous for children’s cognitive and language development (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2003, p. 467). This is because in reality, children are unlikely to consistently receive the same level of stimulation from caregivers during their routine activities like eating, napping, or free play. Also, children’s language and cognitive development is influenced by other sources of individual differences in children’s verbal abilities, such as gender, maternal vocabulary, maternal cognitive stimulation, supportive family environment, or family economic status, as well as child care quality. Therefore, children are able to develop school readiness skills through a variety of resources that affect their development and readiness for school.

**Effectiveness of State-Funded Pre-Kindergarten Programs**

Pre-kindergarten programs have grown as one type of effective preschool program to meet the school readiness needs of all children, and state-funded pre-kindergarten programs have become increasingly common across the nation. Several studies show that state-funded pre-kindergarten programs positively affect children’s developmental competence, including social, language, and academic skills (Barnett, Lamy, & Jung, 2005; Gilliam & Zigler, 2000; Gormley Jr., Gayer, Phillips, & Dawson, 2005; Gormley Jr. & Phillips, 2005; Jacobson, 2003; Howes, Burchinal, Pianta, Bryant, Clifford, & Barbarin, 2008; La Paro, Pianta, & Stuhlman, 2004; Starkey, Klein, & Wakeley, 2004). Based on children’s test scores, a study by Gilliam and Zigler (2000) demonstrates that state-funded pre-kindergarten programs have a great effect on
children’s overall developmental competence, including social-emotional and cognitive development, motor and language skills, and academic/literacy skills. The significant effects on language and academic/literacy skills are consistent in first grade. A study by Barnett, Lamy, and Jung (2005) also shows that the effects of state-funded pre-kindergarten programs on children’s language, literacy, and math skills are significantly meaningful, and the programs produce broad gains in children’s learning and development at kindergarten entry. For example, Oklahoma’s universal pre-kindergarten program has statistically significant effects on children’s pre-reading and reading skills, prewriting and spelling skills, and math reasoning and problem-solving abilities, making strong impacts on all racial and ethnic groups, including Hispanic, Black, White, and Native American, across full-day and half-day programs (Gormley Jr., Gayer, Phillips, & Dawson, 2005).

However, state-funded pre-kindergarten programs produce limited gains in motor skills and no gains in social-emotional development, such as the development of pro-social behavior and motivation to learn (Gormley Jr. & Phillips, 2005). A study by Gilliam and Zigler (2000) shows that positive impacts of the programs are seldom observed in the domains of parent involvement, social development, and behavioral problems. As for the reason for these situations, Gormley Jr., Gayer, Phillips, and Dawson (2005) insist that state-funded pre-kindergarten programs consistently emphasize academic instruction in classrooms rather than a balance between test scores and other classroom activities, even though pre-kindergarten classrooms typically have a pleasant, warm atmosphere related to teacher sensitivity and effective behavior management (La Paro, Pianta, & Stuhlman, 2004). In addition, Gilliam and Zigler (2000) say, “Impact evaluations of state-funded preschool programs vary considerably in their domains of interest, evaluation methodologies, and findings” (p. 465). For example, some
evaluations consist of as little as a pretest and post-test of participants, while others use comparison groups of varying resemblance to the participants. Barnett et al. (2005) also say that the most difficult problem of the evaluations is “possible selection bias due to unmeasured differences between the children who attend state-funded preschool programs and those who do not” (p. 3). Especially in the case of universal pre-kindergarten programs, it is difficult to obtain an adequate comparison group since the programs are freely available to all children and few children are not engaged in the programs. Thus, various evaluations of state-funded pre-kindergarten programs prevent researchers from gaining best estimates of program impacts or certainty about the effectiveness of the programs. Nevertheless, several studies provide scientific evidence that state-funded pre-kindergarten programs positively contribute to improving the learning and development of at-risk children as well as other children and improving their preparation for the increasingly rigorous challenges of kindergarten.

**Limitations of State-Funded Pre-Kindergarten Programs**

First, state-funded pre-kindergarten programs tend to focus on children’s cognitive development rather than the whole of child characteristics considered essential for successful school readiness, like self-regulatory skills (Francis, 2006; Neuman, 2003). In particular, Francis (2006) points out that the programs help children increase their reading and mathematics skills at school entry, but the programs boost children’s classroom behavioral problems, such as fighting, arguing, or disturbing others, and reduce their self-control, such as controlling their temper, accepting peer ideas for group activities, or responding to peer pressure in an appropriate way. These negative behavioral effects continue until the spring of first grade, while the positive effects of the programs on skills largely dissipate. In fact, these negative behaviors are likely to do some damage to their academic achievement in later years, because socially negative behaviors in classrooms are associated with poorer attitude toward learning and lower
competence in social-emotional motivation for school readiness (Fantuzzo, Bulotsky-Shearer, Fusco, & McWayne, 2005). Moreover, a study by Espinosa and Laffey (2003) demonstrates that children’s academic competence is strongly correlated with teachers’ ratings of social skills at the kindergarten level. For example, children who are rated as high for behavioral problems are rated as low for academic ability by teachers. Thus, children who display behavioral problems are less likely to conform to teacher expectations or to establish a warm, positive relationship with teachers and are more likely to be underestimated in their academic potential. As a result, state-funded pre-kindergarten programs do not show sufficient evidence that the programs contribute to improving children’s long-term educational outcomes.

Second, the levels of support services of state-funded pre-kindergarten programs are very different according to where the classroom happens to be located (Gilliam, 2005; Kaplan, 1998). Early learning standards vary widely across states in their organizations, structures, resources, and audiences for which they are intended, since early learning standards in states reflect their own unique characteristics (Neuman & Roskos, 2005). In terms of income eligibility, administrative structure and site, funding program standards like staffing and curriculum, child care programs, and evaluation strategies, one state’s program is not totally similar to that of another state (Kaplan, 1998). These different levels of support service of state-funded pre-kindergarten programs cause unclear standards or procedures for the programs. For example, since the programs do not include clear procedural guidelines regarding the discipline of pre-kindergarteners, the expulsion rates in state-funded pre-kindergarten systems are high and vary according to classroom settings (Gilliam, 2005). The expulsion rates are the lowest in classrooms located in public schools and Head Start and are the highest in faith-affiliated centers, for-profit childcare, and other community-based settings. In particular, four-year-olds are expelled at a rate
about 1.5 times greater than three-year-olds; boys are expelled at a rate over 4.5 times that of
girls; and African-American children who attend state-funded pre-kindergarten programs are
about twice as likely to be expelled as Latino and Caucasian children. The lowest expulsion rates
are reported by the teachers that have an ongoing, regular relationship with a mental health
consultant, who is able to provide classroom-based strategies for dealing with challenging
children behaviors. In other words, the high expulsion rates are caused by the special conditions
of each pre-kindergarten classroom or teachers’ subjective judgment rather than the clear
standards and procedures for the discipline of pre-kindergarteners.

Third, teacher qualifications vary widely by setting; for example, education levels of pre-
kindergarten teachers in public schools are higher than those of teachers in nonpublic school
settings (Clifford, Bryant, & Early, 2005; Neuman, 2003). Also, teacher credentialing
requirements, which represent minimum standards, vary greatly: twenty-four states require
teachers in state-funded pre-kindergarten programs to have a bachelor’s degree; four states
require a two-year college degree; eleven states require a Child Development Associates
credential; and California requires twenty-four credits related to early childhood education
(National Prekindergarten Center, 2004). In addition, teachers’ majors and licensing vary both by
state and time, and thus, teaching certification requirements change over time and today’s
licensed teachers do not necessarily meet today’s certification requirements. As a result, wide
variation in teacher qualifications and teacher credentialing requirements indicates that the
quality and level of state-funded pre-kindergarten programs vary widely, and some children who
are involved in the programs are less likely to be actively taught by qualified teachers than
others. By and large, well-trained teachers in early childhood education are defined as people
who get a minimum of a bachelor’s degree with specialized training (Zigler, Gilliam, & Jones,
Teachers with more years of education and more specialized training in early childhood have been shown to have higher-quality, less authoritarian teaching practices than teachers with lower educational attainment. The teachers are also able to be more sensitive to children’s needs and create a more stimulating learning environment. This indicates that higher education and specialized training in early childhood enable teachers to gain the necessary skills to facilitate children’s learning, manage classroom environments, and involve parents in classroom activities. However, in reality, many states have difficulty in finding enough teachers who meet these minimum standards or who are trained and highly skilled in developing children’s school readiness.

Lack of qualified teachers in state-funded pre-kindergarten programs as well as in the overall early childhood field is strongly associated with the fact that teacher wages vary greatly by several school characteristics like school size, locale, region, and poverty concentration (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). For example, the wages of teachers in public schools are much higher (about $27 an hour) than in nonpublic school settings (about $13 an hour) (Clifford et al., 2005). Also, wages in early childhood education tend to increase a little over time, and the situation is worse for preschool teachers who serve the most at-risk children. As one of the most robust predictors of the quality of the classroom learning environment, teacher wages significantly predict classroom process quality, which involves social, emotional, physical, and instructional elements of interactions with young children, even after teacher-child ratio, group size, and teacher education are controlled (Zigler, Gilliam, & Jones, 2006). Teacher wages play a significant role in predicting classroom quality for children of all ages, since they contribute to the stability of care and the consistency of teacher-child interactions, which are associated with program quality and child development (Clifford et al., 2005). In fact, teachers
who are more educated are paid more and are likely to stay at their jobs longer than those who are less educated and paid less (National Prekindergarten Center, 2004). Thus, the link between wages and turnover is understandable and undeniable because better wages and benefits reduce teacher turnover. Both wages and turnover are clearly associated with program quality and child development since good programs are characterized by smaller group sizes, lower teacher-child ratios, more secure teacher-child interactions, and more educational activities.

Finally, the population of pre-kindergarten teachers is not nearly as diverse as the population of children in state-funded pre-kindergarten programs; for example, 44% of children are Black or Latino, but just 27% of teachers so identify themselves (Clifford et al., 2005; Saluja, Early, & Clifford, 2002). In reality, most of the pre-kindergarten teachers are still White and are not well matched with the ethnic/racial diversity of children in state-funded pre-kindergarten programs. Moreover, the percentage of teachers from minority backgrounds in early education and care programs has decreased since 1990, even though the early childhood workforce should reflect the increasing cultural diversity of children in early childhood programs (Saluja et al., 2002). The high rates of ethnic minority children in state-funded pre-kindergarten programs reflect the relation between poverty concentration and minority enrollment; that is, schools with a high minority enrollment are more likely to have a high concentration of poverty (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). Thus, state-funded pre-kindergarten programs consider children with limited English proficiency as one of the most vulnerable groups for poor educational outcomes (National Prekindergarten Center, 2004). This is because “low family income, low maternal education, and low English proficiency are all considered key demographic risk factors for the development of social and emotional problems” (Zigler, Gilliam, Jones, & Malakoff, 2006, p. 78). However, few professional development programs for
pre-kindergarten teachers include training in understanding, facilitating, and assessing children’s second-language acquisition, and there are few qualified teachers who speak the different languages used by children from many different cultures. This indicates that pre-kindergarten teachers have difficulty in effectively addressing children’s diverse cultural and linguistic needs with a wide range of experiences and skills as well as in being competent or sensitive to multilingual/multicultural issues.

**Teacher-Child Interactions in Child Care Settings**

The topic of teacher-child interactions in child care settings has only recently been focused on by researchers; that is, researchers have begun to carefully observe and analyze daily teacher-child interactions within the last 20 years. Recent research on teacher-child interactions has characterized the significant role of teacher-child interactions in children’s early learning and development as the crux of child care quality. For example, a study by Kontos, Howes, Shinn, and Galinsky (1995) demonstrates that both parents and teachers consider a warm, caring, responsive interaction between teachers and children, a safe environment, and good communication between parents and teachers as the crux of child care quality. In particular, teachers and parents say that a warm and caring interaction between teachers and children is “high on most peoples’ list of what they hope for in child care” (Kontos et al., 1995, p. 65). This is because the interaction provides children with a powerful context for early learning and development by enabling the children to learn about “self, others, the physical environment, and the cultural contexts within which these occur” and to develop the strategies, propensities, and perceptions of those issues (McCollum & Bair, 1994, p. 88).

As for the importance of teacher-child interactions in child care settings, many studies show that the quantity and quality of teacher-child interactions affect children’s social and emotional competence as well as the characteristics of classroom environments (Churchill, 2003;
This is because children are able to learn how to interact with other adults and peers through the ways they interact with teachers, and classroom settings are influenced by the nature and form of specific practices related to the qualities of teacher-child interactions, such as how sensitively teachers interact with children and how efficiently teachers encourage children to engage in learning behaviors (La Paro, Pianta, & Stuhlman, 2004). According to Howes et al. (1994), teacher-child interactions include different aspects, such as emotional security, dependency, and socialization, because teachers play very different roles in children’s classroom experiences, such as playmates, teachers, managers, and caregivers. Therefore, children interact with teachers in different places in different ways, and the types of teacher-child interactions are different and are influenced by different factors, including children’s behaviors and characteristics, gender, or teachers’ perceptions of children’s characteristics. In the case of Howes’ five-year longitudinal study (2000), teachers generally believe that the second-grade children who show less aggressive and disruptive behaviors with peers tend to keep closer teacher-child interactions, and children who have high behavioral problems and low teacher-child closeness in preschool classrooms are more likely to show high aggressive behaviors with peers and low teacher-child closeness as second graders. A study by Blankemeyer, Flannery, and Vazsonyi (2002) also demonstrates that children who highly value the teacher-child interactions are less likely to behave aggressively and more likely to show their social competence.

Especially in child care settings, positive teacher-child interactions encourage children to participate in different cooperative activities in classrooms as well as to actively accomplish their learning at school (Webster-Stratton, 1999). By and large, children in child care settings keep different patterns of interactions with different teachers (Howes & Ritchie, 2002). That is to say,
children interact with the morning teacher, the afternoon teacher, and the assistant teachers, and each interaction between a child and a teacher has a particular pattern. Whenever a new teacher comes to a classroom, a child and the teacher construct a new relationship and the relationship develops with a certain pattern in their environment. Thus, children who have experienced negative interactions with teachers are likely to distrust teachers or other adults and to have fewer opportunities to learn social skills than any other children. A study by Ashiabi (2000) shows that caregiver-child interactions play an important role in identifying children’s emotions in social interactions with peers as well as children’s affective displays, negotiation skills, and abilities to learn classroom regulations and perceive their expectancies. Children who have secure interactions with caregivers are able to display accurately both positive and negative feelings in all situations, as well as to see their surroundings as responsive, stable, and secure (Cicchetti, Ganiban, & Barnett, 1991; Katz & McClellan, 1997). As a result, the dependability and responsiveness of the caregiver affect the quality of the caregiver-child interaction and lead to different caregiver’s expectations for children, which differently have an impact on children’s later expression of emotion and regulation of emotion (Sroufe, 1996).

Several studies show that teacher-child interactions in preschool strongly affect children’s later developmental outcomes (Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Pianta, & Howes, 2002; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Howes, 2000; Peisner-Feinberg, Burchinal, Clifford, Culkin, Howes, Kagan, & Yazejian, 2001; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). A study by Hamre and Pianta (2001) shows that early teacher-child interactions are unique predictors of children’s academic and behavioral outcomes in early elementary school. Especially in the case of the children who have high levels of behavioral problems in kindergarten, the kindergarten teachers’ perceptions of conflict and over-dependency are related to their behavioral and academic problems through eighth grade. In
addition, Pianta and Stuhlman (2004) emphasize that teacher-child interactions affect children’s abilities to acquire the necessary skills for school success and are strongly associated with changes in each child’s acquiring social and academic skills. In terms of children’s behavioral development inside and outside of the school setting, teachers perceive children who are more troublesome and have less close interactions with them as having internalized problems at high levels. Thus, teachers are apt to passively interact with those children, and the children are likely to have few opportunities to engage in academic activities and talk about procedural matters with teachers. This is strongly associated with the fact that teacher-child interactions are significantly related to several aspects of children’s behaviors toward teachers as well as those of teachers’ behaviors toward children (Stuhlman & Pianta, 2001). For example, the more often teachers mention compliance to children, the less they show positive affect towards those children, and the less teachers express negative affect towards children, the more the children show self-reliant attitudes. Thus, teachers and children are able to mutually hold positive or negative beliefs and expectations of one another, and these beliefs and expectations are reinforced by their behavioral interactions.

**Nature of Teacher-Child Interactions**

First of all, the quality of teacher-child interactions is influenced by several factors, including class size, teacher-child ratio, and teachers’ perceptions about teacher-child interactions. In the case of class size and teacher-child ratio, many studies show that teacher-child interactions are more extensive and personalized in smaller classes, and peer interactions are more extensive and personalized in larger classes (Blatchford, 2003; Kontos et al., 1995; National institute of child health and human development, Early child care research network, 2002; Stipek, 2004; Wylie & Thompson, 2003). In addition, a low teacher-child ratio leads to the classrooms that provide more emotional support; children in these classrooms engage in
academic activities more actively and interact with peers more positively (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, Early child care research network, 2002). As for teachers’ perceptions about teacher-child interactions, a study by Howes and Hamilton (1992a) shows that teachers are most sensitive to and involved with children who have a secure interaction with them, and they are least sensitive to and involved with children who have an avoidant interaction with them. Especially in the case of children with disabilities or at-risk children, teachers view the intellectual abilities and behaviors of these children less favorably than those of typical children, and interact with the children negatively and inappropriately (Chapman, Larsen, & Parker, 1979; McKinney & Feagans, 1983). Also, the ways that teachers teach and organize children and tasks influence the quality of teacher-child interactions. A study by Stipek (2004) shows that more didactic and less constructivist teaching is particularly prevalent in schools and classrooms with a high proportion of low-income children, children of color, and poorly-achieving children. This situation results from teachers’ beliefs that “sequentially ordered curricula that maximize the teacher’s direct control over learning opportunities are best suited to these children” (p. 552), and directly results in a big class size or a high teacher-child ratio, which is likely to cause insecure, inappropriate teacher-child interactions.

Second, the styles of teacher-child interactions are different depending on types of activity settings, such as group activity, free play, and meal time. In the case of book reading as a group activity, an observational study by Dickinson (2001b) shows that teachers mainly interact with children for the purpose of instruction, for example, “asking children to attend, taking steps to control their behavior, evaluating children’s responses, and, when necessary, correcting their incorrect responses” (p. 247). That is to say, teachers typically interact with children in book
reading sessions by asking questions to get specific answers from children and by evaluating the children’s responses as being right or wrong (Dickinson, 2001a). Also, a qualitative and quantitative study by Kontos (1999) demonstrates that a sample of teachers mostly interact with children during free play by helping children engage in play, providing different materials, suggesting the use of materials, and physically assisting children who are using the materials. Most of the teacher-child interactions are concerned with objects in children’s play and children’s use of materials rather than children’s behavior management or peer relations. As for teacher-child interactions during meal time, Cote’s (2001) observational study conducted in a Head Start program shows that teachers have an opportunity to hear each child’s voice at a small table, ask questions and pursue topics of interest, and provide each child with a chance to engage in conversation. By using a large variety of common words as well as novel or rare words and by modeling polite forms of speech to children like “Okay, thank you for tasting” during meal time (Cote, 2001, p. 207), teachers help children develop their social and language abilities. In particular, an observational study by Gest, Holland-Coviello, Welsh, Eicher-Catt, and Gill (2006) demonstrates that 65% (24/37) of all teachers engage in “decontextualized talk” – “talk about people, places, things, and events that are not present” – during meal time (p. 304), compared to 43% (16/37) of teachers during book reading and 35% (13/37) during free play. Thus, teacher-child interactions during meal time contribute to children’s language development by enabling teachers to involve children in linguistically challenging conversations about objects and events that are not present through sustained face-to-face contact.

Third, the majority of the teacher-child interactions in child care settings consist of talk between teachers and children. This is because most of the teacher behaviors across a range of daily activities in child care settings are communicative, and a large majority of the
Communicative behaviors include interactions with children. Talk is a key medium for all kinds of interactions in classrooms and represents a large portion of what occurs between teachers and children, but most of the talk in classrooms is done by the teacher. The findings of Walker and Meighan’s (1986) study demonstrate that teachers regularly take control of “who talks to whom about what in the classroom dialogue,” and this can negatively influence children’s identity development (p. 158). For example, even when children talk to each other in classrooms, the teacher controls the “officially sanctioned or privately established conversations” by managing the content or direction of talk (p. 157). Also, children play a secondary role in talking to teachers because they have few opportunities to initiate talk or introduce topics, make statements, ask questions, and make evaluations and judgments. However, the teachers in a study by Girolametto and Weitzman (2002) carry on child-oriented conversations with children regardless of the children’s ages or language abilities. Also, a study by Gest et al. (2006) demonstrates that teachers who most frequently talk to children and use “the most challenging forms of talk” are rated by observers as warmer and more sensitive (p. 309), and a book reading session in a Head Start classroom has a high level of rich and challenging child-directed talk as well as a richness of teachers’ spontaneous utterances. This indicates that the book reading session in a Head Start classroom is considered the most dependable time to provide children with a wealth of linguistic stimulation and can contribute to improving children’s oral language skills. The study also provides evidence that teachers’ “pretend talk” – “talk used to give objects nonreal characteristics or otherwise participate in episodes of pretend play with children” – occurs almost exclusively during free play, while teachers’ “decontextualized talk” is most common during meal time (Gest et al., 2006, p. 303). Thus, each activity setting includes distinctive patterns of “cognitively challenging talk” (Gest et al., 2006, p. 309), and the amount and type of teacher talk
are closely associated with children’s learning and development and play an important role in predicting how sensitively the environment stimulates children to learn. As a result, teachers differently talk to children according to classroom activity settings, even though they generally use a certain familiar style of speech modes and language patterns.

Unilateral Interactions between Teachers and Children

From the theoretical orientation of critical theory and postmodernism, teacher-child interactions in child care settings demonstrate unilateral characteristics resulting from teacher authority over children, and the unilateral teacher-child interactions in child care settings negatively influence children’s developmental outcomes. In a study of real-life conversations in a traditional school, Hayes and Matusov (2005) observe that when a child does not produce the expected answer, the teacher usually rejects the child’s answer as incorrect in order to elicit the correct answer she already knows. That is to say, the teacher is concerned with affirming the truth she already possesses rather than accepting others’ truth that does not fit her truth. This does not apparently contribute to children’s better understanding of the world because they have no opportunity to reflect on their answers and act on their own perspectives. Similarly, a study by Gale and Cosgrove (2004) shows that a child is devalued and disempowered because his words like “Dunno,” “Gotta,” and “Yeah” are continually corrected by the teacher (p. 129). The words are “wrong” according to the teacher’s knowledge and school norms, and thus, the teacher’s power forces the child to say the “right” words that the teacher already knows, but the child does not know. A study by Girolametto, Weitzman, van Lieshout, and Duff (2000) shows that teachers commonly dominate the conversation by using frequent verbal turns during a group activity in child care settings, and this prevents children from speaking frequently, saying different words, and using multiword combinations. Even when teachers praise children in the form of a reward, such as “You did a great job,” “You’re the best student,” and “You did terrific
on your presentation,” the teacher-child interactions are characterized as unilateral (Evans, 1991, p. 263). This is because praise “conveys a lack of faith in human nature” and is based on the belief that children can do something only “through external evaluations leading to reward and punishment” (p. 261). As a result, the unilateral teacher-child interactions lead children to “lower productivity” and “put teachers in power struggles with” children by forcing children to learn obedience to authority and follow orders rather than thinking for themselves (p. 262).

A study by Leavitt and Power (1989) shows how this unilateral interaction between teachers and children in child care settings influences children’s daily experiences in classrooms. For example, caregivers deny the legitimacy of children’s emotions and often treat the children as if they cannot “interpret and understand their own and others’ emotions,” and are “unfeeling objects, unaware of or indifferent to the caregivers’ negative assessments” (p. 37). Caregivers ignore, deny, or reject children’s deep emotions, and instead, they are concerned with children’s performances and children’s appropriate behaviors in their everyday interactions. As a result, children experience incongruence between their deep emotions and their surface emotions because they are taught to “suppress, deny, and rework their deep emotions into incongruent surface displays” rather than to appropriately express their feelings, especially negative feelings like anger, frustration, boredom, and sadness (p. 39). This study demonstrates that unilateral teacher authority over children prevents teachers from understanding children’s emotions clearly, interacting with children authentically, and developing the ability to see the children’s experiences from the children’s viewpoints. Leavitt (1994) indicates that caregivers’ routine tasks, such as endlessly repeated diaper changing and feeding, make them feel the emotional stresses of their work. This leads them to passively react to children’s requests, lose interest in children’s needs, and become separated from children’s feelings. This emotional alienation felt
by caregivers allows caregivers to exercise negative power, which refers to “the ways they control, punish, and ignore children” in order to simply compel children’s surface behaviors (p. 65).

In conclusion, the interaction between teachers and children, as an activity in which they interpret each other’s intentions as well as a discourse set within a broader context, reflects the teacher’s dominant position over the child (Fisher, 2005). That is to say, teachers are considered experts “possessing knowledge of and judgmental power over children” (Canella, 2005, p. 30). Teachers are also considered to be able to have access to particular programs, create changes using power, strengthen the current distribution of power, and possess knowledge to fortify the status quo (Merriam, 2002). Thus, the daily routine in classrooms includes teachers making decisions about curricula, methodology, individual children and their needs and problems, classroom management, and personal and professional morals (Reagan, Case, & Brubacher, 2000). Also, teachers judge children’s feelings and thoughts according to their values and ideologies, determine the quality of children’s work, and force children to think and behave according to the rules and standards they expect. However, children are rarely involved in “the creation of goals, objectives, and expectations of the course” (Breunig, 2005, p. 115), spending most of their time carrying out school tasks which allow them to find and give right answers they think the teacher wants (Calderhead, 2003). As a result, through the formal curricula as well as the social interactions with children in classrooms, teachers exercise unilateral teacher authority over their children in order to force the children to passively learn what they want their children to know. This unequal interaction between teachers and children is repeatedly produced. This is because power is embedded in discourses and is exercised, reproduced, mediated, and resisted
through discourses that convey the specific needs, problems, and concerns of everyday life, as well as represent an ideological structure related to particular interests and social relations.

