AN INVESTIGATION OF SOCIAL ROLES AND SOCIAL RELATIONS OF YOUNG

CHILDREN REGARDED AS LESS SOCIALLY COMPETENT:

ELEVATING THE HETEROGLOT NATURE OF SOCIAL COMPETENCE

by

EUNAE SON

(Under the Direction of Kyunghwa Lee)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to reconsider the prevailing beliefs or judgments about children's social competence through the investigation of unique and diverse social roles, traits, and abilities exhibited by young children considered socially incompetent in schools. This study focuses on ways in which young children regarded as not socially competent form relationships and establish the roles they play in their social interactions. Grounded in the perspectives of cultural psychology, I pay special attention to the cultural beliefs and meanings in everyday practices and consider children as active participants who interact with social and cultural meanings and create their own. Based on Bakhtinian notions of dialogism, I also perceive children's social actions, social competence, and social relationships as the product of the reciprocal interactions between them and others, social circumstances, peer culture, and the broader social culture. Using ethnographic methods, I collected data, such as video- and audio-recordings, field notes, jotted notes, and interview transcripts, through participant observations and interviews with the children's teachers from December 9, 2011 to August 1, 2012.

Drawing on illustrations from the daily social lives in school of four focal Pre-k children, I argue that these children have unique roles and capabilities for participating in peer play and interaction. Although the characteristics that they exhibit in their peer relationships cause them to be considered less socially competent than their peers by their teacher (e.g., shyness, bodily play, unassertiveness, and excessive sensitivity), these traits actually have important social roles and merit in the children's collaborative interactions with others. I discuss how their unique social characteristics actually work effectively, peacefully, and harmoniously in peer play and function as an adhesion in their social relationships. Their "successful" and "enjoyable" social participation in their own ways supports Bakhtin's notion of *heteroglossia* as a basis of thoughts to perceive the diversity of children's social competence and ways of connecting with others. The findings suggest that we need to critically reflect on our cultural beliefs and values and common discourses regarding children's social competence and pay more attention to children's diverse ways of interacting with and relating to others.

INDEX WORDS: Social Competence; Social Development; Socialization; Peer Culture;
                Shyness; Non-verbal Interaction; Bodily Play; Ethnographic Study;
                Cultural Psychology; Bakhtin; Theory of Language

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DEDICATION

To My Beloved Parents and Husband:

My Father, Seha Son,

My Mother, Soungja Lee, and

My Husband, Moonyoung Eom

Whose endless affection, love, encouragement, and prayer

served as my motivation and energy

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INTRODUCTION

In his article "Are you a social constructionist?" Ian Hacking (1999) considers social

constructionism from a philosophical point of view and explains how a concept or an idea is

socially constructed and influences people's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. When

discussing terms, such as *sociability*, *friendship*, and *social competence*, we share ideas about

them based on the meanings that have been socially and historically agreed upon and constructed

(Hacking, 1999). I consulted a dictionary to see how we recognize these words and on what

basis. For example, *sociability* is defined as "a quality or state of being sociable" and "the act or

an instance of being sociable" (Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary, 2015). Based on this

definition, we think about people and perceive ourselves. We also use these words appropriately

according to social and cultural contexts and situations. Likewise, words not only reflect our

living world but also shape our thoughts and modes of thinking and acting (Hacking, 1999).

The main purpose of this dissertation is the reconceptualization of young children's social

competence, which is derived from the changes in my conception of the term *social competence*.

During my undergraduate years, I was particularly interested in the social and emotional

development of young children. Katz and McClellan's (1997) book, *Fostering Children's Social*

Competence, was one of the books that impressed me with regard to the importance of teachers'

roles in young children's social development. Working as a kindergarten teacher, I became

especially concerned about one child who was always alone in the classroom. Reflecting on

what I had learned from Katz and McClellan's work, I considered not only the factors that interfered with this child's social relationships but also my roles as a teacher in helping the child with the difficulties she had.

This inquiry led to my Master's thesis, "A Case Study of a Four-year-old Girl's Participation in Peer Group Play" (Son, 2005). In the thesis, I observed Seo-Eun (a pseudonym), who was always alone in the Pre-k classroom and avoided interaction with other children. I analyzed her difficulties, her teacher's strategies for helping her, and her process of participation in peer group play. I classified the difficulties, which this child experienced during participation in peer play, into two large categories: lack of communication ability and emotional instability. I explained that these difficulties affected Seo-Eun's overall participation in peer play and that over time, she overcame her difficulties and participated in peer play thanks to her teacher's continuous intervention.

However, Thorne's (1993) and Corsaro's (1997) perspectives on children's agency in socialization and social relationships that I was exposed to during my doctoral coursework have caused me to significantly change my perspectives regarding Seo-Eun's social behaviors and characteristics. In particular, the following statement by Thorne was so powerful to me that it shook my preconception about young children's social competence:

> [T]he concept of "socialization" moves mostly in one direction. Adults are said to socialize children, teachers socialize students, the more powerful socialize, and the less powerful get socialized. Power, indeed, is central to all these relationships, but children, students, the less powerful are by no means passive or without agency. (p. 3)

According to Thorne, the socialization theory in mainstream studies of social development regards adults as "the status of full social actors" (p. 3) who socialize the children and children

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"as incomplete, as adults-in-the-making" (p. 3), and as those who get socialized. She also posits

that "children don't necessarily see themselves 'being socialised' or 'developing'" (p. 6).

Thorne's argument provided me with a critical lens for challenging prevailing theories of

children's socialization and social development. Social competence often refers to social

abilities that adults possess or desire. Adults are thought to teach children desirable social skills

and to help them overcome any difficulties they have. From Thorne's position, I came to think

that children have their own unique social competence in making friends, participating in peer

groups, interacting with peers and adults, and creating their cultures. Rather than being judged

by and directed toward certain social ability criteria that adults set, children's own social

competence should be respected and understood in the context of their social worlds, especially

in light of their peer relationships and culture.

Moreover, Corsaro (1988, 1997) also emphasized children's autonomy to produce their

own social worlds and culture, control their lives, and even challenge adult authority, rather than

being passively affected and instructed by adults. According to Corsaro, children's socialization

processes are not linear in that they neither simply imitate nor directly use the adult world. On

the contrary, "[c]hildren creatively appropriate or take information from the adult world to

produce their own unique peer cultures" (Corsaro, 1997, p. 41). This process of creative

appropriation by children is referred to as "children's interpretive reproduction" (Corsaro, 1997,

p. 41):

> Children appropriate information from the adult world to create and participate in a peer
>
> culture at specific moments in time. These same collective actions, through their
>
> repetition in peer culture over time, contribute to children's better understanding of the

aspects of the adult culture they have appropriated. Further, these repetitions over time can even bring about changes in certain aspects of the adult culture. (pp. 41-42)

Corsaro (1979, 1997) also appreciated children's use of various social strategies—for example, "a complex set of access strategies" (Corsaro, 1997, p. 124), such as "nonverbal entry," "producing variant of ongoing behavior," and "encirclement" (Corsaro, 1979, p. 321)—devalued in mainstream socialization theory. From his perspective, children are active social agents who develop dynamic strategies to enter a social world and interact with others. His argument implies that children are socially competent and develop their own unique strategies for social relationships and that they enact creative roles in their socialization processes.

I realized that while narrating the transition of Seo-Eun's social behaviors in my master's thesis, I had paid special attention to the roles of her teacher rather than the child's roles in the process of participating in the peer group. Moreover, I began to question my previous perception of Seo-Eun's lack of social competence. Did she actually need help with her social competence from adults? Was it really problematic? Along with these questions, the title of one small section in Katz and McClellan's book (1997), "Common social difficulties" (p. 7), which included shyness, low rates of interaction, aggression, and loneliness, caught my attention and raised some foregrounding questions: "Do shy children truly lack social competence? What does social competence actually mean?" I began to reflect on my beliefs and conceptions about children's social competence and realized that I had been developing a particular concept of social competence along with my personal and professional experiences. For instance, my recognition of Seo-Eun's quietness and loneliness as her problems in social development was fortified while concurring with Katz and McClellan's discussion about these characteristics. Therefore, a change in my perspectives on young children's social competence led me to

reconsider not only my own values and beliefs but also academic discourses about social competence from a critical point of view.

