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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

PLAYING ON THE PATH TO LITERACY

BY

SHERRILL BROWN 

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION

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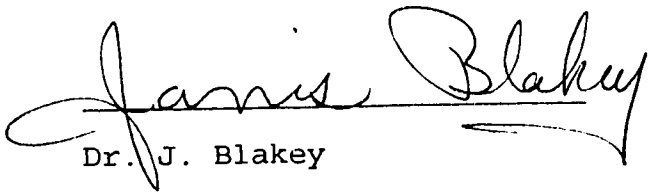

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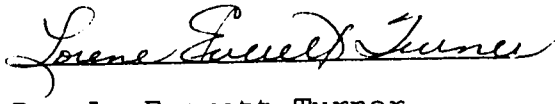

Dr. L. Everett-Turner

Dr. M. Iveson

September 17 1993

This thesis is dedicated to my parents

Eileen Demeter

and

William Demeter

(1925-1987)

whose love and trust and belief in education

have allowed me to follow my own path.

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study is an exploration of the relationship between play and literacy. Observations of children playing and working in a kindergarten setting are crucial as we strive to understand how children access the literate world. When children are constructing narratives and interacting with print in domestic and sociodramatic play centres, they are developing skills needed later in their literacy learning. The role of the teacher plays a part in the success children will experience as they play on the path to literacy.

Children need access to print and print making materials and props in play settings if they are to emulate the adult models they view in the real world around them. In play, children can practise literacy skills while recreating the functional aspects of print they see around them.

When children tell stories in their play, they take on roles which facilitate the development of practical skills needed for later school life and develop an understanding of character and plot, a sense of story. In the stories observed in the centres in which children must create both prop and story (for example, blocks), there appears to be an intense involvement in the

development and sustenance of the narrative as the children adapt the theme to their constructions.

Adults assume roles in this setting to assist children in developing the ability to access literacy through play. They are the models, the managers, and the information providers. Perhaps the most crucial role adults play is in providing time, space, props and materials for children in a manner appropriate to their level of development. Teachers need to exhibit a committment to play as a viable and legitimate learning vehicle.

This study has challenged me into looking at how children are participating in the co-creation of curriculum. It is my contention that the narratives created in play by the children are part of the form of curriculum generated by the learners and the teacher in this classroom.

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And most of all --

My family, without whose love and support, I would not have attempted to play on the path to literacy.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROLOGUE

Adrian is working in the restaurant today. He has assumed all the duties necessary for the efficient operation of a pizza parlour. He is cook, waiter and maitre d' all in one. He is a very busy fellow, for today a lot of customers have wanted pizza to go. One last customer is at the door, waiting to be seated. Fortunately, there is a table near the kitchen. Adrian hands the customer a menu listing various pizza choices and indicates the signs on the walls showing the finished product. He stands patiently while the customer peruses the menu and he answers her many questions about the products. He offers the customer a choice of beverage and waits until she finally decides on milk. He hastily scribbles on his order pad. At last she orders the number 3 pizza on the menu and he writes hurriedly before he scampers off to the kitchen. Soon he is back with her drink and the cutlery she will need. This has certainly been a busy day but he has taken care of everything in his usual calm, efficient manner. Her pizza is ready and he serves it with a flourish. The customer enjoys her meal and looks around with interest at the walls on which the pictures and signs are displayed telling customers about restaurant fare and prices. A telephone book is hanging by the phone, half open and ready for use, in

case Adrian has to call the grocery supplier again. The mailbox with the pizza parlour's address etched on it sits just inside the door. Newspapers lay on the chair where customers wait for their take out orders. The customer swallows the last bite and indicates to Adrian that she is ready for her bill, which he carefully puts on the table. She looks at it and reads "msrm pza" and "mlk" and pays the amount Adrian has verbally indicated. Then she leaves the restaurant and Adrian is at last free to relax after such a busy day.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to gain greater knowledge about the relationships between socio-dramatic play and emergent literacy behaviours. Research questions focused on the nature of the dramatic play context and its effect on the literacy skills children develop and use within the context:

1. What happens in dramatic play that supports the development of literacy skills and behaviours?

2. Is there something about literacy activity that might demand a dramatic play context?

3. How do the residents in a kindergarten culture interact with each other within the framework of dramatic play?

4. How does the environment support both play and literacy?

To examine what lead to the choice of this particular area of study, it is necessary to step backwards in time to Adrian's story which illustrates not only the connection between literacy and play but also highlights the continuum that is teaching and learning. Often as *teachers*, we overlook the fact that we are *learners* as well. Making the connection between teaching

and learning is vital if we are to continue to provide new experiences for the learners in our care, but as teachers, we sometimes don't recognize ourselves as learners. Adrian's story illustrates this point well for it is an example of how I came to understand myself as a learner. Although I had participated in formal learning situations like workshops and seminars, I did not recognize myself as a learner in the classroom in which I taught, until Adrian used inventive spelling (Schickedanz, 1986) for the first time in my presence. Here was corroboration for a concept learned in a formal setting, but it was happening in the everyday world of the classroom. I felt an explosion of learning. I saw Adrian's step as the crossing of the threshold for both of us. I internalized a concept and the learning became personal.

Adrian was not aware that he was giving evidence of a major step in his literacy learning path that day. Playing in the restaurant and writing down the order was a natural extension of his play but it was like a red flag for me. First came the realization of learning. Next came the awareness of all that learning implied about play and literacy, and finally came the thought "what have I been missing and what else is happening?" So Adrian became *teacher* and I became *learner* and I

recognized the symbiotic nature of the relationship between both in the classroom. An important question started to nag at me. I kept asking myself, "What is happening in play that allows literacy to come forth as it did for Adrian ?" Adrian's story became a pivotal point in my own learning journey as I came to know myself again as learner and knew that I must know more about the brief glimpse he had provided into that connection of play and literacy. Thus, play and literacy became the focus of this study.

As teachers in a classroom setting, we gather information implicitly and come to an awareness gradually about the nature of learning. An opportunity to stand back and target a specific area of learning for an extended length of time is a luxury seldom granted to us in busy classrooms. Yet, teachers must also be researchers in the classroom, as we use observation and analysis in implementing a curriculum. Often we do not name the roles we assume in our teaching lives, and as a consequence, we create an aura of mystery around the role of researcher, never recognizing ourselves as such.

Certainly, I cannot immediately discard my teacher hat in favour of one that is labelled researcher only, for even if I separate out the teacher role, I am still

influenced by all those years in the classroom; but, the reactions to the data collected and the subsequent analysis reflect the more passive nature of the observer role. Assuming this role allows me to step back from the teacher/student relationship in an attempt to focus on understanding it from a different viewpoint. The flexibility of this stance allows me to view the whole culture and the roles and relationships prevalent there. Culture is defined in this study as that which "embraces what people do, what people know, and things that people make and use" (Spradley, 1980, p.5). The teacher is also a player in the drama as are any of the adults who come into the culture and interact with the children.

To study the culture, the researcher must focus on: the players - children and adults; the physical space; the environments - props, print; and, on the interplay of all these elements. It is in the "thick description" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p.38) of events and interactions that understanding is gained.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

> They will teach me who they are by the fantasies they explore.
> (Paley, 1986, p.xiv)

To look at both emergent literacy and dramatic play within the context of a young child's world requires some knowledge of issues surrounding both play and literacy, and an understanding of how they interact.

Smilansky (1968) defines socio-dramatic play as a "voluntary social play activity" (p. 7) which involves imitation and initiation as well as the co-operation of another participant. As a result, children grow and develop and begin to prepare for the "school game and the game of life" (p. 12) creatively, intellectually, and socially. Singer and Singer (1977) concur and add that imagery and good vocabulary are being developed for later use in literacy activities.

Play

Through dramatic play, children begin to internalize aspects of an adult role (Smilansky & Shefatya, 1990; Singer & Singer, 1977). Children search for roles that

allow them to internalize the cultural and social worlds (Singer & Singer 1977); at the same time, they are also learning about gender and adult/child distinctions. Thus children make significant gains as they participate in socio-dramatic play episodes. Smilansky and Shefatya (1990) categorize these play episodes into cognitive-creative areas (such as verbalization, language comprehension, problem-solving strategies, taking on the perspective of others, imagination, increased attention span and concentration) and into socio-emotional areas (such as more interaction with peers, co-operation, reduced aggression, empathy and emotional and social adjustment). Gains made in these areas have significant relevance for the school behaviours which are perceived as necessary for academic success. Pellegrini's (1980) studies indicate that the level of play is a predictor for success in school achievement and performance and that children seem to be conscious of the process involved in understanding symbolization.

Play provides a context that allows children to construct and reconstruct meaning in their day to day lives (Bessell-Browne, 1985). Concentration skills are fostered through the necessity of planning, implementing and sustaining a role (Woodward, 1984). Children's sense of concentration is also enhanced as they create, co-

operate and imagine. They "reframe" an activity through their dramatic play (Garvey, 1977 in Genishi & Dyson, 1984, p. 109) and thus engage more competently in representation (Raines, 1990). Schickedanz (1986) cautions that the child's agenda must be met through the play and that adults should not distort the play for the sake of a specific teaching agenda. The play belongs to the child and dramatic play is the "very young child's way of learning" (Rosen & Rosen, 1973, p. 204). Keeping in mind that dramatic or socio-dramatic play enhances learning and may be one of a "plurality of literacies" (Taylor, 1986, p. 140), it is essential to discuss some general areas in emergent literacy if commonality is to be found.

Emergent Literacy

Language is learned through use and through meaningful context (Genishi & Dyson, 1984; Harste, 1990; Smith, 1988; Goodman, 1990; McGee & Richgels, 1990). The "active child in a responsive environment" (Genishi & Dyson, 1984, p. 29) explores and experiments with everyday written and oral language patterns and begins to internalize those adult models, all the while using language for the practical purposes of meaningful communication. Harste reinforces this idea as he states

that "language is learned through use rather than practice exercises on how to use language" (1990, p. 316) as does Smith (1988) who reminds us that children use language for their own immediate purposes. Given that this is an accurate portrayal of the nature of language learning, then children must be surrounded with literacy opportunities such as everyday print which should be purposeful and meaningful to the inhabitants who use it (Nurss, 1988). Children initiating print in a meaningful play context are engaging in literacy activity.

Oral and written language are part of a dynamic relationship (Teale & Sulzby, 1986) and "develop concurrently and interrelatedly, rather than sequentially" (p. xviii). Thus children do not acquire language in isolated chunks within the system, or outside the system since a social context is also necessary. Oral language acquisition is linked to written language acquisition and within written language acquisition, reading and writing are also linked (Durkin, 1966, 1989; Schrader, 1990; Brailsford, 1985). In fact, Brailsford(1985) supports the belief that children learn written language similarly to the way that they have already learned oral language. Garton and Pratt (1989) agree and define literacy as the mastery of both spoken and written language. Literacy is not acquired step by

step in small segments; but, rather, it is internalized in a global manner (Genishi & Dyson, 1984). This suggests that children "experiment and approximate, gradually becoming aware of the specific features of written language and the relationships between symbols, sounds, and meaning" (Genishi & Dyson, 1984, p. 30).

Children come to the formal learning environment as learners, already knowing much about literacy and the functional use of communication (Hall, 1985; Smith, 1988; Bessell-Browne, 1985; Harste, 1990; Brailsford, 1985; Durkin, 1966, 1989). It is possible for adults to view these understandings about the functions of print, for example, in the use of inventive spelling in play contexts. "Children are learning many things about reading and writing long before they are formally being taught to read", states Hall (1985, p.63) and much of that information comes from using language in everyday community and home activities. Brailsford (1985) describes the cultural chain which supports the literacy development of children as including the child's social milieu and the family culture. She maintains these structures are as important as the child's formal reading experience in school. Learners who have a personal stake in learning to read and write are apt to be more successful (Bessell-Browne, 1985) and early readers do

indeed maintain the edge a pre-formal reading experience gives them (Durkin, 1966). Thus, the child who comes to the formal setting motivated to read and write, because the message that language is functional and necessary for communication has already been internalized, will continue to be successful in literacy activity in school.

Relationships are an important aspect of emergent reading and writing. Success depends on interactions with, and responses from, a peer or adult (Strickland, 1990). Indeed Hiebert (1990) posits that social interaction is a means of learning in all domains. While a literacy activity is acccessed by the learner according to personal needs and thus is individual in nature (Bessell-Browne, 1985), vicarious learning can still take place. Children do learn by observing others and then incorporating the model into their play. Smith (1988) advances the notion of a literacy club (a community of learners engaged in literate behaviours), and Bruner (1983) tells us that development of language involves two people negotiating and generalizing. Perhaps Bruner is speaking of a parent/child relationship, but McGee and Richgels (1990) advocate that child / child support and social situations are also possibilities. Children "are natural supportive players for one another and are often more accepting of non-conventional literacy behaviours

than adults are" (McGee & Richgels, 1990, p. 68). Unconditional acceptance of the language user is essential (Searcy, 1988) and the relationship must be authentic (Coles, 1989) in an environment which allows the learner to risk while feeling connected. Such a supportive relationship will ultimately promote literacy acquisition. Adults working in literacy environments need to pay attention to their belief system and to perform regular checks on the consistencies of their teaching and teaching/learning beliefs (Brailsford, 1985; Coles, 1989) in order to promote an optimal literacy learning situation. Inconsistency and constantly changing strategies result in confusion for the learner. Adults must support realistic expectations of the learner (Potter, 1986) and provide learning situations appropriate to the child's current needs. The role of social mediator and the role of an adult as a responder to questions is vital (Genishi & Dyson, 1984), for it is through the response to questions and the observed interaction in social contexts that learners attempt to make sense of the world.