**Causes of the Unilateral Interactions between Teachers and Children**

First of all, teachers themselves are “domesticated by their own schooling” (Stokes, 1997, p. 214), which forces students to follow “no-talking rules” all day long, which lead to the absence of self-expression (Hankins, 1999, p. 64). Students are encouraged to sit and listen rather than speak, as well as to simply obtain a piece of information that has already been discovered and categorized by experts (Hinchey, 2001). Thus, students who are accustomed to “the bond of shared silences” do not express their own experiences (Hankins, 1999, p. 64). It is hardly surprising that this experience forces student teachers to “be passive, conforming, authoritative, inflexible, unimaginative, apolitical, and silent” in schools, including colleges of education (Hinchey, 2001, p. 134), as well as to learn the cultural value system that “their work is far less important than that of doctors, of lawyers – and even, judging by income comparisons, less important than the work of plumbers” (p. 24). That is to say, teachers are not encouraged to view themselves as intellectuals and their work or knowledge as politically and socially constructed, but instead as merely given (Stokes, 1997). In particular, teacher training programs allow student teachers to acquire the knowledge of what they have to teach, as well as to practice different methods, techniques, and skills in order to efficiently transmit such knowledge to their students. Thus, Stokes (1997) says that “the language of teacher training is the language of methods, materials, objectives, skills, schedules, grouping, tracking, discipline, tests, diagnosis, disabilities, deficits, interventions, remediation, and so on,” since student teachers are trained to compel their students to “acquire skills that can be evaluated efficiently through standardized tests” by managing their students’ behaviors (p. 202). In summary, teachers themselves are taught a body of knowledge, which is guaranteed by the authority and power of schools, through
the process of being silenced, and they force their children to learn both such knowledge and the process of knowing through the unilateral interactions between themselves and children as well as different regulations such as punishment, assessment, promotion, and graduation.

Second, teachers are powerless against the dominant ideology in classrooms, which refers to “patterns of beliefs and values shared by the majority of individuals” (McLaren, 1998, p. 182). The dominant ideology in classrooms determines what knowledge is worth the most or what it means to know something; specifically, the dominant ideology determines what books teachers may use or what values and beliefs teachers should transmit to their students (Breunig, 2005; McLaren, 1998). Especially in the United States, the white society’s ways of “thinking, living, and relating with people of color” are considered a standard for “what is right, what is good, and what is true” (McIntyre, 1997, p. 135), and schools reward and reinforce “the norms, standards, and educational models set by white academics and institutions” through diverse techniques of normalizing, such as observation, measurement, classification, regulation, and assessment (McIntyre, 1997, p. 13). A study by Gitlin (2001) shows that teachers underutilize their autonomy because of the state core curriculum, textbooks, and prepackaged curricula, and these limit their abilities to “act on and even transform pedagogical relations, forms of legitimate knowledge, and cultural canons” (p. 254). Moreover, since teachers have lots of “clerking-type tasks” like grading practices during the school day, they do not have time to obtain “an intimate knowledge of their students” and cannot help but repeat “a defensive, fact-oriented curriculum” (p. 254). In short, the teachers’ work becomes characterized as a deskilling job through “tighter management control and packaged curricula” (Connell, 1994), and prevents teachers from stepping back from their classroom practices and considering broader educational concerns or employing a more holistic view of teaching (Gitlin, 2001). As a result, the teachers’
powerlessness against the dominant ideology and lack of control over their work commonly result in teachers putting into place a defensive form of teaching. Moreover, such defensive teaching is completed through the unilateral interactions between teachers and children, since unilateral teacher authority over their children can easily force children to passively learn traditional textbooks that are designed to keep a white, male, European-American model as a cultural standard.

Third, teachers as the oppressed are accustomed to the structure of domination and want to convert “their characteristic ways of living and behaving” into those of the oppressors, showing “a lack of confidence in the people’s ability to think, to want, and to know” (Freire, 1970/2001, pp. 60-61). In other words, teachers as “victims of a systematic culture of oppression and misinformation” have been “socially, politically, and culturally oppressed into thinking that they are incapable of changing their working environments or their approaches to teaching and learning” (Figueroa-Britapaja, 2002, p. 264). For example, through school structures like school meeting – faculty meetings, parent-teacher meetings, and subject area or interdisciplinary team meetings, teachers face the unequal distribution of power within the school or the inequity of school decision-making processes. Teachers feel their lack of confidence, knowledge, and power through the meetings, since they face the expectations of parents and school administrators or the accountability for students’ scores on required tests (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 1993; Gitlin, 2001). The teachers’ autonomy, in terms of goals, pedagogy, and content, is constrained by these common structures, even though school meetings simply aim to communicate, solve trivial problems, and facilitate planning (Gitlin, 2001). In the case of child care settings, teachers are often excluded from decision-making processes, for example, deciding on how many infants the caregivers will be responsible for (Leavitt, 1994). Also, teachers interact with parents somewhat
negatively because of arguments about the way to care for the child, cost, and being late to pick up the child, and thus, most teachers have felt criticized by parents (Kontos, 1995). As a result, teachers have unequal access to school decision-making processes, such as “what kinds of people will teach which grades and subjects” or “what kind of people will be responsible for policies governing classroom activity” (Hinchey, 2004, p. 25). This indicates that teachers rarely have an opportunity to voice their opinions on educational reform, which refers to correcting a real problem that impacts children’s lives through the authentic interactions between teachers and children as well as among children (Roselli, 2005). Instead, teachers are apt to keep the unilateral interactions between themselves and children, as they are accustomed to the structure of domination already existing in schools.

Problems of the Unilateral Interactions between Teachers and Children

Children learn to manifest personality types willing to accept the characteristics of the social relationships that govern the structures of the workplace, such as conformity, passivity, and obedience (Giroux, 2001), by being accustomed to unilateral teacher authority over them and experiencing a patience that is rooted in an unwarranted submission to authority. For example, a study by Leavitt (1994) shows that the arrangement of the rooms in child care settings is determined by the necessity of custodial routines, and all the aspects of children’s lives, including sleeping, playing, and eating, are conducted in one place according to the shared authority of the caregivers. This arrangement of the physical environment is interpreted as “enclosure,” a space “closed in upon itself” (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 141), and indicates that children’s mobility is limited within certain boundaries and is controlled by the caregivers’ management of routines and their exercise of power. Thus, the arrangement of the rooms and materials enables children to practice discipline, which organizes the space at the same time (Foucault, 1975/1995). The societal regulatory practices lead children to passively accept what
teachers utter and to learn knowledge which constitutes “what is taken to be true” rather than knowledge which authentically reveals and represents the real world (Usher & Edwards, 1994, p. 87). In other words, unilateral teacher authority over children forces children to be taught the norms, values, and beliefs that contribute to reinforcing the current distribution of power in society, such as conformity, passivity, and obedience, by leading children to practice discipline without being aware of what is happening.

Moreover, children have a variety of negative emotions like “self-doubt, hostility, resentment, boredom, indignation, cynicism, disrespect, frustration, and the desire to escape” by learning the dominant curriculum in traditional classrooms, since children are forced to passively learn the curriculum through unilateral teacher authority over them (Shor, 1992, p. 23). The dominant curriculum is considered a key source of educational inequality because the curriculum is historically derived from the educational practices of European upper class men (Connell, 1994). That is to say, as “outcomes of struggles over power, authority, and legitimacy, which are decided in historically specific ways,” the dominant curriculum plays a vital role in reinforcing already existing inequality among children (Leonardo, 2003, p. 242). Also, the dominant curriculum does not consider that schooling includes “the complex political, economic, and cultural relations that structure it as a borderland of movement and translation” (Giroux, 1999, p. 37). Thus, each child’s voice is dominated by the privileged voices of the white middle and upper classes even though it has been shaped by his or her particular cultural and historical backgrounds (McLaren, 1998), and the discourse of children from subordinate classes is considered “ugly, inferior, and incorrect” speech, precisely in “the so-called multicultural societies where the language and hegemonic culture smash and belittle the language and culture of the so-called minorities” (Freire, 1993, p. 135). Even the NAEYC’s (National Association for
the Education of Young Children) guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice, which are commonly considered the most suitable methods for developing children’s different abilities, do not reflect “the qualities of diversity,” since the guidelines have “privileged certain ways of being and knowing that do not recognize the diverse qualities of children and their families in a global context” (Yelland & Kilderry, 2005, p. 5). As a result, the dominant curriculum forced by unilateral teacher authority over children allows children to have a variety of negative emotions by excluding them from the privileged voices of the white middle and upper classes. Moreover, the dominant curriculum makes some children have school experiences to be characterized by high school dropout rates, low academic achievement, weak literacy, and lack of critical thinking.

Finally, children rarely have an opportunity to participate in “a culture of inquiry,” which enables them to seek a better understanding of and improvement in the aspects of their schooling experiences in a collaborative and collegial way, by valuing “curiosity, a willingness to try new ideas and practices, and the ability to remain open to the unforeseen and unexpected” (Reagan, Case, & Brubacher, 2000, p. 43). This is because unilateral teacher authority over children, as a necessary basis for classroom management and control, allows teachers to have the authoritative codes for interpreting meaning and text (Davies, 1993). That is to say, unilateral teacher authority over children forces children to think and behave within teachers’ values and ideologies, which are deeply rooted in their own past experiences and reflect particular ideological patterns, social structures, or systems of negotiation (McLaren, 1998). Teachers as the oppressors prevent children from being conscious of the world and themselves through their feelings and desires as well as from developing their abilities to realize and seize the world with their own intentions (Freire, 1997). Moreover, teachers sometimes misunderstand the world of children, since “a reservoir of emotions and thoughts to inform their understanding of the world
of children” results from their own feelings and memories of their childhood, or teachers “use only their own experiences as the hallmarks for the experiences of others” (Bowman & Stott, 1994, p. 128). In the end, the dominant discourse and practices in traditional classrooms like “teacher-talk, reading the riot act, and the last word” allow teachers to easily exercise unilateral teacher authority over children and to prevent children from building on intellectual curiosity as well as from pursuing their inquiries in different ways (Shor, 1992, p. 203).

Summary

The past twenty years have seen a notable growth in an understanding of the nature of teacher-child interactions in child care settings, including the precursors, concomitants, and outcomes related to the quality of teacher-child interactions. In the past 20 years, researchers who study teacher-child interactions have shown that teacher-child interactions play a critical role in providing children with experiences that extend their learning as well as their social and emotional development. However, research on teacher-child interactions has been almost exclusively quantitative; for example, the quality of teacher-child interactions has typically been assessed by teachers’ own ratings rather than naturalistic observational data about various features of teacher-child interactions, such as warmth, conflict, involvement, and dependency. Also, research attention has mainly been given to identifying and classifying the specific teacher behaviors that affect particular child outcomes like children’s social and emotional competence. However, little attention has been focused on describing the responsive teachers’ behaviors with information about the overall context within which these behaviors occur. As a result, very little research shows a description of the teacher-child interactions themselves, including a detailed description of the moment-to-moment encounters between teachers and children. Thus, this qualitative research project is expected to contribute to the existing literature on teacher-child
interactions by providing a whole picture of teacher-child interactions within a specific context in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings using qualitative research methods.

In addition, this qualitative research project will make a major contribution to the existing literature on teacher-child interactions by exploring and describing barriers to and facilitators of effective teacher-child interactions in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings using the theoretical orientation of critical theory and postmodernism. From the theoretical orientation of critical theory and postmodernism, teachers are governed by oppressive practices and ideologies and thus are isolated from the narrative of mainstream history and culture. Specifically, teachers are forced to follow “the norms, standards, and educational models set by white academics and institutions” as well as to consider them to be typical, worldwide, and ordinary (McIntyre, 1997, p. 13). However, within the interactions between teachers and children, teachers are mostly considered the oppressors who exercise the power given by educational institutions, since they force children to learn the norms, beliefs, and values of a dominant class or group through the “networks of discursive and material practices,” such as “ordering, measuring, categorizing, normalizing, and regulating” (Usher & Edwards, 1994, p. 92). Thus, several studies show how the interactions between teachers and children in classrooms are characterized as unilateral and how most of the conversations between them reflect teacher authority over children. However, there is little research on the unilateral teacher-child interactions in child care settings, especially in terms of the potential negative influences of the unilateral teacher-child interactions in child care settings on children’s critical-thinking and problem-solving skills. Therefore, this qualitative research project will advance an understanding of the causes and problems of the unilateral teacher-child interactions by providing scientific
evidence of barriers to and facilitators of effective teacher-child interactions, as defined from a critical perspective, in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings.

Finally, this qualitative research project will lead future research to further explore how teachers as the oppressed and oppressors overcome the unilateral teacher-child interactions in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings. The above literature review implies that, in order to do so, teachers must engage in the struggle for their liberation by acquiring “a critical awareness of oppression through the praxis of this struggle” (Freire, 1970/2001, p. 51). This is because as long as the oppressed are not aware of the causes of their conditions, their status in the structure of domination and their fatalistic attitudes towards the current situations are less likely to change or be improved. Thus, teachers need to realize the reality that they, as “victims of a systematic culture of oppression,” have been “acculturated, assimilated, and melted into a single frame of mind that is repressive and limiting” (Figueroa-Britapaja, 2002, p. 264). They also need to be aware of how they as the oppressors instill knowledge supported by the authority and power of a dominant class or group into children through the interactions between themselves and children at the moment of classroom engagement. Shor (1992) suggests that teachers can negotiate their lesson plans, learning methods, and personal experiences with their children as well as begin with children’s words, themes, and understandings, and children can relate critical thinking to everyday life by examining “daily themes, social issues, and academic lore” and by questioning “rules, work relations, and daily episodes often taken for granted” (p. 44). Also, teachers can use more open-ended questions, clarification questions, and conversational yes/no questions that attempt to involve children in conversation than “commands, test questions, and yes/no questions that serve to elicit a specific vocal, verbal, or action response from the child” (Girolametto et al., 2000, p. 1102). These methods enable both
teachers and children to express their multiple perspectives, engage in more complex discourses, and create more critical thoughts, and finally contribute to the empowerment of teachers and children by enabling them to actively participate in “the search for and acquisition of knowledge and subsequent action to change the status quo” through teacher-child interactions (Merriam, 2002, p. 10). Thus, this qualitative research project will display barriers to and facilitators of effective teacher-child interactions, as defined from a critical perspective, in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings, and stimulate future research to provide more concrete, specific methods for teachers to overcome the unilateral teacher-child interactions in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings.
CHAPTER 3
PROCEDURES AND METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative research project that used interviews and observations in three teachers’ workplaces, in order to investigate barriers to and facilitators of effective teacher-child interactions, as defined from a critical perspective, in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings. In this research project the methods of in-depth interviewing and participant observation are considered the most effective ways to collect data, since the methods enable this study to describe what is really happening by focusing on the three teachers’ behavior and speech in their classrooms. In order to enhance internal validity, reliability, generalizability, and trustworthiness, I used a number of strategies, including “member checks,” which refers to taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they are derived and asking them whether or not the interpretations are plausible (Merriam, 1998, p. 204).

Nevertheless, this qualitative research project shows several limitations resulting from the general characteristics of qualitative research and the unique features of this research project. In this chapter I will explain the unique characteristics of qualitative research and how well these characteristics fit the purpose of this research project. I will describe the three participants who were selected according to the particular criteria that could serve the purpose of this research project. Also, I will give details about the methods of collecting and analyzing the data as well as many strategies used to increase the trustworthiness of this research project. Finally, I will present several limitations of this study in terms of internal validity, reliability, generalizability, and trustworthiness.

**Qualitative Research Methodology**

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), qualitative research has the following five features: naturalistic character, descriptive data, concern with process, inductive method, and
meaning. That is to say, qualitative research is always conducted in actual settings that are considered the direct source of data and include the concrete data collected from human sources. Qualitative data consist of the forms of words or pictures obtained from interviews and observations, for example, direct quotations about people’s experiences, opinions, and feelings, and detailed descriptions of people’s activities and behaviors. Also, qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes or products, as well as with a statement that identifies the phenomenon to be studied. In other words, qualitative research does not search out data or evidence to prove or disprove hypotheses about the relationships between a dependent variable and an independent variable, as is common in quantitative studies (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). By listening to what others say, observing what others do, and representing these as accurately as possible, qualitative researchers are interested in what is going on in the here and now, as well as specially want to know about human subjects in the actual settings. Thus, qualitative researchers are fundamentally concerned with the meaning of the events and happenings in data, and try to see beneath the obvious to discover the new by making comparisons, going out and collecting more data, and asking questions, for example, “How do people negotiate meaning?” or “How do certain terms and labels come to be applied?”

As for the naturalistic character of qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) say that naturalistic inquiry always takes place in a natural setting because context is deeply related to meaning. Such a contextual inquiry requires an instrument that can take account of all factors and influences in the context rather than paying attention to some variables of interest. Thus, a human instrument is used in the natural setting, since the human instrument can be fully adapted to the “indeterminate situation that will be encountered” by using different methods that are “appropriate to humanly implemented inquiry,” such as interviews and observations (Lincoln &
Guba, 1985, p. 187). In other words, the “human-as-instrument” is primarily based on the notion that “everything is indeterminate” in a natural setting and only the human instrument is able to deal with an indeterminate situation (p. 193). As for the characteristics of the “human-as-instrument,” Lincoln and Guba (1985) list the following seven elements: (1) Responsiveness: the “human-as-instrument” can react to all personal and environmental contexts, (2) Adaptability: the “human-as-instrument” can collect a variety of data through different methods at the same time, (3) Holistic emphasis: the “human-as-instrument” is only capable of seeing any phenomenon and its surrounding context in one view, (4) Knowledge base expansion: the “human-as-instrument” is able to use the knowledge of both reason and gossip as well as the knowledge gained from experience with objects and events, (5) Processual immediacy: the “human-as-instrument” is capable of handling data as soon as they become available, creating hypotheses on the spot, and examining those hypotheses in the context in which they are created, (6) Opportunities for clarification and summarization: only the “human-as-instrument” can summarize data and have tentative interpretations or conclusions tested by the people from whom they are derived for clarification, rectification, and intensification, and (7) Opportunity to explore atypical or idiosyncratic responses: the “human-as-instrument” can investigate atypical and idiosyncratic responses in order to examine their validity and to more deeply understand them through different points of view (pp.193-194).

In particular, Swann and Pratt (2003) mention that the purpose of educational research is to improve educational action by informing educational judgments and decisions. That is to say, educational research as critical and systematic inquiry should be directed towards the improvement of educational practice by focusing on what happens in learning situations and continually asking the following questions: “Do research questions have the same meaning to the
participants?” “Does this mean what it appears to mean?” or “Are researchers observing what they think they are looking at?” Thus, Swann and Pratt (2003) emphasize that educational research must be based on respect for people by providing them with information about what is and what is not ethical practice. Also, its outcomes must be important to interested practitioners, including teachers, policy-makers, parents, and learners, so that they can employ them in new and creative ways in order to improve educational practice. In addition, an educational research report must be meaningful and readable to the various audiences by demonstrating what is really happening through multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods, as well as by clarifying the researcher’s assumptions or biases. As a result, the report enables readers to judge the applicability of the researcher’s findings and conclusions and to determine whether the researcher’s findings fit their situations or not.

In conclusion, qualitative research methodology enables educational research to improve educational practice by making critical and systematic inquiries as well as describing what is really happening. This is because qualitative research assumes that reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing, rather than a single, fixed, and objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed, and measured as in quantitative research. From this perspective, qualitative research is interested in understanding “the perspectives of those involved in the phenomenon of interest,” discovering “the complexity of human behavior in a contextual framework,” and presenting “a holistic interpretation of what is happening” (Merriam, 1998, p. 203). At the same time, qualitative research is inherently political and is shaped by “multiple ethical and political allegiances” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 613). This is because qualitative research is not objective, authoritative, or politically neutral outside the context, and qualitative researchers as the “human-as-instrument” are historically positioned and locally
situated. As a result, the naturalistic characteristics of qualitative research and its holistic interpretation of human experience enable educational research to improve educational practice through critical and systematic inquiry.

This viewpoint especially fits well the purpose of this qualitative research project – to help teachers find ways to empower both themselves and children through effective teacher-child interactions, as defined from a critical perspective, by investigating barriers to and facilitators of effective teacher-child interactions in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings. This research project involved three teachers in the study using qualitative research methods; that is, they participated in two formal interviews, three informal interviews, and three observations of classrooms. This process of collecting data itself was very meaningful because the process gave the three teachers an opportunity to reflect on how they interacted with children. All of them had no experience of thinking about the topic of teacher-child interaction before participating in the study, and thus, they were able to recognize the issue of teacher-child interaction through participation in repeated interviews and observations. The data collection process also provided sufficient information about the teachers’ experiences, opinions, and feelings, as well as detailed descriptions of their activities and behaviors. Since these concrete data include what is going on in the here and now, interested practitioners are able to employ the data in creative ways to improve educational practice.

In particular, this research project includes “member checks” – the process of taking data and tentative interpretations back to the teachers and asking them whether or not the interpretations are plausible. By reading and understanding the interpretations, the three teachers were aware of how they interacted with children as well as of how the events and happenings in data were interpreted. By raising their opinions about the interpretations, the teachers had an
opportunity to explain why they behaved in a particular way or to correct some misinterpretations. Also, the teachers were given a chance to know how their behavior and speech were interpreted by the theoretical orientation of critical theory and postmodernism. Thus, the teachers were able to understand the nature of teacher-child interactions as well as barriers to and facilitators of effective teacher-child interactions in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings. This process of “member checks” results from one of the naturalistic characteristics of qualitative research; that is, only a human instrument in a natural setting can have tentative interpretations tested by the people from whom they are derived for clarification and rectification. As a result, qualitative research methodology enables this research project to achieve its purpose – to help teachers find ways to empower both themselves and children through effective teacher-child interactions by investigating barriers to and facilitators of effective teacher-child interactions in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings.

**Sampling Strategy**

The three teachers were selected according to Patton’s (2002) purposeful sampling strategies. The rationale of purposeful sampling is based on the fact that cases for study – such as people, organizations, and communities – provide a variety of information about the phenomenon of interest, and studying the “information-rich cases” yields a thorough investigation of the phenomenon rather than empirical generalization from a sample to a population (Patton, 2002, p. 230). Thus, purposeful sampling enables one to learn greatly about essentially important issues related to the purpose of the inquiry through the “information-rich cases.”

Among several different strategies for purposefully selecting “information-rich cases,” I chose a criterion sampling strategy since the strategy provided me with an opportunity to fully explore the central issues of this qualitative research project – barriers to and facilitators of
effective teacher-child interactions in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings.

The logic of criterion sampling is to “review and study all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance, a strategy common in quality assurance efforts.” The point of criterion sampling is to understand the “information-rich cases” because they may uncover “major system weaknesses that become targets of opportunity for program or system improvement” (Patton, 2002, p. 238).

Based on a criterion sampling strategy (Hatch, 2002), the following criteria were used:

1. The teachers must willingly participate in the study.
2. The teachers must be female teachers.
3. The teachers must be teaching children in Florida’s voluntary pre-kindergarten (VPK) classrooms in child care settings in Gainesville.
4. The teachers must be lead instructors who have credentials required by Florida’s voluntary pre-kindergarten (VPK) program.
5. The teachers must have experience of teaching children in preschool classrooms other than Florida’s voluntary pre-kindergarten (VPK) classrooms.
6. The teachers must be enthusiastic about their work.
7. The teachers must be proud of what they are doing.

**Sampling Procedures**

In order to involve teachers who met the above criteria in the study, I directly visited several child care centers in Gainesville that offered the VPK program and met system directors. I explained the purpose and procedures of this study to them and asked them to recommend a teacher who met the above criteria. One of the directors rejected my request, saying that the study would require teachers to spend too much time and teachers might be tired of participation in the study. Another director said that she could not allow teachers to do things other than teaching children during working hours because she paid for the hours. Some directors refused my request, saying that teachers were too busy to participate in the study. After several visits to
child care centers, I finally selected three teachers that met the above criteria and invited them to an audio tape recording via a letter of invitation and consent form.

As I expected from the perspective of a criterion sampling strategy, the three teachers provided me with a wealth of information about barriers to and facilitators of effective teacher-child interactions, as defined from a critical perspective, as well as several systematic or programmatic factors that impeded effective teacher-child interactions in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings. In particular, since the teachers had many experiences of teaching children in different classroom settings other than VPK classrooms, they were able to compare the characteristics of the VPK program with those of other preschool programs. This indicates that their judgment about the VPK program is based on objective or unbiased facts resulting from their different experiences and thus is useful for interested practitioners to act for program or system improvements in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings.

Description of Participants and Context

The first participant, Susan, has been working with children for thirty-four years and has been teaching children at her current workplace for twelve years. From her experiences, she is very well aware of the different characteristics of a whole range of children’s ages as well as how to teach each child according to his or her unique personality. In particular, since most of the children in her pre-kindergarten classroom have attended the school over one year, she and most of them had already known each other by the time they started the class. She very well understands what kind of curriculum is good for children and how to manage classrooms because she had had her own child care center for six years. She has a bachelor’s degree in music education and uses music as an effective teaching tool, since she believes that singing a song enables teachers to reinforce what they are talking about and to help children remember the
lesson for a long time. For example, children in her classroom ask her to sing songs that they have learned before over and over again. Also, since she thinks that teachers need to help children build a good vocabulary and children need to have a good vocabulary for success in school, she uses each time she talks to children as a chance to teach children new vocabularies. She is very proud that she has a good relationship with other teachers in the school. She frequently talks to other teachers about how to work with children and learns from other teachers’ experiences. In addition, the school began offering the VPK program in 2006, and the curriculum of her pre-kindergarten classroom is based on both the guidelines for the VPK program and the school curriculum that has developed over the years. According to the guidelines, she makes every effort to get children ready for kindergarten by focusing on children’s literacy and keeping track of each child’s progress. In particular, she is concerned about the school’s accountability and thus needs to make sure that every single child in her pre-kindergarten classroom is prepared for kindergarten.

The second participant, Veronica, has been working with children for two years, and her current workplace is her first teaching experience. In order to overcome her insufficient teaching experience, she continually observes how other teachers teach and talk to children as well as asks them some suggestions when she has trouble solving problems. The school began offering the VPK program in 2005, and children in her pre-kindergarten classroom started attending the school last August. She has not known her children long, but has no trouble understanding each child’s characteristics. The school has four VPK classrooms, and each VPK classroom uses the same curriculum based on both the guidelines for the VPK program and the school curriculum. As a half-day classroom, her pre-kindergarten classroom provides children with a three-hour schedule regulated by the VPK program. The time frame of the VPK program makes her
constantly work and teach because she has to do the same amounts of work as teachers in a full-day classroom do within only three hours. However, she is very proud of teaching children in the VPK classroom and is convinced that the VPK program successfully helps teachers to get children ready for kindergarten. Her trust in the VPK program mainly results from her experience of putting her daughter in the program. She saw the VPK program get her daughter ready for kindergarten by providing an opportunity to learn many necessary skills for kindergarten. Thus, when the school gave teachers a chance to select which class they would like to teach, she chose the VPK classroom. She uses every time she talks to children as a chance to make children understand what they need to know to go to kindergarten. For example, even when teachers and children move upstairs to eat their snacks, she continually communicates with children by raising new topics or expanding children’s ideas.