Furthermore, I came to consider how powerful the influences of conceptual ideas and labels regarding children's social competence are in our everyday teaching practices and ways of interacting with children. Hacking (1999) states that "[o]nce we have the idea or the label, we begin to think that there is a definite kind of person, . . . almost as if that were a separate human sub-species" (p. 70). Accordingly, once I had the idea and the label of a socially competent or incompetent child, I thought of and interacted with the child with the category of social competence based on what I had known and learned about children's social competence. Similarly, now, my perspectives on the child's social actions and social competence have changed after my deep-rooted presuppositions and theories about young children's social competence were challenged by Thorne's (1993) and Corsaro's (1997) perspectives. Once I had a different concept of social competence, I now see children differently, because I make sense of almost everything based on this new idea. Therefore, the conceptualization of social competence is critical to our work with young children.

From these initial thoughts and questions, for this dissertation, I decided to revisit the social world of the children who are regarded as less social than others by their teacher and who are probably considered to be in need of adults' help to become socially competent. Moreover, the change in my perspective on children's social competence led me to question the predominant discourse of social competence in the field of early childhood education and even in society.

Children's social competence and socio-emotional development in their early years have long been emphasized in the fields of education and developmental psychology. Many

researchers argue that young children's early social experiences are important for both their childhoods and their later lives and development (e.g., Birch & Ladd, 1996; Galindo & Fuller, 2010; Ladd, 1990; Ladd & Price, 1987; Parker & Asher, 1993; Rhoades, Warren, Domitrovich, & Greenberg, 2010; Shernoff, 2010; Welsh, Parke, Widaman, & O'Neil, 2001; Wentzel, 1991; Williams & Galliher, 2006). Examining the associations between social competence and other factors of interest, such as academic performance, school adjustment, and emotional well-being, these researchers emphasized the importance of young children's early social development.

According to Collins' (2002) chronological overview of research on social development, many studies on children's social development have been conducted by focusing on (a) specifying the notions of and the developmental processes of social competence, (b) identifying influential factors, and (c) incorporating contextual variations into the process of social development. Such foci of research interests reflect the dominant view of social competence, which has been changed "as views of psychological research shifted and as strong formal theories from other fields penetrated the study of social development" (Collins, 2002, p. 5).

During the initial period of the history of research on social development (roughly 1890 to 1919), children's social competence was considered emerging from their endowments and unfolding throughout their lives. Therefore, researchers during this period attempted to disclose its unfolding, considering such social and mastery variables as dependence, aggression, anxiety, and sociability. This view changed as psychological research shifted "from a maturationist orientation to an environmentalist one" (Collins, 2002, p. 5). With increasing interest in clinical and personality psychology, more concerns about social influences on children's social development emerged (from 1920 to 1946), including parental attachment, social experiences of interactions with peers, and socialization. According to Collins (2002), the modern era of

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research on social development (from 1947 to the early 2000s) began with the renascence of

structuralism in the 1960s (e.g., Piaget and Kohlberg). While the earlier interest in socialization

and prediction of social behaviors remained, a new interest in the normative description of

cognitive functioning in social development was prominent among the researchers (e.g.,

Bandura's cognitive social learning and Kohlberg's stage of moral development). According to

Collins, until the 1970s, "psychological researchers were bent toward demonstrating generality

in the effects of certain environmental influences" (p. 12), and the term *environment* meant

"varied sources of stimulation" (p. 12) that surround a child. He explains that nowadays, more

attention is being paid to specifying various influential contexts and incorporating them into the

studies of social development (e.g., "peer gender segregation" used by Maccoby (1990) to refer

to the tendency for children to prefer same-sex partners when they enter mixed-gender settings).

In addition, social development research includes concerns about the significance of variations in

social contexts (e.g., indirect influences of potential environments as explained by

Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework for human development). Therefore, historically,

children's social competence was viewed largely in two aspects: as the process of unfolding

endowments throughout their lives and as the process of an individual child's cognitive

functioning influenced by various environmental contexts.

The historically constructed and shared views of social competence in the academic

discourses of social development research are still prevalent in the field of early childhood

education and have had a consistent influence on the field. For instance, children's social

temperaments, such as shyness and emotional self-regulation, are generally considered to be

endowed and critical to their social competence (Katz & McClellan, 1997; Rubin, Hastings,

Stewart, Henderson, & Chen, 1997; Sanson, Hemphill, & Smart, 2004). Therefore, researchers

have attempted to disclose the unfolding of these endowed social traits, such as aggression toward peers and parents, anxiety, and sociability. Moreover, the influences of children's prior social relationships (e.g., parent-child and teacher-child attachments and peer interactions) and familial and cultural backgrounds on social competence are considered important for children's pro-social behaviors and social knowledge and skills (e.g., Cohn, 1990; Denham et al., 2003; Eisenberg et al., 2001; Howes, 2000; Schneider, 1993; Schneider, Atkinson, & Tardif, 2001). Many researchers have attempted to illuminate the relationships between children's social competence and such various influential factors.

In many studies related to children's social development, children's social competence has been mostly assessed by their social behaviors and skills in social interactions and their popularity among peers. The sets of criteria that the researchers used for assessing children's social competence represent how it was conceptualized. For example, in some studies, children who were considered aggressive or shy and had negative social-outcomes (e.g., peer-rejection or unpopularity) were regarded as socially incompetent (Asher, 1983; Rose-Krasnor, 1997). Certain traits of social behaviors and tendencies, such as sharing, cooperating, being accepted, emotional regulation, and social temperament, were regarded as indicative of social competence and found to be positively related to academic, social, and emotional outcomes (Crick & Dodge, 1994; Denham et al., 2003; Denham & Grout, 1993; Garner & Estep, 2001; Katz & McClellan, 1997; Semrud-Clikeman, 2007). Thus, throughout the history of research on children's social development over a century, the dominant notion of social competence has been constructed and shared among researchers and educators in the field of early childhood education. This

characterization of being socially competent or incompetent has been reified by many studies on children's social competence.[1]

Over the past decade, the number of studies that challenge the unified concept of social competence in the dominant discourse of social competence has steadily increased (e.g., Chen, 2009; Chen & French, 2008; Chen, Rubin, & Sun, 1992; Sutton, Smith, & Swettenham, 1999a, 1999b). These studies argued that children's anti-social behaviors, which have been traditionally viewed as a deficit of social skills, were not always derived from nor related to children's social incompetence. Taking social and cultural contexts into consideration, these studies question the general concepts of children's social competence and socialization, and some researchers emphasize the cultural diversity in social relationships, the ideals of social competence, and the ways of socialization. For example, by reviewing various literature regarding children's different engagement behaviors in social interaction in different societies, Chen and French (2008) argued that cultural norms and values affect the display and functional meaning of social behaviors. According to them, children in different societies (i.e., mostly North American versus East Asian) showed differences in the prevalence of initiative behaviors and shy-inhibited behaviors in natural play situations and peer interactions. Likewise, these studies investigate children's social behaviors and socialization practices in different cultural groups and assert that social competence is defined differently depending on cultural beliefs and practices. Thus, a given social behavior or trait is not always an indicator of a child's social competence, and children's social behaviors should be understood within the careful consideration of various contexts. Informed by the studies emphasizing diversities in the concepts of social competence, this dissertation study is built upon the beliefs that the concepts of social competence are cultural

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[1] By reviewing several studies related to children's social competence, in Ch. 2, I will provide dominant conceptualizations of social competence in the academic discourse of the field in more detail.

constructs and that children's social competence is diverse and can be construed differently depending on cultural values.

These studies examining cultural differences in social competence are meaningful in that they initiated the consideration of the cultural aspects of social competence and the reconsideration of dominant beliefs about social competence in the United States. Yet, researchers in this area have tended to concentrate on the *influence* of social and cultural factors on children's social competence. They treat children's social and cultural backgrounds as an independent variable or "an overlay on some universal process" of child development (Lee & Walsh, 2001, p. 79). For example, in many studies, children's social and cultural backgrounds— ethnicity for a prime example—were used as an influential factor for examining their associations with children's social behaviors and relationships (e.g., Berndt, 2004; Chen et al., 1998; Chen et al., 1992; Sebanc, 2003).