Authenticity in the environment (Christie, 1990) and a meaningful context (Goodman, 1990; Bessell-Browne, 1985) allow the child to go beyond the present in accessing literate behaviours (Schrader, 1990); thus, it

is possible to view the "playing child" as "a working, purposeful child" (Juliebo, 1985, p. 296), incorporating literacy learning as an everyday part of learning about life. The ideal environment is one of low risk (Potter, 1986; Smith, 1988) where the child is able to access new levels, but also display what has been learned elsewhere, and transferred to the school environment (Christie, 1990). This suggests that control is an important issue and the child must have the freedom to think critically (Hall, 1987; Juliebo, 1985) in an equitable environment (Brailsford, 1985) where initiative is respected. This climate is essential if children are to continue to engage in "meaningful literacy acts" (Hall, 1987, p. 91). Making choices is an important part of the process.

Necessary Support for Dramatic Play and Literacy Development

As with any learning situation, materials enhance the process. Props that are authentic, appropriate, interactive, role-defined or of some utility allow the play and literacy to be situated and coherent (Neuman & Roskos, 1990; Bessell-Browne, 1985; Juliebo, 1985; Raines, 1990; Woodward, 1984). Children will engage in literacy activities in play when materials are available (Morrow & Rand, 1991) but sometimes the effect on co-operative talk can be negative if there are too many

props. In such situations, the attention is focused on the object rather than the play (Genishi & Dyson, 1984).

Through direct contact, the learner gains an understanding of the functionality of print and develops expectations of that print (Matthias & Quisenberry, 1986; Hall, 1985). Meaning can be assigned on the basis of context information and information can be gained through print (Goodman, 1990). "When young children have the opportunity to see print in their environment and to respond to its meaning, they focus on understanding the written symbols" (Nurss, 1988, p. 3). Opportunities for focusing on meaning are important (Searcy, 1988) since children are negotiating meaning and discovering their culture as well as learning language (Bruner, 1983). Sense-making is a primary goal for children engaged in literacy activity (Brailsford, 1985; Vukelich, 1990; Genishi & Dyson, 1984). Literacy learners are practising adult like patterns and participating in organizational activity (Raines, 1990; Roskos, 1988).

Children engage in literacy because of adults, not despite them (Schickedanz, 1991); thus, the adult role in play and literacy assumes great importance. Since children are imitating adult roles, (Juleibo, 1985) it is vital that teachers and parents recognize their role as one of support and, when needed, intervention (Woodward,

1984; Christie, 1990; Goodman, 1990). Vaage (1990) indicates that adults need to participate in the literacy play as scaffolders, allowing children to progress as supports are gradually removed. Adults are the models that children emulate.

Integrating Literacy and Dramatic Play Activities

Children are trying on the language and behaviour of social roles when they play (Vukelich, 1990). They are behaving like literate people, thus they develop the skills they are role-playing (Roskos, 1988). They are also developing and using representational skills that serve as a basis for representation in literacy activities (Isenberg & Jacob, 1983; Schrader, 1990; Raines, 1990).

The development of narrative competence may be the major gain in employing dramatic play to enhance literacy development. Character roles (Pellegrini, 1985) allow children to explore and construct knowledge (Goodman, 1990). Children are able to go beyond their present condition (Roskos, 1988) and generate storytelling strategies (Rosen & Rosen, 1973) which is an ability required to make sense of the world and is essential to thinking (Kirby, Latta & Vinz, 1988). The development of a sense of story (Strickland, 1990) encourages children to become less egocentric and able to take on the

perspective of another (Woodward, 1984; Genishi & Dyson, 1984; Rogers & Sawyer, 1988). Children engage in problem-solving in the development and composition of dramatic texts. Social interaction between adults and children assists in the acquisition of narrative competence (Galda, 1984) as literacy learners are able to generate de-contextualized language as well as explicit language for sustenance (Pellegrini, 1985) through participation in dramatic play. Galda (1984) indicates that children seem able to begin substituting signifiers as they begin to understand the realm of the symbolic. Metalanguage is used in dramatic play (Galda, Pellegrini, & Cox, 1989), thus children are beginning to use symbols and move from the concrete to a more abstract level of thinking. "Symbolic play modes required children to be conscious of the process by which they defined and interpreted symbols" (Pellegrini, 1980, p. 534).

The mutually supportive, interactive, dynamic relationship possible by combining dramatic play and literacy activity allows the learners in the environment to become competent (Juliebo, 1985). Vaage (1990) found that co-operative play did indeed generate and facilitate writing in a kindergarten setting. Genishi and Dyson (1984) state that "playful conversation is the setting for sharing script" (p. 106).

> Whatever else is going on in this network of melodramas, the themes are vast and wondrous. Images of good and evil, birth and death, parent and child, move in and out of the real and the pretend. There is no small talk. The listener is submerged in philosophical position papers, a virtual recapitulation of life's enigmas. (Paley, 1988, p.6)

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The Researcher's Frame

A frame allows one to see through things. Its purpose is to hold a viewpoint in place, sometimes an unchanging photograph or painting, or as a window, sometimes a changing vista of the outside world. In this study, the frame for the research is the methodology employed to gain access into the multiple worlds within a kindergarten classroom.

Because of the multiplicity of the variables within a classroom culture such as this one, the research methodology can not have exact and measured outcomes. Thus, a quantitative approach does not appear viable for research in this setting with these questions. A qualitative approach is used to accommodate the nature of the environment to be studied and to permit a descriptive analysis of the classroom culture, using a wide angle lens (Bradley, 1980).

"The logic in qualitative studies is softer - it's more analogical" (Eisner, 1991, p. 204).

A decision to employ this approach arises from the culmination of years of thinking and doing what has been integrated into my experience (Aoki, 1991). My first-

hand knowledge of the classroom as a social system, a culture, is linked with the (re)searching of my belief system. What appears as a simple overt choice of methodology is not really that at all. It is a rising to the surface of an inner core of knowledge based on an understanding of what it is like to be in that culture and a sense of the symbiosis that exists between the teacher and the learner.

The researching of the belief system leads not only to naming the paradigm that one operates from within, but also coming to grips with the reality associated with our understanding of the nature of knowledge (Aoki, 1984). Do we really approach knowledge as we think we do? Certainly, my view of knowledge and learning has changed. Through recent periods of reflection and study, and years of teaching, I have come to understand that knowledge is fluid and everchanging. Reflection and research are each a part of coming to know. Research without reflection is not possible, in my view. My research frame allows me to interact with the question and the study in an intensely personal manner, an unavoidable by-product of learning. This study has become my curriculum and created an opportunity for me to be both participant and stranger. The stranger's viewpoint adds another dimension to the research:

> To take a stranger's vantage point on everyday reality is to look inquiringly and wonderingly on the world in which one lives. ...Now looking through new eyes he cannot take the cultural pattern for granted. ...To make it meaningful again, he must interpret and reorder what he sees in the light of his changed experience. He must consciously engage in inquiry. (Greene, 1973, p. 268)

I am driven by the questions that haunt me about the nature of curriculum. The decision to study the relationship of literacy and play in early childhood comes from my life experience and my interest in the world of young children, but it is the surface question only. What really lies underneath is a question about human learning, about how curriculum is defined. In accessing the literate adult world, children are provided with a curriculum by the adults in the culture. Do children co-create the curriculum as well through their play? As a consequence of the study, perhaps my surface question will be answered about the nature of play and literacy, but I do expect also that some of my questions about play as curriculum will either be clarified or re-generated.

Methods of Research

As a participant observer, I assumed a position of comfort along the continuum of participation and involvement, one of "moderate participation" (Spradley, 1980, p. 60). This stance allowed me to interact at times with the participants but did not compromise my desire to remain an observer. In a sense this stance is outside the culture but does permit a view unencumbered by the limitations of the role of an involved player, a balance between inside and outside (Spradley, 1980). During the course of the study, I was not seen by the children as *teacher* and perhaps not even as *learner*, although that is how I presented my identity. The perception of my role by others did not lessen the experience for me and I constantly felt the pull of both roles. Although the children were probably very confused initially about my position in the classroom (and this no doubt affected the early stages of data collection), I feel comfortable in stating that most of them accepted the roles I selected as observer and participant in the setting. I deliberately submerged any vestige of the role of disciplinarian, a hard task for one so long a classroom teacher, unless a situation arose where someone could be hurt. I did not wish to trespass on any of the roles already being assumed in the culture, nor did I

wish to be a threat to the status of the culture. It was not my intent to foster a deliberate change on, or interfere with, the design of the environment; however, I recognize that from a philosophical viewpoint, my mere presence has an influence. I must also recognize that my presence in the culture may affect how the teacher structures the environment in the future. In fact, during a followup visit this spring, Miss Fisher indicated that she had made changes in her approach to literacy and play as a result of my influence. Research has a way of reaching out to future generations, so it is crucial that constant questioning of self is part of the researcher's methodology (Brimfield, Roderick & Yamamoto, 1983).

Data Collection

Rough field notes which were taken during the sessions were transcribed, edited and expanded before the next session so that questions and new directions could be undertaken. Excerpts included in the following chapters have been taken directly from the expanded and edited field notes except in cases where a more narrative form was required to clarify the message. Fifteen field visits to the kindergarten setting occurred over the period of mid-March through late May, with most occurring during the time of day that children were playing and

working in centres. This time period was usually an hour or more in duration. Some visits were lengthened to permit observation of group times so that a view of the total day experience was possible.

To gather additional data, a small portable tape recorder was placed in or near the block and house centres on some visits so that conversation during play sequences could be monitored. This method of gathering data was the least successful and least satisfying of the various collection strategies employed, although some information from the tapes was very helpful. Photographs recorded the layout of the physical space, the amount and type of print surrounding the children in the classroom, and some of their play constructions. Photographs tend to stop action and interrupt the play sequences. Because it appeared crucial to keep this recording method unobtrusive, pictures were often taken only when children requested them or when it seemed unlikely to disturb them. To that end, photographs can only represent a small amount of the data collection.

Other techniques included discussion and journalling time with the teacher in the kindergarten. Her comments on the set of field notes provided invaluable background information about the events I observed in the classroom. The journal entries in which she answered questions I

posed to her about the nature of literacy and play in the class environment did much to enhance the understanding of the behaviour of the participants in this culture.

Artifacts produced by the children also form a small part of the data collection. These include some of the signs, notes, money, and so forth, produced in connection with the play sequences. There were also other materials, either brought from home, or constructed at school in some of the other centres, that shed light on how the children were interacting with print.

Second Reader

A second reader is an invaluable assistant in the research process. When the second reader is an impartial observer, unconnected to the setting or the participants, but knowledgeable about the culture in general, she is able to raise the questions that can keep the researcher alert to the nature of perspective and provide confirmation or negation of themes so that the study is not compromised. In this case, the second reader is a kindergarten teacher herself, at present at home with two small children of her own. She is certainly familiar with play and literacy issues. Employing a second reader provides the researcher with the comfort of knowing that when someone is reading over your shoulder, you are more

likely to avoid losing perspective and becoming mired in the research. Articulation and clarification of the ideas became important in identifying the themes. I am very grateful to the second reader of this study for her patience and commitment in carefully reading every field note, listening to every tape, discussing every theme and reading the drafts, thus allowing me the luxury of also viewing the data through her eyes.

The collection of data, like the first draft of the proposal for research, is simply the overture to the main body of the work. As the researcher passes through these steps toward the completed study, there is a sense that the more one learns, the less one knows. This becomes a rather humbling affair, as perhaps it should be, and assumptions are challenged while research questions are modified on the basis of the reality of the research. As I face the sifting together of all of the ingredients of the research process, I am sometimes overwhelmed by the experience of getting inside the teaching/learning continuum that allows me to view the links between play and literacy. It seems both possible and impossible to turn the data collection inside out and shake it in the hope that the relationships of learning will tumble out by themselves. Merriam (1991) states that a qualitative approach should generate hypotheses, rather than test

them. In this study, a testing of hypotheses would have been inappropriate and limiting. As Bogdan and Biklen note, "The study itself structures the research, not preconceived ideas or any precise research design" (p. 58).

Definitions of Literacy and Play

The acquisition of literacy is a function of accessing the social world in which humans live. For the purposes of this study, it is essential that I come to an understanding of what I mean when I define literacy. This perhaps will differ from other researchers' definitions, but I suspect that they suffered as much as I did when I had to limit the terms of the definition.

I perceive literacy within this study to be a system that permits assimilation of the child (or the non-literate adult) into the adult's world. Becoming literate involves not just the acquisition of decoding and comprehension skills concerning the print world, but also the ability to develop a sense of story which permits the learner to combine and recombine information for a sense of understanding. It includes the ability to understand and use narratives.

To define play is a much more difficult task and I will not attempt to go beyond the literature, other than to specify that, for the purposes of this study, play is

primarily a child generated activity, either through the provision of materials and stimulus by an adult or through the child's own initiative. What is of primary importance is the child's decision making and management of choices. Play, I believe, is a creative activity, requiring the use of sensory and cognitive faculties.

Choosing a Research Site

There were several possibilities for research sites in a small community outside of Edmonton. Thus, I had the luxury of choosing a site optimally suited to the needs of the study. Criteria for selection included the following:

1. The philosophy of the program must permit and encourage play as a learning medium as outlined in the Alberta Curriculum guide for Early Childhood Services, Philosophy Goals and Program Dimensions (1984);
2. There should be a significant portion of the day spent in self-selected play;
3. The teaching staff, parents and the school administration should feel comfortable about having a researcher spend a considerable amount of time in the program;

4. The teacher should feel comfortable providing responses to the research issues and in allowing the researcher to add to the environment, if necessary;
5. The location needs to be available to the researcher during an appropriate time period;
6. The researcher should feel comfortable with the atmosphere of the environment.

