Large group meetings in the preschool classroom: co-constructing meaning making through group interaction

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the everyday large group meeting interactions in the preschool classroom and its significance to preschool children. In-depth understanding on the preschool large group meeting time was mainly examined through exploring the children’s and teacher’s large group interactions and various meaning making within and across their everyday large group meetings and classroom experiences. The data was collected over a five and a half month period in one preschool classroom, taking an ethnographic research approach. Ethnographic research is mainly based on a socio-cultural theoretical orientation, an understanding that children’s meaning making is socially and culturally constructed in the course of everyday life. Multiple methods were used to gather data, including participant observation, field notes, interviews with teachers, and video recording of classroom interaction during the large group meeting time.

In this preschool classroom, the Morning Meeting consisted of five sub-events. Along with the typical ritual-like characteristics of some sub-events (i.e., calendar/weather), the sub-event of ‘large group conversation/talk’ was a context where various types of group interaction between the children and teacher could be observed, which allowed the large group time, Morning Meeting, not to proceed in one fixed way in this classroom. Through micro-level analysis of the data, four different types/purposes of interaction could be identified. The ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event in this
classroom was: 1) a context for individual’s sharing on personal stories, news, and artifacts that they brought from home within the large group; 2) a context for teacher’s announcements about upcoming events to the group in the classroom; 3) a context for group meaning making on various child-initiated and teacher initiated topics through collaborative and extensive group conversation; and 4) a context for teacher-directed interaction on certain topics that the teacher chose to introduce to the children. It was also found that the children in this classroom jointly constructed and contributed to group meaning making: 1) by linking to / making connections between their own personal experiences and on-going topics; 2) by sharing their thoughts and listening to others’ thinking and reasoning together and building upon each other’s ideas; and 3) by sharing their prior knowledge (what they knew) with the group. The preschool large group meeting time was served as an interactive context for the children and the teacher to engage in meaning making of a socially constructed nature through their large group interaction.

The different ways power was exercised between members of the classroom were explored through taking as the main construct ‘power as process’ rather than power as possession. Rather than the teacher possessed static power in the classroom process, power was relational, and that shifted from one situation to another through their interaction. The children and the teacher in this classroom engaged in various types of group interaction and meaning making within their Morning Meeting context and thus
created various power relationships during such group interaction. The children and the teacher did not take only one type of role in their student-teacher relationships, that is, with the teacher as a powerful individual and the children as powerless in the classroom. Rather, both the teacher and the children actually took various roles that were interactive and adaptive as they acted and reacted to one another within their large group meeting context. In re-examination of some of the group interactions during the Morning Meeting, various power relations (‘power over’ ‘power with’ ‘power for’) were observed in the data, which also illustrated the children’s and the teacher’s multiple roles through such power relations and interactions.

Looking through the entire body of data and examining the data of Morning Meeting time within the frame of the whole classroom context, it was found that sometimes the large group interaction during Morning Meeting was extended to other contexts in the classroom. The construct of ‘intercontextuality as social construction’ was built upon as main methodology to analyze and understand the large group meeting time and its occasional extension to other contexts.

Complex nature of large group interaction was revealed through analysis of the children and the teacher’s actual interaction during Morning Meeting events. These data have allowed the author to gain a better understanding of the complexity of the classroom processes as well as a fuller understanding of the classroom as a culture that was
constructed by patterned ways of life along with dynamic changes (- “culture as verb, which is “unbounded, kaleidoscopic, and dynamic” (Heath & Street, 2008, p.7)).
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to God, who always guides my life with His special plan and love; and is dedicated to my parents, Dr. Yong Tae Kang and Young Hee Bae, who have supported me with their love and countless prayers throughout my study in the U.S, and to my brother, Tae Young Kang.
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Working as a university supervisor (graduate associate) in the M. Ed program for over five years helped me to learn a lot about classroom curriculum and teacher education, especially in making connections between theory and practice. I would like to thank the lead faculty (Dr. Seidl, Dr. Dillard, Dr. Katz, and Dr. Trundle), Jody Wallace, Sue Burt, Sue Wightman, and my many supervisor colleagues. And, most of all, I want to thank those M. Ed students (and the mentor teachers) who I worked with in the 2005-2009 academic years.

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Fields of Study

Major Field: Education

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Table of Contents

Abstract ............................................................................................................................... ii

Dedication .......................................................................................................................... vi

Acknowledgments ............................................................................................................. vii

Vita ....................................................................................................................................... x

Table of Contents .............................................................................................................. xi

List of Tables ................................................................................................................... xiv

List of Transcripts ............................................................................................................. xv

List of Figures .................................................................................................................. xvi

Chapter 1: Introduction ..................................................................................................... 1

Statement of the problem ................................................................................................. 1

Significance ........................................................................................................................ 5

Research Questions .......................................................................................................... 7

Overview of the Research Approach .............................................................................. 7

Description of the research site ....................................................................................... 11

Chapter 2: Review of Literature ..................................................................................... 14
Research Question #2 ................................................................. 104

Research Question #3 .................................................................. 158

Research Question #4 .................................................................. 228

Chapter 5: Discussion .................................................................. 263

Discussion of the findings in the research question 1 and 2 ................. 264

Discussion of the findings in the research question 3 and 4 ................. 274

Implications of the findings .............................................................. 285

Limitations of the study ................................................................. 290

Concluding thoughts ..................................................................... 296

References ..................................................................................... 298

Appendix A: Description of classroom daily schedule and curriculum .......... 310

Appendix B: Sample Interview Questions for Teachers......................... 312
List of Tables

Table 3.1: Children in the classroom (Participants) ................................................................. 47
Table 3.2: Classroom daily schedule ....................................................................................... 49
Table 3.3: Summary of Corpus of Data .................................................................................... 67
List of Transcripts

Transcript 4.1: Interaction during the calendar sub-event ............................................. 93
Transcript 4.2: George’s interaction during the weather sub-event .................................. 96
Transcript 4.3: Katie’s interaction during the weather sub-event ...................................... 97
Transcript 4.4: Talking about the weather and the classroom schedule ......................... 99
Transcript 4.5: Interaction during the dismissal sub-event ............................................. 102
Transcript 4.6: Jenny’s sharing about her elbow ............................................................. 109
Transcript 4.7: Teacher announcement on the day’s special event ............................... 112
Transcript 4.8: Talking about their own experiences of sickness ................................. 117
Transcript 4.9: Talking about clean up issue ................................................................. 127
Transcript 4.10: Talking about our classroom ............................................................... 134, 138
Transcript 4.11: What do you know about flower? ....................................................... 145
Transcript 4.12: Katie’s sharing seashells after her vacation ....................................... 165
Transcript 4.13: Large group conversation on what’s clog .......................................... 175
Transcript 4.14: Large group experiment ................................................................. 186, 193, 195
Transcript 4.15: Large group conversation in the hall way ........................................ 224
List of Figures

Figure 4.1: Morning Meeting: Sub-events ................................................................. 86
Figure 4.2: Calendar sub-event .............................................................................. 92
Figure 4.3: Weather sub-event .............................................................................. 96
Figure 4.4: Interaction during the large group experiment ................................. 106
Figure 4.5: Morning Meeting: Sub-events (large group conversation sub-event) .... 185
Figure 4.6: Picture 1 – Interaction during the sensory table activity ....................... 210
Figure 4.7: Picture 2 – Interaction during the sensory table activity ....................... 211
Figure 4.8: Picture 3 – Interaction during the sensory table activity ....................... 212
Figure 4.9: Large group conversation outside of Morning Meeting ....................... 224
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the problem

Students and teacher meet and interact with one another in the classroom every day. They create, work with, and engage in classroom events together within the classroom context. The classroom meeting time, which is widely known as an everyday large group meeting routine in preschool classrooms, is an official daily event that takes place as a whole-group context. People generally and broadly describe this kind of preschool classroom large group meeting event, which often called ‘circle time,’ as a classroom routine in which, each morning, teacher and children gather on the carpet and share news of the day, go over the calendar, see who is absent, talk about the weather, sing a song, and talk together about things that are meaningful to individual children and classroom happenings (Reich, 1993). The term ‘circle time’ is often used interchangeably with various names such as rug time, floor time, morning meeting, sharing time, show and tell, news and views, group time, etc.

This everyday large group meeting routine has been described as one of the most ordinary events in preschool and primary grade classrooms (Michaels, 1984) and is often defined as “a recurrent speech event in a preschool classroom” (Kantor et al., 1992, p.135). These large group meeting events are the official meeting time for children to
create their own talk, share ideas and stories within the large group context (Cazden, 2001; 2003; Michaels, 1984; Gallas, 1994), and engage in extended group discourse to learn to develop their own topics as well as “learn to contribute to the topics of others” (Green, Kantor, and Rogers, 1991, p.34; Cazden, 2003).

Large group meeting time in the preschool classroom deals with and offers young children an opportunity for an intense experience of coming together as a group; it allows them to learn together as a group and engage together as a group (Peterson, 1992, p.2). Everyday classroom meeting events ask children to actually ‘do’ and ‘join in’ the event process with other members, which gives them ample opportunity to make sense of their group experiences and interactions within such group processes. As we consider the classroom as a context for meaning making, an everyday large group meeting event is a unique but important meaning making context which allows children to engage in group interactions and also to come together as a group to experience such a classroom process daily.

As I reviewed studies done on large group meeting times, I found some study findings which showed that not all preschool classroom large group meeting times provided opportunities for the children to engage in group interaction and meaning making. Emilson (2007) pointed out that preschool large group time could often be characterized as having strong teacher control in content and structure in the group context, which differed quite markedly as compared to other activities in the preschool classroom. She argued that the ways the children could take active roles during their large group meeting process were varied and differed greatly from one classroom to
another, and were influenced greatly by differences in the teachers’ controls on the children’s initiatives and choices in their group processes. Hong (1995) purposefully selected one preschool classroom with active interaction to gain an understanding of preschool children’s interactions during their large group meeting routines. As the author introduced her study, she shared her experiences of observing various preschool large group meeting routines in different classrooms, saying, “Most large-group times that I saw here were filled with only activities, like show-and-tell, singing, simple movement with a puppet song, and the calendar” (p.15-16); such events consisted mainly of rituals rather than having a time for group interactions and meaning making. Hong (1995) included McAfee (1985)’s report on the group time activities of five classrooms: “the most frequently occurring group time activities were reading storybooks (33%), sharing/show and tell (23%), traditional opening activities: calendar, roll, weather (13%), relaxation, person-of-the-week, news-time, transition (2%), and discussion (8%)” (quoted in Hong, 1995, p. 16). McAfee’s observations indicated that books/stories, music-related activities, and “traditional opening activities such as calendar and sharing” were the most frequently used activities during large group meeting routines in her study of five classrooms (McAfee, 1985, p.26). There were only a few opportunities for group conversation and discussion during the large group meeting routines in some preschool classrooms.

As I worked as university supervisor in the M. Ed program for over five years during my doctoral program, I had a chance to observe many preschool classrooms and primary grade classrooms as I visited the M. Ed students in their field placements. It was
fascinating to observe that almost all preschool classrooms actually had a time for the large group meeting in their daily classroom schedule and routine. As Michaels (1984) pointed out, the large group meeting events were very ordinary and easily seen in any kind of preschool classrooms. However, I also observed that the way the large group meeting events were conducted differed greatly from one classroom to another. In some classrooms, the large group meeting times were for the children to actually engage in group interactions with the teacher and peers; in other classrooms, it was a time for whole group activity, sitting altogether as a large group, but mainly comprised of ritual activities like songs and movements without having a time set aside for group conversation and interactions. Here, my intent is not to criticize or to value one classroom over the others; each classroom may have its own local reasons and purposes for their large group meeting routines since each classroom is situated in its own social and cultural contexts (Rogoff, 1990). The main point I would like to make here is that we can not just say that large group time is a significant context for the children’s meaning making or that large group time is often a context where little opportunity is given for the children’s interaction. In other words, large group meeting time itself does not guarantee children’s meaning making. The significant aspects for us to consider are the actual interactions, relationships, and ways the children engage in such group meaning making during the event process, all of which requires a close look in terms of the children’s and teacher’s classroom interactions and processes and, thus, what and how they construct meaning together through their group process.
**Significance**

This ethnographic study seeks an in-depth understanding of the everyday large group meeting interactions in one preschool classroom, which had both components of ritual-like activities (i.e., calendar/weather) and a time for large group conversation and interaction within their large group meeting routine. As I explored each of the sub-activities of the large group meeting event in this preschool classroom, I also examined the children’s and the teacher’s actual interactions and conversations during their large group meeting time to understand what meanings were co-constructed and how they interacted with one another in such a meaning making process. There have been some studies done in the structures of large group meeting time, especially sharing time in primary grade classrooms, showing how such recurrent speech events often are proceeded with a certain talk structure (i.e., I-R-E (teacher initiation-student response-teacher comments)) or narrative styles (i.e., topic-centered / episodic narratives) as the teacher and the children interact with each other during their sharing time events in the classroom (Cazden, 2001; 2003; Michales, 1981; 1984) and a few studies (Eirich, 2006; Gallas, 1994) done in primary grade classrooms regarding what (content) meaning making the children and teacher construct during their large group meeting events, but very little has been done in preschool classroom contexts. In this study, I explored ‘what’ the children and teacher actually talked about, brought in, and shared with one another during the large group meeting time, along with examining the ways (‘how’) they engaged in such group interactions.
It is also significant that in this study, as I examined the large group meeting event in this preschool classroom, I not only looked closely at the interactions during the large group meeting time itself, but also tried to understand the large group meeting event within the contexts of the whole classroom. Through such a process, I could observe some flexibility in the nature of this classroom so that at times large group meeting events were extended to other contexts in the classroom. The large group meeting interactions and their possible extension to other contexts has been of focal interest in a few previous studies, such as one by Gallas (1994). Gallas (1994) explored the children’s oral sharing during sharing time and its possible extension to other forms of meaning making, including arts, drawing, writing, science journals, etc., in her primary grade classrooms. In my study, I have built on the main construct of “intercontextuality as social construction” (Bloome et al., 2005) as a methodology to analyze the actual interactions of the children and the teacher between different contexts (events) in terms of understanding possible connections that the children and teacher co-constructed through their interactions. This will add to the scope of current research studies of preschool large group meeting time and the children’s interactions and meaning making within their classroom contexts. Understanding of ‘classroom as a socio-culturally constructed place’ points to the need for in-depth understanding of the way teachers and students act and react to one another. The preschool large group meeting context is not a static space: it proceeds in multiple forms and ways, and is constantly shaped and co-constructed by teacher and students. The members of the classroom (including the teacher) co-construct the complex nature of large group meaning making through their interactions.
Research Questions

The study seeks understandings of large group meeting interactions in one preschool classroom through the following questions:

1. What is the nature of the large group meetings within the socially constructed daily life of a preschool classroom?

2. What meaning making do the children and teachers engage in during their large group meeting event? How do they engage and act and react to one another in their group interaction and meaning making process?

3. What are the significant functions of such socially constructed large group meeting events within and across the children’s classroom experiences?

4. What are the multiple roles of teachers and children, and how do their roles and interactions create opportunities for building a learning community and meaningful process within the preschool classroom context?

Overview of the Research Approach

To investigate the above research questions, I collected data over a five and a half month period in one preschool classroom, taking an ethnographic research approach. Ethnographic research is mainly based on a socio-cultural theoretical orientation, an understanding that children’s meaning making is socially and culturally constructed in
the course of everyday life. This theoretical orientation gives significant attention to the social context and actual interactions in which meaning making processes occur.

Ethnography helps the researchers to meet their goal of understanding, interpreting, and representing the rich stories of people’s interactions and the meaning of life or events (Dixon, Frank, and Green, 1999; Fernie and Kantor, 2003; Green, Camilli, and Elmore, 2006; Kantor et al., 1992). Using and understanding ethnography as both a tool and a perspective to explore children’s meaning making processes within group contexts helps the researchers to gain more in-depth understanding of the meanings of everyday social actions and interactions and the experiences of young children that are constructed within the classroom and between the classroom members (Green, Camilli, and Elmore, 2006).

Multiple methods were used to gather data, including participant observation, field notes, interviews with teachers, and video recoding of classroom interaction during the large group meeting time. The methods used were aligned with the research questions and the theoretical framework that this study is built on, the sociocultural theoretical framework, which views the classroom meeting process as co-constructed by the children and the teacher as they act and react to one another. This perspective points to the significance of in-depth examination of the actual interaction that the children and teacher engage in and construct within their everyday classroom process in order to understand their meaning making during the large group meeting interactions. In this study, micro-level analyses were conducted on interaction segments from large group meeting events for deeper analysis on those interactions and meaning making processes.
I have also built upon the construct of intercontextuality as social construction (Bloome et al., 2005) as main methodology to analyze and understand the large group meeting time and its occasional extension to other contexts. The complex and rich nature of the large group meeting and its meaning making can be explored through the multiple forms of data and data analysis.

Ethnography allows the researcher to conduct in-depth studies about classroom interactions and processes within the everyday classroom context, which leads researchers to engage in a prolonged period of data collection and analysis based on the local context. Fernie and Kantor (2003) discussed the value of conducting an in-depth ethnographic case study of a single classroom setting. The authors argued that such an in-depth ethnographic study of a single setting allows researchers to provide specific descriptions and close examinations of the particular setting, which helps the researchers to “make sense of complex [classroom] lives” (Fernie & Kantor, 2003, p. 222). They also pointed out that, of course, certain features may be unique to a particular classroom context, and other settings may have different specific features, which lead ethnographic researchers to think about how the findings of one ethnographic study on a single classroom can be related to other classrooms or school settings. Fernie and Kantor (2003) discussed that, as ethnographic researchers take on a socio-cultural theoretical perspective in understanding one’s study, it will allow them to see and interpret the socially constructed nature of every classroom (i.e., what was constructed from actions and interactions; how the classroom members engaged in such a process, their relationships, etc). Fernie and Kantor (2003) also suggested that sharing one’s view of a
particular setting and examples from data “may [also] provide others with the foresight of
how to approach such an interpretive inquiry process in their own setting” (p.222).

Ethnography is a theoretically driven approach to the study of people in socio-
cultural contexts (Green, Dixon, and Zaharlick, 2003). It is also a “logic of inquiry”
(Green, Dixon, and Zaharlick, 2003), which offers a particular point of view and a
methodology that guides researchers in determining what questions they will examine
and how they plan, approach, and proceed with their study. Understanding ethnography
as a “logic of inquiry” actually gives researchers answers to the question of how the
findings of one ethnographic study on a single classroom can be related to other
classrooms or school settings. According to Rex, Steadman, & Graciano (2006),
“ethnographic research allows the researcher to investigate the processes of interaction,
[and] to understand how they occur” (p.744). The ethnographic approach of
understanding the classroom as culture allows the researcher to make “visible the often
invisible patterns of life in classrooms” (Dixon, Frank, & Green, 1999, p.7; Yeager &
Green, 2008), which gives researchers new understanding regarding “the relationships
among learning [meaning making], social participation, and language processes” (Kantor
et al.,1992, p.165). Identifying, understanding, and interpreting how the work of other
researchers or other studies making those invisible patterns of the classroom (i.e.,
discourse, interactions, and actions) visible through the ethnographic perspective and
methodology will help researchers and others to think about ways to “draw on those
principles in flexible ways to meet the locally situated and changing needs of students”
(Yeager & Green, 2008, p. 173) and to consider the relationship of such principles to educational possibilities in their classrooms.

For example, in this dissertation study, I mainly examined the meaning making of one preschool classroom during their large group meeting time. I used micro-level discourse analysis on children’s and teacher’s verbal interactions during the large group meeting time. Each classroom in each different school setting may have a different classroom culture, context, and participants; and different classrooms may have different ways of proceeding with the large group meeting in their classroom. It is anticipated that examining the research approach and methodology that I used in the study of this classroom (--- micro-ethnographic discourse analysis) may lead others to think about using such a research approach to find out about the interaction pattern in their own classroom, which will also allow them to find out about and interpret what meaning the children and teachers in their own classroom construct and how they engage in such meaning making during their large group meeting time. Also, analysis of the interactions during their large group meeting event will allow them to see particular teacher-students relationships, roles, and expectations, and the kinds of meaning making opportunities provided in the classroom, all of which will lead them to think about the educational possibilities and implications of large group interactions in their local classroom contexts.

**Description of the research site**

The ethnographic research approach sees classroom as culture, in which “members construct patterned ways of acting, interacting, and perceiving and interpreting everyday life” (Dixon, Frank, & Green, 1999, p.7). Ethnographic researchers attempt to
understand the “constructed nature of life in the classrooms” (Dixon, Frank, & Green, 1999, p.4). In order to understand the socially constructed nature of classroom life, ethnographic researchers look at everyday “classroom interactions as well as the culture-laden contexts in which these interactions occur” (Rex, Steadman, & Graciano, 2006, p.744). Knupfer (1996) argued that, when ethnographers study children, it is not only important to “learn to understand children’s ways of knowing,” but also important to understand them within the broader contexts of family, community, and cultural history (p.146) that the children and classroom are embedded in. In this section, as an introduction, I will provide a brief overview description of the culture of the classroom that I chose as a research site was embedded in; I will provide further detailed data information on participants and classroom contexts in Ch.3 and will present research analysis on classroom interactions in Ch.4.

This ethnographic study was conducted in a child care center that is located in a large Midwestern city. For my dissertation study, I chose the older age preschool classroom in the Child Care Center, which was comprised of an age 4-5 multi-age group of 23 children and two female teachers (one lead teacher and one assistant teacher). Among the participants (23 children and 2 teachers), only two children were originally from multi-ethnic backgrounds; thus, the participants in this study were predominantly (92%) European-Americans. Regardless of their ethnicity, all children in the classroom were able to communicate in English; there were no students who were learning English as a second language. According to the data from the interview with the lead teacher,
most children of this classroom were from economically middle or upper-middle class families since the child care center no longer had subsidy or tuition support.

The school setting of the Bear Child Care Center (* pseudo name) had some unique features; the center was originally designed as an on-site child care center for employees who worked in a state association. About four years ago, the center started to accept children from outside the association community, and thus parents or relatives of the children no longer had to be employees of the association system. However, the population of the children in this child care center was still largely comprised of children whose parents or relatives worked as employees in the association building. At the time of the study, in this classroom, 82.6% of the children (19 children) had either a parent or a relative who worked in the association. Moreover, the majority of the children (87%, 21 children) had been enrolled in this child care center from either the infant or toddler rooms. Many of the children and families had known each other since the children were very young. Eight children (34.8%) in the classroom had siblings who had previously gone through or were currently attending this center. Those whose parents were not employees of the association had usually been introduced to this center by someone who already had children in the center. The teachers were very familiar with the children’s parents and families, and the parents’ active involvement was also welcomed in the classroom context.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, I will review the literature and research studies done in large group meeting time in preschool or primary classroom contexts. While most of the studies that I review here were mainly based on the sociocultural theoretical framework, which I build on in my study, I have also included some studies done from other perspectives to show some difference in viewpoints and understanding of classroom interactions. Lastly, I will discuss the main ideas and concepts in the sociocultural framework, including Vygotsky and Bakhtin, to explain the theoretical construct upon which I have built my study.

Brief overview of the large group meeting routine in the preschool classroom

The preschool large group routine is often referred to as “circle time”, although the term ‘circle time’ is used interchangeably with various names such as rug time, floor time, morning meeting, sharing time, show and tell, news and views, group time, etc. It is widely known as a daily event that happens as a whole-group context in preschool, in which each morning, teacher and children sit around on the carpet and proceed with several sub-activities within their large group meeting routine (Kantor, 1989; 1992), which differs greatly from one classroom to another. Possible examples of those sub-activities are: sharing news of the day, seeing who is absent, talking about the weather, singing a song, going over the calendar, and talking together about classroom happenings
and things that are meaningful to individual children, which includes sharing the students’ own ideas or stories as well as listening to the ideas of their peers. Circle time has been defined as “a recurrent speech event in preschool classroom” (Kantor et al., 1992, p.135),

Sharing time, often called show-and-tell, is also a narrative activity that children engage in recurrently within the whole group context. It is a speech event in preschool and primary classrooms which gives children opportunity to talk at some length on topics of their choice, such as out-of-school topics like past event stories or an object brought from home, etc. (Cazden, 1986; Michaels, 1981, 1985). Children usually come to the classroom with something for show and tell that has been self-chosen in regard to their interests, and the children are encouraged to explain why they chose what they did, tell a few things about their sharing, and respond to questions from the audience. It is a time for the children to take center stage in the classroom and bring something of their personal lives into school.

These preschool large group meeting events, like circle time and sharing time, share a main core feature as a speech event that happens as a whole-group context with a great deal of connected narrative talk from children and teacher collaboration with the children about their self-selected topics as well as group topics, something of relevance to their own life experience (Cazden, 1986, 2001; Gallas, 1992; Kantor et al., 1989, 1992; Michaels, 1981, 1985).

The history of large group events like circle time for young children began in
Froebelian Kindergarten. Froebel believed that “children need to be gathered under the direction of the teacher at least once a day to create a sense of group cohesiveness” (Fraser & Gestwicki, 2000, p.83). Froebel chose the circle as a symbol of unity, and he believed that such a meeting time enhances relationships and connectedness among group members, which he saw as very important for young children (Fraser & Gestwicki, 2000). The large group events have become a part of preschool classroom routine to promote the children’s learning about appropriate social skills within such large group contexts. There have been numerous studies done regarding the ‘preschool large group meeting event’ as an ample interactive context for children to learn about, build, and construct their understanding on appropriate social skills and various social demands within group contexts. Before reviewing studies based in the sociocultural theoretical framework, I will review some studies that I found done in psychological viewpoint of using the ‘large group meeting routine’ to support children’s social skills.

**Psychological perspective of ‘large group meeting time’**

Interestingly, as I reviewed the studies regarding preschool large group meeting routines like circle time, I found that several studies in the field of psychology were focused on the topic of the development of young children’s social skills within the large group meeting time context. In those studies (Canney & Byrne, 2006; Lown, 2002; Kelly, 1999; Mosley, 1998, 2005), the authors emphasized the use of ‘circle time’ to teach social skills in a nontthreatening manner. From this perspective, circle time was designed for and aimed directly toward improving the social skills of students in order to
raise self-esteem and promote positive behavior and relationships among members of the
classroom, including the teacher (Mosley, 1999); it was sometimes used as intervention,
that is, aimed at improving the social skills of those children who were having emotional
and behavioral difficulties. Proponents of this approach to circle time argue that, through
their involvement in a whole class team building model, like a circle framework, which
integrates games and group problem solving activities, individuals have a chance to
express and recognize their “responsibility for meeting their own and other’s needs”
(Mosley, 1999, p.172), which meets with the main goal of this approach, to “help
individuals within the group to develop self-esteem” (Mosley, 1999, p.174). However, as
I critically re-examined this approach, I found that there were some missing points in
terms of the notion of circle time as a cultural process, which led to a different
understanding regarding the interactive process involved in constructing such social skills
through the large group meeting time event. In these studies regarding large group
meeting time done with the psychological approach, even though the researchers argued
the importance of the large group context as a way of providing various learning
opportunities for children, they saw the learning process with a focus on the individual
rather than as a group or cultural process. In this frame of thought, social interaction was
emphasized as a learning context for the individual child, but the focus was the individual
child’s learning process, rather than careful consideration of the interactive construction
process of the group of individuals within their cultural context. This became clear when
the researchers in these studies focused on research outcomes that they obtained through
questionnaire scales and intervention checklists which are concerning the effectiveness of
circle time by measuring increase in the individual child’s social skills; they did not pay careful attention to the actual cultural group process of meaning making during the large group meeting time event. Acquisition of social skills is not something that can be fully understood by means of a checklist or mastered by the end of the preschool or the kindergarten year; rather, it is an ongoing process that children continue to construct and refine through their classroom events as they interact with their teacher and peers on a daily basis. Thus, there should be a careful examination of the complex process that is created in the social actions and interactions between teachers and children or among children, and what is learned and constructed from participating in such actions and interactions (Green, Kantor, and Rogers, 1991). The entire group should be considered as a unit of analysis because gaining skills and understanding through social interaction is an “aspect of human sociocultural activity” rather than “a property of individuals” (Rogoff, 1998, p.68).

**Large group meeting studies that were built upon the sociocultural theoretical framework**

In studies done within the sociocultural theoretical framework, “the nature of life in the classroom” is “socially constructed through interactions among teachers and students” (Kantor et al., 1992, p.132). The large group meetings represent the socially constructed nature of the classroom and reflect the classroom culture that each classroom is embedded in. ‘Sitting on the floor’ or ‘time on the carpet’ is not a mere habitual action for teacher and children in the classroom. A complex process is created between the
social actions and interactions of teachers and children or among children (Green, Kantor, and Rogers, 1991).

Kantor et al. (1989; 1992) pointed out that during a preschool classroom speech event like circle time, children are asked to take and wait for turns in oral sharing, listen attentively to others’ sharing, speak clearly and accurately for their audience, and display a respectful attitude in responding to, commenting on, and questioning others’ ideas. Children learn social skills and also become “socialized to schooling” (Kantor et al., 1989, 1992; Peterson, 1992) through such group event processes over time. In their studies, Kantor et al. (1989; 1992) examined one preschool classroom’s official large group time, circle time, for a period of over a year. The authors found that circle time in this classroom was identified, not as a single event, but rather as socially coordinated sub-events which required that the children understand distinctive rules and routine expectations for appropriate participation in each of the sub-events, like “Milling time, Transition to being seated, Talking, Singing, Dismissal.” For example, during the Milling sub-event, there was a certain rule and expectation that children in this classroom needed to put things in their cubbies before joining the circle and then sit in their own individual spaces on the circle tape; during the Transition sub-event, there was a rule and expectation about taking turns sitting on the teacher’s lap, and so forth. These examples suggest that the entire circle time actually consisted of many complex and subtle rules and expectations that children needed to know and use appropriately in order to successfully engage in the daily circle time process. More specifically, the authors pointed out that, during the preschool large group meeting events, there were classroom
expectations in terms of what counted as socially, linguistically, and academically appropriate ways of communicating within such group events (Kantor et al., 1992, 131). And, understanding of those rules and expectations was learned and constructed through the actual interactions and experiences within the given classroom meeting event context.

Kantor et al. (1989; 1992) found that as the children engaged in the circle time meeting routine over time, they first learned about the “look” of the circle and then the “sound” of the circle. Namely, the children first learned and established an understanding of the social action in each sub-event, which was related to the structure of the circle time, and then constructed their understanding on how to participate in and develop group communication during the circle time. The authors found that as time went on, the children’s talk became more accomplished: “the group shifted from early dependence on teacher to introduce topic and to talk, to greater involvement of the children over time” (Kantor et al., 1989, p.441). The roles of teacher and children shifted as children learned to initiate topics, took an active role in collaborative conversation, and built on each others’ talk. This shift in the active role of the children affected the role of the teacher, who had to do more maintenance work in terms of ‘who takes a turn,’ ‘whose turn it is now’ rather than taking the role of initiator. There was an emergence of child-initiated talk along with a shift from the initial teacher-child interaction to more child-child interaction. This also led to a shift in norms, expectations and rules as children and teacher constructed, reconstructed, and negotiated with one another as their group event progressed and evolved and they developed a shared understanding of what it meant to be appropriately in the group process. Such shared understanding or “demands are
established, revised, modified, suspended, and reestablished within and across interactions of members” (Kantor, et al., 1992; Tuyay, Jennings, and Dixon, 1995, p.77), which also leads to the significant understanding that culture is patterned but, at the same time, shifting over time (Kantor, Eglas, and Fernie, 1989; Kantor et al., 1992), because it is constructed in the process of interaction between group members, not just passively transmitted.

Eirich (2006) built on findings from Kantor et al. (1989; 1992) that children learn social skills and become “socialized to schooling” (Kantor et al., 1989, 1992; Peterson, 1992) through their everyday large group event processes over time. Eirich (2006) explored the children’s and teacher’s interactions in one primary grade informal progressive classroom to understand how their official large group meeting time reflected the classroom culture, which consisted of the school culture and peer culture that both teacher and children brought in and constructed together during the large group meetings over time. According to Eirich (2006), the teacher presented the norms and rituals in the school culture that the children had to learn in order to be a student in the classroom. This school culture further reflected the focal concerns of the teacher that were evident in her classroom curriculum (i.e., curriculum integration using literature; integration of science/art/literature, etc.). While the teacher presented these expectations in the classroom, the children brought in their own stories and contributed their own input during the large group meeting events, which served as peer culture in the classroom. In her study, Eirich (2006), in the role of teacher researcher herself, described how she negotiated with the children in terms of constructing their large group meetings together;
the teacher tried to support the interests, concerns, and values from the peer culture that the children brought into the classroom. Eirich (2006) found that, through the large group meeting interactions over time, such elements of the school culture and peer culture in the classroom were negotiated as the teacher and children interacted with one another. A school culture event, the large group meeting time, came to intersect with the peer culture. As described in the study, this intersection created opportunities for emergent literacy and for authentic assessment of the students’ social development (Eirich, 2006, p. iii), and thus the classroom culture was co-constructed through their large group meeting interactions.

Michaels (1981; 1984; 1985) and Cazden (2001) examined teacher-led sharing time to understand the interactions between teacher and children during the recurrent speech event, sharing time. By analyzing the classroom interactions between the teacher and the children, the authors pointed out common speech sequence patterns that were identifiable in ordinary teacher-led sharing time events. Michaels (1981; 1984; 1985) and Cazden (2001) found that the structure of sharing time is often initiated by an invitation from the teacher, who asks a question like “who has something to tell us this morning?” (Michaels, 1981, 1985; Kriete, 2002). Such an opening by the teacher serves the role of invitation, and the students share personal experiences or stories about their own self-chosen topics. During the sharing process or at the end of sharing, the teacher gives confirming questions or comments as feedback to the sharer. Control of the turn taking is often maintained by the teacher along with this talk sequence pattern structure; after one child finishes his/her oral sharing and the teacher provides a follow-up comment
to the student's response, the turn moves to the next child, who has been nominated or who has been waiting for his/her own turn.

This kind of classroom discourse pattern has been identified as the I-R-E conversational structure and defined as “Initiation-Response-Evaluation (Follow-up) (Mehan, 1979). The teacher initiates discussion or asks a question, a student responds according to the teacher’s nomination, and then the teacher evaluates the student’s response or offers feedback/comments (Bloome et al., 2005; Heap, 1985; Wells, 1993). According to classroom discourse studies (Mehan, 1979; O’Connor and Michaels, 1993; Wells, 1993), through the follow-up comments, the teacher displays his/her validation of the students’ ideas or sharing, asking questions for clarification or furthering the process, summarizing or reformulating what the student had originally meant to say to the audience, etc. In the teacher’s follow-up comments which serve as validation, the teacher displays certain expectations or norms in regard to how the students are expected to become engaged with the given speech context (Michaels, 1981; 1984). Michaels (1981; 1984; 1985) also concluded, based on the findings of her studies, that there were classroom expectations in terms of what counted as linguistically and academically appropriate ways of communicating within such group events. Michaels (1981; 1984; 1985) and Cazden (2001) found that often such teacher’s expectations for children’s oral sharing were based on and promoted “literate characteristics that fit mainstream conceptions of what literacy and talk should be” (Gallas, 1994, p.18). The teachers delivered certain positive or negative messages to the children as they provided supporting or denying responses to the children’s oral sharing.
In a study of teacher-led sharing time, Michaels (1981) revealed that European-American and African American children tended to have different narrative styles; in the personal story process, European-American children tended to produce more topic-centered narratives, which focused on a single object or event, whereas African American children tended to produce more oral, episodic narratives, which were often characterized by complex shifting scenes and multiple events and objects. Michaels (1981; 1985) claimed that problems arose in the classroom when there were mismatched expectations between a white teacher and black child sharer in terms of ways of engaging in such a topic-centered narrative format in the classroom speech event. When a child started with the topic of her coat and then moved to a story about her cousin’s house, by giving follow-up comments like “what does that have to do with your coat?”, the teacher in some way indicated her expectation that the child should focus on a single topic, which was not being met at the moment. The stories of African American children, who tended to produce more oral, episodic narratives, were more likely to be negatively evaluated by their teachers, who tended to have expectations of single topic centered narratives in their classroom sharing time.

In classroom discourse studies, by examining classroom conversations carefully, researchers have observed and revealed the inner dynamics and the many complex elements that constitute and affect classroom discussion. This has also enabled the researchers to see the inner nature of classroom teaching and learning processes and events more deeply and in more detailed ways. This attention to classroom talk between teacher and students or among students to understand the complex processes and the
nature of classroom events has been greatly emphasized in the classroom interaction and discourse studies, such as those of Bloome et al. (1993, 2005), Cazden (2001), Green and Wallat (1981), Heap (1985), Mehan (1979), Michaels (1981; 1984) O’Connor and Michaels (1993), Wells (1993), etc. These studies emphasized and looked closely at social construction in the classroom process and its meanings through examination of oral narratives of members of the classroom. In these classroom interaction studies, the researchers saw classroom lessons as constructed by the cooperative interaction of teacher and students. They also saw classroom discourse during events not merely in the exchange of talk between student and teacher but, because meaning is not in the word itself, in the whole context of the way oral language is created and constructed by interaction between members of the group (Bloome, 1993; Gumperz, 1986).

These classroom interaction studies were mainly based on the construct of the sociolinguistic perspectives of the study of language, which view social interaction as a linguistic process, thus understanding the social action and reaction occurring within a classroom activity and the nature of such classroom oral events requires “an exploration of the way language is used” (Bloome, Puro, & Theodorou, 1989, p. 269) within a given situation. They view language as a primary tool that participants in the classroom use in constructing their oral events and the meaning making process together in the classroom context. Through language, students and teacher act and react to each other; they establish their social relationships and create and organize their social actions during the interactive lesson process (Shuart-Faris & Bloome, 2004). Therefore, language is always social and influenced by everyday social life. Moreover, language-in-use must be studied
within its social contexts (Bloome et al., 1993, 2005; Cazden, 2001; Gumperz, 1986); it cannot be considered separately from the social contexts in which people are engaged with language and in which such linguistic events occur, because if one understands or interprets language “without considering how it contributes to and is influenced by everyday life,” he or she totally “ignores the situated and interpretive nature of language in use” (Green, Kantor, & Rogers, 1991, p.334).

Gallas (1992; 1994) examined child-led sharing time in one primary grade classroom in a school setting with children from diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. The author examined the children’s oral sharing and storytelling on their personal experiences that they shared during the sharing time events, exploring how the children constructed meaning together as they engaged in verbal interactions with their peers in such classroom meeting event processes. In the study, Gallas (1994) illustrated how she as teacher took an adaptive role in supporting the children’s active meaning making during their group time, which led to stronger group dynamics and the potential for meaningful classroom interactions. Gallas (1992; 1994) described classroom interactions around the oral sharing of an African American girl named Jiana. As Jiana began commenting more and telling more stories during sharing time, she started to tell stories that were clearly fantasy, which was somewhat different from the original format of sharing time in this classroom, in which the children had been expected to create stories based on actual events, their own personal stories. The teacher researcher, Gallas (1992; 1994), negotiated such changes in order to support the children’s active meaning making, and such adaptive role taking allowed the sharing time event in her classroom to
be extended and to evolve further with more diverse ideas and voices. Such adaptive and flexible interactions between the teacher and the children actually supported and encouraged the children’s active role in their group process; the children made more comments, asked questions directed to each other or the sharer, and filled in someone else’s narrative, which had often tended to be the teacher’s role (providing follow-up comments). Gallas (1992; 1994) illustrated in her study how, when the teacher was willing to take an adaptive role to create and support his or her classroom discourse as a more meaningful process, the students’ active participation and contributions were encouraged and valued throughout the classroom discussion process, all of which served a critical role in terms of the co-creation of more interactive opportunities and construction of more active meaning making together in the classroom talk structure (Wells, 1993). This led the children and the teacher to participate more collaboratively in their group discourse, which enabled the children (and the teacher) to become more dialogic and to take a more active role in their interactions.

In her study of the sharing time event, Gallas (1994) emphasized the importance of making multiple forms of expression available in the classroom process. As teacher researcher herself, Gallas (1994) provided opportunities for the children to incorporate classroom talk on various content areas, such as science, literacy, etc., with other forms of representing ideas and thought. Gallas argued that the availability of such opportunities for various forms of representation of ideas and thought using art, drawing, writing, etc. allowed Gallas, the teacher researcher, to see and understand meaningful interaction and various meaning making that the children created through their verbal and
nonverbal engagement in the classroom. Further, Gallas (1994) pointed out that such multiple forms and opportunities for expressive action, like art and drawing, also become an effective support for those children who are English as a second language students or who “are less facile in dominant languages” (p.50).

Hong (1995) also examined the interactive process during the large group meeting time in one preschool classroom. The author focused on exploring the significance of such large group meeting interactions for the children and how the classroom process was co-constructed among members of the classroom, including students, teachers, and parents. She argued that “conversation in dyads, and in small groups has been valued highly, however, the importance of large-group conversation has ignored by the dominant discourse of early childhood education” (Hong, 1995, p. iii). Hong (1995) purposefully chose a preschool with active group interactions during their large group time and with a teacher who supported such a process in the classroom to have an opportunity to understand and reveal the significance of large group time for the children and its educational possibilities in the preschool classroom. A one year long ethnographic inquiry was conducted, and data was collected through classroom observation and interviews with the teachers, children, parents, and student teachers. Hong (1995) found that the children actually constructed their “understanding of people, nature, and the world around them” (p. iv) through their large group interaction during the everyday large group meeting events. The author examined the children’s and teacher’s interaction by looking at their exchange of contextualization cues (Green & Smith, 1983) to understand how they acted and reacted to one another. The exchange of both verbal and
nonverbal contextualization cues, such as the teacher’s “pitch, stress, intonation, pause, rhythm” (Hong, 1995, p.230) as well as “body gestures, facial expression, eye movement” (p.230) helped the children pay attention to and get the point the teacher was trying to make. The children also exchanged contextualization cues with other children, which influenced the teacher’s interactions with them along with negotiating the way the teacher chose to proceed with the large group event. Hong (1995) reported that, through such interactive processes along with the exchange of verbal and non-verbal contextualization cues, the children learned and developed a communicative competence that was important to their participation in group interactions at school. In the data from interviews with parents, Hong (1995) found that the parents showed appreciation for the large group meeting events, which they thought of as a context to support their children’s learning on social skills (i.e., sitting still, paying attention to group process) as well as meaning making and learning on various topics. The large group meeting interactions and process were created mutually among members of the classroom; the teacher tried to develop unit themes and topics for the group meeting time that paid attention to the children’s interests as well as the teacher’s curricular considerations and the parents expectations.

In her study of preschool circle time in Sweden, Emilson (2007) did video-recorded observations on three different preschools for toddlers and young preschoolers between the ages of one to three. Emilson (2007) observed all contexts in each classroom, including circle time as well as free play time. She also closely examined interactions during circle times in different classrooms. In her findings, Emilson (2007) pointed out
that even though preschool large group time tended to have stronger teacher control in the
group context than in other activities (e.g., free play) in the classroom, the way the
teachers interacted with the children during circle time differed quite markedly from one
classroom to another. Such differences in the teacher’s interactions led to differences in
the way the teacher structured their large group meeting events as well as differences in
the controls exercised by the teacher during the large group process. Emilson (2007)
found in her study that children had influence in circle time when teachers did not
exercise full control over the large group meeting process but rather collaborated with the
children. The children took initiative and engaged in meaning making with active
contributions when teachers showed interest and attentive attitudes in response to the
children’s sharing, their perspectives, and their stories from personal experience. A
teacher’s attitude of coming close and listening to the children’s words was closely linked
to the children’s opportunity to contribute actively and take initiative in their group
process. Control of circle time varied based on differences in the teachers’ attitudes and
interactions created during circle time (Emilson, 2007).

In the sections above, I have reviewed a number of studies of preschool large
group meeting events based on the sociocultural theoretical framework. These studies
illustrate the perspective that the large group meeting is socially constructed; in these
studies, the classroom is seen as culture, which is constructed by the members of the
classroom as they act and react to one another. In the classrooms portrayed in these
studies, through their daily interactions during large group meeting events, the children
learned about patterned ways of acting and interacting in the classroom, but they also
took an active role in the construction of the classroom meeting events. By examining classroom interactions carefully, the authors revealed and described the inner dynamics and the complex nature of classroom meeting processes, all of which showed classroom interaction as a co-construction of the teacher and the children. In the next section, before moving on to Chapter Three, on the methodology of the study, I will discuss the main ideas and concepts in the sociocultural framework, including Vygotsky and Bakhtin, to explain the theoretical construct on which I have built on my study.