Therefore, in many existing studies on children's social competence, children are generally viewed as passive in their social relationships and socialization practices and as controlled by such externally influential factors (e.g., Asher, 1983; Cohn, 1990; Eisenberg et al., 2001; Rhoades et al., 2010; Sanson et al., 2004; Schneider et al., 2001). These studies pay little attention to the social roles and skills that children, as socializing agents, employ when they participate in social relationships and interactions. Hutchby and Moran-Ellis' (1998) argument about the *competence paradigm* explains such perspectives about children's social competence, which reflects Thorne's (1993) critical perspectives on socialization theory and Corsaro's (1997) discussions on the peer culture of young children:

> [W]ithout denying that human beings develop over time and in describable ways, nor that appropriate social behaviors are learned and not natural, the competence paradigm seeks

to take children seriously as social agents in their own right . . . to explicate the social

competencies which children manifest in the course of their everyday lives *as* children. (p.

8)

Therefore, these scholars suggest that we need to be sensitive to children's own ways of social

functioning and carefully support their ways of socialization. Adopting their perspectives, I

argue that we, as educators and researchers, should recognize children's agency in their social

worlds. Therefore, scholars, who are concerned with children's social competence, need to pay

attention not only to the *influence* of external factors, but also to the ways children negotiate and

mediate in various contexts to create their own cultures. Actually, more attention should be paid

to the latter, because the former has been relatively considered in much greater depth by many

previous studies. Moreover, there are still few studies that extend the cultural diversity in social

competence to the critical discussions related to social power and position. Most studies

interested in social and cultural contexts did not employ a critical lens to question the dominant

concepts of social competence and socialization and to examine social power relations embedded

in the discourses about children's social development and socialization practices in school.

Reviewing the related literature on children's social competence and development, I saw

the necessity of reconsidering children's social competence within the discourse of diversity and

of critically examining the dominant discourse of social competence. Therefore, in this

dissertation, I aim to investigate social roles and activities that young children considered

socially incompetent actually enact in their social relationships in order to interrogate the

concepts and ideas about social competence that have been socially constructed and possibly

standardized and reified. By doing so, I intend to challenge any culturally and academically

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unified view of young children's social competence and to recognize and shed light on the diversity of social competence.

The purpose of this study is to challenge the prevailing beliefs or judgments about children's social competence through the investigation of unique and diverse social roles, traits, and abilities exhibited by young children considered socially incompetent in schools. My research questions are as follows:

1. What activities do the young children regarded as socially incompetent participate in, and what roles do they play in their relationships with peers?

2. In what ways do these children negotiate and mediate cultural norms and values while engaging in social relations in school?

3. How do teachers' perceptions of and judgments about these children's social relations reflect the dominant discourse on social competence?

Theoretical Framework

Cultural Psychology

The general perspective of this dissertation is grounded in the idea of cultural psychology (Bruner, 1986, 1996; Rogoff, 2003; Shweder et al., 2006), which emphasizes that culture and human beings are mutually constitutive. Cultural psychologists focus on the reciprocal relationship between culture and human beings and "the various patterns or forms of coherency . . . that ha[ve] arisen out of their interactions" (Shweder et al., 2006, p. 731). This bidirectional relationship is described as an ongoing and reciprocal process in which individuals formulate cultural beliefs and practices of cultural communities, and at the same time, those cultural inheritances shape and affect people's ways of thinking and acting.

The cultural psychological perspective on human development supposes that "Humans develop through their changing participation in the sociocultural activities of their communities, which also change" (Rogoff, 2003, p. 11). This view of the socio-cultural nature of human development emphasizes both the individual's agency to participate in and contribute to his/her own culture and the dynamic nature of culture affecting the individual's life. As implied by cultural psychology, children are neither passive in their socialization[2] nor isolated from social and cultural contexts. Rather, they actively interact with social and cultural meanings and create their own while participating in everyday routines.

In addition, cultural psychology indicates that children's social competence is interdependent with the culture in which they are situated at both micro and macro levels (Bruner, 1986; Rogoff, 2003; Shweder et al., 2006), because children learn to form social meanings as they discover a world endowed with meanings through their participation in cultural practices (Miller & Goodnow, 1995). Grounded in the perspectives of cultural psychology, this study pays close attention to cultural practices situated in the social world of children and the beliefs and meanings associated with those practices.

Cultural psychology also guides this dissertation study to concentrate on the reciprocal process in which children create and share their own social meanings and cultures through their active interactions with existing values and norms around them. Led by the cultural psychological approach, this study focuses on children's active and creative roles in their social lives and the ways in which young children, particularly those regarded as socially incompetent,

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[2] When I use the term "socialization," I adopt the perspectives of cultural psychology regarding children's socialization, which value children's agency and contributions. On pages 2 and 3 , I have discussed Thorne's (1993) critique about general point of views on and customary practices of socialization in our society. I agree with Thorne's critical perspectives on children's socialization in school and use this term with recognition of children's active roles and participation in their socialization practices that cultural psychologists articulate. In Chapter 3, I explained cultural psychological perspectives on socialization in detail.

enact such roles in their relationships and participate in social activities with their unique

characteristics. While delving into these children's social worlds, I pay special attention to the

reciprocal processes and the cultural dynamics of children's social negotiations and creations in

which they not only consider others' needs and expectations but also act as social agents.

Bakhtinian Philosophy of Dialogism

The focus of this study on reciprocal processes and cultural dynamics in children's social

activities is theoretically supported by the Bakhtinian philosophy of dialogism. By employing

linguistic terms, such as language, utterance, and word, and by affirming that language is

"conceived as ideologically saturated" and represents "a world view, even . . . a concrete

opinion" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 271), Bakhtin (1981) expanded his idea of language to sociological

perspectives. According to Bakhtin, language is not just a means of conversation but a pathway

of social and ideological dynamics. Words are tension-filled dynamics and full of "a multitude

of bounded verbal-ideological and social belief systems" (p. 288). In this sense, Bakhtin's

description of dialogue, which goes beyond just simple situations of conversation, is analogous

to the cultural dynamics in children's social relationships and interactions in schools in which

they interact with social values and ideologies.

Placing an emphasis on the word's orientation "toward the listener and his answer" (p.

280), Bakhtin (1981) explains mutual interactions within the living dialogue and the situated

nature of the meanings of the word. From the Bakhtinian perspective, a word is "the product of

the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee," and "the

immediate social situation and the broader social milieu wholly determine" (Vološinov, 2000, p.

86) the structure of an utterance and the meaning of a word. Bakhtin states,

The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-

word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction.

Forming itself in an atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time

determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact

anticipated by the answering word. Such is the situation in any living dialogue. (p. 280)

In a like manner, children's social competence and social actions are the products of the

reciprocal relationships between children and others, social and physical circumstances, and the

micro-macro cultural contexts surrounding them. Their social worlds are filled with dialogic

living culture that is constantly mediated and negotiated by those belonging to that culture and

also influenced by other factors in broader society. At the individual level, dialogical processes

of culture exist in which children produce their social actions and interactions with others while

negotiating between social values embedded in various surrounding societies and personal values

that they bring from prior experiences in their families or other contexts. At the broader level,

dialogical processes also exist in which various cultures exchange and merge with others while

reciprocally reflecting one another. Therefore, Bakhtin's emphasis on the reciprocal relationship

between addresser and addressee and the immediate social situation in a living dialogue provides

an insight on cultural dynamics in children's social activities and relationships that can be

illustrated as "*a continuously generative process implemented in"* (Vološinov, 2000, p. 98;

emphasis in original) reciprocally reflective social-verbal interactions.

Such reciprocal processes in which responsive and reflective children's social

competence and social actions are produced involve inner stratifying processes, which reflect

power relationships and guide critical discussions about them. According to Bakhtin (1981),

individuals stratify *heteroglot* languages in proportion to their social significance and create their

own languages and culture. Shared with others, "these languages of *heteroglossia* intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming new socially typifying languages" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 291). In a like manner, children stratify various values with regard to their social lives and create their own value system appropriate to the contexts depending on the social significance of those values in a respective context. In this respect, Bakhtin (1981) affirms underlying political aspects of language that are produced by such stratifying processes. Just as Bruner (1996) states, "culture is also about power, distinctions, and rewards" (p. 28). Social and political tensions exist in dialogue, and cultural dynamics in children's socialization practices reflect such power relationships. Accordingly, this study investigates cultural dynamics in young children's socialization in school by utilizing Bakhtin's philosophy of dialogism as a critical lens to view power relationships between the dominant discourses and the heteroglot values of social competence.