All of these criteria were met in the site eventually chosen. Children in this afternoon class spend at least an hour every day engaged in play and self-selected activities. In fact, play is considered so vital that if, for example, a field trip is scheduled, or there is early closure of the school, a full hour or more is still provided for centre time. The teaching staff, during the initial interview, displayed a commitment to play as a philosophy for kindergarten programming and were extremely supportive to a researcher coming into the classroom.

The teacher and teaching assistant appear to have developed a team relationship. They frequently discuss the progress of the children or provide each other with anecdotal information. Parent involvement seems an important component of the program. In a very short time, most parents had returned their form indicating

permission to study their children and the classroom. Only one parent refused permission for her child to be part of the study. This decision has been respected and no data concerning this child directly appears in this study.

Sixteen boys and five girls participated in the study, more than half of whom have birthdays falling between September and February. (February 28 is the cut off date for school entry in this district). Such a large proportion of boys to girls is not always usual in a kindergarten setting, but classes are constructed from children residing in surrounding districts of the city and children are not generally bussed outside the area. The number of boys in the class reflects the number of boys of kindergarten age residing in the school's community.

A more complete physical description of the setting follows in Chapter Four which will enable the reader to visualize the environment in which these children learn and play.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE RESEARCH SETTING

A Day in the Play of...

In a description of the setting of a research study, it is possible to lose the contextual flavour surrounding the participants while attempting to paint the details in clearly defined strokes. Rather than provide a listing of the contents and their placement within the room in a diagrammatic fashion, I will attempt to provide a taste of the classroom's life so that the reader may fully understand what it is like to be in this setting. The environment is important in providing children with a context in which to develop and use their imagination as they approach learning. Creating a visual image of this environment is crucial to developing an understanding of what occurs there as children play and learn.

It is 1:05 p.m. on a sunny day in March. Light is streaming through the skylight above the circle area in the classroom. The teacher and her assistant are scurrying around, putting out the remaining ingredients for the centres before the afternoon kindergarten children arrive. A variety of print styles is displayed on the walls of the classroom, produced by the teacher and the children. As well, some print is commercially

produced. Notes from home, pictures and drawings from home are displayed along with theme and concept print. There is a story about Dark Wing Duck on the wall by the blocks and happy/sad circles bouncing in the air currents are suspended from the ceiling. The staff exchanges last minute comments about expectations for the afternoon session as the bus pulls up to the school. Children irrupt into the hallway, chattering excitedly to the teacher all the way down to the classroom. Once inside they remove their outer clothing, hang it in their individual locker spaces, put on their inside shoes and quickly assemble on the rugged area in front of the bulletin board where a calendar, weather chart, helping hands chart and names of the months are displayed. On the ledge are books and an alphabet stretches across the top of the board. The area is bordered by the teacher's desk on one side and on the other by the listening centre.

Twenty-two children, sixteen boys and six girls, sit carefully with legs folded underneath them to await the roll call. The "helping child" holds up individual name cards, illustrated and in some cases printed by the children, and they respond by raising their hands, making a noise or reciting a phrase to indicate their presence. This is a daily routine and everyone seems to recognize

his/her name. The "helping child" is dispatched to the office with the list of absences and the children and the teacher move on to the calendar. They recite the names of the days of the week and month until they decide on the appropriate date and chant together " Today is Wednesday, March 4, 1992" and move on to the weather chart. The helping child moves the arrow on the chart to the picture that indicates sunny (there is no print accompanying the pictures) and the routines are completed.

It is time to choose a centre, but first the teacher provides some information. The house is a house again (it was previously a post office) and space creatures can be made "anyway you want to make them." The teacher displays an example and shows how to roll up newspaper to stuff inside. Now, children may choose centres. As they leave circle, they tell the teacher their choice and she records on a class list. This takes two minutes and soon everyone is busy somewhere in the classroom. It is now 1:20 p.m.

Some children are already hungry for snack and proceed to the north end of the room where a table and counter area, fridge and stove are located. On some days, the children will cook at this centre, but not today. Children retrieve their lunch kits and munch

their way through snack, talking and sharing, and cleaning up when they're finished.

At the art table the teaching assistant is helping children to start their space creatures. She provides some initial assistance with construction but encourages the artists to choose their own materials from the shelves bordering the centre. Not all activities are as open ended as this one is today; in fact children are often given an example to copy. But a number of recycled materials are always available for children's use regardless of the specified art activity of the day and today they are augmented with some specialty items for space creatures. Scissors and glue, pencils and crayons, markers and tape are ready and waiting.

Soon space creatures are developing from the raw materials. The children are working hard and concentration hangs heavy in the air. Because there is no helping parent today, the teaching assistant remains in the centre as a troubleshooter.

Separated from the art table by a shelving unit, is the block centre, usually full of avid builders. Today, a sad face hangs over the centre indicating that the centre is temporarily closed to encourage children to choose centres they haven't tried for a while, but the teacher reminds children that the manipulative toys can be used

and some boys do indeed forge lego creations. Conversation is limited to "Don't wreck it" but the silence does not impede the intricacies of the creations. Because the large blocks are not being used today, perhaps the lego creations will last a little longer.

The house centre lies immediately to the south of the block centre. Its space is delineated by a Wendy house outline with a front door and windows cut out of the side. Inside, child-size table and chairs, stove and fridge, cupboard unit dishes, dolls, plastic food, appliances with cords removed and dress-up items are arranged to make the house look like a home. Conversation centres around the various items and their uses as the girls investigate the items to renew their familiarity with them.

Soon a wedding is planned with the stuffed animals from the circle area and the action shifts to that location until the phone rings for someone in the house. Now there are four in the house which creates a difficulty when another child wishes to enter and must be reminded that the sign outside says only four can come in.

The teacher drifts by in time to catch this and mediates by asking the extra child "What do you need to

do?" The problem is solved when the child decides that another centre will be just as good.

It is 1:57 p.m. and the art table is full. The teaching assistant has only left the art table to remind children that there is room if they wish to come. She has remained in one place while the teacher has floated from centre to centre, asking questions, providing materials and information and supporting learning in a variety of ways.

Back in the house, the girls are giggling as they dress the doll. The phone in the house is very busy today and the girls assume character by changing their voices as they talk.

Just outside the house frame is a large doll house. One boy is carefully placing and replacing furniture and people in different areas of the house while he maintains a commentary about where each item goes. Over in the southwest corner of the room, two children cuddle up on the child size couch with a book from the low library shelf in front of them. Another is listening to records on the floor nearby. The circle area just to the north is now empty as the girls and the teddy bears have all gone back to the house. The language and math tables in front of the art table and in the centre of the room are empty right now. No one is at the science area in the

northeast corner of the room beside the snack centre, where two boys are discussing a fingerplay about five little monkeys. One of the boys shows off his credit card and license that he made just like those of his mother.

It is 2:20 p.m. and two boys are in the circle area holding up the name cards and asking, "Whose name is this?" Everyone in the classroom is busy at the centre of their choice.

The teacher announces that it is five minutes till cleanup time and the children begin to finish the projects they're working on and tidy the areas of the room. By 2:30 p.m. all of the children have returned to circle. There is a discussion about the day's activities in the centres as the children share their thoughts about the day.

Sometimes the class will go to the library or gym at this point in the day. Sometimes a field trip, as is the case today, will be scheduled. At other times a cooking activity will lengthen the centre time. Clean up time varies according to other scheduled events; however, centre time is generally at least an hour long and sometimes longer.

During group time, the children may listen as the teacher reads another chapter in Frog and Toad are

Friends or perhaps they will hear a story about a letter of the alphabet so that they can make another popsicle stick puppet. Dramatizing a favourite story is another possibility. Usually the time after centre time is spent together in large group activities, lasting approximately twenty minutes before it is time to go home. It appears to be a time for listening and learning to be part of a group.

A brief description of a typical kindergarten afternoon does not encapsulate the essence of the lived experience that is part of the learning environment for these children and their teachers. It is just that -- a description in a flat dimension -- meant to provide the reader with some background information prior to the discussion that will follow. I hope that my eyes will allow the reader to look from this vantage point beyond the description as I consider the roles and relationships the participants engage in as they work and play in this kindergarten environment. The following chapters will focus on the children's interactions with print, the development of narrative competence and the role played by adults in the literacy and play environment. Just as the setting has been illustrated in narrative form, each chapter will begin with a short vignette which will serve

as an example of the many observations that form the data collection of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE

CHILDREN'S INTERACTIONS WITH PRINT

Writing to Play in the Store

Billy is on the phone. He is calling 89634. He has the pencil stuck behind his ear, just in case he needs it. The grocery store workers, so the boys say, often get called to the phone while they are working. Meanwhile, Danny is making money. On small sheets of paper, he writes 10, saying "ten" to himself. On more paper, he writes 100, saying "one hundred" to himself. Finally, he writes 1000, again repeating the number to himself. Then he leaves the centre. Billy comes to the table and watches as Donnie points to a sign that has a picture but no price. "That means it's free," says Donnie. Billy is writing on a piece of paper and it appears to be a cheque but he makes no comment on his action. Donnie is now making GST coupons. These are little signs about one inch square that have the letters GST printed on them. He writes and then tells the others that this says GST. Billy is now copying what Donnie is doing, only his writing appears to be a mirror image since it reads TSG with the G backwards. Donnie is telling the customers in the store that when they bring their groceries back for recycling, they will get their

GST back, indicating the little squares he is making. (Field notes, April 14, 1992)

This story illustrates how children approach print in a play setting. Billy emulates the adults he has seen in the real world and incorporates functional adult roles into his play. Danny's print is concentrated on the reproduction of money. He has internalized the math concepts of tens, hundreds and thousands and is using this knowledge to recreate the money. His ability to correctly label the numerals as well suggests to me that this is something he has played with before. Donnie's use of the term GST and his suggestion that shoppers will get their GST back implies that he has taken the real world into his play as well, with some understanding of how the system works. The power of this story lies in the message that children experiment with print and adult roles in realistic and functional ways in play. In doing so, they show us that they are capable of understanding how the world works and they display a much more mature grasp of concepts than we expect. Recreating functional print in play allows children to experiment and explore according to their individual interests and abilities.

This chapter will examine the role of print within the literacy experience for these kindergarten children.

Included will be the types of print in the environment, story reading sessions, purposeful print, and print used as a prop. The children's reaction to print activity will also be discussed.

Print in the Environment

The print in this kindergarten environment is a mixture of adult or teacher generated, commercially generated and child generated material. These sources of environmental print provide children with the raw material needed to access the codes for later reading and writing, and as children participate in "meaningful literacy events" they "develop control over functions and forms of reading" (Goodman, 1984, p. 103).

Adult Print

Adults scribe for children as part of classroom activities. Around the room there is evidence of story dictation such as the displayed child's version of "Darkwing Duck" in the block corner and the children's scrapbooks with entries about field trips or special events. Often the scribing task is assumed by a parent but there is no evidence that the parent encodes the message in the child's exact speech.

A chart entitled "How many days..."(science growing chart) is on continuous display and there are signs

throughout the classroom with general statements such as "We are very busy in Kindergarten." There are also signs for locating specific areas, such as the "Parents' Corner"; for theme and concept; for assigning tasks such as "Helping Hands"; and for information to others, for example "Happy Birthday". Adult print is also displayed in the form of notes and messages to and from parents regarding allergy information, absences from school and so forth. Adults play a role in the print making process in which children participate as they provide words for copying, such as the "happy/sad" captions on displayed pictures, for art or language projects, and for the name cards that children subsequently trace and illustrate.

The teacher models print making activity as she writes notes for herself at the writing centre, reminders of tasks that she needs to perform later. She records the choices made by the children for centre time as they leave the circle area. In examining these examples, it is possible to view the adult role in print activity as being both model and the child's agent or scribe. As well, the adult uses print for a purpose which is an important implicit message and one that facilitates literacy experience for young children.

Commercial Print

In this classroom, there are lots of examples of commercial print such as calendars and signs. Posters with the names of the months, dinosaurs and their labelled names, and signs located in the centres, (for example "Hooray for Books") surround the children on the walls of the room. There are also commercially produced alphabet charts, numbers, colours, nutrition pictures and posters such as "Recycle a book, share it with a friend," which enhance the adult generated print on view for the children.

Along with these posters and signs, another source of commercially generated print is available to children in the form of books and record jackets. Books are part of theme displays set up separately from a static book corner. The books in the book corner do not seem to change as often as the books in the theme display but the children who do choose this centre read and reread these books often. There is not as much activity in the book centre as in some others (for example the art, blocks, or house centre), but children who do come to the centre seem absorbed in their choices for reasonable lengths of time with specific books. Generally, there are twenty to twenty-five items in the book centre, including books

produced by this class and another kindergarten class with whom Miss Fisher had previously been involved.

Child Generated Print

Children generally write their own names on their paperwork destined for home or for display. All of the children in this class write some form of their name independently. Children use print at different levels. For example, some children bring pictures from home, either from colouring books or drawn by themselves, with their names attached and a message to the teacher which includes the word "to" and her name. All of these brought-from-home pictures are displayed around the room. For other children, writing their name on their papers is their only attempt at writing, unless they are required to complete an activity which includes copying. There is opportunity in some of the centres to use print but not all children choose to do so. There is no specific writing centre set up in the classroom at the beginning of the study, thus the focus for children to write is focused on the art centre or the language and math centres where paperwork can be found. Although children do not themselves generate a lot of print, they do react to print and it is part of their environment.