**Theoretical connections: sociocultural theory**

*Vygotsky: human meaning making socially constructed*

Vygotsky (1978) viewed human learning and meaning making as a social product that is achieved through social interaction (Moll, 1990), and thus emphasized the developmental importance of children’s interactions with other people as a crucial way of making sense of the world. He argued that social interaction is a significant means or vehicle of human thought, through which a human acquires and adapts to the skills and knowledge valued by his/her human group and culture. In his view, “social interaction is the context in which cultural forms come to individuals and individuals come to use cultural forms” (Holland et al., 1998, p.176), and through this process, humans become skilled participants in society.

In the book Mind in Society: the development of higher psychological processes (1978), Vygotsky explained the major processes of the individual’s learning and development clearly. He argued that human learning and meaning making occurs first on
the social level, which means “between people” (“interpsychological”), and then this learning is gradually internalized and transformed to the individual level, which is “inside the individual” (“intrapsychological”) (Vygotsky, 1978, p.57). Therefore, according to Vygotsky, social interaction in a group context is a critical part of the meaning making process which allows people to participate in socially and culturally supportive activities with others (here, in classroom event processes like circle time or sharing time), which would be impossible for them to accomplish alone, and allows them to learn to use and become involved with cultural tools and signs. Such a process helps enable children to become aware of and learn about values, skills, approaches, and local goals of their culture as they interact within the everyday context (Rogoff, 1990).

According to Vygotsky, in order to understand human interaction, dialogue, and the meaning making process, one must consider one important fact, that the individual is inseparable from his/her living contexts, particularly the social and cultural contexts in which such linguistic and meaning making processes occur. Vygotsky gave close attention to how the individual engages in mutual involvement with other individuals, individuals with social partners, and the sociocultural world in order to understand the human mind and knowledge construction within a given context. However, even though Vygotsky considered the sociocultural context as a significant influence in the human learning and knowledge construction process, he did not position the individual as simply a passive recipient of social influences. Rather, Vygotsky viewed the individual as active participant in learning and constructing his/her knowledge with others within the sociocultural context. He understood the process of human interactive learning and meaning
making as a process which is characterized by active interrelationships and simultaneous involvement between self and others, and social context and environment. Namely, the relationship between the individual and society is dialectical, and knowledge is constructed and reconstructed in the discourse between people doing things together (Wells, 1999). Members of a group construct and reconstruct their classroom processes as they engage in the non static and constantly evolving process through their interactions (Gallas, 1992;1994).

*Bakhtin: the self in a dialogic process*

Bakhtin considered human speech communication as a significant source which contains and through which it is possible to show the interactive human consciousness of relations between the self and others. In Bakhtin’s view, human mind and behavior occur through a dialogic process which creates a conscious understanding of the context specific relation between the self and the other. His understanding of dialogism starts from the need to pay attention to “think through relations between human beings” (Holquist, 1990, p.157). Bakhtin thought that the self is not a unitary thing, but “rather, it consists in a relation, the relation between self and other” (Holquist, 1990, p.34), and such a relation of self and other is constituted by dialogue.

Bakhtin attempted to define and understand the process of human action and reaction by examining language, especially human discourse, which he considered a means for examining the multi-dimensional and dialogic nature of the relation of self and others. Bakhtin argued that discourse is a conscious dialogic and interactive process
because utterances are constructed between two socially organized individuals and, thus, it is a two-sided act that not only generates a response in the addressee but in addition makes the speaker consciously anticipate the addressee’s response to his/her own utterance (Morris, 1994). According to Bakhtin, in human discourse, an utterance [“the real unit of speech communication” (Bakhtin, 1986, p.71)] not only conveys a message but also always makes a claim about who the person making the utterance is relative to another and the nature of their relationship (Holland et al., 1998). It reveals ‘responsivity’, which applies both in listening and in speaking. For the listener, in order to perceive and understand another’s utterance, he/she needs to take an active responsive attitude toward the speaker. For the speaker, he/she needs to take into consideration the listener’s understanding. The speaker and listener are themselves responsive to preceding utterances along with their anticipation of both sides’ action and reaction. According to Bakhtin, as human beings participate in interactive discourse, their thought and speech are not only based on their conscious awareness of institutional, historical, and cultural factors, but, at the same time, are also affected by their conscious awareness of their responsive relation to the other’s utterances in which they are interacting, all of which serves to describe Bakhtin’s understanding of the human being: a social being whose conscious thought processes, which are reflected in his/her discourse, are significantly influenced by social contexts and affected by his/her dialogical and interactive relationships with other members of society as well.

In Bakhtin’s view, human identity is formed, shaped, and reshaped in this continuous process as individuals take on the voices of others, which allows socially and
historically positioned individuals to actively construct ‘self’ through the exercise of free will. Bakhtin called the dialogic process of forming identity “authoring self”. According to Bakhtin, “I” author the world as I write my own identity, but the “I” is not completely free from social contexts: the “I” is bound to one’s dialogical relationships with others in that social system (Bakhtin, 1986). “I” is not only being addressed and receiving others’ words, but is also responding to others through his/her action (Holland et al., 1998). Bakhtin understood this socially constructed selfness in relation to others as something still in the process of creation and evolving, something that is constantly moving, rather than seeing the human mind and identity as existing as a stable, completed creation, all of which are aspects of Bakhtin’s understanding of the interrelationship between the individual and the social world in an ongoing dialogical and dialectical process.

In Bakhtin’s view, the world people create and use belongs partially to others since, as individuals participate in speech communication, their utterance is a responsive link in the continuous chain of other utterances (Moll, 1990); this may convey Bakhtin’s main point, that individuals are mutually connected and responsive in the creation of utterance and, ultimately, the thought process and interactive construction of meaning of human beings is a mutual social process of constructing meaning and context together through their discourse, language. Bakhtin emphasized that the human mind and behavior occur through a dialogic process that creates a conscious understanding of the relation between the self and the other within their situated contexts.

Building upon these socio-cultural theoretical frameworks, children’s meaning making during the large group meeting events can be understood as socially constructed;
social interaction serves as a significant process and means for the children to make sense of various topics around them as they act and react to one another. The classroom is a cultural context which leads members of the classroom to learn and construct their understanding of the cultural process through their interaction. The children (and the teachers) are active agents, who constantly maintain, modify, challenge, construct, and reconstruct their interactions, which leads to culture as both a patterned way of interacting and, at the same time, dynamic, changing, and fluid (Bloome et al., 2005; Heath & Street, 2008), thus having a complex nature that is co-constructed by members of the classroom.
CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study seeks an in-depth understanding of the everyday large group meeting interactions in the preschool classroom and its importance to preschool children through exploring what meanings children and teachers make within and across their everyday large group meetings and classroom experiences. Four research questions guided exploration of this main objective of the study:

1. What is the nature of the large group meetings within the socially constructed daily life of a preschool classroom?

2. What meaning making do the children and teachers engage in during their large group meeting event? How do they engage and act and react to one another in their group interaction and meaning making process?

3. What are the significant functions of such socially constructed large group meeting events within and across the children’s classroom experiences?

4. What are the multiple roles of teachers and children, and how do their roles and interactions create opportunities for building a learning community and meaningful process within the preschool
classroom context?

To investigate these research questions, I collected data over a six-month period in one preschool classroom, taking an ethnographic research approach, which is mainly based on a socio-cultural theoretical orientation, an understanding that children’s meaning making is socially and culturally constructed in the course of everyday life. This theoretical orientation gives significant attention to the social context and actual interactions in which meaning making processes occur.

In chapter three, I will describe: firstly, the research approach that I took in this study; secondly, the classroom context that I selected for the collection of this dissertation data, including the school philosophy, classroom setting, and the participants; thirdly, my role as researcher in the study, especially as a participant observer in the process of data collection and interpretation procedures, which include ethical consideration, reflexivity and trustworthiness of the study; fourthly, data analysis process, including an explanation of the corpus of data.

**Research Approach**

This qualitative study is grounded in an ethnographic approach to understand large group meetings and their meaning making in one preschool classroom. Ethnography is a theoretically driven approach to the study of people in socio-cultural contexts (Green, Dixon, and Zaharlick, 2003). This approach attempts to describe and interpret the socio-cultural behavior of people, which guides researchers to engage in systematic ways of exploring such meaning making processes. It is more than a
technique; it is actually a “logic of inquiry” (Green, Dixon, and Zaharlick, 2003), which offers a particular point of view and a methodology which are guiding what question the researcher examines and how the researcher plans, approaches, and proceeds his/her study. Ethnography leads the researchers to pay careful attention to patterned ways of acting, interacting, engaging, communicating, believing, perceiving, and interpreting the everyday life (Dixon, Frank, and Green, 1999) of the group, which thus helps the researchers to meet their goal of understanding, interpreting, and representing the rich inside stories of people’s interactions and the meaning of such patterned life or events (Dixon, Frank, and Green, 1999; Fernie and Kantor, 2003; Kantor et al., 1992). Using and understanding ethnography as both a tool and a perspective to explore children’s meaning making processes within group contexts helps the researchers to gain more in-depth understanding of the meanings of everyday social actions and interactions and the experiences of young children that are constructed within the classroom and between the classroom members (Green, Camilli, and Elmore, 2006).

The ethnographic approach is based mainly on a theoretical framework that falls under Sociocultural perspectives. According to Vygotsky, the human interactions should be understood with “reference to the social milieu in which the individual is embedded” (Rogoff, 1990, p.35; Vygotsky, 1978). Researchers with this theoretical orientation give significant attention to the social context in which the interaction and meaning making processes occur, and they have an understanding that children’s learning is socially and culturally constructed in the course of everyday life. The researchers in this framework take a contextualized and situated view of meaning making processes in the children’s
context. This context-specific approach has led the researchers to use an ethnographic lens to explore classroom events and processes in the everyday classroom context in order to get a rich and in-depth understanding of children’s meaning making or interaction processes based on the local context.

Epistemologically, the ethnographic perspective shares a point of view with Interpretivists, which see knowledge as based on the idea that "meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world" (Merriam, 2002, p.3; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003; Schwandt, 1994; 2003). Interpretivists argue that human reality cannot be viewed as a “fixed, single, agreed upon, or measurable phenomenon” (Merriam, 2002, p.3); rather, they view realities as constructed, multiple and thus relative (different people may construct meaning in different ways) (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003; Goodwin and Goodwin, 1996; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The Interpretivist paradigm focuses their inquiry on the "meaning of human action in cultural context" (Corsaro and Miller, 1992, p.6) rather than value-free, generalizable features of human behavior. Such point of view is well reflected in the ethnographic approach by focusing on in-depth understanding of the participants’ everyday experiences and interactions and the meanings shared and constructed by group members within their sociocultural contexts. The Interpretivist emphasizes the importance of studying and understanding “what is going on within and between participants” (Bredo, 2006, p.28). The participant’s actions and interactions are studied seriously by the observer in order to get inside the way the participant sees the world from his own perspective (Crotty, 1998; Spindler, 1963; Spradley, 1980).
This ethnographic perspective of attempting to understand the insider's (participant’s) point of view (Spradley and McCurdy, 1972) has had a significant impact on the way researchers conduct and proceed with research studies in the early childhood education field in terms of their attention to child-centered research perspectives and approaches (Corsaro, 2005; Graue and Walsh, 1998). Rather than observing or studying the child “objectively” within a controlled reality, researchers in ethnographic perspective give significant attention to “the early childhood educational and social processes that are situated within the group life” (Fernie and Kantor, 2003, p.225), which provides the researchers with a way to understand the everyday classroom life that children experience and construct, and thus to provide more in-depth information about “what is going on within and between them [children]” (Bredo, 2006, p.28).

The ethnographic approach allowed me as a researcher to understand young children and their meaning making process in more in-depth and holistic ways and to be sensitive to the everyday experiences and meaning making processes that are embedded in the cultural and contextual features of the classroom (Corsaro and Miller, 1992; Fernie and Kantor, 2003; Graue and Walsh, 1998). This research approach guided me to meet with the main purpose of my study: exploring and understanding about preschool large group meetings and their meaning making in the classroom contexts. Ethnographic approach helped me as a researcher to look closely at actual interactions, relationships, what was constructed from such actions and interactions, and ways the children and teachers engaged in such group meaning making during the event process. It also guided me to closely explore what classroom culture the children were embedded and nurtured
in, and also what meaning making they were actually constructing every day with their teacher and peers.

**Context of the Classroom**

**Description of the school setting**

This study was conducted in a child care center that is located in a large Midwestern city. The bear child care center (\* pseudo name) is comprised of two infant rooms, two toddler rooms, and two preschool classrooms (one preschool classroom with children age 3 and 4; the other preschool classroom with children age 4 and 5). For my dissertation study, I chose the older age preschool classroom, which was comprised of a multi-age (4-5 years old) group of children and two female teachers.

This school setting had unique features that weren’t part of most child care centers. The center was originally designed as an on-site child care center for employees who worked in the state association. The Bear child care center is located on one side of the first floor of the building which houses this association system. It started with one preschool classroom about 20 years ago, and the current director was one of the teachers in that initial classroom. The infant room was added about 10 years ago. In the beginning, the center was only open for the enrollment to children who had at least one parent or relative working in the association system. The center also had subsidy or tuition support for parents whose child was in this center. About four years ago, the center started to accept children from outside the association community, and thus parents or relatives of the children no longer had to be employees of the association
system. Now the center is basically self-sufficient, and there is no longer subsidy or tuition support for the parents who are employees of the association system. However, the population of this child care center is still largely comprised of children whose parents or relatives work as employees in the association building. The program is licensed by the State Department of Job and Family Services.

**Rationale for selecting this classroom as a research site**

I had been familiar with this classroom setting and the teachers since about one year previous to the actual data collection period when I served as supervisor for a Master of Education student in the preschool classroom with ages 4 and 5 from September to December 2007. At that time, I regularly visited the classroom (once every 2 weeks) to observe and supervise the M.Ed. student so that, I was able to observe and become familiar with some of the contexts of the classrooms and had a chance to build initial relationships with the classroom teachers as well. I saw that the classroom daily process and teachers-children interactions were consistently reflective of their school philosophy, which encourages children’s active interaction, and that the school structure and philosophy allowed for children and teachers to engage naturally in ample interaction during their classroom processes, including the large group meeting process, which I anticipated observing and exploring. This initial understanding of the classroom context and relatively comfortable relationships with the people in the classroom guided me to think about this classroom as a possible research site where I could become involved in ethnographic study.
Another significant rationale for selection of this classroom as the research site of my study involved specific elements in their large group meeting event. As I visited this classroom in supervising the M.Ed. student, I also had a chance to observe their official large group meeting time (Morning Meeting) and interaction, which was part of the daily routines. At that time, I noticed that in this classroom, the Morning Meeting consisted of sub-events of ordinary preschool circle time ritual activities, such as calendar and weather as well as a sub-event of time for large group conversation within the official large group meeting routine. During the large group conversation sub-event, the children and the teachers conversed with one another on various topics within their Morning Meeting context: they talked about self and talked and thought together about group topics as well. Since my study was to focus on exploring an in-depth understanding of the everyday large group meeting interactions in the preschool classroom and what meanings children and teachers made within and across their everyday large group meetings and classroom experiences, such active verbal interactions during the large group meeting events would be a significant data source for this research study.

Furthermore, at the same time, this classroom’s large group meeting time also contained representational features of the ordinary and traditional preschool circle time routines (calendar/weather) commonly seen in other preschool classrooms. I thought the features in this classroom reflected a good combination of both elements of ritual-like activities and large group interactions within the preschool large group meeting events.

Participants
The classroom that I chose for this study was comprised of an age 4-5 multi-age group of 23 children and two European-American female teachers (one lead teacher and one assistant teacher). Since my study was exploring this classroom’s everyday large group meeting and its meaning making among classroom members from an ethnographic perspective, I wanted to observe the natural flow of the classroom process and routine as the children and teachers engage in their everyday context. This study did not necessitate any changes in the current classroom structure and process, and in that sense all classroom members were included as participants in the study. Pseudo names were given to all participants.

Jully, the lead teacher, had been working in this preschool since July 2001. She had a B.S. degree, majoring in early childhood development and education. Before working in this preschool, Jully worked as classroom teacher in other preschools which were play and integrated curriculum based programs. In her current classroom, Jully had been serving in the role of mentor teacher for early childhood major student teachers from local universities and colleges, who need to fulfill their student teaching field experience requirements. Pam, the assistant teacher, had been working in this classroom since January 2006. She had a college degree and had substitute teacher experience in another school district and experience teaching in Head Start for four years before she came to this classroom.

All 23 children in the classroom were included as participants of the study. Even though the total number of participants was 23 children throughout the whole data collection period (mid March ~ the end of August 2008), around 12-16 children were
usually present in the classroom on an everyday basis due to the nature of the preschool classroom (i.e., some children were registered on a part-time basis and came to the school on certain days (2-3 days a week); also the children’s attendance often depended upon their family schedule and was affected by such activities as vacation, staying at their grandparents’ house, etc).

As seen in Table 3.1, the children were mostly European-Americans, but there were two children from multi-ethnic backgrounds. Kelley was born in the U.S., but her parents were originally from Philippine; Michael was also born in the U.S., but his parents were originally from India. Regardless of their ethnicity, all children in the classroom were able to communicate in English. According to Jully, the lead teacher, most children in this classroom were from economically upper-middle class families or had two working parents. Previously, when they had subsidy or tuition support for the parents, the classroom tended to have a more diverse mix of income groups, but now there is no longer a subsidy, and most children were from middle—upper-middle class families.

In this classroom, 87% of the children (21 children) had been enrolled in this child care center from either the infant or toddler rooms. As the children got to the appropriate ages, they moved up from infant room to toddler room, toddler room to younger preschool room (3-4 years old), and younger preschool room to older preschool room (4-5 years old). Two children in this older preschool classroom had been enrolled in the center since August 2007. Many of the children and families had known each
other since the children were very young, and the teachers also had been seeing the children since they were babies.

The teachers had close relationships with the parents and their families. Eight children (34.8%) in the classroom had their siblings who had previously gone through or were currently attending in this center. Jully, the lead teacher, had had some of the children’s older siblings in her classroom in previous years. As seen in Table 3.1, the parents or relatives of 82.6% of the children (19 children) in this classroom were currently employee in the association system building. Those whose parents were not employees of the association had usually been introduced to this center by someone who already had children in the center. So, all in all, the teachers were very familiar with the parents since they saw them every single day, and the parents’ active involvement was also welcomed in the classroom context. Sometimes the parents would come down to classroom to have a special lunch time with the children on special days, such as Mother’s Day or Father’s Day.
Table 3.1: Children in the Classroom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Attended this center since</th>
<th>One of the parents or relatives worked in the agency building</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>Toddler room</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>Infant room</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>Infant room</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>Infant room</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>Infant room</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>Infant room</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>Infant room</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>Preschool room</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>Infant room</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>Infant room</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>Infant room</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Classroom</th>
<th>Move Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>Infant room</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>Infant room</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Infant room</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erin</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>Toddler room</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>Toddler room</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>Infant room</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>Preschool room</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denny</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>Infant room</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>Infant room</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4*</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>Infant room</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4*</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>Infant room</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4*</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>Infant room</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These children moved up to older preschool classroom (4/5 room) from July 2008
**Classroom schedule / curriculum**

[Table 3.2] **Classroom daily schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:30 – 8:50</td>
<td>Arrival / Free play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:50 – 9:00</td>
<td>Clean up and get ready for Morning Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00 – 9:30</td>
<td>Morning Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30 – 10:15</td>
<td>Outdoor time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:15 – 10:25</td>
<td>Snack time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:25 – 10:40</td>
<td>Story time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:40 – 11:30</td>
<td>Free Choice time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30 – 12:00</td>
<td>Outdoor time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00 – 1:00</td>
<td>Lunch / Clean up / Get ready for rest time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00 – 3:00</td>
<td>Rest time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:00 – 3:30</td>
<td>Wake up / Snack time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:30 – 4:15</td>
<td>Free play / Story time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:15 – 5:00</td>
<td>Outdoor time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:00 – 6:00</td>
<td>Free Choice time / Leaving</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The school is open from 7:30am-6:00pm, Monday through Friday. Most children arrive between 8:00am and 9:00am, and leave between 4:30pm and 6:00pm, depending largely on their parents’ schedule. Thus, the times for the children’s arrival in the classroom and leaving are varied. The schedule above is an outline of the daily schedule of this classroom. However, except for the set outdoor times, the classroom schedule was
flexible and sometimes would be changed based on the flow of the classroom and other planned experiences, such as walking to the library or going to a garden concert in a park which was near the child care center. The outdoor times are set since the outdoor playground is shared with the other classrooms, including infant, toddler, and younger preschool rooms. This classroom shared their outdoor times with the younger preschool room (children with age 3-4).

In the morning, when the children arrive, they engage in free play. The areas in the classroom (- the housekeeping area, block area, computer area, writing table, science exploration area, book area, manipulating areas including puzzles) are open, and children engage in their free choice ideas until right before the clean up time which is around 8:50am. During the clean up time, the children pick up their play materials and get ready for the morning meeting time, which starts around 9:00am. By this time, usually, most children have arrived in the classroom.

During the morning meeting, all the children and teachers sit around on the carpet area and engage in communication about things they want to share with the group. Topic is pretty much open and is usually about things regarding their personal experiences or things that have happened around their classroom experiences. Sometimes the teacher had certain topics that she wanted to introduce and discuss with the children. In the official document which gives written explanation of this classroom’s daily routines, the morning meeting is described as “During the large group time, we have wonderful discussion and share our experiences with each other. It offers the children the opportunity to listen and to be heard. Morning meeting helps establish our class as
community of learners” (from Appendix - A). Myself as ethnographic researcher, along with my own description of the classroom, I also included the classroom document artifact (Appendix - A), which illustrates their classroom’s schedule and curriculum approaches in their words so that I could better represent their ideas regarding their classroom program from more insiders’ perspectives. After group talk, the children and teacher also talk about the calendar, weather, daily helpers, and plans for the day.

After the morning meeting, the children go outside for outdoor play. The outdoor playground is located right next to the center building. The playground equipment, including slides, bicycles, and a sand box with play materials, are open for the children. It is also a good time for the children to play with the children in the other classroom, the younger preschool room (3-4 years old). The center also has an inside gym, which is located downstairs from the classroom (basement of the building). When the weather is rainy, too hot or too cold, the children go to the inside the gym for their outdoor play times.

When they come back from the outdoor time, the children have a snack, and story time starts when everybody finishes their snack. During the story time, the children gather on the carpet area, and the teacher sits in front of them and reads one or two picture books that the teacher has chosen. Books are chosen mainly based on topics that are related to one of the planned activities (i.e., if one of table activities is making an individual pizza, then the teacher will read a book about pizza; i.e. if one of the table activities is about making things with recycle materials, then a book about recycling will be read; if one of table activities is an art activity of creating a bug with various materials,
then a book about bug will be selected). The children and teachers go bi-weekly to borrow new books at a public library, which is 10 minute walk from the center. They sometimes attend the library’s story time or just borrow new books. The borrowed books are placed in the classroom bookshelves and read individually during the children’s free choice time or in a large group during the story time.

After the story time, the children move to free choice activities. All the areas are open, and at three large tables, planned activities are set up by the teachers. The children are free to engage in those planned activities and in free play in the housekeeping area, block area, computer area, bookshelf area, and science area, and at the writing table. Costumes, housekeeping toys, props, phones, etc. are placed in the housekeeping area so that the children can engage in socio-dramatic play. Wood blocks are located on the shelves in the carpet area and children construct things with wood blocks there. The writing table is kept supplied with paper, markers, rulers, magazines, envelopes, scissors, and glue so that the children can freely engage in drawing, writing, or creating things with scissors and glues. Rocks, animal figures, magnifying glasses, magnets, marbles, etc. can be found in the science area so that the children can explore those objects along with books about science topics. The planned table activities are for the most part very hands-on and they range from or are integrated with art, science/social studies, literacy, or math. Examples of those planned table activities might be planting seeds with dirt in cups, making play dough from a recipe with a teacher and other children, playing a game of placing the number of marbles that corresponds with pictures or letters, painting with various materials, shaving cream with brushes, etc. Sometimes, one of the tables is
planned as a small group activity which is guided by the teacher and involves 4-5 children at a time, such as science experiment, cooking ideas, making play dough, bingo games, etc. In the classroom’s official document explaining the daily routines, free choice times is described as follows. “We provide stimulating activities and create an environment in the classroom for the children [to] gain knowledge through discovery. …. During free choice time, the children are encouraged to make their own choices and solve their own problems” (from Appendix A). A sensory table is also open during this free choice time – it is usually filled with various materials that the children can explore with their hands, such as bubble water with sponges and animal figures, rice or grain along with alphabet magnets and magnetic sticks, etc.

After the free play, the children go outside again for 20-25 minutes and then have their lunch. After lunch time, the children take a nap until 3:00pm. Afternoon routine is generally repeat of the morning routines. After naptime, the children have a snack and engage in free play. If there are some activities that the children could not engage in during the morning, they can continue working on those activities in the afternoon. The teacher gathers the children on the carpet area for a short story time before they go outside for the outdoor play. The children are picked up by their parents between 4:30-6:00pm.

The teachers in this classroom plan their classroom curriculum on a weekly basis. In the classroom’s document explaining about their daily routines as follows: “We [Teachers] plan our activities based on the interests of the children as well as exciting things we [teachers] would like to share with them [children]” (from Appendix A). I
think this well illustrates this classroom’s curriculum, which is combination of activity arising from the children’s interests and teacher guided learning experience. Sometimes teachers chose topics that they wanted to introduce to the children, usually something related to the children’s life experiences, things going on at this points (i.e., seasonal, plants and animals (-flogs, a bug, ), holidays, …etc), special days in the school (i.e., buckeye day, mother/father’s day, …etc). Topics of the classroom curriculum are usually related to the children’s life experiences along with some teacher-chosen topics; a combination of these two modes prevailed in the classroom curriculum. Such aspects can be seen within the Morning Meeting as well. Instead of judging what kinds of particular curriculum approach whether this classroom is fit in or not, I would like to include the teacher’s own thought about her classroom curriculum in here. During the third interview meeting on August 2008, when I asked Jully, the lead teacher, how she would define or name their classroom curriculum (i.e., Reggio Emilia approach, Inquiry-based, ….etc), she said that “I wish there is a category we fit in ..., but I guess we don’t. I guess, what makes us probably unique is, it’s children based interests, and also teacher guided, um., I think it is also emergent, at times. I guess that’s what I would say, we are combination of all of three things. .... We are pretty much open, as long as we are hitting those things in the content standards, as long as we are making sure they [ideas/activities] can be back mapped and related to those learning, ...” As long as they are meeting with those center’s philosophies, all the decisions in the classroom are up to the teachers, which makes it possible to create a classroom curriculum that is flexible in nature.

Entry and Access
I received the initial approval of my research from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) in February 2008. I discussed with the teachers in this classroom and director of the center prior to the study. I gave consent forms to the teachers regarding their participation in the study and permission for interviews. I visited the classroom during the children’s nap time and had initial meeting and conversations with the teachers in order to explain the purpose of my study and main study procedure, and provided a letter to the teachers along with the consent form.

I also sent parent permission forms and consent forms for the parents to sign along with a letter which included an introduction of myself and the purpose of my study along with a description of the main study procedures. The consent letter provided a place for parents to give permission for me to make audio and video recordings of their children. All families gave consent for their child to participate in the study. At the beginning of the actual study (data collection) in mid March 2008, I introduced myself and explained the nature of my study to the children, saying that I would visit their classroom and interact with them and observe their classroom meeting two or three times a week. New children were added throughout the study due to an increase in enrollment in the classroom. Children who were close to their 4 year old birthday were moved from the younger preschool room to the older preschool room. Those children who were new addition to the classroom based upon their age were moved from the 3 year old preschool classroom, which was right next to the current 4-5 year old preschool classroom. When this occurred, I individually sent parent permission forms and consent forms to the new children’s parents to sign. I also gave a letter, which includes an introduction of myself
and the purpose of my study and a description of the main study procedures. I also got the approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the change in number of participants as I submitted forms for the continuing review.

**Role of Researcher**

*My position as a participant observer*

In ethnographic studies, the researcher and the researched are interactive and inseparable in terms of getting an in-depth understanding about the social behaviors and cultural meaning making of the researched within group contexts (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003; Glesne, 2006; Spradley, 1980). In order to grasp and gain a rich contextual understanding of the way in which the participants engage in and make sense of in their contexts, researchers in ethnographic studies have to engage with the insiders (participants) within the context. The researchers take the role of participant observers in the process of collecting and interpreting their data. Also, researchers in ethnographic studies support the assumption that meaningful human research is impossible without the full understanding of and cooperation with the participants: “Knower and known are inseparable” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.105). According to Spradley, “ethnography means learning from people rather than studying people” (1980, p.3). In that sense, the researcher in ethnographic studies can be seen as a learner, and the research process in ethnographic studies is interactive collaboration between the researcher and the participants. Such collaboration allows the researcher to learn about the in-depth shared meaning of social interactions of the group (Crotty, 1998, p.7).
During the actual data collection period, I visited the classroom at least three days a week for three to four hours a day over a period of five and a half months (mid March 2008 ~ end of August 2008). Data collection occurred during the hours of the school day, following their classroom schedule. During this period, I took the role of a participant observer who observes and learns about the classroom culture and meaning making process, while respecting and supporting the natural flow of the classroom process and routine as the children and teachers engaged in their everyday contexts.

Even though my focus was mainly on the large group meeting time, I also observed the daily processes in this classroom and the children’s interaction during other routine times so that I could gain a more holistic understanding of the large group meeting process in connection with the whole classroom culture frame. By spending prolonged time and engagement with classroom members and in observing their participation, I tried to develop direct, respectful and sustained relationships with the group, and I recorded their classroom experience, which helped me make sense of the complex nature of classroom processes.

When I entered the classroom on the first day, during the large group time, I introduced myself and explained the nature of my study to the children, saying that I would visit their classroom and interact with them and learn about their classroom meeting two or three times a week. When the children asked my name, instead of giving my full first name, Hyun Young, I said to them, “you can call me Young!” I asked them to call me Young because I thought Hyun Young might be hard for non-native Korean speakers to pronounce, and I was worried whether it might interfere with my building a
comfortable relationship with the children as soon as possible. Thankfully, the children could very easily to pronounce and remember my name Young from the beginning of the data collection period. The children in this classroom were accustomed to having other people in their classroom, like student teachers from local universities and colleges during their school years. The classroom environment also helped me to quickly build comfortable relationships with the children.

In this classroom, the two teachers were also called by their first names (Jully; Pam) by the children. Since I was also one of the “grown-ups” in the classroom and also called by the first name Young, I had to be careful in establishing my researcher role, as participant observer and learner, with the children in the classroom. As I observed and followed the natural flow of the classroom process, I tried not to take a ‘teacher’s role’ throughout the data collection period. For example, when there were conflict situations during the children’s play, I tended to step back and let the teachers mediate those guidance and discipline situations. Rather, I took the role of a co-player someone who observed, followed, and wanted to learn about their routines. Also, during the morning meeting times, I tried not to interact impulsively or guide their large group process. Since my study was exploring this classroom’s everyday large group meeting and its meaning making among classroom members from an ethnographic perspective, I wanted to observe the natural flow of the classroom process and routine as the children and teachers engaged in their everyday context. With this careful awareness of my presence in the classroom, I did also actively participate in the classroom activities and routines. During other routine times, like free play, free choice times, or outdoor times, I interacted
and communicated with the children. I did not guide their play or ideas in certain ways, but observed, sometimes joined in, and supported their ideas through on-going interactions. For example, during the free-choice activity time, I sat near the children who were engaged in their table activities, and observed and had verbal interaction on what they were making or involved in. During the outdoor play time, as I observed the children’s play interactions, they sometimes invited me to take part in their play, and I joined in their free play as co-player. I also participated in their special routines, like walking to the library or walking to a garden concert in the park near the center, as one of the members of the classroom and to learn about their classroom experiences.

**Researcher’s subjectivity**

The ethnographic perspective shares a point of view with the Interpretivists, which acknowledge the researcher’s subjectivism that the researcher’s values, beliefs, and experiential background influence his/her understanding of physical and social reality (Crotty, 2003). “Any gaze is always filtered through the lenses” of the researcher’s own viewpoint, which is constructed through his/her identity and who he/she is as a person; everything positioning them as a person influences their research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; 2000). In her study, Ladson-Billing said, “Situating myself as researcher--who I am, what I believe, what experiences I have had--affects what, how, and why I research” (Ladson-Billing, 2003, p. 416), which reflects clearly the researcher’s recognition of the important role of subjectivism in research. In the process similar to that described by Ladson-Billing (2003), throughout my research study process, including the data collection, recognizing my subjectivity really helped me to guide my thinking and
approach as ethnographic researcher. “We cross borders, but we don’t erase them; we take our borders with us” (Behar, 1993, p.320, quoted in Glesne, 2006, p.119).

Awareness of my subjectivity and who I was as a person helped me to see and inquire into my perspectives and interpretations (Glesne, 2006) to ask why I perceived or approached the study process in certain ways.

As an international doctoral student, one aspect of this unique position guided how I chose the research site for the study. Since ethnographic study requires the researchers to engage in prolonged participation and interactions with the participants of their studies, it could be challenging for me to engage in such a study in a classroom where I did not have any prior understanding of the classroom approaches or teachers. During my doctoral study, I had the opportunity to be involved in classroom observations of many early childhood schools in our local communities as a university supervisor guiding student teachers in their field placements. Through such valuable experiences, I was able to observe and become familiar with some of the contexts of the classrooms and had a chance to build initial relationships with classroom teachers as well, which became a valuable guideline and resource for me in thinking about possible research sites where I could become involved in ethnographic study. The way I introduced myself to the children and teachers with simplified form of my name, ‘Young,’ at the beginning of the study could be seen as another example of my awareness on own subjectivity of my situation and its inclusion in the study process. The way I introduced myself to the participants reveals my awareness on who I was as a person, an international student in
the U.S. and reflects on my feelings and adjustment that I wanted to create comfortable relationships with the children and teachers balanced with consideration of my identity.

As I engaged in the actual data collection process, such awareness of my subjectivities also guided me to constantly reflect on, re-examine and monitor my roles as participant observer in the classroom context and certain perspectives (i.e., socio-cultural theoretical framework) that I might carry along with me throughout the research process. In terms of establishing my role as participant observer with the participants, including the teachers, I had to be aware of my previous relationships with the teachers as university supervisor. I had served as university supervisor for a M.Ed. (Master of Education) student in this preschool classroom from September to December 2007, which was about one year ago before I began data collection for my study. Even though I initially entered into comfortable relationships with the teachers and their classroom contexts, I had to be careful about my role in the classroom throughout the study process. I needed to keep in mind that my role in the classroom had shifted from university supervisor to participant observer and learner. With the children, I took more of a co-player role, someone who observed, followed, and wanted to learn about their routines and classroom experiences. During the morning meeting times, I tried not to jump into or guide their large group process so that I was not taking a ‘teacher’s role’ in the classroom throughout the data collection period. Especially with teachers, I observed and followed the classroom routines and activities, and respected their decision making in the classroom. When I was in the role of supervisor, as I guided the student teachers, I sometimes shared suggestions with the classroom teachers on better ways to support the
student teachers and their field experiences. However, in this research study process, as I took the role of participant observer and learner, I tended to step back from the teachers’ decision making in the classroom activities so that I could observe and explore the natural flow of the classroom routine as the children and teachers engaged in their everyday contexts. Interviews and informal conversations with the teachers were helpful in terms of clarifying and understanding the teachers’ approaches and reasons behind certain decision makings. Asking questions of myself throughout the research process (Glesne, 2006), especially in regard to who I was as a person and researcher, what position I was taking and why, and what perspectives I carried with me, really helped me to monitor my role as well as to re-examine my reflections and interpretation during the study process.

**Data collection procedures**

Ethnographic researchers are mainly interested in asking questionings regarding the “ordinary conduct of life” (Bruner, 1990, p.19) of a group. The basic questions that the ethnographer asks are, firstly, “what’s going on here,” question of behavior and events, and secondly, question of meaning (Wolcott, 1997, p.347). Researchers start their examination with wide-angle questions which are intended to explore and describe phenomena in the classroom to learn more about children’s learning or meaning making in the everyday classroom setting. Such wide-angle questions lead to an inductive approach and direct the ethnographic inquiry in a way which allows the researcher to “reveal the general through the particular, the abstract through the concrete” (Peacock, 1986, p.83). My data collection also started with the wide-angle research questions to explore and learn about the classroom, exploring and gaining in-depth
understanding about preschool large group meeting events and their meaning in the preschool classroom. During the data collection, even though my focus was mainly on large group meeting time, I also observed the classroom’s daily processes and the children’s interaction around the large group meeting events as well as during other routine times so that I could have a more holistic understanding of the large group meeting process in relation to the whole classroom context. The actual data collection was conducted from mid March 2008 until the end of August 2008. During this period, I visited the classroom at least three days a week for three to four hours a day. Data collection occurred during the hours of the school day, following their classroom schedule. I usually stayed in the classroom throughout the morning routines before lunch/naptime. I also observed some afternoon routines after naptime so that I could better understand the classroom process. Since 43.5% (10 children) of the total participants of this study were five year olds who graduated from the child care center and moved out of this preschool classroom by the end of August 2008, I finished the actual data collection by this time.

**Corpus of data**

In the ethnographic study, the researcher him/herself is the main instrument; therefore, in this study, I was the major instrument of data collection because of the participant observer nature of the study. I collected the data through direct observations, field notes, both written and visual forms of documentation including video recording and photographs, formal/informal face-to-face interviews with the teachers, actual
artifacts from the classroom, etc (see table 3.2). The use of multiple data collection methods was an effective tool for enabling me as an ethnographic researcher to obtain rich data, and thus helped me to interpret data more effectively.

I observed and followed the natural flow of the classroom process by spending prolonged time periods in engagement with classroom members and in observing their participation. During my observations of the large group meeting events, I observed and took field notes near the carpet area where the children and teachers were engaging in the large group meeting. I placed the video camcorder at the back of the carpet area so that it would not visually or physically interfere with the actual meeting process of the children and teachers.

Even though my focus was mainly on the large group meeting time, I also observed the daily processes in this classroom and the children’s interaction during other routine times so that I could gain a more holistic understanding of the large group meeting process in connection with the whole classroom culture frame. I kept a pen and small notebook with me and often took brief field notes when I was interacting with or observing the children in their classroom processes (Emerson, Fretz, Shaw, 1995). At the end of each day as I got back from the research site, I went over those observational field notes and sometimes noted my personal reflections as researcher in the field notes.

Video recording was conducted with the intention of documenting and capturing the participants’ interaction in a form, which could be used for micro-level discourse analysis. Erickson (2006) argued that the main advantage of video recorded data is that “it provides a continuous and relatively comprehensive record of social interaction”
It allows a researcher to capture not only the speaker’s talk and behavior, but also “the reciprocal attention behavior of listeners, who influence speakers (continuously) during the course of their speaking” (Erickson, 2006, p.179). White (2009) also argued that video recorded data of persons and events allows a researcher “to assess and interpret what is happening at that time of recording” (p. 390), and can provide “rich contextual detail” (Young, 1975, quoted in White, 2009, p.391), which could be helpful for close investigation of participants’ interaction and micro-level analysis of group talk and discourse, as in this dissertation study of preschool large group meeting events and interactions. Video recording allowed me as a researcher effectively to capture details and a full picture of the way the children and teachers engaged in the large group meeting process and their classroom interactions, including verbal and non-verbal features, which would have been hard to capture fully in only written field notes.

Along with video recording and field notes talking, I took photographs of the children’s classroom experiences to provide visual images to complement the written descriptions of the data. I also collected classroom document artifacts (Appendix - A) which illustrate the classroom’s schedule and curriculum approaches ‘in their words’ so that I could better represent their ideas regarding their classroom program from more insiders’ perspectives.

Three one and a half hour interviews with the teachers were conducted during the data collection period, and the interviews were audio-taped. These interviews were combination of formal and informal interview format: I initially prepared possible questions for the interviews (Appendix B) in advance, and then, as the interviews
proceeded, along with asking those prepared questions, I also engaged in flexible and explanatory informal interviews with the teachers through asking open-ended questions, just like informal conversation. These informal forms of conversation would range from comments on the children’s actions to more lengthy conversations about their classroom experiences (-such as things happened when I was not in class, etc.) or clarification on my observation or their approaches in the classroom.

Interviews and informal conversations with the teachers provided opportunities for me to hear the teachers' thinking and reflection on their practices (i.e., the beliefs and values underlying their teaching practices) in the classroom meeting process, which were sometimes difficult to construct through observation only (Crotty, 2003). And this gave me as a researcher a more in-depth and contextualized understanding about my observation of the participants’ teaching practices. Crotty argued that "only through dialogue can one become aware of the perceptions, feelings and attitudes of others and interpret their meanings and intent" (Crotty, 2003, p.75), and this is a very significant aspect of qualitative research, especially in ethnography. In that sense, informal interview with the teachers served a significant role, not only as a data collection method, but also as a tool for establishing dialogue between insiders and outsider (researcher), and such a dialogic process gave me a great opportunity to learn about the insiders’ culture and practice, which thus provided me an opportunity to develop a better understanding of my observations and collected data.
Table 3.3: Summary of Corpus of Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Days in the classroom</th>
<th>68 days</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Video recording</td>
<td>46 videotapes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(46 hours and 30 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field notes</td>
<td>171 pages of field notes were taken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with teachers (audio recordings and field notes)</td>
<td>3 interview meetings with teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(about an hour and 10 minutes each)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and informal conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photographs</td>
<td>250 photographs were taken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifacts from the classroom</td>
<td>School pamphlet / Classroom introductory document were collected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Ethical consideration: reflexivity and trustworthiness*

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is a crucial element in terms of considering the validity and credibility of the study. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, member checks and peer debriefing can be effective methodology for decreasing researcher bias in qualitative research, and thus also help to build trustworthiness within a study. Triangulation by multiple investigators (collaborators), multiple sources of data, or multiple methods strengthen a study with findings that are consistent and dependable (Brenner, 2006; Merriam, 2002; Servigny, 1981). The use of multiple data collection methods is an effective tool to enable the qualitative researcher to obtain rich data, and it also allows the collected data and the information that it represents to be more reliable, which helps
the researcher to obtain and interpret data that are closer to the reality of the participants (Merriam, 2002).

In this dissertation study, the data gathered from various sources (field notes, observations, audio/videotapes, informal interviews, and the collection of artifacts) allowed me to establish the triangulation of the data and served to establish validity in the study (Erickson, 1986) by revealing consistent features across the data. In my study exploring the preschool large group meeting, informal interviews with the teachers and peer debriefing also served in the role of member check, which also helps to build trustworthiness in the study. Member check refers to “taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them if the results are plausible” (Merriam, 1998, p.204). I used the interviews as opportunities to confirm my understanding of the classroom large group meeting with the teachers who are thoroughly knowledgeable about the children and classroom process. The processes of informal interviews and conversations with teachers provided an opportunity to confirm that what I saw in the classroom large group meeting process was consistent with what they observed or experienced in such interactions and group meeting situations. Also, I maintained peer debriefings (discussions with a colleague and the advisor) to ensure the effectiveness of the data collection and interpretation process through ongoing conversations. As another person who is not directly involved with the children and teachers of my study, the peer debriefers helped me in terms of re-examining my thinking and analyzing my role in the context. As soon as transcribing is begun, I assigned a pseudo name to each child and teacher among the participants and used these
pseudo names in the written field notes and transcriptions, so that even though I used peer debriefing as one method of building trustworthiness in the study, the participants' names and identities remained confidential.

Another element that contributes to increasing the trustworthiness of a study is providing an honest display of the findings and detailed description of the study and interpretations so that the reader will understand the study and context as clearly as possible. This is a significant aspect to consider since it deals with ethical issues in representing of other people’s lives and experience to the general public. It is important that researchers describe their data and data sources carefully because readers will judge the people who are studied in regard to the writings of the researcher. For this reason, the final presentation of the study has to communicate in a clear, truthful, and fair manner (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003; Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 2002). In this study, when I have provided descriptions of the classroom and their approaches, along with my interpretation, I have also tried to include the participants’ words or voices from collected data sources (such as quotes from interview or the actual document artifacts from the classroom) so that I could more fully and carefully represent the participants and the classroom that I studied to the readers, which I believe and hope helps to increase trustworthiness of the study.

**Analysis of data**

In the data analysis, by examining classroom interactions carefully, I was able to observe and understand the inner dynamics and nature of this preschool classroom
meeting events and meaning making processes more deeply and in more detail in terms of the ways the teachers and children engaged in and co-constructed meaning making within their classroom context. In addition, along with informal on-going conversations with the teachers, three one and a half hour interviews were conducted with the teachers during the data collection period, and the audio-tapes of interview data were transcribed to provide data representing the teachers’ thinking and reflection on their practices and classroom processes.