Methodology

Ethnography

Cultural psychology provides the methodological grounds for this study. The basic premise of cultural psychology, the intimate bidirectional relationships between human beings and culture, is accompanied by a methodological orientation. Because cultural psychologists view individuals and contexts as interdependent and mutually co-created (P. J. Miller & Goodnow, 1995), their methodological orientation is distinctive from that of cross-cultural psychology. Cross-cultural psychology considers culture and psychology "as discrete phenomena, with culture conceptualized as an independent variable that impacts on the dependent variable of individual behavior" (J. G. Miller, 1997, p. 88). Therefore, cross-cultural psychologists "carry a procedure established in one culture, with known psychometric properties,

to one or more other culture" (Shweder et al., 2006, p. 722). Based on universalism, they utilize questionnaires or experiments in order to make cross-cultural comparisons. As opposed to this view of cross-cultural psychology, cultural psychology maintains that "[c]ontext is not conceptualized as separate from the person, nor is the relationship between individual and society conceived in X-on-Y terms—that is, in terms of the effect of society upon people, of people upon society, or of context upon development" (P. J. Miller & Goodnow, 1995, p. 8).

Rather than treating cultures as independent variables for comparison, cultural psychologists "derive procedures for each culture from the lifeways and modes of communication of that culture" (Shweder et al., 2006, p. 722). Cultural psychologists place emphases on the perspectives, terms, meanings, and beliefs of the insiders in those cultural communities. Therefore, they utilize interpretive and ethnographic methods (Cole, 1996; P. J. Miller & Sperry, 1987; Shweder et al., 2006) to identify practices supported by a cultural community and to analyze their meanings (P. J. Miller & Goodnow, 1995). By deeply engaging in the ordinary lives of participants and analyzing the culture-specific beliefs and meanings associated with the related cultural practices (Shweder et al., 2006), cultural psychologists demonstrate the dynamic and mutually constituting nature of relationships between individuals and culture (e.g., P. J. Miller & Sperry, 1987; Rogoff, 2003; Shweder, Jensen, & Goldstein, 1995).

I perceive that my mode of inquiry is situated in ethnography. Because my primary focus of this study is cultural aspects of children's social competence, I intended to explore children's social experiences in their school lives, their peer culture related to social relationships, and the cultural dynamics in their socialization practices. In order to understand the cultural meanings of children's social competence and social actions and their socialization practices in schools, I

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believe that I need to deeply engage in children's daily social lives and develop ongoing relationships with the people inside the setting. According to Preissle and Grant (2004), ethnography is "a specialized form of fieldwork, in which culture is a central concept, where deep engagement over time with a culture is expected, and where a central goal is the presentation of an insider's view of that culture" (p. 165). They point out that ethnography prioritizes the perspectives of the people in the culture over those of the researchers. While seeking to understand the social world of children, I attempted to interpret social and cultural phenomena in children's lives and children's perspectives about their social lives.

In order to prioritize the insider's view in the participating children's social world, I consider the researcher's openness to others and self-examination to be an important phase of this process of interpretation and understanding. Stating that "one cannot be purely self-regarding," Schwandt (2004) explained, "Genuine understanding is only possible if one adopts the posture of experiencing the other as someone who really has something to say" (p. 38). This is the attitude of mind, which calls for *openness* to others. In order to truly understand others, one needs to be ready to listen to them. Dialogue merely within oneself can bring about severance of understanding and deepen one's own prejudices. For genuine understanding, I believe that we—researchers—should be open to others, "respecting their autonomy and presuming they possess an independence and voice we must address and by which we ourselves are addressed" (Schwandt, 2004, p. 38).

Furthermore, openness involves self-examination in order to accept what is in opposition to our beliefs, to risk our own self-understanding, and to be open to "the possibility of a mutually evolved new and different understanding" (Schwandt, 2004, p. 39). Therefore, for a researcher, the attitude of *openness* means not only openness to others but also openness to ourselves by

challenging and risking ourselves. Researchers need to be aware that they are beings who are

affected by their life histories, cultural beliefs and values, and any other factors to which they

have grown accustomed (Gadamer, 1975). With openness to others and ourselves (reflective-

self), a genuine understanding may occur. In particular, for studies on the cultural aspects of

education and children's lives, I believe that researchers should carefully reflect on their beings

and their own understanding during research. When I engaged in the participating children's

ordinary social lives and tried to understand any phenomena, my prior knowledge and

assumptions and my own cultural beliefs and values were indispensably included in my

understanding. Therefore, in order to prevent researcher bias, which is one of the main threats to

validity in qualitative research (Maxwell, 2005), I tried to understand children's perspectives of

their social lives by engaging myself in self-examination and reflection.

I believe that such aspects of the dialogical process are necessary not only for researchers'

genuine understanding but also for the rights and agency of children in research, because the

participating children are positioned as active social agents and considered to be knowledgeable

informants. With regard to positioning children as social actors, James (2007) notes that it is not

merely letting children speak; rather,

> [i]t is also about exploring the nature of the "voice" with which children are attributed,
>
> how that voice both shapes and reflects the ways in which childhood is understood, and
>
> therefore the discourses within which children find themselves within any society. (p. 266)

Therefore, researchers also need to pay attention to the unique contributions that children make

for researchers to understand children's social worlds (James, 2007). In order to approach

children's voices in their own culture and social lives and actualize their contribution to the

discourse of childhood in broader society, researchers should deeply engage in children's culture

and participate in this dialogical process, which involves paying reflective attention to their own understanding and examining their own prior knowledge and beliefs and the perspectives of broader society.

In summary, guided by cultural psychology, I conducted ethnography, while considering the following two aspects: reflective attention and openness to children's perspectives and those of myself and valuing children's contributions to my understanding of their social world within and into which they find themselves.

Participants and the Setting

The setting of this research was a private daycare center operated by a local church in the state of Georgia. The participants of this study were eight children in a Pre-k classroom and two teachers who were in charge of them. In particular, I concentrated on four focal children who had been identified as less social than others by their classroom teacher: Jason, Tyler, Maggie, and Gabriel[3].

Research setting. The research site was Everett Christian (Pseudonym) preschool that offers full-time and half-day daycare for children ranging from 6 weeks to 4 years in age. Full-time daycare is provided from 7am to 6pm, and half-day is from 8am to noon. All of my participating children attended the full-time daycare program. The school curriculum for Pre-k children includes not only academic preparation for kindergarten but also Christian academics, such as Bible stories and songs. The usual schedule of the Pre-k class was as follows:

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[3] All names of the people in this dissertation are pseudonyms.

Table 1.1

The Ordinary Schedule of the Pre-k Classroom

Time	Classroom Schedule	Researcher's role[4]
7:00 ~ 10:30	Morning snack and Curriculum	No visit
10:30 ~ 11:20	Free play	Peripheral observer
11:20 ~ 12:00	Lunch	Helper
12:00 ~ 1:30	Nap time	Helper
1:30 ~ 3:00	Outdoor play or Free play	No visit

According to the lead teacher of this Pre-k classroom, each child arrives at a different time and plays freely until the other children come to class. Then, they have a morning snack after free play and work on Pre-k curriculum, such as phonics, numbers, and social studies. In the Pre-k classroom, two teachers were rotated on a daily basis. Ordinarily, the lead teacher took care of the children from morning to 2pm and worked on the Pre-k curriculum in the morning. The assistant teacher took a turn taking care of the children from 2pm to 6pm. However, at around 5pm, only a few children were left in the classroom. In this Pre-k classroom, six to nine children attended daily. When I first visited this site in December 2011, the total number of children enrolled was eight. In the middle of February 2012, one more child enrolled. The map of this Pre-k classroom is as follows:

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[4] The researcher's roles and relationships with the participants are discussed in detail in the next section (pp. 31-36).