The third participant, Cindy, has six years of teaching experience and has been teaching children at her current workplace for four years. Her previous workplace was a working environment that enabled teachers to sufficiently interact one-on-one with children, since the teacher-child ratio of each classroom was low and the class size was small. The number of teachers in the classroom was twice as many as a standard teacher-child ratio. This experience made her understand the fact that a low teacher-child ratio enabled teachers to provide children with a stable learning environment. For example, since teachers were able to always observe and respond to each child’s behavior and speech, children did not need to speak loudly and teachers did not need to frequently correct children’s misbehavior. Thus, she thinks that the teacher-child ratio in her pre-kindergarten classroom is a little bit high and prevents her from having enough one-on-one interactions with children. In addition, the school has offered the VPK program since 2005 and has three VPK classrooms. The classrooms use the same curriculum based on both the
school curriculum and the guidelines for the VPK program. She prefers the school curriculum to the guidelines, since she believes that the school curriculum has more expectations for children and motivates children to learn more. Her pre-kindergarten classroom is open from 7:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M., and children in her classroom stay after the class regulated by the VPK program ends. Since most of the children in her classroom have attended the school longer than one year, she already knows their names as well as their characteristics. Also, since their parents already know that she works as a teacher at the school, she is able to easily communicate with the parents. Through a daily report as one way of communicating with parents, she informs parents of what their child was doing and asks them to discuss the school day with their child when their child had a really tough time.

Data Collection Methods

Interviews

Two formal in-depth interviews were conducted in the three teachers’ workplaces before and after the series of observations, and the interview data were audio tape recorded and transcribed. Audio tape recording was conducted at the teachers’ workplaces, and the audio tape recording sessions lasted one hour each. In the case of the first and third participants, I interviewed them during children’s nap time. However, I interviewed Veronica (the second participant) after all children in her classroom went home, since her classroom as a half-day program was open only from 9:00 to 12:00. Also, I conducted three observations in the teachers’ classrooms with an informal interview to follow each classroom observation. The informal interviews lasted approximately 5 minutes each, and the data were audio tape recorded and transcribed. In particular, the informal interviews were very helpful for me to immediately understand the meaning of each event and happening that took place during each classroom observation. The interviews as semi-structured included a few probing questions, specifically “a
list of questions and prompts in order to increase the likelihood that all topics will be covered in each interview in more or less the same way” (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002, p. 122). Interview guides are included in the Appendix.

The reason that I chose in-depth interviewing as the first method of data collection is that in-depth interviewing offers “a valuable source of data on the ideologies of language that underlie social scientific research” (Briggs, 2003, p. 499). That is to say, by providing participants with opportunities to perceive, inquire about, and report their own thoughts and feelings, in-depth interviewing enables participants to “reconstruct their experience and to explore their meaning” (Seidman, 1991, p. 69). Thus, every aspect of the structure, process, and practice of interviewing needs to be aimed at creating “a climate for mutual disclosure,” which indicates that both the interviewer and the participants willingly share their own feelings and thoughts, and the participants are able to put their experience into language without being hurried into interview situations prematurely (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004, p. 147).

During the interview sessions, I tried to make interviewing be informal, nondirective, and freewheeling because I believed that a less structured atmosphere could enhance rapport with participants (Adler & Adler, 2003). In order to establish the less structured atmosphere, I sometimes used rephrasing of the questions since “carefully worded questions” can make participants feel less threatened (Adler & Adler, 2003, p. 167). Also, I used “summary feedback,” which means that the interviewer “summarizes the last set of statements” expressed by the participants, since “summary feedback” makes participants be aware that the interviewer has heard what they are saying and encourages them to continue and expand their answers (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002, p. 131). In the end, I as a listener showed a genuine interest in the participants’ stories and was cautious about using my gestures or body language, for example,
raising my eyebrows or changing my tone of voice. This is because such a motion may represent the power of the interviewer, which can control “what takes place in the interview itself” (Briggs, 2003, p. 500).

**Observations**

As the second method of collecting data, three observations of classrooms during whole-group, free-play, and meal time were conducted per teacher. However, I observed Veronica’s classroom during snack time instead of meal time, since children in her classroom stayed only from 9:00 to 12:00 and had no meal time. The reason that I chose the three different activity settings as the targets for observation is that teachers were expected to differently interact with children through different conversations depending on different activity settings (Cote, 2001; Dickinson, 2001a; Dickinson, 2001b; Gest et al., 2006). The observation focused on three teachers’ behavior and speech in their classrooms, for example, how the teachers talked to children in order to make children pay attention to their directions. This is associated with the description of how teachers stimulate children to learn through teacher-child interactions by providing evidence of the detailed moment-to-moment encounters and the actual words that the teachers use in daily classrooms. The three teachers wore a remote microphone, and their language was audio tape recorded and transcribed. Also, the observation data were recorded in the form of field notes, and expanded field notes were recorded for each event.

The observations are characterized as participant observation, which is conducted in natural settings that reflect the life experiences of participants more precisely than do laboratory or contrived settings (Merriam, 1998). Participant observation is considered a method “to develop a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study that is as objective and accurate as possible given the limitations of the method” (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002, p. 92). In particular, participant observation is useful to understand what is going on in the here and now, and thus, it
is effectively used to understand phenomena that happen at a specific time and place as well as to “discover the existence of patterns of thought and behavior” (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002, p. 100). As a result, participant observation enabled me to understand the three teachers’ behavior and speech in a specific context as well as the patterns of their behavior and speech in their daily classrooms when interacting with children. This is the reason that I chose participant observation as the second method of data collection.

During the classroom observations, I minimally participated in the research site; that is, I was present at the scene of the action and identifiable as a researcher, but I did not actively participate or only occasionally interacted with people in it. This is because the biggest threat to reliability in qualitative research is researchers’ biases, such as researchers’ excessive involvement in the site. At the beginning of the first observation, the three teachers introduced me to their children, along with a short explanation of why I was there. While I was observing the teachers’ behavior and speech, the children were seldom interested in me, but some children sometimes asked their teacher why she wore a remote microphone. That is to say, all children and teachers were hardly conscious of my presence and displayed their usual behavior and speech in daily classrooms. In addition, I made an effort to be a good and careful listener, showed respect for participants in a setting, and was prepared to tell the truth, since the quality of participant observation would vary depending on researchers’ personal characteristics like gender and age, their training and experience, and their theoretical orientation (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002).

Data Analysis Method

I used the method of discourse analysis because discourse as a technology of power is articulated in the forms of knowledge that constitute the formal curricula as well as the social interactions between teachers and children in classrooms. In the case of discourse analysis, its
framework provides an understanding of meaning-making systems and discourse networks in specific situations through the description and interpretation of meaning making as well as the critical analysis of ideology. From this perspective, I was concerned with how teachers’ discourses were constructed, reproduced, and controlled by the hierarchical organizations of school systems. Also, I was interested in how the discourses that constituted the social interactions between teachers and children in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings were enacted and confirmed through the forms of laws, rules, norms, or habits. This is because I consider power that is exercised, reproduced, mediated, and resisted through discourses in classrooms as the biggest threat to effective teacher-child interactions, as defined from a critical perspective, in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings.

I selected Gee’s (2005) method of discourse analysis, which formulates hypotheses about the data as well as moves from context to language and from language to context. Gee (2005) says that these hypotheses need to be confirmed by further exploration of more data since much of discourse analysis is about formulating and gaining some confidence in hypotheses which should be further investigated, rather than gaining any sort of “definitive proof” (p. 13). Through “information about a context in which a piece of language has been used,” hypotheses about “what that piece of language means and is doing” are created, and information about how the context is interpreted by the people is produced (p. 14). From this perspective, I formulated two contrasting hypotheses: one is that teachers as the oppressed are forced to teach children a white, male, European-American model through diverse techniques of normalization, such as measurement, regulation, and evaluation; the other is that teachers as the oppressors force children to learn such a model through the unilateral interactions between themselves and children. However, as Gee (2005) emphasizes, I am always open to further investigation of my
hypotheses and to finding evidence against my preferred views, since I as the primary instrument for data collection am likely to filter data through my theoretical point of view.

According to Gee’s (2005) method of discourse analysis, I read interview and observation data, which were audio tape recorded and transcribed, and underlined “the word or phrase with the most stress” and “the new and most salient information” (Gee, 2005, p. 125). And then I organized the data into a number of stanzas, which mean “sets of lines devoted to a single topic, event, image, perspective, or theme” (Gee, 2005, p. 127). In order to analyze the data at a macro level, I read the stanzas and made sub-sub-stories, sub-stories, and frames within stories, in that order. When making the stories, I used idealized lines, by removing many different sorts of “speech hesitations and dysfluencies” from the actual lines (Gee, 2005, p. 129). This is because idealized lines are useful for “discovering meaningful patterns in people’s speech” and “getting at their basic themes and how they are organized” (Gee, 2005, p. 129).

Finally, I completed seven building tasks: Significance, Activities, Identities, Relationships, Politics (the distribution of social goods), Connections, and Sign systems and knowledge. When creating building tasks, I sometimes used hesitations, pauses, dysfluencies, and non-clause lines. This is because these factors include important information about the discourses, such as “how planning is going on in the speaker’s head” (Gee, 2005, p. 129).

The seven building tasks mean seven areas of “reality,” and result from the notion that we always and simultaneously build the seven areas of “reality” whenever we speak or write (Gee, 2005, p. 11). That is to say, we continually and actively construct and reconstruct our worlds through language used in interactions, nonverbal systems, technologies, and particular ways of “thinking, valuing, feeling, and believing” (p. 10). For example, we engage in a certain kind of activity and recognize our engagement through a piece of language used in the activity. By
asking the question of how this piece of language is used in the activity or what we are using this piece of language to do here, discourse analysis is able to investigate the reality that we are actively building through language in the activity. In summary, studying language enables discourse analysis to reflect “reality” by exploring different identities and activities enacted through language as well as people’s different access to different identities and activities linked to different kinds of status and social goods.

**Trustworthiness**

Data collection and data analysis in qualitative research are likely to present ethical dilemmas. In the case of interviewing as a standard data collection technique in a qualitative study, participants face both risks and benefits, and the risks are likely to raise ethical problems. For example, participants may “feel that their privacy has been invaded,” may be uncomfortable about certain questions, or may tell things they have never intended to make known (Merriam, 1998, p. 214). However, participants may have positive feelings when they are asked to review their achievements or are encouraged to act positively in their own behalf. Also, participants may enjoy sharing their thoughts, beliefs, or experiences, and may acquire very helpful self-knowledge. Observation as a second method of collecting data in a qualitative study has its own ethical pitfalls according to the researcher’s participation in the activity. For example, participants who are accustomed to the researcher’s presence may engage in an activity they will later feel embarrassed about or give information they have not intended to reveal. In addition, data analysis may present ethical dilemmas since the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection has filtered data through his or her particular theoretical orientation and biases.

In order to avoid these kinds of ethical problems, I first helped participants understand the meaning of informed consent. This is because participants have the “right to freely choose whether to participate in a research project or not” with a reasonable understanding of both risks
and benefits that are involved in the research project (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002, pp. 198-199). Also, I secured or concealed all personal data by using pseudonyms of participants in field notes as well as in possible publication, since “no one deserves harm or embarrassment as a result of insensitive research practices” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 218). Thus, I tried to increase the trustworthiness of this qualitative research project by continually asking the questions of whether participants had been given full information about what the study involved, whether participants willingly had given their consent to participate, and whether participants in the study were deceived in any way or not.

**Limitations of the Study**

In terms of internal validity, reliability, generalizability, and trustworthiness, this qualitative research project shows several limitations resulting from the general characteristics of qualitative research and the unique features of this research project. First of all, this research project does not provide sufficient evidence on generalizability, which is concerned with “the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations” (Merriam, 1998, p. 207). This is mostly caused by the fact that this research was conducted in the VPK program. As one of the state-funded pre-kindergarten programs, the VPK program includes several limitations of state-funded pre-kindergarten programs. One of the limitations is that the levels of support services of state-funded pre-kindergarten programs as well as teacher qualifications are very different according to where the classroom happens to be located. Thus, the events or individuals in one state-funded pre-kindergarten classroom are not typical and are hard to compare with those of another classroom. Also, this research project includes the general characteristics of qualitative research, which is concerned with the particular situation of a single case or a small nonrandom sample (Merriam, 1998). That is to say, I focused on the particular rather than the general and thus selected three participants using the particular criteria that could serve the
purpose of this research project. As a result, the situations of this study are not typical, and the findings of this study cannot be readily applied to other situations.

However, in order to increase generalizability, this research project used different strategies, including rich, thick description and maximum variation, which refers to using several sites, cases, or situations. In order to maximize diversity in teacher-child interactions in the VPK program, I conducted three observations of classrooms during whole-group, free-play, and meal time per teacher. In order to provide enough detailed information about classroom events, I recorded the observations in the form of field notes and included very detailed descriptions of the observations in Chapter 4. The rich, detailed information about teacher-child interactions in the VPK program enables readers to determine how closely their situations match this research context or whether the findings of this study can be transferred to their situations.

Another limitation of this qualitative research project is to offer partial evidence on internal validity despite its several strategies to enhance internal validity. In order to clarify my assumptions and worldview based on my personal experiences, I involved my subjectivity statement in Chapter 1. Also, I conducted “member checks” after completing the first draft of data analysis; that is, I asked the three participants whether or not my tentative interpretations were plausible. Nevertheless, this research project provides insufficient evidence on the validity of the findings, since the data were collected over a short period of time. That is to say, the data were not collected through “long-term observation at the research site or repeated observations of the same phenomenon” (Merriam, 1998, p. 204). This prevents this research project from fully explaining “the complexity of human behavior in a contextual framework” or from presenting “a holistic interpretation of what is happening” (Merriam, 1998, p. 203). Thus, this research project
does not give a positive answer to the question of whether the research demonstrates what is really happening.

From a traditional perspective on reliability in a research design, the fact that the data were collected over a short period of time is related to the reliability of this research project. This is because the traditional perspective assumes that a study can increase validity through repeated observations in the same study that lead to the same results. However, since human behavior is never static and reality includes many interpretations of what is happening, a qualitative study will not yield the same results repeatedly (Merriam, 1998). Thus, in qualitative research, the results are reliable if they are “consistent and dependable” rather than exactly the same (Merriam, 1998, p. 206). Reliability in qualitative research is generally improved by researchers’ detailed descriptions of how data are collected, how categories are derived, and how decisions are made throughout the inquiry. From this viewpoint, this qualitative research project sufficiently shows its reliability and enables readers to understand how the results are produced and to confirm the findings of this study independently. Also, by minimally participating in the research site, I dealt with the biggest threat to reliability in qualitative research: researchers’ biases, such as researchers’ excessive involvement in the site. However, since only I as a human instrument participated in the research site, this research project includes observer’s biases resulting from my personal characteristics like cultural and academic backgrounds, my lack of experience of conducting research, and my theoretical orientation. This is another limitation of this qualitative research project.

Finally, I used many strategies to increase the trustworthiness of this qualitative research project. However, since this research project was conducted over a short period of time, I did not have sufficient time to establish a close rapport with the participants. Also, my lack of
experience of conducting research prevented me from building an excellent rapport. This indicates that both I and the participants partly understood and shared reciprocal cultures and beliefs, and this research project is based on such an understanding. This point needs to be addressed by future research based on long-term relationships between researchers and participants or researchers’ rich experience of building rapport.
CHAPTER 4
PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

In this chapter I will present the results of data analysis, which are based on two contrasting hypotheses: one is that teachers as the oppressed are forced to teach children a white, male, European-American model through diverse techniques of normalization, such as measurement, regulation, and evaluation; the other is that teachers as the oppressors force children to learn such a model through the unilateral interactions between themselves and children. The results of data analysis consist of two parts: each teacher’s narrative and seven building tasks. Each teacher’s narrative is part of each teacher’s interview data and reflects my main concern with each teacher’s interview. The narrative includes sub-sub-stories, sub-stories, and frames within stories by means of idealized lines and stanzas. In addition, seven building tasks consist of Significance, Activities, Identities, Relationships, Politics (the distribution of social goods), Connections, and Sign systems and knowledge. Unlike the narrative, seven building tasks are based on interviews as well as observation data and include hesitations, pauses, dysfluencies, and non-clause lines, which show important information about the discourses. Thus, each teacher’s seven building tasks show how each teacher interacts with children in her classroom; what makes her behave and speak in a particular way; what her behavior and speech mean within a specific context; and how the events and happenings in data are connected and interpreted.

The First Participant, Susan

My main interest in Susan’s interview is to see how she is concerned about the school’s accountability through her actual words. This main interest comes from the fact that as one of the issues most frequently mentioned during the interview sessions, the school’s accountability seems to significantly influence Susan’s behavior and speech. Susan frequently talked to children
to have them build a good vocabulary and believed that free-play time was the best for effective teacher-child interactions because she was able to freely interact with each child. However, her behavior and speech mainly focused on getting children ready for kindergarten, since she was constantly worried about the school’s accountability.

When children go to kindergarten, their school readiness is evaluated by kindergarten teachers. Since kindergarten teachers keep track of what school children attended before, pre-kindergarten teachers need to make sure that children know the necessary skills for kindergarten. After the VPK program started, pre-kindergarten teachers have more responsibility for children’s school readiness and do more paperwork to check each child’s progress. This indicates that the VPK program does not allow teachers to do activities other than things required by the VPK standards. Thus, the VPK program makes teachers teach children only the values and norms of the VPK program through measurement and evaluation.

Susan’s narrative shows how and why she is concerned about the school’s accountability. Also, it demonstrates how her concern about the school’s accountability influences her behavior and speech as well as interactions with children. In particular, her narrative includes how the VPK program changes and constrains her way of teaching and interacting with children. As a result, Susan’s narrative shows how her discourses are constructed and controlled by the hierarchical organizations of school systems and how her interactions with children are influenced by the discourses.

**Susan’s Narrative**

FRAME: Stanza 1: Teachers consider some problems of the earth as a weekly theme

1. It is a program that we had read about
2. and we know that the earth is having problems,
3. there are so many people
4. and a lot of people are not reusing things and recycling items
5. and throwing away so many things,
6. the garbage piles are piling up higher and higher
7. and it's a problem, that the earth has.

**Story: Teachers’ concerns about the school’s accountability**

**Sub-story 1:** VPK program’s specific information about the necessary skills for kindergarten

Sub-sub-story 1: What to do with a theme is based on the necessary skills for kindergarten

   Stanza 2: Teachers add some problems of the earth to the school curriculum

8. So, that's one reason we've added that to our curriculum.
9. And then certain written programs are about it
10. and tell you something you can do with the children.

   Stanza 3: Teachers show children how to reuse something

11. Like last year, we made paper,
12. they all brought in lint from their dryers
13. and we made paper out of it to show them
14. how we can reuse something that someone might throw away,
15. we can use it to make something else.
16. It’s a good thing for them to know and think about it.

   Stanza 4: Teachers decide a weekly theme based on the school curriculum

17. We have curriculum here at my school
18. that was developed over, over some years by teachers
19. and we usually go by that, by that theme each week

   Stanza 5: Teachers choose what to do with a theme
20. but we are responsible for deciding what to do.

21. For instance, if our theme is recycling or, saving the earth,

22. then we teachers that are here now would kind of decide

23. what we’re going to do, with that theme.

24. We have some suggestions

25. but, we are also looking for books that we have,

   **Stanza 6: Teachers think about the necessary skills for kindergarten**

26. and we think about what these children need to know

27. to go to kindergarten,

28. how we can incorporate those skills also.

29. What we do, everything that we have,

30. we, we relate that using the standards

31. that they need to have for kindergarten.

   **Stanza 7: What to do with a theme is related to the necessary skills for kindergarten**

32. For instance, we might have them, drawing things about the earth,

33. or painting a river, painting a clean river,

34. and talking about what that would have in it,

35. a live animal and fish and, things like that so.

36. Everything that we do goes with that theme,

37. but it would also build on their skills

38. and their needs for VPK.

**Sub-sub-story 2: VPK program provides teachers with much specific information**

   **Stanza 8: VPK program provides a lot of helpful information**
39. We have a lot of standards.
40. They are very helpful,
41. there's so much, so there's so much
42. because how, I'll have to show you the book if you want,

   Stanza 9: The information is very specific

43. but there's a unit as a whole section on their physical abilities,
44. if they, if they can do small motor things, large motor things,
45. physically, how are they physically,
46. how they’re in good health,
47. do they seem to eat good food.

   Stanza 10: VPK program emphasizes children’s literacy

48. That’s just one aspect, then you have, you have another one,
49. that's, there's a whole section on literacy on what,
50. what they need to be able to do
51. to facilitate learning to write and read

   Stanza 11: VPK program includes tracking children’s progress

52. and you have to, you have to track every child and see.
53. For instance, for us it’s like if you were a child in my class
54. I would watch you drawing
55. and see what you needed to work on.

   Stanza 12: Teachers assess many different aspects of children’s development

56. I would ask you, “What letter is this?”
57. and see how many letters you know
58. and that if you didn't know very many
59. we would write that down, well, needs to work on letters
60. and we would work with you more on letter recognition.
61. It is really quite complicated (ha, ha) the standards for kindergarten.

    Stanza 13: Teachers have gotten children ready for kindergarten even before the VPK
62. We just started VPK programs last year
63. and that's when we got the official standards.
64. But we had basically been doing most of those things before,
65. just getting them ready for kindergarten,
66. teaching them about the world,

    Stanza 14: VPK program includes very specific information
67. but this is very specific,
68. it has, specific things that you can do,
69. to help them, be ready for their world.

Sub-story 2: Teachers’ understanding of each child’s progress through paperwork

Sub-sub-story 3: Teachers fill out paperwork to identify what each child needs to know

    Stanza 15: Teachers need to fill out more paperwork
70. A little bit, it’s probably we have more paperwork, because the work,
71. we’re filling out the forms for each child.
72. We’re doing assessment on them throughout the year.
73. We have to keep the portfolio to make sure.
74. We have samples for their work,

    Stanza 16: More paperwork aims to check what children need to know
so that we, we track each child

and we scaffold on what they already know.

We build on that.

So there’s more and more paperwork,

and more reading,

more really doing with each child one-on-one too.

And we did it before,

but it’s, we don’t really do that many more different things.

Stanza 17: She is concerned about the school’s accountability

I think just more accountability for us, just.

I now know and think children go to kindergarten now.

At least I think in this county

they keep track of what school they attended before.

So this school will become known,

as either being excellent or not,

according to how many children know what they need to know

when they go to kindergarten.

So I hold the school’s accountability now.

Stanza 18: A portfolio shows how children develop their abilities

Portfolio? Okay. We do, we keep the samples of their art work.

For instance, at the beginning of the year,

we say, “Draw yourself,” so they draw,

and then a year later we say again “Draw a picture of yourself.”
96. And then they draw a more detailed picture.

   Stanza 19: A portfolio enables teachers to keep track of children’s progress

97. At the end of the year,

98. we can keep track of their progress,

99. and also, we have, things that they try to write,

100. they can write the letters.

101. When they write their name,

102. we put that in at the beginning of the year,

103. and then every few weeks put in another try to write their name,

104. and we track their progress on that.

Sub-sub-story 4: Paperwork helps teachers know what they have to do for children

   Stanza 20: Paperwork enables teachers to be aware of what they are doing

105. I don’t like it.

106. But, it really, I mean it, ultimately it is a good thing

107. because it does keep you aware of,

108. how much they need to learn,

   Stanza 21: Paperwork helps teachers understand something

109. you have to be kind of some of it’s, subjective,

110. like they may not know something one day

111. and if you ask them another day they know it

112. and, sometimes they don't know it right then,

113. but then later they remember,

114. (she uses a child’s voice) “Oh, yeah, I knew that.”
Stanza 22: Paperwork is considered burdensome

115. So that makes it a little bit difficult
116. but, I think in the long run it's good,
117. it does take more of our time and more,
118. there’s more pressure on us,
119. to make sure that they're doing what they need to do.
120. So that, that part of it is hard,

Stanza 23: Paperwork helps teachers care about their children

121. but I think it is a good thing,
122. because, there are a lot of teachers
123. I think that if they don't really care about the children that much,
124. they won’t do anything,
125. they just let ‘em play,
126. they don’t talk to them,
127. they don't do anything.

Stanza 24: Paperwork enables teachers to know how to assess children’s progress

128. But now if they're doing the VPK,
129. they have to have a folder for each child that shows, their progress.
130. They have to assess each child,
131. they have some kind of form that they fill out.

Stanza 25: Paperwork is helpful for teachers in the end

132. So they have to be, doing what they're supposed to be doing.
133. So I think it's really good in the long run,
it's harder (ha, ha) it's more for us but,

I think it's, a good thing.

**Sub-story 3: Teachers’ concerns about the school’s accountability**

Sub-sub-story 5: Teachers are concerned about the school’s accountability

Stanza 26: Teachers need to make sure children are prepared enough for kindergarten

One thing is that with this new VPK program,

we are responsible for knowing each child enough

so that we know what they need to learn

before they go to kindergarten

and so we have to assess them,

Stanza 27: Teachers need to see if children understand what they need to know

we have to show them letters

and see which ones they don't know.

And then record that so we can make sure

ey they work on those letters

and same thing with colors and numbers, the different concepts,

like, prepositional words like **over, under, around.**

we have to talk to them about those

and see if they understand those,

Stanza 28: Which school children came from will be known

because, at the, when they do go to kindergarten,

they, the teachers will know what school they came from.

So that's another thing,
people who know, teachers who know,

“Oh, this child came from so-and-so school,”

and he knows a lot, so they must have really worked.

And they made sure that he knew everything.

Stanza 29: The school’s accountability is important

That's another way we were held accountable by the other schools,

they will, I don’t know if they’ll report that,

but they will know.

I’m not sure if there are some kinds of grading systems yet,

but that might be coming.

Stanza 30: The school needs to be accountable to parents

So, so we’re held accountable and also to the parents

we have a conference with all the parents in January, in January or February,

I think February this year.

Stanza 31: Teachers inform parents of what their child knows

And we will tell them,

your child knows that, knows all of this,

but if you could work with him on this

while you were still working on,

him learning all of his letters or whatever.

Stanza 32: Parents need to make sure their child is ready for kindergarten

So we’re accountable to the parents also

because they want their child ready for kindergarten
and they know that, that's one thing we say that we do.
So we say we do it, so we have to,
to live up to that statement that we do get them ready for kindergarten.

Stanza 33: Parents need to know what their child needs to learn
So we have to be sure we tell them everything,
that they need to do or that their child needs to learn.
So we're held accountable to the parents
to the, to the schools they're going to,

Stanza 34: The school needs to be accountable to the state
which is, (3.0) it really adds up to that we're accountable to the state,
’cause they're putting money in it,
they are paying for these children to go to VPK.
So we're accountable to them
we have to be sure that
we, chart, each child's progress
and do everything we can
to have them ready for kindergarten.

Sub-sub-story 6: Teachers have to make every effort to get children ready for kindergarten

Stanza 35: Teachers have to show their efforts to get children ready for kindergarten
It's that the whole, whole idea behind this.
It's that more children will do well in kindergarten.
sometimes it makes it a little harder
because you have to be sure that you're doing enough,
Stanza 36: Teachers have to work with children who do not understand letters

190. you look at your records say,
191. he still doesn't, he still doesn't understand,
192. these different letters and the sounds of the letters so.
193. Then you have to find the time
194. when you can work with them on that
195. or make sure that they're participating in
196. a game that talks about, those sounds of those letters.