Procedures of data analysis

As an initial phase, I read and reread the written observation field notes on classroom processes and, through inductive analysis of the data, identified emerging themes or patterns which recurred across the data (Spradley, 1980). I also reviewed the video clip data of the large group meetings that were recorded during the actual data collection period and selected several segments that would reflect the main patterns that I had identified as typical daily interactions of the large group meeting events in this classroom (for research questions 1 and 2). For example, I identified several sub-events that in this classroom, comprised the typical pattern of Morning Meeting proceedings, which included coming to the rug, large group conversation, weather, calendar, and dismissal. Also, as I reviewed video data and field notes taken during the sub-event of large group conversation, I was able to identify four major patterns in the large group talk/conversation sub-event: 1) a context for an individual’s sharing of personal stories, news, or artifacts that they brought from home within the large group; 2) a context for
teacher’s announcements about upcoming events in the classroom; 3) a context for group meaning making on various child-initiated and teacher initiated topics through collaborative and extensive group conversation; and 4) a context for teacher-directed interaction on certain topics that the teacher chose to introduce to the children. The interaction segments that were transcribed and analyzed were selected from a number of large group meeting events and their interactions. Those selected segments were chosen as important data sources which represented the main elements and patterns of this classroom’s Morning Meeting event. For each sub-event, I selected one segment which would represent the main interaction of the sub-event. For the large group talk/conversation sub-event, I selected one interaction segment for each of the four patterns that I had identified from video clips and field notes to serve as representational data for the Morning Meeting event process in this classroom.

Along with presentation of the patterned ways of doing Morning Meeting that illustrated the typical of the daily large group meeting process in this classroom as described above, I also included some illustrative cases that that may not have appeared as often as the typical daily processes, but existed in this classroom to illustrate the flexible nature of the classroom. In answering research question 3 on socially constructed large group meeting events across the classroom experiences, as I looked through the entire body of data and examined the data of Morning Meeting time within the frame of the whole classroom context, I identified some incidents in which the large group interaction during Morning Meeting was extended into other contexts in the classroom. These newly identified data were not observed as frequently as the data
representing the typical pattern of the daily Morning Meeting routine. However, it seems important to include such nonrepresentational data, which definitely existed in this classroom, to illustrate a significant feature of the nature of this classroom: its flexibility. These illustrative case data allowed me as a researcher to gain a fuller understanding of the complexity of the classroom processes (Ellen, 1984; Mitchell, 1984), and especially of the role of the large group meeting events within the whole classroom frame. As Graesser et al. (2003) pointed out, “According to an alternative approach (sometimes called the qualitative approach), much can be learned about discourse from a detailed analysis of a single case, a small representative sample of cases, or a small nonrepresentative sample of cases (Mitchell, 1984). In presenting such illustrative cases, the researcher needs to provide the warrants for claims that these cases are truly illuminating from the standpoint of existing theory and research. They must also resist the temptation to overgeneralize…” (Graesser, Gernsbacher, & Goldman, 2003, p. 9). In my study, as I sought to understand the classroom as culture through ethnographic inquiry, along with data of patterned ways of acting and interacting within the large group meeting context, I also needed to include some case data for illustrative purposes (Mitchell, 1984; Ellen, 1984) to show the flexible nature of activities that evolved around the large group meeting time (which was sometimes extended to other contexts). These data also capture the nature of the large group meeting events in this classroom, which did not always proceed in one static way, but allowed for fluid and dynamic, same as the culture, which has elements of both “continuity” (reproduction of cultural practices) and “change” (to “modify and adapt those cultural practices”) (Bloome et al., 2005, p.52).
When ethnographers take an approach that defines ‘culture’ as verb (Heath & Street, 2008) and try to understand “what culture does” (Heath & Street, 2008, p.7) rather than only looking at what culture is, such an approach can “provide flexibility to capture the complexity of people’s lives” (Bloome et al., 2008, p.31).

The selected interaction segments during Morning Meeting interactions were transcribed for micro-level analysis in order to look more carefully and gain more in-depth understanding of interactions and meaning making constructed in the classroom meeting events. In microethnographic studies, researchers conduct micro-level analysis of specific interaction, events, or segments of activity through focusing on small units of interaction within a context (Bloome et al., 2005) for deeper analysis on those interactions or events. Such micro-level analysis allows researcher to carefully examine the children’s actions and reactions occurring within a classroom context and thus also allows “an exploration of the way language is used” (Bloome, Puro, & Theodorou, 1989, p. 269), “discourse-in-use” (Bloome & Clark, 2006) within a given situation.

1) Micro-level discourse analysis. I adopted a microethnographic approach to answer the research questions of this study concerning the nature of large group meetings in this preschool classroom and the meaning making do children and teachers engage in such processes. Micro-level discourse analyses were conducted on selected interaction segments from large group meeting events to explore the nature of the large group meeting events and social construction of meaning making during the large group time as the children and teachers acted and reacted to one another. I transcribed the selected segments of the video clips, which would reflect elements in this classroom, and analyzed
the ‘classroom discourse’ (children’s talk and teacher’s talk) during the large group meeting to examine the verbal interactions occurring between children and between teacher and children so that I could look closely at the social construction of meaning making in the classroom (Bloome et al, 2005).

Bloome et al. (2005) defined ‘event’ as follows: “For us, “event” (social event) is a theoretical construct. It is a heuristic for making an inquiry into how people create meaning through how they act and react to each other. Event is also a way to place emphasis on the dynamic and creative aspect of what people do and accomplish in interaction with each other” (p.5). In terms of understanding meaning created during classroom events, it is highly significant that the actual interactions be explored within those contexts, since “meaning and social significance are located in the action and reactions people take to each other, not abstracted or isolated psychological states. There can be no separation among meaning, significance, and action” (Bloome et al., 2005, p.7). In that sense, micro-level discourse analysis is a vital methodology that can be used in this study to place emphasis on classroom discourse and the interaction process, and which would allow the researcher to re-examine the events in greater depth in terms of the action and reaction of children and teachers during their classroom processes. “Both talk between teachers and learners and talk among learners have important roles to play” (Mercer, 2002, p.141) in group meaning making.

This attention to classroom talk between teacher and students or among students to understand the complex process and nature of classroom events has been greatly emphasized in the classroom interaction and discourse studies, such as Bloome (1993,
2006), Cazden (1986), Green and Wallat (1981), Heap (1985), Mehan (1979), O’Connor and Michaels (1993), Wells (1993), etc. These studies emphasized and looked closely at social construction in the classroom process and its meanings through examination of oral narratives of members of the classroom. In these classroom interaction studies, the researchers saw classroom processes as constructed by the cooperative interaction of teacher and students (Bloome, 1993; Gumperz, 1986). Micro-level analysis of specific interaction, events, or segments of activity within a context (Bloome et al., 2005) allows researchers to engage in careful examination of the complex process that is created between the social actions and interactions of teachers and children or among children, and what is constructed from participating in such actions and interactions (Green, Kantor, and Rogers, 1991).

In this study, from the data collected over a five month period, the interaction segments that were transcribed and analyzed were selected from a number of large group meeting events and their interactions, and chosen as important data sources to reflect elements of this classroom process and to illustrate ample social construction of meaning making through large group meeting interactions.

The transcripts were broken into message units, “the smallest unit of conversational meaning” (Bloome et al., 2005, p.19), following the study of Green & Wallat (1981), in which message units were identified “through participants’ use of contextualization cues” (i.e., use of pause, stress pattern, intonation patterns, change in volume, etc.) (Bloome et al., 2005, p.19). Interactional units, “a set of message units that are interactional related and connected” (Bloome et al., 2008, p.81) (e.g., question and
answer or teacher question-student response-teacher follow up comments, etc) were excerpted from the transcripts. The children’s and teacher’s actions and reactions to one another were analyzed on a message-by-message basis to understand what meaning making they constructed and how they engaged in such a process during their large group meeting events.

2) Intercontextuality. Intercontextuality is another main theoretical and methodological construct that I brought to this ethnographic study to answer the main research questions of revealing the complex nature of meaning making through the large group meeting events within and across the classroom experiences. I mentioned earlier in the discussion of data collection in methodology that, even though my focus was mainly on the large group meeting time, I also observed the daily processes of this classroom and the children’s interaction around the large group meeting events and during other routine times as well so that I would have a more holistic understanding of the large group meeting process in connection with the whole classroom culture frame. As I looked through the entire body of data and examined the data of Morning Meeting time within the frame of the whole classroom context, I observed some flexibility in the nature of this classroom in that at times the large group meeting events were extended to other contexts in the classroom.

The large group meeting interactions and their possible extension to other contexts has been previously examined in a few research studies. Gallas (1994) explored primary grade children’s sharing time and its extension to other forms of meaning making. Gallas (1994) mainly presented such possible connection between oral sharing
time and other forms of meaning making by presenting data from children’s art works, drawing, writing, science journals, etc. In my study, I have built on the main construct of “intercontextuality as social construction” (Bloome et al., 2005) as a methodology to analyze the actual interactions of the children and the teacher between Morning Meeting events and other contexts in terms of understanding possible connections that the children and teacher co-constructed through their interactions. This will add to the scope of current research studies of preschool large group meeting time and the children’s interactions and meaning making within and across their classroom contexts, especially in terms of presenting methodological analysis on intercontextual links using actual transcripts that document the interaction of different contexts (events). This analysis also allows the readers to see and understand that the preschool large group meeting context is not a static space: it proceeds in multiple forms and ways, and is constantly shaped and co-constructed by teacher and students. The members of the classroom (including the teacher) co-construct the complex nature of large group meaning making through their interactions. As the children and the teacher make the intercontextual links through their interaction, their active meaning making becomes richer and deeper because they have an opportunity for multiple forms of engagement using the various contexts and materials available to them, and active validation of the children’s contribution in the group process of intercontextuality which is socially constructed. This will be discussed further in the implications section of Ch.5.

The concept of “intercontextuality” can be defined as “part of the creation of any event involves the construction of relationships between the event and other events”
(Bloome et al., 2005, p.44). Described more simply, “intercontextuality” can be understood as ‘two or more contexts that are linked with one another.’ In this study, I have built on the main construct of “intercontextuality as social construction” (Bloome et al., 2005), which views the links/connections between contexts (events) as socially constructed through people’s interaction. Thus, such intercontextual connections “need to be interactionally proposed, acknowledged, and recognized, and they must have social significance” (Bloome et al., 2005, p.144). This construct leads researchers to examine and analyze the actual interactions among the children and the teachers, and thus allows the researcher to see whether the connections among events (contexts) were actually socially constructed, that is, whether those intercontextual connections were socially proposed, recognized, and acknowledged by the participants through their interaction and had social consequences in the classroom (Bloome et al., 2005). Bloome et al. (2005) pointed out that “the methodological demand, therefore, is to identify where, within an interaction, people are making connections … between and among the events” (p.144).

As I analyzed and examined intercontextual links between the large group meeting event and other extended contexts, I arranged the interactional units of transcript .3.3 in a table format so that I could specifically locate the children’s and teacher’s proposal, recognition, and acknowledgement of intercontextual connections through their interactions while I also analyzed the message units to understand the meaning making constructed by the children and the teacher within the large group meeting event. The social consequences of such socially constructed intercontextual links are described in my analysis and interpretation in Chapter 4.
The children’s nonverbal hands-on explorations and interactions in extended contexts (e.g., sensory table) have also been included as data illustrating the children’s meaning making in various multiple ways in the classroom. Such data, especially when the data consisted mainly of the children’s non-verbal hands-on process of meaning making rather than a verbal process, are presented as written descriptions of observed action and interaction among the children along with photographs to elucidate the children’s specific hands-on exploration using objects. Young children express their ideas and create meaning not only verbally but also through their actions and sometimes with various objects around them. When we understand ‘language’ in broad definition, language can be understood as something through which people make meaning, which can include “nonverbal language, prosody, pictorial forms, and the symbolic manipulation of materials” (Bloome et al., 2008, p.10). As I looked closely at such observational data, I could also see that some children were using the materials and their hands-on processes to continue to explore or present ideas that were discussed in the previous events; that is, there was some juxtaposition between their non-verbal representation/action during the hands-on event and their group talk/meaning making from previous events. Thus, in this study, as I mainly examined transcripts of the children’s and teacher’s verbal interaction and meaning making during large group meeting events, I also included data that recorded the children’s various forms of meaning making in their classroom so that I would have a fuller understanding.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to understand the everyday large group meeting interactions in the preschool classroom and its importance to preschool children by exploring what meanings children and teachers make within and across their everyday large group meetings and classroom experiences. In the role of ethnographic researcher in one preschool classroom, I collected and analyzed data related to this purpose of the study from a sociocultural theoretical framework. In this chapter, I will present the findings of the study as identified from the data I have collected.

The study findings are presented in response to the following four research questions, which guided the study:

1. What is the nature of the large group meetings within the socially constructed daily life of a preschool classroom?

2. What meaning making do the children and teachers engage in during their large group meeting event? How do they engage and act and react to one another in their group interaction and meaning making process?

3. What are the significant functions of such socially constructed large group meeting events within and across the children’s classroom?
experiences?

4. What are the multiple roles of teachers and children, and how do their roles and interactions create opportunities for building a learning community and meaningful process within the preschool classroom context?

The findings are structured in terms of these four research questions, which create the four sections of this chapter. However, even though I will discuss the findings for each research question individually for the sake of clarity, these findings and data are interrelated. Discussion of the findings related to the research questions 2, 3, and 4 concerning what meaning the children and teacher make, and how they engage in meaning making processes within their large group time also provides the interrelated findings that answer research question 1, “What is the nature of the large group meetings within the socially constructed daily life of a preschool classroom?”

In the first section, in response to research question 1 asking the nature of large group time in this preschool classroom, I present an overall description of the large group meeting time (Morning Meeting) in this classroom, including its general features and procedures. In the second, third, and fourth sections, micro-level analyses are conducted on selected interaction segments from large group meeting events for deeper analysis on those interactions and meaning making processes. I also build upon the construct of intercontextuality as social construction (Bloome et al., 2005) as main methodology to analyze and understand the large group meeting time within and across classroom
experiences in the discussion of research question 3. The complex, in-depth, and rich nature of the large group meeting and its meaning making can be explored through the findings of research questions 2, 3, and 4.
RESEARCH QUESTION #1: What is the nature of the large group meetings within the socially constructed daily life of a preschool classroom?

In this section, I will provide a description of the nature of the large group meeting in the preschool classroom that I selected as the research site for the study. In chapter three, I mentioned the large group time briefly in my overview of the classroom daily schedule and routines. There were two types of classroom events that proceeded as large group contexts in this classroom’s daily routines: one was *Morning Meeting*; the other was *Story Time*. The official classroom large group time for their group communication was mainly contained within the Morning Meeting context. It was a time when all the children and teachers sat in a circle on the carpet area and engaged in large group conversation and interactions. On the other hand, Story Time was a context for the teacher to read one or two books to the children before they moved on to their free-choice activity and play time and was generally not intended to serve the purpose of fostering group communication.

In this dissertation study, I will focus on examining *Morning Meeting*, the official large group meeting time in this classroom, to explore the children and teachers’ active interaction and communication during their large group meeting context. However, as mentioned in Ch.3, in my data collection period, I also observed the daily processes in this classroom and the children’s interaction during other routine times, including Story Time and other activity and play times, so that I could gain a more holistic understanding of the large group meeting process in connection with the whole classroom frame.
In this first section, I will provide the overall description of the classroom’s large group meeting time, Morning Meeting. I will present detailed description of its general features and process, thus to provide contextual idea of what those daily large group meeting times usually look like in this classroom.

**Morning Meeting**

In the studies of Kantor et al. (1989; 1992), the preschool large group meeting time was identified not as a single unitary event, but rather as consisting of a series of sub-events that were “functionally different” but “socially coordinated” (1989, p.437) and worked together within the large group meeting context. In the preschool classroom that I selected for the research site, the official large group time, Morning Meeting, consisted of several sub-events (sub-activities). Specifically, the Morning Meeting consisted of five sub-events: coming to the rug, large group conversation/talk, calendar, weather, and dismissal (transition to go line up for outdoor play time) (See Figure 4.1). Identifying these sub-events within the Morning Meeting event provided me an opportunity to understand this classroom’s large group time (Morning Meeting) more fully and to become aware of more details of its features and processes.
I collected the data from mid March to the end of August, which was about the end of their academic year. The children were familiar with their Morning Meeting and got used to knowing what to do and how to engage in each sub-event of Morning Meeting. As I looked through specific sub-events within Morning Meeting time, rather than examining Morning Meeting as a unitary event, I could see the complex nature of large group meeting time in this classroom.

Among the five sub-events, the sub-events of ‘coming to the rug’, ‘calendar’, ‘weather’, and ‘dismissal’ had somewhat more ritual like characteristics, in that, I could observe one main pattern of a recurring participation format/structure within these sub-events. Namely, such sub-events proceeded in generally similar steps and things to do everyday in the Morning Meeting process. On the other hand, the sub-event of ‘large group conversation/talk’ had characteristics that made it somewhat different from the other sub-events. During the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event, as the children
and the teacher engaged in their group conversation, various types of group interaction
could be identified rather than the one main pattern of doing the ‘large group
conversation/talk’ sub-event. Active construction of meaning making through their
group conversation during this sub-event did not necessarily proceed by following one
type of group interaction: I observed more than one way to do the ‘large group
conversation/talk’ sub-event based on the various needs and purposes of the children and
the teacher. The ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event had multiple purposes and
functions in this classroom, which points to this classroom’s active use of their large
group conversation during Morning Meeting for various purposes. Such a feature
allowed this classroom’s Morning Meeting routine to proceed in not one fixed way of
doing it even though the Morning Meeting had some traditional/typical ritual like sub-
events, like calendar and weather. All of these sub-activities during the Morning Meeting
create, work together, and present the nature of the large group meeting time (Morning
Meeting) in this classroom context. In the following section, I will describe each of the
sub-events that comprise the Morning Meeting thus to give a full picture.

Coming to the rug

Around 8:50am, the teacher asks one child, who has been assigned as ‘light helper’
of the day to give the other children the “5 more minutes to clean up” call by turning off
the classroom lights. By this time, most of the children have usually arrived in the
classroom and are engaging in free play. After five minutes, with the teacher’s help, the
light helper gives a clean up call to the classroom by turning off the classroom lights
again, saying “clean up time!” As the clean up call is given, one of the teachers plays a marching band song on the CD player, and the children start to clean up the toys and materials that they have been playing with during their free play time and get ready for Morning Meeting.

As the children engage in the clean up process, the teacher puts “seat markers” around the circle on the carpet area where the everyday Morning Meeting occurs. These “seat markers” are made of laminated paper, and each seat marker has the name of one of the children written on it in the child’s own handwriting. During the clean up time, as the carpet area is cleaned up, one of the teachers places these “seat markers” in a circle on the carpet. The clean up CD song goes on as the children finish the clean up, and once the clean up is done, the children gather on the carpet area; each child recognizes his/her own seat marker on the floor and sits on it to get ready for the Morning Meeting. The teachers sit with the children as a part of the circle on the carpet.

The description above illustrates the typical process of the ‘coming to the rug’ sub-event during Morning Meeting in this classroom. This sub-event serves as a preparation phase of getting ready for the Morning Meeting time and transitioning from their free-play time to Morning Meeting time with the clean up routine. There were a number of ritual-like characteristics during this ‘coming to the rug’ sub-event: when clean-up call has been given, the teacher plays a marching band song on the CD player as a clean up song; the children engage in cleaning up their play materials, especially those on carpet area, so that the space (carpet area) is ready for the Morning Meeting; the teacher puts “seat markers” around in a circle on the carpet area; each child sits on his/her
own seat marker to get ready for the Morning Meeting; and the teacher also sits with the children as part of the circle.

Along with the patterned procedures that the children and the teacher have constructed over time, there was also some teacher control noticeable in the children’s seating. Seating for Morning Meeting was not freely determined by the children. Unlike the Story Time, when the children sat on any spaces they wanted to on the carpet area to listen to the teacher reading a book, during the Morning Meeting time, the seating arrangement was decided on by the teacher. The teacher puts the seat markers of each child on the carpet area every day, and the seating arrangement varies slightly based on the children’s attendance each day as well as the teacher’s decision that it might be better for some children to sit apart rather than right next to each other for the group interaction during Morning Meeting. As soon as the children and the teacher are gathered on the carpet area and the children are sitting on their seat markers, the next sub-event of Morning Meeting, the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event, is ready to start.

*Large group conversation/talk*

The second sub-event of ‘large group conversation/talk’ is an important feature in Morning Meeting which provides an opportunity for the children and teachers to engage in group communication. It is a time for the children and the teachers to converse with one another on various topics within their Morning Meeting context. It is also a time for them to talk with and listen to one another, namely, a place for talking about self as well as talking and thinking together about group topics. The topics are pretty much open, and
are usually about things around their home and school lives, which includes their personal experiences as well as things that have happened around their classroom. Sometimes the teacher brings in certain topics that she has chosen to share and discuss with the children as a part of the classroom curriculum.

This sub-event usually lasts for an average of 15-20 minutes of group interaction within the entire Morning Meeting time, which is 25-30 minutes. However, this varies depending on the flow of the children’s interaction each day as well as occasional changes in the classroom schedule (i.e., water day / picture taking day, going to the library, etc). Thus, this ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event is sometimes shorter if the class needs to accommodate a change in the classroom schedule (e.g., early outdoor play time due to another classroom’s water day) or if they do not have many things to share or talk about. And sometimes the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event is longer when the children have many things to share or the group has brought up interesting topics which lead to the children’s active interaction. Since this classroom has a set time for going to the outdoor play area which they share with other classrooms, sometimes when the group conversation is longer, then they spend a shorter time for the next sub-events, calendar and weather.

As I examined and analyzed the data from the ‘large group conversation /talk’ sub-event during Morning Meeting over the five months of data collection, I realized that this classroom did not have just one type of interaction within this sub-event. I was able to identify multiple and diverse types of group interaction within the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event which illustrate this classroom’s active use of their large
group conversation during the Morning Meeting for various purposes. Through analysis of the data, four different types/purposes of interaction could be identified. The ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event in this classroom was: 1) a context for individual’s sharing on personal stories, news, and artifacts that they brought from home within the large group; 2) a context for teacher’s announcements about upcoming events to the group in the classroom; 3) a context for group meaning making on various child-initiated and teacher initiated topics through collaborative and extensive group conversation; and 4) a context for teacher-directed interaction on certain topics that the teacher chose to introduce to the children. In response to research question 2, in order to understand what meaning making the children and the teacher engaged in during their large group time and how they engaged in such meaning making processes, I will examine the children’s interaction during this ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event in more depth. I will examine various types of their group interaction through specific data and micro-level analysis to understand their actions and reactions during the interaction in this sub-event.

Calendar & Weather

Calendar. The next sub-event is the ‘calendar’. As the Morning Meeting moved toward the end, the teacher and children went over the calendar and weather board together as a part of their daily morning routine within Morning Meeting context. In this classroom, calendar and weather cards were attached to the front wall of the carpet area where the morning meeting occurred every day.
The calendar consisted of number cards (1~31) which were easily attached to the calendar board. There were also picture cards for special days like birthday, a classroom swim day, special lunch day, etc, and the teacher placed those picture cards on the calendar for those days so that the children could visually and easily identify certain special days for the classroom. Adjacent to the calendar board on the wall was the job chart; on the job chart, the daily job helpers (light helper, door holder, calendar helper, weather helper, pet helper) were assigned with pictures of the individual children’s faces. The teacher placed the individual children’s pictures on the job chart before starting the morning meeting every day.

[Figure 4.2] Calendar sub-event

During calendar time, the teacher asked the children who the calendar helper was, and the children recognized the person by referencing the job chart. The calendar helper came to the front and guided the calendar process (placing the new number for the day on
the calendar) with the assistance of the teacher and other children. The following is a
transcript of the calendar process for one day, which will illustrate how this sub-event
(calendar time) usually proceeded in this classroom.

[Transcript 4.1] Interaction during the calendar sub-event

1 Teacher (Jully): Who is the calendar helper today?
2 Children: Andy (by looking at the job chart)
   (Andy comes up to the front where the calendar is attached to the wall and
   The teacher stands near Andy)
3 Teacher (Jully): Yesterday was the 26 th (indicating the number card attached
   to the calendar the previous day).
4 What number would be next?
5 Andy: (thinking)
6 Teacher (Jully): What comes next to 26?
7 Do you want to count?
8 Andy: Yes
9 One, two, three, …..(counting while pointing to each number card that
   is on the calendar. The other children also count together with
   Andy), twenty-five, twenty-six, twenty-seven.
10 Teacher (Jully): Twenty-seven. Today is the 27 th.
   (Andy places number card 27 on the calendar)
11 Teacher (Jully): Yesterday was Thursday (pointing to yesterday’s work)
12 What is today? Do you want to sing a song?
13 Andy: Yeah.
   (Andy and the children sing the ‘days of the week’ song together)
There is Sunday, there is Monday, there is Tuesday, ~, there is Thursday, there is Friday.

Teacher (Jully): Yesterday was Thursday.

Today is?

Andy (and other children): Friday!

In transcript 4.1 above, the teacher guides the calendar process by asking questions to the child who has been assigned as calendar helper for the day. The calendar helper takes the lead in counting and placing the new card for the day on the calendar. The other children also participate and collaborate in counting numbers together and singing the ‘days of the week’ song together as they proceed with the calendar work. Interestingly, in line 9 and line 14, I could see some ritual aspects in this classroom’s ‘calendar’ sub-event. In line 9, when the children get stuck in finding the right number for the day, the children are accustomed to counting from 1 on the calendar as the calendar helper points to each number on the calendar, and the calendar helper and the other children also visually and orally as they count together with their eyes and mouths. In line 14, the ‘days of the week’ song is a helpful reference for the children in this classroom as they try to figure out what day today is. As they verbally sing out the ‘days of the week’ song which they are already familiar with (“There is Sunday, there is Monday, there is Tuesday, ~, there is Thursday, there is Friday”, line 14), this process helps them figure out what day comes next. In their usual calendar process, I could see some patterns which showed that the children and the teacher had a shared understanding
of how to proceed with their daily routine in a certain way which they had constructed over time (i.e., counting from 1; singing the ‘days of the week’ song’, etc.).

Even though the basic process followed the above pattern, this does not necessarily mean that the process (sub-event) was always done in the same way. In this classroom, the calendar was also a helpful tool that aided the children in recognizing what would be upcoming events in the classroom. At the beginning of each month, the teacher placed picture cards on the calendar for certain special days, like water day, special lunch day, birthdays, etc., so that the children would notice visually that those special days were coming up. The children often enjoyed asking how many days were left before those special days, as they noticed the picture cards on the calendar. Along with the daily routine of finding the appropriate number for the day, the calendar was used actively and extended to relate to their various classroom experiences (i.e., “how many days left before my birthday party? Let’s count”, “We’ll have swim day this Thursday and we’ll have a special lunch”).

Weather. Right after the ‘calendar’ sub-event, it is time for the ‘weather’ sub-event. Talking about the weather was another important routine during the Morning Meeting in this classroom. This usually took place along with the calendar work. At this time, the weather helper would go up to the front and talk about the day’s weather based on what he/she had seen that morning, and place the corresponding weather picture cards (cold, warm, hot, snowy, cloudy, rainy, sunny) on the weather board.
Transcript 4.2 below provides an example in which the typical process of this weather sub-event in the Morning Meeting can be easily seen.

**[Transcript 4.2] – George’s interaction during the ‘weather’ sub-event**

1. Teacher (Jully): Who is the weather helper?
2. Children: George! *(looking at the picture on job chart)*
3. Teacher (Jully): George, what’s the weather like outside today?
4. George: Cold.
5. Teacher (Jully): George is telling us it was a little bit cold.
6. George: I also saw clouds!
7. Teacher (Jully): Okay, it’s cold and cloudy outside today.

*(George places the ‘cold’ and ‘cloudy’ weather cards on the board)*
As the teacher asks who today’s weather helper is, the children recognize the child by looking at the picture on the classroom job chart. During the ‘weather’ sub-event, the child who has been recognized as the weather helper for the day shares his/her observations on today’s weather when he/she was on the way to the school that morning. In transcript 4.2, George shared what the weather felt like (“cold”, line 4) and looked like (“I also saw clouds!” line 6) with the other children. He used his observation as a source to decide what picture cards to put on the weather board. The teacher validated what George decided to put up for the weather.

The children also sometimes used various sources other than their direct observation of the weather during the ‘weather’ sub-event. In transcript 4.3 below, Katie put up picture cards for the weather which indicated the current weather as well as the weather expected later, which shows her understanding of weather changes.

[Transcript 4.3] – Katie’s interaction during the ‘weather’ sub-event

1  Teacher (Jully): Katie, you were the weather helper today.

2  (Katie goes to the weather board and selects two weather picture cards, sunny and rainy)

3  Teacher (Jully): (to the class) Now, do you see what Katie put up?

4  (to Katie) Tell your friends why you put those two things up.

5  Why do you think that’s a good idea today?

6  Katie: Because it’s raining and the sun will be up (raising arm to show sun coming up).

7  Teacher (Jully): Maybe you watched the news today.

8  You’re right.

9  I heard it’s going to be a sunny kind of day today,
but there could be chances of what?

Children (and Katie): A little rain.

Teacher (Jully): Yeah.

Bob: A little bit of rain and a little bit of thunder!

Teacher: Yeah, that seems to be happening a lot.

As the teacher called Katie’s name as the weather helper, Katie seemed very familiar with this sub-event procedure, knowing what to do and how to proceed without any teacher’s assistance for the procedure. Katie put up two picture cards that she thought of as an appropriate description for the day’s weather, which were ‘sunny’ and ‘rainy’ (line 2). In Katie’s answer to the teacher’s question on why she chose those cards for the weather, it is clear that Katie was not only talking about the current weather outside but also telling about what the weather would be later (“Because it’s raining and the sun will be up,” line 6). The teacher validated Katie’s idea, suggesting that she might have gotten this information from [weather] news with additional elaboration. During the main procedure of the ‘weather’ sub-event, the children followed ritual-like activity which they had constructed over time: identifying who the weather helper was; and putting up picture cards that described the day’s weather. In this process, the children chose the picture cards based on their direct observation of the weather or sometimes other sources, like TV news. As in the calendar sub-event, even though one child came up to the front and proceeded with the ‘weather’ sub-event routine, the other children were also engaged in the sub-event process by their interaction. In line 13, Bob voiced
his engagement in this sub-event by adding to Katie’s and other children’s comments that they would have rain later in the day (“A little bit of rain and a little bit of thunder!”), and the teacher validated Bob’s contribution.

Finding out and talking about the weather was an important routine and process for the children in the classroom because the weather determined whether they could go outside or would go downstairs for outdoor play time instead. If it was rainy or too hot to go outside, the children had to go to the gym downstairs instead of to the playground outside; or sometimes a special routine once every two weeks, like going to the library or having lunch at the park, would have to be cancelled because of bad weather. In transcript 1.4 below, the children also showed their understanding of the classroom schedule as they engaged in the ‘weather’ sub-event.

[Transcript 4.4] – Talking about the weather and the classroom schedule

1  Nick: We don’t go to the park today because it is raining.
2  Teacher (Pam): Yeah.
3  Children: Me, too.
4  Tom: It was still raining when I came in
5  Teacher (Pam): Even if it wasn’t raining, the ground would have been
6  very, very wet,
7  we wouldn’t have been able to play.
8  It would have been wet to sit on the ground xxxxx.
9  Jack: Now we can’t play outside.
10 Teacher (Pam): No, we can’t play outside either.
Andy: And we’ll have to go downstairs to play.

Teacher (Pam): Yeah, we probably won’t be able to play outside at all today because of the rain and because it’s supposed to be very hot after the rain is all gone.

Jack: We can’t do xxx?

Teacher (Pam): Then it’s supposed to be cooler I think tomorrow.

In interaction in transcript 4.4 above, the children’s understanding of their classroom rules and routines, which they had constructed over time though their classroom experiences, was evident. As they talked about the weather during the ‘weather’ sub-event (i.e., “It was still raining when I came in”, Tom, line 5), several children indicated their understanding of changes in classroom process and routine due to the weather. Nick pointed out that they could not go to the special event that had been planned for that day (“We don’t go to park today because it is raining,” line 1). Jack said there might be some change in their daily routine for outdoor time (“Now, we can’t go outside,” line 10). Andy added to Jack’s observation that the class would have a different choice for their outdoor time (“And we’ll have to go downstairs to play,” line 12). All of these show that the ‘weather’ sub-event during Morning Meeting was closely connected to the children’s classroom experiences, and the children indicated their understanding of such a connection through their interaction.
Dismissal (transition to go line up for outdoor play time)

Once the ‘weather’ sub-event in Morning Meeting was done, the teacher dismissed the children from the Morning Meeting context. This ‘dismissal’ sub-event was actually a transition that the children moved to line up for outdoor play time. When the children were dismissed from the Morning Meeting, they were ready to go outside for their outdoor play time. The children went to the bathroom and lined up at the door to go outside.

The dismissal process was led by the teacher, who usually asked each child (or group of children) a simple question to answer or respond to; each child answered the teacher’s question and then joined the line at the classroom door to go outside for outdoor play time. Those teacher’s questions or requests that dismissed the children from morning meeting changed on a daily basis and were wide-ranging, generally based on the teacher’s decision. Some typical examples are:

Teacher: If you are wearing stripes today, go get into line for going outside.

(The children look at and identify their clothing pattern, and those who have stripes on their clothing leave the carpet area where the morning meeting occurs)

The teacher continues giving similar dismissal requests until all of the children are gone (e.g., “If you are wearing long sleeves, go get into line for going outside” “If you are wearing shoes with laces, …” etc.).

Sometimes, the teacher asks each child more specific questions to answer. Those dismissal questions might be simple open-ended answer questions (e.g., “What did you
do this weekend?”). Transcript 4.5 provides an example of the typical process of this ‘dismissal’ sub-event.

[Transcript 4.5] Interaction during the ‘dismissal’ sub-event

1 Teacher (Jully): John, what did you do this weekend?
2 John: Swimming *(leaves the group as he answers)*
3 Teacher (Jully): Katie, what did you do this weekend?
4 Katie: Eat out with mommy *(leaves the group as she answers)*

*The teacher continues asking each child the same question until the entire group is dismissed.*

Or, sometimes the teacher asks each child a more specific question that requires a specific answer (e.g., “What is the first letter of your name?”). One day when the teacher asked each child the first letter of his/her name, the teacher encouraged the children to look at their own Morning Meeting seat marker, on which the child’s name was written, so that they could visually recognize the first letter of their name.

As seen in these examples from the collected observation data, the dismissal process (transition to go line up for outdoor play time) was led and structured by the teacher. The kinds of questions or requests from the teacher, the answer to which allowed the children to line up at the door, were changed on a daily basis and chosen by the teacher. Even though the teacher chose/used different and diverse dismissal questions/requests every day, a consistent routine-like format and process (teacher asks/requests, student answers/responds--then, the student goes to the door for line up) was observed and noticeable.

102
Summary

In this section, I have provided a description of the nature of the large group meeting in the preschool classroom that I selected as the research site for the study. In this preschool classroom, the Morning Meeting consists of several sub-events (sub-activities): coming to the rug, large group talk/conversation, calendar, weather, and dismissal. Among the five sub-events, the sub-events of ‘coming to the rug’, ‘calendar’, ‘weather’, and ‘dismissal’ had more ritual-like characteristics, whereas in the sub-event of ‘large group conversation/talk’ there were various types of group interaction, which led to dynamic and diverse meaning making through this sub-event. All of these sub-events during the Morning Meeting worked together to create and thus present the nature of the large group meeting time in this classroom context, in which the large group time did not proceed in one fixed way but was constantly evolving and a significant context for active meaning making through the group interaction of the participants.

In the next section, I will look more closely at the “large group talk/conversation” sub-event and explore the meaning making the children and teachers actually engaged in during their large group meeting event, Morning Meeting, through their group interactions.
RESEARCH QUESTION #2: What meaning making do the children and teachers engage in during their large group meeting event? How do they engage and act and react to one another in their group interaction and meaning making process?

Large group meeting time is often defined as the official group time for the children to create their own talk, share their ideas and stories within the large group context, and engage in extended group discourse (Cazden, 2001, 2003; Gallas, 1994; Green, Kantor, and Rogers, 1991). As described in the findings of research question #1, in this classroom, the Morning Meeting event consisted of five sub-events (sub-activities). Among those sub-events, the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event was a time for the children and the teachers to converse with one another on various topics around them. It was a time provided for the children to talk about self as well as to engage in group conversation within the Morning Meeting context. In this section, I will re-visit and examine in more depth the ‘large group talk/conversation’ sub-event, the context in which the children and teacher’s active group interaction was mainly observed during the Morning Meeting process in this classroom.

As discussed briefly in the findings for the research question 1, in this classroom, there was not just one type of interaction identified within the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event. The ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event actually had multiple and diverse types of group interaction, which illustrates this classroom’s active use of this sub-event during the Morning Meeting for various purposes. The multiple and diverse types of group interaction during the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event also show that there was not one fixed way of doing the large group talk in this classroom:
rather they make it possible to see the complex and multiple layers of discourse and nature in this classroom’s large group time (See Figure 4.2).

Through analysis of the data, I identified four different types/purposes of interaction in the ‘large group conversation /talk’ sub-event in this classroom: 1) a context for individuals’ sharing on personal stories, news, and artifacts that they brought from home within the large group; 2) a context for teacher’s announcements on upcoming events to the group in the classroom; 3) a context for group meaning making on various child-initiated and teacher initiated topics through collaborative and extensive group conversation; 4) and a context for teacher-directed interaction on certain topics that the teacher chose to introduce to the children.

In this section, for the findings of the research question 2, I will examine each of these four types/purposes of interaction identified within the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event. In order to fulfill the intent of research question #2 of exploring and understanding “what meaning making the children and teachers construct” and “how they engage in such meaning making processes” during their large group time, micro-level analyses are conducted on interaction segments from the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event during the Morning Meeting events.
[Figure 4.4] The multiple ways of doing/engaging in large group conversation in the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event (- active use of this ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event for diverse purposes)
1) Context for individual sharing

In this classroom, the ‘large group conversation/talk sub-event’ during Morning Meeting time is often a context for the children to share their personal stories, news, or artifacts that they brought from home with other children within the large group context. Incidents in the individual children’s personal and home life was shared and heard within this large group context.

This kind of verbal sharing of the individual child within large group contexts is often referred to as “sharing time,” and ‘sharing time” has been studied by several researchers, such as Cazden (2001), Gallas (1992), and Michaels (1981, 1985), who sought to understand its features as well as the group interactions during the sharing time process. It has been described as a context where the children come to the classroom with something to talk about, self-chosen topics which are often related to their personal/home life or show and tell about an object brought from home (Cazden, 2001; Michaels, 1981, 1986).

In this classroom, the individual children brought items or news that they wanted to share with the other children in their large group context, and this most commonly occurred during the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event during the Morning Meeting context. Such individual child’s sharing was often observable, especially when the children came back from a family vacation or travels; the child shared what he/she had done and seen during the vacation along with sharing some relevant objects from the vacation (e.g., seashells from a vacation at the beach; lava rocks from a vacation in Hawaii, etc.). The children also used this sub-event of ‘large group conversation /talk’
during Morning Meeting as a context for publicly sharing personal news or telling about special things that they had done or that had happened to them, such as going to the circus, getting stitches taken out at the hospital, visiting a new school (Kindergarten), etc. The teachers themselves sometimes became participants in such sharing; the teachers sometimes shared about things that happened in their personal/home life or brought things back from vacation to share with the children.

The floor was held by the children with the facilitation of the teacher. In this classroom, when children have special news they want to share or bring something they want to show at the Morning Meeting, the children tend to talk to the teacher about it as soon as they arrive at school in the morning. This conversation usually also includes the children’s parents, who come into the classroom to drop the children off and greet the teacher. Thus, before the actual Morning Meeting, the teacher tends to know in advance which children have something to share at the Morning Meeting. During the sub-event of large group conversation/talk, the teacher facilitates the group process so that those children who want to share have the floor and an opportunity to share during the Morning Meeting. Sometimes the child him/herself initiates the verbal sharing by raising a hand at the beginning of Morning Meeting to show that they have something to share during the Morning Meeting.

In transcript 4.6 below, during the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event in the Morning Meeting process, Jenny shared with the other children about a bruise that she had gotten the previous day. She got the floor by raising her hand at the beginning of this sub-event, and the teacher facilitated and assisted in the process of Jenny’s sharing.
on her bruise within the large group context. In this transcript, I analyzed and interpreted how the children used their large group time (Morning Meeting) as a context for sharing about themselves and how this kind of group interaction proceeded in this classroom.

**[Transcript 4.6] Jenny’s sharing about her elbow**

1 Teacher (Jully): Jenny had something she wanted to share with her friends,
2 so Katie and Andy, give Jenny some respect, please.
3  
4 (to Jenny) What did you want to tell your friends?
5  
6 Jenny: (holds up her arm)
7 Teacher (Jully): (to class) Oh, do you see what’s on her elbow?
8  
9 Jenny: xxxx not hurting right now
10  
11 Teacher (Jully): Well, that’s good.
12 What happened to your elbow?
13 Jenny: When I was going home, xxx I tripped on a rock this big *(showing size)*
14 and then bleeding.
15 Teacher (Jully): The rock was bleeding?
16  
17 Jenny: No, I was! *(laughing)*.
18  
19 Teacher (Jully): You were.
20  
21 Children: *(laughing)*
22  
23 Bob: A rock doesn’t bleed.
24  
25 Teacher (Jully): And then who helped, fixed you up?
26 Who helped your elbow?
27  
28 Jenny: Mommy.
29  
30 Teacher (Jully): Mommy.
31  
32 Eric: Or Daddy? xxxxxxx
Teacher (Jully): So she wanted to tell you to be careful

(to boys who are talking to each other) Friend, she’s not done yet.

(to Jenny) What did you want your friends to know about your elbow?

Jenny: Can you help me when we play xxxxxx (speaking very softly)

Teacher (Jully): Eric, did you hear it?

(to Jenny) I don’t think they heard you.

(to Jenny) Can you say it again?

Jenny: Can you play with me gentle down stairways?

Teacher (Jully): She wants you to be careful with her elbow

and maybe not run with her downstairs

so she could hurt her elbow again.

In transcript 4.6, Jenny’s sharing about a bruise that she got a day before was a self-chosen topic that was special news for her that she wanted to share with the other children. She chose this large group context as a way for her to talk publicly about herself and things that happened to her with other children. She raised her hand to get the floor for an opportunity to talk, and the teacher validated Jenny’s sharing about herself by assisting in the process of Jenny’s verbal sharing on her bruise within the large group context.

As Jenny gained the floor to talk in the large group talk/conversation sub-event, she initiated her sharing by showing her bruise to the other children in the large group meeting context. Jenny’s such non-verbal behavior was her expressed intention that she wanted to and was going to share about the bruise that she had gotten the previous day,
which was the main reason (purpose) she wanted a turn for sharing in the large group meeting context. As Jenny talked about her bruise, she showed her arm (line 4); described its current state (line 6); and gave a verbal description of what actually happened (“When I was going home, xxx I tripped on a rock this big and then it was bleeding,” lines 9-10). She also told the children that she wanted the other children to be gentle with her elbow when they played downstairs, where many children engaged in active physical play in their indoor gym (line 24; line 28). In this process, the teacher facilitated Jenny’s verbal sharing by asking questions so that Jenny could fully deliver the story about her bruise that she wanted to tell the children (i.e., “what did you want to tell your friends? (line 3); “what happened to your elbow?” (line 8); “The rock was bleeding?” (line 11); “Who helped your elbow?” (line 17); “what did you want your friends to know about your elbow?” (line 23)).

The teacher also assisted Jenny in getting the floor within the large group context. The teacher gathered the children’s attention at the beginning before Jenny’s sharing (lines 1-2), and during the actual sharing process, she made statements to the group that assisted Jenny in continuing to hold the floor for her sharing as well as making sure that the other children were listening to Jenny’s sharing: “Friends, she’s not done yet” (line 23); “Eric, did you hear it?” (line 25). The teacher also provided elaboration on Jenny’s words to the group so that Jenny’s verbal sharing about herself (her bruise) was clear to the other children: “She wants you to be careful with her elbow and maybe not run with her downstairs so she could hurt her elbow again” (lines 29-31).
In this classroom, the ‘large group conversation/talk sub-event’ during Morning Meeting time was a context for the individual children to share their personal stories, news, or artifacts that they brought from home with other children within their large group context. The individual children’s personal and home life was shared through the children’s self-chosen topics that were special news that they wanted to share with the other children. During the process, the teacher took the facilitator’s role to assist the individual child’s public sharing on what he/she intended to say or talk about with the other children within the large group context.