Figure 1.1

The Map of the Research Site
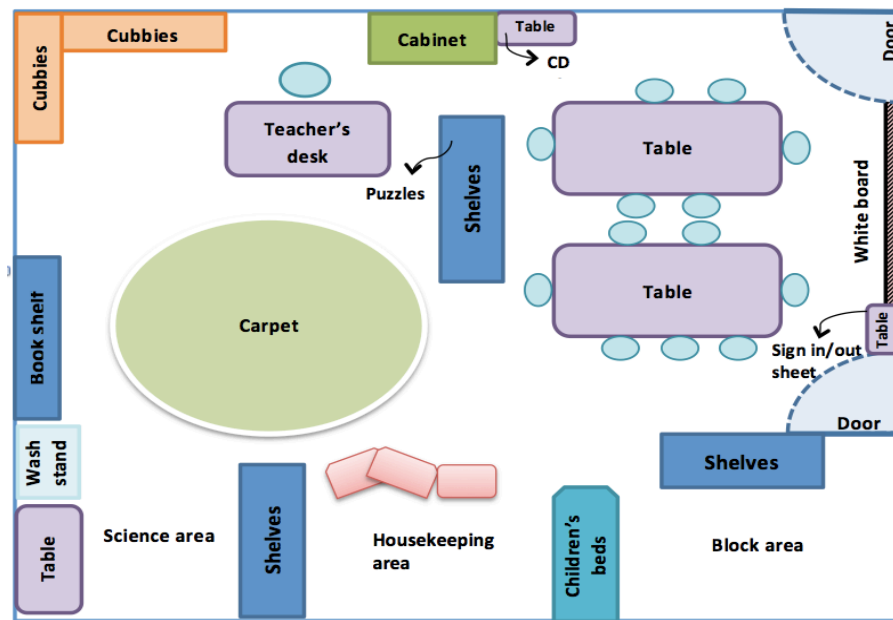
I usually visited the Pre-k classroom at around 10:30am. Whenever I walked into the classroom, the lead teacher and the children were usually gathered on the carpet and working on the curriculum. Sometimes, the children were sitting around the tables, and the teacher led a lesson standing by the whiteboard. During free playtime, the children were always divided into three or four groups and were assigned to play areas—science, housekeeping, block, and manipulative areas. During free playtime, the tables were used for children's play with manipulatives while the carpet was used as the reading area. The children were supposed to stay in the area assigned by the teacher each day and not cross into the other areas. The teacher usually sat at the teacher's desk and did her job, occasionally watching the children playing in their areas. Her desk was positioned so that she could quickly scan the entire room. After free playtime, the children were gathered on the carpet, and I read a storybook to them while the teacher served lunch at the tables. After all meals were set, the children and I moved to and sat down together around the tables.

Participants. The participants were a group of Pre-k children and their teachers. I invited all of the children in the Pre-k class, including the child who joined the class later in February, and their teachers—the lead teacher, Ms. Gracie, and the assistant teacher, Ms. Emma, who took care of the children in the afternoon—to participate in this study. However, I could not obtain the permissions of the recently enrolled child's parents, nor of Ms. Emma. Ms. Emma was not willing to participate in this research, expressing her concerns about her lack of professionalism in teaching children. However, Ms. Gracie was very open with me and was also interested in participating in my research. She is a European-American female and was in her sixties during my study. She started teaching in 1982 and worked as a substitute teacher for four years. Because she originally had a degree in business administration, she worked in business for a while. After raising her own four children and after her youngest child was enrolled in college, she decided to start teaching full-time and received her certificate after 2 years of enrollment in an early childhood education program at a community college.

The other participant teacher was Ms. Eva, who was in charge of the 3-year-old children in the next classroom. After I visited the classroom several times, I thought that Ms. Eva could be another potential informant, because these two classes had an intimate relationship. They shared one door between the rooms. Because Ms. Gracie usually took care of her children alone, when she had to leave the room, she asked Ms. Eva to watch her children by standing at the door between the classrooms. I often saw Ms. Gracie and Ms. Eva having conversations at the door. Ms. Eva also knew the names of all the Pre-k children and seemed to be familiar with them. Above all, I realized that Ms. Eva would be in charge of the participating children during the summer. Starting in May of 2012, the participating children were divided into two classes along with the 3-year-old children, and this 3-year-old classroom teacher took charge of half of my

participating children. As soon as I realized this, I recruited Ms. Eva, and she delightedly joined in this research. Ms. Eva came from Southeast Asia. She had a slightly different accent. She looked like she was in her forties or fifties. Over the summer, I was able to interview her and get her opinions about participating children's social competence and relationships.

In my fourth visit to the Pre-k class in January 2012[5], I asked Ms. Gracie if there were any children whom she thought were less socially competent than other children. Among the participating children, she first pointed out Jason, Tyler, Maggie, and then, Gabriel, who became my focal children in this study. According to Ms. Gracie, Jason had separation anxiety when he first came in the Pre-k classroom, and he had fewer interactions with his peers than his other classmates. She explained that Tyler was extremely introverted and sensitive. Maggie was introduced as an introverted, shy, compliant, and quiet child. Gabriel was also introduced as a boy who was shy and too quiet. Throughout this study, I paid particular attention to these four focal children. The following table lists the names of all the participating children and Ms. Gracie's brief descriptions of their characteristics.

Table 1.2

Participating Children's Names and Characteristics

Name[6]	Gender	Ethnicity	Characteristics
Gabriel*	Boy	African American	Shy, too quiet, problems with using words
Henry	Boy	European American	Behaviorally conflicting with teachers
Jason*	Boy	European American	Separation anxiety, fewer peer interactions

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[5] I visited this Pre-k classroom three times (Dec. 9, 2011; Jan. 13, 2012; and Jan. 17, 2012) before asking about the participating children's social characteristics.
[6] The names in bold and with asterisks are the focal children.

Katie	Girl	European American	Socially competent, a lot of energy, a leader
Maggie*	Girl	European American	Introverted, shy, compliant, quiet
Ryan	Boy	African American	Rough, bossy, a leader, gets along with other kids
Tyler*	Boy	Latino American	Introverted, sensitive
Joy	Girl	European American	Likes people, creative, wild

Among the participating children in this Pre-k class, five children are boys, and three children are girls. Two boys are European American, two boys are African American, and one boy is Latino American. The participating girls are all European American. Among these five boys, three boys were considered less socially competent than their other peers by the teacher. These three boys included one European American, one African American, and one Latino American. And, one girl was identified as less socially competent than the other two girls.

In my first formal interview with Ms. Gracie, I asked her to describe each participating child's social characteristics. Among the four focal children, except Jason, three of the children—Maggie, Gabriel, and Tyler—were described similarly with the terms "shy" and "introverted." Katie was directly described as socially competent. According to Ms. Gracie, Katie and Ryan were leaders in the classroom and regarded as more socially competent than other children. Although Henry and Joy were not pointed out as socially competent children, their social competence was not a matter of concern. In the following chapters, from Chapter 4 to Chapter 6, I will present Ms. Gracie's perceptions about each focal child's social characteristics in more detail. I will also discuss Ryan's and Katie's social characteristics in detail in Chapter 6.

Data Collection Methods and Procedures

Participant observation. In order to observe the natural situations of children's social relationships and socialization practices in school, I used participant observation as a primary data collection method for this study. The essence of ethnography is about "going out and getting close to the activities and everyday experiences of other people" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 1). Therefore, ethnographic field research generally involves participant observation, as indicated by Dewalt and Dewalt (2002), who note that "[p]articipant observation is accepted almost universally as the central and defining method of research in cultural anthropology" (p. 1). According to Dewalt and Dewalt, participant observation is "a way to collect data in naturalistic settings by ethnographers who observe and/or take part in the common and uncommon activities of the people being studied" (p. 2). Ethnographic researchers engage in the natural settings of people's lives, while observing their activities and ordinary life experiences and investigating the embedded meanings behind their activities. By the same token, participant observation has been commonly used and considered appropriate for studying children in a natural way (e.g., Corsaro, 2006; P. J. Miller & Sperry, 1987), because according to Corsaro (2006), children's natural social interactions and peer cultures occur in the moment and are hardly accessible through interviews, surveys, or experiments.