Reaction to Print

Story Sessions

From responses given during circle time, it is very evident that most children, if not all, recognize their own name. Donaldson states that this has "a particular emotive power and often serves as a starting point, a way into the world of written language" (1984, p. 179). Several children appear to recognize the names of classmates as well; thus, it is possible to postulate that the children have internalized that the symbols on the card carry meaning. The name cards are used extensively everyday to record attendance. Children are required to indicate that they recognize their name in some fashion. Their responses, unless excessively noisy, are not structured. Thus nonsense rhymes, made-up jingles and body movements are acceptable. For example, a nursery rhyme is used one day by one of the children. For the next few days this response is used by many students and then variations are injected. Children's attempts to experiment with oral language as a reaction to a print activity are accepted.

Circle time provides an opportunity for print interaction as children and teacher discuss calendar and weather. These routines include recitation of the days

of the week, the number of the days, the month and the year, all of which are displayed with corresponding signs. Weather pictures are discussed but print is not attached to the weather board to enhance the challenge for those who are ready. Children are able to recognize the name of the month if they are a given a print context clue to do so.

Group times are also the times when books are discussed and read. Some attention is given to the format of the book (title, ending, print direction, etc.) and story reading occurs regularly at the end of the kindergarten day. As well, children go to the school library once a week for story sessions with the librarian and to check out books to take home. The following observation suggests that the value of the session might be viewed as doubtful.

> The children have arrived at the school library after walking through corridors as quietly as they could, with reminders from the staff about talking in line. The librarian invites them into the room and asks them to sit quietly on the rug in the middle of the floor. They cuddle down and are reminded to sit flat so others can see. The librarian, who is seated on a

> chair, holds the book facing herself, reads the story very quickly, and briefly shows the pictures to the children in a sweeping arc motion. There is some response to the pictures as they are shown and they appear to fit contextually with the content of the story, but the children do not respond with comments after the story, nor are they invited to do so by the librarian. When there are no pictures, the children become very restless and the teacher attempts to quiet them on an individual basis. The librarian picks up another book, quickly reads it and follows that with some poems. No pictures are shown. The stories chosen do not appear to be familiar to the children. Nor was I familiar with them. Children are then able to select books to take home if they have brought back their previous library books. (Field Notes, April 14, 1992)

This episode is in direct contrast to the teacher directed story session. The teacher has the book in her hand so all can see and so that the pictures are facing

the children, who are clustered on the rug quite close to her. She is sitting on a low chair so that she is not above their line of vision when holding the book.

> She starts to talk about the book. It has chapters and she won't plan on reading the whole story of Frog and Toad are Friends. John says, "Teacher, that book won" and teacher says, "Won what?" He says, "That thing on it", indicating the Caldecott Medal on the cover. There is some discussion regarding the Medal and what it means and then, the teacher says, "Listening time now please." She starts to talk about the book and the cover and then turns inside to the chapter title and says, "This word right here says 'spring'." There is some discussion regarding spring and (as discussion lengthens) the attention of some of the children begins to wander..."Let's go back to our story," says the teacher and the story resumes. The children seem interested and involved in the storyline and they are quietly listening. When Miss Fisher reads the part in the story where Toad couldn't think of a story, Alice replies, "There are lots of stories." (Field Notes, March 20, 1992)

The lack of interaction in the story session with the school librarian would appear to be a result of the nature of the session. The process is not an interactive one for the children; their role is passive and, except for the pictures, their interest is not captured. In contrast, the teacher encourages discussion of the book's format, allows discussion of the themes, and negotiates their involvement with the story when she senses that the discussion is becoming too long. The librarian does not discuss the story content with the children, she simply moves onto another story and it is up to the teacher to manage their behaviour during the session. In the teacher's session, it appears that children are able to make asides, hence statements such as Alice's that "There are lots of stories."

In response to the field notes describing the library story session, the teacher's comments are that it is " a very different storytelling/story reading technique" and that "it is good for them to get used to listening to different people." However, there does not appear to be any evidence to support that this session is of value to the children, since they do not refer to the session again, nor is there any interaction during the session on which to base an evaluation of its effectiveness. But both of these storytelling sessions,

regardless of how we might evaluate them, are part of the reality of the children's exposure to the printed word in story form.

Understanding Stories

The children in this class appear to have internalized the components of a story as can be seen in the following example. Following the story session with the teacher, related above, the teacher and the children participate in a dramatization of a favourite story, The Three Billy Goats Gruff. Although the dramatization activity is chosen by the teacher, the choice of story belongs to the children. The teacher assigns the roles and then asks, " Are we ready storytellers? What do we need to start with? Where do they want to go? Who goes first? Let's see what happens." At the end, she says, "Is our story finished?" and the children chorus "The End." The children understand the components of the story and are able to unfold the drama with the teacher providing a framework to encourage the details. Their resounding chorus of "The End" displays their understanding that stories have endings as well as beginnings. The scaffolding that she provides, in terms of the questions she asks (Vaage, 1990), is necessary for

the children to continue to develop their understanding of story.

Purposeful Print

In response to reading the field notes, the second reader for this study points out that print appears to be functional in the context of the classroom. The names, as part of the circle routine, provide the class with information as to attendance. The teacher records absences on a chart, which is later taken to the office by the "helping child", allowing the children to see a purpose in this print recognition activity. Similarly, children are encouraged to write their names on their papers for the purpose of delineating ownership. Children ask for the correct spelling of names such as that of Miss Fisher.

The signs are also an example of functional print since they provide the names of centres children use, such as the book or listening centre. Even the calendar, with its labels and numbers, provides children with an understanding that print in the environment is functional illustrated by this example:

> Donnie is working at the calendar now and the teacher says, "What will 20 look like?" Donnie points to the number. Then the children chant

> the days of the week on the calendar that Donnie is pointing to, saying, "Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday." When they get to Friday. Donnie says, "Stop!" and indicates that this is the right day. Miss Fisher asks, "What's this big number mean?" (1992) A child says, "The second year" to which Miss Fisher replies, "That's right, it tells us the year." Donnie asks, "Is it snowy? windy?" as he shows the weather chart. There is a lot of discussion until Miss Fisher says, "Let's let Donnie decide." Donnie decides the clouds are winning and he moves the arrow to the picture that shows cloudy weather. Next in circle, they discuss the first day of spring and Donnie moves the arrow to the section on the chart that has the word "spring". (Field notes, March 20, 1992)

Thus it is possible to see that print in this environment is used to fulfill purposes. Miss Fisher needs to make notes, children carry newsletters home for parents to read, print is on the worksheets providing information about the activity, signs on the display board label the theme, and children read books in the library centre. Given that print is used in purposeful

ways in the classroom, do children internalize that concept? Do they carry print with them into their play? Does print become a prop in their play episodes?

Print as a Prop

The primary evidence of print being used as a prop appears in the play episodes in the house after it becomes a store. The store is the bridge, linking both literacy play with print and literacy play with the development of narratives.

Initially, as domestic play unfolds within the confines of the housekeeping centre, children do not have access to print, nor do they take it into the house with them. Because the play in the house is dominated by two participants during this time period, much of the play appears to centre continuously on the same recurring theme of mother and babies with friends and teaparty. Since the props which might promote literacy play in the house are not available, it is not possible to theorize about their possible use. These children might not use them in any case, since their recurring play appears to be very focussed within the confines of the mother and baby agenda.

However, with the change of the house to a store, and the field trip experience to a grocery store as the

source of information about the environment, literacy activity increases. The class begins the set-up of the store with a discussion of what might be needed. Different children are chosen everyday for several days to assist the teacher with initial organization. After the daily set-up period, these children are given the option of remaining to play or leaving. If they leave, other children are able to take a turn which becomes a regulated affair with a name sheet on the outside of the door so that everyone might participate at some point. This is also a literacy event since children must recognize their names and cross them off once they have had a turn in the store.

The children and teacher prepare price tags, signs, money, pictures and other necessary props for successfully operating a store. The teacher has structured the generation of the literacy props and store related concepts and provides information on how to set up, as can be seen in the following:

> Ronnie reads the sign that says "Green Giant" to me and tells me its price is ninety-nine cents. The whole sign reads, "Green Giant Corn Niblet" but he only identifies "Green Giant." Jennifer notices two signs that have the s[illegible] picture. The children have put signs all o[illegible]

> the inside of the house. Miss Fisher says, "Shall we make a sign that says 'cashier'?" She writes the word and they copy it. Ronnie changes the small letter h in his writing to the capital letter H. His word looks like "CASHier" but Jennifer and Brenda both make their words exactly like Miss Fisher's example. The teacher and the set-up crew finish and the house is opened for play. (Field Notes, April 10, 1992)

Primarily, the children's initial activity in the store is limited to interaction with props constructed under Miss Fisher's supervision. For many children, creating the environment with the teacher supersedes the desire to interact with it on their own, for they often leave the centre after helping to set up. Perhaps their interest wanes or perhaps they define set-up as the focus and function of the centre.

However, as some of the children assume ownership of the store, there is an explosion of print in the environment. Children begin to generate more print. Most of what is created is simply more of the same -- price tags, money and signs. But with Miss Fisher's encouragement, grocery lists begin to appear as well. Children read the logos and copy them onto their lists

from the packages. Shopping expeditions occur and children begin to select items on the basis of the print on the boxes they have brought from home, just as in this play segment:

> Danny takes the wallet, opens it, and fishes out a bill from the tight wad inside. ... It looks like he has observed this manner of taking money from a wallet. It is so precise. He finds more things to buy, takes out more money and says, "The eggs for the kids." He hands the wallet to John who takes it and tucks it under his, while choosing shopping items. John asks about a shopping list. The teacher assistant suggests looking at the shelves to find items to put on the list. Grant is copying a shopping list from packages on the shelves. This is slow work so his list is not long. He comes over to Karen and Danny to have his items put into a bag, still carrying the list. He leaves the house and comes back with his list and a pencil to write more items. He comes up to Karen and asks, "How much?" She replies, "$60.00." Grant looks at the price tags and copies the price onto his list. (Field Notes, April 10, 1992)

When Miss Fisher and I place coupons, telephone books and flyers in the centre, children use them to enhance their play. There are some players who do indeed access print without adult assistance. Donnie and Billy make more money, following Miss Fisher's pattern, but enlarging the scope by making hundred and thousand dollar bills as well as GST coupons to be returned to customers. Billy uses the phone book to order pizza, using actual listings and easily identifying pizza restaurants through their logos. This leads me to speculate about how the children in this class might access print without adult intervention and many "What if...?" questions begin to surface. Regardless of who initiates the activity, "when children use reading and writing in their pretend play, they tend to display their stance or orientation toward literacy" (Roskos, 1988, p. 563).

Although most of the literacy activity within the centre is devoted to creating the print environment with the teacher's guidance and her interpretation of what should be there, children do eventually assume ownership of the activity. But the nature of that interaction changes from a focus on print to a focus on creating narrative, which will be discussed further in Chapter Six.

It appears that children are busily engaging in print activity -- the kind of activity that would be commonly associated with literacy. But they do not seem to initiate this activity for themselves until it is first carefully structured by the teacher. The question remains as to the value of the literacy and play activity as being child-directed. The teacher's agenda underlies the activity and it is unknown if the children would respond by using print in some manner if it had not been modelled for them or if she had not elicited the appropriate responses through her questions. Through her structuring of the sessions into set-up and play, she unconsciously makes a distinction between work and play. Is she giving a subtle message that one is more valuable than the other? This is unknown, but it is possible that this is a message that children are carrying away from the activity.

To involve the children in the set-up of an actual centre in any form is a positive feature; but, is the direction she provides with her modelling and questioning necessary? What would they do if the materials were simply provided in the centre after the field trip and the subsequent group discussion? Would they recreate the grocery store on their own? Is the knowledge gained in the recreation process as valuable, or even more

valuable, to the children if they initiate it themselves? Has this teacher used a scaffolding technique too soon, thereby inhibiting the children in their approach to creating and working in the centre by prescribing the kind of play that could be used? Because I did not observe a precedent in this classroom for the use of literacy props in the dramatic play centres, suppositions of this nature are pure speculation without further study.

CHAPTER SIX

CHILDREN'S NARRATIVES

Tales of the Unexpected

The discussion in the blocks is about horses today. Many of the children have arrived at school in western attire since it is rodeo week in town. Cowboy hats and bandanas are common and Alice is in full western gear, complete with chaps. Donnie is having a problem because all of the blocks he needs for his horse have already been used by others so he is sitting alone over near the windows, aloof from the play going on in the centre. John and Jeremy are busy. Their horses are nearly complete and surprisingly enough, look very similar to the motorcycles, fire engines and doobie boats constructed on other days. The cowboys are at last astride their horses and the whooping and galloping is fast and furious. All of a sudden, Jeremy's horse falls apart from underneath him as he begins to stand up. John slowly dismounts, meanders over to Jeremy, looks carefully at the broken horse, looks back at his own and says, "Your horse is a robot horse and my horse is a human horse. That's why your horse fell apart and mine didn't." (Field Notes, May 1, 1992)

John and Jeremy are working on a theme of cowboys and logically build their structures similar to something with which they have already experimented. In creating the horses in a similar manner to their previous constructions, they are displaying flexibility and imagination. The prop is important to the storyline, but it is the theme that creates the story. For me, there is a sense of unity in being able to perfect a construction and see possibilities beyond the original purpose. When Jeremy's horse collapses the children are able to incorporate the unexpected event into the play and maintain the theme. The other bonus for me lies in witnessing Jeremy's first co-operative play experience with the group in the blocks. The stories children play out in dramatic contexts can tell us much about them and their ability to develop solutions when their narratives might be sidetracked. The use of "human horse" and "robot horse" in John's speech indicates to me that he is able to use a sophisticated comparison.