End of Story: The school’s accountability makes teachers try hard to get children ready for kindergarten

FRAME: Stanza 37: Teachers have to record everything that happens to each child

197. So it’s, so it's a lot more (2.0) mental preparation
198. and also on paper
199. and we have to write all these things down
200. and have a record of each child.
201. So, that affects a lot.

Table 4-1. Susan’s class schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:00</td>
<td>Group time: Roll call, Pledge of allegiance, Calendar, Story, Helper chart, Poem &amp; Songs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:20</td>
<td>Free-play: Art, Dramatic play and other centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:15</td>
<td>Switch rooms: Another group time with story, Review and Recall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:15</td>
<td>Clean-up: Another group time – Review and Recall, Educational game</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30</td>
<td>Outside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00</td>
<td>End of the VPK time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Seven Building Tasks

Building significance

How and what different things mean – the sorts of meaning and significance they are given – is a component of any situation.

1. What are the situated meanings of some of the words and phrases that seem important in the situation?

In the first and second formal interviews, she frequently uses the word “talk,” and the word “talk” is differently interpreted according to each situation. First, the meaning of “talk” is that teachers and children simply express their thoughts and feelings. That is to say, the word “talk” means that teachers and children say something rather than conveying the particular.

If they don’t talk and listen a lot, they might not understand the test questions, you know, that seems to happen.

It’s, uh, it’s a lot easier for a child to start reading and writing if they can talk well and they can hear people talking a lot.

Second, the word “talk” means that teachers involve children in discussing a certain topic by making children pay attention to the topic. In the situation when teachers teach children a certain subject by giving children a chance to say their ideas about the subject, the situated meaning of “talk” is to discuss something.

We talk about, um, for instance, this week we were talking about recycling and reusing items, you know, saving, trying to keep the earth clean.

We talk about that subject again, “Who talked about the recycling?” Later on today I just ask them, “Do you remember what we were talking about this morning?”

Third, the word “talk” has the meaning that teachers say what they want children to do and children are required to do what is expected of them. Through “talk,” teachers ask children to do what teachers expect. In other words, “talk” is considered a means of having children do what teachers expect.
I ask them open-ended questions, which means they can't just say yes or no they have to talk to me about it, so that improves their vocabulary and helps the interaction.

If we’re sitting close to them, we usually try to talk about, you know, talk about things to go to the vocabulary.

Finally, the meaning of “talk” is sometimes considered to be equal to the meaning of “interact.” “Talk” means that teachers and children give and take their thoughts and feelings based on mutual respect, trust, and understanding. Also, the word “talk” means that teachers share their thoughts and feelings with other teachers when teachers “talk” to each other.

We just go and interact. We might go into the dramatic play area, and, for instance, we’re having, uh, a bakery shop, we might talk to them about it, “What do you think we need to make a bakery shop?”

We talk to each other about what we learn, you know, to help the other teachers, to be able to do some of those things that we will be successful with.

Next, she frequently uses the word “tell” during the interviews and observations, and it has three different situated meanings. First, when she wants children to express their thoughts and feelings obviously and positively, she uses the word “tell.” Especially when children complain about other children’s misbehavior, she allows children to say their feelings using the word “tell.” Thus, the word “tell” means that teachers and children articulate their opinions persuasively and clearly.

After the story, uh, we talk about what it was about and I let them tell me things about the story.

We staple the paper together, and they can draw pictures and then they tell us what they write for their book, we do that a lot too.

Remember what we talked about. Tell him how you’re feeling. Don’t just hit.

That hurts your feelings. You need to tell her, okay?

The second meaning of ‘tell’ is to explain or describe something. That is to say, the meaning of “tell” is to provide information about something, and thus, teachers and children are able to use it.
Certain written programs are about it and, uh, tell you something you can do with the children.

The third meaning of “tell” is that teachers and children understand something. In other words, the word “tell” means that teachers and children recognize what something means and react to it.

If they are mad, we can tell that they are mad.

How can you tell from his face that he’s sad?

**Building activities**

Some activity or set of activities is a component of any situation (the specific social activity or activities in which the participants are engaging; activities are, in turn, made up of a sequence of actions).

2. What is the larger or main activity (or set of activities) going on in the situation?

The main activity is to prepare children for kindergarten in the VPK program in child care settings. Based on the standards for kindergarten, teachers teach children what children need to know when they go to kindergarten during whole-group, free-play, and meal time. Since teachers believe that preparing children for kindergarten is closely related to the school’s accountability, teachers focus on children’s academic skills and create the school curriculum to expand those skills. This main activity consists of several sub-activities, which are made up of a number of different actions.

One of the sub-activities is to focus on children’s literacy. This sub-activity consists of facilitating children’s learning to read and write, helping children build a good vocabulary, and giving children an opportunity to experience different expressions. In particular, teachers try to help a child who speaks English as a second language practice a perfect sentence by correcting the child’s broken English. This is because teachers are concerned that the child might have
trouble understanding teachers’ words in kindergarten and might not be understood by other children or teachers.

A second sub-activity is to assess children’s abilities. The aim of this sub-activity is to figure out what each child already knows and needs to know. This sub-activity consists of seeing what each child is doing through one-on-one interaction, filling out different forms for each child, and keeping track of each child’s progress, for example, completing each child’s portfolio.

A third sub-activity is to create the school curriculum based on the standards for kindergarten and the guidelines for the VPK program. This sub-activity consists of discussing the school curriculum with other teachers, gathering information through different sources such as participation in a conference, and sharing different experiences with other teachers. Through these kinds of actions, teachers obtain specific information about children’s learning and create the school curriculum that maximizes the children’s learning.

**Building identities**

Any situation involves identities as a component, the identities that the people involved in the situation are enacting and recognizing as consequential.

3. What identities (roles, positions), with their concomitant personal, social, and cultural knowledge and beliefs (cognition), feelings (affect), and values, seem to be relevant to, taken for granted in, or under construction in the situation?

From the interview and observation data, her role as a pre-kindergarten teacher seems to be mainly connected to the school’s accountability. Her major concern is how well teachers get children ready for kindergarten, saying, “At least I think in this county they keep track of what school they attended before. So this school will become known, you know, as either being excellent or not, according to how many children know what they need to know when they go to kindergarten.” Thus, her instruction mostly focuses on increasing children’s literacy and allowing children to accomplish their tasks well in kindergarten. For example, during whole-
group time, she says to a child, “When you get to kindergarten and you’re gonna do it, you need to start doing it in that way, all right? Not this way. That’s okay for today,” and “You can’t do this any more ‘cause kindergarten teachers don’t want that. When you begin big school, you have to do it another way.” That is to say, even though children are in a pre-kindergarten classroom and their behavior and speech are not wrong, she needs children to be aware of and practice what kindergarten teachers expect in advance.

In addition, her role in helping children build a good vocabulary seems to be related to the school’s accountability. She says that children might have trouble with the test questions when they read them if they do not understand, if they do not have a good vocabulary, or if they do not talk and listen a lot. In other words, she is worried that her children are not able to succeed in school because of their poor vocabulary, and believes that teachers are responsible for developing children’s vocabulary. Thus, she helps children build a good vocabulary in different ways. For example, during meal time, she makes her salad by herself while children are eating lunch and asks children what kinds of vegetables she has, saying “Who knows a vegetable I have now?” She allows children to answer the question and gives children a quick explanation of the vegetables. As a result, she tries to give children a chance to develop a good vocabulary as often as possible regardless of time and place, in order for children to succeed in school.

In summary, she as a teacher makes every effort to develop children’s vocabulary because she believes that children’s success in school depends on the quality of the children’s vocabulary. Furthermore, as a pre-kindergarten teacher, she gets children ready for kindergarten by giving children a chance to practice the standards for kindergarten. Thus, her role as a teacher in helping children build a good vocabulary and her role as a pre-kindergarten teacher in getting children ready for kindergarten seem to be consistently relevant to the school’s accountability.
Building relationships

Any situation involves relationships as a component, the relationships that the people involved enact and contract with each other and recognize as operative and consequential.

4. What sorts of social relationships seem to be relevant to, taken for granted in, or under construction in the situation?

Children frequently complain that they are mentally or physically hurt by other children and ask teachers to deal with the problem. This situation involves both a teacher-child relationship and a child-child relationship. For example, during free-play time, when one child complains about another child’s misbehavior, she says, “That’s right. That hurts your feelings. You need to tell her, okay? So that hurt my feelings. Tell her it made you sad. Yeah, tell her it made you sad.” Also, she says, “Remember what we talked about. Tell him how you’re feeling. Don’t just hit.” Moreover, she specifically teaches children how to say something using a child’s voice and tone, saying, “Honey, don’t rip it more, it’s still usable, I’m gonna take that.” This indicates that she wants children to solve the problem by themselves, but she helps children solve the problem by reminding children about how to express their feelings. According to the first interview data, her children have already learned how to deal with this kind of problem and how to say their feelings. However, since children do not always remember how to say something, she reminds children about that. Therefore, this situation shows that she needs children to get through the situation by using the ways that they have already experienced. In other words, this situation involves a teacher-child relationship, which indicates that teachers need children to understand and practice what teachers are saying, and children need to follow what teachers expect.

In addition, this situation involves a child-child relationship. Children learn the ways to get along with other children from teachers and are able to improve their relationships with other
children using those ways. Since children do not always remember how to say their feelings, they often need teachers’ help in a specific situation. Thus, this situation gives children an opportunity to experience different child-child relationships by practicing the ways that they have already learned through a teacher-child relationship. These social relationships are stabilized in this situation. This is because whenever this situation takes place, children ask teachers’ help and teachers instruct the same thing.

**Building politics (the distribution of social goods)**

Any situation involves social goods and views on their distribution as a component.

5. What social goods (e.g., status, power, aspects of gender, race, and class, or more narrowly defined social networks and identities) are relevant (and irrelevant) in this situation? How are they made relevant (and irrelevant), and in what ways?

The curriculum of the VPK classroom is based on both the guidelines for the VPK program and the school curriculum that has developed over the years. In general, the pre-kindergarten teachers decide a theme each week based on the school curriculum and then choose what to do with that theme using the guidelines for the VPK program. When the teachers decide what to do, they think about what children need to know to go to kindergarten and then select some skills among the skills that the VPK program suggests. The pre-kindergarten teachers incorporate those skills into the curriculum of the VPK classroom. However, the majority of the curriculum of the VPK classroom consists of the guidelines for the VPK program rather than the school curriculum. This is because the teachers focus on having children practice the skills that children need to know to go to kindergarten and children spend much time practicing those skills. For example, if the teachers chose recycling as a theme, the teachers might have children draw things about the earth, paint a river, talk about things that would live in a river, and read about recycling. As a result, the curriculum of the VPK classroom is dominantly controlled by the standards for kindergarten, even though the VPK classroom is a child care setting.
The dominant status of the standards for kindergarten in the curriculum of the VPK classroom appears through her speech. For example, during whole-group time, she says, “You need, I know you can do it, name on it with all the capitals. That’s really good, but the kindergarten teachers, let me show you, they want the capital “G” like you do, then little “a,” little “b,” little “r,” little “i,” little “e,” and little “l,” just like we’ve been having you do your name on those, your name papers. You need to start doing it in that way, okay?” This indicates that the standards for kindergarten fix the way children write their names and need children to follow that way. In order to go to kindergarten, pre-kindergarten children need to know and practice the way of writing their names. Thus, teachers involve the way in the curriculum of the VPK classroom since they should prepare children for kindergarten. In other words, the way of writing children’s names based on the standards for kindergarten is considered to be proper in the VPK classroom, and this indicates the dominant status of the standards for kindergarten in the curriculum of the VPK classroom.

**Building connections**

In any situation things are connected or disconnected, relevant to or irrelevant to each other, in certain ways.

6. What sorts of connections – looking backward and/or forward – are made within and across utterances and large stretches of the interaction?

During the first formal interview, she says that it is pretty easy to understand what children are feeling because children are freely open and do not hide their feelings. Her understanding of children’s feelings helps her have more effective interactions with children because she is able to think about what children are going to do and react to it in an appropriate way. In particular, she emphasizes that her teaching experience enables her to easily figure out what children are feeling, saying “That’s true, experience makes a big difference.” That is to say,
her teaching experience helps her understand children’s feelings and her understanding enables her to effectively interact with children. Thus, those utterances show that her teaching experience positively influences her way of interacting with children.

In addition, during the second formal interview, she says that her teaching experience enables her to become more relaxed with the way of teaching and the way of feeling. If she used a certain way and found that the way was not working, she tried another way in order to find the best way to interact with children. Thus, she allows children to talk a little bit rather than focusing on classroom discipline, saying, “I've become relaxed and I am able to have more fun with them sometimes than I used to. Because I’m, I used to be afraid of losing control, you know, that they were gonna go crazy and I wouldn’t be able to control it. But I don’t, I don’t fear that anymore, because I've had so much experience I know I can get them back under control anytime.” Those utterances show that her teaching experience positively affects her way of interacting with children, and her current understanding of how to interact with children results from her previous experiences developed through a process of trial and error.

Furthermore, as for her relationship with other teachers, she says, “We get along together and we help each other, we work together,” and “We usually learn from experiences we have, you know, we might talk to them about things we’ve done and they can try or also some other books are talking about some other research, after we get back from a conference, we talk to each other about what we learn, you know, to help the other teachers, to be able to do some of those things to do that we will be successful with.” These utterances are connected to the previous utterances in terms of emphasis on the importance of teaching experience. That is to say, teachers try to help each other, talk about what they are doing, and learn from their experiences. By observing how other teachers interact with children, teachers are able to think
about their own ways to interact with children and find a better way of interacting with children. Thus, the teachers have good relationships with other teachers by sharing their experiences with other teachers, and this indicates that teaching experience plays an important role in maintaining good relationships between teachers. As a result, teaching experience is consistently connected to the relationships among teachers as well as the interactions between teachers and children. This is because teachers are able to learn an example of effective teacher-child interaction from other teachers’ experiences, and good relationships among teachers provide teachers with a better chance of sharing their experiences with other teachers.

**Building significance for sign systems and knowledge**

In any situation, one or more sign systems and various ways of knowing are operative, oriented to, and valued or disvalued in certain ways.

7. What sign systems are relevant (or irrelevant) in the situation (e.g., speech, writing, images and gestures)? How are they made relevant (and irrelevant), and in what ways?

Her words about the teacher-child ratio and paperwork are relevant in the situation when teachers have to follow the guidelines for the VPK program even though they do not totally agree with the guidelines. During the first formal interview, she says that when there are fifteen children and two teachers in her classroom, the teacher-child ratio is appropriate because teachers are able to have more one-on-one interactions with children and children are able to talk to each other very well. Her classroom has eighteen children on the roll and two teachers based on the guidelines for the VPK program, but her classroom usually has fifteen or sixteen children and two teachers because one or two children are usually absent. By emphasizing the notion that fifteen is a really good number, she implies that the teacher-child ratio set by the guidelines for the VPK program is a little bit high and prevents children from learning well and from effectively interacting with teachers. That is to say, she does not totally agree with the guidelines
for the VPK program, but she has to follow the guidelines because the guidelines are valued and she is powerless against the guidelines in the VPK classroom.

In addition, during the first formal interview, she points out that teachers have more paperwork after the VPK program started, saying, “There’s more and more paperwork, and more reading, you know, more really doing with each child one-on-one too. And we did it before, but it’s, we don’t really do that many more different things.” This implies that she considers much paperwork as burdensome. However, during the second formal interview, she says, “I think in the long run it's good, um, it does take more of our time and more, uh, there’s more pressure on us, you know, to make sure that they're doing what they need to do. So that, that part of it is hard, but I think it is a good thing, because there are a lot of teachers I think that (2.0) if they don't really care about the children that much, they won’t do anything, they just let ‘em play, they don’t talk to them, they don't do anything. But now if they're doing the VPK, (2.0) they have to have a folder for each child that shows their progress. They have to assess each child, they have some kind of form that they fill out. So they have to be, you know, doing what they're supposed to be doing. So I think it's really good in the long run, it's harder (ha, ha) it's more for us but, (1.0) I think it's a good thing.” This shows that she considers much paperwork as burdensome, but she makes an effort to get through the difficult situation by seeing the positive aspects of the VPK program. Similar to her words about the teacher-child ratio, her words about paperwork show that the guidelines for the VPK program are valued, and she is powerless against the guidelines in the VPK classroom.

8. What systems of knowledge and ways of knowing are relevant (or irrelevant) in the situation? How are they made relevant (and irrelevant), and in what ways?

Both singing a song and one-on-one interaction are considered ways of knowing and are relevant in the situation when teachers try to make children understand and remember what
teachers are saying. During whole-group time, she allows children to sing different songs, including a “recycling” song, a “pledge allegiance” song, and a “days of the week” song. As for the reason that she frequently uses a song in the classroom, she says, “Especially when we’re doing action songs and do a song about whatever our theme is. And then they really become more involved, so it makes it easier to have interactions and easier to talk about them later if we’ve done some music about it because they enjoy that and they have a good feeling about it, you know, then they, they wanna do more and talk more about it. So that’s, that’s one way I found really makes things more effective.” That is to say, by using a song, teachers are able to easily involve children in an activity because children enjoy singing a song and have a good feeling when they are singing a song. Moreover, she says, “We reinforce what we’re talking about in other ways. We do songs, a lot of songs. Like today we started learning every recycling song. That’s another way that we remember that, they’re singing, they remember that for weeks, they learn the song, and they like it. Yeah, they still ask us for the songs we’ve done before, on the different subjects, because it stays in their minds if they sing. Especially, if they move to it, they know from the latest research that if a child sings something and does something physical, it stays in their brain longer.” That is to say, teachers believe that singing a song is a successful way to make children understand and remember what teachers are saying, and thus, they frequently incorporate singing a song into the school curriculum. As a result, singing a song is considered one of the ways of knowing.

Another way of knowing is one-on-one interaction. She says, “I had already given them some examples earlier, and then when I called on one child, and they started to talk about it, and then they could think of the words, so I kind of help them and then they are able to give that idea. So we had one-on-one interactions, you know, I talk to them and then they say things back to
me. I think, I think, that’s, that’s one of the effective ways. Especially, if they want to talk about it, they raise their hands, you know, and so they are ready to hear what we have to say too.” The situation when a teacher calls on one child in order to give the child a chance to answer the question that the teacher and the child have already talked about and then the child answers the question is considered one-on-one interaction. For example, during whole-group time, she asks, “Who can tell me the name of our poem we have this week? Raise your hand if you can tell me the name of our poem.” Then she picks one child among several children who raise their hands, and the child answers the question. Similar to the situation when she asks a child what the child is doing and then the child answers the question during free-play time, this situation is considered one-on-one interaction because one teacher and one child talk about the same issue. By giving one child a chance to answer the question that the teacher and the child have already talked about, teachers are able to check whether the child understands and remembers what teachers are saying. By answering the question, the child is able to expand his or her thoughts and receive new ideas from teachers. Thus, one-on-one interaction is considered one of the ways of knowing.

9. What languages in the sense of “national” languages like English, Russian, or Hausa, are relevant (or irrelevant) in the situation?

English and Korean are relevant in the situation when teachers have difficulty in making one Korean boy who does not speak English well understand what teachers are saying. She says, “We have some children from all around the world. Sometimes they are still learning English and now I try to talk to them, and sometimes they just don’t, because they don't know English very well, they don’t understand what I’m saying. Like today, um, (2.0) one little boy came up, uh, I think he's from Korea and, uh, he just comes up and says ‘Car.’ And I ask him, ‘What do you want to do with the car?’ He wanted to get the cars out to play with them, but he just can’t
go with ‘car.’ And then I just said, ‘You want me to get the cars out?’ ‘Yes,’ and then I said, ‘You need to say that.’ And he just, he would say that, you know. I try to get him to say, ‘Please get the cars out.’ But I think he felt intimidated because his verbal skills in English are not very good yet. So I felt that I wasn’t very effective.” That is to say, the language barrier prevents the Korean boy from communicating with teachers and from understanding what teachers are saying, and thus, she defines this situation as ineffective teacher-child interaction. Also, she says that teachers try to talk to the Korean boy more and get him to talk more to them using full sentences because teachers are worried that he is going to have a lot of trouble in kindergarten.

However, she does not consider the language barrier as one of the barriers to effective teacher-child interactions. This is because she believes that young children are able to pick up English quickly because their brain is ready to learn language and sees that young children are usually able to speak English fluently in about six months. In other words, the language barrier can be easily overcome in her classroom through children’s progress towards English, and children are able to understand what teachers are saying after a while. Nevertheless, the situation when the Korean boy does not understand what teachers are saying is considered ineffective because she defines a child’s misunderstanding of what teachers are saying as ineffective teacher-child interaction. Thus, she wants the Korean boy to pick up English as soon as possible by expressing her dissatisfaction with his speed of learning English, for example, “I think he speaks Korean at home, they, the parents don’t know English very well. So that makes it harder for him, but he’ll get it (ha, ha).” As a result, according to her definition of effective teacher-child interaction, English and Korean are relevant in the situation when teachers do not effectively interact with one Korean boy because of his misunderstanding of what teachers are saying.
The Second Participant, Veronica

My main concern with Veronica’s interview is to see how her way of teaching and interacting with children is affected by the VPK program. This main concern comes from the fact that Veronica is very confident in the VPK program and is expected to actively follow the guidelines for the VPK program. Veronica emphasizes the positive effects of the VPK program on children’s school readiness, such as having children know alphabets or colors. Before the VPK program started, many children were not prepared for kindergarten; for example, they did not know how to write their names. However, the VPK program gets children ready for kindergarten for a whole year, and thus, she is not worried that children in her classroom are not prepared for kindergarten.

Despite the positive aspects of the VPK program, the time frame set by the VPK program prevents her from effectively interacting with children. Veronica does not have enough time to talk to children because she has to constantly plan and teach lessons within a three-hour schedule. In other words, she has little time to listen to and react to each child’s interests and needs, even though she considers children’s positive reaction to teachers’ words as effective teacher-child interaction. Also, the time frame set by the VPK program prevents her from finding a successful way to deal with an unhappy conversation with a shy and quiet child, which is considered ineffective teacher-child interaction in terms of her definition of effective teacher-child interaction. This indicates that in reality, the VPK program is not helpful for her to effectively interact with children, contrary to her trust in the program.

Veronica’s narrative shows what makes her trust in the VPK program and why she is satisfied with the VPK program. Through her actual words, her narrative also demonstrates how the VPK program gives her a limited chance to effectively interact with children and how she interacts with children within the time frame set by the VPK program. As a result, Veronica’s
narrative shows how the interactions between her and children are enacted by the guidelines for the VPK program she has to follow as well as how the discourses that constitute these interactions are confirmed through the forms of rules or norms.

**Veronica’s Narrative**

FRAME: Stanza 1: Teachers see children’s positive reaction to their words

1. You can tell what is effective
2. because you see the child is happy or satisfied,
3. or they’re proud of themselves for
4. whatever they discussed about you, with you.

Story: Effects of the VPK program on preparing children for kindergarten

Sub-story 1: Benefits of children using their own words

Sub-sub-story 1: Teachers need children to do what they are saying

Stanza 2: Teachers say something to get desired actions from children
5. And you can tell when they’re not successful,
6. because they’re,
7. you’re gonna get the action that you desired,

Stanza 3: Teachers need children to do something that teachers expect
8. like if you were telling them the word,
9. “Can you use your words to set up instead of hitting your friends?”
10. or, “Can you put this away or something like that?”

Stanza 4: Teachers try to find a successful way of correcting children’s misbehavior
11. And you can see that they’re still upset about something
12. or they’re not listening to you that day,
13. they just choose not to do, what you have asked of them,
14. you can tell then what is successful for them.

Sub-sub-story 2: Children are encouraged to use their own words when solving problems

   Stanza 5: Teachers help children use their own words

15. Like on a daily basis,

16. we, try to get the children to use their words more with each other,

17. ‘cause we see that the children of VPK

18. they have no problem with telling you something,

   Stanza 6: Children have problems with others

19. but they’re, they won’t interact with their, their peers,

20. the same as they interact with you so.

21. Like they’re having a problem with someone else,

   Stanza 7: Teachers teach children how to express their feelings

22. and, “Oh, this person pushed me, oh, this person took my toys or whatever.”

23. We’ll ask them, “We want you to tell him how they made you feel,”

24. “Tell them how they did you like that.”

   Stanza 8: Children learn how to talk to each other

25. And, now we’re saying more

26. that the kids are talking to each other,

27. and we try to get them to know

28. that they could use their own voice,

   Stanza 9: Children can express their desires and share them with other children

29. that they can say what they want

30. or say what they don’t like with each other
31. and their friends will understand,

Sub-sub-story 3: Children develop their independence by using their own words

   Stanza 10: Children develop their independence

32. so they don’t have to, run to the teacher every time that,

33. it builds more independence

34. that they know they can solve their own problems.

   Stanza 11: Children can solve their own problems using their own words

35. So that’s the interaction we’ve been doing

36. lately to try to get the kids to know that,

37. they have a voice that they can speak with each other

38. as well as not only to the teachers, to the,

39. with their peers as well.

   Stanza 12: She usually tells children what she wants

40. The strategy that I usually use here,

41. basically I wouldn’t say

42. there’s a specific strategy as I talk to the kids,

43. I talk to them like, I talk to anybody else,

44. tell them what I want

   Stanza 13: Children feel valued when expressing their feelings

45. and ask them what they would like to,

46. and just basically we use the words to express our feelings

47. and to know that their feelings are valuable.

Sub-sub-story 4: Children learn how to interact with others by conversing with teachers
Stanza 14: Teachers help children express what they are feeling

48. And we try to help them to express what they’re feeling too.
49. And sometimes the kids will have the words to use,
50. so I just try to help them to say what they’re feeling
51. and then tell them what I’m feeling,
52. and tell them what I would like to help them.

Stanza 15: Children learn how to respond to others from teachers

53. And usually I’m responding to them in the same way
54. that they’ll see you’re talking to them in a certain way,
55. then they’ll talk to you in the same way.

Stanza 16: Children learn how to interact with others

56. They’re, like, Veronica doesn't like this
57. and I don’t like this either so
58. that’s how they interact with their selves,
59. with their, their peers.

Sub-story 2: Her way of dealing with ineffective teacher-child interactions

Sub-sub-story 5: Unhappy conversations with children are considered ineffective

Stanza 17: Unhappy interactions with children are considered ineffective

60. What I would consider ineffective is,
61. any interaction that doesn’t leave,
62. me and the child being happy afterwards.

Stanza 18: She tries to find what makes children upset

63. So that was, any situation where I could help the child,
64. to figure out what was making them upset
65. or what was causing them not to make the choices that day

   Stanza 19: She has trouble conversing with a shy and quiet child
66. or, like a particular quiet child,
67. not being able to converse with that child,
68. because they’re, maybe they’re shy or don’t want to talk to me.