2) Context for Teacher’s announcement

In this classroom, the ‘large group conversation/talk sub-event’ during Morning Meeting time was also a context for the teacher to give large group announcement to the children within their large group context. The teacher’s announcements were usually related to the classroom or upcoming events at the school (e.g., water day, picture day), special plans for the day (e.g., having a special lunch with parents, etc), or sometimes about changes in the classroom schedule (e.g., going to library and thus having a short Morning Meeting, etc). Unlike the earlier type of interaction discussed, where individual sharing in the Morning Meeting context occurred with; in this form of interaction, the teacher’s announcement, the teacher was the main speaker who was telling about something or was giving information to the children.
[Transcript 4.7] Teacher’s announcement on the day’s special event

1  Teacher (Jully):  When your daddies come,
2       we’re going to have to kind of get up today quickly,
3       and take blankies off our cots quickly,
4       because daddies will be coming at 3:30,
5       and I already made,
6       we’re going to have lemonade and chocolate chip cookies.
7  Jenny:  I like lemonade!
8  Teacher:  I already made the lemonade.
9  Katie:  I don’t like lemonade.
10 Teacher:  (to Katie) Oh, well, then you can have water.
11       (to class) And then you can give your daddies
12       their gifts and your cards you made for them
13  Eric:  And the pictures we drawed
14  Teacher:  and the pictures,
15       and we’re going to make a banner for them today that we can
       hang up

In this classroom, since many of the children’s parents work in the same building
where the childcare center is located, there are occasionally special events with the
parents in the classroom, especially some days like Mother’s Day and Father’s Day. The
day represented in the transcript was during the week before Father’s Day, and a special
event had been arranged; the children would have a special snack with their fathers in the
afternoon. The children were aware of this special event because it was one of the school
events that they had had before and because they had been preparing some pictures and cards for their fathers during their free-choice activity and play time.

In transcript 4.7, during the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event in Morning Meeting, the teacher was giving a large group announcement on the special event which would be held later in the afternoon. The teacher gave specific information about what they would do when the children’s daddies come for the special snack: the daddies would come around 3:30, and thus the children might need to get up and put their blankies/cots away more quickly than usual at naptime (lines 2-3); and then they would have some lemonade and cookies (lines 5-6) for the snack. The teacher gave some ideas for what they would do with the fathers: give them cards and gifts (lines 11-12); make a banner for them before they came (line 15). Eric added on to the teacher’s explanation of what they would do with their fathers, saying ‘pictures’ to remind the teacher (and other children) of another activity for the fathers which they had been preparing for them during the free-choice activity and play times.

In this classroom, the ‘large group conversation/talk sub-event’ during Morning Meeting time was also a context for the teacher to give large group announcements, which informed the children regarding upcoming events in the classroom or sometimes changes in the classroom schedule within their large group context. It was a context in which the teachers could tell about and explain those classroom experiences publicly to the children so that the group could not only be informed of upcoming events or special classroom processes but also have an opportunity to construct their understanding on upcoming classroom events through their group interaction with the teacher. Further, the
children indicated their understanding of the teacher’s announcement as they responded to the teacher through their group conversation.

3) **A context for collaborative group meaning making on various topics (child-initiated topics as well as teacher-initiated topics)**

In my analysis of the data from the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event during Morning Meeting, I found that this sub-event was also a context for the children and teacher to engage in group meaning making though their large group interaction. It was a significant context for the children and the teachers where they collaboratively and interactively constructed meaning together on various topics around them through extensive group conversation. I found this context for extensive group conversation as significant because, in this type of interaction, the children’s participation was not just an individual’s sharing on any topic that the individual wanted to share. Rather, their engagement was a more interactive group process, in which I noticed that the children acted and reacted to one another. It was evident in the transcripts as the children were actually listening to what others were saying as they joined in and shared their ideas and thoughts that were relevant to what the other peer had just said or to an on-going group topics within their large group meeting contexts. They talked, shared, and listened to their own as well as others’ ideas; they also asked questions and thought and reasoned together, all of which helped them to make sense of things and issues around them through their group conversation and interaction. The socially constructed nature of the children’s active meaning making could be observed in this type of interaction during the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event in the Morning Meeting. As I analyzed the data,
I could identify three main patterns in terms of how the children in this classroom jointly constructed and contributed to group meaning making: 1) by linking to / making connections between their own personal experiences and on-going topics; 2) by sharing their thoughts and listening to others’ – thinking and reasoning together and building upon each other’s ideas; and 3) by sharing their prior knowledge (what they knew) with the group. In the following section, I will explore and examine closely the ways the children made meaning together through their group interaction during Morning Meeting time.

Linking to and making connections to personal experiences

One of the findings from my data analysis is that, in this classroom, as the children talked and thought together about various topics during the Morning Meeting time, they actively brought in and shared their personal experiences and stories that were relevant to the topics that they are talking about. This differed from the first type of interaction of individuals sharing on self-chosen topics that they wanted to share with the other children; in such sharing, the sharer did not necessarily have to choose topics relevant to others. However, in this type of interaction, the children brought in and made connections with personal experiences that were relevant to the on-going group topic, which served as a vital interactive process for them in making sense of the things they were talking about together within the large group context.

One morning, as usual, as soon as the children gathered on the carpet area
(‘coming to the rug’), the Morning Meeting started. As the teacher opened the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event in the Morning Meeting by briefly mentioning who was present and who was not at the classroom that day, Bob initiated a topic about John, who was absent from the Morning Meeting.

Transcript 4.8: Talking about their own experiences of sickness

1   Bob: John is not here,
2       he is here, but he is in bathroom
3       cause he is sick
4   Pam (Teacher): Actually, John went home because he is sick
5       John was coming to school with his mommy,
6       and he got sick in the car on the way.
7       They made it to school, and she cleaned him up
8       and then they had to go back home.
9       Cause he’s sick.
10  Brian: He threw up.
11  Teacher: Yeah, his tummy was not feeling very well.
12  Joe: It was like a tummy ache,
13       but it wasn’t?
14  Teacher: It was a tummy ache.
15       It made him throw up.
16  Teacher: So if you’re throwing up, you can’t be at school
17       because it has lots of germs.

(Children share their stories with the group all at once)
18  Michael: When I got to school, I didn’t get sick.
19 Teacher: Raise your hands, please
20 cause I can’t hear you all at one time.

*(Children raise their hands for turns)*

21 Nick!

22 Nick: One day when I was in a car, I threw up.

23 Teacher: It happens to everybody once in a while.

24 Eric!

25 Eric: I threwed up on the boat in the water one time.
26 I threwed up because my belly got upset.
27 And one time, I threwed up when I was coming to school.
28 I threwed up in the garage,

29 Teacher: Yeah, it does not feel good.

30 Eric: Then I went back home.

31 Teacher: Jack!

32 Jack: One time, when I was at home,
33 one time, I didn’t feel good,
34 and I told my mommy and I had to throw up

35 Teacher: Yeah.

36 Jenny!

37 Jenny: One time when I was a baby,
38 I got sick, and I was going to my new school,
39 and I threwed up all over my new shoes.

40 Teacher: Your new shoes?

41 Jenny: *(nodding her head)*

42 Teacher: Sometimes you can’t help it.
You can’t make it to a trash can or some place

Katie: And you can’t make it to the potty.

(continuing to hold her hand up)

Teacher: Katie!

Katie: Um, I remember, when I was in the 3-4 room,
and we went downstairs
and we were about to go back to our room
and I threw up all over the floor

Teacher: I remember.

Bob!

Bob: Um, why do people feel sick?

Teacher: Lots of things make your belly upset.
You can eat too much food
or eat the wrong kind of food

Bob: Or eat candy too much?

Teacher: Or have a cold,
or eat candy too much.

Ann!

Ann: One time, I threw up outside, (pointing in the direction of the outdoors with her finger)
outside down on the carpet

Teacher: Yeah.

Bob initiated the topic of John’s absence and talked about, the topic based on what Bob himself had observed that morning. Bob explained that John was at the school
but he was not at the Morning Meeting because he got sick in the bathroom (lines 1-3). Pam, the teacher, validated and responded to Bob’s comments by continuing to talk about the topic of John’s absence, and she provided more detailed information about John to the whole group (lines 4-9). In line 4, the teacher elaborated on and clarified Bob’s statement of “John is not here, but he is here” (lines 1-2) for the whole group by saying, “John went home because he is sick.” Then, she provided the more detailed information that John got sick in the car on the way to the school (lines 5-6), which also explained to the children why he had to go back home.

Some of the children had observed John’s incident that morning as they engaged in the free play routine before Morning Meeting. Like Bob, who started the talk about John based on what he had observed that morning (lines 1-3), Brian also shared his observation of John that morning, that John was throwing up (line 10), in response to Bob’s (line 3) and the teacher’s comment (line 9) that John was sick that morning. After Brian’s comment, the teacher responded and explained more fully that John was sick because his tummy was not feeling very well (line 11).

Joe, who was listening to the group conversation, asked the teacher a question for clarification (“It was like a tummy ache, but it wasn’t?” lines 12-13), and the teacher gave more elaboration in her explanation about what made John get sick (“It was a tummy ache. It made him throw up,” lines 14-16) as she responded to Jack’s question.

In transcription 4.8, as Bob initiated the group conversation on something that happened in the classroom that morning (John was sick at the school), the children also interacted with one another; they shared their observations of John that morning and also
asked the teacher some questions to find out the reason for John’s sickness. The teacher took part in the group interaction by elaborating and adding more information based on the children’s interaction.

Along with the children and the teacher’s action and reaction to one another to engage in their group interaction, in my analysis, I found that the children made sense of the topics of discussion and made meaning together within the large group meeting context by bringing in and linking their personal experiences that were relevant to the group topic, which showed that the children were actively making connections between their personal experiences and the current on-going group topic that they were talking together about. In lines 21-50, several children simultaneously brought in and shared personal experiences that were similar to John’s sickness; as they brought in and made connections of those personal experiences with the current topic, the children were making more sense of the current topic of what it is like to get sick. Through their group interaction and making connections with similar personal experiences of their own at home or at school, the children talked about people sometimes getting sick, sometimes not making it to the toilet when they are sick, getting sick because of a tummy ache, etc.

Some children made connections with and described an experience of getting sick that was similar to John’s: Nick talked his experience of getting sick ‘in the car’ like John (line 22); Eric made a connection with his experience of getting sick because of a ‘belly ache’ like John (lines 25-26); Eric also shared his experience of getting sick ‘on the way to the school’ and when he had to ‘go back home’, which also had explicit parallels with John’s experience (lines 27-28, line 30). The children were not sharing just any of their
personal experiences, but made clear connections to the group topic about John’s incident by sharing their personal experiences that had explicit relevance and similarities (i.e., sick in the car; belly ache; getting sick on the way to the school; needed to go back home). In lines 37-39, Jenny shared her experience of getting sick when she was visiting her new school and not being able to help it. The teacher and Katie responded to Jenny’s sharing by saying that sometimes people can’t make it to toilet or other places (lines 42-44). In lines 46-49, Katie also brought in her previous experience of getting sick at this childcare center (“When I was in the 3-4 room, …”), which also indicated her explicit connection with John’s incident of getting sick at the school. Ann also talked about her previous experience in the classroom (“One time, I threw up outside, outside down on the carpet,” lines 60-61).

As the children made connections with and shared their own previous experiences and listened to others tell about their experiences, they were not only actively constructing understanding as they took an active position in sharing their personal experiences (they were the experts in their own personal stories), but also constructed group meaning making interactively through their on-going conversation within the large group meeting Morning Meeting context. Such interactions provided me as the researcher an opportunity to see the children’s concrete understanding of topics and their way of making sense of those topics through their group interactions and conversation.

As the children shared their own experiences within the Morning Meeting context, the teacher provided comments or responses to the children as a way of showing her validation of the children’s participation and contributions to the group conversation. In
transcription 4.8, the teacher validated the children’s sharing by showing sympathy in her comments. For example, in response to Nick’s sharing of getting sick in a car (line 22) and Eric’s sharing of his previous experience of getting sick on the way to school (lines 25-28), the teacher provided the sympathetic comments “It happens to everybody once in a while” (line 23), and “Yeah, it does not feel good” (line 29). In response to Katie’s sharing of her previous experience at the school (lines 46-49), the teacher made an acknowledgement with her comment that she also remembered Katie’s previous experience at the school (“I remember”, line 50).

In transcript 4.8, the teacher also took the role of facilitating the children’s turn taking during the large group conversation process. Interestingly, from lines 1-18, conversation turns were freely managed by the children. The children (Bob, Brian, Joe) autonomously joined in the group conversation; they took turns one at a time without raising their hands or waiting until the teacher called on them. As they were able to manage the turns by themselves, the teacher did not take control of talk turns. However, from lines 19-62, when the children simultaneously talked about their relevant experiences or stories all at once, the teacher, Pam, took the role of managing the children’s talk turns. In lines 19-20, the teacher requested that the children raise their hands for turns (“Raise your hands, please. ‘Cause I can’t hear you all at one time”). Then the children who were talking to the group directly raised their hands and waited for the teacher to call on them. Throughout the rest of the group conversation process, the teacher called out the child’s name to distribute talk turns among those who had raised their hands to share within the large group context (lines 21; 24; 31; 36; 45; 51; 59) as she
also provided response comments to the children’s sharing.

In a segment of transcript 4.8, the children’s recognition of various forms of interaction can be observed. In lines 37-50, Katie’s performance in her own turn of taking the floor and bringing in a personal experience similar to John’s was in clear contrast to her responses to Jenny’s sharing and the teacher’s comments. As seen in transcript 4.8, Jenny shared her previous experience that she couldn’t help getting sick on her new shoes when she went to visit her new school (37-39). The teacher provided her sympathetic response to Jenny’s sharing of getting sick on her new shoes (“Sometimes you can’t help it. You can’t make it to a trash can or some place” (lines 42-43)).

Responding to Jenny’s sharing (lines 37-39) and adding to the teacher’s comment that people sometimes can’t make it to the trash can or some place (line 43), Katie provided the comment “And you can’t make it to the potty” (line 44), which showed that Katie was responding to Jenny and the teacher’s talk. Interestingly, at this time, Katie just participated in the group conversation without the teacher’s calling on her for a turn, whereas she continued to hold her hand up and waited for the teacher to call her name for a turn in sharing her own experience. In line 45, after the teacher called Katie’s name, Katie shared her own previous experience of getting sick at the school (lines 46-49). In this segment, I could see that the children had an understanding of the various group interaction processes, which included both forms of responding to their peers’ contributions as well as making their own contributions, all of which was a vital process for the children’s social construction of meaning making within the large group context. It was apparent that, through sharing their own and listening to others’ personal
experiences, the children were helping one another to construct understanding on what they needed to do when they felt sick and where to throw up.

In lines 51-58, I could also see that the children were taking an active role in terms of asking questions about something that they were curious about, which allowed them to further extend their talk. As Bob’s name was called by the teacher for his turn (line 51), unlike the other children who were sharing their own experiences of getting sick like John, Bob asked a question about why people get sick: “Um, why do people feel sick?” (line 52). In response to Bob’s question, the teacher provided several possible ideas, such as eating too much food or eating the wrong kinds of food (lines 53-55). In response to the teacher’s ideas, Bob also provided his own idea for a possible reason (“Or eat candy too much?”, line 56), and the teacher validated Bob’s idea by repeating it in her comment (lines 57-58).

As seen in the above analysis of transcript 4.8, during the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event in the Morning Meeting, the children and the teacher acted and reacted to one another actively. Especially, the children actively shared, linked to, and made connections between their personal experiences and the current on-going topic that they were talking about together, and this provides an illustration of the socially constructed nature of meaning making and making sense of things within the large group context in this classroom.

*Sharing ideas and building upon each other’s ideas within the large group context (Questioning/ reasoning/thinking together)*

125
In this classroom, the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event during Morning Meeting time was a context for the children to engage in collaborative group conversation on various topics around themselves and their classroom experiences. As the children engaged in their collaborative group conversation, they shared and listened to each other’s ideas and often they actively built upon each other’s ideas through their group interaction, all of which created significant moments and contexts for joint construction of meaning making. In this section, I will mainly present interaction segments and analyses of those interactions, which will allow a detailed look at the interactions of the children in building upon each other’s ideas; reasoning together by sharing of their thoughts and ideas and listening to others’; and posing questions to think together within the large group context. These findings will describe the ways in which meaning making was socially constructed through their interactions.

One morning, the Morning Meeting was opened with teacher’s statements about the clean up process in this classroom. As part of the daily routine and schedule in this classroom, the children engage in free play as they arrive in the classroom every morning. As mentioned earlier in research question 1, the first sub-event of Morning Meeting, ‘coming to the rug,’ is actually a transition from their free-play time to get ready for Morning Meeting by cleaning up their play materials and creating a space for their Morning Meeting on the carpet area. Since the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event follows right after the ‘coming to the rug’ event, clean up issues are sometimes brought up during the large group conversation.
On this day, the clean up time took much longer than usual because many blocks had been pulled out on the carpet area and the children did not collaborate with each other to clean them up. One teacher, Pam, started the conversation by saying that it took such a long time to clean up today, and the other teacher, Jully, continued the conversation by asking why they needed to clean up the areas in the classroom. In the group conversation process, the children provided reasons to explain why they thought they needed to clean up their classroom as they talked about what would happen if they did not clean the room up. The children and teacher made meaning actively on the ongoing topic by building upon one another’s ideas during their group interaction.

**Transcription 4.9: talking about a clean up issue**

1. Jully (Teacher): We just don’t have the room in our classroom to leave block structures up like that, because we have to use the carpet for morning meeting, story time, and naptime.
2. Elizabeth: What if, what if, um, um, our room was a mess and we didn’t have to clean it up? [and] we would be tripping and there would be no room.
3. Jully (teacher): There would be no room to play.
4. Nick: xxxxxxxx have blocks here? *(pointing to the block shelves, which are right by the carpet area, with his finger)*
Pam (Teacher): For building.

Jully (Teacher): We have blocks for building,
but we can’t have them all over the carpet,
because people could trip and fall
and we would have no room to play.

Would you want to have your cot laying on top of blocks?

Children: No

Jully (Teacher): No,
that wouldn’t feel good.

John: It would break

Jully (Teacher): It could break your cot, yeah.

John: or have sharp edges

Jully (Teacher): Yeah

Bob: Or it could go through your cot
and hit you right in the back.

Jully (Teacher): Yeah,
a poke in the back wouldn’t feel good

John: It would break your spine (*touching his back with his hand*)

Jully: Yeah,
it would be nice if we had more room, but we just don’t,
so that’s why we clean up things

Kelly: Or it would break your body

Jully (Teacher): And we can always take pictures of things,
or draw picture of what it looks like
if we want to save an idea.
Elizabeth: The 3-4’s have, like, they have a lot, that’s a lot of room!

Jully (Teacher): Well, they have, actually, we have bigger room.

Did you know that?

Yes, we have the biggest room.

Elizabeth: How come?

Jully (Teacher): Because we have more children, and you’re bigger kids and you’re taller

Elizabeth: Ohh \textit{(with a smile)}

The teacher, Jully, initiated the conversation by mentioning some reasons for the clean up issue in this classroom, saying that they could not leave the block structures on the carpet area all day because of the limited space and physical structure of the classroom and that the carpet area was also used for other routine times in this classroom, like Morning Meeting, Story Time, and naptime (lines 1-4). Right after the teacher’s comments, Elizabeth built upon the teacher’s statement on the clean up issue and extended their group conversation/talk further by posing a question: “What if, what if, um, um, our room was a mess and we didn’t have to clean it up?” (lines 5-7). Then Elizabeth shared her own idea and thought on the question that she had posed, what could possibly happen if they didn’t clean up the classroom, by saying that they would be tripping and there would be no room (lines 8-9).
Elizabeth’s question served a significant role in this interaction by leading the children and the teacher to think together about what would happen if they did not clean up the room and why they needed to do the clean up. In such a group meaning making process, the children built upon each other’s ideas through their large group interaction.

In response to Elizabeth’s idea and thought (“we would be tripping, and there would be no room,” lines 8-9), the teacher not only validated Elizabeth’s thought by repeating it but also built upon it with more elaboration (“There would be no room to play,” line 10; “We can’t have them all over the carpet because people could trip and fall and we would have no room to play,” lines 14-16). As she validated and built upon Elizabeth’s question and thought/idea, the teacher extended her response further in a question format, saying to the whole group, “Would you want to have your cot laying on top of blocks?” (line 17). This also served as a way for the teacher to provide an explicit example of what Elizabeth’s idea/thought would mean to the class (they would be tripping and there would be no room).

In lines 21-33, the children built on Elizabeth’s ideas/thoughts on what would happen if they did not clean up the room (“We would be tripping and there would be no room,” lines 8-9) and the teacher’s example of the possibility of having to lay a cot on top of blocks (line 17). In line 21, John provided his own idea on what could happen in such a situation as the example given by the teacher, saying that “it would break” (line 21). The teacher provided a response to John’s comment by repeating and elaborating his idea: “It could break your cot, yeah,” (line 22). John continued to share his idea in line 23 in terms of what could happen in such a situation of laying the cots on top of blocks. John
shared another idea, that those blocks might have sharp edges (“or have sharp edges,” line 23). In lines 25-26, Bob shared his idea/thought on this on-going group topic; he listened to John’s idea and responded to and built upon John’s idea as he shared his idea/thought. In response to John’s comment about the blocks having sharp edges (line 23), Bob shared his idea, “Or it could go through your cot and hit you right in the back” (lines 25-26), which showed that Bob was building upon John’s comment as he developed his idea on what could happen in the situation of ‘laying the cots on top of blocks.’ In response, the teacher validated Bob’s idea by saying, “Yeah, a poke in the back wouldn’t feel good” (lines 27-28), which directly showed her acknowledgement of Bob’s idea (“hit you right in the back” (line 26). John also responded to Bob’s idea of a block hitting someone in the back (“and hit you right in the back,” line 26); in line 29, John said that a block could break someone’s spine, as he made a body gesture of touching his back with his hand. This statement of John’s (“It would break your spine,” line 29) directly built upon Bob’s comment that a block could hit someone in the back (line 26). Kelly also shared her idea, which added to John’s idea that a block (that hit someone in the back) could break one’s spine. In line 33, Kelly said that a block would break someone’s body (“or it would break your body”). Such a statement about the ‘body’ can also be seen as an indication that she listened to, responded to, and was building on John’s previous comment mentioning a part of the body, the ‘spine’.

As I analyzed transcript 4.9, it became evident that the children and the teacher were making meaning together on what would happen if they did not clean up the room and the reason they needed to do the clean up through collaborative group conversation
during the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event in the Morning Meeting. The data provide evidence that the children socially and interactively constructed group meaning making and created understanding together on various classroom issues; the children built upon each other’s ideas, thinking together, sharing their thoughts and ideas and listening to others as they acted and reacted to one another within the Morning Meeting context.

*Sharing prior knowledge (sharing what they know about/contributing to group meaning making)*

In this classroom, as the children engaged in collaborative group conversation, they also brought in and shared their prior knowledge about things that they knew from personal experiences and building on each other’s remarks in their group conversation, which showed their active contributions to jointly constructed meaning making. This sharing of their prior knowledge (what they knew about) with the group served as an important resource in the children’s helping each other gain understanding and making sense of things and issues around them through their group conversation and interaction.

One morning, as the children gathered on the carpet area for Morning Meeting, the teacher, Jully, showed a book that Kelly had brought in for the day’s Morning Meeting. As mentioned earlier, the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event during Morning Meeting was a context for individual children to bring things that they wanted to share with the other children. The children sometimes brought objects from home or special artifacts from their vacation; occasionally, the children brought in books or CDs
that they wanted to share with the entire classroom. Even though this classroom has an official story time, which is part of the everyday schedule as their daily routine right before the free-choice play and activity time, the books that individual children occasionally brought from their homes to share with the group were usually read during the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event in Morning Meeting time. The children usually showed the books or artifacts that they wanted to share during Morning Meeting to the teachers in advance, as they arrived at school in the morning, and the teacher arranged time for reading or sharing them with the group within the given ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event. Official story time in this classroom generally consisted of teacher-selected books, usually on topics that were relevant to one of activities that the teachers had planned, and the teachers concentrated mainly on book reading, rather than giving the children time to talk together, as in Morning Meeting.

On this morning, Kelly had brought a picture book that she wanted to share with the class. As soon as she arrived in the classroom, Kelly showed the book to the teacher, Jully. The picture book was *I Love School*, by Philemon Sturges, and the book content was focused on new school and classroom experience. As the children gathered on the carpet area for Morning Meeting, the teacher, Jully, started the Morning Meeting by showing the book that Kelly had brought in, and said that she would read this book since many of the children in this classroom were ready to go to kindergarten soon and the class had been talking about their graduation and new schools.

During the book reading process, the teacher invited the children’s active participation by asking questions to create space for large group conversation around the
book content and different/similar classroom life experiences. The following transcripts are interaction segments from such large group conversation centered on comparing the children’s classroom life and the classroom life portrayed in the book. The children participated in the group meaning making process by sharing their prior knowledge regarding things they knew about, in here, their prior knowledge about what’s recess. This sharing of prior knowledge with one another within the large group context served as a significant contribution towards active co-construction of explanation as well as a meaningful way to develop their group understanding during the group conversation.

Transcript 4.10: Talking about our classroom (comparison with the content of a book)

[Interaction unit 1]

1    Jully (Teacher): Here might be a new word for my friends.
2         (reading) “It’s recess”
3    John: My brother,
4         my brother has recess time
5    Jack: My sister has recess
6    Bob: My sister does recess

(Various children make similar contributions, simultaneously)

7    Jully (Teacher): Do you know what it means?
8    John: Outside time

9    Jully (Teacher): It’s another name for playtime outside on the playground.
10       (reading) “It’s recess when the school bell rings”
(reading) “I like the slides, I like the swings”

Joe: We don’t have swings though

Jully (Teacher): No, we don’t

John: We just have a slide

Brian: How come we don’t have swings?

Jully (Teacher): We don’t have enough room

Eric: My new school is 10 times bigger

Kelly: My neighbor has slides

Jully (Teacher): um-hmm (with nodding)

In the interaction unit above, during the book reading process, the children actively engaged in group conversation, and the teacher also provided opportunities for such conversation by asking questions and responding to the children’s comments. In lines 1-2, the teacher read a sentence from the book, saying that there might be a new word for the children (“Here might be a new word for my friends. “It’s recess””). As soon as the teacher read the sentence “It’s recess” (line 2), several children verbally responded that their siblings had recess (lines 3-6), indicating that they knew what a “recess” was. In lines 3-6, John, Jack, and Bob responded to the teacher that their own siblings had recess: “My brother, my brother has recess time” (lines 3-4); “My sister has recess” (line 5); “My sister does recess” (line 6). In line 7, the teacher, Jully, then asked those children what the word ‘recess’ meant (“Do you know what it means?”), which actually gave the children an opportunity to engage in active contribution to the group
meaning making by sharing their knowledge and explanations with the group. In response to the teacher’s question, one of the three children who said that their siblings had recess, John, gave his explanation of what the word ‘recess’ meant by saying “outside time” (line 8). John was sharing his prior knowledge from experience outside the school, here, from the experience of his family member: “My brother, my brother has recess time” (lines 3-4). In line 9, the teacher acknowledged John’s explanation with a little more elaboration for the group: “It’s another name for playtime outside on the playground”.

The children responded to the book content by making connections with their own classroom life. In lines 10-11, the teacher read the book sentences (“It’s recess when the school bell rings. I like the slides, I like the swings”) as she showed the illustrations which portrayed children’s outdoor play. Joe responded to the teacher’s reading by saying, “We don’t have swings though” (line 12). Here, Joe shared his own observation and also shared a comparison that he had made by making a connection between their own classroom situation and the classroom which was illustrated in the book. The teacher acknowledged Joe’s comment by showing her agreement: “No, we don’t” (line 13). John responded to Joe’s comment that their school did not have swings by adding his observation (prior knowledge) of what they had at their school instead: “We just have a slide” (line 14). Brian extended this conversation of comparing their own classroom and the classroom in the book content by expressing his curiosity in question form: “How come we don’t have swings?” (line 15). In response to Brian’s question, the
teacher provided an explanation, saying that they did not have enough room in the school playground (line 16).

Some other children extended the comparison to other places. In line 17, Eric made a comparison of his new school (kindergarten), which he had had a chance to visit previously and would attend soon, with his current school (the childcare center): “My new school is 10 times bigger”. He was responding to the teacher’s explanation about why the current school did not have swings (“We don’t have enough room,” line 16) with his comparison of the childcare center to his new school. In line 18, Kelly made a comparison involving her neighbors, that they had slides, indicating a feature similar to one at the children’s current school (the childcare center): “My neighbor has slides”.

As the book reading continued, the children and teacher’s on-going conversation around the book content and different/similar classroom life experiences also continued within the large group context. The following transcript segment is a continuation of the transcript discussed above (interaction unit 1). The interaction segment below (interaction unit 2) shows the children bringing in and sharing their prior knowledge based on their own classroom experience (what they knew) in the large group conversation as they make comparisons with the classroom experience in the book content. Here, they specifically talk about some classroom rules that they follow in their own classroom (i.e., they do not trade food with each other) in comparison with the activities in the classroom portrayed in the book content (i.e., traded their food with each other). The children bring in prior knowledge that they have built from their shared classroom experiences; they know that some children in their classroom are allergic to
certain foods and they discuss such shared knowledge as they engage in group conversation. This group process of sharing their prior knowledge on who has certain allergies to certain foods serves not only as an active contribution to jointly constructed group meaning making on why they do not trade food in their classroom, but also as an important resource for fostering each other’s understanding on the on-going topic through their conversation and interaction.

[Interaction unit 2]

40 Jully (Teacher): *(reading)* “I will trade my apple juice for lemonade”
41 Do we trade food?
42 Children: No
43 Jully (Teacher): Why can’t we trade food?
44 John: Because it has germs
45 Jully (Teacher): Well, it could have germs on it.
46 Ann: Some are allergic [to].
47 Jully (Teacher): Some people are allergic
48 and if we gave them our sandwich
49 and they got
50 Bob: *(jumping in during the teacher’s explanation)*
   If you eat them that you are allergic to,
51 you’ll get sick
52 John: Like Sophia is allergic to peanut butter?
53 Jully (Teacher): Um-hmm *(nodding)*
54 Katie: If you didn’t know that Jimmy is allergic to peanut butter,
55 and you know what?
He wanted to trade for my sandwich,
and he … (hand gesture of putting something into her mouth)

Jully (Teacher): That would be so scary.

That’s why we don’t have peanut butter in our room,
because if you get peanut butter all over your hand
and go in the bathroom and touch our sink,
and Jimmy would come in and touch the same sink,
and then put it in his mouth, or near his lips,

Katie: Or maybe he could lick his fingers to feel something
and get something off, and he might be sick

In line 40, the teacher read a sentence from the book that illustrated the school lunch time in the book content: “I’ll trade my apple juice for lemonade”. The children in the book were trading foods with one another during their lunch time. After reading the sentence, the teacher, Jully, posed a question to the group to make a connection between their own classroom and the book content. In line 41, the teacher asked the group about their own classroom situation (“Do we trade food?”), which led the children to refer back to their own classroom and think about their own classroom rule on trading food. The children responded to the teacher’s question by saying, “No” (line 42), which showed that the children had certain knowledge about their own classroom rule, that was based on their shared classroom experience and that they had been building through their everyday routines, such as lunch time and snack time.

Jully, the teacher, then extended this conversation further by asking why they did not trade food in their own classroom (line 43). The children responded to the teacher’s
question with their ideas and guesses of reasons for not trading food in this classroom. In line 44, John said that it was because of germs, and the teacher indicated some acceptance of John’s guess by saying that this was possible (“Well, it could have germs on it” (line 45)). In the line 46, Ann shared another idea in response to the teacher’s question on why they did not trade food in the classroom, pointing out that it was because some people are allergic to certain foods (“Some people are allergic to’”). The teacher acknowledged Ann’s answer by repeating what Ann had just mentioned (“Some people are allergic,” line 47) and then began to give an additional explanation of what could happen if they gave certain foods to people who were allergic to them. In the middle of the teacher’s explanation (line 48), Bob jumped in and continued what the teacher was saying. In the lines 49-50, Bob continued with the teacher’s suppositional statement of what could happen if they gave a certain food to people who were allergic to it (line 49) and also provided his summary of the teacher’s statement by saying that people would get sick: “You’ll get sick” (line 50). Bob’s explanation (lines 49-50) showed his understanding of what could happen if people eat something they are allergic to, that is, one could be sick, and he shared his understanding with the other children within their large group context.

As they continued their group conversation on why they did not trade food in their classroom, the children brought in and shared the prior knowledge that they had built from their school experience (what they knew) in the group meaning making process. It is especially noteworthy that, in lines 51-63 of the transcript (interaction unit 2), during the large group conversation, the children provided their prior knowledge about a certain
child in their school context who had a food allergy as an explicit example for the on-going group conversation, which served as a meaningful contribution as well as a resource for their group meaning making and shared understanding on why they did not trade food in their classroom. In response to the on-going conversation between Ann, Jully (teacher), and Bob, who had been talking about allergies to certain foods as a reason why they did not trade food in their classroom (lines 46-50), John shared his prior knowledge with the group. In line 51, John brought in specific information on Sophia, a classmate who was allergic to peanut butter, as an example relevant to their on-going group conversation on people who were allergic to certain foods (“Like Sophia is allergic to peanut butter?”). John brought what he knew about Sophia into their group conversation; he shared the prior knowledge that he had built from classroom experience, and it served as an explicit example for the whole group since this example of Sophia was directly from their shared classroom experiences. In line 52, the teacher acknowledged such a contribution with her verbal agreement (“Um-hmm”) and the gesture of nodding.

In lines 53-55, Katie also shared her prior knowledge (what she knew) on a certain child who had a food allergy as another example for the group. At this time, Katie brought in the case of Jimmy as an example of food allergy and why they did not trade food in the classroom for their group conversation. Interestingly, unlike John, who gave the example of one of their classmates, Sophia, Katie brought in the example of Jimmy, who was not one of their classmates but a student in the classroom next door (the younger preschool classroom). Katie extended the example further with a child who was in another classroom, and actively used the prior knowledge that she had about a friend
(Jimmy) who was in the classroom next door. In lines 53-55, Katie explained why they did not trade food with each other by referring to the example of Jimmy, who could accidentally eat the peanut butter that he is allergic to: “If you didn’t know that Jimmy is allergic to peanut butter, and you know what? He wanted to trade for my sandwich, and he ... (hand gesture of putting something into her mouth).” The teacher acknowledged Katie’s sharing of Jimmy’s example by showing her sympathy with Katie’s comment on the possibility of accidentally trading the food a certain child was allergic to: “That would be so scary” (line 56). And the teacher, Jully, continued her comment (“That’s why we don’t have peanut butter in our room,” line 57) and provided elaboration on the example of Jimmy that Katie had shared: “because if you get peanut butter all over your hand and go in the bathroom and touch our sink, and Jimmy would come in and touch the same sink, and then put it in his mouth, or near his lips” (lines 58-61). Here, the teacher also additionally pointed out the fact that they shared the same bathroom with the next door classroom (the younger preschool classroom) that Jimmy was in. Katie added to the teacher’s comment by saying that Jimmy could accidentally touch it and lick his fingers, which could make him get sick (“Or maybe he could lick his fingers to feel something and get something off, and he might be sick,” lines 62-63), which served as her explanation of why they needed to be careful about certain foods in the classroom.

In this transcript (interaction unit 2), I observed the socially constructed nature of meaning making on their on-going topic of ‘why they don’t trade foods with each other in the classroom.’ The children actively contributed to their group conversation process by bringing in and sharing their prior knowledge in group meaning making and
understanding. In the process of their group conversation, some children, like John and Katie, shared their prior knowledge about specific children in their school who had allergies to certain foods. This sharing provided explicit examples and explanations for the group in terms of what they were talking about (‘why they do not trade food in the classroom’), which thus helped the children to make sense of the things around them more concretely and supported each other’s understanding as well.

4) Context for Teacher directed interaction

In the earlier section, we examined one of the important functions of the large group conversation/talk sub-event in this classroom, that it provides ample opportunity for the children and the teacher to engage in their group meaning making on various topics around them through their group discourse with one another. From the transcript data examples, we have seen that such large group conversation proceeded collaboratively among the children and the teacher; in transcript 4.8, the children initiated the group conversation on their own experiences of sickness as they related to one child’s experience of being sick on that day; and in transcript 4.9, the children and the teacher talked together about a clean up issue in their classroom, a topic which was initiated by the teacher but proceeded through the children’s building on each other’s ideas on why they thought they needed to clean up in the classroom.

In this section, I will examine another type of interaction that I was able to identify in the data from the large group conversation/talk sub-event-- teacher-directed interaction. Occasionally, in this classroom, the large group conversation/talk sub-event
was a context for the teacher to purposefully bring in and introduce some topic that the teacher had chosen/planned for the class. In such cases, the topics were introduced by the teacher; the topics were usually relevant to the weekly classroom plans, and included cooking (talking about ingredients, measurement, … etc), something related to the season, plants or animals (i.e., frogs, a bug, …) that the children were interested in, upcoming holidays (e.g., Independence Day, …) etc. As described in Ch.3, in this classroom, topics of the classroom curriculum are usually related to the children’s life experiences along with some teacher-chosen topics; a combination of these two modes prevailed in the classroom curriculum. Such aspects can be seen within the Morning Meeting as well.

The teacher sometimes used the large group conversation/talk sub-event within the Morning Meeting as a context for introducing some planned topics for certain weeks to the children and talking together about such topics.

Transcript 4.11 below is an interaction segment from one large group conversation/talk sub-event in the Morning Meeting. Unlike the earlier section of large group conversation interactions introduced, here, we can identify another type of interaction, in which the group conversation was led mainly by the teacher. The teacher initiated the group interaction by going around the circle and asking each child a question on what they knew about flowers (anything about flowers, which might include what certain kinds look like, some names or parts of flowers that they know). As I analyzed their actual interaction in transcript 4.11, I could perceive a certain talk sequence pattern that was followed throughout the interaction process, along with the specific teacher’s control of the topic and turn taking in proceeding with this large group interaction.
[Transcript 4.11] what do you know about flowers?

1  Jully (Teacher): Do you know anything about flowers?
2  Ann: You water them.
3  Jully (teacher): Oh, you water them (writing down Ann’s words on some paper).
4  You’re right,
5  they need water, don’t they?
6  Pam (teacher): flower is on her(Ann’s) shirts
7  Jully (teacher): You do. Do you water that one too?
8  Ann: (shaking her head with a smile)
9  Jully (teacher): Oh no.
10 Jully (teacher): Eric, do you know anything about flowers?
11 Eric: I have lots of tulips at my house xxxxxx.
12 I have purple ones, and yellow ones, and pink ones, red ones.
13 Jully (teacher): (as she writes this down) You have purple, yellow,
14 is that what you said?
15 Eric: Yeah
16 Jully (Teacher): and red.
17 Eric: Yeah.
18 Jully (Teacher): Do you know that tulips are my favorite flower?
19 Eric: Do you know what? Those are my favorite mom’s flowers.
20 Jully (teacher): Your mom’s favorite flowers? (little laugh)
21 Katie: Those are my favorite flowers
22 Jully (teacher): Katie, what do you know about flowers?
23 Katie: I know that, uh, bees get honey from flowers.
24 Jully (Teacher): Bees get honey from flowers?
25 Katie: They get stuff to make honey.
26  Jolly (teacher): Oh. Bees get stuff to make (repeats Katie’s words as she writes the responses down)

27  Eric: Those, it’s called pollen.
28  Jenny: That’s pollen.
29  Jolly (Teacher): It’s called pollen? How did you know that?
30  Jenny: From the bee movie
31  Eric: Bee movie
32  Jolly (Teacher): Oh, the bee movie.
33  Here I thought you guys were scientist xxxxx
34  Students: (various children talking at once)
35  Jolly (Teacher): You’re right, Katie.
36  Bees get stuff to make honey from flowers.
37  If it weren’t for flowers,
38  it means the bees would be very unhappy.
39  Jack: And they won’t have food to eat.
40  Jolly (Teacher): They wouldn’t have much to eat,
41  Bob: or to drink
42  Jolly (Teacher): and we wouldn’t have very much honey.
43  Katie: and they wouldn’t have honey.
44  Jolly (teacher): Bill, what do you know about flowers?
45  Katie: In the movie of the bees, they talked xxxxx
46  Jolly (Teacher): (to Bill) Do you know anything about flowers?
47  Bill: (shakes his head no with a shy smile) Nothing.
48  Jolly (Teacher): Do you know anything about flowers, and ….. of them,
49  or how to take care of them, or
50  Bill: I don’t know anything.
51  Jolly (teacher): Do you try to stay away from flowers?
…. said that you water them.

Is there anything else they need to make them grow?

Bill: *(just keeps shaking his head no with a shy smile)*

Jully (teacher): It’s OK to talk about flowers.

How about you, Jack?

Do you know anything about flowers?

Jack: They have petals on them.

Jully (Teacher): *(as she writes this down on the paper)* They do have petals.

That is a part of a flower, petals.

Jully: Brian, do you know anything about flowers?

Brian: Sunflowers… xxxxxx

Jully (Teacher): Sunflowers do what?

Brian: Sunflowers grow in the sun.

Jully (Teacher): Grow in the sun, yes.

Some flowers really, really like it to be hot and sunny,

and then there’re some flowers who like the shade

— they don’t like the sun at all.

*(It was Bob’s turn, and Bob was whispering with John, who was next to him, and showing something small in his hand to John)*

Jully (Teacher): I think I might have to come back to two friends

because they’re busy talking right now,

I don’t know if they’re ready for a turn.

Bob, do you think you’re going to be ready to share?

Pam (teacher): *(interrupting with a quiet voice as she saw that Bob was holding something small in his hand)* Maybe you can put that
styrofoam down.

73 Bob: It’s not styrofoam.
74 Pam (teacher): *(with quiet voice)* Whatever it is, put it down.
75 Jully (teacher): Can you tell us something about flowers?
76 Bob: Roses.
77 Jully (Teacher): Roses is a certain kind of flower, you’re right.

78 Anything about roses?

79 Roses have something special on them.

80 Do you know what they are?
81 Bob: Oh, petals.
82 Jully (Teacher): They have petals,

83 but they have something else so you have to be careful.
84 Eric: Prickees
85 Bob: Prickles
86 Jully (Teacher): Do you know what those are called?
87 Bob: Prickles
88 Jully (Teacher): They hurt. They’re prickly.

89 They’re called thorns.
90 Students: *(various students repeat)* Thorns
91 Jully (Teacher): Thorn.

92 They’re very sharp and they come out,
93 and if you’re not careful, if you pick a rose,
94 that thorn will prick your skin and cut.
95 Bob: And you know what?

96 They live with the water,
97 and you know how they wake up?
Jully (Teacher): How do they wake up?
Bob: With the sun.
Jully (Teacher): Oh. Flowers wake up with the sun? (she writes this down)
Bob: Like sunflowers.
Katie: Bob, I think what Bob’s talking about is, they’re . . . in the water, and they come out and they get sun on them,
I think he means they’ll wake up.
Jully (Teacher): OK
Bob: I’m talking

Throughout the interaction process in transcript 4.11, a certain talk sequence pattern can be identified: the teacher initiates the group conversation by posing a question, “What do you know about flowers?”; then a child responds to the teacher with his/her idea or thought and the teacher writes down the child’s response on a piece of paper and provides a follow-up statement, feedback, in terms of the child’s response and the turn goes on to the next child. Such a talk sequence pattern between the teacher and children continued throughout the classroom event. This kind of classroom discourse pattern has been called the I-R-E(F) conversational structure, and defined as “Initiation-Response-Evaluation (Follow-up) (Mehan, 1979; Wells, 1993); it has been discussed as a common speech sequence pattern that is identifiable in ordinary or traditional classrooms. Compared to a strict I-R-E structure, in which the teacher tends to known-answer questions and gives evaluative comments after the students’ responses to confirm whether a response was right or wrong, in this classroom, the teacher-led group interaction was more like the I-R-F pattern. The teacher asked an open-ended question of
whether they knew anything about flowers rather than right/wrong known-answer questions, and the teacher also provided follow-up comments related to the children’s responses rather than evaluative comments so that the children could more easily participate in the group process. However, it also can be seen that the teacher asked everyone the same question, which implied that the teacher was encouraging the children’s participation though an open-ended question, but the children’s responses should be something relevant to the teacher-selected topic, ‘flowers.’ Along with the control of topic in transcript 4.11, a turn was given to every child the turn went around the circle, and the teacher asked each child the question “what do you know about flowers?” This differed from other types of interaction within the large group conversation/talk sub-event in the Morning Meeting discussed in earlier sections, in which the children voluntarily participated and autonomously joined in their large group interaction. Here, my intent is not to evaluate or suggest that one type of interaction is better than the other; the main purpose of presenting and analyzing the data is to illustrate the large group conversation/talk sub-event during Morning Meeting in this classroom, where various types of large group interaction existed in this preschool classroom context.