Storytelling is part of our lives. "Narrative is the way we make sense of our world and of our experiences in that world" (Kirby, Latta & Vinz, 1988, p. 721). For centuries, civilizations have used stories as a way of transmitting and sustaining their culture. As research on the importance of narrative competence in the acquisition

of literacy continues (Galda, 1984), the focus on storytelling, as in the transmission of culture to the young from the old, is crucial to our understanding of the processes children engage in as they are involved in play. Stories that children tell and develop in their play are rooted in the adult world; that is children interpret, organize and develop plots and character from what they observe in their environments.

Galda states that "we have evidence that dramatic play influences the narrative abilities of constructing and recalling stories" (1984, p. 114) and argues for even more research to confirm what is actually happening as children use narrative in their play.

A cautionary note is important in this discussion in this chapter. The girls in this class are definitely a minority group. Their numbers in relation to the numbers of boys are very small and, therefore, make it difficult to generalize about gender differences. A further consideration is that of the six girls in this class, only four play in the house centre on a regular basis and, of those four, only two are there consistently and for long periods of time. These two girls dominate the domestic play in the house area. Of these two girls, I am only able to study one. Repeated and varied attempts

on my part, and that of the classroom teacher, have failed to secure the permission of the parents for one of these girls to participate in the study. This is indeed unfortunate since this child is the one who, within this dyad, consistently develops a large portion of the character and plot during their play in the house. My study would have benefitted greatly with the discussion of her stories and her ability to develop character. But the real world intervenes for all of us and we must respect external limits imposed by parents.

Roles

Over the course of my observations, there appears to be some consistency in the roles the children take on in the creation of their stories. Pellegrini states that "using language to transform roles from reality to fantasy is an excellent example of a multifunctional utterance, serving both interactional and imaginative functions" (1984, p. 138). It appears from Pellegrini's work that, when children assume roles and use language to create narratives, they are demonstrating competence in language abilities.

Children take on two roles as they construct story. They become the characters in the story, carrying out the functions of authors, actors,

directors, set managers, and audience. They also explain as they proceed, to outsiders and to each other. While this is not the case for all of the players, since individual differences in cognitive and social ability are present within the group, it happens often enough to be noteworthy. Children who are able to negotiate and participate in the enactment of play sequences may be "socially adept" (Doyle, 1987, p. 16).

Because each child brings different experiences and understanding to the story play, some negotiation must occur in order to prevent chaos. Embedded within the notion of negotiation are also the functions of consultation and interaction. Because a group dynamic is in operation to facilitate the development of the story, there are some issues surrounding leadership and control that need to be addressed. Problem solving accompanies this activity as well.

Each player has an agenda, despite the fact they may be sharing one narrative at the time. This means that each will change the nature of the play slightly according to the focus they assume. A structure is being built by Grant and his friend:

> "We're making the animal's home. This is the cliff we fall down when we get dead. These are my babies. Yeah, this is where I live.

I'll show you where I live."

Meanwhile, Donnie and another are playing in the same structure:

> "You don't have to be scared of Sharp Tooth's mother anymore. Now all I have to do is take care of Sharp Tooth's father." He goes over to another dinosaur. "Hey, it wasn't me, Bozo." (Field Notes , March 24, 1992)

Thus each child participates in the narrative but each of the boys approaches the story with his own agenda and takes on a unique role in the play.

To facilitate the discussion of the roles that seem to be part of narrative competence in this research setting, it would be appropriate to present a profile for some of the key players.

John

In years to come, I will picture John wearing a carpenter's apron and with a hammer in his hand for he is the builder. Somehow there is a tacit agreement that he is the authority in the block centre. He initiates several of the structures that are later copied by others in the group and he seems to be the one who changes the structure.

> John moves the flappers at the back and "puts the jets on" and says later, "I'm turning it into a fire boat." (Field Notes, April 16, 1992)

He is the set builder for the stories. His involvement in the stories is not as a plot or character developer although he does participate. Rather he creates the set through his block creations and the props needed such as the flat board for pizza, the oxygen mask for the firefighters, the horses for the cowboys and the racing car/boat structures.

Donnie

Donnie is the staunch and loyal friend who supports everything John suggests, but he does not always remain attached to John's side in the block corner. He is an organizer. He is responsible in the Safeway store for making GST coupons, more money, and recycling. He assists in setting up for shopping, placing the cash register in a realistic spot at the end of a long counter and reminding the children of the procedures witnessed in a real Safeway store, right down to wearing the pencil over his ear. He appears to be able to provide information in any of the play

scenes I witnessed, which leads me to speculate that he is very observant about what goes on in the real world. The threads of the stories are drawn from the real world in which the children live.

Alice

Alice bustles around the house, tidying and organizing. While she does not take as active a role in the stories in the house, she does perform some other valuable services for the group. She is the stage manager. She organizes and sets out the props and provides them to the players as they are needed. She provides the commentary to the adults, especially to me, about the events taking place and the props that are used. She also keeps the storyline in place and does not like the intrusion of alternate plots; for example, she leaves the house after failing to regulate "the dogs" in family play. She is also the keeper of the rules and reminds players that they have to be "nice". One of her biggest roles is that of mediator, in which she encounters alternate views and reconciles group tension, an important development in the acquisition of symbolic thinking (Nourot & Van Hoorn, 1991). However, it is necessary to put the discussion of that role in context with the role of objector.

Candy

There are often times when Candy has difficulty accepting an alternate point of view resulting in friction which impedes the development of the play and the story in the unfolding dramas. An objector or critic keeps the play lively and reminds us that another point of view is worthwhile. Candy fulfills that function well. Alice provides the mediation required to get the play back on track. She is able to provide the neutral ground between the two players in disagreement and bring the play back into focus so it can continue. Candy's role as objector appears to serve no purpose except disruption; but I wonder if the disagreements in some way might be functional in that, in having to defend their point of view, those children engaged in the conflict have to solidify their position or their storyline. I cannot cite direct evidence but it is a point worth considering for future research.

Cory

Every play needs a director. Cory assumes this role, and also that of actor, very well as he interprets how the drama will unfold.

Billy pretends to shoot the dog. Cory explains, "I was looking for food. Somebody put the purse on my back." Meanwhile, Billy, the storekeeper, has turned to deal with a customer, Jennifer. Cory begins again, "You were at the door okay? Open the door a little. I came to give you a lick." Jennifer is counting her change and Billy says "Found your purse, lady." Cory, the dog, tells Jennifer, the customer, "You dropped it on my neck. I gave it to you. I was in the pet store, okay? You wanted to buy me. I was sleeping." Brenda, another customer, comes into the store and says, "You and Billy get to ring this through and put it in bags. You're the dad, Jennifer, you're the mom." Then she adds, "You have to pay for it Jennifer" to which Jennifer replies, " I did already." Cory, the dog, who is sleeping, says, "You had to wake me up already." Brenda says, "You're my dog." Cory replies, "I'll be both of yours. Brenda, you be the sister and here's the ..." Brenda quickly says, "No, I want to be the Mom" to which Cory says, "Okay. Jennifer, you be the sister. Jennifer, you bug your mom so much to buy a big dog." Discussion

> and disagreement erupt until someone says, "I'm telling teacher." Cory, the dog, tries to distract with "I was scratching to get out" and peace reigns again. Everyone in the store is busy again and trying to organize the setting. Brenda comes to the dog and says, "You're over there, Cory" and Cory explains, "I was just scratching the window to get out cause I'm a big dog." Brenda, the customer again, says, "Hmm, maybe I should buy this dog." She turns to Jennifer and says, "We need more than $2.00." The sale is concluded and the dog is ready to go home with his new owners just as the bell rings for clean up. (Field Notes, April 22, 1992)

Cory is both an actor and a director as well as a writer. He does this within other play episodes but this particular scene is fairly representative of his ability as author and director of a narrative. There are other children in this classroom who participate in much the same kind of roles as Cory, but he is, by far, the most sophisticated director. He has a sense of plot development and a feel for developing character. As a dog, he really was a dog with heavy panting and real

scratching on the play house window. He continually uses phrases like " Say I was..." or "Pretend...". This is an indication of metalinguistic awareness and might facilitate literacy development in young children (Galda, Pellegrini & Cox, 1989).

These segments illustrate the roles that children can take on in a narrative play episode. Many of the children use one or more of these roles in the creation of their play stories, but some can manage only the role of actor as directed by others, which is to be expected given the variety of their abilities and preferences. Sometimes a play episode would have more than one director, which makes for a chaotic plot line; and sometimes, the story would evolve without a director with different plot lines converging at last into a common story. Perhaps the commonality of the set constructions assisted in this convergence. Perhaps, it is a case of follow the leader.

Leadership

Clearly, within this group, there are leaders and followers. Cory as the director is a leader by choice. He propounds his ideas to the followers in the group in which he is currently playing, with the result that a

plot emerges with fairly well defined characters. John, on the other hand, does not consciously choose to be a leader, but his design conceptions are copied and the other habitual block players follow his lead in the play stories; thus, doobies, racing car/boats, motorcycle, pizza delivery, camping and horses are constructed by others playing in his vicinity. Often there are minor modifications but a definite common feature is recognizable. When the block structures are completed, either the plot in the individual stories retains some of that commonality or the play is shared by the group.

> Meanwhile in the blocks, the boys are making doobies and other things. Donnie, John, Cory and Andy, who wanders around the outside remaining on the fringe of the play, are all making individual structures. Cory says, "Our things can jump out" indicating that their structure has now become a tunnel. Donnie says, "See, this is my steam oil" to John and it appears that there are now two different groups building. Miss Fisher goes to Cory's group and asks, "Will your roof stay on?" to which he responds by moving the

supports closer together. To Donnie she says, "Is it going to be a fast boat?" and he responds by describing in detail just what the expected boat can do. Jeremy has meanwhile been working off to one side, intently watching what the others are building. Miss Fisher asks him, "What are you making?" His reply is "Motorboat."

At this point, there is shared construction but no story as yet. A little later the storyline develops.

John is very busy working on his dooby. Donnie is trying to get his attention and it is not working so he says, "I turned mine off." Andy is trying to take blocks from Jeremy's motorboat and is not successful. Andy says, "I need it" and Jeremy reluctantly points to others lying nearby that he can take, leaving the motorboat intact. [illegible] and John have built almost identical structures and Jeremy's is a faint copy, resembling theirs but not exactly the same. He is still some distance away from them but he copies their moves, riding his boat when

> they ride theirs and pretending to sleep on his boat as they do when it is nighttime in the blocks. ... Now it is daytime and the doobie race is on. John and Donnie are making engine sounds and Jeremy copies them again. Somehow Jeremy has moved his structure a little closer to Donnie and John and is paralleling the racing action, moving his arms and legs when they move theirs and making engine noises when they make them. (Field notes, April 20, 1992)

When a block structure construction is shared, it can lead to a shared plot as well. For Jeremy this is an important step and leads to a copying of other block structures which eventually move him into the centre of the play as he creates his horse.

Now that the roles children take on in play have been outlined, the narratives the players create can be discussed.

There Are Lots of Stories

But where do all the stories come from and where do they take place? The children in this class seem to draw

from their interpretations of family life, community life and television, movies, and books.

Perhaps family life is the primary seedbed for stories that children use in their play. The girls in the house played a consistent version of mother and babies, teaparty and friends, boyfriend and girlfriend. As a theme, mother and babies and family life pervades domestic play. In fact, when the girls leave the house to go to the block centre, they take mother and babies with them.

> Alice and her friend have returned to the block centre. She gathers the small dinosaurs from around the centre and they begin to play mother and babies. As they are playing, one of the boys objects to their presence and tells them, "You shouldn't come to dinosaurs." Reluctantly, he leaves their vicinity and they continue the play. The small dinosaurs are calling back and forth to the large dinosaurs. Soon two other boys join the girls and the names "Big Foot and Little Foot" are being used. Big Foot and Long Neck take care of the babies so that Sharp Tooth doesn't get them. Alice takes the mother and baby over to a block

> constructed house. Jeremy threatens the mother and baby but Alice says, "Get out of my house this minute. Look, I have sharp teeth." The enemy retreats. (Field Notes, March 20, 1992)

While the mother and babies theme comes from a family life source, it can be modified by what children are exposed to in the form of books, movies, or television. Little Foot, Sharp Tooth, Long Neck and Big Foot are names associated with movie dinosaurs. In fact, these names are entwined in the children's understanding of dinosaurs so much that in a later class discussion when Miss Fisher attempts to introduce the real names of the dinosaurs, the children are quite unreceptive to her information.

Television is also a source of stories. The boys in the block centre create several vehicles while I am present as a researcher. One of these is a "dooby", a cross between a racing boat and a car (I think!) which, according to my sources in the class is featured in a Saturday afternoon television program. Donnie also constructs and plays with a version of a video game he has seen advertised on television. He is quite specific in his description and quotes what seems to be the entire commercial word for word.