   Stanza 20: Unhappy conversations with children are considered ineffective
69. That’s what I would consider ineffective,
70. if we’re not happy at the end of the conversation,
71. one of us is not happy.
72. We both wanna walk away
73. and to be happy in the situation with the problem solved,
74. I think it’s ineffective.

Sub-sub-story 6: She asks other teachers some suggestions to solve the problem

   Stanza 21: She keeps trying to solve the problem
75. We’ll like, keep trying until I do.
76. I keep trying until I do,
77. we don’t just give up on trying to make me and the child happy.

   Stanza 22: She asks teachers to give her an idea about how to deal with the problem
78. And if I can’t figure it out then,
79. I will go to another teacher, and then, like,
80. “Well, can you help me with this situation?”

   Stanza 23: She gets some ideas about how to solve the problem from other teachers
81. or if that doesn’t work out,
82. which that hasn’t ever been the case,
83. then I will go to, maybe the director.
84. My system director asks, “What do you think?”
85. to get some suggestions on how can I solve the situation.

**Sub-story 3**: Positive effects of the VPK program on getting children ready for kindergarten

Sub-sub-story 7: VPK program helps children learn how to interact with others

   Stanza 24: Her personal experience made her love the VPK program

86. I love the VPK program.
87. When it first started, I put my daughter in it
88. because not everybody needs to go to preschools,
89. so there’s a lot at home with moms.

   Stanza 25: Children learn how to interact with others through the VPK program

90. And so I love how it gets them ready for kindergarten, I mean.
91. So I love that, the kids are learning
92. how to interact with other kids their own age
93. when they just could’ve been at home with their moms,
94. they’re not getting any interactions with moms.

   Stanza 26: Children learn how they should behave in school through the VPK program

95. I love how they’re learning
96. what is expected of them in a classroom setting,

   Stanza 27: VPK program helps children learn how to interact with other adults

97. and I love how they learn
that they can actually trust another grown up, another adult

that’s someone that is not their parents.

Stanza 28: Children can trust and have good relationships with other adults

They can, they can grow to love us and everything,

we have great relationships with our kids.

I love that about the VPK.

Sub-sub-story 8: VPK program gets children ready for kindergarten

Stanza 29: Many children were not prepared for kindergarten before the VPK started

Before VPK,

we see a lot of children not ready for kindergarten.

Like we may see a lot not knowing how to write their names,

not knowing what the alphabets are or colors or anything that,

that is expected from children nowadays,

before they even get into the kindergarten.

And as for kindergarten we see,

Stanza 30: Children learn the necessary skills for kindergarten through the VPK program

after VPK we see,

the kids have learned so much for a whole year,

we have not had a problem where we felt

the kid was not ready for kindergarten at the end of the year.

Stanza 31: Children become accustomed to a kindergarten classroom setting

We see that the children are so excited about the kindergarten

and now they, they’ve gotten used to being in a classroom setting.
So it’s less traumatic for them when kindergarten, when their parents leave, because now they’ve gotten used to knowing that their parents are going to come back at the end of the day,

Stanza 32: VPK program helps children succeed in school

and they are ready for it,
I love that VPK asks them to be ready for kindergarten to be successful in the school.

Sub-sub-story 9: VPK program enables children to build a good vocabulary

Stanza 33: Teachers talk to children as much as they do in other classrooms

I wouldn’t say that that is any different than any regular preschool programs, because we still talk to the kids, we talk to them just as much as if they’re in a one-year-old room as they’re in a four-year-old room,

Stanza 34: Children build a vocabulary through conversations with teachers

we’re constantly speaking with the children that’s how they learn their vocabulary and how they learn how to interact with adults and other people.

Stanza 35: Children have trouble being prepared for kindergarten at home

So I see VPK basically is, has helped the kids who didn’t have any preschool beforehand
they didn’t have, don’t have many brothers and sisters at home

or they don’t, they don’t have any other way to get ready for school.

I see that’s what VPK programs have benefited among us.

Sub-story 4: Some barriers to effective teacher-child interactions in the VPK program

Sub-sub-story 10: She has trouble interacting with some children

Stanza 36: She has difficulty in interacting with children who are extremely shy

Extremely shy children, extremely shy children,

they are not,

it takes a while for them
to open up to any adult that is not their mom or dad.

Stanza 37: Teachers help shy children open their minds

And we had that problem from the beginning of the year,

and we just now are having those students
to kind of open up to us,

and actually talk with us

Stanza 38: Shy children are considered a barrier to effective teacher-child interaction

and do what their peers are doing,
it just takes them a while longer

but, but that’s, that’s kind of a barrier.

Stanza 39: Children who do not speak English well are considered another barrier

And then again, a child doesn’t speak English well,

that’s another barrier.

We haven’t had that this year, but have had that before.
151. The child isn’t learning English along with everything else
152. that he’s learning in the VPK.
153. That is the barrier.

Sub-sub-story 11: The time frame of the VPK program makes her work constantly

Stanza 40: Time constraints are considered a third barrier

154. For, maybe time constraints, like if you,
155. we’re running late then,
156. we don’t really have that time
157. to just sit around and talk or whatever.
158. That’s a kind of barrier too as well.

Stanza 41: VPK program provides teachers with only three hours

159. With the time constraints with,
160. with the VPK programs have only,
161. they’re for three hours a day.
162. But we work a whole day in preschool,
163. a whole day of preschool within those three hours.

Stanza 42: Teachers have to do so much work within the short time frame

164. So we kind of move pretty fast,
165. within the day we don’t have much time.
166. And we have plenty of time to talk to the kids,
167. because we do all the time,

Stanza 43: Children have to do the same amounts of work as full-day children do

168. but not as much as the child who was in a regular preschool here,
although they have all day to be with the teachers,

‘cause they have three hours with us,

and they still have to get just the same amounts of work done

as a full-day preschool child.

Stanza 44: Teachers have to constantly work for three hours

So we’re constantly working,

we’re constantly teaching more than

if we were in a full-day program.

End of Story: The time frame of the VPK program prevents teachers from effectively interacting with children despite the program’s positive effects on getting children ready for kindergarten

FRAME: Stanza 45: Teachers need more time to converse with children more frequently

We can still teach them constantly the words,

but we’ll have plenty of time
to also converse with children too,
because we have a whole day to get things done

instead of the three hours.

Table 4-2. Veronica’s class schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:00</td>
<td>Centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:15</td>
<td>Share time, Alphabet challenge, Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30</td>
<td>Special class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:15</td>
<td>Bathroom breaks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:20</td>
<td>Snack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:35</td>
<td>Clean up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:45</td>
<td>Indoor field trip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:10</td>
<td>Circle time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:35</td>
<td>Projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00</td>
<td>End of the VPK time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Seven Building Tasks

Building significance

How and what different things mean – the sorts of meaning and significance they are given – is a component of any situation.

1. What are the situated meanings of some of the words and phrases that seem important in the situation?

During the interviews and observations, she frequently uses the word “see,” and it has three different situated meanings according to each situation. First, the word “see” has the meaning that teachers and children are aware of something. That is to say, she uses the word “see” instead of using the word “understand.”

We’re constantly talking to the children here, because the, the child will listen more, if they see we’re listening to them too.

We, um, try to get the children to use their words more with each other, ‘cause we see that the children of VPK they have no problem with telling you something, but they’re (3.0), they won’t interact with their, their peers, the same as they interact with you so.

Second, the word “see” means that teachers and children observe any situation or any change. In other words, the meaning of “see” is to watch carefully what is going on in order to get information. She especially uses the word “see” when she wants to figure out what the VPK program is changing in classrooms.

Before VPK, we see a lot of children (1.0) not ready for kindergarten. Like we may see a lot (1.0) not knowing how to write their names, not knowing what the alphabets are or colors or anything that, that is expected from children nowadays, before they even get into the kindergarten. And as for kindergarten we see, after VPK we see, you know, the kids have learned so much for a whole year, we have not had a problem where we felt the kid was not ready for kindergarten at the end of the year. We see that the children are so excited about the kindergarten and now they, they’ve gotten used to being in a classroom setting.

Third, the word “see” means that teachers and children are needed to pay attention to something. In particular, she uses the word “see” when she needs children to listen to her speech
and to understand what she is saying. That is to say, when she finds one child who does not concentrate on her speech or a particular activity, she uses the word “see” rather than directly pointing out the child’s misbehavior, saying, “I don’t see Sally’s eyes or James’s. I don’t see crisscross applesauce from Hurley.”

Caroline, can I see your eyes, please? Caroline, can I see your eyes?

Even if they didn’t like something or they’re making a bad choice right now, listen why they’re doing that, if they, you know, they just see that, okay, they listen to me, okay, that’s all I really wanted it, somebody to pay attention to me at that moment.

Next, she frequently uses the word “learn,” and it has four different situated meanings. First, the word “learn” means that teachers and children start to understand the fact that they have to change the way they behave. Thus, the fact that children “learn” how to interact with others means that children have begun acknowledging that they need to change their own way of interacting with others by reflecting on that way.

I love how (1.0) they learn that they can actually trust another grown up, another adult that’s someone that is not their parents.

We’re constantly speaking with the children, that’s how they learn their vocabulary and how they learn how to interact with adults and other people.

Second, the meaning of “learn” is to get information about a new subject or activity. According to her speech, children always “learn” something, and this means that children constantly gain new facts from their surroundings.

I wanna say that they can change their curriculum if they would like to say, “Okay, we wanna learn about that,” but all throughout the day, they’re learning about something else that might not be our curriculum, because they’ll ask several questions.

We haven’t had many parents come in (3.0) and say, “When can they learn about this and learn about that?” We have had that but we say, “Yes, you’re welcome as well.”

Third, the meaning of “learn” is to remember something through repetition. From the interview data, both singing a song and parent involvement are considered effective ways to
make children remember teachers’ words. Within those contexts, the fact that children “learn” something in classrooms means that children keep in mind what teachers are saying by repeating it many times.

It’s like confirming what we are already teaching the kids and then, and then the parents teach them too because the kids learn through repetition, and so it helps the kid out more, and they seem like the more successful in school and in class where their parents help them at home to learn the same thing.

It’s just a teaching tool, the more songs they sing is easier for them since like I pick up the song and they’ll remember what we want them to learn.

Finally, the word “learn” means that teachers and children accidentally become acquainted with something. She uses the word “learn” in the situation when children get to know how valued they are through the process of expressing their feelings verbally. That is to say, teachers give children an opportunity to express their feelings, and this opportunity allows children to “learn” how valued they are.

We’re gonna find out what makes him or her upset and (2.0) make them happy (2.0) and usually just telling us about it (2.0) satisfies them and let them tell us about that, “Such and such made me upset,” and they’re gonna talk to you about that, they learn that they are valued and their emotions are valued.

Building activities

Some activity or set of activities is a component of any situation (the specific social activity or activities in which the participants are engaging; activities are, in turn, made up of a sequence of actions).

2. What is the larger or main activity (or set of activities) going on in the situation?

The main activity is to get children ready for kindergarten, and this main activity mostly takes place during whole-group time, but is connected to all kinds of children’s actions. This main activity consists of several sub-activities, which are made up of a number of different actions that are related to what children need to know to go to kindergarten.
A major sub-activity is to involve children in an activity to develop their ability to read and write. For example, during whole-group time, teachers ask, “What is the letter that sounds ‘B’?” or “What starts with ‘B’?” Teachers pick one child among children who want to answer the question and raise their hand. In order to involve all children in this activity, teachers try to pick a different child every time and ask children the same question until most of the children answer it. Also, teachers let children practice the vowels in English to make children remember them. As a result, this sub-activity – developing children’s literacy – consists of a number of different actions, for example, making children raise their hand; figure out the words that start with a special sound; remember the vowels in English; pay attention to teachers’ speech; and listen to other children’s words.

A second sub-activity is to make children accustomed to their daily routine. This sub-activity includes all the actions that children do every day. For example, during whole-group time, children participate in the same activities every day, including doing the calendar, the date, the weather, the planet, the color, and the continent. Also, during snack time, teachers let children line up by making a pattern, such as “girl, boy, boy, girl, boy, boy,” when they finish eating snacks in the cafeteria and move to their classroom. She says that teachers let children do different things every day to get them to line up; for example, they walk in the line holding their hands to pretend to be a snake. That is to say, children learn what teachers think children need to know to go to kindergarten through their daily routine. Since teachers believe that children are able to go to kindergarten by practicing what children need to know to go to kindergarten every day, they make children accustomed to their daily routine.

A third sub-activity is to allow children to experience a kindergarten lifestyle. For example, during snack time, teachers and children move upstairs to eat their snacks in the
cafeteria, and during free-play time, they go outside and spend time in the playground. Also, children go to different rooms, including a project room, in order to participate in different activities. She says, “I like that we have to move around because that's more (2.0) in my mind, toward the kindergarten setting. Everything’s not gonna be in their room when they’re in kindergarten, they’re gonna have to leave to go to the lunch, they’re gonna have to leave to go to the library, they’re gonna have to leave for different activities.” Thus, she says that children’s experience of traveling from one place to another is an effective way to get children ready for kindergarten. As a result, by allowing children to experience a kindergarten lifestyle, such as traveling to different locations in the school, teachers prepare children for kindergarten.

**Building identities**

Any situation involves identities as a component, the identities that the people involved in the situation are enacting and recognizing as consequential.

3. What identities (roles, positions), with their concomitant personal, social, and cultural knowledge and beliefs (cognition), feelings (affect), and values, seem to be relevant to, taken for granted in, or under construction in the situation?

The interview data show that she has different identities as a mother, pre-kindergarten teacher, and employee, along with her belief that children are able to be successfully prepared for kindergarten in the VPK program. Her identities as a mother, pre-kindergarten teacher, and employee seem to be relevant in the situation when she teaches children what they need to know to go to kindergarten according to the schedule of the VPK classroom. First, she, as a mother, has experience in putting her daughter in the VPK program, and this experience gives her a sense of identity. During the second formal interview, she says, “When my daughter was in VPK, I fell in love with that program, I loved it, I felt it got them ready for school, um, much to me, I just loved it, actually that’s where I wanna be.” That is to say, she as a mother saw that the VPK program provided her daughter with opportunities to learn the necessary skills for kindergarten,
develop her different abilities, and be ready for kindergarten. Thus, this experience made her trust the VPK program, and she was genuinely motivated to become a pre-kindergarten teacher by this trust. When the school gave teachers a chance to select where they would like to work, she chose the VPK classroom because of her trust in the VPK program.

Second, she as a pre-kindergarten teacher strongly believes that she successfully gets children ready for kindergarten in the VPK program. During the first formal interview, she says, “After VPK we see, you know, the kids have learned so much for a whole year, we have not had a problem where we felt the kid was not ready for kindergarten at the end of the year. We see that the children are so excited about the kindergarten and now they, they’ve gotten used to being in a classroom setting.” Also, during the second formal interview, she says, “I (3.0) love the organization of the VPK, because it is a faster pace than, because it is more like kindergarten and like I see the differences in those children from when they start with us to when they leave. It is a total difference, that I know I have complete faith that they’re ready for school.” That is to say, she sees that children learn a lot in the VPK classroom and thus are ready for kindergarten. As a result, she, as a pre-kindergarten teacher, is very proud of her teaching job, and this fact gives her a sense of identity.

Third, as an employee, she follows the schedule of the VPK classroom based on the guidelines for the VPK program and the school curriculum. The schedule of the VPK classroom makes her do so much work within a short time frame, but she cannot avoid this hectic schedule. This fact gives her a sense of identity as an employee. In her school, classroom schedules are decided at the beginning of the year, and teachers have to stick to their classroom schedule. When teachers want to change the schedule, they need to get the director’s approval in order to give the director time to look over the schedule and make sure everything will work out. In
reality, the schedule of the VPK classroom is restricted because the schedule is arranged within only three hours. Thus, teachers in the VPK classroom are constantly working and teaching because they do the same amounts of work as teachers in a full-day classroom do within only three hours. However, she says, “We do have a leeway time for if, you know, we feel like (3.0) we wanna stay a little longer at snack time or we wanna stay a little longer outside to play or longer project time room, we can, you know, shorten it in some places, shorten it in somewhere else and take that time out.” That is to say, teachers are able to change their classroom schedule a little bit, but such changes are not easy. This is because they need to get the director’s approval when they want to change the schedule. As a result, the fact that she has to follow the schedule of the VPK classroom and has trouble changing the schedule shows that she is only an employee of the school, and this gives her a sense of identity.

**Building relationships**

Any situation involves relationships as a component, the relationships that the people involved enact and contract with each other and recognize as operative and consequential.

4. What sorts of social relationships seem to be relevant to, taken for granted in, or under construction in the situation?

A teacher-child relationship and a teacher-teacher relationship seem to be relevant in the situation when she tries to deal with ineffective teacher-child interactions. She says that she has trouble conversing with a child who is shy or does not want to talk to her. She considers the situation when she has an unhappy conversation with the child as ineffective teacher-child interaction. In order to solve this problem, she tries to make both her and the child feel happy in different ways. For example, she goes to other teachers and asks, “Well, can you help me with this situation?” As a result, she gets some suggestions and tries them until she finds the best way to solve the problem. If she finds that the suggestions are not working, she goes to the director
and gets some further ideas about how to solve the problem. In particular, she has only two years of teaching experience and thinks that her insufficient experience of working with children is one of the barriers to effective teacher-child interactions. She has learned how to deal with certain situations or how to communicate with children from other experienced teachers and thus is much more confident in herself than in the past by overcoming a fear of “I don’t know what to do.” In short, she deals with the situation in which she has trouble having a happy conversation with a child by getting some suggestions from other teachers. This indicates that a teacher-child relationship and a teacher-teacher relationship seem to be relevant in the situation when she tries to deal with ineffective teacher-child interactions.

In addition, a teacher-child relationship and a child-child relationship seem to be under construction in the situation when she has children clap and cheer for their friends in her classroom. For example, during whole-group time, she encourages children to participate in an activity, saying, “I need a friend to draw a line from Asia to the Arctic. Emily, do you wanna try it?” If Emily accepts her offer, she claps her hands and cheers for Emily, saying, “Yeah, Emily.” As for the reason that she frequently uses clapping and cheering, she says that children are very upset or grumpy when they are not picked for something and then they do not want to do anything else for the day. Thus, teachers start rewarding children to cheer for their friends, saying, “Oh, yeah, good job, you propped for it for your friends, you know, we like that, I like that, you’re such a good sport, you know, now I’m gonna pick you, ‘cause you did such a good job.” This makes children learn good sportsmanship because they praise their friends without being upset that they are not picked for something. Also, she says, “They basically make their friends have higher self-esteem too, because they're being cheered for, ‘Yeah, yeah, they did a good job, our friends are happy for me.’” As a result, having children clap and cheer for their
friends contributes to improving teacher-child relationships because it enables children to continually listen to what teachers are saying without being upset that they are not picked for something. It also contributes to improving child-child relationships because it enables children to learn good sportsmanship as well as to make their friends have higher self-esteem.

**Building politics (the distribution of social goods)**

Any situation involves social goods and views on their distribution as a component.

5. What social goods (e.g., status, power, aspects of gender, race, and class, or more narrowly defined social networks and identities) are relevant (and irrelevant) in this situation? How are they made relevant (and irrelevant), and in what ways?

The school authority and family values are relevant in the situation when parents help children do their homework. Every Friday, her pre-kindergarten classroom sends home the homework that a child cannot do by him/herself and parents should be involved in. For example, teachers have parents and children make an “R” collage with the letter “R,” by cutting out things that begin with the letter “R” from magazines, books, or newspapers and pasting them to a piece of thin cardboard. Also, teachers have parents teach their children what they have already learned in school, since teachers believe that children are able to successfully learn what teachers are saying through repetition. As for the benefit of this parent involvement in the homework, she says, “The kids like say, ‘Yeah, my mom helped me out with this and we did this together,’ and they know there have been more stories and they’re more proud of, ‘My dad did this, my dad helped me cut out this,’ and it’s more involvement when they’re more interested in the homework because they’re doing it with their mom and dad. And so (3.0) that lets them learn better, ‘cause they’re interested in it and it’s not something that they have to do, (3.0), it’s something that they get to do with mom or dad.” That is to say, this parent involvement in the homework makes children interested in the homework, be proud of doing their homework with their mother or father, and actively engage in learning.
As a result, this parent involvement in the homework is considered a useful way of getting children to learn what teachers are saying. However, this parent involvement in the homework makes parents spend much time helping children do their homework and talking about it. In particular, since her pre-kindergarten classroom sends home the homework every Friday, parents and children need to spend a lot of time doing the homework over the weekend. This implies that parents and children focus their attention on the school curriculum as well as on academic performance rather than social and emotional competence. As a result, this indicates that they have little time to talk about family values including what is right and wrong and what is most important in life, and the school authority controls family values. Also, she says, “Usually we’re pretty good with the curriculum we have, our parents just, (2.0) you know, they, they’re learning what we’re teaching their kids that day, you know, it’s approved.” That is to say, parents trust the school curriculum and accept whatever teachers teach their children rather than asking questions about the school curriculum. As part of the school curriculum, the parent involvement in homework is taken for granted by parents, and thus, parents rarely think about its educational effects on their child and its advantages and disadvantages in terms of family values. As a result, the school authority represented by the school curriculum is relevant to family values in the situation when parents help children do their homework.

**Building connections**

In any situation things are connected or disconnected, relevant to or irrelevant to each other, in certain ways.

6. What sorts of connections – looking backward and/or forward – are made within and across utterances and large stretches of the interaction?

She considers children’s positive reaction to what teachers are saying as effective teacher-child interaction. For example, when a child actively answers a teacher’s question or a
teacher willingly responds to a child’s question, the child seems to be satisfied with the conversation. This makes the child feel valued and proud of him or herself. In terms of her definition of effective teacher-child interaction, she considers every chance teachers get as the best time for effective teacher-child interactions, saying, “Because we’re constantly talking to the children here, because the, the child will listen more if they see we’re listening to them too. So we talk to them constantly. The only time really (5.0), I can’t even say the time we’re not interacting with children verbally, because even during the circle time they raise their hands and they’re answering and questioning. Um, during the free-play morning time, they were playing and they’re talking to them, they’re telling all of their stories, what will happen the next day or a long time ago, it doesn’t matter, and they tell their stories and (3.0), you know, any chance we get any time, any alone time we get to tell her, any time we see they’re upset about anything, that’s a good time to talk to them.” That is to say, she tries to talk to children as often as possible and make children experience a valuable conversation with her, which gives them a chance to positively react to her speech. Thus, in terms of her definition of effective teacher-child interaction, these utterances indicate that she considers every chance she talks to children as the best time for effective teacher-child interactions.

During snack time, her classroom moves upstairs to have a snack at the cafeteria. While teachers and children are moving, she continually talks to children by asking them several questions, for example, “You’re going to Europe? I wanna come? I wanna go to Europe. Can I see the Eiffel tower, too? You go to Africa? I want to see some giraffes.” She allows children to freely talk about what country they want to go to. Children enjoy talking about the subject and seem to be satisfied with the conversation. While teachers and children are eating their snacks, they talk about what movie they have already watched, including “Tom and Jerry,” “That’s So
Raven,” and “Curious George.” When a child asks her what kind of beverage she is drinking, she answers the question and explains where it is from and what is included in it. This conversation develops into discussion about where children were born and where their parents came from. In addition, during free-play time, she pretends to be a monster and encourages children to pretend to be something else, saying, “Stacy, what are you? Are you still a polar bear? What are you? What are you guys? Are you a sea monster still? I thought you guys got rid of the sea monster.” And she chases children like a monster, and children enjoy playing with her and seem to be really joyful. These utterances show that she tries to talk to children as often as possible, and their discussion ranges over various topics. As a result, these utterances are connected to the previous utterances because these utterances provide evidence that she uses every chance she talks to children as time for effective teacher-child interactions.

**Building significance for sign systems and knowledge**

In any situation, one or more sign systems and various ways of knowing are operative, oriented to, and valued or disvalued in certain ways.

7. What sign systems are relevant (or irrelevant) in the situation (e.g., speech, writing, images and gestures)? How are they made relevant (and irrelevant), and in what ways?

During the first formal interview, she says that teachers try to make children use their own words in order to get children ready for kindergarten. For example, she says, “Like they’re having a problem with someone else, and, ‘Oh, this person pushed me, oh, this person took my toys or whatever.’ We’ll ask them, well, ‘We want you to tell him how they made you feel,’ ‘Tell them how they did you like that.’ And, now we’re saying more that the kids are talking to each other, and we try to get them to know that they could use their own voice, that they can (1.0) say what they want or say what they don’t like with each other and their friends will understand, so they don’t have to (2.0), you know, run to the teacher every time that, (1.0) it builds more
independence that they know they can solve their own problems.” That is to say, by using their
own words, children are able to independently solve their own problems and to successfully
interact with others. Also, she says, “We’re gonna find out what makes him or her upset and
(2.0) make them happy (2.0) and usually just telling us about it (2.0) satisfies them and let them
tell us about that, ‘Such and such made me upset,’ and they’re gonna talk to you about that, they
learn that they are valued and their emotions are valued, they learn how to express that, and that
makes them feel better.” That is to say, when teachers need to know what makes children upset
or happy, teachers let children express their feelings using their own words. Moreover, she is
worried about a child who is shy and quiet because the child is poor at expressing his or her
thoughts and feelings by using his or her own words. The child’s poor ability to use his or her
own words indicates that the child has trouble solving his or her own problems independently
and interacting with others successfully. In summary, she believes that children need to develop
their ability to use their own words in order to go to kindergarten because the ability influences
their problem-solving skills as well as their school achievement.

During the second formal interview, she says that she has changed her way of interacting
with children over time by not using negative words, such as “Don’t” and “No.” She says,
“Instead of telling them things that they can’t do, telling them things that they can do. Like if
they’re running in the classroom, like I say, ‘Use inside feet, please,’ they still give me the
desired behaviors what I want. So instead of (3.0) their talking again now, instead of saying,
‘Okay, everybody be quiet. No more talking,’ that’s negative. Instead, I’ll say, ‘Inside voices,
please,’ then they’ll use inside voices, (1.0) that’s positive, ‘cause I’m telling them what they can
do and they’re choosing to do the right behavior for themselves.” By using positive words, she
encourages children to make the right choice on their own and leads children to behave in a
proper way. Children’s proper behaviors indicate that she is effectively interacting with children, since she defines children’s positive reaction to what teachers are saying as effective teacher-child interaction. She also says that using positive words contributes to boosting children’s self-esteem by developing children’s decision-making skills. These advantages of using positive words enable her not to use negative words, and thus, she has changed her way of interacting with children. This indicates that her way of interacting with children is strongly influenced by the characteristics of the words she uses. As a result, in terms of emphasis on the importance of words, the fact that her words play a critical role in her way of interacting with children is relevant to the fact that she attaches a lot of importance to children’s ability to use their own words.

8. What systems of knowledge and ways of knowing are relevant (or irrelevant) in the situation? How are they made relevant (and irrelevant), and in what ways?