In transcript 4.11, the children also engaged in group meaning making as they shared anything they knew about flowers within the large group context. In lines 1-9, Ann shared her prior knowledge on flowers, that you need to water them, which is one aspect of how to take care of flowers. Kinds and names of flowers were also brought in by the children: in lines 10-20, Eric shared that he had various colors of tulips (purple, yellow, pink, and red) at his house and that they were his mom’s favorite flowers; in lines
61-67, Brian talked about sunflowers, giving the additional information that sunflowers grow in the sun; in lines 75-106, Bob brought up roses as one kind of flower that he knew about. Some specific parts of flowers were also brought up by the children and discussed within their large group interaction: in lines 56-60, Jack mentioned ‘petals’ as something he knew about flowers; in lines 22-45, ‘pollen’ was brought up by Eric and Jenny as Katie shared what she knew about bees getting stuff from flowers to make honey (lines 22-28); in lines 75-94, the word ‘thorn’ was introduced by the teacher as she responded to Bob’s sharing on roses.

In transcript 4.11, even though the overall interaction pattern was the I-R-F sequence and the teacher posed the same question to each child, this did not mean there was only teacher-individual child interaction; other children joined in the interaction even if it was not their own turns and sometimes shared additional information that they knew about flowers in relation to the ongoing topic. In lines 22-45, the teacher initiated interaction with Katie by asking her what she knew about flowers. In response to the teacher’s question, Katie shared that bees get stuff from flower to make honey. In this process, Eric and Jenny jumped in and shared additional information in relation to the ongoing topic that bees get something from flowers to make honey and called that stuff “pollen” (lines 27-28). When the teacher asked them how they knew that, Jenny said it was from a bee movie which they had watched in the classroom previously. Here, I could observe that the children were make meaning together on specific information about flowers as they shared their prior knowledge from various sources with one another. Moreover, some aspects of the way the children made meaning together through their
large group conversation (i.e., sharing prior knowledge, building upon each other, etc.) which was described in detail earlier in the discussion of large group interaction, could also be observed in this teacher-led interaction, especially when they could be adapted to such an interaction sequential pattern. In this interaction as Eric and Jenny jumped into the teacher-Katie interaction about bees getting something from flowers and shared with the group “pollen,” additional information, which they remembered from a bee movie, the teacher not only accepted the contribution but also provided complimentary comments (“Oh, the bee movie. Here, I thought you guys were scientist…”, lines 32-33) thus validating those additional comments and participation. As the teacher gave follow-up comments to Katie (“You’re right, Katie. Bees get stuff to make honey from flowers. If it weren’t for flowers, it means the bees would be very unhappy”, lines 35-38), other children also joined in and responded to the teacher’s follow-up comments. In line 39, Jack said that bees wouldn’t have food to eat; in line 41, Bob added that bees wouldn’t have much to drink. In lines 22-45, I could see that even within the I-R-E interaction pattern, as the teacher took an adaptive role, the group interaction became more interactive than initial teacher-individual child interaction. However, I could also observe and identify a level of teacher control which differed somewhat from that observed in the collaborative group interaction discussed earlier. Unlike the third type of group interaction, in which active collaborative meaning making processes were observed (i.e., earlier section - transcript 4.8; transcript 4.9; and transcript 4.10), in this teacher-led interaction, the children’s extended talk during their large group process was sometimes controlled by the teacher, who was also focusing on giving turns to everyone.
In line 45, as Katie started to talk further about what she had seen in the bee movie after
the teacher gave a new turn to Bob (line 44), the teacher did not respond with additional
comments to Katie; the teacher moved on to Bill’s turn, asking him what he knew about
flowers (line 46). Here I could see that within the I-R-F conversational sequence pattern,
the teacher and the children also adaptively interacted with each other, which allowed
them to make meaning together; however, a higher level of teacher control could be
observed in this type of interaction. The teacher was paying attention to assuring that
each child had a turn, and thus longer extended talk was not allowed as in the third type
of collaborative group interaction.

In lines 46-55, it was interesting to observe the individual children’s different
reactions to certain topics during their large group conversation/talk sub-event within the
Morning Meeting. When the new turn was given to Bill by the teacher’s asking him what
he knew about flowers, Bill resisted participating in the conversation. In my interview
meetings with the teachers, they explained to me that Bill had a tendency to prefer not to
engage in certain topics or items that were especially relevant to the feminine. He was
very active in boy’s play and things relevant to boys, but showed shyness and a reluctant
reaction to topics or things that seemed to be relevant to girls (i.e., princess books,
housekeeping props, things he thought of as feminine). In lines 46-55, the teacher tried to
invite Bob’s participation by giving some examples that he could think about (“Do you
know anything about flowers ….or how to take care of them? …said that you water them.
Is there anything else they need to make them grow?”). However, Bill kept showing his
reluctance by shaking his head while smiling, and the teacher finally accepted Bill’s
decision not to participate. The teacher said to Bill that it was okay to talk about flowers, but she didn’t insist further and moved on to the next child. It was interesting for me as a researcher to see such different reactions of the individual children within the large group context. Since in this teacher-led interaction, the teacher gave turns to all children, this made such a reluctant reaction of Bill became visible, as compared to, as in the other types of large group interaction that I discussed earlier, participation in the large group conversation that was voluntarily and autonomously decided upon and joined by the children.

Throughout the transcript 4.11 interaction in the above analysis, the teacher’s follow-up comments were mostly validation of the children’s sharing by repeating or elaborating what the children had just said. However, in lines 75-106, I could see that sometimes the teacher introduced or added new information in addition to her follow-up comments to the children’s responses. As Bob said “roses” as something he knew about flowers, the teacher validated and elaborated that roses are a certain kind of flower (line 75-77). Then in addition to such follow-up comments, the teacher gave Bob another question about something special that roses have on them (lines 78-80). Here, I noticed that the teacher was asking a known-answer question, which was somewhat different from the open-ended question she had been asking the children, “What do you know about flowers?” or “Do you know anything about flowers?” Here, the teacher was asking for specific information about roses. The question was directed to Bob, but other children also voluntarily jumped in and gave their ideas. In line 81, Bob said ‘petals’ which was mentioned earlier by Jack in terms of what he knew about flowers in line 58.
The teacher said that flowers do have petals but she was asking about another part on roses, and gave an additional hint to the group: “….but they have something else so you have to be careful,” (line 83). Then, another child, Eric, made a guess in response to the teacher’s hint: “Prickees” (line 84), and Bob also gave his guess, “prickles” (line 85), after hearing Eric’s. The teacher acknowledged Eric and Bob’s responses, which were descriptive words but showed that they had some understanding of the features of roses (“They hurt. They’re prickly” (line 88)). Then the teacher gave the exact name, “thorns,” as correction information and provided some additional explanation about “thorns” (“They’re very sharp…. if you’re not careful, a thorn will prick your skin”, (lines 91-94)).

In this kind of teacher-led group interaction, as the teacher and the children engage in group understanding through their group conversation, the teacher also had the specific purpose of using this large group conversation/talk sub-event as a context for introducing and building initial knowledge together on a certain planned topic. Here, I can see that as the teacher asked the children to share what they knew about flowers, her intent was not just an introductory and explanatory conversation on a certain topic, flowers, but also to provide additional information to the children to construct their understanding further.

At the end of transcript 4.11, Bob showed his understanding of flowers gained through this large group conversation: in lines 95-101, Bob said to the teacher that roses live in the water and they wake up with the sun like sunflowers. This information was discussed by other children in their interaction: in transcript 4.11, lines 1-9, Ann was talking about flowers needing water; in lines 61-67, Brian shared that sunflowers grow in the sun. When Ann and Brian were sharing such knowledge with the teacher and the
group, Bob was not necessarily part of the group conversation. But here I could see that Bob had actively joined in the group conversation by listening to what his peers were saying, and as he gave his responses to the teacher, he was actually summarizing some of the responses from his peers during their large group conversation on flowers. But Bob was also actually creative in understanding those other children’s sharing in his own way; based on Brian’s sharing on sunflowers, that they grow in the sun, Bob created his own idea, that flowers “wake up” with the sun, like sunflowers (lines 97, 99, and 101).

As discussed earlier, we cannot say automatically that the I-R-F pattern structure itself limits the children’s meaning making through group conversation. The children engaged in group meaning making within the large group context as they shared and listened to what each of them knew about flowers, which they got from various sources. The children’s group meaning making on ‘flowers’ was possible, especially as the children and teacher participated in and proceeded with this kind of teacher-led interaction adaptively rather than sticking closely to the original I-R-F sequence structure (teacher-individual child interaction). The other children’s sharing of their ideas on the ongoing topic of flowers was acknowledged by the teacher, which led the children to engage in more group interaction rather than just listening to the teacher-individual child interaction and waiting for own turns. However, in this teacher-led interaction within the identified I-R-F conversation structure, a certain level of teacher control was more discernable than in other collaborative group interactions; the children were allowed less freedom in longer extended talk than in the collaborative type of group conversation (i.e., transcript 4.8; transcript 4.9; and transcript 4.10) due to the teacher control focused on
giving turns to everyone. Also topics of the group conversation had to be something relevant to flowers, the topic that the teacher had chosen and initiated, whereas in the collaborative types of interaction, various topics were brought in and initiated by both the children and the teacher. Here, the purpose of presenting and analyzing these data is to illustrate this classroom’s large group conversation/talk sub-event during Morning Meeting, where various types of large group interaction existed within this preschool classroom context, rather than evaluating to suggest that one type of interaction is better than the other. Complex interaction was revealed through analysis of the children and the teacher’s actual interaction within their large group conversation/talk sub-event during Morning Meeting context.
RESEARCH QUESTION #3: What are the significant functions of such socially constructed large group meeting events (Morning Meeting time) within and across the children’s classroom experiences?

In research questions 1 and 2, I examined one preschool classroom’s official large group time, Morning Meeting. Morning Meeting in this classroom consisted of several sub-events: coming to the rug, large group talk/conversation, calendar, weather, and dismissal. In research question 1, I provided an overview and some detail to give a sense of what each sub-event looked like by presenting representational interactions that I observed during typical Morning Meeting routines. In answering research question 2, I examined more deeply one of the sub-events in the Morning Meeting, the “large group conversation/talk” sub-event, to understand meaning making the children and teacher co-constructed through their group conversation and how such meaning making proceeded through their group interaction. As I analyzed the actual interactions during this “large group conversation/talk” sub-event within Morning Meeting time, diverse types of interaction could be identified. Unlike the other sub-events (coming to the rug, calendar, weather, and dismissal), there was more than one main pattern of engaging in the large group conversation/talk sub-event, and this showed the socially constructed and multiple purposes/functions of this sub-event within the Morning Meeting context. Four major interaction patterns were identified: firstly, this large group conversation/talk sub-event was a context for individual children to share personal news, stories, or artifacts that they personally brought in within the large group context; secondly, this sub-event was also a context for the teacher and children to engage in large group announcements, which were
often related to upcoming or special events of their school and classroom that the group needed to know about for the daily classroom process; thirdly, the most significant function was that this large group conversation/talk sub-event was a context for the teacher and children to engage in large group conversation on various topics around them, which allowed them to construct group meaning making and understanding through their collaborative group interaction; and lastly, this sub-event was also a context for teacher-directed interaction on certain topics that the teacher chose and introduced to the children. The answers to research questions 1 and 2 also in part provided an answer to research question 3 concerning the significant functions of such socially constructed large group meeting events (Morning Meeting time) within the children’s classroom experiences. In the following section, then, I will focus on the question of what the significant functions of such socially constructed large group meeting events (Morning Meeting time) were across the children’s classroom experiences. In order to answer research question 3, I examined and tried to understand this classroom’s large group time (Morning Meeting) within the whole classroom contexts, considering it along with other contexts within the classroom.

Looking through the entire body of data and examining the data of Morning Meeting time within the frame of the whole classroom context, I could see some emerging categories which suggested that sometimes the large group interaction during Morning Meeting was extended into another context in the classroom. Also, at times, the large group conversation/talk process occurred outside of the official Morning Meeting context; at these times, a short large group conversation meeting was held at various
times and in different spaces within the classroom contexts when quick group meaning making was needed.

These newly identified categories were not observed as frequently as the typical or representational data which could be seen in the typical daily process. However, throughout the five and a half month data collection period, even though these features may not have appeared as often as the data discussed in considering research questions 1 and 2, it seems important to include such infrequent data, which definitely existed in this classroom. These data allowed me as a researcher to gain a fuller understanding of the complexity of this classroom’s processes; these features may be identified as infrequent data or cases, but they serve as important data which reflect one significant feature of this classroom – flexibility and adaptation in proceeding with the current classroom structure.

As discussed in Ch.3, along with the presentation of the patterned ways of doing Morning Meeting that illustrate the typical daily large group meeting process in this classroom in the findings of research questions 1 and 2, in this section focusing on research question 3, I will also include some illustrative cases that show changes in and the flexible nature of such a patterned cultural process, which I think will provide a rich spectrum of data for this ethnographic study of preschool large group time. This inclusion of both typical patterns and infrequent but important cases to illustrate the flexible nature of this classroom will not only more fully describe the complex nature of this classroom, but also allow the classroom as a cultural process which includes both patterned ways of doing and the notion of “culture as verb” which is “kaleidoscopic and dynamic” (Heath and Street, 2008, p, 7).
In the following section, I will mainly describe two emerging infrequent categories in this classroom as I examine and seek to understand the important function of Morning Meeting in connection to the whole classroom context. The first category is that sometimes the large group interaction of the Morning Meeting was extended into other contexts in the classroom. I will build on the concept of intercontextuality as a social construction (Bloome et al., 2005) as a major methodology that will allow me to analyze and examine and thus to understand such possible links between the Morning Meeting context and other contexts in this classroom. Within this first category, there were two different types of intercontextuality that I could identify throughout the data: a) an individual child’s sharing of artifacts during the Morning Meeting context and the use of such shared artifacts in a free-choice activity setting; and b) large group meaning making through group conversation during the Morning Meeting and its extension to various contexts, which allowed me as a researcher to understand in-depth social construction of intercontextuality through the interactions within the classroom.

The second category identified as I tried to understand the function of the large group time within the whole classroom context is that the large group conversation/talk was pursued outside of the official Morning Meeting context; there were times when a short large group conversation meeting was held as an adaptive format at various times and in various spaces within the classroom contexts when quick group meaning making was needed. This feature serves as significant case example which captures this classroom’s flexible and adaptive nature in proceeding with the current set classroom structure and experiences. In this section, I will provide illustrative cases as data to
present the complex and dynamic nature of the preschool large group meeting time within and across the classroom context.

(1) Large group time (Morning Meeting): its link to other contexts

The Morning Meeting was sometimes extended to other contexts in this classroom: firstly, this occurred through use of some artifacts that individual children brought to Morning Meeting to share in the activities the children could explore in the free-choice activities and play context; secondly, this occurred through linking of the large group meaning making through group conversation during the Morning Meeting with various contexts in the classroom.

These case examples were not observed as frequently as the typical daily classroom process. In the typical daily process, the large group time often proceeded as a context for emergent conversation in which the teacher and the children could bring in various topics around them, including individual experience as well as something relevant to their group classroom experiences, along with the ritual-like sub-activities, such as talking about the calendar and weather, all of which were explored in the findings of research questions 1 and 2. Whereas Story Time was a context in which the choice of book topics was always directly related to one of the table activities, the topics that were discussed during the Morning Meeting did not necessarily always have links to other contexts, like story time or free-choice activities/play time. However, along with such typical patterns within and across the classroom, there were also incidents which showed changes in those typical patterns; the large group meeting and meaning making were not
limited to one fixed way of following a daily routine within a given structure. When the children were making meanings actively through their group interactions during the Morning Meeting, if it was possible to extend some of the topics they discussed during the Morning Meeting through hands-on activities or other possible activities that they could easily access within the given classroom space and time, the interaction during Morning Meeting was sometimes extended to other contexts. As described in Ch.3, the methodology of this ethnographic study, in terms of understanding the Morning Meeting and its intercontextual links with other contexts, has been built upon the main construct that intercontextuality is socially constructed (Bloome et al., 2005). This construct leads researchers to examine and analyze the actual interaction among the children and the teachers, and thus allows the researcher to see whether the connections among events (contexts) were actually socially constructed, that is, whether those intercontextual connections were socially proposed, recognized, and acknowledged by the participants through their interaction and had some social consequences in the classroom (Bloome et al, 2005).

a) Sharing of artifacts during the Morning Meeting and use of the artifacts in an activity setting

As discussed in research question 2, in this classroom, the large group conversation/talk sub-event in Morning Meeting was a meaningful context in which the individual child could share personal news, stories, or artifacts that they personally brought in within the large group context. As the children shared their personal news and
stories that they wanted to share within the large group, they sometimes shared special artifacts they had brought from their home along with their verbal sharing during the Morning Meeting. Especially when the children came back from their vacations, they often engaged in verbal sharing of something they wanted to talk about experiences during their vacation and also shared some artifacts like pictures or special objects that were relevant to their vacation or other personal experiences. For example, when Jack returned from his vacation with his family in Hawaii, he brought several artifacts that he got in Hawaii, such as lava rocks, a miniature Tiki totem, a Hawaiian ukulele, etc. He showed these artifacts as he shared what he saw and did during his vacation in Hawaii. With the teacher’s assistance, he also shared pictures from the vacation which were posted on his father’s blog with the other children at the computer area during the free-choice activity and play time. In another example of this kind of sharing, when Kelly was about to leave for her vacation with her family in the Philippines, she brought several items that were related to the Philippines so that she would know more about the Philippines before visiting there. She brought a coconut from her home; during the Morning Meeting, Kelly shared her news that she would visit the Philippines soon and showed the coconut as something she might eat when she went there. During the free-choice activity and play time, the teacher, Jully, placed the coconut that Kelly shared during the Morning Meeting on a table, and then engaged in the activity of cracking the coconut with tools with the children to explore the inside of the coconut as well as taste the liquid inside of the coconut.
Transcript 4.12 below is an interaction segment from one day’s Morning Meeting; Katie had just come back from her vacation at Myrtle Beach. She had a chance to share verbally with the group about her vacation; during the verbal sharing about her vacation, she also showed the children some seashells that she had gathered at the beach. During Katie’s sharing about her vacation at Myrtle Beach, the teacher extended the children’s understanding by using a map, which was attached on the classroom wall bordering the carpet area where the Morning Meeting was held, to show where Myrtle Beach actually is in relation to Ohio. An intercontextual link to another hands-on activity context using those seashells was also proposed by the teacher, and acknowledged and recognized by the children through their interaction; in this sequence of events, I could see social construction of intercontextuality along with some social consequences of such intercontextual links within the classroom.

[Transcript 4.12] Katie’s sharing seashells after her vacation

1  Teacher (Jully): I’m going to start with this friend,
2      because this friend, who we haven’t seen for a while,
3      has something to share with us.
4  Children: Katie!
5  Teacher (Jully): (to Katie) Can you tell your friends where you went?
6  Katie: We went to Myrtle Beach.
7  Teacher (Jully): She went to Myrtle Beach.
8      (to the class) Do you know where Myrtle Beach is?
9  Children: xxxxxxx
10 Teacher (Jully): Let me show you on the map

   (the teacher rises and goes to the map posted on the
wall nearby and the children are watching the teacher)

11 Let me show you on the map while Katie gets those out.

12 Where do we live again?

13 Children (Katie): In Ohio.

14 Teacher (Jully): xxxxxx, Ohio.

(pointing to Columbus, Ohio with her right hand, and
to Myrtle Beach with her left hand) Way down here is

Myrtle Beach.

16 Children: Where?

17 Teacher: Right here, on the coast.

18 Brian: (looking at the map) oh, lots of water

19 Teacher: Katie was right here where my finger is,

20 and she went allllll the way down here (moving finger)

21 to Myrtle Beach.

22 Katie: xxxxxx really long time last night,

23 because I was kind of grumpy last night because I wanted to get

24 home xxxxxx

25 I got home my dad takes really long time to get out.

26 Teacher (Jully): (to the class) Katie didn’t get home last night till

27 really late.

(To Katie) I bet you’ll be a good napper today.

(Looking at a plastic bag that Katie has open in front of
her) What did you bring back? to share with your friends?

27 Katie: (taking seashells out of the bag) Seashells.
Teacher (Jully): (picking up a shell from Katie’s bag) I found one of those. Do you know what that’s from? Remember?

Teacher (Jully): Yeah. Mine had a hole in it.

Teacher (Jully): Do you remember what it was?

Bob: Yeah, got a hole

Teacher (Jully): An oyster shell.

Katie: Yeah

Teacher (Jully): You found lots of shells.

Teacher (Jully): I told Katie I had to buy mine in a store, but she found a lot.

Did you go out in the morning and hunt for shells?

Or what did you do it?

Katie: xxxxx. A big wave put me in the water (with hand gestures), and my daddy, my daddy helped me up.

Teacher (Jully): Yeah. Were you scared?

Katie: (nodding)

Teacher (Jully): That happened to me too, when I was at the beach.

Jenny: (to Katie) Was the big wave coming lots of seashells?

Eric: One time, when I was at the beach, a big wave swam me and my daddy out into the sea.

Teacher (Jully): Yeah, you gotta be careful.

Bob: (to Eric) You know what? A huge wave, bigger than yours (shows big size with arm).
I went on top of it.

Teacher (Jully): Yeah.

Can I ask you a question, Katie?

What are you going to do with those shells?

Katie: Wash them xxxxxx

Teacher (Jully): Oh, did you hear what Katie said we could do with her shells?

Katie: *(holding up one shell)* It’s like a chip *(pretending eating motion).*

Teacher (Jully): *(to Katie)* It does look like a chip.

*(to class)* She said we could wash them.

Maybe this afternoon we could put out little buckets and toothbrushes and soapy water,

and you guys can help wash ‘em.

It’s a good idea.

You got an awful lot.

John: Is she going to take them home?

Teacher (Jully): Let’s ask her.

Katie, are you going to take them home after they’re clean?

Or are you going to leave them at the school?

Katie: I’m going to take them home *(very soft voice).*

Teacher (Jully): She’s going to take them home.

Well, that’s nice of her to let us help wash them, and touch them and see them.

John: *(nodding)*
Teacher (Jully): It's a big pile of shells there.

In transcript 4.12 above, the teacher initiated their large group conversation/talk sub-event in the Morning Meeting by giving a turn to Katie, who had just come back from her vacation and brought something to share at the Morning Meeting time. Katie actually brought a bag of seashells that she had gathered while on her vacation with her as she ‘came to the rug’ (first sub-event) for Morning Meeting, which shows that Katie purposefully brought the seashells to show as she shared about her vacation with the other children in the Morning Meeting context. This was very typical of this classroom, a pattern that the children were well aware of; they had gotten used to bringing such artifacts to Morning Meeting to share with the other children.

In line 5, Katie shared the name of the place (“Myrtle Beach”) where she went with her family on vacation. The teacher extended her explanation further by using a map to show where Myrtle Beach is in relation to Ohio, where the children live. Social construction of intertextuality (Bloome et al., 2005) was observable during their large group interaction using the map in lines 7-25. The map was frequently used in this classroom, especially during Morning Meeting, as the children verbally shared where they had been during the weekend or on vacation, etc. The map is attached to the classroom wall bordering the carpet area where the Morning Meeting is held so that they can easily see and have access to it during the Morning Meeting process. After Katie shared with the large group that she went to Myrtle Beach, the teacher, Jully, asked the children if they knew where Myrtle Beach was (line 8). Then the teacher stood up and
pointed to the map. She proposed such an intertextual link by stating that she would show where Myrtle Beach, the name of the place that Katie had just shared (lines 10-11), was on the map. The teacher continue proposing the intertextual link between Katie’s verbal sharing and the map by asking the children where they lived (Ohio) and then showing where Myrtle Beach was in relation to Ohio. She pointed with one finger on Ohio and another finger on Myrtle Beach, saying: “Way down here is Myrtle Beach” (line 15); “Katie was right here where my finger is, and she went allllll the way down here to Myrtle Beach” (lines 19-20). The teacher’s proposal of such an intertextual link was acknowledged and recognized by the children; as the teacher tried to show two places (Ohio and Myrtle Beach) with her fingers, the children re-clarified with the teacher where exactly she was indicating. In line 16, the children asked the teacher where her finger was pointing (“where?”), and the teacher re-confirmed with the children by pointing again (“Right here, on the coast”, line 17). Such intertextuality was recognized by the children; Brian noticed that the point the teacher was indicating with her finger as Myrtle Beach was surrounded by the color blue, and he knew that blue represented water within the map. In line 18, Brian showed his recognition of the intertextual link by saying that he could see lots of water on the map where the teacher was pointing with her finger to Myrtle Beach.

Katie also showed her recognition of the intertextual link in her verbal sharing about her vacation as she responded to the teacher’s intertextual proposal. In lines 19-20, as the teacher was showing on the map where Myrtle Beach was in relation to Ohio, where they live, the teacher stressed in her verbal explanation that the distance was quite
far (“She went to allllll the way down here to Myrtle Beach”). Katie responded to the
teacher’s emphasis on the distance between the two places on the map with her verbal
sharing that it took a really long time to get back to her home the night before (lines 21-
23), which shows Katie’s recognition of the teacher’s intertextual proposal and making
the connection between the teacher’s statement and her sharing about her vacation trip.
Some social consequences might be that, through such a socially constructed intertextual
link using the map, the children could construct their meaning making more concretely as
they actually saw where Katie had been on the map, which allowed an opportunity for
some children to understand that Myrtle Beach was quite far away from Ohio, where they
live, and that Myrtle Beach was surrounded by water (ocean), which was identifiable on
the map as a blue color.

In lines 26-72, Katie’s sharing about her vacation proceeded to the seashells that
she brought from the vacation. The group talked about one similar seashell that they had
seen previously when the teacher had brought some seashells from her own vacation and
had shared them at the Morning Meeting (lines 28-36). Katie also talked about things
that happened at the beach (“A big wave put me in the water and my daddy, my daddy
helped me up” (lines 41-42)), which led to other children’s sharing of similar experiences
at the beach (line 45; line 47; lines 50-51).

In lines 53-72, one of the important aspects of this classroom can be identified,
that at times Morning Meeting was extended to other contexts, here, through use of
artifacts that an individual child brought to the Morning Meeting to share in an activity
during the free-choice activities and play context. In line 54, an intercontextual link was
initially proposed by the teacher’s asking Katie what she was going to do with the shells. Katie responded by saying that she wanted to wash those seashells, an activity which the children in this classroom were accustomed to engaging in (line 55). Here, as Katie responded to the teacher’s question, she also showed her acknowledgement and recognition of the intercontextual link proposed by the teacher. In lines 59-61, the teacher gave a more concrete intercontextual proposal to the entire classroom with her verbal statement which indicated ‘when’ and ‘what other materials’ could be used along with Katie’s seashells in their later activity (“Maybe this afternoon we could put out little buckets and toothbrushes and soapy water, and you guys can help wash ‘em”). The teacher’s explicit intercontextual proposal was acknowledged and recognized by John, who asked whether Katie would take those seashells home after their later activity (line 64). This shows John’s recognition of intercontextuality, that the class would have another activity later that day using Katie’s seashells. Here, it is important to note that the teacher’s proposed intercontextuality was recognized, not just by Katie, but by other children as well, all of which indicates a social construction of intercontextuality through the interaction within the Morning Meeting context. Some social consequences of such intercontextuality in this classroom are identifiable in the teacher’s final comments that even though Katie would take the seashells home after the later activity, it was still nice for them “to wash them, and touch them, and see them” (lines 69-70). Namely, through such intercontextual link to another activity context, the children would be allowed to explore those seashells with their hands and senses (“to wash them, and touch them, and see them,” lines 70-71) thus to have an opportunity to explore those seashells that Katie
shared at the Morning Meeting in more concrete and various ways in a hands-on activity context. This intercontextuality had social significance in showing that things an individual child shared and brought from his/her home were validated and valued in this classroom, and also in providing an opportunity for the child to explore sharing with other children in different ways.

b) Large group meaning making through group conversation and its extension to various contexts (opportunity for social construction of intercontextuality through interactions within and across various contexts)

The second way that Morning Meeting was extended to other contexts identified above was through linking their large group meaning making through group conversation during the Morning Meeting with various contexts in the classroom. This type of intercontextual link was less frequently observed than the first type of link, using artifacts that an individual child brought to the Morning Meeting to share in the activities during the free-choice activities and play context. Even though this second type did not exist as a frequent data category in this classroom, the data from such interaction across different contexts were very significant in terms of understanding the way the children made meaning within and across the classroom experiences, and the significance of the Morning Meeting as a possible context for supporting the children’s group meaning making.

The data below are presented as an illustrative case which may not be representational data but is important in depicting the flexible nature of this classroom. There were times when the large group meaning making observable during Morning
Meeting contexts was extended to other contexts, here, the large group experiment context and sensory table activity context. With accessible resources available in the classroom, the teacher was able to support such intercontextual links in the classroom. However, the teacher’s proposal of intercontextuality (setting those contexts) does not automatically imply that there were intercontextual links and that the children were making meaning through such intercontextuality. Examination and analysis of actual data from interaction among the children and teacher within and across those contexts are significant and necessary in terms of more fully understanding the meaning making that the children and the teacher construct in the various contexts.

*Meaning making during Morning Meeting - Large group conversation on things that happened the previous day (a drainage problem in the classroom) and talking together about what a clog is.*

One morning during the Morning Meeting, the teacher and children started their large group conversation by sharing stories about something that had happened the previous day during their naptime. There had been a drainage problem in the school building, and dirty water had overflowed from the school toilets and sinks. The children had to wake up during their naptime and maintenance people came to the classroom bringing tools with which to fix the problems. The next morning during the Morning Meeting, the children and teacher were engaged in talking about what had happened in their school building classroom the day before. In this process, the children brought up their personal experiences of similar drain problems at their homes, which provided them
an opportunity to engage in group meaning making about what a clog was and to construct understanding together through their large group conversation. The interaction segment below is the part of the large group conversation during the Morning Meeting on the morning after the drainage problem at the classroom.

Transcript 4.13: Large group conversation on what a clog is during the Morning Meeting time.

1 Katie: One day, at my house, I dropped something in my sink, and my mommy, she called the, um, the fixers

2 Teacher (Jully): The fixers came?

3 Katie: Uh huh, and then they put a fishing pole down there

4 Teacher: That’s what that snake was that I was trying to tell you about.

5 Katie: (continuing) and they pulled out, uh, you know what?

6 Teacher: That’s not called a fishing pole.

7 Katie: (continuing) and they pulled out, uh, you know what?

8 A band-aid down there and it got stuck and they pulled it out and

9 Teacher: Was it yucky-looking?

10 Did it smell?

11 Yeah, sometimes when you put the wrong things down your sink or your drains at home

12 they will cause them to clog,

13 cause do you know what’s been stuck in our sinks before when they stopped draining?

14 Students: What?

15 Teacher: Forks, washcloths, toothbrushes, paintbrushes, marbles, toys.

16 Jenny: Hey, I got to tell you something.

17 I stuck a marble down, um, my sink,
and then fixers had to come and took my new marble out.

Teacher: Yeah, you don’t want to stick stuff down the sink because it can cause a big problem.

Bob: You know what?
You know what?
My mommy says

Teacher: Sometimes that happens.

Bob: I want to tell you (several students are speaking simultaneously)

Teacher: You know what?

John has been raising his hand quite nicely.

Umm (to another student who has continued to talk)

Bob: Katie, shh.

Teacher: Shh. John has had his hand up for a while.

Can we give John a turn?

When Perry, one of the maintenance men, came yesterday to help answer my email,

he thought we just had a clogged potty,

and I said, “Oh no, Cary, this is much worse than a clogged potty.”

Bob: Michael, stop talking!

Teacher: “You’re going to need more than a plunger.”

That’s that tool you use sometimes at home.

It has a big long stick on it, and like a rubber thing at the bottom to get the clogged bit up.

Brian: My daddy has that.

Teacher: Yeah. We needed more than that.

John, what did you want to tell us?

176
John: One time I had yucky stuff in Mommy’s sink, and my daddy, and then, instead of the cleaners, my daddy had to get it out.

Teacher: Yeah, I have to do that at my house. Sometimes when I use my bathroom sink, a lot of my hair falls in it, and it clogs the sink.

Michael: I want to tell you something. Guess what.

Teacher: You put a lot of paper towels in your potty?

Michael: Yes.

Teacher: What happened?

Michael: My mommy couldn’t flush it at my home then.

Teacher: Uh huh. Did she say, “Michael, that’s too much paper”?

Michael: Uh huh.

Teacher: Yeah, because if you put too much paper in the potty, it will clog the toilet too.

I think you all understand.

We’re going to try paper, and when we do our experiment today, we will try paper in there, and I’ll show you what happens with some other stuff.

In transcription 4.13, the children were making sense of the drainage problem they had observed the previous day (-what’s a clog) and exploring why it had occurred through their group discourse in the large group meeting process. As discussed in the
findings of research question #2, making a link to a personal experience that was similar to the on-going topic was a vital way for the children in this classroom to make sense of and more fully understand the group topic. As the children and teacher shared personal stories and experiences and listened to one another, they were constructing an understanding of something that had happened in their classroom (what’s a clog) and why it had happened, which served as an ample opportunity for the children to engage in social construction of meaning making through their large group conversation.

In lines 1-8 and lines 17-21, Katie and Jenny were making sense of the classroom drainage problem by making connections with it and sharing their own personal stories about drainage problems that they had had in their own homes. They both shared their personal experience (at home) of dropping something down the drain in the sink (line 1; line 18). The ‘fixer’ had to come and pull out things from the sink (i.e, “a band-aid”) (line 7-8, Katie); “fixers had to come and took my new marble out” (line 19, Jenny)). Both of these incidents were similar to the incident in the classroom the previous day. In line 4, Katie indicated her understanding that a certain tool had been used to pull things from the sink, saying “they put a fishing pole down there” (line 4), and she shared such knowledge, her previous observation from personal experience, with the large group. In response to Katie’s sharing, the teacher acknowledged Katie’s understanding of a certain tool to be used in drainage problems: “That’s what that snake was that I was trying to tell you about” (line 5, Teacher (Jully)), and also provided more correct information: “That’s not called a fishing pole,” (line 5, Teacher). As the group discourse went on, the teacher provided a more detailed explanation about different tools
and what they look like and how people use such tools to fix drainage problems as in lines 37-39: “… a plunger, that’s that tool you use sometimes at home. It has a big long stick on it, and like a rubber thing at the bottom to get the clogged bit up.” In response to the teacher’s explanation, Brian, who was listening to the group discourse, made a personal connection and indicated his understanding of what the tool looks like: “My daddy has that” (line 40). Brian’s comment is interesting because it indicates that even though he had not been verbally actively in sharing his stories or ideas, he was participating and actively making connections in the group meeting process through listening to others’ sharing.

In lines 43-44, John shared his personal experience of a similar situation (“One time, I had yucky stuff in Mommy’s sink” (line 43)), and he also shared his observation that someone fixed the problem. Interestingly, unlike Katie and Jenny who shared that a fixer came to their homes to fix the problem, just like the previous day in the classroom, John shared the somewhat different experience that his dad had fixed the problem: “instead of the cleaners, my daddy had to get it out” (line 44). In line 53, Michael shared his experience of causing clogging to occur when he put too much paper into the toilet (potty): “My mommy couldn’t flush it at my home then.” The children exhibit various ways of making connections with their own personal experience with the on-going topic of clogging. As they made connections between the classroom clogging incident and their personal experiences, the children were making meaning and constructing understanding together about a clog through their large group conversation during the Morning Meeting interaction: a clog happens when something gets stuck in the sink;
there is yucky stuff in the sink; when they put too much paper in the toilet; fixers or parents (i.e., dad) have to fix the problem; sometimes tools are used to fix the problem (i.e., a fishing pole, a snake, a plunger). The teacher also acknowledged that the children were making sense of the things that happened in the classroom (-the clogging problem) through such a group meaning making process during Morning Meeting context: “I think you all understand” (line 58).

In the process of group discourse and the children’s sharing, the teacher, Jully, took the role of listening to the children’s sharing and elaborating on the things they shared to explain why such problems had occurred: “Yeah, sometimes when you put the wrong things down your sink or your drains at home, they will cause them to clog” (lines 11-13); “Yeah, because if you put too much paper in the potty, it will clog the toilet too” (line 57). As mentioned earlier, the teacher also provided information about the tools that can be used in case of a clogging problem (lines 5-6; lines 37-39) as she listened to and acknowledged the children’s sharing of their similar experiences at home. The teacher also brought in details about similar previous incidents in the classroom to support the children’s understanding of clog: “do you know what’s been stuck in our sinks before when they stopped draining?” (line 14) “Forks, washcloths, toothbrushes, paintbrushes, marbles, toys” (line 16).

In addition, the teacher shared her own personal experience in response to John’s sharing of his experience (line 45-47) as a participant in the children’s large group conversation. Through sharing her personal experience, the teacher joined the children’s on-going group discourse about clogging in life experience at home (“Yeah, I have to do
that at my house. Sometimes when I use my bathroom sink, a lot of my hair falls in it, and it clogs the sink” (lines 45-47)), which served to provide another related example for the children. During this morning’s large group conversation process within the Morning Meeting context since the children actively entered into during the conversation process, for the most part, the children voluntarily took turns for talking without the teacher’s management. Some children held the floor voluntarily by saying “Hey, I got to tell you something” (Jenny, line 17) or “I want to tell you something” (Michael, line 48). However, when several children tried to share their ideas at once, the teacher took over turn-taking management and gave the next turn to the child who had been raising his hand for a turn. There will be further discussion about the various roles that the teacher took within the event process in research question 4.

In transcription 4.13, at the end of their large group conversation interaction, the teacher indicated that the children in some way had made sense of the things that happened in the classroom (-the clogging issue) through their group conversation: “I think you all understand” (line 58). And before moving on to the calendar and weather, the next sub-events of Morning Meeting, the teacher, Jully, briefly mentioned that they would have an experiment with clogging using paper later on that day (“We’re going to try paper, and when we do our experiment today, we will try paper in there, and I’ll show you what happens with some other stuff” (lines 59-61)). In her verbal statements, the teacher publicly proposed to the children that there would be another event, which will be related to what they had just talked about, a clog. This teacher’s statements actually served as proposal for intercontextual link between this
current large group talk about the drainage problem and a clog during the Morning Meeting with the later experiment using paper. Since it was at the very end of their large group conversation process, there was no uptake or response from the children after the teacher’s proposal. The teacher moved on to the calendar and weather and then the children went outside for outdoor playtime. At this point from this transcription only, there is not a sufficient evidence to argue whether the teacher’s proposed intercontextual link was recognized and acknowledged by the children, and had social consequences in the classroom. According to Bloome et al. (2005), because intercontextuality is socially constructed, “merely proposing a relationship between one event and another does not in and out of itself create a connection. … A connection among events has to be ratified by others; the participants have to acknowledge and recognize the connection, and the connection has to have some social consequences” (p.44). In the next sections, I will present the actual data from the large group experiment that was conducted later in the day in this classroom when the children went back in from the outdoor play time. Through analysis of interaction segments from the transcription of the large group experiment using paper to clarify “clogging idea,” it will be possible to examine whether the teacher’s proposal of intercontextuality was recognized and acknowledged, and had some social consequences; that is, whether there was an intercontextual link between events (Bloome et al., 2005).
Large group experiment on what a clog is during the story time

When the children returned from the outdoor play time after the Morning Meeting, the large group story time is next in the regular routine for the typical daily schedule in this classroom. However, on this day, the teacher changed the large group story time to a large group experiment on the carpet area using a large transparent pipe, paper, and water to show the children about the question ‘what’s a clog,’ which they had group conversation about together during that day’s Morning Meeting interaction. During the Morning Meeting interaction, the children engaged in active group conversation on what had happened the previous day in their classroom (clog problem), and they tried to construct understanding together about the question ‘what’s a clog’ by sharing and making connections with their previous experience at home as a source of their group meaning making. At the end of the group conversation, the teacher publicly proposed to the children that they would have an experiment on a clog using paper later in the day (“We’re going to try paper, and when we do our experiment today, we will try paper in there, and I’ll show you what happens with some other stuff” (Transcript 4.13, lines 59-61).

The following interaction segments from transcript 4.14 are data from the large group experiment exploring what a clog is during the large group story time later that day. The entire experiment and interaction lasted about 15 minutes, and in this section, I will present interaction segments which illustrate the main procedure of the experiment. The children and teacher’s interactions and conversation during the large group experiment on demonstrating a clog using a transparent pipe and paper are also
illustrated. Building upon the analysis of Bloome et al. (2005) on social construction of intercontextuality, the data from transcription 3.3 have been arranged in a table format so that not only individual messages, but also location of the proposal, recognition, and acknowledgement of intercontextuality within the transcript data could be described. The social consequences of such socially constructed intercontextual links will be also described.

Analyzing the children and teacher’s interaction during their large group experiment will provide an understanding that: 1) how the children and the teacher continue constructing their meaning making on ‘what’s a clog’ through actually seeing and participating in the large group experiment using the transparent pipe, paper, and water; and 2) how(whether) the teacher’s initial proposal for the intercontextual links between two events (Morning Meeting and large group experiment) was in fact acknowledged and recognized by the children, and thus have some social consequences through such interaction in this classroom. That is, whether the children’s previous interaction and conversation on the question ‘what is a clog’ during their Morning Meeting was actually furthered and made more concrete by the experiment; whether the children actually see and have an understanding of the intercontextual links and that this current event of the large group experiment is actually related to the previous event, the interaction and meaning making during the Morning Meeting earlier of the day.
The teacher initiated the large group experiment by putting a crumpled newspaper inside the transparent pipe and then pouring water through the pipe. As they engaged in their large group experiment, the children observed and talked about how the paper remained stuck in the pipe even though they had poured water through it, and the teacher showed them a special tool she would use to get the paper out of the pipe. Within this process, the teacher kept making intercontextual links in her explanation so that this experiment would be relevant to the incident that occurred the previous day in the classroom, and to their conversation during the Morning Meeting regarding what a clog is earlier this morning.
### Transcript 4.14: Large group experiment during Story time

#### Transcript 4.14 - [Interaction Unit #1]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line #</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Message Unit</th>
<th>Intercontextual links: Proposed, recognized, acknowledged, and having a social consequence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jully</td>
<td><em>(as she crumples one page of newspaper into ball)</em> Now sometimes, this is what happens a lot,</td>
<td>Proposed, Intercontextual link</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(teacher)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>people put in too much paper in the toilet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>or sometimes it’s food that you stick down</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>or sometimes it’s a fork, sometimes it’s a toy,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>Sometimes it’s a marble.</td>
<td>Acknowledging and Recognizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Sometimes it’s a band-aid</td>
<td>Acknowledging and Recognizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td><em>(nodding to Elizabeth)</em> sometimes it’s a band-aid,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>sometimes it’s a washcloth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>We’re going to pretend that this is like toilet paper <em>(as she puts the crumpled newspaper into the pipe).</em></td>
<td>Proposing, Intercontextual link</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>Look, what happened?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>It stuck.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>John</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>It’s stuck in there, isn’t it?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>(nodding)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Because when you flush something down in the toilet, it creates some pressure.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Do you remember when we did this? (As she pressed her palms together)</td>
<td>Proposing Intercontextual link</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>(watching some children pressing their palms together as she had) And you’re pressing? That’s pressure.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Like in our bottle.</td>
<td>Acknowledging and recognizing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Like in our bottle, you’re right, when we did our science experiment.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>That’s pressure,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>and pressure happens inside some pipes where it will pull something in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>but it doesn’t have enough pressure to pull it out.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>And this is what I think happened yesterday.</td>
<td>Proposing Intercontextual link</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>When the firefighters came and they had to hook up their pipe, their hoses,</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>---</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to the pipes in the street</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>and they had to get a lot of force behind that water to shoot it up the building,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>I think it took down the water pressure in the pipes so that, instead of pushing real hard, it only pushed a little bit.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td><em>(Using hand motions to clarify. To demonstrate pushed a little bit, she presses her two index fingers together, then contrasts that with the greater pressure created by pressing her two palms together)</em> Use your fingers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td><strong>Children</strong> <em>(following the teacher’s gesture – pressing their two index fingers together)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td><strong>Teacher</strong> See how tiny?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>That’s not as powerful as your whole hands. Right?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>And I think it didn’t have enough pressure to pull all of our yuck and waste and toilet paper down through our pipes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td><strong>Andy</strong> Now, put the water</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Throughout the large group experiment, the teacher was trying to explain ‘what it means to clog’ with a visual demonstration using a transparent pipe and paper. In such a process, the teacher constantly proposed intercontextual links between their current experiment process and the previous Morning Meeting event, in which they talked together about the clog problem that had occurred the day before, thus to support the children in constructing their understanding on ‘what’s a clog’ and why it happened in their classroom the previous day through their interaction.