John draws his play stories from his family life as well, mostly from the adventures he has previously had with his uncle or expects he might have in the future. John seems to know a lot about convertibles and motorcycles and uses these structures on several occasions in the block centre:

> John says, "See my motorcycle. It's allowed two persons. Motorcycles run on oil." Pat says, "Just gas!" John says, "No oil too, you know." The boys have built their motorcycles in front of the house door. John calls Donnie over and says, "You sit right there." Then he gets on. Suddenly Pat yells, "Seatbelts!" but John says, "This one doesn't. Most motorcycles don't." Donnie says "Say you drop me off at the shop Nintendo. Blup, belup, belup." The motorcycle stops, Donnie gets off and so does John. They have arrived. (Field Notes, May 11, 1992)

Just as the house centre is dominated by two girls and their version of domestic play, the block corner is the centre of operations for two boys. But differences appear to arise. In the house, the two girls are frequently the only two players; while in the blocks, the

boys are often joined in their play, either co-operatively or in a parallel manner by others, usually boys. I would hesitate to speculate on gender issues at this point; in a class where boys outnumber girls at least two to one, there will usually be more boys than girls using the block centre. And there are many other centres to work in as well, including art, an obvious favourite with all of the students. Boys do play in the house at times just as girls play in the blocks at times. The space for blocks is expandable, allowing the children to build out into the room with virtually no limit on the number of participants. The house is restricted in space and limited to only four players. So while John and Donnie are the primary players in the block centre, there are often a number of other players, not always the same ones, fluctuating in numbers and depending on other options. The issue of who controls the content and nature of the story/play sequences in the blocks is not as crucial as in the house. The stories in the blocks are certainly influenced by the primary players but not controlled exclusively by them.

How Are Stories Created?

For the most part, children's stories arise as part of play and in response to the environment. There are

differences, however, within the block and the house play; and, there are definite roles that children and adults take on during the creation of the stories. In the house, the props that support story creation are already there in some form and may not need to be created before play can occur. Some rearrangement and organization, however, may be necessary to position the props.

> Back in the house, one child is directing imaginary friends to appropriate places. Alice says, "We have no tea. I've got coffee. Oh my friends are here now." (Mr. Bear and Bunky, two of the circle time stuffed animals are brought to the house by another child). The stuffed animals are placed on the blanket that is laid out in the middle of the floor in the house. Alice counts the number of friends and says, "Pretend we had a party now." The table is set as well and all of the dishes and pots and pans and every moveable prop in the house is set out. Miss Fisher arrives and the girls tell her, "We're having a party with boy friends and girl friends." ... There is more food in the house and the girls put this out too. Alice removes her apron and decides to dress the baby, all the while explaining her every

> move to Miss Fisher. There is a discussion about the merits of putting the food on the tablecloth on the floor. (Field notes, March 16, 1992)

The props in the house are recognizable and can be interacted with in their present form, either for an intended purpose or for a pretend purpose. Children seem to know that the toaster is still a toaster even though it is "pretend cause it has nothing" indicating that the cord has been removed. However, in the block centre (where there are small cars, animals, lego, dinosaurs and other accessories) major construction takes place to create the setting and the props as the story happens.

> In the blocks today, John and Donnie are working on a steering wheel and say, "It's for dinosaur owners." The car collapses and the boys tell Miss Fisher that it's a traffic jam. Donnie is repairing the robocar. Cory talks about axles "Axles are really nice" but he sounds a little exasperated since it appears no one is listening to him. ... "Oh the door's open, we're sinking", says one boy. "John's the captain - he's got the hat." John says, "I got to fix it" and he puts blocks inside the

hollow blocks that are part of the vehicle. Play continues as they carefully fix it. (Field Notes, April 6, 1992)

This kind of block play differs from the house play since it offers children the opportunity to do more than manipulate props already present. Blocks demand construction and as the building occurs the story is created. The focus is not solely on interacting with the structure since the structure can change as the story changes and the story can change as the structure changes.

Another major difference occurs when the focus of the story within each site is considered. In the blocks the stories revolve around objects and the landscape, (machines, buildings, cliffs for the dinosaurs); and, while people are part of the play, the story is more about what happens with machinery and structures. The boys create cars, racing boats, doobies, motorcycles, convertibles, corvettes, cliffs, traps, and waterskis. They interact with the structures and sometimes use animals or dinosaurs as the central characters, but the vocabulary used and the purpose of the story seems to revolve around the actual block construction. As time progresses and the themes develop in block play, one of

the boys begins to create more props in the art centre to support the play. He makes air tanks and gas masks to extend the fire theme play and subsequently wears them to participate in the play, but again the focus is on the objects, not on the players.

In the house, the props are definitely secondary to the people and the stories there reflect the importance of people and animals as the main characters, such as boyfriends, girlfriends, mother, babies, family members, cats and dogs. Props are used to support this play, but it most likely would continue in some form without them. For example, when the girls must leave the house, they transfer the theme of their mother and baby play to the dinosaurs in the blocks. Their focus is not on the cliffs or the house constructed for the dinosaurs by the boys but rather on the dinosaurs and their characters of mother and babies. A similar situation occurred when the house becomes a Safeway store with regulations concerning turn taking. The girls take their turn in the house to grocery shop but transfer their family theme to the library corner which becomes their house. When a drama like this is transferred beyond the location of its origination, it seems logical to suppose that this is a theme that transcends setting and props.

As I watch boys concentrate their play on objects and girls base their play on people and animals, I wonder if these perceived gender differences are unique to this particular culture or if there is a pattern implied for children in general. I have never looked for this distinction before, and it is not clearly illustrated in this study. Perhaps it is a subject worthy of a study all to itself in the future. McLoyd, Warren and Thomas (1984) speculate in their study on role enactment that girls appear to prefer domestic drama and boys prefer drama rooted in fantasy or occupations. This study reinforces that speculation, but I would hesitate to present it as a hypothesis on the basis of such limited observation.

Just as print is used as a prop for literacy activity during play sequences, other props are required to enhance narratives that children develop during dramatic play segments. Children use props as tools in their construction of story as they become meaning makers. In the dramatic play context of a household experience, objects like toasters and dolls promote pretend. Children are aware that items are for pretending and not necessarily real. "This is pretend" says Alice but she uses the toaster with no cord as though it did have one. Her imagination is not limited

as she weaves dramatic play around domestic items. Similarly, the phone is well used by the children in the house. [illegible] fascinating to note that a simple change of voice [illegible] ct a change in character. Children assume roles [illegible] the phone even when they are unaware that anyone is listening. They are playing with the dimensions of character as they develop story. Puppets and stuffed animals are pressed into service as teaparty guests. They become "friends", characters in the drama as the girls manipulate the storyline.

Just as the domestic play story is enhanced and expanded through the use of props, so is the block play. The difference lies in the use of the blocks as props for they must be built according to the theme of the drama and then used. So the children in this centre are continually creating their props and changing the story in relation to the evolving constructions. There is a chicken and egg question here as to what comes first. Does the creation of the block structure create the narrative or is the narrative developed first, thereby creating the structure? My suspicion is that children ex[illegible]ment with both as they create structure and narrative at the same time.

The amazing flexibility in using blocks as props allows for a multitude of different themes to develop

along a similar structural pattern, such as the firefighters and firetrucks, racers and doobie boats, cowboys and horses, campers and motorcycles and even pizza delivery. The block structures from which these stories arise appear remarkably similar and storylines change rapidly during construction. But perhaps the most interesting illustration of flexibility is the crossover of firetrucks into other centres. For some time Miss Fisher had been encouraging children to integrate their play into other areas of the room. This has been resisted by the children as they maintain specific activities like house and blocks within the confines of the individual centres. However, as the boys in the block centre begin their firetruck constructions, their play extends further into the rest of the classroom each day, until the narrative takes them into the house to put out fires. The construction of the props in the block centre alone is not enough to push out the boundaries of play. It is the development of the narrative that finally allows children to let go of their rigid notions of where play can occur. It is the narrative which sends them to the art centre to make gas masks and oxygen tanks. It is the narrative and excitement of a firetruck theme which encourages the integration Miss Fisher has been seeking as a sign of developing maturity in play.

In conclusion, it is possible to suppose that the domestic play in the house, whether in a store theme or house theme, is much more limited in terms of the use of props since the props there are used for their apparent purpose. In contrast, the block play provides more flexible storylines, possibly due to the variety of uses the props assume. Do children who must use their imagination to create both the props and the story evolve more varied and complex narratives? My contention based on the observation of their stories is that children are much more involved in the development of narratives if they are creating the props as well.

Narratives within a play setting depend very heavily on social interaction, which is "a means of learning that extends to all domains, not just literacy" (Hiebert, 1990, p. 505). There are usually leaders and followers. But developing social relationships to the point where the risk of developing a shared story is possible is not always a smooth path. It is pebbled with the sharp little stones of discontent, disagreement, and an inability to share another person's point of view. Do shared narratives in play setting require social relationships? If a communal plot is to be developed, then there must be give and take, someone who can mediate or negotiate. Are all narratives in play shared? Probably not, but it is

the shared stories that are most visible simply because they require vocalization and can be heard by outsiders. The non-verbal narratives that I am convinced do indeed exist would demand a study of their own to discover what the non-verbal clues are that a story is taking place. Could there be more than one player in a non-verbal story? Are all verbal stories the creations of up? These are interesting questions for another time, another study.

Adults play a vital role in how children access the literate world and subsequent discussion in Chapter Seven will deal with this issue and related topics.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ADULT ROLE

Circle Time With Miss Fisher

Danny has the name cards and is waiting patiently until we are all ready. He recognizes the children's names as he shows them to the class. Someone says, "Wortik!" in response to seeing his name. Miss Fisher says, "That's an unusual reply." Danny holds Alice's name upside down but rights it just as Miss Fisher draws his attention to it. Circle is noisier than usual this afternoon and the teacher has a different quality in her voice as she reminds them of appropriate behaviour. Her voice is soft but rises in pitch and it is not as calm as her usual speaking voice. ... Miss Fisher shows the children some photographs of class activities that were taken earlier in the year. Parent teacher interviews are approaching and she tells them that she has been getting things ready to show their parents. ... While they are still in circle, Miss Fisher shows a collection of papers previously worked on by the children and the staff. Each paper has captions like "When I was little I could..." with a baby photo attached, as well as "Now that I am older I can..." with a current photo attached. Even though they have been sitting for a long time, the

children enjoy each of the twenty papers they look at and help Miss Fisher remember what each student said. When this activity finishes, Miss Fisher reminds them of what's available for centres and says, "When we are sitting quietly and listening, I will tell you." (Field Notes, March 25, 1992)

In this story, a picture of circle time experience emerges that many Alberta children are probably very familiar with in their kindergarten classrooms. This is an adult-directed learning time in which young children must learn to sit still and listen.

Miss Fisher is seen in this story to be enforcing the rules of circle. Her actions are true to her belief that children need to learn to sit quietly so that they can learn to listen, yet she is also very careful to make sure that they are each given an opportunity to have their pictures shown. Miss Fisher is socializing the children to the institution of school. Underneath this socializing function, I sense a duality. She is sensitive to the needs of all the children as she makes sure that all the children receive recognition of their work. This duality of socialization to a conformed standard of behaviour yet recognition of individual needs is an indication of the two worlds Miss Fisher must straddle in the adult role in this classroom.

As adults, we live in two worlds. Firstly, we are residents of the child's world; we have all been children, and we retain within in us knowledge of childhood experiences. Secondly, we have all, as adults, become members of the grownup world.

These are the two worlds operating within the kindergarten classroom. The themes of power and control of the adult world over the child's world have a very strong message embedded within this study. However, there is something more here that needs to be explored.

Teachers are subject to the pressures and exigencies of their environments. They cannot be situated outside of the learning; they must be part of it, smelling, tasting, breathing in the classrooms just as the students do. Teachers teach with their whole bodies, just as students learn with their whole bodies. Both groups are immersed within, and affected by, the culture within which they reside. Ultimately, however, the responsibility for the student's well-being must rest with someone within the institutionalized setting. Someone must act as the mediator, the safety net, the scaffold and support for the learning. Someone must assume the role of *grownup*. Someone must know whose turn it is to be the "master" or the "slave" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 142) in the relationship of learner/teacher.

Relationship of power are buried in the learning activity and is the adult's view of what childhood is that determines how the power will be wielded. Part of what we, as adults, structure for children is based on our remembrances of our societal/cultural definitions of childhood. Is childhood a magical place of innocence, a separate state where the rules of adults are seen as deterrents to happiness? Or do adults see children as deficient adults, unable to function in our world or theirs without our controlling assistance? Both of these views hold one concept in common. The child is seen as existing in a different place and has to travel across huge distances to reach the world of the adult. When this notion of childhood is prevalent within society, it is difficult to imagine how teachers might escape the issues of power and control that surely arise in the ecology of the classroom. The abuse of power is a danger for all adults who co-exist in a culture with students.

Miss Fisher's role in enccuraging literacy development in this classroom is underscored by these questions and concerns about power. Where is the line that separates her responsibility as a teacher of these children and her participation in the control that adults have over literacy? As the representative of the adult's world and the keeper of the keys to literacy, Miss Fisher

plays a vital role within this classroom society that should be examined.

Conflicting Messages

Children operate within their own world and are limited in their imagination only by the constraints of the experiences that they come up against in the adult world. Becoming literate is part of accessing this extension of the adult world, visible to children through the print that surrounds them, which must be decoded before they can cross into the wider social world. The role of the adult is to provide the keys. But there is a sense that the child's world may not be totally overpowered along the way. The imposition of the adult world upon the childhood culture is not a paved overlay, for the child's world seems to bubble through on occasion.