I participated in children's daily social lives in a Pre-k classroom, particularly during free playtime—the time period when children's natural social interactions with peers evolve most frequently. I observed the focal children's play twice a week from December 9, 2011 to August 1, 2012, 49 times in total. Although my primary focus was directed toward free playtime, I remained in the participating children's classroom before and after free playtime, spending a total of two hours per visit and observing the focal children's relationships and interactions with

peers during other structured time periods (e.g., lessons, group meetings, lunch time, and nap time). Besides these regular observations, I also visited the classroom for special events, such as a Valentine's Day party, an Easter party, and commencement. Through this participant observation method, multiple data, such as video recordings, jotted notes, and expanded field-notes, were collected.

While delving into the social world of the focal children of this study, who had been identified as socially incompetent by their teacher, I observed how they interacted with peers, developed and maintained peer relationships, and socially functioned within their peer culture. I intended to understand how the focal children's unique roles and social characteristics worked and were harmonized within the peer culture. In addition, I paid particular attention to the teacher's interventions in the children's social interactions, the focal children's reactions to the interventions, and the processes through which the individual focal children changed or sustained personal social characteristics over time. By doing so, I intended to document the processes and ways in which these children perceived, adjusted, and created social and cultural values. This documentation was analyzed to illuminate the dynamic nature of these children's social participations and activities.

One of the main foci of the participant observations was to understand cultural values and beliefs regarding social characteristics in terms of social power relationships. While observing and analyzing children's everyday practices in their social lives, I tried to remind myself of what cultural psychologists call *practice*. Cultural psychology refers to the term *practices* as "not behavior in the behaviorist sense but rather meaningful action, action that is situated in a context and open to interpretation" (P. J. Miller & Goodnow, 1995, p. 6). Accordingly, I consider cultural practices of social relationships as being "invested with normative expectations and with

meanings or significances that go beyond the immediate goals of the action" (P. J. Miller & Goodnow, 1995, p. 7). As inferred from cultural psychologists' definition of *cultural practices*, meanings in an action—a situated action in a context and open to interpretation—was the focus of my exploration rather than behaviors. By doing so, I attempt to illuminate how social and cultural values embedded in children's social relationships involve power-relations in both the children's peer culture and school culture and also reflect social power relations in the larger culture.

For my observation, I used two video cameras—one to capture a wide view of the fixed area on the cabinet in the classroom and another for close-ups that I held to record focal children. While observing their play, I mostly video-recorded them except for the moments when I interacted with the children. When interesting moments occurred during the observations, I jotted down simple notes to record all my initial impressions, momentary thoughts and questions, or additional information about the situations. After each observation, I made a research log and recorded more detailed explanations and simple analytic memos (Emerson et al., 1995), revisiting my video files and jotted notes.

Interviews. While participating in the children's social world of school, I interviewed their teachers using two types of interviews. One was informal ethnographic interviews, and the other was semi-structured interviews (Roulston, 2010). The informal ethnographic interview was intended to "explore the meanings that people ascribe to actions and events in their cultural worlds, expressed in their own language" (Roulston, 2010, p. 19). Therefore, the conversational style of these ethnographic interviews was similar to that of ordinary conversations (Roulston, 2010; Spradley, 1979). The informal interviews focused on the events that occurred during the participant observations. The informal interviews were conducted without the participant

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teachers' awareness and were carried out as mere friendly conversation (Spradley, 1979), while I relied on "the ongoing analyses of data generated via field notes of observations, participation in the research settings, development of rapport with informants, and multiple interviews [(the pre-conducted semi-structured interviews and informal interviews)] over extended periods of time" (Roulston, 2010, p. 19). Occasionally, children's drawings or various materials, such as toys and writings, guided these informal interviews during the observations.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participant teachers three times in total—I interviewed Ms. Gracie twice and Ms. Emma once. The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to comprehend teachers' overall understandings of the following: the focal children's social competence and development, teachers' roles in children's competence, and focal children's familial information. Each interview was 1-1.5 hours long and occurred in several places such as the classroom, a local coffee shop, and the music room, where the participant teachers felt comfortable.

The first interview with Ms. Gracie was conducted in February 2012. This first interview focused on the background information of the participating children and the teacher's general beliefs about children's social competence, while being guided by open-ended questions (Roulston, 2010), such as the following: "What do you know about [child name]?"; "What do you think children's social competences are?"; "What traits do you recognize in socially incompetent children?"; "What do you think is necessary for the development of these socially incompetent children?"; and "What roles or strategies do you think you need to adopt for these children?"

The second interview with Ms. Gracie was conducted in May 2012. This interview was designed to facilitate and supplement my understanding of the participating children and the

setting by asking the teacher questions about the children's peer relationships and her intentions in her educational practices. During this interview, based on the data gathered through participant observations and informal ethnographic interviews, I introduced "ethnographic elements" (Spradley, 1979, p. 58), which were the videos of a child's peer interactions and part of my analytic notes to the teacher in order to assist her in responding to the questions that followed. Sharing these video clips and notes, I focused on clarifying my understanding and asking about the children's growth in regard to social competence and peer relationships and the teacher's self-assessment of her support and practices for promoting these children's social competence. The interview questions were especially expected to reveal cultural values in the teacher's ideas about "socially competent children" and the cultural practices necessary for supporting them. Examples of these questions were: "What do you think about his/her behavior in this situation?"; "Why did you decide to intervene?"; "What do you think about [child name]'s social competence across this school year?"; "What do you think about [child name]'s social relationships across this school year?"; "What was your role in regard to these children?" and so on. In this way, making close connections between interviews and participant observations, I intended to reduce possible biases and errors in understanding and interpretations and increase validity; this strategy is referred to as "triangulation" in qualitative research literature. This method consists of "collecting information from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods" (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 112).

I conducted another semi-structured interview with Ms. Eva in June 2012. This interview was conducted in order to supplement my understanding of the focal children and teachers' values and beliefs regarding children's social competence. I asked questions such as the following: "What do you know about [child name]?"; "What do you think children's social

competences are?"; "What do you think about [child name]'s social competence across this school year?"; and "What do you think about [child name]'s social relationships across this school year?" However, in the process of data analysis, I found that there is a limitation to fully incorporating Ms. Eva's interview into my findings, because I was not able to observe her interactions with the participating children during free playtime. Therefore, I used this interview with Ms. Eva to gain additional information about the participating children's social competence and relationships.

My Role as a Researcher

Researchers who have worked with children and have focused on children's culture emphasize the roles of adult researchers in research (Corsaro, 2003). They note that gaining entry to the children's peer culture is especially challenging, because "adults are physically larger than children, are more powerful, and are often seen as having control over children's behavior" (Corsaro, 2006, p. 98). Because one of the main foci of this study is children's natural social interactions and their peer culture, my presence and role as an adult researcher was one of the concerns. I found Corsaro's "'reactive' entry strategy" (Corsaro, 1985, 2003) compelling for this study. Based on his finding that typical adults primarily initiated contacts with children, directed and monitored children's play, and seldom entered child-dominant area (e.g., playhouses), Corsaro (1985) made himself "available in peer-dominant areas and waited for the children to react to [him]" (Corsaro, 1985, p. 28). Even while participating in children's play, he took a "peripheral" role and never attempted "(a) to initiate or terminate an episode, (b) to repair a disrupted activity, (c) to settle disputes, or (d) to coordinate or direct activity" (p. 32). I found his "reactive" entry strategy and "peripheral" role very useful for gaining access to children's culture and reducing my influence on the nature of their play and peer relationships. Therefore,

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before I started collecting data, I decided to engage in their play situations during free playtime while adopting a "reactive" entry strategy and "a peripheral" role in order to observe the participating children's natural interactions with others and avoid influencing the nature of their play. However, as soon as I visited the site for the first time, the situations during the real research procedure, as reflected in Vignette 1.1, drove me into confusion in my researcher's role and placed me in a dilemma. It took a fairly long time to adjust myself to the research site and negotiate my roles as a researcher for the children and the teacher.

The participating children were interested in me and were very active in talking about themselves and asking me questions. During the first day, I did my best not to interrupt their play or the teacher's lesson, remaining seated behind of the children. However, I became engaged in the children's play more deeply by their invitation (I wanted to get familiar with the children). When I was with the children, I tried to look less powerful and to not have control over them. One day, Ms. Gracie cautioned me that the children needed to learn to respect adults. Her cautious remark made me reflect on my roles. The following are excerpts from my field notes.