One of the ways of knowing is repetition, and it is relevant to answering a question in the situation when she gives a child an opportunity to answer her questions in order to check if the child remembers what children have already learned. For example, during whole-group time, she asks one child a question, saying, “Charlie, can you name what is starting with ‘R’?” Since children have experience of making an “R” collage with the letter “R” as their homework, she says, “You made the projects. You guys put on a whole lot of stuff that starts with ‘R’ as your homework.” However, the child gives a wrong answer to her, and she says, “Butterfly? It starts with ‘B.’ We made ‘R’s.” And then she gives another child a chance to answer the question, saying, “With ‘R’? Celina?” She continually gives children a chance to answer the same question by calling on each child’s name and moves to a question about the vowels in English, saying, “This is the letter ‘E.’ What’s special about this letter? Who remembers?” She encourages children to raise their hands to answer the question and asks, “What is that called, Sally, when a
letter has two sounds?” The child does not give her a right answer, and she says, “It’s called a ‘Vowel.’ Are all of you remembering that word?” Finally, she asks some children questions, saying, “Sally, what is it called? Austin, what is it called? What is it called, Emily?”

This situation shows that she repeatedly reminds children about what they have already learned and wants children to remember what they need to know to go to kindergarten. In order to check if each child remembers what children have already learned, she asks every single child the same question and responds to the child’s answer. In particular, during the second formal interview, she says that repetition through children’s daily routine is helpful for children to learn what children need to know to go to kindergarten. Thus, she believes that children are able to successfully remember what they have already learned by repeating the same thing. Also, the situation demonstrates that children are able to have an opportunity to express their thoughts by answering teachers’ questions. This opportunity enables children to get feedback from teachers by showing where they are, as well as to share their ideas with other children and teachers. Thus, both repetition and answering a question are considered ways of knowing and are relevant in the situation when teachers provide each child with an opportunity to answer their questions in order to check if the child remembers what children have already learned.

9. What languages in the sense of “national” languages like English, Russian, or Hausa, are relevant (or irrelevant) in the situation?

English and Japanese are irrelevant in the situation when she is concerned that one Japanese girl in her classroom is very shy and quiet. According to her speech, the Japanese girl is brand new to the school and her classroom, and teachers are just working with the girl and are hoping that the girl actively speaks with others. Teachers give the girl a chance to say the answers, and the girl has answered when she knows the answer, but is quiet for the rest of the day. Teachers try to facilitate the girl to engage in a conversation with others by talking to her
and having her talk to them. Teachers think that the girl is very smart and has no problem with an understanding of what teachers are saying, and thus, teachers treat her like every other child in the classroom. For example, when the whole class was making a storybook, the Japanese girl wrote her own sentence and drew pictures for the sentence on her own. When teachers asked her questions, she expressed her opinion and gave her own following story. Therefore, teachers’ major concern for the Japanese girl is not that she will not understand what teachers are saying because of the language barrier but that she is very shy and quiet. In other words, teachers consider the Japanese girl as only one of the children who are shy and quiet rather than as one of the children who come from other countries.

During the first formal interview, she says that teachers have concerns about one boy who speaks English very well, but is very quiet and does not speak much. Teachers have trouble conversing with the boy and figuring out his thoughts and feelings. Teachers are very worried about the boy because they believe that children need to be confident enough to be able to speak so as to go to kindergarten. That is to say, teachers believe that children need to be prepared to confidently express their thoughts and feelings to go to kindergarten. Thus, teachers make every effort to help shy and quiet children express what they are thinking and feeling in order to get them ready for kindergarten. As a result, the reason that teachers are mainly worried about the Japanese girl is the same as the reason that teachers are concerned about shy and quiet children. Since teachers’ major concern for the Japanese girl does not result from the language barrier, English and Japanese are irrelevant in the situation when she is concerned that one Japanese girl in her classroom is very shy and quiet.

The Third Participant, Cindy

My main interest in Cindy’s interview is to see how she is concerned with the effects of a teacher-child ratio on teacher-child interactions. This main interest comes from the fact that
Cindy considers the high teacher-child ratio as the biggest barrier to effective teacher-child interactions. Her previous experience of teaching children in a classroom that provided a low teacher-child ratio made her understand the importance of a low teacher-child ratio in teacher-child interactions. Cindy thinks that the teacher-child ratio set by the VPK standards is high and the ratio does not reflect different classroom situations. However, since she cannot change the ratio, she has to teach children in the classroom with the ratio. In other words, she has to follow the rules set by dominant academics and institutions and is powerless to modify her teaching environment.

From her experiences, she knows that a low teacher-child ratio enables teachers to have more one-on-one interactions with children. That is to say, teachers are able to easily pay attention to each child and successfully help each child learn new skills or facts. Along with a low teacher-child ratio, she emphasizes a small class size because it contributes to improving children’s learning environments by making children feel calmer and more relaxed. In addition, she considers free-play time as the best time for effective teacher-child interaction, since children are more relaxed during that time than during whole-group or meal time. As a result, her way of interacting with children is strongly influenced by external factors, including teacher-child ratio, class size, and time.

Cindy’s narrative shows what makes her attach a lot of importance to a low teacher-child ratio and how a low teacher-child ratio affects teacher-child interactions as well as children’s learning. Also, her narrative points out why the teacher-child ratio set by the VPK standards is not reasonable and how policy makers or researchers have to decide an appropriate teacher-child ratio. Thus, Cindy’s narrative demonstrates how her discourses controlled by the hierarchical organizations of school systems influence her way of interacting with children.
Cindy’s Narrative

FRAME: Stanza 1: She goes to children who seem to be unhappy

1. If they’re unhappy,
2. if I see they’re unhappy,
3. I’ll bring them over to me
4. or I’ll go to them.

Story: Many benefits of a low teacher-child ratio

Sub-story 1: Need of a low teacher-child ratio for more one-on-one time with children

Sub-sub-story 1: She has one-on-one interaction with children in different ways

Stanza 2: She asks what happened to the children

5. If I, if I’m able to get up from wherever I’m at,
6. I’ll go to them,
7. and get down on their level
8. and ask them, “What’s wrong?”
9. “Why do you have a sad face on?”

Stanza 3: She hugs the children to make them happy

10. And usually they’ll tell me
11. and I, if I can offer,
12. I’ll wait for them to be happy,
13. I’ll give them hugs always,

Stanza 4: She lets the children sit on her lap to converse with them

14. but they’re, it’s like missing their mommy,
15. I’ll say, “When will we see mommy again?”
16. And usually they’ll say after nap, after free-play,
17. I’ll let ‘em sit on my lap

Stanza 5: She allows the children to get their stuff that makes them comfortable

18. if they need to go get their stuff,

19. if they have stuffed animals usually that they sleep with,

20. I’ll let them go get that

21. if they truly need it,

22. that’ll give them some comfort.

23. Or I’ll just let them sit on my lap and cuddle.

Sub-sub-story 2: A low teacher-child ratio offers more one-on-one time with children

Stanza 6: A low teacher-child ratio provides children with many benefits

24. If, if we could have less kids

25. I think it would be beneficial for the students

26. if we had, like, like if we had a ratio

27. instead of two teachers to eighteen kids,

28. we had two teachers to ten or twelve kids,

Stanza 7: The low ratio enables children to have more one-on-one time with teachers

29. I think it would be a lot easier and a lot better for the children

30. because then you can have more one-on-one time with the child

31. rather than I have, I have eighteen kids and two teachers,

32. and obviously you can’t be everywhere at once.

33. So if the ratios for the kids to teachers were at least like ten kids to two teachers,

34. then the kids I'm sure would benefit more

35. because they would have more one-on-one time.
Stanza 8: The high teacher-child ratio lets her simply give directions to children

36. Instead of like when I do my work, my daily worksheets,
37. instead of like all my kids sat at the tables in their spots.
38. And I just give, I hold up a piece of the paper, the worksheet,
39. and I give them, the direction on what to do
40. and I pass out the worksheets.

Stanza 9: A low teacher-child ratio enables her to give her full attention to each child

41. If I have three or four kids who need help,
42. obviously I’m not gonna be able to get three or four kids,
43. I have to start with one kid and then I work my way on.
44. But if the ratio was smaller,
45. then I will be able to help more kids quicker and
46. I don’t know.
47. I just think it would be better,
48. but the state says one, two teachers, eighteen kids.

Sub-story 2: The current teacher-child ratio ignoring different classroom situations

Sub-sub-story 3: The current teacher-child ratio in every school is high

Stanza 10: The teacher-child ratio regulated by the VPK program is high

49. Basically, the state says one to ten or one to eleven,
50. but since we have, that’s for, VPK,
51. but you can have up to eighteen,
52. so that’s why we have the second teacher come in.
53. But the state says the ratio is one to eleven,
54. I think it should be two to eleven.

   Stanza 11: The current teacher-child ratio in every school is high

55. I think this, it would be nice if the state would lower the ratio.

56. Even an elementary school,

57. I mean a teacher can have thirty kids sometimes in the classroom,

58. and be by herself or himself.

   Stanza 12: A low teacher-child ratio enables children to get better results

59. And I think it would be beneficial to the child

60. if they had less children in their classroom that they had dealt with

61. and you would get more one-on-one

62. and I think you would get better results out of the children,

   Stanza 13: The low ratio enables teachers to spend more time with each child

63. if they had less competition per se

64. and if they had more one-on-one time,

65. and the teacher could spend more time with individual students

66. if she needed to or he needed to.

Sub-sub-story 4: The current teacher-child ratio ignores different classroom settings

   Stanza 14: The high teacher-child ratio is a barrier to effective teacher-child interaction

67. Some barriers? Probably the ratio,

68. where I, where I would, I would only be there,

69. the only barrier I can think of is having so many kids.

   Stanza 15: A low teacher-child ratio enables teachers to freely interact with children

70. If you had less kids,
71. you can interact more freely with them,
72. you can interact more one-on-one
73. and that's really important
74. I think it’s the, more one-on-one attention
75. that I would think it could be the only barrier’s the ratio of kids to teachers.
76. Otherwise, I don’t really think there is a barrier within an interaction.

   Stanza 16: Researchers need to go to different classroom settings

77. The ratios come from researchers,
78. I think they’re wrong (ha, ha).
79. If somebody is actually in the classroom and not just one classroom,
80. if they go all over Florida
81. and go from different classroom settings to different classroom setting,

   Stanza 17: Researchers need to ask teachers their ideas about a teacher-child ratio

82. I think they would have a better idea of ratios with kids
83. than just sitting at a desk and typing up the paper
84. and, researching it that way,
85. if they would ask the teachers,
86. “What do you think?”

Sub-story 3: Beneficial effects of a low teacher-child ratio on children’s development

   Sub-sub-story 5: She saw that children had benefited greatly from a low teacher-child ratio

   Stanza 18: She taught children in the classroom with a low teacher-child ratio

87. I came, I used to live in Pinellas County, in Florida Pinellas County,
88. and the ratio, that of day care I worked at,
89. we doubled the standards’ meaning,
90. I was in a two-year-old room
91. and the, you can have ten two-year-olds to one teacher,
92. we only had two teachers with ten two-year-olds.
93. We doubled the teacher standards
94. and that really was effective.

Stanza 19: She saw the benefits of a low teacher-child ratio
95. But Pinellas County is also one of the strictest counties in Florida,
96. when it comes to children.
97. And that is more effective than what we have here.
98. Even though it’s a state-regulated ratio,
99. the state puts out the ratio, but.
100. Surely nothing I can do about it when the state says, “Can't fight them.”

Sub-sub-story 6: Some children make teachers prefer a low teacher-child ratio

Stanza 20: The teacher-child ratio regulated by the state is high
101. The state is probably the factor,
102. because they, the way they have made the ratios
103. so high in preschool
104. I know in school it’s even higher,
105. and public school’s higher.

Stanza 21: Teachers usually have some children who disrupt the class
106. You have different discipline problems that you have to deal with,
107. if I'm constantly giving my attention
108. to two or three students who have a discipline problem,
109. then that’s gonna affect all my other kids
110. who are not getting my attention.

Stanza 22: The children prevent her from effectively interacting with other children

111. That’s, that’s the factor why someone,
112. why you don’t get effective teacher interaction with the kids.
113. If you have discipline problems
114. and you’re constantly stopping and dealing with,
115. if you have other things going on,
116. like right now I have Apple accreditation
117. I’m trying to do along with teaching my kids.

Sub-story 4: Positive influences of a low teacher-child ratio on teacher-child interactions

Sub-sub-story 7: Many responsibilities prevent her from freely interacting with children

Stanza 23: She is currently responsible for many things

118. I have another teacher,
119. and another VPK teacher who just got put into a VPK room
120. and doesn’t understand her job,
121. so I’m doing her work load plus my work load
122. plus Apple plus try to find fun.

Stanza 24: Many responsibilities influence her way of interacting with children

123. So more stuff you have to load onto you,
124. and more responsibilities
125. I think it is, affects the teacher-child interaction.
Stanza 25: She has so much work to do during the VPK time

126. The best? It’s probably before we start work at 9 o’clock.
127. My kids I can,
128. because I have so much to do
129. and things that need to be done from me as a teacher,
130. and just different things are going on, 9 to 12,
131. it’s pretty busy.

Stanza 26: She is able to freely interact with children before the VPK time

132. But before 9 o’clock,
133. I get here at 7:00, a lot of my kids get here early,
134. also interaction at the table
135. and we’re talking and playing, all day long.
136. But then there’s just stuff we have to get done.

Sub-sub-story 8: A relaxed atmosphere helps her to effectively interact with children

Stanza 27: She is sometimes busy when children eat breakfast

137. Before 9 o’clock? Breakfast is it.
138. We have breakfast between like 8:15 to 8:30,
139. and, that, sometimes that could be a little hectic
140. depending on how many kids actually want to eat,

Stanza 28: She has to feed many children at once

141. and if it’s like all twenty,
142. you can imagine trying to feed twenty kids at one time,
143. ‘cause we have breakfast in the room,
not in the lunch room.

But otherwise they’re playing from 7:00 to 9:00,
it’s just play time.

Stanza 29: She feels more relaxed during free-play time

During the VPK time? Probably play time,
‘cause that’s what the, more what they wanna do
and they’re more relaxed,
you’re more relaxed usually,
unless you’re trying to do something else
like an art activity or something.

Stanza 30: She prefers eating in her classroom to in the cafeteria

I prefer in my room,
there's been days like when our cook isn’t here,
and we have to eat in our room,
I think I’m the only one of the teachers in the building
that likes to have to eat in the room.

Stanza 31: She has difficulty in leading many children to the cafeteria

I cheer when I don’t have to walk over there,
‘cause it is a hassle, a hassle trying to walk over there,
‘cause I have eighteen kids sometimes or twenty in line,
get ‘em over there,
get ‘em fed to where and,

Stanza 32: Her classroom provides her with more opportunities to talk to children
‘cause in my room it’s more relaxed.

I don’t have to be, the, the, the, the, with them.

I can just, you can sit down

and talk more with them

when it’s in the room rather than over there.

Sub-sub-story 9: Fewer children make a big difference to teacher-child interactions

Stanza 33: A low teacher-child ratio enables her to effectively interact with children

Overcome some barriers?

Lower the ratio (ha, ha)?

That’s my big one is lower the ratio.

I think if there's less kids,

you can obviously talk with them more,

Stanza 34: A low teacher-child ratio makes teachers easily interact with children

‘cause you don’t have eighteen to contend with,

you could, you have ten or twelve.

That’s always a lot easier,

you’re always gonna,

you could be able to have more one-on-one with them,

Stanza 35: Fewer children in the classroom make a totally different atmosphere

and it’ll be less hectic in here when, there,

I noticed when there’s fewer kids in here,

the whole atmosphere of the classroom is completely different.

Stanza 36: There is less disruption when there are fewer children in the classroom
181. Everybody is calmer,
182. it’s not as loud,
183. there’s not loud, as many disruptions when there’s fewer kids,
184. and then there’s, less disruptions

End of Story: A low teacher-child ratio contributes to effective teacher-child interactions by providing teachers with more one-on-one time with children

FRAME: Stanza 37: Fewer children make her spend more time talking to each child
185. and there’s less times I’m correcting somebody or,
186. talking to somebody, about what they’re doing wrong
187. or not making a good choice.
188. When there’s fewer kids, everyone just learns easier.
189. It’s happier in a classroom (ha, ha),
190. you could talk more.

Table 4-3. Cindy’s class schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:00</td>
<td>Free-play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:15</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:30</td>
<td>Clean-up and read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00</td>
<td>Outside-time (Beginning of the VPK time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30</td>
<td>Wash hands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:40</td>
<td>Circle time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:15</td>
<td>Worksheets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00</td>
<td>Centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00</td>
<td>End of the VPK time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seven Building Tasks

Building significance

How and what different things mean – the sorts of meaning and significance they are given – is a component of any situation.

1. What are the situated meanings of some of the words and phrases that seem important in the situation?
During the interviews and observations, she often uses the word “understand,” and it has four different situated meanings. First, the word “understand” means that teachers and children know the meaning of what someone says. The situation when children “understand” what teachers are saying means that children are acquainted with the meaning of something that teachers are saying.

You get positive feedback from the kids, they smiled, they (3.0) understand what you're saying, what you’re talking, like for the circle time, and I'm giving them something new.

So we just ask them, basically we will ask them for confirmation that they understand what I just said.

Second, the meaning of “understand” is to know what is going on. The situation when teachers and children “understand” something means that they have knowledge of how something happens.

I'll understand that they understand, you know, by them answering my questions and smiling and they’re happy and (3.0) I guess that's how I would know interaction has been effective.

You win, ‘cause you don’t have any cards left. Do you understand?

Third, the word “understand” has the meaning that teachers and children have information about something. She uses the word “understand” in the situation when children do not “understand” how to do something, and this means that children cannot do something because they do not have any information about how to do that.

We just let them do whatever they wanna do and then they just come to us, if they need help with, they don’t understand how to do a certain project, they're fighting with their friends and they can't resolve it by themselves.

I have another teacher, and another VPK teacher who just got put into a VPK room and doesn’t understand her job, so I’m doing her work load plus my work load plus Apple plus try to find fun.

Fourth, the meaning of “understand” is to be familiar with how someone is feeling and what someone is thinking about. In the situation when teachers “understand” children, the word
“understand” means that teachers are acquainted with how children are feeling, what children are considering, and what makes children behave in a particular way.

I’m not sure I understand completely (1.0), ‘cause I have a good relationship, I think my relationship with all of my kids is good.

Next, she frequently uses the word “know,” and it has four different situated meanings.

First, the meaning of “know” is to realize that something is happening. Teachers give children instruction on how to do something and “know” whether the instruction is successful or not by observing how children are doing something. In this situation, the word “know” means that teachers realize whether or not children are doing something under the instruction.

When (1.0) I see them doing it and following my directions, then I know, and if they do something, if they don't do it right, I will say, “You didn’t quite understand my directions, did you?”

I’ll write a parent, for instance, saying, “Your, you know, so-and-so, had a hard time keeping their hands to themselves or they forgot their listening ears today.” So the parents always knows how their behavior was, they always know it every day.

Second, the word “know” means that teachers and children are familiar with something because they have already experienced something. The situation when children “know” their classroom schedule means that children are familiar with their daily routine because they have already experienced what they have to do every day.

They know when they come in, what they're supposed to do, they know after they wash their hands, they sit for circle, they know after circle we do work, after work they have free time until the end.

Or sometimes on the first day, if they’re acting like a clown on the first day (ha, ha), you kind of already know what they’re gonna be like.

Third, the word “know” has the meaning that teachers and children keep in mind a fact or a piece of information. She uses the word “know” in the situation when teachers need to keep in mind what they should do for children or when children remember a fact.
I think the teacher should know that you just can't come in here, just tell the kids what to do and be done with it, you have to be able to talk to kids, you have to be able to get down on their level and talk with them.

I know you know, let's just listen for me instead of just (1.0) yelling ‘em out. You’re a smart boy, you know all of these words.

Fourth, the word “know” is to have information about something. The situation when teachers and children do not “know” something means that they have no information about something.

I don’t know exactly how long, I know it’s been more than ten years, it’s probably, it probably could have been around for twenty years.

You got eczema? Do you have eczema? Do you know what that is?

**Building activities**

Some activity or set of activities is a component of any situation (the specific social activity or activities in which the participants are engaging; activities are, in turn, made up of a sequence of actions).

2. What is the larger or main activity (or set of activities) going on in the situation?

The main activity is to get children ready for kindergarten, and it consists of several sub-activities. A major sub-activity is to give children an opportunity to develop reading and writing skills. This sub-activity is made up of several different actions, including having children do a spelling test, teaching children a different letter each week, reading children a book on the theme of the week, and helping children build a lot of words. In the case of a spelling test, children in her pre-kindergarten classroom have the test once or twice a month. Teachers first send home the words that they choose, for example, “HAVE,” “AM,” “DID,” “A,” and “ONCE.” Then teachers allow children to practice the words at home for at least two whole weeks as well as to go over the words in class. Before taking a spelling test, teachers give children a chance to review the words. Children sit at their seats and take the test, and immediately after taking the test, they
know the results. As for grading the children’s work, she says, “I don’t like I grade them, but even if they got them all wrong, I’m still telling them ‘good job’ or writing ‘good job’ on their paper. I don’t put it in the book, but I’m just putting it up on the board, sent home, just they get ready for kindergarten, ‘cause the kindergartens have a spelling test.” Also, she says, “I just try to get them (1.0), you know, more prepared for kindergarten, that way when they get to kindergarten and they’ve had a spelling test, they won’t have the anxiety of taking a test, they’ll already know what a spelling test is.” Thus, in her pre-kindergarten classroom, having children do a spelling test is considered one of the most successful ways of preparing children for kindergarten.

A second sub-activity is to involve children in different classroom activities. This sub-activity consists of a number of different actions, for example, providing children with opportunities to have a lot of hands-on experiences of puzzles, blocks, and circle stackers; to develop small motor skills, such as coloring, cutting, tracing, and gluing; and to participate in a math activity like counting, adding, and subtracting. These actions enable teachers to get children ready for kindergarten by helping children develop the necessary skills for kindergarten. For example, during free-play time, she plays “UNO” with two children at a table. This game enables each child to have five cards and to check if he or she has a card that has the same color or number as the card that has already been at the table. If he or she has the card that has the same color or number, he or she puts that card down. Thus, this game enables children to develop the ability to distinguish a particular color or number from various colors and numbers.

A third sub-activity is to get children to be accustomed to a kindergarten lifestyle and is composed of many different actions, including lining up and cleaning up. In particular, during meal time, teachers and children go outside and travel to the cafeteria. While they are travelling,
teachers get children to line up, to walk fast, and to be quiet. In the cafeteria, teachers allow children only to eat their lunch rather than talking to each other or teachers because they have only thirty minutes for lunch. After eating lunch, teachers have children throw trash away, move their chairs to the corner of the cafeteria, and pile them up. They come back to their classroom, and children take a nap immediately. As a result, the VPK classroom has its own structured schedule and makes both teachers and children busy keeping the schedule. By having children experience the structured schedule, teachers get children to be accustomed to a kindergarten lifestyle and prepare children for kindergarten.

**Building identities**

Any situation involves identities as a component, the identities that the people involved in the situation are enacting and recognizing as consequential.

3. What identities (roles, positions), with their concomitant personal, social, and cultural knowledge and beliefs (cognition), feelings (affect), and values, seem to be relevant to, taken for granted in, or under construction in the situation?

According to the interview data, she has different identities based on her belief that teachers should help children to develop the necessary skills for kindergarten as well as to succeed in school by providing enriching environments that maximize children’s learning. First of all, she is very proud of the school curriculum because she believes that the school curriculum enables children in her pre-kindergarten classroom to be well prepared for kindergarten. She is confident in the school curriculum more than in the guidelines for the VPK program. As for the school curriculum, she says, “I mean VPK says like kids should have these standards, you know, A, B, C, and D, and I do A, B, C, and D, but I go all the way to G per se.” That is to say, the school curriculum includes more learning materials and more necessary skills for kindergarten than the guidelines for the VPK program do and needs children to do a lot of worksheets. Thus, she believes that the school curriculum enables teachers to get children ready for kindergarten.
more than the guidelines do, saying, “All of my kids (2.0) practically all of my kids, my eighteen kids right now can skip kindergarten. If you go to another school and see what my kids can do versus another school who just plays all day, there’s gonna be a big difference. My kids can write their name, my kids can (2.0) do spelling test and ace them, my kids can do a lot of stuff that other kids can’t.” That is to say, she enjoys teaching children using the school curriculum because the curriculum provides children with a lot of opportunities for academic achievement and success in school. She, as a teacher in the school, is very proud of the school curriculum as well as teaching children in the school using the curriculum. Also, as a pre-kindergarten teacher, she feels absolutely sure that her children are prepared for kindergarten better than children in other schools. These facts give her a sense of her own identity.

Second, she considers the high teacher-child ratio as the biggest barrier to effective teacher-child interactions. She thinks that the teacher-child ratio set by the state is high, and the ratio does not reflect the conditions of different classroom settings. Thus, she believes that the ratio does not enable teachers to have enough one-on-one interactions with children or to provide children with a stable classroom atmosphere. As for the benefits of a low teacher-child ratio, she says, “Everybody is calmer, you know, it’s not as loud, there’s not loud, as many disruptions when there’s fewer kids, and then there’s, you know, less disruptions, and there’s less times I’m (2.0) correcting somebody or talking to somebody, you know, about what they’re doing wrong or not making a good choice. When there’s fewer kids, everyone just learns easier. It’s happier in a classroom (ha, ha), you could talk more.” That is to say, she is dissatisfied with the teacher-child ratio set by the state, but she cannot change the ratio since the ratio is based on the researchers’ findings and controlled by the state. This fact shows that she is powerless to modify her teaching environment, but gives her a sense of identity.
Third, she has no chance to talk to other teachers in the school and develops teaching methods on her own. The school has three VPK classrooms, and each classroom is based on the same curriculum. The pre-kindergarten teachers do the same kind of work, but have different teaching styles. For example, a spelling test in her pre-kindergarten classroom is not part of the school curriculum but one of the teaching strategies that she uses to get children ready for kindergarten. As for the relationships between teachers in the school, she says, “We don’t have time like we don't (1.0) get a break at the same time to go,” and “There’s usually no time to talk to the other teachers so (1.0), kind of come in and do our work and then leave when it’s time to leave.” That is to say, teachers in the school do not have an opportunity to share their ideas about how to teach or interact with children with other teachers. Teachers develop their own teaching styles by themselves rather than learning from other teachers’ experiences. Each classroom is isolated from all the other classrooms and is operated by each teacher’s independent judgment. These facts make teachers feel isolated from all the other teachers and give them a sense of identity.