In lines 1-4, the teacher began the large group experiment by crumpling the page of a newspaper into a ball and getting ready to put it into the transparent pipe. As the
teacher visually showed the children how something could get stuck in the pipe, the
teacher proposed intercontextual links through her verbal explanation that a clogging
problem happens when people put too much paper in the toilet, or sometimes food, a fork,
a toy, all of which were examples shared in their earlier Morning Meeting interaction.
Here, the teacher was proposing to the children the intercontextual link that, even though
she was demonstrating with the pipe and paper, they were currently talking about the clog
issue, which was directly connected with their previous interaction during the Morning
Meeting event. The teacher’s intercontextual proposal was acknowledged and recognized
by the children in lines 6 and 7. In these lines, Bob and Elizabeth responded to the
teacher’s example of a clog by adding other examples that were mentioned in the earlier
Morning Meeting interaction. Bob said that a clog could happen sometimes from
sticking marbles down and Elizabeth said that it could happen with a band-aid; both of
these were specific examples from their earlier Morning Meeting interaction. Bob and
Elizabeth’s comments acknowledged and recognized that the teacher was currently
making an intercontextual link between the current large group experiment and the earlier
Morning Meeting event, which was also relevant to the toilet clogging incident that had
occurred the previous day in the classroom. Here, social consequences of the
intercontextual link can be identified: through their interaction and social construction of
the intercontextual link, the children recognized and showed their understanding that a
clog involves putting something wrong or inappropriate into a sink or pipe.

In line 9, the teacher continued proposing the intercontextual link by saying that
they were going to pretend this crumpled newspaper ball was toilet paper, and she put the
newspaper ball into the transparent pipe to show something stuck in the pipe. In this way, the teacher proposed an intercontextual link between the current large group experiment using the crumpled newspaper and the toilet clog incident that they had talked about during the earlier Morning Meeting. The toilet paper that the teacher mentioned in pretense was also actually an exact example that came from their earlier Morning Meeting conversation about what could cause the clog in the potty (i.e., transcript 3.2, line 57, p.177 – Teacher: “Yeah, because if you put too much paper in the potty, it will clog the toilet too”). John responded to the teacher’s proposal with his observation on the pipe (experiment): “It’s stuck” (line11). Here, it is not clear whether he acknowledged or recognized the teacher’s proposal of intercontextual link even though using a newspaper ball stuck into the pipe have a clear link with the previous events (the things that happened the previous day in the classroom and their interaction during the earlier Morning Meeting event). At this point, John’s response showed that he was actively joining in the experimental process by responding to the teacher’s lead with his observation about the pipe.

In lines 14-37, as the teacher proceeded with the experiment using the crumpled newspaper ball and the pipe, before pouring water into the pipe, the teacher tried to give an explanation on why a clogging problem can happen by making a connection with the concept of pressure. In line 15, the teacher proposed a new intercontextual link with another previous classroom event, from some time before in which they talked together about ‘pressure’ (“Do you remember when we did this?”). The teacher brought up the hand movement of that time they did together (-pressing palms together to feel the
pressure (the teacher’s nonverbal movement in line 16) to remind the children as well as to support her intercontextual link. This intercontextual link was acknowledged in line 17 by John, who explicitly brought up the exact example from the previous water pressure experiment (“like in our bottle”). John recognized the intercontextual link between the current experiment on clogging with the another previous experiment event on pressure which the teacher was proposing. I could identify some social consequence of such intercontextual link that, as John brought up the example from their previous pressure experiment (-using a bottle to explore water pressure), he was also clarifying and reconfirming with the teacher that the link that the teacher was making was same link that he was making now. The teacher responded to John with confirmation of such intercontextual link: “Like in our bottle, you’re right, when we did our science experiment” (line 18). John was actively constructing an intercontextual link with an event other than the earlier Morning Meeting, which enabled him to use previous interaction and meaning making on pressure as another resource for his understanding of the current new meaning making on clogging.

Unlike John, the other children did not show any acknowledgement or recognition of the teacher’s proposal of an intercontextual link between the current clog experiment with the previous water pressure experiment. The majority of the children were more interested in when the teacher would actually pour water into the transparent pipe that the crumpled newspaper ball was stuck in. In lines 23-37, the teacher explained to the children that what happened the other day in the classroom was actually something relevant to the concept of pressure (“And I think it didn’t have enough pressure to pull of
our yuck and waste and toilet paper down through our pipes” (line 30)). The teacher was holding a cup of full of water in her hand as she engaged in her verbal explanation on the clogging problem connection with water pressure. Even though the children were listening to the teacher’s explanation, they showed more interest in actually pouring water into the pipe. In line 31, Andy insisted that the teacher pour water soon (“Now, put the water”); and in lines 35 and 36, John and Elizabeth also showed their interest in pouring water into the pipe instead of responding to the teacher’s explanation (“Maybe we need to put in the water” (line 35); “Are you going to put in the water?” (line 36)). In the next interaction segment (Interaction Unit 2) of Transcript 3.3, the teacher proceeded with the experiment process; she poured the water into the pipe with the crumpled newspaper ball in, and the teacher and the children became engaged in the actual experiment process.

**Transcript 4.14 - [Interaction Unit #2]**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line #</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Message Unit</th>
<th>Intercontextual links: Proposed, recognized, acknowledged, and having a social consequence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>All right, let’s pretend we’re going to flush the toilet.</td>
<td>Proposing Intercontextual link</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>(pouring a large cup of water into the pipe(tube) with crumpled newspaper lodged inside)</em> Here we go, flushing the potty.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td></td>
<td>Oh look! <em>(showing the water drops)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued
**Interaction Unit #2 Continued**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>coming through the pipe)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Nick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>Children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 57 | Teacher | (as she pours more water into the pipe)  
All right, now. |
<p>| 58 | John | It kinda pushed it up (with a hand gesture of water moving up) |
| 59 | Children | ahhhh- (giggling and some are pointing their fingers at the pipe) |
| 60 | Teacher | I’m going to put some more in there (pouring). |
| 61 |   | It’s absorbing a lot in the paper. |
| 62 |   | Some is going up and some is going down. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>Can you do me a favor, John? Will you fill that up?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td><strong>Brian</strong></td>
<td>The paper is moving down, it’s going down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td><strong>Teacher</strong></td>
<td>The paper is moving, but there is water in there, too.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In lines 47-65, the teacher proceeded with the experiment. In lines 47-49, as she poured the cup of water into the pipe with the crumpled newspaper lodged inside, the teacher proposed intercontextual link (“All right, let’s pretend we’re going to flush the toilet” (line 47)). The intercontextual link she was proposing to the children was that even though they were doing an experiment by pouring water into the pipe, it actually had a connection/relationship with the things that happened the other day in their classroom (clog problem) as well as their interaction during the earlier Morning Meeting event. Interestingly, in this experiment process, even though the children were actively engaged in the experiment interaction, they did not immediately show their acknowledgment and recognition of such intercontextual link as that the teacher proposed. The children were showing their excitement and focusing more on the actual experiment process. They actively provided their observations on what they could see about the water poured into the pipe with the crumpled newspaper ball (“It came down” (line 50); “It kinds pushed it up” (line 58); “The paper is moving down, it’s going down” (line 64)).
The children also insisted that the teacher pour more water into the pipe, saying “Try more!” “Try a lot!” (line 51; line 54; line 56). Such interactions suggest that the children seemed to have some understanding that in order to push out the crumpled newspaper that was stuck in the pipe with water, they needed to put in more water, a lot of water. However, at this point, it is not clear whether they were making another advanced connection of such understanding (-needing more water) with the concept of strong pressure that the teacher was trying to explain to them. In line 63, as they obviously needed more water, the teacher asked some children to go and fill the cups with water for the experiment and they continued through such a process to pour more water into the pipe. However, like in their actual situation the day before, the wet crumpled paper in the pipe was not pushed out solely by the water.

In the next interaction segment (Interaction Unit #3) of Transcript 3.3, the teacher used a tool (‘rod’) to push the wet crumpled newspaper ball out of the pipe, which was exactly what the maintenance person who had come to the classroom the day before had done to fix the problem. The teacher proposed such intercontextual link in her verbal explanation as she showed the children the use of a tool to fix the clog problem by visual demonstration. This also had intercontextual link with the children’s interaction during their earlier Morning Meeting event, in which they made meaning together on using tools for clog problems (--someone had to fix the problems and some tools were used to fix the problem at their homes).

As the experiment process proceeded to the end, the children showed acknowledgement, recognition, and some social consequences of the intercontextual
connection that the teacher had been proposing throughout the experiment and interaction process.

**Transcript 4.14 - [Interaction Unit #3]**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line #</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Message Unit</th>
<th>Intercontextual links: Proposed, recognized, acknowledged, and having a social consequence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>124</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td><em>(showing a rod that she picked up from the shelf behind her)</em> This is kind of like the snake that they use. It’s this big long tool and it’s flexible.</td>
<td>Proposing Intercontextual link</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>125</td>
<td></td>
<td>This one’s not flexible though.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>126</td>
<td></td>
<td>And it goes down so it can move around bumps and bends in the pipe.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>127</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>It’s going down.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>128</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>And they brought in the Rotarooter, <em>(makes a machine noise while agitating inside the pipe with the rod).</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>129</td>
<td></td>
<td>And all the sudden <em>(makes a machine noise)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>130</td>
<td>Children</td>
<td><em>(joining in)</em> <em>(makes a machine noise)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>131</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td><em>(She pushes the clog out of the pipe with the rod)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>132</td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>(clapping) Yaaaay</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>133</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Around the edges <em>(as most of the students move too close to the pipe)</em>.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>134</td>
<td></td>
<td>No more clog in our potty and the pipe was clean,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>135</td>
<td></td>
<td>and this <em>(indicating the newspaper clog)</em> went down the sewer like it’s supposed to.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>136</td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>xxxxxxxxx <em>(various comments from children)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>137</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>And this was probably some of the stuff we saw on our carpet and on our floor, that came out of the sewer.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>138</td>
<td></td>
<td>Because the problem was some of this stuff came up with that water when it went over and got all over our floor.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>139</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>What really came up?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>140</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>It was probably, to be honest with you, a little bit of poop <em>(making a wry face)</em>.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>141</td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Ewwwwww (laughing and giggling)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>142</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Well, that’s where poop goes. It goes in the potty, right?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>143</td>
<td></td>
<td>And it was probably some mud and dirt from inside of the pipe,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line</td>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Text</td>
<td>Acknowledging and recognizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>144</td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Yuck!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>145</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>and it was probably some trash maybe too,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>146</td>
<td></td>
<td>and some yucky water that—if water sits inside a pipe, maybe toilet paper put together.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>147</td>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>Um, xxxxxxxxx</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>148</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Probably, whatever was stuck inside the pipe like that, when that water came out</td>
<td>Proposing Intercontextual link continues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>149</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>(as she pours water inside of the empty pipe)</em> When the water comes through a pipe, sometimes it comes through with enough force that it will rinse away whatever is on the pipe,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150</td>
<td></td>
<td>and that’s what came out on our floor, this stuff, probably a combination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>151</td>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>Toilet paper?</td>
<td>Acknowledging and recognizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>152</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td><em>(nodding)</em> Yeah, a little toilet paper,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>153</td>
<td></td>
<td>a little bit of poop,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>154</td>
<td></td>
<td>a little bit of dirt.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>155</td>
<td>Children</td>
<td><em>(watching and pointing at the wet</em></td>
<td>Acknowledging and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