Vignette 1.1 Field notes 1/17/2012

I have been engaging in children's play pretty deeply. I interacted with the children and have tried to develop good relationships with them. There are eight children in the classroom, which is fairly small. I am doing observations in another kindergarten class that is in a public school. I feel like, here, it is a more family-like circumstance. The children are very interested in me! When I enter the classroom, many of them say hello to me. Some of the children run to me and hug me. They show me what they are playing with. When Ms. Gracie is still teaching them, I feel sorry, because their reaction makes

me feel that I am interrupting her lesson. I always try not to interrupt their class activities or lessons. However, the children's reactions and interest in me are increased so that unintentionally I interrupt her class. So, I try to learn the school practices and classroom rules that the teacher emphasizes. And, I try not to be intrusive in class during lessons or free play. I do not want to make Ms. Gracie feel uncomfortable with me. However, today, I was little perplexed, because Ms. Gracie seemed to be concerned about my role in the class. She told me that the children needed to learn to respect adults. When I played with the children, I did not behave like an adult. I tried to be like a child in order to enter their peer culture. … But, I realized that my attitude toward the children could go against the teacher's pedagogical goals. She might want me to assume an adult's role during my observations. As an international researcher, I particularly need time to adjust myself to the research site. I need to learn the classroom rules, the values that the teacher puts emphasis on, their everyday practices, etc.

Vignette 1.2 Field notes 1/19/2012

Today, I decided not to participate in children's play so much. I became an onlooker around their play. I just watched and reduced my interactions with the children. Before, I reacted to the children's words more actively. Now, I just smile and react to their words as little as possible. I feel like, now, I can focus more on what they are doing. When I was playing with them, it was much harder to see the overall context of their play. Now, I see their relationships with each other and their interactions with others more clearly. I can see each child's characteristics more fully. Considering that I will be holding my camera while observing them, it might be realistic to create some distance from the children and observe them while engaging less in their play.

Through this process of negotiating my roles in the research site with the expectations that the children and the teacher had, I began to maintain the roles of peripheral observer and helper depending on the situation[7]. I found that my efforts to get familiar with the participating children and enter the children's play situations by actively interacting with them without authority caused Ms. Gracie to be concerned about my role as an adult. As time went by, when I felt they had become familiar with me, I began to use Corsaro's (1985) reactive strategy and assume a peripheral role, just quietly holding a small video camera during free playtime. About two weeks later, the children showed less interest in me and even in the camera (they had shown interest in the camera a great deal at first). Although they sometimes came and talked to me in order to show me what they were doing, I was able to shoot their natural play and peer interactions. Considering Ms. Gracie's concern, after free play, I changed from my peripheral role to the helper's role, similar to an assistant teacher, by reading storybooks to the children while they were waiting for their lunch. Then, I had lunch with the children and served them when they asked for more. Lunchtime was also informative to me in that I was able to observe their peer relationships. The children talked to each other, allowing me to get more information about their familial issues. After lunch, I helped Ms. Gracie clean the tables and watch the children who went to the bathroom. I also helped the children take their naps (I hugged them and said "good night" to them). They seemed to think that I was an adult, but a less powerful adult who never controlled them.

I was also concerned about the possible influences of my linguistic and cultural backgrounds on my research. Because my cultural and linguistic background is based on my South Korean heritage, I anticipated some limitations in communicating with young children. Although I can understand most adults' English, I worried about not being able to understand

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[7] My roles depending on the class schedule are shown in Table 1.1.

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what the participating children said and meant. Because this study's purpose is to understand

cultural meanings and beliefs embedded in ordinary social relationships and practices in school,

understanding nuances in the conversations and behaviors of the people in the research setting

was crucial for understanding and interpretation. However, in his book *We're friends right?*

Corsaro (2003) described Italian children's reactions to his "reactive" method and lack of

proficiency in Italian. Speaking in his fractured Italian, he was viewed "not only as an atypical

adult, but also an incompetent adult—not just a big kid but sort of a big dumb kid" (p. 16).

Interestingly, he was accepted by Italian children much more easily and quickly than by

American children. From his example, I realized that a researcher's cultural and linguistic

backgrounds being different from the participating children's were not exclusively limitations;

rather, they could serve as potential avenues for adult researchers who desire to participate in the

world of children as less authoritative and "incomplete" adults. Although I cannot fully know

what my participating children thought about me, it seemed that they did not consider me to be

authoritative. Moreover, Hatano and Miyake's (1991) notion of "the double-sided effect of

culture" (p. 275) alleviated my concerns about the difference in cultural backgrounds. They

wrote: "Culture makes some learning much easier, but other learning more difficult, or even

almost impossible" (Hatano & Miyake, 1991, p. 275). In other words, when we are more

accustomed to certain things, we are simultaneously distancing ourselves from other possibilities

or overlooking them altogether. Our cultures enable and disable us at the same time. This

notion offers the insight that although my cultural background may affect my understanding of

the research situations, this can potentially bring about other possibilities that might be difficult

for other researchers who are familiar with the culture of the research settings. Therefore, I

believe my linguistic and cultural backgrounds did not necessarily result in limitations but possibly opened up different perspectives and worldviews on the research phenomena.

Data Analysis

The data analysis began on the first day of my visit to the research site. In order to find participants for this study, I visited several preschools in my local area and started learning about the research site from the first meeting with the principal. Everything I learned from the first visit was all reflected in my interpretations. While collecting data through participant observations and informal and semi-structured interviews, I conducted an initial data analysis by thoroughly watching the video recordings, transcribing the interview audio recordings, and keeping the research log. According to Butler-Kisber (2009), analysis is divided into the coarse-grained phase and the fine-grained phase. She explains that the former includes

> close readings and rereadings or listening and viewing, dialoguing with [myself] about what is being revealed, writing reflective and analytic memos and/or keeping a journal or log, and playing with some broad categories in which different portions of the field texts can be placed, at least temporarily. (p. 30)

While closely reading, viewing, or listening to the collected data, including video and audio recordings, the research logs, analytic memos, and interview transcripts, I tried to identify "possible kinds of relevant information" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005) and record a wide variety of ideas and insights about what is going on in the data by writing "initial theoretical memos" (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 155).

In this way, I started my initial coding, which included reading "through the data line by line, noting any words, phrases, or patterns of behavior that seem relevant" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 85). Dyson and Genishi (2005) explained that the goal here is "to begin to probe

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beyond the behavioral descriptions, considering the social meanings or importance of what's happening" (p. 85). Initially, because the purpose of this dissertation study is to challenge the prevailing beliefs or judgments about children's social competence, the focus was placed on the teacher's perceptions of the focal children's social characteristics. Therefore, based on the primary focus of the study, my initial codes included the focal children's names (Maggie, Jason, Gabriel, and Tyler) and the teacher's perceptions of these focal children (e.g., shyness/ introversion, solitary play, peer interaction, quietness, excessive sensitivity, unassertiveness, and passivity). For example, while reviewing literature regarding children's shyness and reading the interview transcripts, I learned that quietness, fewer social interactions, and passivity in social relations were mainly regarded as characteristics of shy children. I used these terms as my initial codes. I also used the teacher's descriptions of the focal children, such as "too sensitive," "problem with standing up for himself," and "problem with using words," and included such codes as excessive sensitivity and unassertiveness.

As the amount of data increased, I repeatedly investigated the collected data and created more focused coding based on the research questions (Saldaña, 2009). By comparing and contrasting the chunks of data and using "an iterative process of expanding and reducing categories" (Butler-Kisber, 2009, p. 32), I tried to identify themes that "produce conceptual and interpretive understandings" (Butler-Kisber, 2009, p. 32) regarding the research questions. For the first research question, I focused on the roles and the functions that these children's social characteristics actually perform in peer relationships and interactions. For example, during the initial coding, while observing the focal children's peer play and focusing on their shyness, I found that the social characteristics of these children that were considered as problematic (e.g., quietness, fewer social interactions, and passivity in social relations) actually had beneficial

aspects for their peer relationships and interactions. Accordingly, I added the following codes: social interest, careful observation/deliberation, sensitive caring, knowing boundaries, followership, contribution to peer group, and harmonious peer interaction.