As a result, as a teacher in the school, she is proud of the school curriculum because she believes that the school curriculum enables teachers to successfully get children ready for kindergarten, but she feels isolated from all the other teachers because she has no time to talk to other teachers and develops teaching methods on her own. In addition, as a pre-kindergarten teacher, she is strongly convinced that children in her pre-kindergarten classroom are well prepared for kindergarten, but she complains about the high teacher-child ratio in her pre-kindergarten classroom because the ratio prevents her from having enough one-on-one interactions with children. Thus, her different identities seem to be relevant in the situation when
she makes every effort to get children ready for kindergarten by using her own teaching style based on limited one-on-one interactions with children.

**Building relationships**

Any situation involves relationships as a component, the relationships that the people involved enact and contract with each other and recognize as operative and consequential.

4. What sorts of social relationships seem to be relevant to, taken for granted in, or under construction in the situation?

A teacher-child relationship and a teacher-parent relationship seem to be relevant in the situation when she tries to deal with the problem of a child’s misbehavior by means of a daily report. According to her words, children in her pre-kindergarten classroom get a daily report, and the report includes information about their behaviors, for example, their disposition like happy, sad, quiet, and tired; their lunch; and their nap. Also, she says, “If they had a bad day with hitting, I’ll write a parent, for instance, saying, ‘Your, you know, so-and-so, had a hard time keeping their hands to themselves or they forgot their listening ears today.’ So the parents always knows how their behavior was, they always know it every day.” That is to say, she communicates with parents through a daily report. Moreover, she uses a daily report as a way of correcting children’s misbehavior, saying, “If I had like a bad time with a child, I’ll call the parents myself while I’m here and say, you know, ‘So-and-so has had a hard day, can you please talk to them?’ and so forth.” By informing parents of their child’s misbehavior and asking parents to help her solve the problem, she deals with the problem of a child’s misbehavior. This indicates that a teacher-parent relationship contributes to improving a teacher-child relationship. Thus, a teacher-child relationship and a teacher-parent relationship seem to be relevant in the situation when she tries to deal with the problem of a child’s misbehavior by means of a daily report.
In addition, she uses a daily report as a way of encouraging children not to behave badly, saying, “I’ll just give ‘em a head’s up, ‘Hey, this is what I’m just gonna say on the note home.’” For example, during whole-group time, she finds that one child does not follow the directions and says, “Adam, I’m writing a note home to your mommy and daddy saying that you’re not, um (2.0), you’re having a hard time listening and following the directions. I don’t think that you’re gonna be too happy with that.” In her pre-kindergarten classroom, a daily report is used as a warning that if children break the rules, their parents are deeply disappointed about that. Since children are afraid that their parents will be disappointed by their misbehavior, she frequently uses a daily report as this kind of a warning whenever she finds children’s misbehavior. This indicates that she tries to improve the relationships with children through a parent-child relationship. As a result, a parent-child relationship and a teacher-child relationship seem to be relevant in the situation when she uses a daily report as a way of preventing children from behaving badly.

**Building politics (the distribution of social goods)**

Any situation involves social goods and views on their distribution as a component.

5. What social goods (e.g., status, power, aspects of gender, race, and class, or more narrowly defined social networks and identities) are relevant (and irrelevant) in this situation? How are they made relevant (and irrelevant), and in what ways?

Her teaching experience and the VPK program are relevant in the situation when the VPK program has not fundamentally changed her way of working with children. According to her words, she has six years of teaching experience, and her way of working with children has changed over time. She says that she really did not know how to teach and interact with children when she first started a teaching job. As an assistant, she learned how to teach and interact with children by observing a lead teacher. She was not comfortable with her job because she did not know what she was supposed to do, but she is currently more comfortable with what she is doing.
and more open with children. That is to say, her way of teaching or interacting with children has changed positively over time, and this indicates that her teaching experience strongly influences how and why her way of working with children has changed.

However, she says that the VPK program did not change her teaching style, saying, “It made me (2.0) a little bit stricter on my lesson plans like actually I had to write out what I was doing for (2.0), we added, um (1.0), like skills development isn't something we had before and now we have in the VPK you have like skills development, they want you reading every day which is something I think almost every teacher always did anyway but they want you to read and write out more stuff now.” Also, she says that the VPK program did not fundamentally change her way of interacting with children even though the VPK program gave her new ideas about what to teach or how to assess children’s work; for example, she has children do a spelling test in the VPK program, but she did not do that before the VPK program. That is to say, the VPK program gives her information about what to teach or how to assess children’s work rather than about how to teach or interact with children. Moreover, the VPK program makes her teach children more learning stuff according to more structured lesson plans, but she thinks that what the VPK program makes teachers teach children is not basically different from what most of the teachers have usually taught children by means of their own teaching styles. As a result, her way of working with children has changed over time, and how and why her way of working with children has changed is more strongly influenced by her teaching experience than by the VPK program. In the situation when the VPK program has not fundamentally changed her way of working with children, her teaching experience and the VPK program as social goods are relevant.
Building connections

In any situation things are connected or disconnected, relevant to or irrelevant to each other, in certain ways.

6. What sorts of connections – looking backward and/or forward – are made within and across utterances and large stretches of the interaction?

As for typical teacher-child interactions during meal time, she says, “There’s, um, unfortunately usually not a lot of time for interaction that I have found, because we’re so busy, we only have a set amount of time that we’re allowed in there.” In order to feed eighteen to twenty children, teachers have to give them their plates and milk, see what they need when they finish eating, have them put away their chairs, and clean the tables. She spends the majority of the meal time encouraging children not to talk, to finish eating, and to throw trash away. For example, she says, “Are you eating or talking? If you don’t have a clear plate in front of you, you are not talking. We’re eating and leaving. When you’re done, throw it out. If there’s plenty on your plate, don’t ask me for more.” Thus, she says that she has little time to interact with children during meal time. These utterances are considered teachers’ directives because teachers need children only to follow the directions rather than expecting any feedback from children. Since teachers and children have to do so much work within a restricted time frame, teachers allow children only to understand what teachers are saying and to do what teachers expect immediately.

In addition, among whole-group, free-play, and meal time, she considers free-play time as the best time for effective teacher-child interactions, saying, “That’s what the, you know, more what they wanna do and they’re more relaxed, you’re more relaxed usually, unless you’re trying to do something else like an art activity or something.” During free-play time, she allows children to decide for themselves where they want to go and what they want to play with. In
other words, children have no work to do within a limited time frame and do not need to follow the directions. She just walks around the classroom, asks children what they are making, plays with them, or helps children solve problems or arguments. For example, she talks to one child, “You’ve gotten a two-story house now? You have a two-story house? Yeah. Where you have one floor to go upstairs and there is another one on the top? No? Are there bedrooms upstairs? That means you have a two-story house.” Or she asks, “What are you girls playing? Oh, it’s a kind of carnival or a zoo? Have you guys already combined it? Who might get in?” These utterances show that she freely talks to children and their discussion ranges over various topics, since she is able to have time to get feedback from children and respond to it during free-play time. Thus, during free-play time, teachers and children have sufficient time to think about and talk about something since they are not rushed.

As a result, compared to the previous utterances characterized as teachers’ directives, these utterances are based on mutual respect and understanding. This difference mostly results from the question of whether teachers and children have work to do within a limited time frame. Pressure to do so much work within a restricted time frame makes teachers and children feel upset and have few opportunities to initiate talk or introduce new topics. This kind of pressure makes teachers rush children by giving orders or using commanding words without waiting for children’s responses. Thus, her utterances during meal time are connected to the utterances during free-play time, since both utterances show the fact that pressure to do so much work within a restricted time frame directly influences what kinds of words she uses.

**Building significance for sign systems and knowledge**

In any situation, one or more sign systems and various ways of knowing are operative, oriented to, and valued or disvalued in certain ways.
7. What sign systems are relevant (or irrelevant) in the situation (e.g., speech, writing, images and gestures)? How are they made relevant (and irrelevant), and in what ways?

As for the ways teachers can promote effective teacher-child interactions, she says, “Have more time. My kids that are up here all day long get more from me than do the kids out here just for three hours a day. If we had all day to teach rather than (1.0) with VPK this training teaching three hours, it will be a lot better, ‘cause we have time frame on everything, on how long can we do this, how long can we do that, this only should take this long.’” Also, she says that she can effectively interact with children before 9 o’clock, saying, “Because I have so much to do and things that need to be done from me as a teacher, and just different things are going on, 9 to 12, it’s pretty busy.” In addition, she says that she has no idea how other teachers teach children or interact with children because she has no time to observe other teachers. She attaches a lot of importance to time, and time strongly affects her way of teaching and interacting with children. Even though she does not directly mention that time constraints prevent her from effectively interacting with children, her speech demonstrates that she is under pressure to do so many things within a short time frame, and this makes her have few opportunities to effectively interact with children.

In particular, she considers children’s positive reaction to what teachers are saying as effective teacher-child interaction. That is to say, the situation when teachers give children new information about something and then get positive feedback like enjoyment, happiness, or satisfaction from children is considered effective teacher-child interaction. Thus, the time frame set by the guidelines for the VPK program prevents her from effectively interacting with children, since the time frame does not allow her enough time to give and take feedback from children. Also, the time frame allows her few opportunities to learn good examples of effective teacher-child interactions from other teachers’ experiences. As a result, the time frame set by the
guidelines for the VPK program is considered a barrier to effective teacher-child interactions. This is relevant to the fact that time plays an important role in teachers teaching and interacting with children in the situation when she has to do so many things within a short time frame and thus has trouble effectively interacting with children.

8. What systems of knowledge and ways of knowing are relevant (or irrelevant) in the situation? How are they made relevant (and irrelevant), and in what ways?

One way of knowing is one-on-one interaction, and another way of knowing is repetition. Both ways of knowing are relevant in the situation when she deals with children’s behavioral problems through repeated instruction. For example, she says, “One I have a child who wants to hit constantly and I sit down with him one-on-one and redirect him, I’m still interacting with him, even though I’m redirecting him.” If she sees that the child hits somebody, she encourages him to go to a quiet corner and read a book or to do what he wants. Also, she tells him to hit his jacket or his pillow instead of hitting somebody else. From her previous experiences, she says that this strategy to deal with the problem really works. This is because she sees children not hitting anymore, not getting aggressive anymore, or not getting angry anymore. When children need to just talk to her, they say, “I need to talk to you,” and she just sits down next to them and listens to what they are saying. Thus, in order to correct children’s misbehavior, she talks one-on-one with children and teaches them repeatedly how to control their negative feelings.

In the case of a child who always disrupts the class and moves to another room, she encourages the child to participate in different classroom activities, saying, “Oh, let's do this, or let's do this.” However, the child still displays his behavioral problems, and she has trouble dealing with the problem. As for the reason that she does not have a good relationship with the child, she says, “Sometimes you just don't get along with another adult and you just don't know why. And for some reason it was like this with this child, and I know that’s sad to say, but for
this child, him and I, for some reason, just could not make it work.” She has not discovered the best way of solving the problem yet, but she is still interacting with the child by continually talking to him and repeatedly using the same methods.

As a result, in the case of children who display behavioral problems, she first talks one-on-one with the children in order to know what makes them behave badly or to teach them how to control their negative feelings. Then she encourages the children to engage in a new activity for the purpose of correcting their bad behaviors. She repeatedly uses this strategy to deal with children’s behavioral problems until she confirms that children’s bad behaviors are corrected. In other words, through repeated conversations with teachers, children are able to know what kinds of behavioral problems they have as well as how and why they have to correct their bad behaviors. Thus, as a way of knowing, both one-on-one interaction and repetition are relevant in the situation when she deals with children’s behavioral problems through repeated instruction.

9. What languages in the sense of “national” languages like English, Russian, or Hausa, are relevant (or irrelevant) in the situation?

English and all the other languages are irrelevant in the situation when she interacts with children who speak English as a second language in her pre-kindergarten classroom. She says that there are several children who speak English as a second language in her pre-kindergarten classroom, but they speak English very well and have no trouble understanding what teachers are saying as well as communicating with teachers. In other words, the children who speak English as a second language in her classroom are able to fluently express their thoughts and feelings, and she is able to easily figure out what their reactions to her words mean. Thus, she does not consider the language barrier as a barrier to effective teacher-child interactions.

In addition, she is very well acquainted with her children and what feedback from her children about her words means. Since most of the children in her classroom have attended the
school over one year, she has already observed the majority of her children and learned their characteristics. As for the reason that teachers are able to easily figure out each child’s characteristics, she says, “You can tell them by just watching ‘em. You just watch ‘em and observe for even just a few hours, you kind of get an idea of how they’re gonna be (5.0), they don’t hide anything like adults do (ha, ha), it’s all out there.” That is to say, teachers are able to understand what children are thinking and feeling through their verbal and nonverbal language because children express their thoughts and feelings very frankly. Thus, she is able to understand well what the reactions of her children, including children who speak English as a second language, mean. In terms of her definition of effective teacher-child interaction – children’s positive reaction to what teachers are saying, she is able to effectively interact with every single child in her classroom. As a result, in the situation when she interacts with children who speak English as a second language in her pre-kindergarten classroom, English and all the other languages are irrelevant.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This qualitative research project aims to investigate barriers to and facilitators of effective teacher-child interactions, as defined from a critical perspective, in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings. In this chapter I will demonstrate barriers to and facilitators of effective teacher-child interactions based on the results of data analysis in Chapter 4. The findings of this study show that teachers mainly interact with children in the VPK classroom to have them understand what they need to know to go to kindergarten. Teachers enthusiastically teach children the rules and standards for kindergarten through their daily routine, but are powerless to modify their working environments. Thus, the findings of this study support two contrasting hypotheses: one is that teachers as the oppressed are forced to teach children a white, male, European-American model through diverse techniques of normalization, such as measurement, regulation, and evaluation; the other is that teachers as the oppressors force children to learn such a model through the unilateral interactions between themselves and children. In addition, I will address how the findings of this study are connected with the results of previous research, and make some recommendations for further research, which are intended to overcome several limitations of this study as well as to lead further research to focus on improving educational practice. Finally, I will show how the findings of this study can be employed by interested practitioners, including teachers, policy makers, and researchers.

Summary of Findings

First, the teachers’ words that are frequently used in the classroom – including talk, tell, see, learn, understand, and know – have many different situated meanings. Nonetheless, these words are commonly used for two purposes: one is to have children do what teachers expect; the other is to give children a chance to be aware of something new or already known. That is to say,
the three teachers use these words when they want to check if children are acquainted with what
teachers are saying or remember what children have been already taught; when they need
children to pay attention to what is going on and to follow the directions; and when they need
children to change how to behave or speak, such as a way of interacting with other children.
Also, the three teachers use these words to provide children with an opportunity to express their
thoughts and feelings, to get information about a new subject or activity, and to use any
knowledge of what they have already experienced. As a result, the teachers’ words that are
frequently used in the classroom indicate that the three teachers mainly interact with children to
transmit a body of knowledge and to confirm if children are aware of or keep in mind the
knowledge.

In particular, the teachers’ primary purpose in having children acquire certain knowledge
is to get children ready for kindergarten and make sure that children are familiar with what they
need to know to go to kindergarten. Even certain skills that children usually learn in other regular
classrooms in child care settings – such as numbering, coloring, gluing, cutting, and tracing – are
emphasized as the necessary skills for kindergarten. Children need to practice and attain
proficiency in these skills because their abilities need to be rated by kindergarten teachers as
good or outstanding. The three teachers especially give emphasis to children’s literacy readiness
since the VPK program focuses on developing pre-kindergarten children’s early literacy skills.
Thus, the three teachers make every effort to have children build a good vocabulary by talking to
children as often as possible, reading children a new book every week, or having children do a
spelling test. Also, the three teachers attach a lot of importance to children’s ability to
independently solve problems by using their own words, especially when they have a problem
with other children. This ability is directly related to children’s social and emotional competence
considered essential for successful school readiness. As a result, the three teachers need children to succeed in kindergarten by having a good vocabulary or using their own words.

The teachers’ emphasis on children’s literacy readiness is strongly related to the fact that they are concerned about the school’s accountability. The VPK program that is aiming at results-based accountability judges the quality of a VPK provider by how well pre-kindergarten graduates fare in kindergarten. Thus, pre-kindergarten teachers need to be accountable to the state as well as the parents by showing that children will fare well in spelling tests or other examinations in kindergarten. The VPK program’s results-based accountability makes the three teachers give priority to the standards for kindergarten. For example, children practice writing their names in a particular way that is used in kindergarten classrooms or are accustomed to a kindergarten lifestyle, such as traveling different activity rooms. By having children think and behave according to the rules and standards for kindergarten, teachers expect that children will get good test results in kindergarten because children are already familiar with any kind of test and what kindergarten teachers expect. As a result, the three teachers mostly interact with children in order to have children succeed in kindergarten by being accustomed to the rules and standards for kindergarten through their daily routine in the VPK classroom.

Second, the three teachers have different identities as a pre-kindergarten teacher, employee, and colleague. As a pre-kindergarten teacher, they are proud of preparing children for kindergarten and of seeing children acquire the necessary skills for kindergarten. However, as an employee, they show their limited abilities to decide the curriculum of their classroom and to change their teaching environments, including the teacher-child ratio and time frame of the VPK program. Since the curriculum of their classroom is based on both the VPK standards and the school curriculum that has developed over the years, it hardly reflects their own opinions or
thoughts. In particular, the time frame of the VPK program prevents teachers from creatively thinking about and developing their own curriculum. Since the three teachers have to carry out so much work related to instruction within only three hours, they cannot spend time doing things other than teaching children and doing paperwork. Thus, the three teachers complain about the time frame of the VPK program directly or indirectly; that is, they say that they do not have enough time to talk to each child or they speak fast, especially during whole-group time, in order to transmit too much information to children within a short time frame. However, teachers cannot change the time frame because it is set by the VPK standards. This indicates that teachers have limited access to decision-making processes, including the curriculum and schedule of their classroom, as well as few opportunities to voice their opinions on educational reform.

The time frame also prevents teachers from sharing information with other teachers since they are too busy to talk to each other. Even though the relationships among teachers vary according to the three teachers’ working environments, they commonly have insufficient time to talk to other teachers about each child’s needs or a way of interacting with individual child. By observing other teachers, teachers are able to reflect on their own ways of teaching or interacting with children as well as to find ways to overcome their weaknesses and reinforce their strengths. Moreover, teachers can discuss the organization and management of school systems with other teachers and search for a better way of modifying their working environments. Therefore, the fact that the three teachers have little time to talk to each other indicates that they have few opportunities to correct a real problem that impacts their own as well as children’s lives, including the negative effects of the state core curriculum represented by the VPK standards on teacher-child interactions. As a result, the teachers’ limited time to talk to each other indicates
that the teachers have few opportunities to develop their own critical-thinking and problem-solving skills through active conversations with other teachers.

Finally, the three teachers consider children’s positive reaction to what teachers are saying as effective teacher-child interaction. Children’s positive reaction to teachers’ words means that children demonstrate their understanding of the meaning of teachers’ words and what is expected of them through enjoyment, happiness, or satisfaction. From the same perspective, the situation when children do not understand what teachers are saying or do not perform what is expected of them is considered ineffective teacher-child interaction. Thus, the three teachers are concerned about children who do not speak English well or who do not express their thoughts or feelings because of their shyness or silence. This concern is because the teachers have trouble making these children understand what teachers expect or figuring out what they are thinking and feeling. In particular, since the teachers need to get children ready for kindergarten, they are seriously worried that these children will not succeed in kindergarten because of their misunderstanding of teachers’ words. Similarly, the teachers are concerned about children who have mental or behavioral problems, since they have difficulty interacting with the children and preparing the children for kindergarten.

The three teachers make an effort to have one-on-one interaction with children in order to deal with the situation when they have trouble interacting with children. By enabling the teachers to figure out and respond to each child’s needs, one-on-one interaction with children helps them understand what a child is thinking and feeling as well as what kind of problem the child has. For example, when teachers need to know if a child understands the directions or to make sure that a child follows the directions, they ask the child a question about the directions and give the child a chance to answer the question. In addition, when a child displays a behavioral problem like
hitting somebody or getting aggressive frequently, teachers talk to the child, listen to the child’s words, point out the child’s problem, and suggest another activity or read the child a book. When a child looks upset, teachers come to the child, ask what is happening to the child, and help the child find ways to solve the problem. In short, the three teachers attach a lot of importance to one-on-one interaction with children and make an effort to have one-on-one interaction with children as often as possible.

The three teachers’ understanding of the importance of one-on-one interaction with children mainly results from their teaching experiences. The three teachers have very different teaching experiences, but their teaching experiences positively influence their own ways of interacting with children. First of all, their teaching experiences make the teachers more relaxed when they are working with children; that is, the teachers are more comfortable with what they are doing than in the past, since they know what they are supposed to do. They are less embarrassed by and are more open-minded about children’s unexpected behaviors or fluctuating emotions, making children feel comfortable and thus be able to freely talk to teachers about their own interests or problems. Teachers’ one-on-one interaction with children enables children to more freely discuss their own needs with teachers, since more one-on-one time with teachers they have, the more comfortable they feel, and the more often they talk to teachers about their personal matters. Thus, the three teachers believe that one-on-one interaction with children is essential for effective teacher-child interaction because it enables teachers to quickly figure out and respond to what children are thinking and feeling.

Despite the teachers’ putting a high value on one-on-one interaction with children, the teacher-child ratio and class size set by the VPK standards prevent teachers from having sufficient one-on-one time with children. In their classrooms two teachers are usually responsible
for 18 children, and the three teachers think that this teacher-child ratio does not enable them to frequently talk to each child and facilitate his or her learning. Since their hectic schedules have further increased this situation, the teachers have little time to converse with each child, listen to his or her story, and stimulate him or her to create new ideas. Thus, even though the teachers make an effort to have one-on-one time with children, most of the one-on-one interactions with children take place in the situation when teachers call on one child and ask the child a question in order to confirm if the child understands or remembers teachers’ words. One-on-one interaction with children, along with singing a song and repetition, is mainly used as one of the most useful ways of transmitting certain knowledge to children in their classrooms rather than of giving children a chance to develop their critical-thinking and problem-solving skills. In conclusion, the three teachers cannot help but have limited one-on-one interaction with children because the teachers themselves cannot modify the several factors that impede one-on-one interaction with children, including the time frame of the VPK program as well as the teacher-child ratio and class size set by the VPK standards.

Discussion of Findings

Barriers to Effective Teacher-Child Interactions

First of all, the teachers’ understanding of effective teacher-child interaction is considered a barrier to effective teacher-child interactions in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings, according to the definition of “effective” teacher-child interaction used in this project – the process that leads both teachers and children to solve their own problems through critical thinking. Teachers consider children’s positive reaction to teachers’ words as effective teacher-child interaction. Teachers need children to understand what they are saying and follow the directions; that is, teachers need to see if each lesson works well, if children remember the lesson, or if children tell teachers about what they are listening to. Through homework or a
spelling test, children are tested to see if they practice or remember the lesson well, even though they are taught in pre-kindergarten classrooms in child care settings. Such a practice prevents children from seeking a better understanding of different aspects of the lesson because they are too busy to think about things other than what teachers expect. Children are forced to think and behave within teachers’ values and ideologies, which result from their own past experiences and reflect particular ideological patterns like the guidelines for the VPK program. Since the VPK program especially requires teachers to make children understand what they need to know to go to kindergarten, both teachers and children are forced to think and behave according to the guidelines for the VPK program. Thus, the teachers’ understanding of effective teacher-child interaction prevents both teachers and children from enhancing new ideas and remaining open to the unforeseen and unexpected and thus from critically thinking and independently solving their own problems.

Second, the teachers’ powerlessness to modify their teaching environments is considered another barrier to effective teacher-child interactions, as defined from a critical perspective, in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings. Teachers are suffering from the time frame of the VPK program as well as the teacher-child ratio and class size set by the VPK standards. These factors directly influence their ways of teaching or interacting with children; for example, teachers cannot have sufficient one-on-one time with children, and teachers have to constantly teach children and do paperwork. Since teachers are always rushed to do so much work within a restricted time frame, they speak fast, especially during whole-group time, and cannot feel relaxed. The teachers’ uncomfortable status is likely to lead teachers to passively respond to children’s requests and lose interest in children’s needs. During whole-group time, teachers transmit a wealth of knowledge to children through daily routine by continually having
children pay attention to their words and learn new skills or facts. Teachers also need children to sit and listen rather than speak, to give expected answers to teachers’ questions, or to say the right words that teachers already know. Thus, teachers prefer free-play time or meal time to whole-group time, since they are able to feel more relaxed and freely talk to children about diverse issues during that time. Nevertheless, teachers cannot change the time frame of the VPK program as well as the teacher-child ratio and class size set by the VPK standards, and thus, this prevents teachers from having sufficient one-on-one time with children and effectively interacting with children.

Third, the teachers’ lack of confidence in what is right and what is good is considered one of the barriers to effective teacher-child interactions, as defined from a critical perspective, in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings. Especially in the VPK program, teachers use prepackaged curricula, which focus on children’s literacy readiness, include continuous assessments of children’s abilities, and demand the school’s accountability to the state and the parents. Even though the prepackaged curricula are based on both the guidelines for the VPK program and the school curriculum that has developed over the years, they reflect the standards for kindergarten more than the school curriculum. Teachers have children write their names in a particular way that is used in kindergarten, do a spelling test, do homework with their parents, and practice a kindergarten lifestyle like traveling classrooms. In order to make sure that their children will fare well in kindergarten, teachers involve children in these classroom activities by depending on the prepackaged curricula that control children’s different developmental domains, including health and social/emotional/motor development, language and communication, emergent literacy (reading readiness), cognitive development, and general knowledge. Thus, the prepackaged curricula that strongly reflect the standards for kindergarten
are considered a standard for what is right and what is good in the VPK program in child care settings. The prepackaged curricula as a standard control the teachers’ abilities to think and know and thus make teachers lose their confidence in their ways of thinking and behaving. As a result of this lack of confidence, teachers have few opportunities to create their own lesson plans and negotiate them with children as well as their parents, and thus, both teachers and children have few opportunities to develop their own critical-thinking and problem-solving skills.

**Facilitators of Effective Teacher-Child Interactions**

First, teachers are able to facilitate effective teacher-child interactions, as defined from a critical perspective, in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings by encouraging children to use their own words. Teachers teach children how to say their thoughts and feelings when children need to solve their own problems like arguments with other children. For example, when a child complains about another child’s misbehavior, teachers can encourage the child to directly tell another child that another child’s misbehavior makes the child feel bad by reminding the child about how to say his or her feelings. Teachers help the child to apply information that he or she has already learned to a real situation rather than solving the child’s problem. By practicing a way of expressing his or her feelings, the child is able to develop his or her own way of solving this kind of problem as well as getting along with other children. Especially in the VPK program that emphasizes children’s early literacy skills, children are able to successfully develop the ability to express their own thoughts and feelings because teachers help them build a good vocabulary. Even though the emphasis of the VPK program on children’s early literacy skills aims to prepare children for kindergarten, having a good vocabulary enables children to be confident in their words, successfully understand what others are saying, and explain what is going on. Taking into account the fact that all kinds of interactions in classrooms happen through the medium of talk, children are able to effectively interact with other children as well as
teachers by clearly expressing their own thoughts and feelings by means of a good vocabulary. Thus, by giving children a chance to use their own words as often as possible, teachers help them to differently understand what is happening, to critically think about how to solve problems, and to independently solve their own problems through critical thinking.