199
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interaction Unit #3 Continued</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>200</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

```
newspaper ball and pieces) Yuk /Ewww (laughing) recognizing

156 Teacher So, luckily, we can use our potty today, and we won’t have any clogs anymore.

157 Children *(various comments)* It’s a lot.

158 Teacher Yeah, it’s a lot of water.

159 Jenny: Um, um, how do you, how do you get a clog in the potty?

160 Teacher Who can answer that question for Jenny?

161 Jenny is saying, “How do you get a clog in your potty?”

162 Jack You stick something down in the potty.

163 Teacher You put something down in the potty that doesn’t belong.

164 Denny Or you have a really big poop *(stretching his arms out to represent ‘big’).*

Acknowledging and recognizing intercontextual link

Continued**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>165</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Or you have a really big poop. You’re right, Denny.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>166</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yeah, or sometimes like I said the pressure wasn’t right. The city didn’t have enough water pressure to get the clog out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>167</td>
<td></td>
<td>I need everybody to scoot against the sides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>168</td>
<td>Children</td>
<td><em>(Children go back to their original seating).</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>169</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Maybe tomorrow,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>170</td>
<td></td>
<td>I don’t think we can do this today, because we have something in our water table now,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>171</td>
<td></td>
<td>but maybe tomorrow, if I can get to school early, I can bring some pipes to school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>172</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hey, Bill, xxxxxx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>173</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>real pipes or pretend pipes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>174</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Well, pretend pipes, because I don’t have enough money to buy real pipes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>175</td>
<td></td>
<td>We can put some [of] these pipes and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Continued
In lines 124-126, as the teacher brought out a tool (here, ‘rod’) to push the wet crumpled newspaper ball out of the pipe, the teacher proposed intercontextual link between the current large group experiment and the situation the day before in their classroom (clog problem) and the interaction they engaged in the Morning Meeting earlier that morning. As she showed the rod to the children, she made an intercontextual link with the tool that the maintenance person had used (“This is kind of like the snake that they use” (line 124)). As she was agitating the paper ball inside of the pipe with the rod, the teacher also made intercontextual connection with another special tool that the maintenance person had brought to fix the clog problem (“And they brought in the Rotarooter, rrrrrrrrr (making machine noise)”, line 128). The children responded to the teacher’s intercontextual connection by joining in and making the same machine noise, “Rrrrrrrr” (line 130), while the teacher was making her hand motion. At this point, it is hard to identify whether the children were actually acknowledging or recognizing the intercontextual link that the teacher was proposing or whether they were simply focusing on and joining in the actual experiment process rather than making an intercontextual link.
As the teacher finally pushed the crumpled newspaper ball out of the pipe using the tool (‘rod’), the children showed their excitement by clapping and cheering (line 132). The children were actively engaged in the experiment process. Then, as the experiment moved toward the end and as the children and the teacher engaged in their group conversation further, it became clear that the children also acknowledged and recognized the intercontextual links that the teacher had been proposing.

In lines 137-138, the teacher continued to propose the intercontextual link between the current experiment using paper and pipe and the clog incident that they had experienced the day before in the classroom and the interaction that they had during the earlier Morning Meeting event. As they observed the wet crumpled newspaper pieces that were pushed from the pipe, the teacher proposed the intercontextual link by saying, “And this was probably some of the stuff we saw on our carpet and on our floor, that came out of the sewer” (line 137). This proposal of intercontextual links was acknowledged and recognized by John in line 139, when he asked the teacher what really came up. This clearly shows his recognition of the intercontextual links: even though what he was seeing at the time was the wet newspaper pieces from the current experiment, his question makes an intercontextual connection with the clog incident that happened the day before in their classroom, which they made meaning through their interaction during the earlier Morning Meeting. There were also some social consequences from such an intercontextual link: John constructed his understanding of clog more actively and concretely as he recognized these events were interconnected. The teacher also acknowledged and recognized John’s recognition of the intercontextual link by providing
an honest response to John’s question on what really came up. In lines 140-156, as the teacher provided information to the children about what really came up in the classroom the day before, the children responded by giggling and expressing their reaction to the unpleasantness of the stuff that came out of the classroom sewer the day before (“Ewww” (line 141 and 155); “Yuck” (line 144 and 155)). The children’s responses also showed their acknowledgement and recognition of the teacher’s proposal of an intercontextual link between the large group experiment (-wet newspaper pieces) and the clog problem that occurred the previous day (-the actual stuffs that came out from the sewer). In line 151, Bob was recognizing and responding to the intercontextual link that the teacher and children were constructing through their interaction: Bob contributed an idea that added on to the teacher’s response on what really came up. Bob said that toilet paper could also be some of the stuff that came out of the classroom sewer (“toilet paper?” (line 151)) and the teacher validated Bob’s response (line 152), all of which showed that Bob was also acknowledging and recognizing the intercontextual links that John and other children had recognized and constructed through their interaction.

In lines 159-166, it was very interesting for me as an early childhood educator to observe that there are differences in the individual children’s responses in terms of constructing and understanding the intercontextual link that the teacher proposed. In line 159, as the group conversation moved toward the end, Jenny, a 4 year old girl, asked to the teacher, “Um, um, how do you get a clog in the potty?” Even after the actual experiment with the pipe, paper, and water and their conversation that made connections of the large group experiment with the clog incident in the classroom the previous day
and their interaction during the Morning Meeting earlier, Jenny indicated that it was still not clear to her how they got the clog. In lines 160-161, the teacher revoiced Jenny’s question for the entire group and let the children explain ‘how they got the clog’ for Jenny. In line 162 and 164, Jack and Denny gave their ideas and explanations to Jenny. Even though the teacher did not explicitly propose or request that they make intercontextual link in her question (“Who can answer that question for Jenny? Jenny is saying, “How do you get a clog in your potty?”” (lines 160-161)), Jack and Denny made intercontextual links in their responses, their explanation to Jenny about how they got the clog. These responses and explanation of Jack and Denny to Jenny showed that in constructing their understanding of what a clog is and how a clog occurs, such intercontextual links that they had constructed together through their group interaction were actually helpful and vital for them in the process of making sense of what a clog is and how they got a clog. The teacher also validated Jack and Denny’s understanding and explanations on the clog as she repeated their responses for the group (line 163 and line 165).

In lines 169-177, the teacher proposed an intercontextual link with a new event (context), in the sensory table context. In lines 169-171, the teacher initially proposed another new intercontextual link with a future event (“maybe tomorrow, if I can get to school early, I can bring some pipes to school” (line 171)). This initial proposal of intercontextual link with tomorrow’s event was acknowledged by John, who asked the teacher what kind of pipe she would bring to class tomorrow in line 173. At this point, it was not yet clear that John was also recognizing the explicit intercontextual link that the teacher was making. In lines 174-177, the teacher proposed a more specific
intercontextual link with the future event which would be in the sensory table context, another context that is different from the large group process (-like the Morning Meeting or large group experiment). The teacher was proposing the intercontextual link that the children could continue constructing their ideas on a clog using small pipes of the sensory table the next day ("We can put some these pipes and cups, and you guys can pretend to make clog. You can work with the pipes in the sensory table" (lines175-177)). Since this was at very end of their large group experiment interaction, from this data alone, it is hard to know whether the children acknowledged and recognized the teacher’s proposal of intercontextual link with the sensory table activity. In the following section, I will present a specific written description based on observational data from the fieldnotes along with picture data to illustrate the intercontextual links that some children made through their hands-on exploration on clog idea using small pipes at the sensory table.

Sensory table activity during free-choice play and activity time

- hands-on exploration regarding the clog idea at the sensory table

On the next day, during their free-choice play and activity time, the teacher, Jully, filled the sensory table with water and put small plastic pipes, cotton balls, and cups in the water so that the children who wanted to engage in the activity could explore this clogged pipe idea through their own hands-on process.

As described earlier in Ch.3, in this classroom, the free-choice play and activity time is scheduled directly after the large group story time. During the free-choice play and activity time, all the areas are open; the children are free to engage in table activities
that are set up and planned by the teacher, and in free play in the housekeeping area, block area, computer area, bookshelf area, science area, and at the writing table. A sensory table is also open as one of the choice activities for the children during this free choice time – it is usually filled with various materials that the children can explore with their hands, such as bubble water with sponges and animal figures, rice or grain along with magnifying glasses, or with alphabet magnets and magnetic sticks, etc.

As the teacher stated at the end of the large group experiment on the clog idea using a large transparent pipe and paper, the sensory table was set up as one of the free-choice activities and as a play area on the next day. This sensory table was kept open for a few more days with the other free choice activities.

Unlike the other two contexts, the Morning Meeting and large group experiment, in which the teacher was involved in the actual interaction with the children, sometimes as facilitator of their large group conversation during the Morning Meeting and sometimes as guide in the experiment process, this sensory table activity with plastic pipes all proceeded under the interactive of the individual or groups of children who wanted to continue engaging in the clog idea or other hands-on exploration with those materials, as one of the set activities during the free-choice activity and play time. Unlike the two large group interaction processes, where everyone in the classroom had to be present in that space (context) regardless of whether they were interested in the activity or not, the free-choice play process is a totally voluntary and open-ended process for the children. The children who are interested in it chose to come to the sensory table area
and become engaged in the hands-on process the way they want to without any direction or guidance from the teacher during the exploration process.

On this day, I observed that the children voluntarily engaged in meaning making by using pipes, cotton balls, water, cups, etc. The children poured water into the small pipes and explored their ideas at the sensory table. Around the sensory table, there were almost 6-7 children at a time engaging in the plastic pipe ideas. Throughout the entire free-choice play and activity time (about 45-50 minutes), most of the children present on that day (about 15 children) were joining in and out of their hands-on exploration at the sensory table. Some children were focusing on making a pipe construction by connecting each piece of the pipes together. Some were playing with the water and cups. Since this activity was totally open-ended and teacher was not participating in the sensory activity process with the children, the children were autonomously proceeding with those sensory table ideas by themselves. They used the materials provided in the sensory table in various ways individually or with their peers.

Among the children, the pictures shown below and the observation data from field notes provide some indication that, among the children, some were acknowledging and recognizing the teacher’s previous intercontextual proposal that she made at the end of their large group experiment the previous day. Since this was mainly a hands-on process, there was not much verbal conversation that went on during the sensory table exploration process. However, in their hands-on exploration using the small pipes, cotton balls, cups, and water, I observed that some children continued exploring the clog idea that they had discussed together in the previous large group conversation or experiment contexts (-
something stuck in the pipe; pouring water into a pipe that had something stuck in it; finding out whether water could get through it, etc), which indicated that those children’s non-verbal explorations were not just random behaviors but actually a process by which the children could purposefully manage their activity of meaning making on the clog idea. I could see explicit juxtapositions between their non-verbal representation using the materials and their hands-on processes to explore the clog idea at the sensory table and the ideas discussed in relation to the clog problems at the previous two events (Morning Meeting and large group experiment context). This can also be seen as those children’s acknowledgement and recognition of such intercontextual link, which the teacher had proposed at the end of the previous day’s large group experiment, that they were able to continue constructing their ideas on clogs using the small pipes at the sensory table (“We can put some these pipes and cups, and you guys can pretend to make clog. You can work with the pipes in the sensory table” (Transcript 3.3 (lines175-177)). This can be seen as those children’s acknowledgement and recognition of such intercontextual link, that this sensory table activity was in some way connected with and something relevant to the previous events (-the clogging problem in their classroom toilet, their large group conversation about the clog during the Morning Meeting, or the large group experiment using a large transparent pipe and crumpled newspaper ball). As the children constructed such intercontextuality, it not only provided them an opportunity to engage in their meaning making on a clog in multiple ways/forms but also served as a concrete process for the young children to understand what a clog is as they actually saw, touched, and played around with those small pipes and cotton balls in their actual hands-on exploration
at the sensory table, all of which can be seen as social consequences of such intercontextuality.

[Figure 4.6]

In the Figure 4.6, John, Bob, Bill, and Jack were engaged in building a large pipe construction by connecting small plastic pipes to each other. In the process, Bob and John were sticking wet cotton balls inside of the pipe. Then they poured water into the pipe with a cup several times and saw whether the water could get through the pipe with cotton balls stuck inside. In Figure 4.7, Bill was also sticking a cotton ball into the end of the pipe construction. He saw that Eric was putting water inside of the pipe with a dropper at the other end of the pipe construction. Then Bill filled a cup with water and poured more water into the end of the pipe after he had stuck the wet cotton ball.
This hand-on exploration (non-verbal) provided the young children an opportunity to explore their ideas in multiple/various ways, whereas the two previous contexts (Morning Meeting and large group experiment) proceeded mainly through verbal communication.
The picture in Figure 4.8 captures a moment when Michael was actively engaging in his clog idea using the materials at the sensory table. Throughout the interactions across the three different events (large group conversation on the clog issue during Morning Meeting; large group experiment using a large pipe and crumpled newspaper ball; sensory table activity using small pipes, cotton balls, water, and cups), Michael was part of the group process but not as active or not verbally engaged in the first two event processes. He participated in the large group conversation during Morning Meeting by sharing a personal experience that was similar to the classroom clog issue, but in the large group experiment process, he mainly participated by listening. However, he was engaged in the process actively by observing the teacher’s experiment and listening to the group conversation.

In this sensory table activity process (Figure 4.8), I could see that Michael was also exploring clog idea with his non-verbal hands-on processes. He picked up one piece
of the small pipe and pushed a cotton ball inside of the pipe. He poured water through it a couple of times to see whether the water could get through the pipe. He also put a couple of cotton balls in a cup filled with water and tried to flush the wet cotton balls out as he poured the water into the pipe. It was interesting for me as an early childhood educator to observe that young children who may not be as verbally active as other children also actively engage in their meaning making through their hands-on processes. They express their thoughts and ideas through various symbolic representation using the semiotic tools and forms available for and around them, all of which has significance in the early childhood classroom as one way to support the children and enable them to express their ideas and thoughts visibly (Gallas, 1994), not necessarily solely in one way (-verbal) but in various/multiple ways.

Within the open-ended sensory table context where the children proceeded with their ideas without the teacher’s guidance, I could see that some children, like John, Bob, Bill, and Michael, were voluntarily and concretely using those materials in connection to continuing explore their ideas on clogs, which they had discussed in previous events, whereas other children (e.g., Katie and Ann) were not necessarily showing any particular hands-on process relevant to the clog idea. They were just engaging in water play with cups or more interested in constructing and connecting pipes together. Here, I am not saying that one is better than the other. Those various open-ended ways of engagement at the sensory table are also worthwhile. What I want to point out is that, within the open-ended sensory table context and process, some children were acknowledging and recognizing the intercontextual links by themselves. I was able to observe in some
children’s activity such juxtapositions between their non-verbal representation using the materials and their hands-on processes to present the clog idea and the ideas that discussed about the clog problems at the previous two events.

Nature of knowledge (—large group experiment)

In this section, I will examine the ‘nature’ of the knowledge that was constructed and observed during the large group interaction regarding the question ‘what’s a clog.’ Before discussing what kind of knowledge the children and the teachers constructed as they talked about ‘what’s a clog’ within the large group meeting context, I will provide an overview of the theoretical perspective that I adopt in terms of understanding the ‘nature of knowledge.’

Wells (1999; 2007) pointed out that the term ‘knowledge’ is often understood as “what is known,” and in this sense, “knowledge is the accumulated outcome of the formal procedures whereby what particular individuals claim to know … is critically evaluated and formally approved” (2007, p.264). Wells (2007) argued that this kind of notion leads to an understanding of knowledge as an authoritative and monologic mode, which is often presented by an individual knower (i.e., teacher) or books, etc. In terms of his approach to understanding “knowledge,” Wells (1999) argued that material and artifacts (i.e., books) are “not in themselves knowledge, nor do they contain knowledge” (p.89). According to Wells (1999, 2007) “knowledge is intrinsically bound up with ‘knowing together’” (2007, p.264), which is a perspective mainly based on Bakhtin (1986)’s point of view: “after all, our thought itself – philosophical, scientific, and artistic – is born in
the process of interaction and struggle with others’ thought” (p.92, quoted in Wells, 2007, p. 264). From this notion of knowledge, Wells (1999, 2007) argued that “knowledge is most fully achieved in dialogue between people who are together trying to solve a problem, construct an explanation or decide on a course of action” (2007, p.264). Wells (2007) argued that this kind of notion leads to an understanding of knowledge as an authoritative and monologic mode, which is often presented by an individual knower (i.e., teacher) or books, etc. In terms of his approach to understanding “knowledge,” Wells (1999) argued that material and artifacts (i.e., books) are “not in themselves knowledge, nor do they contain knowledge” (p.89). According to Wells (1999, 2007) “knowledge is intrinsically bound up with ‘knowing together’” (2007, p.264), which is a perspective mainly based on Bakhtin (1986)’s point of view: “after all, our thought itself – philosophical, scientific, and artistic – is born in the process of interaction and struggle with others’ thought” (p.92, quoted in Wells, 2007, p. 264).

In his classroom interaction studies done in several classroom contexts, Wells (1986; 1992; 1999; 2006; 2007) examined what meaning making was constructed in those classrooms through analysis of the children’s and teacher’s discourse during their interactions. As he presented and analyzed several transcripts of classroom discussion and interactions, Wells (1986; 1999; 2006; 2007) pointed out that ‘inquiry,’ which he identified as a “mode of knowing and practice,” promotes “scientific” knowledge construction and dialogic interaction in the classroom. Wells (1999) argued further that inquiry indicates “a stance toward experiences and ideas” which can be described as a “willingness to wonder, to ask questions, and to seek to understand by collaborating with
others in the attempt to make answers to them” (p.121). Wells stated that ‘inquiry’ often involves: “drawing on relevant first-hand experience, and with the aid of works of reference and teacher guidance, participants engage in the discourse of knowledge building in order to make connections among the different objects and activities with which they are involved, and in the process, to develop those systematic conceptual structures that Vygotsky (1987) called “scientific”” (Wells, 1999, p.124).

In this dissertation study, especially in the transcript data of the children’s and teacher’s group interaction on what’s a clog during their large group experiment context (Transcript 4.14 – Interaction Units #1, #2, and #3), in the group interactions I observed some elements of ‘inquiry’ which could promote the construction of scientific nature of knowledge through such group activity of experiment and conversation. First of all, this large group experiment using a pipe and crumpled newspaper was developed from the children’s and teacher’s previous conversation during the earlier Morning Meeting on a drainage program. In the Morning Meeting, the children and the teachers talked together about the drainage problem in the sink and toilet which had occurred the previous afternoon in the classroom. In this process, the children brought up their personal experiences of similar drain problems at their homes. At the end of the Morning Meeting (Transcript 4.13 – Large group conversation on what a clog is during the Morning Meeting), the teacher proposed that they were going to have an experiment that would be related to what they had just talked about, a clog (“We’re going to try paper and when we do our experiment, we will try paper in there, and I’ll show you what happens with some other stuff,” lines 58-61). Then, at the beginning of their large group experiment later on
that day, the teacher started the experiment process by saying that a clogging problem happens when people put too much paper in the toilet, or sometimes food, a fork, or a toy, all of which were examples shared in their earlier Morning Meeting interaction. The children responded to the teacher’s examples of a clog by adding other examples that had been mentioned in the earlier Morning Meeting interaction (“Sometimes it’s a marbles,” Bob, line 5; “Sometimes it’s a band-aid,” Elizabeth, line 6). Here, their initial interaction during the experiment was based mainly on “relevant first-hand experience” (Wells, 1999, p.124), which made concrete connections for their further talk about a ‘clog’ and what causes a ‘clog’ that were relevant to the classroom experience they had had the previous day as well as some home experience stories that they shared at the Morning Meeting that morning. As the experiment moved toward the end, the teacher showed the wet, crumpled newspaper pieces that had been pushed from the pipe and said, “And this was probably some of the stuff we saw on our carpet and on our floor, that came out of the sewer” (line 137). With this statement, the teacher continued to make connections between the current science experiment using paper and pipe and the clog incident that they had experienced the day before in the classroom along with the children’s personal experiences on drainage problems which they had shared during the earlier Morning Meeting event. The teacher was not the only one who tried to make such connections. In line 138, John also actively displayed his acknowledgement as well as his knowledge construction regarding the relationships between the current science activity and life experience of drainage problems by saying, “What really came up?” as he saw the wet crumpled newspaper pieces that were pushed from the pipe.
The connections between their relevant life or first-hand experience and the science experiment allowed the children ample opportunity to construct scientific knowledge of the concepts behind the questions what’s a clog and what causes a clog, not just in an ambiguous lesson for learning concepts, but as active construction of knowledge since they knew this science experiment was directly related to themselves and to events that they had seen and knew about from their own experience. These connections between the scientific experiment (knowledge construction) and their own experience led to the children’s active participation and contribution in the group meaning making process, which also encouraged the children to engage in the elements of ‘inquiry’ that are vital for the construction of knowledge of a scientific nature. Another element that I noticed in the transcript data that could contribute to building knowledge of a scientific nature was certain ways the children engaged in their large group experiment, especially their engagement in group discourse and interaction through modes of inquiry (Wells, 1999). According to Wells (1999), when children actively engage in inquiry, it provides the children an opportunity for wondering, asking, observing, reasoning, problem solving to attempt to make answers, reflecting, interpreting evidence, … etc., all of which identified as significant tools for scientific nature of knowledge building. As seen in transcript 3.3 (Interaction unit #1), during the large group experiment in this classroom, the children became actively involved in the science experiment on ‘what’s a clog’ and ‘what causes a clog’ by providing their observations. As the teacher put the crumpled newspaper into the pipe, John shared his observation of what was happening in the pipe ("It stuck", line 11). When the teacher
poured a large cup of water into the pipe with the crumpled newspaper lodged inside, the children actively provided descriptions of what they observed inside of the transparent pipe due to the water (“It kinda pushed it up” (John, line 58); “the paper is moving down, it’s going down” (Brian, line 64)).

The children also displayed active problem solving as they engaged in the experiment process; when they saw that the crumpled newspaper in the pipe was not easily pushed out by pouring in one cup of water, the children insisted that the teacher pour in more water, which showed the children’s thinking and reasoning that, in order to solve this problem of paper stuck in the pipe, they needed to pour in lots of water to push it out (“Try more!”, line 54, Nick; “Try a lot!”, line 56, children). In lines 159-166 (Transcript 3.3 – Interaction unit #3), Jenny displayed that she was still ‘wondering’ how people get a clog in the potty by ‘asking a question’ directed to the teacher (“Um, um, how do you get a clog in the potty?”, line 159). The teacher re-directed Jenny’s question to the whole group, and in the group process involved as the other children explained clogging to Jenny, I was able to identify the children’s reflections on and interpretations of the large group science experiment on a clog using the pipe and newspaper. For example, Jack responded to Jenny’s question by saying, “You stick something down in the potty” (line 162), which displayed his ‘interpretation’ of the finding from this science experiment.

The third element that I identified as the construction of scientific knowledge in this large group experiment on what’s a clog and what causes a clog is that the teacher used several artifacts/representations during the group process to support the children’s
understanding and knowledge building. The teachers’ use of artifacts/representations (i.e., pipe, crumpled paper, water, rod, etc.) served as a significant means to support the children not only in helping them make connections between the current science experiment using paper and pipe and the clog incident that they had experienced the day before in the classroom and the children’s personal experiences on drainage problems which they had shared during the earlier Morning Meeting event, but also in helping the children concretely understand the science concepts behind the clog incident in their classroom. Wells (1999) pointed out that, in scientific inquiry, artifacts are used intentionally in and for representational activities and argued that artifacts play an important role in terms of mediating children’s knowledge construction. In transcript 4.14 of the large group experiment on a clog, I observed that the teacher used the crumpled paper and the big transparent pipe to show the children what really happened inside of a pipe when something got stuck there (lines 9-10). The large transparent pipe was an effective reference artifact in that it allowed the children to visually observe the inside of the pipe so that they could better understand why drainage problems sometimes happen. In her verbal statement, as the teacher shoved the crumpled newspaper into the pipe, she said, “I’m going to pretend that this is like toilet paper” (line 9), which indicated her effort to make the connection that these artifacts were being used to represent and explain the drainage incidents of the previous day. Also, as she used a ‘rod’ to push the wet crumpled newspaper ball out of the pipe (line 124-126), the teacher provided the verbal explanation that this rod represented the tool that the maintenance person had used the previous day in the classroom (“This is kind of like the snake that they use” (line
124)). Analysis of my observations on the teacher’s use of various artifacts in the group interaction process allowed me to see how such artifacts served as representation as well as a reference that aided the children to make connections between the current science experiment and the life experience of drainage problems, and thus effectively supported the children’s knowledge construction on what’s a clog and what causes a clog. Even though it was not as strongly emphasized as it might be with older grade classroom children, I observed the use of some technical scientific terms, like “pressure,” “force” (transcript 4.14, lines 15-30), in the teacher’s explanation that sometimes low water pressure/force can cause a drainage problem in the school building, which was illustrative of the teacher’s effort to give explanations based on the science behind such everyday experiences and thus make it possible to connect with knowledge construction in the science content area.

(2) Large group conversation/talk at different times and in different spaces
(-other than the official Morning Meeting time)

In this classroom, Morning meeting is the official large group meeting time context when and where the teacher and the children gather together on the carpet area as the entire group. As discussed in the research question 2, during the Morning Meeting process, there is time provided for the children and teacher to engage in large group conversation/talk, which is one of the sub-events of the Morning Meeting event in this classroom. In the results of research question 2, by analyzing the large group interaction, it was found that during the “large group conversation/talk” sub-event within Morning
Meeting time, the children and teachers engaged in various types of interactions (-individual’s sharing; teacher’s announcements; social construction of meaning making on various topics by collaborative group conversation; and teacher directed interaction), which showed the diverse purposes for which the “large group conversation/talk” sub-event within the Morning Meeting context was used.

In addressing research question 3, as I tried to understand the large group time (Morning Meeting) within the whole classroom context, I was able to identify one more characteristic of this classroom, that large group conversation does not always happen only within the official large group time (Morning Meeting). The teacher and the children sometimes engage in their short large group conversation/talk at different times and in different spaces than in their official Morning Meeting. Unlike the official Morning Meeting process, which consisted of five sub-events (-coming to the rug, large group talk/conversation, calendar, weather, and dismissal), when there was large group conversation/talk at other than the Morning Meeting time, the sub-event of “large group conversation/talk” was adapted and proceeded independently within their classroom as it was needed. Rather than proceeding with all components of the sub-events of Morning Meeting, the sub-event of “large group conversation/talk” was used adaptively in this classroom at various times in different spaces, especially when the class needed to have a brief and quick group conversation at a certain moment or when they needed to talk about or make sense of some issue quickly. Such adaptive use of the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event in various contexts and moments may not be as frequently observed as the typical daily process in this classroom. However I did observe several
incidents of such cases (i.e., a short large group meeting in the hallway, outside on the playground, … etc.), and those serve as significant data which capture this classroom’s flexible and adaptive nature within their current set classroom structure and experiences. In this section, I will provide an illustrative case to show such an adaptive nature in this classroom.

One day right after the free-choice play and activity time, the children were ready to go outside for their short outdoor play routine before their lunch time. As the children lined up and walked down the hallway to go outside, several children were talking with one another and did not pay attention to walking down appropriately, which the result that some children stepped on each other and fell on the hallway floor. The teacher, Jully asked the entire group of children to sit down in the hallway for a while and proceeded with a short large group conversation to calm the group down and discuss why they needed to listen to each other and control their bodies. Transcript 3.5 below is an interaction excerpt from their large group conversation in the hallway on that day. Also, in Figure 4.3, I have placed this short large group conversation in the hallway within their overall classroom frame, which gives a clear idea of this classroom’s adaptive use of large group conversation in various spaces and times other than their official Morning Meeting context.
[Figure 4.9] Illustrative case of large group conversation outside of Morning Meeting context (-different time and space within the classroom process)

Classroom daily schedule

7:30 – 8:50  Arrival / Free play
8:50 – 9:00  Clean up and get ready for Morning Meeting
9:00 – 9:30  Morning Meeting
9:30 – 10:15 Outdoor time
10:15 – 10:25 Snack time
10:25 – 10:40 Story time
10:40 – 11:30 Free Choice time

→ Short large group conversation that happened in the hallway on this day

11:30 – 12:00  Outdoor time
12:00 – 1:00  Lunch / Clean up / Get ready for rest time
1:00 – 3:00  Rest time
3:00 – 3:30  Wake up / Snack time
3:30 – 4:15  Free play / Story time
4:15 – 5:00  Outdoor time
5:00 – 6:00  Free Choice time / Leaving

[Transcript 4.15] Large group conversation in the hallway

1 Teacher (Jully): John got a bump on his nose.
2            What will happen when we don’t have listening ears?
3           Brian: Out of control.
4            Bob: Eric got stitches.
5 Children: Yeah, Eric got stitches.
6 Bob: Got bunk [bumped]!
7 Teacher (Jully): Yeah
8 I also saw someone got scratches.
9 That’s why we have to have our listening ears.
10 Brian: I have a question.
11 Teacher (Jully): Yes, Brian
12 Brian: Can a listening ear fall off?
13 Teacher (Jully): No, ears do not fall off.
14 Your ears are right on here (indicating her ears with her fingers)
15 It’s always with you.
16 Bob: Let’s put extra special glue on it, Brian (pretending to put something on his ears).
17 Brian: Yeah!

The teacher, Jully, started the group conversation by pointing out that one child (John) got a bump on his nose because they did not see and listen carefully to one another as they were walking down the hallway. Then the teacher asked the entire group what would happen when they did not have listening ears (line 2), which opened the floor for the group to think and talk about some possible consequences of such behaviors. In lines 3-6, the children, especially Brian and Bob, shared their ideas about possible consequences of not having listening ears: they will be out of control (line 3); they could get bumped by each other (line 6). In line 4, Bob also brought up a recent incident of
Eric, who accidently fell at the school and had to get stitches, as a relevant example that had recently happened at their classroom. The teacher validated these contributions of Brian and Bob to their large group conversation. She also added her own observation as another example, as well as responding to the children’s comments (“I saw someone got scratches” (line 8)). After some children shared ideas on what could happen when they do not have listening ears, the teacher provided an explanation to the group, saying that that is why they have to have listening ears, which also implied to the group that this was the reason they were having a large group conversation at this moment. As seen here, this kind of large group conversation at various times and spaces took place in a very short period of time. It is usually done at that immediate moment and space when quick group meaning making was needed. The time proceeded for this kind of group conversation was very brief, but within such a time frame, the children could make sense of some issues that was important to them, and make more explicit meaning together through their group conversation at that immediate moment.

In lines 10-17, it is also interesting to observe that even within such a short period of time for the group interaction process, the children were making sense of things in their own unique ways. At the end of the teacher’s comment on why they needed to have their listening ears (line 9), Brian asked the teacher a question: “Can a listening ear can fall off?” (line 12). I think that here, Brian was perceiving a “listening ear” as something other than his real ears; it was more like pretending ears, associated with those times in which the children often were actively engaged in their pretending ideas. In response to Brian’s question, the teacher did not differentiate the listening ear from the real ear. In
lines13-15, the teacher responded to Brian’s question on the ‘listening ear’ (line 12) by
directly answering back with the word “ear”. In her response, the teacher said to Brian
that ears do not fall off, they are right on their faces, and always with them. Interestingly,
Bob and Brian acknowledged the importance of having a listening ear, which was the
point the teacher was trying to make throughout the group conversation, but they were
also making sense of the importance of having a listening ear with their continual
pretending idea. In line 16, Bob suggested to Brian that they should put some extra
special glue on their ‘listening ears,” and make a hand gesture of pretending to put
something on his ears, and Brian agreed with Bob’s idea with the same pretending
gesture. Within their group meaning making processes, the children may sometimes
make sense of things in their own unique ways that the adult (teacher) may not think of.
Here, the teacher did not acknowledge Brian’s attempt, but Bob and Brian continued their
own way of meaning making with each other. This observation allowed me to see and
think about the complex action and reaction between people and in the preschool
classroom interaction, even within a very short period of time.
RESEARCH QUESTION #4:

What are the multiple roles of teachers and children, and how do their roles and interactions create opportunities for building a learning community and meaningful process within the preschool classroom context?

In the findings of research questions 1, 2, and 3, I have explored various meaning making and interactions that the children and teacher engaged in during their large group meeting time, Morning Meeting. In such meaning making and interaction processes during the Morning Meeting, the children and the teacher did not take only one type of role in their student - teacher relationships, that is, with the teacher as a powerful individual and the children as powerless in the classroom. Rather, both the teacher and the children actually took various roles that were interactive and adaptive as they acted and reacted to one another within their large group meeting context. In this section, I will re-examine some of data discussed earlier in research questions 1, 2, and 3 of various interactions during the Morning Meeting, to explore the multiple roles of the teacher and the children as they co-constructed their classroom meeting process. I will also present data from interviews with the teachers to illustrate the teachers' thinking and reflection on their practices in the classroom meeting process, which will provide a more in-depth understanding of my data from observation only.

Re-conceptualizing issues of power in the classroom community

In the everyday classroom processes, power relationships are unavoidable in any child-adult relationships (Edmiston, 2008). Even though there may be differences in
classrooms so that teachers in some classrooms may take a less authoritative role than teachers in classrooms that are involved in traditional ways of transmission of knowledge, there is still teacher authority existing in any classroom context. Here, authority is not necessarily limited as a coercive term, but includes the positive use of authority (i.e., guidance) as well. In this section, I will discuss power relationships in the classroom in terms of understanding and exploring the multiple roles that the teacher and the children that took as they acted and reacted to one another during their large group meeting process.

In this study, I’m building upon the view of ‘power as process’ (Foucault, 1981; 1982) rather than power as possession. According to Foucault (1982), power is always relational: power relations are “rooted deep in the social nexus” (p. 222), and that may shift from one situation to another. “Power varies among and between contexts rather than being a static product” (Bloome et al., 2005, p.162). And power works through actions (Dreyfus & Rainbow, 1982). According to this definition of ‘power as process,’ power relations are an integral part of any kind of social and cultural interactions and experiences (Bloome et al., 2005), such as the interaction between teacher and students in the classroom.

In the classroom context, there are many different ways for power to be exercised between members of the classroom. In the classroom observed in this study, especially the preschool large group meeting time, Morning Meeting was a context for the children and the teachers to engage in various interactions and meaning making through their large group interactions, which thus created various power relationships during such
group interaction. In the book *Forming Ethical Identities in Early Childhood Play*, Edmiston (2008) argues that there needs to be a re-conceptualization in terms of approaching and understanding power in the classroom; rather than one type of power relationship, such as powerful-powerless, in which power is often viewed as only a coercive relationship, power can also be viewed as having potential in terms of supporting meaningful interaction and relationship. Within this frame, power can be identified and exercised in three major ways in the classroom context: ‘power over’, ‘power with’ and ‘power for.’ In the data presented in the findings of research questions 1, 2, and 3, I was also able to identify these various ways of exercising power during the large group interaction in Morning Meeting, which actually led to the diverse and adaptive role taking of teachers and children within and across the classroom experiences.

*Power over.* ‘Power over’ refers to one using power to control others’ actions and events, which is similar to Foucault (1982)’s notion that ‘power is exercised and acts upon’ to control something. Even though this notion of power is most easily seen in hierarchical relationships or rigid structure systems, it can also be seen in the everyday classroom context.

According to the data presented in research question 1, the Morning Meeting consisted of five sub-events, coming to the rug, large group conversation/talk, calendar, weather, and dismissal (transition to go line up for outdoor play time), and these sub-events worked together and thus created the structure of the Morning Meeting in this classroom. Within such sub-events, the teacher’s control in some of the Morning Meeting structure and processes was identified. During the sub-event of ‘coming to the
rug,’ the teacher put “seat markers” around in a circle on the carpet where the everyday Morning Meeting occurred. Seating for the Morning Meeting was not freely determined by the children; the seating arrangement was controlled by the teacher. The teacher decided upon each child’s seating, taking into consideration that it might be better for some children to sit apart rather than right next to each other for the group interaction during Morning Meeting.

The process of the ‘dismissal’ sub-event (transition to go line up for outdoor play time) was also always led and directed by the teacher; the teacher decided what questions she would ask each child (or group of children), and allowed the children to line up at the door as they answered those questions. Even though the kinds of questions or requests from the teacher changed on a daily basis and were wide-ranging (e.g., “If you are wearing long sleeves, go get into line to go outside”; “What did you do this weekend?”; “What is the first letter of your name?” etc.), the teacher was the one who always came up with ideas for and chose those questions that dismissed the children from the Morning Meeting context. Along with such teacher control in aspects of the structure of the Morning Meeting, the teacher sometimes exercised power over the children in their group interactions during the sub-event of ‘large group conversation/talk’ in the Morning Meeting. Transcript 4.11 (“what do you know about flowers?”), discussed in the findings of research question 2, provides one example of the teacher’s ‘power over’ the children in their group interaction during the Morning Meeting. In transcript 4.11, the teacher purposefully brought in and introduced a particular topic that she had chosen/planned for the class, about ‘flowers.’ Unlike other types of interaction (e.g., an individual child’s
sharing; collaborative group conversation on various topics), in transcript 4.11, the group conversation was led mainly by the teacher with the teacher maintaining control of the specific topic (‘anything about flowers’) and of turn distribution, so that everyone had to participate.

Throughout the interaction process in transcript 4.11, a I-R-F talk sequence pattern was identified: the teacher initiated the group conversation by posing a question, “What do you know about flowers?”; then a child responded to the teacher with his/her idea or thought and the teacher provided a follow-up comments, in terms of the child’s response and the turn went on to the next child.

The teacher asked everyone the same question: that is to say, the children’s responses should be something relevant to the teacher-selected topic, ‘flowers,’ which obviously shows teacher’s control over the topic for group conversation.

Along with the control of topic in transcript 4.11, a turn was given to every child, which asked for everyone’s participation. This differed from other types of interaction (e.g., an individual child’s sharing; collaborative group conversation on various topics) within the large group conversation/talk sub-event in the Morning Meeting, in which the children voluntarily participated and autonomously joined in their large group interaction.

In lines 46-55 in transcript 4.11, Bill showed reluctance to talk about the teacher-chosen topic, ‘flowers,’ which he personally did not want to be involved in because he thought of it as a feminine topic. When the teacher asked every child to take a turn to participate in this teacher-led process (teacher’s control of group participation), a reluctant reaction like Bill’s became visible, in contrast to the other types of large group interaction where
participation in the large group conversation was voluntarily decided upon and entered into by the children. Here, I have discussed that during the Morning Meeting, power was sometimes exercised by the teacher and the teacher’s control was observable in the Morning Meeting structure as well as sometimes in her interaction with the children. In fact, as discussed in the findings of research question 2, in the Morning Meeting, especially during the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event, the children and the teacher engaged in various group interactions. And as I analyzed the data, I could also identify other forms of power relations between the children and the teacher, which led them to take multiple roles as they acted and reacted to one another during their group interaction.

*Power with.* Another way of exercising power in the classroom is ‘power with.’ The form of ‘power with’ is often seen in the learning community where the teacher shows a willingness to share his/her power with the students and takes the role of a co-constructor who acts and makes meaning together with the students in the classroom. In the ‘power with’ relationships and interactions, the teacher and children jointly construct and engage in the meaning making process through ongoing collaborating, dialoguing, listening, compromising, negotiating, arguing, etc (Edmiston, 2008). Through such a process of ‘power with,’ control is shifted from the teacher solely to teacher and children (Edmiston, 2008) in terms of actively making meaning together within their group context.

In this classroom, the sub-event of ‘large group conversation/talk’ during the Morning Meeting was also a significant context for the children and the teachers to
collaboratively and interactively construct meaning together on various topics around them through extensive group conversation. In the data from collaborative group interaction during the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event in Morning Meeting, I have observed that the teacher’s power was shared with the children as they constructed their meaning making on various topics around them together. The large group process was not solely led by the teacher; rather, the children actively brought in their own ideas and voluntarily built upon one another’s ideas on topics that they initiated as well as those initiated by the teacher.

In transcript 4.8 (“Talking about their own experiences of sickness”), Bob initiated group conversation about the topic of John’s absence, saying that John was sick at the school and went back home (lines 1-3), and the other children also actively joined in the group interaction. In lines 21-50, several children simultaneously brought in and shared personal experiences of being sick that were similar to John’s. For example, Nick talked about his experience of getting sick ‘in the car’ like John (line 22), and Eric made a connection with his experience of getting sick because of a ‘belly ache’ like John (lines 25-26); both examples had explicit parallels with John’s experience. As they brought in and made connections of their personal experiences with the current topic, the children were making more sense of the current topic of what it is like to get sick, understanding it more concretely and explicitly (i.e., sick in the car; bellyache; getting sick on the way to school; needing to go back home). Throughout the group interaction process, the teacher validated and responded to the children’s contributions by continuing to talk about the topic of John’s absence, and she took part in the group interaction by elaborating and
adding more information based on the children’s interaction (lines 4-9; lines 14-17; lines 57-59).

In this data (transcript 4.8), it can be observed that power was shared between the teacher and the children as they acted and reacted to one another through their large group interaction. The topic was initiated by the children and developed further by the children’s making connections with their own previous experiences, sharing as well as listening to others tell about their relevant experiences. Through such collaborative group interactions, the children not only constructed group meaning making interactively, but also actively constructed understanding as they took an active position in voluntarily bringing in their own personal experiences that were relevant to the on-going topics. The teacher took part in the group process by collaborating with the children through validation of the children’s active links to their own similar experiences and also through provision of additional elaboration on the children’s meaning making process. For example, when Bob asked why people got sick (line 52), the teacher participated in and supported the group meaning making process by providing several possible ideas to the group (i.e., eating too much food or eating the wrong kinds of food (lines 53-55)). Here, it is clear that in this classroom, Morning Meeting was also a context where power relationships did not always proceed as ‘teacher’s power over children,’ namely, perceiving the teacher as powerful versus the children as powerless. The control of topics as well as the way of proceeding with the group interaction process were negotiated and collaboratively worked on with the children. Power was shared with the children, which allowed the children to create meaningful interactions within the large
group contexts, and thus to co-construct their meaning making on various topics around them more actively and interactively.

*Power for.* ‘Power for’ emerges with a strong notion of “caring relations” (Edmiston, 2008; Noddings, 1992), which allows the ordinary view of power as a coercive relationship to be re-conceptualized (Bloome et al., 2005). Noddings (1992) argues that, in the classroom context, relationships should be critically re-considered in terms of caring and the ethics of care. In this ‘power for’ process, power is used in terms of caring relations by considering how the members of the classroom community can create a better context for one another, between teacher and children as well as among children.

Within this power relationship, the teacher uses his/her power to support and challenge students to go further in their active meaning making; such use of ‘power for’ is possible because the teacher ‘cares about’ the students and their learning within the classroom community (Edmiston, 2008). The teacher takes the role of nurturer as well as mediator, someone who is actively engaged in helping and encouraging the children to become more active learners and meaning makers in their classroom process. As a mediator, the teacher supports the children’s active meaning making by providing opportunities for various meaningful classroom interactions and experiences. In addition, the teacher reframes, redirects, and re-voices students’ ideas and thought further not only to scaffold the child’s meaning making but also to invite active group interactions and meaning making during the classroom process (O’Connor & Michaels, 1993).
This kind of ‘power for’ interactions and relations were also observed in this classroom, as I analyzed and examined the data from the Morning Meeting within and across the classroom experiences. In the findings of research question 3, I mentioned that sometimes the large group interaction during Morning Meeting was extended into other contexts in the classroom, which reflects one significant feature of this classroom – flexibility and adaptation in proceeding with the current classroom structure. The teacher exercised her ‘power for’ to support the children’s active meaning making during Morning Meeting and extend it further in other contexts in their classroom.

In transcript 4.12 (“Katie’s sharing seashells after her vacation”), when an individual Child (Katie) brought artifacts (seashells) to the Morning Meeting, as she shared and talked about her vacation, the teacher proposed that the children could further explore those seashells in the free-choice activities and play context later on that day (lines 53-72). An intercontextual link to a hands-on activity context using the seashells was proposed by the teacher, and acknowledged and recognized by the children through their interaction. In line 54, the teacher asked Katie what she was going to do with the shells, implicitly showing her use of ‘power for’ to support Katie’s sharing about her vacation and the seashells, and to suggest extending her sharing further by using those seashells in other contexts. Katie responded by saying that she wanted to wash the seashells (line 55), an activity which the children in this classroom were accustomed to engaging in. Katie’s idea was validated, and ‘power for’ was observable in the way the teacher supported Katie’s activity idea by talking explicitly about ‘when’ this would happen and ‘what other materials’ could be used along with Katie’s seashells in their later activity (“Maybe this
afternoon we could put out little buckets and toothbrushes and soapy water, and you guys can help wash ‘em,” lines 59-61). Here, I could observe that as another way of exercising power in this classroom, the teacher took the role of adapting classroom procedures so that she could sometimes incorporate things an individual child shared and brought from his/her home to share during Morning Meeting into other contexts. The teacher used her ‘power for’ providing an opportunity for the children to explore the seashells that Katie shared in the Morning Meeting in more concrete and various ways in another activity context, to explore them with their hands and senses (“to wash them, and touch them, and see them,” lines 70-71). Thus, items an individual child brought from his/her home and shared were validated and valued in this classroom, and an opportunity was also provided for the child to explore sharing with other children in different ways.

Another example of ‘power for’ during the Morning Meeting in this classroom can be observed in transcript 4.13 (“Large group conversation on what a clog is during the Morning Meeting time”) and transcript 4.14 (“Large group experiment during Story time”) in the findings of the research question 3. In this classroom, the large group meaning making usually seen during Morning Meeting contexts was sometimes extended to other contexts. In transcript 4.13, the children made sense of the drainage problem they had observed the previous day in their classroom and explored why it had occurred through their group discourse in the large group meeting process. The children and the teacher interactively constructed an understanding of what a clog is and why the clogging incident had happened as they shared and made connections with similar personal stories and experiences of clogging in their homes and listened to one another. The children
actively engaged in social construction of meaning making regarding what a clog is through their large group conversation. In this large group meaning making process, the teacher’s ‘power’ was exercised ‘for’ supporting and encouraging the children’s active and continuous meaning making on what a clog is by extending it to another context, the large group experiment. In lines 59-61, the teacher mentioned that they would have an experiment with clogging using paper later on that day (“We’re going to try paper, and when we do our experiment today, we will try paper in there, and I’ll show you what happens with some other stuff”).

In transcript 4.14, I identified the roles of mediator and scaffolder taken by the teacher as she tried to explain ‘what it means to clog’ with a visual demonstration using a transparent pipe and paper. The teacher put crumpled newspaper inside the transparent pipe and gave the children a visual demonstration of how something could get stuck in the pipe (lines 1-4; lines 9-10). The teacher provided explanations as she proceeded with the visual demonstration, saying that a clogging problem happens when people put too much paper in the toilet, or sometimes food, a fork, or a toy, all of which were examples shared in their earlier Morning Meeting interaction. The teacher also poured water through the pipe to show how the paper remained stuck in the pipe even when they poured water through it (lines 47-65). Then, in lines 124-126, the teacher used a tool (a ‘rod’) to push the wet crumpled newspaper ball out of the pipe (“This is kind of like the snake that they use,” line 124), which was similar to what the maintenance person who had come to the classroom the day before had done to fix the problem. The teacher’s visual demonstration also had connections with the children’s interaction during their
earlier Morning Meeting event, in which they had made meaning together on using tools for resolving clogging problems (someone had to fix the problems, and some tools were used to fix the problem at their homes). In all of these examples, the teacher took the roles of mediator and scaffold and her ‘power’ was exercised ‘for’ supporting the children’s active and continuous meaning making in more concrete and explicit ways using various materials and visual demonstration of what they just had talked about during the Morning Meeting interactions.

Throughout the large group experiment (transcript 4.14), the teacher constantly proposed connections (intercontextual links) between their current experiment process and the previous Morning Meeting event, in which they talked together about the clog problem that had occurred the day before, thus supporting the children in constructing their meaning making on ‘what a clog is’ and ‘why this happened in their classroom the previous day through their group interaction and visual experiment. As analyzed and discussed in the findings of research question 3, not all intercontextual links proposed by the teacher were acknowledged and recognized by the children. However, such an opportunity for a visual experiment within the group context strongly supported the children’s active meaning making. In lines 159-166, the children’s understanding of the meaning of a clog from the Morning Meeting interaction and large group experiment context can be observed. As the group conversation during the large group experiment moved toward the end, Jenny asked the teacher, “Um, um, how do you get a clog in the potty?” (line 159), even after the actual experiment with a pipe, paper, and water and their conversation that made connections of the large group experiment with the clog incident
in the classroom the previous day and their interaction during the Morning Meeting earlier. Instead of answering Jenny’s question herself, the teacher re-voiced Jenny’s question for the entire group and let the children explain ‘how they got the clog’ for Jenny (lines 160-161). As mentioned earlier, in ‘power for’ relations, the teacher takes the role of a mediator who sometimes re-voices students’ thoughts and questions not only to scaffold the child’s meaning making but also to promote active group interactions and meaning making during the classroom process (O’Connor & Michaels, 1993). Here, I identified such an example of ‘power for’ in this classroom process. In response to the teacher’s request for an explanation to answer Jenny’s question of ‘how they got the clog,’ the children provided answers which displayed their understanding which had been constructed through their group interaction in the Morning Meeting and the large group experiment context (e.g., “You stick something down in the potty,” Jack, line 162; Denny, line 164). These explanations of Jack and Denny showed that, in constructing their understanding of what a clog is and how a clog occurs, the intercontextual opportunity that the teacher proposed and provided (‘power for’) within another context, a visual experiment within a group context, was actually helpful for the children. It was a helpful and vital processes and means of supporting the children in constructing meaning making together as well as actively making sense of what a clog is and how they got a clog in their classroom through their group interaction.

The teacher’s arrangement to set up a sensory table activity using small pipes can also be seen as an example of the way power exercised as ‘power for’ can support the children’s active meaning making. The teacher provided another opportunity for the
children to continue constructing their ideas on a clog in a hands-on activity context. Within the open-ended sensory table context where the children proceeded with their ideas without the teacher’s guidance, I observed that some children, like John, Bob, Bill, and Michael (in Figures 4.6; 4.7; 4.8), were voluntarily and concretely using the small pipes, cotton balls, cups, and water in connection with continuing to explore their ideas on clogs (stuck cotton balls in the pipes; poured water into a pipe that had cotton balls stuck in it; finding out whether water could get through the clogs, etc.). Through such an opportunity for hands-on activity (‘power for’), the children had an opportunity to engage in their meaning making on a clog in multiple forms as well as concrete ways as they actually saw, touched, and played with the small pipes and cotton balls in their own actual hands-on exploration at the sensory table.

As discussed in the findings of research questions 1, 2, and 3, in this classroom, the Morning Meeting was a context for the children and the teacher to engage in various group interactions, which thus created various power relations and multiple role taking during their large group interactions as they acted and reacted to one another within the large group context. In response to research question 4, I have discussed the various forms of power exercised in this classroom (‘power over’; ‘power with’; ‘power for’). Power was exercised through the children and teacher’s interaction within the classroom contexts: thus power was process and relational rather than static and possessed by a certain person regardless of social situations or interactions. The teacher-children relationship was not just powerful-powerless: rather it was more complex and fluid (Edmiston, 2008) as the children and the teacher interacted with one another in the
various classroom processes. As I re-examined the transcript data in the findings of the earlier research questions, I could also identify that the children and the teacher were shifting among those various forms of power relations (‘power over’ ‘power with’ ‘power for’) as they acted and reacted to one another during their large group interactions.

In my discussion of transcript 4.11, the teacher-led group interaction on what the children knew about flowers, I used this group interaction as an example of the teacher’s ‘power over’ the children in their group interaction during the Morning Meeting. The teacher’s power was exercised over the children in terms of the teacher’s maintaining specific control of the topic (‘anything about flowers’) and a systematic turn distribution that meant everyone had to participate, along with an I-R-F talk sequence pattern. However, within such teacher-directed group interaction, I have also identified some interactions in which power was shared with the children (‘power with’). As Bob was participating in the teacher-led I-R-F interaction by saying ‘roses’ as a kind of flower and a flower name that he knew about, he extended his talking by taking the role of asking the teacher a question in turn in lines 95-97 (“And you know what? They live with the water, and you know how they wake up?”). The teacher accepted Bob’s extension by saying, “How do they wake up?” (line 98). Here, the power was shared between the teacher and Bob; the teacher took an adaptive role in terms of not limiting Bob’s extension based on the I-R-F sequence, in which the teacher herself tended to be the person who mainly initiated and directed questions to the children. Bob’s initiation to extend his contribution by asking how flowers wake up was accepted by the teacher in their interaction. When Bob said that flowers wake up with the sun (line 99), the teacher validated Bob’s idea as
she wrote down Bob’s response on the paper (line 100) on which she was writing down all the children’s responses on what they knew about flowers.

Another example of the children’s and teacher’s shifting among the various forms of power relations (‘power over’ ‘power with’ ‘power for’) as they acted and reacted to one another during their large group interactions can be observed in transcript 4.8 (‘Talking about their own experiences of sickness’). In this transcript, the children and the teacher were engaged in collaborative group interaction regarding John’s absence because John was sick and went back home. Throughout the large group process, their group interaction was not led solely by the teacher; rather, the children actively brought in and shared personal experiences that were similar to John’s (lines 21-50) and voluntarily built upon one another’s ideas on the topic of John’s absence that they (Bob) had initiated. Power was shared between the teacher and the children as they constructed their meaning making on the current topic of John’s being sick and what it is like to get sick (i.e., getting sick in the car; having a bellyache; getting sick on the way to the school; needing to go back home). The teacher mainly followed through the children’s group interaction of sharing and making connections with their own similar experiences. The teacher validated the children’s contributions by continuing to talk about the topic of John’s absence within the large group meeting contexts.

At the beginning of the interaction (lines 1-18), the children (Bob, Brian, Joe) were able to manage the turns by themselves, and the teacher did not take control of talking turns. The children one by one shared their own ideas as another person finished his/her talk with the teacher; they initiated their talk as soon as the other child’s or
teacher’s talk was done. The conversation turns were freely and autonomously managed by the children, and they took turns one at a time without raising their hands or waiting until the teacher called on them. However, when several children simultaneously began sharing their relevant stories with the group, the teacher took the role of organizer and began to manage the turn taking (“Raise your hands, please. ‘Cause I can’t hear you all at one time,” lines 19-20). Here, I could see that control of turn taking shifted from the children to the teacher, namely, from ‘power with’ to ‘power over.’ Turn taking was controlled by the teacher throughout the rest of the group conversation process (lines 19-62) in transcript 4.8. As the teacher requested that the children raise their hands for turns, the children who wanted to share their ideas with the group immediately raised their hands and waited until the teacher called on them. Throughout the remaining interaction process, the teacher called out the child’s name to distribute talk turns among those who had raised their hands to participate within the large group context.

I have discussed the various forms of power exercised in this classroom (‘power over’; ‘power with’; ‘power for’) during the Morning Meeting. According to Sergiovanni (1994), in a learning community, “leadership is not [always] defined as the exercise of power over other” (1994, p.170). Within the learning community, the teacher and children interact actively; the children actively engage in thinking, exploring, and meaning making within the group context, and the teacher also serves multiple roles in the process of classroom events in order to support and mediate students’ active meaning making. Such features of a learning community were observable in the large group interactions during the Morning Meeting in this classroom. As the children and the
teacher engaged in various group interactions within their large group contexts, they acted and reacted to one another, and they constructed the group process together by constantly negotiating and interacting. Through such an interactive group process, various power relations emerged, developed, were contested, and shifted, which thus lead the children and the teachers to actively negotiate and take multiple roles in the classroom. Meaningful interaction and relationship between the children and the teacher and among the children were further supported and promoted in the classroom as they had a chance to take multiple and adaptive roles in their classroom processes and experiences.

In an interview, the teacher (Jully) described her classroom curriculum as a “combined” curriculum; the classroom had elements of both emergent and teacher-initiated curricula. The teachers in this classroom planned their weekly/daily activities based on the children’s interests as well as things that the teachers wanted to introduce to them. Sometimes the teacher would bring up a certain topic that she had planned for the curriculum at the beginning of the large group meeting process to encourage the children to talk and think about it together as a group. As described in Ch. 3, in this classroom, topics of the classroom curriculum were usually related to the children’s life experiences along with some teacher-chosen topics; a combination of these two modes prevailed in the classroom curriculum. Such aspects can be seen within the Morning Meeting as well. The children were encouraged to bring up their personal stories and experiences and to make connections with their on-going ideas and interests during the large group meeting. The teacher supported classroom contexts in which the large group meeting and interaction during the meeting could be a meaningful process that allowed the children
and teachers to make meaning and construct understanding together as a group on various topics around them. The teacher also sometimes used the large group time, Morning Meeting, as a context for introducing planned topics for certain weeks to the children and talking together about such topics. The teacher also took state standards (early childhood content standards) into consideration and ensured her classroom curriculum addressed with those criteria. Since about half of the classroom enrollment consisted of 5 year olds who would be graduating from this preschool classroom soon in August and going to Kindergarten, the teacher was also concerned about getting those children ready for Kindergarten (i.e., recognizing their names and letters (literacy), some numbers (mathematics), some basic understanding from content areas like social studies/science, etc.) as the classroom moved toward the end of the academic year (August).

“We try to incorporate the kids’ interests and state standards that we know we need to work on. ... Curriculum with kids’ ideas. Um, sometimes occasionally teacher directed things that we might know that we need to get done in advance or that they might need additional help on skills that they might need to get ready for kindergarten. We are not strictly ruled by our plans. So it is a combination” (Jully, the lead teacher).

The complex nature of this classroom was also revealed in the teacher interview data as in other collected data from classroom observations, especially transcripts. I observed that as the teacher (Jully) proceeded with the classroom activities with the children, there was a constant co-construction and negotiation process within the given current ordinary structure in the classroom. The teacher tried to create a balance and considered various elements to support the children’s active and meaningful interactions in their classroom contexts.
“I wish there is a category we fit in ..., but I guess we don’t. I guess, what makes us probably unique is, it’s children based interests, and also teacher guided, um, I think it is also emergent, at times. I guess that’s what I would say, we are combination of all of three things. .... We are pretty much open, as long as we are hitting those things in the content standards, as long as we are making sure they [ideas/activities] can be back mapped and related to those learning, ...” (Jully, the lead teacher).

As long as the teachers are meeting with the center’s philosophies and content standards, all decisions for curriculum planning in the classroom are decided by the teachers, and this makes it possible to create a classroom curriculum that is flexible in nature. Within such a process, the teacher and the children construct the classroom process together, and the teacher takes multiple and adaptive roles to support the large group meeting time and make its interaction more meaningful to the children.

As seen in the data examples in the findings of this chapter, Morning Meeting in this classroom was a significant context for the children and teachers to make meaning and construct understanding together as a group on various topics around them. In the interview data, the teacher revealed that the large group meeting time (Morning Meeting) did not proceed in the same fixed way all the time in this classroom. There were moments when she herself as a teacher needed to follow and support the children’s ongoing interests or provide a context for the children to engage in meaningful conversation during the large group process so that the large group meeting time would be a meaningful space for the children even though what emerged might be somewhat different from her original plan for that day.
“I think a lot of it depends on, too, how excited, how interested they are. You can tell something like that happens, they are going to talk about it all day. Like we can tell in advance, we will be saying to each other, “We’re going to talk about this today.” For example, when there were tornado sirens. ... every kid came in that morning, they all heard the siren and some of them went to the basement and that’s they all they wanted to tell me. “Did you have to go to the basement last night? We had to go to the basement.” So I know that’s what we are going to need to talk about today. You know that’s kind of I think our role as an educator too, that’s how the children learn, they need to talk about stuff....” (Jully, the lead teacher)

The teacher, Jully, explained that such group conversation on various topics around the children could also be connected with some content areas for preschoolers.

“We also do lots of science. We get books out and say this is why a tornado happens, this is what it is, the thunder and lightning. We learn that so the next day there’s a big thunderstorm, why thunder, why lightning, with the science behind.”

However, in the interview data, the teachers also revealed that there were also difficulties and limitations within the classroom context. The teachers could not always support the children’s interests and meaning making on various topics immediately – they also had to consider the dynamics of the daily process, classroom resource availability (i.e., accessible materials; classroom spaces; possible support from parents etc), negotiation with the teacher planned ideas /activities, and the consideration of making connections with early childhood state content standards.
"I think a lot of times it also depends on the resources we have. Like I knew in my head, we have pipes in the back room. We can put that in the sensory table, we can--that’s something I’m okay with letting them explore. Yeah, it can leave some mess, but it is easy to clean it up. I think it is kind of our heads with what kinds of resources we have, to facilitate what we want to do, some things we have on hand, some things we have to go out and buy, that kind of stuff comes into play--how easy it is for us to pull off or do we need parents’ support, the kind of stuff we can do knowing our parents and our classroom." (Jully, the lead teacher).

As discussed earlier, in this classroom, the teacher – children relationships were more than powerful-powerless. The children actively contributed in their group meaning making as they shared their own ideas as well as listened to others and built upon one another’s ideas within their large group meeting context. Power was shared between the teacher and the children and among children, and various forms of interactions and power relations (‘power over’ ‘power with’ ‘power for’) were co-constructed and shifted as the children and the teacher acted and reacted to one another in this classroom context. Along with having an understanding of various ways of exercising power in this classroom, the teacher was also a decision maker who organized various meaning making experiences in the classroom. In the interview data presented above, the teacher states that she makes such decisions concerning classroom processes as she interacts with the children. This was not a process that depended solely on the teacher; rather, the teacher and the children co-constructed the classroom processes. Along with the actual interactions with the children, the teacher also engaged in complex considerations
regarding various aspects of the classroom process. Here, the teacher constantly negotiated and took multiple and adaptive roles, not only so as to support the children’s meaningful interaction within the classroom context but also to meet certain requirements and standards that she had to consider as a classroom teacher.

**Teacher Skills**

Throughout the discussion of dissertation findings so far, I have presented and analyzed the children’s and the teacher’s actual interactions during the Morning Meeting event to understand what meaning making they were constructing and how they engaged in such a meaning making process within and across their large group meeting time in the preschool classroom. In this section, I will examine and discuss further the specific teacher skills that I identified in the study. I revisited some of the children’s and teacher’s large group meeting interactions which I have presented in the transcript data with a focus on identifying effective teacher skills that the teachers in this preschool classroom displayed and used in their meaningful interactions with the children.