The stories told by the children are their interpretations of their observations of the adult world. While the stories are an indication that a socialization process is happening, they belong to the children. This is the realm where the children can sustain the power they have over relationships and comprehension in play. John announces this as he comes to the blocks one day, "I have come to the kingdom", he says (March 24, 1992).

Miss Fisher can structure a play setting, such as the controlled setting up experience of the store in the house centre; but she cannot impose the kind of play that happens there. The intention of this store centre was to help children explore their understandings of the concepts associated with this community resource.

Certainly they did explore this theme, but they nourished their own particular themes as well; thus, we have the boys as firefighters coming to the house/store to put out fires, the girls insisting on domestic play in the middle of a store, and the store evolving from a grocery store to a pet shop. All of these themes are worthwhile and are an indication of developing cognitive abilities, but they are not necessarily what the teacher expected. Nevertheless, for the most part, she accepted these variations in play.

Group time experiences are, however, subjected to a different set of rules which Miss Fisher imposed more tightly (the restrictions of the adult world). Group times, such as circle or story, are times for sitting still and learning how to listen. The visit to the school library is also a time when the value of learning to listen to another adult supersedes the value of the activity as a literacy event. Miss Fisher is quite firm in her opinion of this for she repeats the justification

on more than one occasion in the contexts of different conversations. Her view of circle time sitting is reinforced for the children as she says,

> You are all sitting nicely and listening really well for me today. (March 20, 1992)

She moves Grant closer to her during the story that day because he is silently tracing the concrete block pattern of the wall and not appearing to listen to the story.

To encourage appropriate classroom behaviour, a primary socializing function imposed by the adult world upon the child world, Miss Fisher's voice is an indicator. It is unlikely that she really notices that this is happening; but, in cases of disruptive behaviour during group times, her voice gets very quiet, raises in pitch, and becomes very controlled and measured as she is reminding children of the standards she expects for circle. This socializing aspect of her role as behaviour manager is apparent in her use of words and expressions like "nicely" to describe how she wishes them to proceed. She also says things such as, "Let me finish what I need to say" in circle and gives reminders of the noise level in the classroom .

These examples of enforcement are similar to what many teachers do, in order to manage the classroom so that it is not chaotic. It is not that these events

characterize Miss Fisher as an autocratic disciplinarian; it is more that they are representative of the power adults wield over children as they socialize them to the institutions of the adult world.

What is so amazing in this classroom is that there is such dissonance in the wielding of power between the group time and the time set aside for self-selected play. During self-selected time, Miss Fisher provides opportunities for children to make their own decisions. Her reminders of the dictates of the adult world are less imposing and her role is more to encourage episodes of learning situations in their play than to manage the classroom. The contrast is sharp and must surely provide children with mixed messages, but they give no hint of experiencing confusion. Occasionally, during play, they are conscious of the noise level, or that cleanup is an important part of the play but there is no evidence that this is inhibiting play. As the differing expectations of the sections of the kindergarten experience are considered, it is not possible to reconcile the fit. They are like two puzzle pieces from different puzzles put in the same spot. Inconsistencies in the role of the adult with regard to the use of power must at some point result in cognitive friction and impede growth. But I could see no visible sign. Will it appear later?

Perhaps the only comment that might indicate the intrusion of the adult world belongs to Alice as she says, "Why don't we give teacher a chance not to have a mess?" (March 25, 1992). Miss Fisher responds in my field notes with a happy face to this comment. Does the mess belong to the teacher, the adult? Or is Alice modelling the adult function within this play? Perhaps she has internalized many of the values required in the adult world for her play is characterized by cleaning and organizing in the house and asking that others be "nice" as they play. She dislikes confrontation and moves to stem it, particularly when dealing with the "dogs" in the house or Candy's inability to accept alternate viewpoints. Perhaps these values of quiet and order are part of the child's world too and not exclusive to the adult world. There are so many questions about the nature of the child's world that require further in depth study.

To the outsider, these children live in two worlds in the classroom, the adult world during group times and the child's world during self-selected times. The borders are certainly blurred by overlap at times but nevertheless obvious.

Adult Roles

The primary instrument of the adult world in this kindergarten setting is the teacher. Miss Fisher is the adult world's representative and performs many functions as the keeper of the keys to the literate adult world. Much of the preceding description is based on her role as the enforcer of the strictures of the adult world upon the child's world, in a sense, the manager. But she performs other management duties as well which relate more closely to her role of keeper of the keys to the literate world. She is also an information provider and a model of literacy activity.

Manager

As the teacher in the classroom, Miss Fisher manages the environment. She provides the appropriate equipment and the time for children to interact with the setting. Her decisions about what is appropriate, especially in terms of props and print, have a bearing on how the children will use the centres and how their patterns of interaction will develop. For example, with the addition of artifacts like price tags, grocery signs, bags, coupons, paper and pencils, the children are able to draw on the experiences they had on a field trip to Safeway to extend their play into a literacy developing activity. Because Miss Fisher has provided an opportunity to make

money and price tags, the children incorporate this activity into their play when they assume ownership of the centre. Conversely, because Miss Fisher provides no literacy props in the house, when it is a site for domestic play only, there is no interaction with print. Miss Fisher's provision of the environment has a direct effect on literacy interactions.

Miss Fisher performs other functions within the classroom which assist children with managing their time and learning. For example, she reminds children of possible choices before and during centre time while yet supporting children as they make independent choices. She interferes in choice selection only when she feels that children need to experience a specific activity or when children need to expand their horizons. At this time she either makes a direct suggestion as to what the child might not choose. For example, a girl is directed away from the house because she has not chosen any other activity for some time. Miss Fisher also makes indirect suggestions by posing questions. In either scenario she provides the child with other options so that control of the choice, though perhaps limited, is still with the child. Children are still empowered in some manner. Children need to be involved in making decisions about

learning if they are to be their own "best teachers" (Howes, 1974, p. 62). The acquisition of literacy skills is really about empowering children to live in the adult world. Do we, as adults, imposing our power, offer limited choices to smooth the transition into literacy?

Information Provider

Miss Fisher provides explanations and descriptions of centres and possible activities within those centres. She also records the choices children make, both as a list maker during circle as they make choices and by providing a list of names at a centre (the house) for them to check off when they are there. This is done to provide equal access but also so that children can begin thinking about the choices they are making. Is it possible she is also providing the oral link of choice of centre to the written link of the list, while still imposing control?

She gives information about specific concepts relating to literacy; for example, Brenda wished to write Mrs. Parmatiuk's name by herself but had difficulty with the letters. Miss Fisher provides the correct spelling, an important step for Brenda since she is hurriedly passing through inventive spelling to the next stage (Schickedanz, 1986).

There are many other incidences where Miss Fisher has given explanations and information, both in circle and during centre time. These explanations or information bites are usually about specific items, their use or names, such as the difference between a piano and a keyboard brought for show and tell. Sometimes Miss Fisher volunteers the information herself but at other times she might ask, "What do you think it might be used for?" as she did when the cash register was introduced to the store. Her ability to suit her explanation to the understanding of the individual students reflects a sensitivity and an understanding of them as individuals and is noteworthy.

Miss Fisher also uses questions and comments to help children extend their play during the narratives they construct and during their interactions with the activities provided in the classroom. Perhaps it is this scaffolding ability that allows children to go beyond their experiences and take play further than they might have. This aspect of her role provokes comment on the importance of this adult role in assisting children to stretch the boundaries of play. Perhaps her comments on their play allow them to name what it is they are doing as in this example:

> Miss Fisher asks, "What is it?" Derek replies, "It's a tractor with a pusher that pushes dirt." "Oh," says Miss Fisher, "it's a grader." "Yeah," says Derek, " a grader." Derek continues his play, carefully and with seemingly great effort pushing the dirt(blocks) around with his grader.
> (Field notes, April 24, 1992)

Miss Fisher's role as the adult in this culture goes beyond the meaning we normally assign to "teacher". She is certainly the model they copy as they step out of their world into the adult world of literacy. She also provides the assistance and information they need as well as the physical environment in which they feel secure enough to risk their play. She is a supportive and caring teacher and the bonds forged in the teacher/student relationships she nurtures are vital if they are to be successful learners. But she is outside the play. Her role is observation and intervention when necessary to assist or encourage "nonplayers" (Christie, 1990, p. 544). Does she manage to manipulate the power she holds so that the experience is positive? Perhaps the measure of this is indicated by the working relationships that I saw existing within the culture.

Children have the freedom to create narratives and access the literacy world during play. It is possible that the negative aspect of the imposition of power during group time is overshadowed by the positive aspect of the freedom to play during individual learning time. Has Miss Fisher found the line that separates her responsibility as teacher involved in supporting children's learning within their own world from her participation in the imposition of the power that adults have over children? This discussion continues to plague me both as a teacher and as an adult in society.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The acquisition of literacy is crucial in our modern times for full participation in societal and cultural activity. Being able to read and write is perceived as the stepping stone to a successful career and satisfying life. But where does literacy begin? This study is an examination of how beginning literacy is linked with play in a kindergarten setting. Discoveries in this study have solidified the broader definition of literacy which includes the ability to develop and use narrative as well as the ability to interact with print. The teacher or adult role is also seen as crucial.

Interacting With Print

Children need access to print in meaningful and purposeful situations. The function of print as a means of communicating is an implicit message that children are provided with in this classroom. This is accomplished, for example, through the teacher's modelling activity, the play centres and the use of names to denote ownership. Opportunities to use print in traditional ways, such as name writing, as well as ways that are less traditional should be provided in early childhood programs. For example, if children are provided with

materials to write in play settings they will use them to experiment and create. If children are provided with appropriate print to decode in play settings, they will use the context to assist their understanding. In this classroom, the play centres such as the store provided the contexts for children to read and write according to their individual abilities. Children cannot interact with print when materials are not at hand to do so.

Although environmental print surrounds these children in the classroom, it is not until the house becomes a store with literacy artifacts provided that a significant increase in print making occurs. Being surrounded by print does not necessarily preclude that children will use print in their play. In fact, it is probable that print must be seen by the children to be functional and purposeful before they initiate the activity themselves. Props that encourage children to use and make print are crucial to the environment.

A question has arisen out of observations of the print activity in the store. How much scaffolding is necessary for children to grasp the functions of print and begin imitating the activity modelled? This question comes from observation of Miss Fisher as she structured the set-up of the store. Would the children have taken a leadership role in using print props to imitate and

recreate the store based on their observations of its environment? This question cannot be answered based on the data collected and warrants further study. It is an interesting problem and the answer would have ramifications for teachers as they provide learning situations for young children. Dyson (1990) urges that we be observant in "allowing space for the diverse intentions and resources of our children" (p. 212).

Narratives

Perhaps the narratives of the children in this classroom provide the larger share of the discussion of the study's discoveries. They certainly generate a great deal of questions for future study and have provoked much reflection on the nature of curriculum which will be discussed later.

Watching dramatic play in house and block centres became a fascinating activity. Children's play is littered with all of the elements of an intriguing novel. Plot, character, theme, tension, and set construction are all part of their foray into the world of pretend.

The roles that children take on during their dramas are practical. Children help each other by becoming actors, initiating the themes that create stories and negotiating the plot, and assuming leadership roles to

ensure the drama unfolds. The children operate within the relationships they
have created within the classroom ecology. The stories they tell come from those relationships as well as their play environment, from books and stories, from family life and from their individual experiences. Narratives allow children to push the boundaries of play.

Developing and using narratives is crucial to developing the ability to understand stories. Reading and writing for these children at a later date will be built upon the understanding of story and on "conceptions of structure in language" (Francis, 1987, p. 106). In their narratives, they are developing character and plot, constructing settings and playing out the themes embedded in their lives.

It appears that there are differences in the nature of play that occurs when children must create both the prop and the narrative. Props in different settings have varying impact on the narrative that arises in the centre. For example, play in the blocks requires the construction of the prop while play in the house can unfold using a prop already in place.

Some issues may not be resolved on the basis of this study. For example, questions about gender differences have surfaced. Why do the boys in the class centre their

narratives on objects while the girls' play episodes are stories about people? Are some narratives non-verbal and if so, what are the clues to them? In Chapter Six, I posed these questions and others, and so I will not repeat them here.

The implications for fostering narrative play in early childhood classrooms include the following:

1. Providing significant amounts of time for children to work through a narrative to a conclusion or state that they are comfortable with;
2. Providing props that children can use in multifaceted ways to support their narratives;
3. Recognizing the importance of narrative as a form of curriculum;
4. Recognizing the importance of "process and the literacy content of young children's symbolic play" (Isenberg & Jacob, 1983, p. 274).

To summarize, we need to value children's play as a viable and legitimate way in which children learn. Children develop skills in their use of complex play strategies that assist them to access the literacy world (Pellegrini, 1980).

The Adult Role

The teachers in early childhood classrooms must be flexible in their approach to providing an appropriate play environment. Their roles as managers of the environment and behaviour, providers of materials and information, and models are crucial if children are to be successful at accessing the literate world. Teachers hold the responsibility for making sure children do become literate. In a sense, a teacher is the gatekeeper.

In this study, it is possible to see the teacher fulfilling these roles as children experiment with print and develop narratives. But there is a significant dissonance in this classroom in relation to the power of the adult world over the child's world. Miss Fisher is providing mixed messages in her conflicting philosophies regarding the children's classroom experiences. During the kindergarten day's self-selected activity time, she encourages children to make choices, be independent thinkers, and create their own curriculum through play. In short, children are empowered through play. During group times, however, the adult world is imposed and children are expected to conform, sit still and remain quiet when requested to do so. I found it difficult to reconcile this difference in approach and I have many questions surrounding the apparent lack of effect on

these children. Are children able to handle these conflicting messages and if so, how?