Second, teachers are able to facilitate effective teacher-child interactions, as defined from a critical perspective, in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings by improving their relationships with other teachers. Teachers are able to learn different examples of teacher-child interactions by observing other teachers, ask other teachers a question about how to deal with their ineffective interactions with children, and suggest other methods of interacting with children. In particular, the teachers’ teaching experience strongly influences their own ways of teaching and interacting with children. Therefore, experienced teachers are likely to have more knowledge about how to interact with children or are less likely to change their values and ideologies, which are deeply rooted in their own past experiences, and to learn new ideas about teacher-child interactions. By talking to each other, teachers are able to reflect on their own ways of interacting with children and find ways to overcome their weaknesses and reinforce their strengths. However, many teachers have not been aware of the importance of the relationships among teachers, since their working environments have provided them with few opportunities to communicate with other teachers. For example, the teachers’ different schedules prevent teachers from seeing each other at the same place at the same time, or the teachers’ workplaces do not provide teachers with a place to meet and discuss something. In particular, the hectic schedules of the VPK program have further increased this situation and make teachers have fewer opportunities to talk to each other than in the past. Thus, teachers need to actively take an opportunity to communicate with other teachers and improve their relationships with other
teachers. This process itself facilitates effective teacher-child interactions by giving teachers a
chance to search for a better way of modifying their working environments and to enhance their
own critical-thinking and problem-solving skills.

Third, teachers are able to facilitate effective teacher-child interactions, as defined from a
critical perspective, in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings by
understanding children’s diverse ethnic, racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. One of
the limitations of state-funded pre-kindergarten programs is that the population of pre-
kindergarten teachers is not nearly as diverse as the population of children; that is, most of the
pre-kindergarten teachers are still White and are not well matched with the ethnic/racial diversity
of children in state-funded pre-kindergarten programs. In reality, teachers in the VPK program
have difficulty in communicating with children who speak English as a second language and in
effectively interacting with them. After the children pick up English and understand what
teachers are saying, teachers still have difficulty in effectively interacting with the children
because of their parents’ limited English proficiency. Their parents have trouble completely
understanding the content of the VPK program and successfully discussing the children’s
individual needs with teachers. Teachers currently interact with children from much more
diverse ethnic, racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds than in the past, and these
children come to school with much different learning experiences and varied developmental
needs (Zimiles, 2000). Therefore, the teachers’ misunderstanding of children’s diverse cultural
and socioeconomic backgrounds prevents teachers from being aware of children’s individual
needs and correctly interpreting each child’s thoughts and feelings. Through an understanding of
knowledge, identity, and culture in children’s own lives, teachers are able to help children to
construct and articulate their own knowledge as well as to aggressively solve their own problems as active subjects.

**Summary**

The findings of this study support two contrasting hypotheses: one is that teachers as the oppressed are forced to teach children a white, male, European-American model through diverse techniques of normalization, such as measurement, regulation, and evaluation; the other is that teachers as the oppressors force children to learn such a model through the unilateral interactions between themselves and children. Both the teachers’ powerlessness to modify their teaching environments and the teachers’ lack of confidence in what is right and what is good, which are considered barriers to effective teacher-child interactions, as defined from a critical perspective, in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings, show that teachers as the oppressed are forced to teach children the norms and standards set by dominant academics and institutions within the hierarchical structure of schools. Even though teachers attach a lot of importance to one-on-one interaction with children, they are forced to teach children these norms and standards through measurement or assessment. In particular, since the VPK program requires teachers to show the school’s accountability, teachers are forced to teach children the necessary skills for kindergarten and to make sure that children are prepared for kindergarten. Thus, teachers as the oppressors force children to learn what they need to know to go to kindergarten and consider the situation when children understand teachers’ words and perform what is expected of them as effective teacher-child interaction. This definition of effective teacher-child interaction demonstrates unilateral characteristics resulting from teacher authority over children and is considered another barrier to effective teacher-child interactions, as defined from a critical perspective, in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings.
As a result, the above barriers to effective teacher-child interactions prevent both teachers and children from critically thinking and independently solving problems. However, teachers are able to facilitate effective teacher-child interactions, as defined from a critical perspective, in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings by encouraging children to use their own words; improving their relationships with other teachers; and understanding children’s diverse ethnic, racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. These facilitators of effective teacher-child interactions reflect the unique characteristics of the VPK program, such as focusing on children’s literacy readiness, setting a restricted time frame, and recognizing the ethnic/racial diversity of children. These characteristics of the VPK program have both a positive and a negative effect on teacher-child interactions; for example, its emphasis on children’s literacy readiness requires children to practice and memorize a lot of words, but such an emphasis leads children to learn new words or to build a good vocabulary. Such a good vocabulary enables children to express their thoughts and feelings and to solve their own problems using their own words. The teachers’ efforts to improve the relationships among teachers within a restricted time frame help them enhance their own critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, and the teachers’ understanding of children’s diverse cultures and identities enables both teachers and children to construct their own knowledge and to solve their own problems as active subjects. Thus, different strategies to facilitate effective teacher-child interactions enable teachers to find ways to overcome several barriers to effective teacher-child interactions by being aware of the unilateral teacher-child interactions in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings.

**Connections with Previous Research**

My interpretations of the findings are connected with the results of several previous studies reviewed in Chapter 2. That is to say, my interpretations of the findings of this study are based on the lessons learned in a number of previous, similar studies, and the hypotheses in this
study are supported by the findings of this study. At the same time, my findings have a positive effect on my interpretations of previous research by providing a wealth of scientific evidence that supports as well as expands the results of previous research. In particular, my interpretations of the findings of this study make a major contribution to the previous research by consistently interpreting the results of previous research based on the theoretical orientation of critical theory and postmodernism.

First of all, a study by Giroux (1988) and a study by Brookfield (2005) give me a chance to think about critical theory and to clarify the characteristics of the relationship between teachers and children. Critical theory explains that teachers, as experts privileged over children, exercise power in the classroom, and all social interactions between teachers and children are characterized as hierarchically structured. Also, these studies help me create two contrasting hypotheses for teacher-child interaction: one is that teachers as the oppressed are forced to teach children a white, male, European-American model through diverse techniques of normalization, such as measurement, regulation, and evaluation; the other is that teachers as the oppressors force children to learn such a model through the unilateral interactions between themselves and children. My interpretations of the findings of this qualitative research project are based on these hypotheses, and my findings add rich, detailed descriptions of teacher-child interactions in the VPK program to these hypotheses. For example, the findings of this study show that a white, male, European-American model is represented by the VPK standards and is transmitted to children through a spelling test or homework as a technique of normalization.

Second, an observational study by Dickinson (2001b) shows that teachers mainly interact with children for the purpose of instruction, asking children to listen to teachers’ words or correcting children’s incorrect responses. In particular, this fact is observed in the three teachers’
classrooms regardless of time and place, since the main activity of the three teachers is to get children ready for kindergarten by making them understand what they need to know to go to kindergarten. Also, Dickinson’s (2001b) study enables me to figure out what kinds of words the three teachers frequently use in the classroom and why the three teachers frequently use certain words, including talk, tell, see, learn, understand, and know. I understand that these words are commonly used for two purposes: one is to have children do what teachers need; the other is to give children a chance to be aware of something new or already known. That is to say, from the theoretical orientation of critical theory and postmodernism, the three teachers mainly interact with children to transmit a body of knowledge and to confirm if children are aware of or retain the knowledge. This interpretation of these words reinforces the results of Dickinson’s (2001b) study by offering scientific evidence as well as by showing how the results are interpreted by the theoretical orientation of critical theory and postmodernism.

Third, a study by Gest et al. (2006) helps me choose three different activity settings – whole-group, free-play, and meal time – as the targets for observation by providing evidence that teachers differently talk to children according to classroom activity settings. The study shows that each activity setting includes distinctive patterns of “cognitively challenging talk” (Gest et al., 2006, p. 309), and the amount and type of teacher talk are closely associated with children’s learning and development. Also, the study enables me to focus on the three teachers’ behavior and speech in their classrooms by showing that the majority of the teacher-child interactions in child care settings consist of talk between teachers and children. The results of this study are very similar to the results of a study by Gest et al. (2006), since they show that the three teachers freely talk about different subjects with children during free-play time, while they mainly discuss academic topics related to the classroom curriculum with children during whole-group time.
However, the findings of this study demonstrate that the conversations between teachers and children in the VPK program mostly aim to have children build a good vocabulary in order for children to succeed in kindergarten. Thus, my interpretation of the findings of this study is different from the results of a study by Gest et al. (2006), since it clarifies the purpose of teacher talk by using the theoretical orientation of critical theory and postmodernism.

Fourth, a study by Hayes and Matusov (2005) helps me interpret the three teachers’ understanding of effective teacher-child interaction as a barrier to effective teacher-child interactions, as defined from a critical perspective, in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings. The study, based on real-life conversations in a traditional school, shows that when a child does not produce the expected answer, the teacher usually rejects the child’s answer as incorrect in order to elicit the correct answer she already knows. The teacher is concerned with affirming the truth she already possesses, and thus, children have no opportunity to develop their understanding of the world by reflecting on their answers and acting on their own perspectives. Similarly, the three teachers in this study consider children’s positive reaction to teachers’ words as effective teacher-child interaction; that is, they need children to understand what they are saying and follow the directions. Thus, the three teachers’ understanding of effective teacher-child interaction makes children learn obedience to authority and follow orders rather than thinking for themselves; these children have no opportunity to develop their own critical-thinking and problem-solving skills. This interpretation of the three teachers’ understanding of effective teacher-child interaction is derived from the findings of Hayes and Matusov’s (2005) study, but goes beyond these findings by including from the conversations to the interactions between teachers and children.
Fifth, a study by Leavitt and Power (1989), along with a study by Leavitt (1994), shows how caregivers differently exercise power over children through daily routine in a day care center. For example, caregivers deny the legitimacy of children’s emotions and often treat the children as if they cannot understand their own as well as others’ emotions. Caregivers’ routine tasks, such as diaper changing and feeding, make them feel the emotional stresses of their work, and this leads them to passively react to children’s requests and to simply compel children’s surface behaviors. Leavitt and Power’s (1989) study, based on postmodernism that includes diversity, complexity, and multiple perspectives, enables me to see how teachers’ power over children is exercised differently within a specific classroom setting. For instance, the three teachers use different strategies to make children understand and remember what teachers are saying, according to each teacher’s and school’s characteristics. Susan prefers singing a song and one-on-one interaction, while Veronica makes use of repetition and answering a question. Also, the three teachers differentially use diverse techniques of normalization, such as a spelling test or homework, in order to make children practice and keep in mind the norms and standards set by dominant academics and institutions. This interpretation of such techniques reflects the unique characteristics of the VPK program as well as the general characteristics of state-funded pre-kindergarten programs. Thus, my interpretation expands the findings of Leavitt and Power’s (1989) study, since the study particularly focuses on problematic relations of power within a day care center, while my interpretation includes power relations in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings.

Finally, a study by Gitlin (2001) enables me to understand how the three teachers are powerless against the dominant ideology in classrooms. Gitlin’s (2001) study shows that teachers underutilize their autonomy because of the state core curriculum, textbooks, and prepackaged
curricula, and these limit their abilities to change educational relations or standards. The teachers’ limited abilities prevent them from stepping back from their classroom practices and considering broader educational concerns or employing a more holistic view of teaching. In the same way, the three teachers use the prepackaged curricula based on both the guidelines for the VPK program and the school curriculum that has developed over the years, and are forced to increase children’s literacy readiness through continuous assessments of children’s abilities. The prepackaged curricula as a standard control the teachers’ abilities to think and know and thus make teachers lose their confidence in their ways of thinking and behaving. This finding is consistent with the results of Gitlin’s (2001) study on how teachers are powerless against the dominant ideology in classrooms. Therefore, Gitlin’s (2001) study contributes to my interpretation of the prepackaged curricula in the VPK program and helps me realize how this lack of confidence has an effect on teacher-child interaction. At the same time, the findings of this study add a detailed description of the prepackaged curricula in the VPK program to Gitlin’s (2001) study.

**Implications for Professional Practice**

The findings of this study are very useful for teachers in state-funded pre-kindergarten programs to interact more effectively with children. The findings of this study show the nature of teacher-child interactions resulting from the characteristics of the VPK program in child care settings, for example, how teachers interact with children within the time frame of the VPK program, how the curriculum of each VPK classroom based on the guidelines for the VPK program influences teacher-child interactions, and how the teacher-child ratio and class size set by the VPK standards affect teacher-child interactions. Such information can be used by teachers in other state-funded pre-kindergarten programs, including other VPK classrooms, even though the levels of support services of state-funded pre-kindergarten programs as well as teacher
qualifications are very different according to where the classroom happens to be located. Teachers are able to reflect on their own ways of interacting with children in their state-funded pre-kindergarten classrooms as well as the effects of state-funded pre-kindergarten programs on their interactions with children. Thus, by figuring out the nature and quality of their own interactions with children, teachers in state-funded pre-kindergarten programs are able to find ways to effectively interact with children.

In particular, the findings of this study are helpful for all teachers to be aware of the importance of the effective teacher-child interactions that empower both teachers and children. The findings of this study clarify three barriers to effective teacher-child interactions, as defined from a critical perspective, in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings by showing the causes and problems of the unilateral teacher-child interactions as well as the effects of the barriers on both teachers’ and children’s critical-thinking and problem-solving skills. Also, the findings of this study specifically suggest three facilitators of effective teacher-child interactions by explaining what the rationale of the facilitators results from and how teachers can promote effective teacher-child interactions in a real situation. The barriers to and facilitators of effective teacher-child interactions are applied to voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings. Nevertheless, teachers in every classroom are able to use such information about the barriers and facilitators, since most of the conversations between teachers and children in classrooms are characterized as unilateral and reflect teacher authority over children. Such information gives teachers a chance to be aware of the unilateral teacher-child interactions and to overcome the notion that they are incapable of changing the status quo. Therefore, by searching for specific strategies to develop effective teacher-child interactions within their own unique
situations, all teachers are able to be aware of the importance of the effective teacher-child interactions that empower both teachers and children.

Moreover, the findings of this study are very useful for policy makers to improve the quality of voluntary pre-kindergarten programs. Since there is little research on the nature and quality of teacher-child interactions in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs, policy makers do not have specific information about how voluntary pre-kindergarten programs influence teacher-child interactions. For example, as described in Chapter 4, teachers are complaining that the teacher-child ratio set by the VPK standards is a little bit high and does not reflect different classroom situations. In other words, the ratio is based on researchers’ opinions rather than on teachers’ voices and thus ignores different happenings that take place in real classroom situations. Thus, the findings of this study provide policy makers with specific information about how teachers are suffering from the ratio and how the ratio prevents teachers from effectively interacting with children. Based on this information, policy makers are able to check if the ratio is reasonable or to think about how they can change the ratio. Moreover, policy makers are able to reflect on how the VPK program affects teacher-child interactions as a whole and how they can decrease the negative effects of the VPK program on teacher-child interactions. As a result, by figuring out the nature of teacher-child interactions in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs, policy makers are able to find ways to improve the quality of voluntary pre-kindergarten programs.

Finally, the findings of this study are helpful for researchers to put a new perspective on the nature of teacher-child interactions in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings. The findings of this study include a detailed description of the moment-to-moment encounters between teachers and children using the theoretical orientation of critical theory and
postmodernism. Since this study describes teachers’ behavior and speech through their actual words, researchers are able to easily imagine how teachers interact with children in a natural classroom setting. In particular, the theoretical orientation of postmodernism enables this study to explain how teachers’ power over children is exercised differently within a specific classroom setting. That is to say, this study describes how the organization and management of daily routines are implemented differently by each teacher’s and school’s characteristics as well as how teachers interact with children differently within these different classroom settings. In addition, this study identifies and classifies teachers’ behavior and speech by means of consistent theoretical orientation: critical theory and postmodernism. All of the teachers’ behavior and speech are identified and classified based on the notion that teachers as the oppressors force children to learn the dominant culture and ideology through the interactions with children, and teachers as the oppressed are forced to contribute to maintaining the social inequalities within the hierarchical structure of schools. Thus, by using the theoretical orientation of critical theory and postmodernism, researchers are able to develop their scholarly understanding of the nature of teacher-child interactions in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

This qualitative research project is a first attempt to investigate the nature of teacher-child interactions in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings by using the theoretical orientation of critical theory and postmodernism. That is to say, as a theoretically important foundation for further research, this study shows how educational research can improve educational practice by making critical and systematic inquiries as well as describing what is really happening. Thus, some recommendations for further research are made in order to lead further research to focus on improving educational practice as well as to address several limitations of this study mentioned in Chapter 3.
First of all, this qualitative research project offers partial evidence on internal validity despite its several strategies to enhance internal validity, including “member checks,” which refers to taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they are derived and asking them whether or not the interpretations are plausible (Merriam, 1998, p. 204). Nevertheless, this research project provides insufficient evidence on the validity of the findings, since the data were collected over a short period of time. In addition, since this research project was conducted over a short period of time, I did not have sufficient time to establish a close rapport with the participants. This indicates that both I and the participants partly understood and shared reciprocal cultures and beliefs, and this research project is based on such an understanding. Thus, one recommendation for further research is to examine the nature of teacher-child interactions over a longer period of time, which would enable researchers to observe the same phenomenon repeatedly and to establish a close rapport with participants. Such research would enable researchers to explain participants’ behavior and speech as well as what is happening in more different and holistic ways. Also, researchers are able to offer more detailed descriptions of the moment-to-moment encounters between teachers and children. Thus, further research on the nature of teacher-child interactions in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings over a longer period of time would contribute to increasing the internal validity and trustworthiness of this research project.

Another limitation of this research project is that it does not provide sufficient evidence on generalizability. I focused on the particular rather than the general and thus selected three participants using the particular criteria that could serve the purpose of this study. As a result, the situations of this study are not typical, and the findings of this study cannot be readily applied to other situations. Therefore, another recommendation for further research is to investigate the
nature of teacher-child interactions in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in settings other than child care settings. By focusing on where voluntary pre-kindergarten programs take place, further research on the nature of teacher-child interactions in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in settings other than child care settings would offer more and deeper information about the nature of teacher-child interactions in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs. Also, such research would include different ways of empowering both teachers and children through effective teacher-child interactions, as defined from a critical perspective. This is because such research enables teachers to figure out their own as well as their workplaces’ strengths and weaknesses and to more successfully find ways to facilitate effective teacher-child interactions in their classrooms. As a result, teachers are able to have more confidence that they are capable of changing the status quo.

In fact, the notion that teachers are able to facilitate effective teacher-child interactions, as defined from a critical perspective, does not directly indicate that they are able to overcome several barriers to effective teacher-child interactions. However, the process of searching for and using different strategies to facilitate effective teacher-child interactions directly contributes to the empowerment of teachers and children, and this empowerment leads teachers to find ways to overcome several barriers to effective teacher-child interactions. This is because this process is based on the teachers’ awareness of the causes and problems of the unilateral teacher-child interactions in their classrooms; that is, this process comes from the teachers’ awareness of the fact that teacher authority over children prevents both teachers and children from critically thinking and independently solving problems. By acknowledging the importance of effective teacher-child interaction – the process that leads both teachers and children to solve their own problems through critical thinking, teachers are able to change their previous understanding of
effective teacher-child interaction. Also, teachers are able to negotiate their lesson plans or learning methods with their children as well as to begin with children’s words or understandings. Teachers are able to take action to change their working environments and confidently voice their opinions about the school curriculum. Thus, it is important for teachers to find ways to facilitate effective teacher-child interactions, as defined from a critical perspective, in their classrooms by figuring out their own as well as their workplaces’ strengths and weaknesses. It is also important for further research to include different ways of empowering both teachers and children through effective teacher-child interactions.

As a result, this qualitative research project shows how educational research can improve educational practice through critical and systematic inquiry as well as detailed descriptions of what is really happening. Based on the theoretical orientation of critical theory and postmodernism, this study defines “effective” teacher-child interaction as the process that leads both teachers and children to solve their own problems through critical thinking. Through effective teacher-child interactions, both teachers and children are able to develop their own critical-thinking and problem-solving skills that are needed for them to eventually take their places in a participatory, democratic society. In fact, by participating in this study, the three teachers were able to realize the importance of teacher-child interactions as well as how they interacted with children in the VPK program. Also, they were able to understand how their behavior and speech were interpreted by the theoretical orientation of critical theory and postmodernism. That is to say, they became aware of the fact that teacher authority over children prevents both teachers and children from critically thinking and independently solving problems. Thus, they are expected to more deeply think about their own ways of interacting with children and more frequently talk about a way of changing several factors that impede effective teacher-
child interactions with other teachers. In addition, by getting information about barriers to and facilitators of effective teacher-child interactions in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings, interested practitioners are able to figure out the nature of teacher-child interactions in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs and find ways to improve the quality of voluntary pre-kindergarten programs.

In short, by describing the moment-to-moment encounters between teachers and children in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings based on the theoretical orientation of critical theory and postmodernism, this qualitative research project shows that it is important for educational research on teacher-child interactions to demonstrate or depend on its own theoretical orientation consistently. Moreover, this study strongly suggests that educational research on teacher-child interactions needs to be able to stimulate teachers to take action to solve the problems they face when interacting with children; to lead interested practitioners, including teachers, policy makers, and parents, to create new ways to improve the quality of teacher-child interactions; and to provide various audiences with sufficient information about what is really happening in learning situations. Thus, as a theoretically important foundation for further research, this qualitative research project recommends that further research focus on making critical and systematic inquiries as well as on describing what is really happening in order to improve educational practice.
APPENDIX A
LETTER OF INVITATION AND CONSENT FORM FOR A TEACHER

Informed Consent

Protocol Title: Teacher-child interactions in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings: A critical analysis of barriers and facilitators

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

Purpose of the research study: The purpose of the study is to investigate barriers to and facilitators of effective teacher-child interactions in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs in child care settings.

What you will be asked to do in the study: To participate in two one-hour formal interviews and three 10-minute informal interviews after each classroom observation, as well as to permit three observations of your classroom during whole-group, free-play, and meal time. With your permission, interviews will be audio-recorded, and you will wear a remote microphone during the three observations.

Risks and Benefits: There is no direct benefit to the participant in this study. However, you are likely to gain insight into the factors that impede and promote interactions with children. Minimal risks to you are potentially anticipated, for example, fatigue resulting from two one-hour interviews or feeling nervous about being observed.

Confidentiality: Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Interviews will be audio tape recorded for the purpose of transcription. The audio tapes will be accessible only to me for verification purposes. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the audio tapes will be destroyed. In addition, the observation data will be audio tape recorded and transcribed, and the data will not include children’s names and your name. Results will be reported in my dissertation, and may be presented to education journals and magazines for possible publication. Your name as well as children’s names will not be used in any report.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. There is no compensation to you for participating in the study.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study: If you have any questions about the study, I or my faculty supervisor, Dr. Kristen M. Kemple, will be happy to answer them.

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Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant in the study: UFIRB Office, Box 112250, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-2250; ph 392-0433

Agreement: I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description.

Participant’s Signature and Date:

Principal Investigator’s Signature and Date:
Interview Guide for the First Formal Interview

I want to talk to you about barriers to and facilitators of effective teacher-child interactions in your classroom. We know that teacher-child interactions are important, but we also know that effective teacher-child interactions do not happen very often due to a variety of factors. I want to understand why and what can be done to improve teacher-child interactions.

I would like to ask you a few questions:

1. Could you describe a typical teacher-child interaction during whole-group time in your classroom?

2. Could you describe a typical teacher-child interaction during free-play time in your classroom?

3. Could you describe a typical teacher-child interaction during meal time in your classroom?

4. How do you know if an interaction has been effective?

5. Tell me about an example of an interaction you have had with a child that you would consider effective.

6. Tell me about an example of an interaction you have had with a child that you would consider ineffective. Why do you consider it ineffective?

7. What are some barriers to effective teacher-child interactions?

8. What conditions help you have more effective interactions with children?

9. What do teachers need to know about teacher-child interactions?

10. Is there anything you would like to add? Do you have any further comments or questions?

Interview Guide for the First Informal Interview

I would like to ask you about teacher-child interactions during whole-group time:

1. I noticed that you ….. (an example of teacher-child interactions). Was this a typical kind of interaction for whole-group time?
2. How effective was the interaction?
3. What made the interaction effective?
4. Were there factors that constrained the interaction? If so, what were they?

**Interview Guide for the Second Informal Interview**

I would like to ask you about teacher-child interactions during free-play time:

1. I noticed that you ….. (an example of teacher-child interactions). Was this a typical kind of interaction for free-play time?
2. How effective was the interaction?
3. What made the interaction effective?
4. Were there factors that constrained the interaction? If so, what were they?

**Interview Guide for the Third Informal Interview**

I would like to ask you about teacher-child interactions during meal time:

1. I noticed that you ….. (an example of teacher-child interactions). Was this a typical kind of interaction for meal time?
2. How effective was the interaction?
3. What made the interaction effective?
4. Were there factors that constrained the interaction? If so, what were they?

**Interview Guide for the Second Formal Interview**

I want to talk to you about the factors that promote effective teacher-child interactions in your classroom as well as how to overcome some barriers to effective teacher-child interactions you confront in your classroom.

1. You have (   ) years of teaching experience. Have you changed the way you interact with children over time? If so, how have you changed the way you interact with children? Why have you changed the way you interact with children?
2. What do you think are the ways teachers can promote effective teacher-child interactions in their classrooms?
3. What do you expect are the factors that prevent you from promoting effective teacher-child interactions?
4. Tell me about how you would/have overcome some barriers to effective teacher-child interactions in your classroom.

5. Is there anything that you might not have thought about before, but has occurred to you while participating in the study?

6. Tell me about your thoughts and feelings while participating in the study.

7. Is there anything you would like to add? Do you have any further comments or questions?
REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

I was born and raised in Seoul, South Korea. I am the eldest of four children, and my parents have definitely put high expectations on me. I graduated from Sacred Heart Women’s High School and got a bachelor’ degree in earth science education from Seoul National University in Seoul, South Korea. I have 10 years of experience teaching science to middle- and high-school students in South Korea. I was motivated to become a teacher through my participation in various social reform actions in my native country, such as demands for the release of political offenders and the protection of low-income families’ rights. My social experiences led to my interest in early childhood education programs benefiting children from low-income families and to pursue a master’s degree in early childhood education. I got a master’s degree in early childhood education from Indiana University at Bloomington. As a recipient of the Alumni Fellowship at the University of Florida, I have participated in several educational conferences and tried to publish a journal article. I volunteered at First Presbyterian Preschool in Gainesville, Florida for 3 years, extending my experience working with culturally diverse children and their families.