**Building Classroom Community by developing ‘Social Relationships’**

One of the most identifiable teacher skills that I noticed through analysis of the classroom interactions during the large group meeting time was that the teachers in this classroom promoted and developed positive ‘social relationships’ with the children through their interactions. Bloome et al. (2005) explained the term “relationship” as “an identity based on a relationship to another” (p.103). Here, I have adopted the viewpoint that ‘social identities’ are “being constructed through the interactions people have with each other (sometimes referred to as social positioning)” (Bloome et al., 2005, p.101).
Therefore, in order to understand the social relationships constructed in the classroom, it is important to look closely at the social identity each of classroom members brings into the classroom and how they position themselves as they interact with one another.

‘Social relationships’ that were constructed in this classroom were analyzed by micro-level discourse analysis of the large group verbal interactions. As I re-visited the transcript data, I focused especially on the teacher’s social identity in terms of her positioning in relation to the children during the large group meeting process. Bloome et al. (2005) argued: “The process through which social identities are named and constituted are language processes; that is, it is through the use of language that people name, construct, contest, and negotiate social identities. Analysis of social identity, therefore, requires attention to language use” (p.103). I examined the language that the teachers used during such group meeting time interactions, with particular attention to the specific pronouns that the teacher used in indicating herself and positioning herself in relation to the children, which I anticipated would allow me to see how the teacher in this classroom developed social relationships with the children, especially during their large group meeting interactions. Through re-analysis of the transcript data, I identified three major teacher skills that the teachers of this classroom displayed in terms of developing positive social relationships with the children and thus helping to build a classroom community through their interactions. Those three identified teacher skills related to ‘social relationships’ are: (a) positioning of the teacher herself as a member of the classroom (“We”); (b) promoting positive social relationships through the language that
she used with the children (“Friends!”); and (c) developing social relationships through positive emotions in the classroom (i.e., humor, kindness, sympathy, etc.).

(a) Positioning of the teacher herself (her identity) as a member of the classroom (“We”)

The first teacher skill that I identified in this classroom through analysis of the teacher’s verbal interactions with the children was that the teachers in this classroom positioned themselves as members of the classroom the same as the children. The teachers used the pronoun “we” as they interacted with the children, especially when they talked about classroom related issues with the children during the Morning Meeting context. In transcript 4.4, as the teacher engaged in group conversation on the day’s weather with the children, she responded to the children’s comments with “we” in her verbal comments, which displayed her positioning of herself (her identity) in relation to the children not just as an outsider separate from the children but as a member of the same group as the children. For example, in transcript 4.4, the group conversation started with Nick saying that due to the rain, they could not go to the park that day (“We don’t go to the park today because it is raining,” line 1). Here, Nick indicated himself by “we,” which showed that Nick positioned himself as a member of the classroom, the same as the other children who followed the same daily routines with one another. Like Nick, other children also used the pronoun “we” as they talked about what they could not do as group members due to the rain on that day (“Now we can’t play outside,” Jack (line 10); “And we’ll have to go downstairs to play,” Andy (line 13), etc. Interestingly, the teacher, Pam, also used the pronoun “we” in her verbal response to such comments from the
children. In lines 6-9, as the teacher explained to the children why they might not go outside, Pam said, “Even if it wasn’t raining, the ground would have been very, very wet, we wouldn’t have been able to play,” lines 6-8). Throughout her conversation with the children about the classroom routines, Pam positioned herself as “we” as she responded to the children’s comments (“No, we can’t play outside either,” line 11; “we probably won’t be able to play outside at all today,” line 14). In this classroom, when the teacher interacted with the children, the teacher herself frequently used the word “we” as she talked with the children within the large group meeting context. Such use of the pronoun “we” was especially noticeable when the teacher talked about classroom experiences (i.e., special events in the classroom (transcript 4.7 – lines 1-6, classroom routines, etc) that the children would need to know or do together as a group. The way the teacher used “we” in her explanations or verbal comments when she was talking about classroom experiences depicted how the teacher positioned herself in relation to the children within this classroom context. Analysis of the teachers’ classroom interaction with the children showed that the teacher positioned herself (her identity) in relation to the children not just as an outsider remote from the children’s classroom experiences but as a group member just like the children, which would promote the development of social relationships in the classroom through their interaction.

(b)Promoting positive social relationships among the children: through language that the teacher uses (“Friends!”)

The second teacher skill that I identified in this classroom through analysis of the
teacher’s verbal interactions with the children was that the teacher used certain words (language) to promote positive relationships among the children. As I re-analyzed the transcript data on the large group meeting event interactions, I observed that the teacher used the word “friends” when she was talking to directly the children, especially when she wanted to deliver verbal statements or messages to an individual or group of children. Instead of saying “you” to the child (children), the teacher often used the word “friends” in calling upon the children as she interacted with them during the large group process.

In transcript 4.6, Jenny shares about a bruise that she got the day before. Jenny wanted to share about herself and some things that had happened to her with the other children during the Morning Meeting event and raised her hand to get the floor for an opportunity to talk. In this process, the teacher assisted Jenny in getting the floor within the large group context. As the teacher gathered the children’s attention to get ready for Jenny’s sharing, the teacher addressed the children by calling out, “Friends.” In lines 1-2, the teacher made an announcement to the group, saying, “Jenny had something she wanted to share with her friends, so Katie and Andy, give Jenny some respect, please”). Then the teacher asked Jenny, “What did you want to tell your friends?” (line 3) to assist Jenny so that Jenny could start her verbal sharing about the bruise with the group of children. In line 1, the teacher related Jenny to the other children by calling them “her friends,” and in line 3, as she spoke directly to Jenny, the teacher positioned the other children in relation to Jenny as “your friends.” Again, in line 23, as the teacher asked Jenny what she wanted to say to the other children about her elbow, the teacher used the word “friends” rather than indicating or referring to the other children as “them” (“What
did you want your friends to know about your elbow?”). Here, as I analyzed the transcript data, I noticed that the way the teacher positioned each child with another child (or other children) within the classroom context was as “friends,” which I think illuminates the kind of social relationships among children the teacher wanted to promote and develop in her classroom community.

As I analyzed the data, transcript 4.12 was very fascinating to me in that the teacher did not position herself with just one identity (role) as she interacted with the children within the large group meeting context. In transcript 4.12, after returning from her vacation, Katie is sharing seashells during the large group meeting interaction in the Morning Meeting event. Throughout the large group interaction with the children, the teacher often used the word “we,” especially as she talked to the children about classroom experiences. For example, in lines 1-3, as the teacher told the children that they had not seen Katie for a while because Katie was on vacation, the teacher included herself as well by using “we,” which indicated that she was also one of the classroom members who had not seen Katie for a while (“I’m going to start with this friend, because this friend, who we haven’t seen for a while, has something to share with us,” teacher, lines 1-3). The teacher also designated Katie as “this friend” to the group, which indicated the way she positioned Katie with the other children as “friends,” just as seen in the example discussed above. However, it was noticeable that several times the teacher indicated herself using “I” rather than “we,” especially when she was taking the role of classroom teacher. In lines 10-11, as the teacher stood up to show the children where Myrtle Beach was on the map, the teacher indicated herself by “me”, which indicated that
at this time she was positioning herself in the individual teacher role rather than taking the same position as the children (“Let me show you on the map,” line 10; “Let me show you on the map while Katie gets those out,” line 11). In lines 56 and 59, the teacher once again referred to herself with “we” as she talked to the children about what Katie wanted the class to do with her seashells (“Oh, did you hear what Katie said we could do with her shells?” line 56; “She said we could wash them,” line 59). Through analysis of transcript 4.12, I noticed that the teacher in this classroom did not position herself only in an authoritative teacher role as she interacted with the children. Rather, the teacher positioned herself as one of the classroom members by her use of “we,” especially when she was talking in terms of any classroom experiences with the children; on the other hand, she also positioned herself by using “I” when she needed to guide or lead the children as a teacher (i.e., guided group interaction on map). In this classroom, the teacher-student relationships were not always defined and positioned as powerful-powerless. Often, the teacher used such words as “we” and “friends” as she interacted with the children and when she was engaged in interaction among the children, which illuminates her effort and skill in creating a classroom environment which could promote positive social relationships among the children in the classroom context. These teacher skills are clearly relevant to the notion of a caring relationship in the classroom context that Noddings (1992) pointed out. Noddings (1992) argued that relationships in educational settings should be critically re-considered in terms of caring and the ethics of care, which will lead teachers to think about their role and relationships with the children within the classroom context. It is significant that elements like care and respect needed
to be included in the classroom community. In the next section, I will present another
teacher skill that served to promote positive relationships in this classroom, which I
identified from the transcript data.

(c) Developing social relationships through positive emotions in the classroom (i.e.,
humor, kindness, sympathy, etc.).

The third teacher skill that I identified in this classroom through analysis of the
teacher’s interactions with the children was that the teachers in this classroom actively
nurtured positive emotions within the classroom context, which greatly influenced the
way the teacher developed social relationships with the children.

*Humor.* As I analyzed the transcript data, I noticed that in this classroom, the
children often displayed laughter as they interacted with the teacher during their large
group meeting time. The teacher also often engaged in humor as she interacted with the
children. In transcript 4.6, as Jenny gave a verbal explanation about a bruise on her
elbow (“When I was going home, xxx I tripped on a rock this big *(showing size)* and then
bleeding.” Jenny, Lines 9-10), the teacher responded to Jenny with a clarification
question which also indirectly implied her intention of humor. The teacher responded to
Jenny by saying, “The rock was bleeding?” (line 11). This teacher response was made
intentionally to help Jenny be more precise in her oral sharing with the group, but, at the
same time, the teacher included humor in her verbal response and thus created laughter
within their large group meeting context. As seen in lines 12-15, the teacher’s humor
invited Jenny’s laughter (“No, I was! *(laughing)*,” line 12) as well as other children’s
*("(laughing),” line 14). Such laughter not only served as a source of positive emotion for
the children within their classroom life, but also was helpful to group members, including
the teacher, in building social relationships with one another.

In transcript 4.14 (Interaction Units #1, #2, #3) on the teacher’s and children’s
interaction during their large group experiment on what’s a clog using the pipe and
crumpled paper, there were several laughter and fun, which I observed in the analysis of
the data. In lines 139-158, as the teacher talked to the children about what really came up
in the classroom the day before (“It was probably, to be honest with you, a little bit of
poop,” the teacher, line 140), the children responded by giggling and laughing along with
expressing their reactions to the unpleasantness of the stuff that came out of the
classroom sewer the day before (“Ewww” (line 141 and 155); “Yuck” (line 155)). This
laughing and giggling were actually very honest reactions of the preschool age children,
and such reactions of laughter and giggling were allowed and validated in the classroom.
The teacher accepted the children’s natural reactions and laughter, which happened
spontaneously in the process of the large group experiment. The children’s giggling and
laughter were also actually indications of their acknowledgement and recognition of the
teacher’s proposal of an intercontextual link between the large group experiment (wet
newspaper pieces) and the clog problem that had occurred the previous day (the stuff that
actually came out of the sewer).

In lines 128-132 of transcript 4.14 (Interactional Unit #3), as the teacher agitated
the paper ball inside of the pipe with the rod, she made the sound of the Rotarooter that
the maintenance person had brought to fix the clog problem the day before as another
intercontextual connection (“And they brought in the Rotarooter, rrrrrrr (making

259
The children responded to the teacher’s intercontextual connection by joining in and making the same machine noise, “Rrrrrrr” (line 130). And as the teacher finally pushed the crumpled newspaper ball out of the pipe using the tool (‘rod’), the children showed their excitement by clapping and cheering (“Yaaaaay,” line 132). The children’s laughter, giggling, joining in and having fun with the Rotarooter sound (“rrrrrrrr”), clapping and cheering all clearly illustrated how actively the children were engaged in this large group experiment process. Those reactions were not received as chaotic or something out of place in the classroom, but rather were naturally validated by the teacher as a part of the active meaning making process, all of which thus strengthened the children’s active role as well as their social relationships through positive emotions shared with other peers and teacher.

Sympathy  Sympathy is another positive emotion that the teacher displayed as she interacted with the children, especially as she responded to the children’s verbal sharing on their personal experiences. In Transcript 4.8, the children and the teacher were engaged in large group conversation about John, who got sick on the way to the school and went back home. The children brought in their own previous personal experiences of being sick that were similar to John’s. For example, Nick told about his experience of getting sick ‘in the car’ like John (line 22); Eric made a connection with his experience of getting sick because of a ‘bellyache’ like John (lines 25-26).

As the children shared their own experiences within the Morning Meeting context, the teacher validated the children’s participation and contributions to the group conversation by providing sympathetic comments or responses to the children. For
example, in response to Nick’s sharing about getting sick in a car (line 22) and Eric’s sharing of his previous experience of getting sick on the way to school (lines 25-28), the teacher provided such sympathetic comments as “It happens to everybody once in a while” (line 23) and “Yeah, it does not feel good” (line 29). In response to Katie’s sharing of her previous experience of being sick at the school (lines 46-49), the teacher made an acknowledgement with her comment that she also remembered Katie’s previous experience (“I remember”, line 50). The teacher’s expression of her sympathy in response to the children’s verbal sharing of a personal experience of sickness would actually serve as a vital interaction and opportunity for the children and the teacher to build solidarity through their group interaction. Each child’s own personal experience of sickness was not just perceived as separate from the experiences shared by others in their stories, but rather all of their personal stories were actually connected as experiences that were similar and thus shared with one another. The teacher’s sympathetic emotions and responses to the children’s stories on sickness created an interactive context for solidarity and social relationships with and among the children.

Kindness Another data example of the teacher in this classroom promoting social relationships through positive emotions in the classroom was the teacher’s attention to the children’s “niceness” or “kindness” to one another during the classroom interactions. In transcript 4.12, Katie did oral sharing about her family vacation along with showing seashells from the vacation to the other children during the large group meeting time. After Katie’s sharing about her seashells, the teacher asked Katie what she was going to do with the shells. Katie responded by saying that she wanted to wash the seashells. In
lines 59-61, the teacher gave an intercontextual proposal to the entire classroom by saying that the class would have another activity later that day using Katie’s seashells. As the group conversation moved toward the end, the teacher said that even though Katie would take the seashells home after the later activity, it was still nice for them “to wash them, and touch them, and see them” (“She’s going to take them home. Well, that’s nice of her to let us help wash them, and touch them and see them,” lines 69-70). Here, as I analyzed the data, I identified several social significance through the intercontextual connections the teacher made using the artifacts (seashells) that Katie brought from home. Firstly, such an intercontextual link provided the children an opportunity to explore the seashells with their hands and senses (“to wash them, and touch them, and see them,” line 70), which would allow them to engage in various forms of meaning making. Secondly, things an individual child brought from his/her home and shared were validated and valued in this classroom with the teacher’s support. Thirdly, especially in regard to promoting social relationships through positive emotions, I noticed that in line 70, the teacher explicitly pointed out an example of “niceness” to the group, that Katie shared her seashells with them to explore in the activity context (“Well, that’s nice of her to let us help wash them, and touch them and see them”). The teacher displayed her caring, appreciation, and validation of positive emotions like “niceness” and “kindness” between and among the children as a classroom community, which again illuminates the specific teacher skills for developing social relationships in the classroom.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the everyday large group meeting interactions in the preschool classroom and its significance to preschool children. In-depth understanding on the preschool large group meeting time was mainly examined through exploring the children’s and teacher’s large group interactions and various meaning making within and across their everyday large group meetings and classroom experiences. Four research questions guided exploration of this main objective of the study.

1. What is the nature of the large group meetings within the socially constructed daily life of a preschool classroom?

2. What meaning making do the children and teachers engage in during their large group meeting event? How do they engage and act and react to one another in their group interaction and meaning making process?

3. What are the significant functions of such socially constructed large group meeting events within and across the children’s classroom experiences?

4. What are the multiple roles of teachers and children, and how do their roles and interactions create opportunities for building a
learning community and meaningful process within the preschool classroom context?

In this section, firstly, I will mainly discuss the findings from these four research questions, which I presented with specific data analysis earlier in Chapter Four. As I discuss the findings of each research question, I will also make connections with some other research studies and theoretical constructs from the literature. Secondly, I will discuss implications of this study of preschool large group meeting time and interactions, especially its implications for the early childhood education field. Lastly, I will discuss some limitations in my study along with possible ideas for future research based on those limitations.

**Discussion of findings in the research questions 1 and 2**

In answering the first research question, I presented a detailed description of the classroom’s large group meeting time, Morning Meeting. The general features and process during Morning Meeting were discussed to give a contextual idea of what the daily large group meeting time usually looked like in this classroom. In the studies of Kantor et al. (1989; 1992), the preschool large group meeting time was identified not as a single unitary event, but rather as consisting of a series of sub-events that were “functionally different” but “socially coordinated” (1989, p.437), working together within the large group meeting context. This was also observed in this classroom’s official large group time, Morning Meeting. In this preschool classroom, the Morning Meeting consisted of five sub-events: coming to the rug, large group conversation/talk, calendar,
weather, and dismissal (transition to go line up for outdoor play time). Among the five sub-events, I found that the sub-events of ‘coming to the rug’, ‘calendar’, ‘weather’, and ‘dismissal’ had more ritual-like characteristics; they proceeded with generally similar steps and things to do every day in the Morning Meeting process. On the other hand, the sub-event of ‘large group conversation/talk’ had characteristics that distinguished it from the other sub-events. During the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event, as the children and the teacher engaged in their group conversation, various types of group interaction could be observed and identified. As pointed out by Kantor et al. (1989; 1992), all of these sub-events during the Morning Meeting worked together to create and thus present the nature of the large group meeting time in this classroom context. In this classroom, along with the typical ritual-like characteristics of some sub-events (i.e., calendar/weather), the sub-event of ‘large group conversation/talk’ was a context where various types of group interaction between the children and teacher could be observed, which allowed the large group time, Morning Meeting, not to proceed in one fixed way in this classroom. Morning Meeting had elements of “ritual” and “everyday routine” which provided repetition and order in some of their procedures (Reich, 1994, p. 55), but it also served as a significant context for active meaning making through the group interaction of the participants, which led to dynamic and diverse meaning making within such a Morning Meeting context in this classroom.

In research question 2, I examined the “large group talk/conversation” sub-event more deeply by exploring and analyzing the children’s and the teacher’s interactions in this sub-event during Morning Meeting. In order to respond to research question 2 of
exploring and understanding “what meaning making the children and teachers construct” and “how they engage in such meaning making processes” during their large group time, micro-level analyses were conducted on interaction segments from the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event during the Morning Meeting events. Through analysis of the data, I was able to identify four different types/purposes of interaction in the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event in this classroom: 1) a context for individuals’ sharing of personal stories, news, and artifacts that they had brought from home within the large group; 2) a context for teacher’s announcements on upcoming events to the group in the classroom; 3) a context for group meaning making on various child-initiated and teacher initiated topics through collaborative and extensive group conversation; 4) and a context for teacher-directed interaction on certain topics that the teacher chose to introduce to the children.

In their studies of classroom interactions, Cazden and Beck (2003) addressed that teacher researchers had recently reported that “they designed and encouraged variations in the purposes and structures of traditional ST [Sharing Time]” (2003, p.169). Cazden (2001) pointed out that variations in lesson (group interaction) structure show “differences in educational purposes for talk” (p.53), which reflects that “classrooms are complex social systems for many reasons” (p.54). The multiple and diverse types of group interaction during the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event illustrated the classroom’s active use of this sub-event (large group conversation/talk) during the Morning Meeting for various purposes.
As demonstrated in the first type of group interaction, the children in this classroom often used this sub-event of ‘large group conversation/talk’ during Morning Meeting as a context for publicly sharing personal news or telling about special things that they had done or that had happened to them. This kind of verbal sharing of the individual child within large group contexts is often referred to as “sharing time,” and ‘sharing time” has been studied by several researchers, such as Cazden (2001), Gallas (1992), and Michaels (1981, 1985). It has been described as a context where the children come to the classroom with something to talk about, self-chosen topics which are often related to their personal/home life or show and tell about an object brought from home (Cazden, 2001; Michaels, 1981, 1986). As discussed in these large group meeting studies, in this classroom, individual children’s personal and home life was shared, heard, and valued in their large group meeting time, Morning Meeting.

Along with supporting individual child’s sharing and talking about self within the large group context, in this classroom, the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event was a time for the children and the teachers to converse with one another on various topics around them. It was a time provided for them to engage in group conversation within the Morning Meeting context. Here, I would like to discuss the importance of large group time serving as a context for the children and teacher to engage in group meaning making though their large group interaction. I observed this sub-event was a context for group meaning making on various child-initiated and teacher initiated topics. It was a context for the children and the teachers to collaboratively and interactively construct meaning together on various topics around them through extensive group conversation. In this
type of interaction, the children’s engagement was an interactive group process, in which it could be observed that the children acted and reacted to one another. They talked, shared, and listened to their own as well as others’ ideas; they also asked questions and thought and reasoned together, all of which helped them to make sense of various topics and issues around them through their group interaction. The socially constructed nature of the children’s active meaning making could be observed in this type of interaction during the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event in the Morning Meeting.

As I analyzed the data, I identified three main patterns in terms of how the children in this classroom jointly constructed and contributed to group meaning making: 1) by linking to / making connections between their own personal experiences and on-going topics; 2) by sharing their thoughts and listening to others’ – thinking and reasoning together and building upon each other’s ideas; and 3) by sharing their prior knowledge (what they knew) with the group.

One of the significant findings from my data analysis is that, in this classroom, as the children talked and thought together about various topics during the Morning Meeting time, they actively brought in and shared their personal experiences and stories that were relevant to the topics that they were talking about. This was different from the first type of interaction of individuals sharing on self-chosen topics that they wanted to share with the other children (e.g., talking about one’s own bruise); in such sharing, the sharer did not necessarily have to choose topics relevant to others. However, in this type of interaction, the children brought in and made connections with personal experiences that were relevant to the on-going group topic, which served as a vital interactive process for
them in making sense of the things they were talking about together within the large
group context.

The interactive nature of group process was also observed in the way the children
built upon one another’s ideas as they engaged in large group conversation. This showed
that the children were actually listening to what others were saying as they joined in and
shared their ideas and thoughts within the group contexts. The children built upon one
another’s ideas to make sense of various issues around them (e.g., why they needed to
clean up blocks, etc), which also served as vital process for them to reason and think
together through their group interaction.

In this kind of collaborative group interaction, the children took the role of active
contributors for their group meaning making; they not only brought in and made
connections to relevant personal experiences, but also shared what they knew (prior
knowledge), knowledge that they had gained both in and outside of classroom
experiences (e.g., why they did not trade food with one another). The way the children
made sense and made meaning though such an interactive process served as important
resources and an opportunity for them to bring in, share, and build upon each other’s
ideas. It is important to note that the preschool large group meeting time thus also served
as an interactive context for the children and the teacher to engage in meaning making of
a socially constructed nature through their large group interaction.

The large group time was also occasionally a context for teacher-directed
interaction. At such times, it was a context in which the teacher could purposefully bring
in and introduce a topic that she had chosen/planned for the class and talk together with
the children about the topic. Unlike the collaborative group interaction described earlier, where topics were initiated by the children as well as the teacher, in this teacher-directed interaction, topics were initiated by the teacher, and there was often specific teacher control on turn taking in proceeding with this large group interaction. My analysis of the data revealed that a ‘teacher initiation - student response – teacher’s follow-up comments’ talk sequence pattern between the teacher and children continued throughout the classroom event. This kind of classroom discourse pattern has been called the I-R-E (F) conversational structure, and defined as “Initiation-Response-Evaluation (Follow-up)" (Mehan, 1979; Wells, 1993); it has been mentioned as a common speech sequence pattern that is identifiable in ordinary or traditional classrooms. The I-R-E conversation structure has been viewed as a traditional lesson format, in which the teacher often takes the primary role of an actor/knower who dominates and controls the classroom talk by asking many questions and evaluating students’ answers as right or wrong. However, in recent studies of classroom discourse (Bloome, 2005; 2008; O’Connor and Michaels, 1993; Wells, 1993), the authors found that when the teacher took an adaptive role to support his or her classroom discourse as a more meaningful process, the students’ active participation and contributions were encouraged in the classroom discussion process, even in the I-R-E conversational structure.

These features could also be observed in my data in the teacher-directed interaction. Even within the I-R-F talk sequence, the teacher asked open-ended questions, for example, of whether they knew anything about flowers, rather than right/wrong known-answer questions, and the teacher also provided follow-up comments related to
the children’s responses rather than evaluative comments so that the children could more easily participate in the group process. Moreover, even though the overall interaction pattern was the I-R-F sequence and the teacher posed the same question to each child, this did not mean there was only teacher-individual child interaction; the teacher took an adaptive role by letting other children join in the interaction even if it was not their own turn and the other children sometimes shared additional information that they knew about flowers in relation to the ongoing topic. As pointed out earlier, we cannot say automatically that the I-R-F pattern structure itself limits the children’s meaning making through group conversation. The children engaged in group meaning making within the large group context as they shared and listened to what each of them knew about flowers, which they had gotten from various sources. The children’s group meaning making on ‘flowers’ was possible, especially as the children and teacher participated in and proceeded with this kind of teacher-led interaction adaptively rather than by strictly maintaining the original I-R-F sequence structure (teacher-individual child interaction).

However, in this teacher-led interaction within the identified I-R-F conversation structure, a certain level of teacher control was more observable than in other collaborative group interactions; the children were allowed less freedom in engaging in longer extended talk than in the collaborative type of group conversation due to the teacher control focused on giving turns to everyone. In addition, topics of the group conversation had to be something relevant to flowers, the topic that the teacher had chosen and initiated, whereas in the collaborative types of interaction, various topics were brought in and initiated by both the children and the teacher.
Here, my intent is not to evaluate or suggest that one type of interaction is better than the other; the main purpose of presenting and analyzing the data is to illustrate the large group conversation/talk sub-event during Morning Meeting in this classroom, where various types of large group interaction existed in this preschool classroom context. Complex nature of large group interaction was revealed through analysis of the children and the teacher’s actual interaction within their large group conversation/talk sub-event during Morning Meeting context.

One possible interpretation of the finding that multiple forms of group interaction existed in this classroom could be that I collected the data from mid March to the end of August, which was toward the end of their academic year. The children who were five years old and who were going to graduate in August had been in this classroom setting since they had their fourth birthday, which means they had been in this classroom for almost two years at the time I collected data in this classroom. The children were familiar with their Morning Meeting routine and knew what to do and how to engage in each sub-event of the Morning Meeting. In the studies, Kantor et al. (1989; 1992) examined one preschool classroom’s official large group time, circle time, for a period of over a year to understand how the children learned to participate in socially and academically appropriate ways within this circle time event. Kantor et al. (1989; 1992) found that as the children engaged in the circle time meeting process over time, they first learned about the “look” of the circle and then the “sound” of the circle. Namely, the children first learned and established an understanding of the social action in each sub-event, which was related to the structure of the circle time, and then constructed their
understanding on how to develop group communication during the circle time. The authors found that as time went on, the children’s talk became more accomplished: “the group shifted from early dependence on teacher to introduce topic and to talk, to greater involvement of the children over time” (Kantor et al., 1989, p.441). There was an emergence of child-initiated talk along with a shift from the initial teacher-child interaction to more child-child interaction, all of which illustrated that the children were taking a more active role in collaborative group interaction and building on each other’s talk. In my study of large group meeting interactions, at the time that I observed and collected the data in the classroom, most of the children were very familiar with how to participate and what to do in each sub-event, especially in the ritual like sub-events (coming to the rug; calendar/weather; dismissal), those with similar steps and recurring patterns. Moreover, the children actively engaged in their large group conversation and interaction during the sub-event of ‘large group conversation/talk.’ They sometimes actively held the floor and initiated topics that they wanted to talk about with the group and made meaning together as they acted and reacted to one another on various topics around them. I was able to observe multiple and diverse types of group interaction during the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event in their official large group time, Morning Meeting. The complex and multiple layers of discourse that comprised the nature of this classroom’s large group time were revealed by multiple and diverse types of group interaction during the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event. The children and the teacher took active roles in interacting within this large group context. They actively used this large group meeting contexts to support the various needs and multiple purposes.
of them in the classroom, which thus allowed this large group meeting context to be socially and interactively constructed and to serve multiple functions in this classroom. Such multiple functions of the large group meeting time were also illustrative of a classroom that was flexible, adaptive, and interactive in nature, which will be discussed further in the next section.

**Discussion of findings on research questions 3 and 4**

In order to answer research question 3, I examined this classroom’s large group time (Morning Meeting) within the whole classroom contexts, considering it along with other contexts within the classroom. Looking through the entire body of data and examining the data of Morning Meeting time within the frame of the whole classroom context, I found some new categories which suggested that sometimes the large group interaction during Morning Meeting was extended to other contexts in the classroom. Also, at times, the large group conversation/talk process was occurred in other contexts, outside of the official Morning Meeting context; a short large group conversation meeting was sometimes held as an adaptive format at various times and in various spaces (e.g., hall ways, outdoor playground etc) within the classroom contexts when brief group meaning making was needed.

The data in these categories were not observed as frequently as the typical or representational data which could be seen in the typical daily process, like the data presented in discussion of research questions 1 and 2. However, throughout data from the five and a half month data collection period, even though these features may not
appear as frequently as the data discussed in considering research questions 1 and 2, they serve as significant case examples which capture the flexible and adaptive nature of this classroom in proceeding with the current set classroom structure and experiences. These data have allowed me as a researcher to gain a better understanding of the complexity of the classroom processes as well as a fuller understanding of the classroom as a culture that was constructed by patterned ways of life along with dynamic changes. I will discuss this notion of culture later in this section.

In terms of understanding the extension of large group meeting events to other contexts, the concept of intercontextuality as a social construction (Bloome et al., 2005) was applied as a major methodology that enabled me to analyze and examine such possible links between the Morning Meeting context and other contexts in this classroom. Within this category, I was able to identify two different types of intercontextuality throughout the data: a) an individual child’s sharing of artifacts during the Morning Meeting context and use of the shared artifacts in a free-choice activity setting; and b) large group meaning making through group conversation during the Morning Meeting and its extension to various contexts. The theoretical and methodological construct of ‘intercontextuality as a social construction’ provided an opportunity for me as researcher to identify whether there actually were intercontextual connections created by the children and the teacher. Because, “merely proposing a relationship between one event and another does not in and out of itself create a connection. … A connection among events has to be ratified by others; the participants have to acknowledge and recognize the connection, and the connection has to have some social consequences” (Bloome et al.,
2005, p.44). Namely, the teacher’s setting up activities using the child’s shared artifacts does not itself necessarily indicate that this activity had an intercontextual relationship with the Morning Meeting interaction. It is important to see the actual interactions between the teacher and the children and among the children to understand how the intercontextual links were proposed, acknowledged, and recognized by them, and in what ways they had social consequences, all of which reflect socially constructed intercontextuality (Bloome et al., 2005).

In the data presented in Ch.4, I found some indications of the socially constructed nature of the intercontextual links that the teacher and the children created through their interaction. As the child (Katie) shared her personal stories about her vacation, she also showed and shared seashells that she had gathered at the beach as relevant artifacts for her verbal sharing. At the end of her sharing, an intercontextual link was initially proposed by the teacher, who asked Katie what she wanted to do with the shells. Katie responded by saying that she wanted to wash those seashells, a hands-on activity which the children in this classroom were accustomed to engaging in. Here, as Katie responded to the teacher’s question, she also showed her acknowledgement and recognition of the intercontextual link proposed by the teacher.

The teacher’s intercontextual proposal was also acknowledged and recognized by John, who asked whether Katie would take those seashells home after their later activity. This showed John’s recognition of intercontextuality, that the class would have another activity later that day using Katie’s seashells. Here, it is important to note that the teacher’s proposed intercontextuality was recognized, not just by Katie, but by other
children as well, all of which indicates a social construction of intercontextuality through the interaction within the Morning Meeting context. Some social consequences of such intercontextuality in this classroom are identifiable: through such an intercontextual link to another activity context, the children would be allowed to explore the seashells with their hands and senses, and thus have an opportunity to explore the seashells that Katie shared at the Morning Meeting in more concrete and various ways in a hands-on activity context. This intercontextuality had social significance in showing that things an individual child shared and brought from his/her home were validated and valued in this classroom, and also in providing an opportunity for the child to explore sharing with other children in different ways.

The second case observed in the data was occasional extension of the Morning Meeting to other contexts by linking their large group meaning making through group conversation during the Morning Meeting with various other contexts in the classroom. Even though this second case did not exist as a frequent data category in this classroom, the data from such interaction across different contexts were highly significant in terms of understanding the way the children made meaning within and across the classroom experiences. In the data example discussed in Ch.4, the large group interaction during Morning Meeting about a drainage problem the previous day in the classroom was extended to other contexts, here, the large group experiment context and sensory table activity context. With accessible resources available in the classroom, the teacher supported such intercontextual links in the classroom. However, as discussed earlier, mere proposal by the teacher or topic relevance among different contexts do not
automatically imply that there were intercontextual connections within the classroom context. Examination and analysis of actual data from interaction among the children and teacher within and across those contexts were significant and necessary in terms of more fully understanding the meaning making that the children and the teacher construct in the various contexts, and also to find out whether intercontextual connections were constructed by their interaction and engagement.

In the data presented in Ch.4, I was able to distinguish some features of the socially constructed nature of intercontextual links within and across the classroom experiences. During the Morning Meeting interaction, the children and the teacher made meaning together on a drainage problem that had occurred in their classroom. The children brought in similar personal experience of clogged drains at home during their large group interaction in the Morning Meeting context, which served as a meaning making process that helped them to understand what a clog is and why it happened. That meaning making and interaction was extended into a large group experiment in the teacher’s proposal for using a large transparent pipe, paper, and water to see and explore ‘what a clog is,’

During their large experiment on the carpet area, the teacher proceeded with the experiment by putting a crumpled newspaper inside a transparent pipe and then pouring water through the pipe. As they engaged in the large group experiment, the children observed and talked about how the paper continued to be stuck in the pipe even though they had poured water through it, and the teacher showed them a special tool she would use to get the paper out of the pipe. Within this process, the teacher kept making
intercontextual links in her explanation so that this experiment would be relevant to the
incident happened that the previous day in the classroom, and to their conversation during
the Morning Meeting on what a clog is earlier morning.

By locating proposal, recognition, acknowledgement, and social consequences in
the actual data set, I was able to visually and specifically examine in the transcription the
ways the children and the teacher acted and reacted to one another in the process of
constructing such intercontextual understanding through their interaction. As I analyzed
the data, I found that even though not all intercontextual links proposed by the teacher
were acknowledged and recognized by the children, the children’s previous interaction
and conversation on ‘what a clog is’ during their Morning Meeting was actually furthered
and made more concrete by the visual experiment and their group interaction. In their
verbal interaction in the data, it was evident that some children displayed understanding
that this large group experiment using pipe, paper, and water was relevant to the group
interaction in which they talked about the drainage problem during the Morning Meeting.

In this classroom, the teacher and the children sometimes engaged in brief large
group conversation/talk at different times and in different spaces than in their official
Morning Meeting. Rather than proceeding with all components of the five sub-events of
Morning Meeting, the sub-event of “large group conversation/talk” was used adaptively
in this classroom at various times in different spaces, especially when the class needed to
have a brief and quick group conversation at a certain moment or when they needed to
talk about or make sense of some issue quickly. The data example provided in Ch.4
shows this kind of short large group interaction in the hallway.
In this section, I have discussed some case data indicating that the Morning Meeting was extended to other contexts or its procedures were followed adaptively in various spaces and times to support the children’s meaning making. These illustrative case data were not identified as part of the typical daily process, which was presented in research questions 1 and 2; however, these cases serve as important data which reflect one significant feature of this classroom – flexibility and adaptation in proceeding with the current classroom structure. When we consider the classroom as culture, classroom process should be understood as “fluid and dynamic” rather than “fixed and static” (Bloome et al., 2005, p.52). Such a complex and flexible nature can be revealed if culture is understood as both patterned ways of acting and behaving within a group context and ‘a verb’ connoting activity that is “unbounded, kaleidoscopic, and dynamic” (Heath & Street, 2008, p.7), and which thus fosters change in the classroom process. This understanding of culture will also lead the researcher to think about classroom processes “within the dialectics of continuity (reproduction of extant classroom cultural practices and social structures)” and “change” that “modify, adapt, and transform those cultural practices” and social structures (Bloome et al., 2005, p.52). As Cazden and Beck (2003) illustrated with “jazz musicians who use the conventions of the musical system as a point of departure for improvisation” (p.172), the classroom processes can become more flexible and adaptive with such possibilities for improvisation.

In answering research question 4, the different ways power was exercised between members of the classroom were explored through taking as the main construct ‘power as process’ (Foucault, 1981; 1982) rather than power as possession. Rather than
the teacher possessed static power in the classroom process, power was relational (Foucault, 1982), and that shifted from one situation to another through their interaction. As discussed earlier in the findings, the children and the teacher in this classroom engaged in various types of group interaction and meaning making within their Morning Meeting context and thus created various power relationships during such group interaction. The children and the teacher did not take only one type of role in their student - teacher relationships, that is, with the teacher as a powerful individual and the children as powerless in the classroom. Rather, both the teacher and the children actually took various roles that were interactive and adaptive as they acted and reacted to one another within their large group meeting context.

In terms of understanding such complex and fluid power relations, I adopted the view that there needed to be re-conceptualization in terms of approaching and understanding power in the classroom, because power in the classroom is often viewed only as a coercive relationship. According to Edmiston (2008), power can be identified and exercised in three major ways in the classroom context: ‘power over’, ‘power with’ and ‘power for.’ In re-examination of some of the group interactions during the Morning Meeting, various power relations could be observed in the data, which also illustrated the children’s and the teacher’s multiple roles through such power relations and interactions.

‘Power over’ refers to one using power to control others’ actions and events, which is similar to Foucault (1982)’s notion that ‘power is exercised and acts upon’ something to control it. In the data, some teacher control could be observed in the process of the ritual-like sub-events during the Morning Meeting, such as creating a
seating arrangement during the sub-event of ‘coming to the rug’ and the teacher-led process during the sub-event of ‘dismissal.’ The teacher sometimes also exercised power over the children in their group interactions during the sub-event of ‘large group conversation/talk’ in the Morning Meeting. A data example was given from the teacher-directed group interaction of talking about flowers, in which the group interaction proceeded with the teacher’s control in selection of topic and specific turn taking.

The ‘power with’ relation is often seen in interactions where the teacher shares his/her power with the students and takes the role of a co-constructor who works with the students. In the data from collaborative group interaction during the ‘large group conversation/talk’ sub-event in the Morning Meeting, I observed such ‘power with’ interactions as the children and the teacher engaged in meaning making on various topics around them. The large group process was not led solely by the teacher; rather, the children actively brought in their own personal stories as well as their ideas, and voluntarily built upon one another’s ideas on topics that they initiated as well as those initiated by the teacher. The teacher took part in the group process by collaborating with the children through acknowledgment of the children’s active links to their own similar experiences and also through provision of elaboration on the children’s meaning making process. According to Edmiston (2008), ‘power with’ relationships and interactions can be described as those in which the teacher and children jointly construct and engage in the meaning making process through ongoing collaboration, dialogue, listening, compromise, negotiation, argument, etc., which I could also identify in the data of collaborative group interaction within the Morning Meeting.
In ‘Power for’ interactions, power relationship should be critically re-considered in terms of caring and the ethics of care (Noddings, 1992). The teacher takes the role of nurturer as well as mediator, someone who ‘cares about’ the children’s meaningful interaction in the classroom (Edmiston, 2008), and is thus actively engaged in helping and encouraging the children to become more active learners and meaning makers in their classroom process. As a mediator, the teacher supports the children’s active meaning making by providing opportunities for various meaningful classroom interactions and experiences. Such ‘power for’ interactions were also observed in this classroom, especially as the teacher exercised her ‘power for’ to support the children’s active meaning making during Morning Meeting and extend it further in other contexts in the classroom. The teacher took the roles of mediator and scaffold in trying to explain ‘what it means to clog’ with a visual demonstration using a transparent pipe and paper. In this classroom, the teacher also took an adaptive and flexible role by sometimes incorporating things an individual child brought from his/her home to share during the Morning Meeting into other contexts. ‘Power for’ relations were proceeded by the teacher as she provided an opportunity for the children to explore the seashells that Katie shared in the Morning Meeting in more concrete and various ways in another activity context, to explore them with their hands and senses.

These power relationships (‘power over’ ‘power with’ ‘power for’) in the classroom shifted constantly (Edmiston, 2008) as the children and the teacher acted and reacted to one another. I could observe real complexity of power in the interactions between the children and the teacher in this classroom; they shifted among the various
forms of power relations (‘power over’ ‘power with’ ‘power for’) as they interacted with
one another during their large group interactions, which thus led to various role taking in
the classroom process. Through such an interactive group process, various power
relations emerged, developed, were contested, and shifted, all of which created dialogic
relationships and interactions in the classroom (Holoquist, 1990; Edmiston, 2008). Such
interactions led the children and the teachers to negotiate their roles actively and to take
multiple roles in the classroom.

The complex nature of this classroom was revealed in the collected data from
classroom observations as well as the teacher interview data. As the teacher proceeded
with the classroom activities with the children, there was a constant co-construction and
negotiation process within the given current ordinary structure in the classroom.
In the interview data, the teacher stated that she makes her decisions concerning
classroom processes as she interacts with the children. This was not a process that
depended solely on the teacher; rather, the teacher and the children co-constructed the
classroom processes. Along with the actual interactions with the children, the teacher
also engaged in complex considerations regarding various aspects of the classroom
process. The teacher constantly negotiated and took multiple and adaptive roles, not only
so to support the children’s meaningful interaction within the classroom context but also
to meet certain requirements and standards that she had to consider as a classroom
teacher. The understanding of ‘classroom process as constant negotiation’ was also
addressed in Eirich (2006)’s study on the large group meeting event in one primary grade
classroom. The author examined how the classroom meeting time reflected the
classroom culture, which consisted by school culture and peer culture. Eirich (2006) found that, through the large group meeting interactions over time, such school culture and peer culture in the classroom were negotiated as the teacher and children interacted with one another. A school culture event, the large group meeting time, came to intersect with the peer culture. This intersection created opportunities for emergent literacy and for authentic assessment of the students’ social development (Eirich, 2006, p. iii), and thus the classroom culture was co-constructed through their large group meeting interactions.

**Implications of the findings**

*Teaching and learning are embedded in the world outside the school,*

*and the children bring different parts of that world with them, as do I.*

*In the classroom, all of our worlds are joined; new discourses are created,*

*and different ways of knowing the world are spawned for each of us* (Gallas, 1994, p.158)

The first implication of the findings of this study for early childhood education is the importance of the preschool large group meeting time being a meaningful and interactive process for the children. In this study, during their large group meeting time, the children shared their own ideas on various topics related to their personal lives and their classroom lives; they listened to and built upon one another’s ideas; and they thought together through interaction. The topics ranged from one student’s illness to a drainage problem at school; they were very diverse but, importantly, relevant to the
children. During the large group meeting interactions, I was able to observe that group meaning making became a more active and concrete process when the topics were related to the children’s life experience, including their classroom experience as well as home life. Further, meaningful interaction was possible when there was time and space given for the children actually to engage in group conversation and interaction within the large group meeting time context, when they could bring in and make connections between their own ideas and personal experiences and those of other children in the large group context.

It could be seen in the findings that the children used their personal experience from their homes as well as in the classroom as an important resource not only in their group meaning making but also in their active contribution to such a group process. In her study of preschool circle time, Emilson (2007) pointed out that preschool large group time could often be characterized as having strong teacher control in content and structure in the group context, which differed quite sharply as compared to other activities in the classroom. However, Emilson (2007) found in her study that the children took initiative and engaged in meaning making with active contributions when the teacher did not solely exercise full control of the topics and structure of circle time, and especially when teachers showed an attitude of willingness to be attentive to the children’s sharing, their perspectives, and their stories from personal experiences. A teacher’s attitude of showing interest and listening to the children’s words was closely linked to the children’s opportunity to contribute actively and take initiative in their group process. Control of circle time varied based on differences in the teacher’s
attitudes and interactions created during circle time (Emilson, 2007). Gallas (1994) also discussed “use of personal stories and experiences as valuable sources” (p.87) in the classroom curriculum.

In a study of Katz et al. (2010), the authors examined early childhood educators in terms of the way they used “early childhood learning content standards” in social studies in their classroom processes. The participants were selected from among early childhood educators who attended a professional development series that provided an explanation of early learning standards for social studies and how to incorporate them in the classroom. In their findings, Katz et al. (2010) mentioned that the majority of the early childhood educators in the study reported that the content standard on ‘history’ with the benchmark of “use calendar to determine the day, the week, month, and year” was often incorporated in their circle time as they went over the calendar. In my study of preschool large group time, as I analyzed the actual group interactions during the sub-event of ‘large group conversation/talk’ in the Morning Meeting; the topics that the children and the teachers brought into the classroom actually dealt with many benchmarks in social studies standards. As they engaged in various topics around their personal life experiences in and out of school during the large group meeting process, the children were already involved in making meaning on such elements in the early learning content standard (e.g., people in societies). For example, as they talked about why the classroom blocks needed to be picked up, they were not only talking about their classroom rules but also reasoning together based on some of classroom rules that they knew, all of which touch with social studies standards for government (ODE, 2006). Likewise, as Katie shared about her
vacation at Myrtle Beach, the children and the teacher found the location of Myrtle Beach while looking at a map on the classroom wall and pointing to that particular place. They could get a visual impression of how far it was from the city they lived in, all of which was closely related in the benchmarks in the standard of geography for early childhood education (ODE, 2006). Their meaningful participation was possible as the children took an active role, and such an active role was made possible by the teacher’s validating and acknowledging the children’s contributions within the large group context. For the children, their personal life experiences in and out of school were significant resources for group meaning making as well as their active contribution. Moreover, their meaning making on various topics around them was actually meeting with some of the content standards for early childhood.

Another implication of the findings of this study for early childhood education is the significance of various interactions and opportunities within the large group meeting and also in other contexts. In this classroom, the large group meeting time, Morning Meeting, was usually a time for the children and teacher to engage in emergent group conversation on various topics around them. Thus, the content was not necessarily always related to other contexts whereas story time was a context where the choice of book content was always something relevant to one of planned table activities. However, occasionally, because of the flexible nature of the classroom, the interaction or talk shared during the Morning Meeting could be explored in other contexts, especially with hands-on exploration opportunities. Such opportunities for hands-on or other forms of expression serve a significant role in the classroom, especially in the early childhood
classroom, where the children make meaning through their verbal interaction as well as their various senses. Gallas (1994) emphasized the importance of making multiple forms of expression available in the classroom process. In her study, Gallas (1994) incorporated classroom talk on various content areas, such as science, literacy, etc., with other forms of representing ideas and thoughts. Addressing the value of such activity, she said, “Through the medium of science talks and science journals and drawings, I have seen children develop ways to make their thinking visible in their verbal and nonverbal engagement (Gallas, 1994, p.77). Further, Gallas (1994) pointed out that such multiple forms and opportunities for expressive action, like art and drawing, also become a good support for those children who are English as a second language students or who “are less facile in dominant languages” (p.50).

In the data of this study, I was able to see that some children made active and continuous meaning through their hands-on processes (e.g., the clog idea). Among those children, Michael was one who somewhat passively participated in the large group experiment and conversation process. However, as seen in Figure 4.8 along with my written description of his hands-on exploration, I observed that he was actively and continuously making meaning on what a clog is through his nonverbal hands-on exploration (e.g., picking up one piece of the small pipe and pushing a cotton ball inside of the pipe; pouring water through it a couple of times to see whether the water could get through the pipe; putting a couple of cotton balls in a cup filled with water and trying to flush the wet cotton balls out as he poured the water into the pipe, etc.). With such an opportunity for multiple expression and exploration, young children who may not be as
verbally active as other children can also actively engage in meaning making through their hands-on processes. With the potential for various symbolic representation using the semiotic tools and forms available for and around them, the children’s thoughts and ideas were expressed not only solely in one way (verbally) but in various/multiple ways.

**Limitations of the study**

In this dissertation study, I took an ethnographic research approach to understanding large group meeting interactions and the children’s and teacher’s active meaning making during the large group meetings in one preschool classroom. The main goal was to describe, interpret, and gain in-depth understanding on the socially constructed interactions and meaning makings within the large group meeting context in one preschool. The ethnographic research approach, which is mainly based on a socio-cultural theoretical orientation, guided my study and the examination for the four main research questions of this study. However, I do acknowledge that there are some limitations to this study as well, which could lead to possible thoughts for recommendations for future studies.

The first limitation is related to the participants in the study. As described in Ch. 3, among the participants (23 children and 2 teachers), there were only two children from multi-ethnic backgrounds (Indian and Filipino). Most of the participants, including the teachers, in this study (92%) were European-Americans, and most of the children were from economically upper-middle class families. Regardless of their ethnicity, all children
in the classroom were able to communicate in English; there were no students who were learning English as a second language.

In transcript 4.11, one example can be found in regard to the nature of school discourse in this classroom context. As the children and the teachers talked together about what they knew about flowers by teacher-led group interaction during the Morning Meeting event, the teacher gave verbal discipline to Bob, who was whispering with John and showing him something small in his hand (lines 68-76). The teacher gave a verbal message to John, saying, “Maybe you can put that stryrofoam down” (line 72). The teacher’s use of a certain discourse style in delivering her message allowed the researcher to observe that a particular type of school discourse was reflected in this classroom context. “Maybe you can put that stryrofoam down” (line 72) conveyed a discourse style typical of the white middle-class in the U.S, a discourse style that was familiar to most of the children in this classroom from their home backgrounds. In this classroom setting, the school discourse and the children’s home discourse were similar, mainly a white-middle class discourse style that met with the mainstream discourse style. If the teacher had been from a different discourse background than the group of children or vice versa, the way they interacted with one another might have been different from what I observed in this classroom setting. There have been a several research studies done regarding examination of literacy practice in school culture and home culture by looking at how children’s different backgrounds affect their interaction with teachers (Au, 1993; Heath, 1983; Michaels, 1981). Au (1993) pointed out that for children from diverse backgrounds, there was a mismatch between the culture of the home and the culture of
school, and the culture of the school tended to acknowledge only the values of the power
dominant groups in the culture as the mainstream culture. Thus, the values and standards
of the mainstream were imposed upon subordinate groups of children from diverse
backgrounds, which often led to poor achievement or success in mainstream school
education. Heath (1983) did an ethnographic study of three communities in the Piedmont
Carolina, and found that the children’s classroom performance and teacher’s attitude
were influenced by culture of families in each community. Heath (1983) argued that
studying students’ social interactions outside of school (family/community) was vital part
of understanding their educational interactions within classrooms. Michaels (1981)
conducted a systematic analysis on sharing time in a multi-ethnic classroom setting, and
found that when the discourse style of children did not match with the teacher’s literate
discourse style, this mismatch led to a tendency for the teacher to make a negative
evaluation of the children’s literate performance in the classrooms.

One recommendation for future study would be to explore preschool large group
interactions and meaning making with participants from a variety of backgrounds,
including not only children from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, but also children
who are learning English as a second language. Examining the preschool large group
meeting time within classroom settings with children and teachers from diverse socio-
cultural and linguistic backgrounds would provide the researchers an opportunity for in-
depth understanding on the dynamics in their interactions, which would lead the
researcher not only to focus on micro level social interaction within the classroom but
also to think about the broad contexts of the macro level that this classroom is embedded
in. It might also lead to an examination of the dynamics in home and school connections in this kind of classroom setting and how such dynamics would affect the way the children and the teachers make meaning within preschool classroom contexts, and thus allow the researchers to extend further the educational or curricular possibilities that are constructed within such socio-culturally and linguistically diverse, multicultural classroom environments.

The second limitation is related to my acknowledgement that the findings of this study were based on data that I collected over a five and a half month period. Throughout the data collection period, I visited the classroom three times a week and observed their classroom processes as a participant observer. Sometimes I heard from the teachers about interesting things or interactions which occurred during their large group meeting time when I was not in the classroom for data collection. Such incidents could not be included in the data for my study; I only included data that I observed and collected when I was physically present in the classroom. Of course, I maintained active communication with the teachers so that I would have some understanding of class activities on days when I was not in the classroom; however, I also acknowledge that my understanding of this classroom can only be partial since I visited this classroom only three days a week. Moreover, since I started to collect the data in the middle of their academic year, which was from mid March to the end of August in 2008, I was not able to observe the children’s and the teacher’s interaction during their large group meeting time at the very beginning of the school year. However, in this classroom context, there was not a distinct academic year in the organization of their child care center; when the
individual child was near the end of his/her third year or shortly after his/her fourth birthday, they moved individually to the older preschool classroom (4/5 room) from the younger preschool room (3/4 room). Thus, there was not one group of children in the classroom who all started their academic year at the same set time. Toward the end of August of each year, five year olds who were going to Kindergarten in the following school year graduated from the preschool classroom, and the rest of the children continued with the established classroom experiences and routines, while new children were added to this classroom from the younger preschool classroom based on the individual child’s age. For future study, through longitudinal exploration (for over a year) of the preschool large group meeting time, it would be possible to understand the large group interactions and process over time (i.e., changes in content and structure of the large group time, expectations of teachers, etc.). A particular group of children who are selected as a focus group could be observed from the beginning of the school year to the end of the school year to see how their interaction and group meaning making during the large group time have changed and been co-constructed over time.

The third limitation of this study is that, even though I received permission from the children’s parents for their children’s participation for this study, I did not include the parents as participants in my study. The children and the teachers were the participants of the study; I mainly examined their interactions during the large group meeting time in the classroom. However, as described in Ch.3, this child care center (school setting) had unique features that may not typical of most child care centers. The center was originally designed as an on-site child care center for employees who worked in the state
association. The child care center is located on one side of the first floor of the building which houses this association system. As discussed in Ch.3, the parents or relatives of 82.6% of the children (19 children) in this classroom were currently employees in the association system building. The teachers were very familiar with the parents since they saw them every single day, and the parents’ active involvement was also welcomed in the classroom context. Sometimes the parents would come down to the classroom to have a special lunch time with the children on special days, such as Mother’s Day or Father’s Day. They sometimes supported the children’s meaning making in the classroom process (i.e., writing a letter for the children; sharing home videos/pictures in the classroom, etc).

For future study, the parents could be included as participants of the study, especially in school settings like this child care center where the parents maintained close relationships with their children’s classroom experiences. Including the parents as another valuable resource for understanding the classroom has the potential to make the data as well as interpretation of such data richer. Including parents as participants of the study will not only allow a researcher to explore the parents’ thoughts and expectations regarding the children’s large group meeting routines, but also to gain some understanding of differences in individual parents’ involvement in the classroom. Even though this classroom appears to have close relationships with the parents, the dynamics and differences among families in such relationships within the same classroom setting could be examined further.

In this study, the main data sources were direct observation of the children and teacher’s interactions during the large group meeting time and interviews with the teacher.
My understanding and interpretation of the children’s meaning making within their large group contexts were mainly based on analysis of the transcriptions from actual observational video data and the in-depth conversations with the teachers through interview meetings. The children’s voices or their own ideas on what they actually thought about their large group meeting time were not obtained in this study. For a future study, along with the data from the teacher interviews and the researcher’s direct observation of their large group meeting interactions, data from informal conversations/interviews with the children might also be possible. In addition, I mainly examined intercontextual connections based on the large group meeting interaction and its possible extension to other contexts in the classroom. Examination of possible intercontextual links between and among various other contexts in and outside of the preschool classrooms (e.g., outdoor play time) can be undertaken in future study.

**Concluding thoughts**

This ethnographic study of one preschool classroom captures the importance of large group meeting events where children and teachers can bring in their personal experiences, share their own and listen to others’ ideas, and build understanding of various on-going topics around their personal and classroom lives. As Gallas (1994) pointed out, classroom processes are “embedded in the world outside the school,” and such classroom processes become ‘meaningful’ when the children’s voices and the teacher’s voice are joined and thus “new discourses are created” (Gallas, 1994, p.158) and valued in the classroom. The preschool large group meeting time can be a
'meaningful’ event for children and teachers when they actually have an opportunity to engage in and co-construct various meaning making through group interaction.
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302


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Appendix - A) Description of classroom daily schedule and curriculum

Welcome to the 4-5 Preschool Classroom! We are very excited to have you share your child with us. We look forward to a wonderful time together. This packet will help provide you with information about our classroom, our daily routine, policies and curriculum.

Classroom Considerations: In the 4-5 classroom, we uphold the philosophies of the 3R's:
1. Respect for yourself
2. Respect for others
3. Respect for all your actions

We provide and support an accepting, warm, secure and non-violent environment.

Highlights of our Day

Morning Meetings: During our large group time, we have wonderful discussions and share our experiences with each other. It offers the children the opportunity to listen and to be heard. Morning Meeting helps establish our class as a community of learners. Parents are always welcome to join us at our meetings, which usually start around 9:00 a.m. At Morning Meeting, we also discuss the calendar, weather, daily helpers, and plans for the day.

Outside times: Our outdoor times are important for your child's growth and development. We will be outside at least 3 times per day if the weather permits. Our schedule of the playground is as follows:

9:30-10:15 a.m.
11:30-12:00

Every other week, we alternate times with the toddler classrooms. Early week time is Wake-up to 4:15 p.m. Late week is 4:15-5:00 p.m.

If weather is not permitting, we will go downstairs to the activity center. If the outside temperature is above 90 or below 28, we will not go outside.

Please dress your child appropriately for the day's weather.
Walks: We enjoy taking walks downtown with the children. Some of our favorite places to walk include the Main Library, The Topiary Gardens, and the State House. When we walk, we always carry our classroom cell phone and first aid kit in case of emergency. We follow the walking routes outlined in the distributed walking route book. When we walk, the children hold hands and practice safety at all times. We welcome parent participation.

Snack time: We offer nutritional-based snacks and beverages at the center. Snack is offered twice daily, once in the morning and once in the afternoon. The children are encouraged to participate, but may decline. Copies of our daily snack schedules can be found on the classroom refrigerator. If you would like to furnish a snack for the class, please let a teacher know in advance so that we can make preparations. Many times, the children help bake their own snacks. Snack time provides a wonderful opportunity to develop and enhance social skills such as manners and independence.

Story: We have many opportunities for the children to read and be read to while in the classroom, whether it be during small groups, one-on-one interactions, or with the entire class. We encourage children to bring in their favorite books to share. Many times, our class walks to the library to pick out new books for our classroom. We also encourage parents to come down as guest storytellers.

Free Choice times: The children have many activities offered to them throughout the day. Our room is divided into sections. We have a housekeeping area, a science area, a block area, a computer area, a writing table, a sensory table area, an art area, a music area, a math and manipulative area, and a book area. We provide stimulating activities and create an environment in the classroom for the children to gain knowledge through discovery. We plan our activities based on the interests of the children as well as exciting things we would like to share with them. During free choice time, the children are encouraged to make their own choices and solve their own problems. As the children mature, they begin to find sections of the room that they enjoy more than others and will spend the majority of time during free choice acquiring as much knowledge as they can from those activities. Each child is treated as an individual, respected and trusted to make his/her own choices during this time. The children gain confidence, self-reliance and independence by having the power to choose for themselves how to spend their time at free choice.
Appendix - B) Sample Interview Questions for Teachers

1. How do you define / describe everyday large group meeting events in your classroom?
   How do the children and teachers engage in and make meanings together during the everyday large group meeting event?

2. In your opinion, what role does this kind of large group meeting serve in preschool children’s learning and development?

3. What are some of goals that you expect to achieve through everyday large group meeting events?
   What are some aspects that are emphasized in your classroom large group meeting events, and in your opinion, why are such aspects significant for the children in your classroom?

4. What is your belief and philosophy about the image of the children and the children’s group learning process in the classroom?

5. How is such a belief and philosophy reflected in your classroom meeting events?
   What are some challenges that you think you’ve had during the large group meeting events?

6. How do you define / describe your role in the everyday large group meeting events?
   How do you position yourself and your roles during the large group meeting process and why?

7. What are some of expected roles of the children during the large group meeting process?
   How would you describe your thinking or ideas behind such expectations?
8. How do you prepare for / proceed with the everyday large group meeting events? (connection to children’s interests, curriculum, themes, etc.)

What are some of the resources you use or incorporate in the large group meeting events?