I do want to emphasize Miss Fisher's sensitive and insightful teaching manner. For a teacher with only a few years of classroom experience, she displays a remarkable understanding of children as learners in her classroom. Her journal entries clearly illustrate this sensitivity. For some teachers, it takes several years to acquire an ability to work with such composure and harmony in a kindergarten setting with young children and their families. I am also extremely grateful for her generosity in allowing me access to her classroom and her thoughts. This access to her perceptions about classroom life enabled me to gain understanding about her role as a teacher.

The teacher's role in providing access to literacy activity for children through play, whether the focus is on print interaction or narrative competence, is vital. The adult must provide just the right amount of scaffolding without imposing too heavily the constrictions of the adult world. It is vital that children are able to root these activities in their imaginations while leaning on the existing structure of the adult literate world. But we must also remember the

humbling words of Bissex (1984), lest we, as adults, trample on the child's world.

> Learning is part of what the human mind *does*; it is hard to stop it from learning. We do not need to go to school to learn, except to learn those things we cannot learn through association with the people and world around us. In a literate society, literacy is not one of the things for which we need schooling.(Bissex, 1984, p. 91)

Narratives in Play as Curriculum

A discussion of play with respect to this study is incomplete without the implications that surface with regard to curriculum. Stories are part of the everyday fabric of early childhood classroom life. They are the core of our lived experience and they are the curriculum through which we learn and teach each other. They are "an organic design. A growing living changing design" (Ashton-Warner, 1963, p. 14). Organic curriculum, as Ashton-Warner described, is developed from "the dynamic life itself "(p. 33). It is meaningful because it encapsulates the child's world with all of its reality.

When curriculum is an external force, it demands the pressure of living a fragmented existence on a self

already living within its own experience; but it is that Cartesian separation (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 170) and the static curriculum that does not move that is the lie we live in the classroom. The form we choose is one that moves, whether we believe it or not. Even as we close the classroom door we are already planning for those moments in time and space when we will move from formula to formlessness and on to a form created by both teacher and learner.

"Curriculum is a moving form" (Grumet, 1988, p. 172) and a "waterfall" (Langer, 1957, p. 48). These are words full of wonder and image, full of power and movement, lying in wait, ready to spray us with the challenge of placing such a curriculum within the daily grind of the classroom routine. A mirror reflecting daily classroom practise would illuminate curriculum as several elements of classroom life, not the unified *thing* we think it is. Somewhere beneath the daily routines, the teachable moments, the discipline, the conversation, and the structured lesson plans lurks a curriculum that comes from the formula applied by the institution of schooling, influenced by our fear of existing in formlessness. It is the blending of formula and formlessness that brings us to the form, the lived experience (Aoki, 1991, p. 7), the form that "intertwines

the ideal and the actual" (Grumet, 1988, p. 172). What we live everyday in the classroom is form, the reality. What we bring to the formula or the formal imposed curriculum, an ideal, is mediated by both our repulsion and attraction to formlessness, another ideal. Learners, both teachers and students, bring with them the tension required to bring the pot to the boil as they generate together the form that emerges from formula and formlessness. They build from the flow of their unique experiences and their collective social realities. The form is the accommodation of all of the variables of the classroom, it is the interactive learning that takes place, not the plan for learning we hope we have put into practise. Perhaps we have generalized the label *curriculum* so much that we are unable to clearly define the individual meanings we assign to its use in the classroom.

In Alberta, the Early Childhood Services curriculum document, Philosophy, Goals and Program Dimensions (1984) is in fact a statement of philosophy about the nature of what constitutes an appropriate environment for young learners ages three to eight and is currently used as an appropriate guide in planning for a kindergarten program. The learner is seen as a whole person, learning as much through sensory modes as through more traditional

cognitive strategies. "Dignity" and "competence" are important words in the document. The actual form of the curriculum is left to the interpretation of the community sponsoring the program. Parents and teachers are empowered to provide for the individual and collective needs of the group they serve. Clearly, multiple conceptions of form must be accepted based on the particular interpretations of each group.

In this classroom, the dramatic play stories children create are the source of the curriculum. They are part of the form, generated by the players as they weave individual and group experience together to create a fabric they can all wear. The same issues reappear in different stories with different names, different settings, different props. Stories come from family experience, and express themes of relationship from which children collect information about the world and its workings, all mediated by a teacher willing to see the importance of establishing learning about life and people. Meanwhile, the learning about things is still happening: the alphabet is still promoted and number concepts are still drilled through games and play. The stories of lived experience, the sensory world of a body and a mind existing as a unified whole within an environment of others lifts this curriculum to a

wholistic form rather than a collection of bits strung together. It is in the expression of the stories, the play built from the children's experiences, mediated by others, whether adults or children, that we can see the emergence of curriculum issues. Certainly, there is tension. Miss Fisher might not recognize the narratives as being a part of the curriculum although she admits respect for play as a learning vehicle. As a researcher, my definitions of curriculum have changed and I must look again at past teaching experience to come to an understanding of how I define curriculum.

> Even language experience or arts curricula that seem to invite the fantasies and memories of students challenge the teacher to come to terms with her own versions of the truth and with the designations she reserves for those accounts that contradict the current wisdom.
> (Grumet, 1988, p. 168)

The children and the narratives they tell lead me to new assumptions about the nature of a living curriculum and about the relationships required for its sustenance.

The Oxford English Dictionary (1970) gives two meanings for teach: illustration of forms and signification. Signification is explained with a number

of terms such as "present or offer", "prescribe", "point in a direction", "to let one know the cost or penalty", "impart", "communicate", "hand over", "deliver", "give in trust", "commend to the keeping."

The first meaning for learn includes both an intransitive verb, "to acquire knowledge" and another intransitive verb, "to receive instruction as well as become informed, acquainted with something, to hear of or ascertain." The second definition given is "to impart knowledge, to teach." Words give us a sense of our history. The common definition shared by teach and learn confirms my suspicion that teacher and learner provide both teaching and learning services for each other. Learning is a dyadic function shared by the participants in the relationship. Merleau Ponty (1960) advises us that we cannot escape the body-subject as we learn. Nor can we escape each other as we learn. Just as we must know that we bring all of our body and mind together in one package to the learning, so do we bring all of our own entity into the realm of the larger system composed of other entities. We do not escape each other and it is that dyadic teacher/learner relationship which creates the tension we bring to the process of informing curriculum.

The teacher has a vital part to play in the story. It is not possible, nor desirable, for all of us to hold the same view of classroom practise. What I believe is happening is based on the interpretation I impose on the collective experience I observe and take part in. But a posture of willingness to see relationships and to be part of the learning might be what separates teachers from technicians.

> We cannot impose our beliefs. As convinced as we are about the theories that inform our teaching, they are, after all, only illusions of reality. The answer is... when you think you have the answer, you really don't. And so around we go, redefining and evolving, growing in understanding. (Tellier, 1990, p. 328)

This study allowed me to find some answers for my immediate questions about play and literacy. I made discoveries about the effects of print in the environment, the development of narratives as literacy events and the role of the teacher and other adults in this process. However, there are far more questions bursting from this study that cannot be answered at this time. Just when we think we have found the answers, we discover that we don't know all the questions. Kenneth Clark in Moments of Vision says,

> I have now reached the frontiers of my subject, given the limited form in which I had conceived it. (Clark, 1981, p. 17)

I find I can go no further without changing my initial conception of the nature of this study. I now have new questions and problems to investigate, a new curriculum as I continue on my path of learning, but I would like to leave one final thought for consideration, eloquently understated by Jane Torrey.

> **Reading is learned, not taught.** (1969, p. 556)

EPILOGUE

REFLECTIONS ON RESEARCH

Within a teacher's closet are many hats. In any one teaching day, we are asked to assume many roles. Some fit well, others do not. There is a researcher hat in that closet as well, though we often do not realize it is there. We gather information and validate assumptions and theories, on both a conscious and an unconscious level. When we deliberately step back to take on what we think of as a new role of researcher, we recognize that we have already been a closet researcher.

At the beginning of this study, I described the hook that led me into wanting to learn more when I told Adrian's story. I also reflected that being a full time researcher would allow me the "luxury" of a closer look at this very intriguing area. Luxury, as I found out, is a very misleading word. The word "luxury" for me has always had connotations of abundance; in this case, an abundance of time, an abundance of opportunity to study at my leisure how play and literacy fit together. I perceived my research self being able to control the study. I did not perceive it having a life of its own.

Time passed very quickly in the research setting. Before I knew it, I had been there for over ten weeks and I found it very difficult to separate myself from the

setting and the participants. I was not the passive or uninvolved observer I had planned to be.

I was determined that, in my role as researcher, I would not affect or change the environment and that my presence would not impact on the stories and observations I would hear and see. Somehow, without knowing how it happened, I found myself being drawn into the life of the class. The children's stories that I heard became my stories as well. I hastily scribbled key words and phrases in my journal to capture them in my field notes, only to reflect, edit and expand them at night into narrative form. I could not avoid being drawn into the play. I could not avoid the children's attempts to bring me in as they played dual roles, that of narrator and actor. I concentrated my efforts in remaining at the edge, on the periphery, but I did develop an intense personal relationship with the research.

I still wanted to tell only the children's stories, but honesty compels me to admit the whole research process is very much my story. I can only tell their stories through my stories about them. Even in the retelling of them, I am making them mine. For the reader sees them through what I select as important in context. I suspect that in reading them, you also will make them

yours as you select what associations and meanings you will assign to them within your own contexts.

Within a classroom, many relationships exist: the teacher to the students as a group and then as individuals; the students to the teacher and to each other; other adults who are involved in some manner in auxilliary functions; the larger school relationships of class to class, children to other children or adults; and then, visitors. I fell into the last category.

In the eyes of the children, I did not fall into a role they previously knew and I had to be explained away in a way that they would be able to comprehend. The term research has little meaning to them and so I became a student who was also learning. We all have a hole we must fit into. The children and I developed a relationship that was very special to me. As time wore on I became accepted and just part of the scenery. They expected I would be there and that I would listen to their stories. Acceptance is a privilege and I tried very hard not to abuse it. But that acceptance also created some difficulties for me.

Perhaps two of the most interesting children to watch in the house centre seemed to actively court my interest in their stories. They were constantly in the house when it was set up domestically. Their play and

their stories were of great interest and would have added immeasurably to this study. As I noted in Chapter Three, one of the children's parents refused permission for her to participate in the study, despite my repeated assurances of a positive experience for all of us. As well, it took a long time before these parents formally communicated their refusal. By that time, my attention was seriously engaged in the play of these children and because their stories and experiences were so closely interwoven, much of what I observed in the house centre can not be used in the study. It was very difficult to tear my focus away from them and over to others I could include. Frustration of this nature was not part of the elysian definition I attached to the "luxury" of research.

Conducting research requires that we face realities of the research process that we might not have expected. One reality I had to consider was a realization that I must now ponder the nature of my own past conduct in the classroom. I recognized myself in Miss Fisher many times and was able to view those actions in new ways and perhaps add to my understanding of what teaching actions means. This is especially true in the discussion about the different expectations we place on children in the classroom with respect to different contexts. I expected

that the children would sit still and listen in circle; yet, at the same time, I encouraged children to take more responsibility for themselves during self-selected play. I too gave mixed messages and perhaps it is this realization that provides the concern that I have about the dissonance I observed.

The other reality of research which confronted me, and still does, is the necessity of narrowing the focus. There is so much more that I could write about that I have had to purposefully omit. It feels like major surgery as I amputate bits and pieces in favour of maintaining a reasonably healthy body which is not encumbered by my customary wordiness. There was so much happening in this classroom society that I am sure I will be reading and re-reading the set of field notes and finding new things to say for years to come.

The second reader for this study is herself an experienced kindergarten teacher, currently at home with her own small children. Her assistance in reflecting on the themes emerging from the field notes was crucial to my final drafts. In our discussions, I was able to clarify my thoughts and begin to support my conclusions, especially when we did not hold the same viewpoint about the expectations of the children in the different classroom contexts of circle time and self-selected play.

In this case, the second reader was extremely valuable to this study, in that I had to be able to clearly think through my conclusions and support them. Disagreement can be a positive force if it provokes deeper thoughts about what is observed.

One of the most interesting and rewarding aspects of conducting research in Miss Fisher's classroom was the opportunity to collaborate. Miss Fisher was very generous in her acceptance of my role in the classroom and we were able to discuss additions and changes in the setting. In a follow-up discussion with her the following spring, it was possible to see the effects the collaboration process had on her. The classroom was literally bursting with even more environmental print. She had incorporated writing materials and print in the socio-dramatic play centres, delayed some print intensive activities until children would feel more comfortable in the setting, and stated the research experience was very positive for her and helped her to think about the nature of literacy activity in the classroom. Our collaboration, it seems, was just as helpful to her as it was to me.

And lastly, I wish to mention the process of percolation. There has been a significant time lapse between the collection of the data and the writing of this thesis. Each time I sifted the data, new themes

would appear and old ones would be sacrificed. I began to feel I would never finish writing. However, I recognize now that something important was happening. I have been working on this much as one would a tapestry, and it takes time to complete the needlework before one recognizes the whole picture. It took time for me to recognize the whole picture in this study. During the time I felt I was procrastinating, I was really assembling the picture. When it finally came time to write, the picture was there and writing was relatively easy.

Research is a Catherine Wheel, a large explosive cartwheeling firework. The sparks, just as I theorized in my proposal, do continue to fly in all directions, taking me off to new worlds of learning.

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