For the second research question, I paid particular attention to the teacher's intervention during free playtime and added such codes as "using words" and "good manners." While reviewing Jason's play videos repeatedly, I found that the teacher's perceptions of his problem—fewer social interactions—was associated with the lower number of verbal interactions he had with peers and his more frequent solitary play. This initial finding guided me to focus on his tendency to play bodily (often with the movement of his whole body) and the roles and the values of children's bodily play and interactions. I added the following codes: bodily solitary play, bodily peer play, nonverbal interaction, laughter (during bodily play or bodily interactions), and humor. I also paid attention to the conflictive situation between the teacher's placement of value on using words and the children's placement of value on using their bodies for their play and interactions. Accordingly, I added another code—value conflict.

For the third research question, I was interested in how the teacher's conceptualization of children's social competence reflects dominant discourses of a socially competent child and how such an association between teachers' concepts and dominant discourses explains power relationships. Reviewing interview transcripts repeatedly, I realized that Ms. Gracie described Maggie, Gabriel, and Tyler with different words that connoted her expectations about gender roles in social relations. I found that these gendered aspects of teachers' perceptions of social competence seemed significant to this study, and it became another analytic focus. As a result, I added the following codes: gendered aspects in teacher's perception, gendered aspects in teacher's intervention, boys' assertive/unassertive actions, and boys' sensitivity.

While analyzing data with these aforementioned codes, I consistently looked at the phenomena of the participating children's social interactions and play through Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) theory of language. When I gained an insight, I added theoretical codes derived from Bakhtin's theory of language such as unitary language, heteroglossia, dialogism, and carnival. The following concept map (Figure 1.2; adopted from Butler-Kisber, 2009, p. 41) shows the codes that I used in the analysis and details of the coding and categorizing processes for this study. Analysis is an ongoing and recursive process rather than a pass through a given set of steps. Therefore, although I presented the data collection and analysis in a seemingly logical order, the process was rather recursive and often concurrent over the course of this study.

Figure 1.2

Concept Map
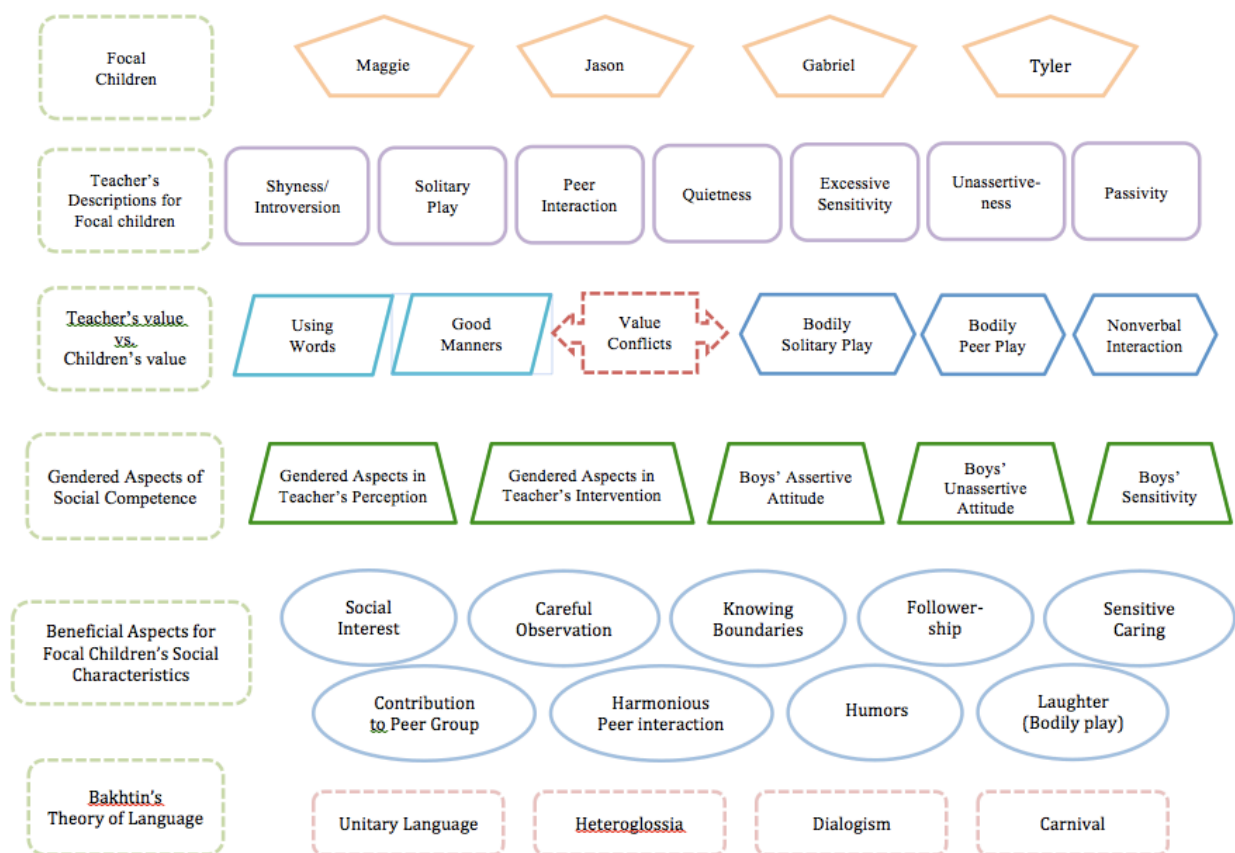
Limitations of the Investigation

One of the limitations of this study is that the focal children's familial backgrounds were reflected only to a limited extent in the interpretation of the data. Because the concentration of this study is on the focal children's unique social roles and characteristics in their peer culture and their social experiences and socialization practices in school, I did not include their parents or family members among the targeted research participants. I was able to gather only basic information about the children's familial backgrounds from their teachers. In order to overcome this limitation, I planned to use informal and formal interviews with the teachers as a medium to access the children's familial stories so that I could obtain as much information as possible from them. Therefore, I asked the teachers questions regarding the participating children's lives outside of school.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 2 is a literature review that investigates how social competence, as a discourse, has been constructed in the field of early childhood education and how the conceptualization of social competence in academia has been applied to educational practices. Based on Bruner's (1996) notions of folk psychology and folk pedagogy, I identify the cultural values and beliefs in the dominant discourses about raising "a socially competent child," comparing and contrasting them with cultural psychological studies on cultural practices of socialization and teaching. By doing so, I discuss both relatively overemphasized and neglected perspectives of young children's socialization in the field. This literature review becomes an analytical basis for understanding cultural dynamics within the classroom. I conclude the chapter with the educational implications of cultural diversity in the conceptualization of and cultural practices of

social competence and call for the appreciation and empowerment of diverse values and characteristics of social competence.

Chapter 3 provides the theoretical frameworks in more detail. I first explain cultural psychology and Bakhtin's theory of dialogism. Based on the detailed explanation, I show how these theories guided me in formulating this dissertation study and helped me to understand the bidirectional relationship between an individual child and culture, children's agency in their culture, and cultural dynamics in children's social lives. In addition, by applying these theories to understand earlier social developmental studies, I also present my analysis of philosophical shifts in these studies from a historical point of view and academic discourses regarding children's social competence and development.

Starting in Chapter 4 and continuing through Chapter 6, I basically answer the first research question by investigating the social roles and relations that each focal child had during free playtime. Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 particularly address the second research question and the third research question, respectively.

Chapter 4 focuses on the case of Maggie, who was identified as shy, quiet, compliant, and introverted by her teacher. By thoroughly investigating the ways in which Maggie formed relationships and established the roles she played in her social interactions with the peers, I argue that she has her unique roles and capabilities for participating in social play and interaction. Although her shyness made her seem less social than others, it actually had important social merit in her collaborative interactions with others.

Chapter 5 focuses on the case of Jason, who was identified as less interactive with peers by the teacher. I investigate the value of Jason's bodily play in children's culture. In this chapter, by comparing the teacher's interventions emphasizing children's use of words in social

interactions with the values of non-verbal interactions in children's peer culture, I specifically analyze the ways in which the children negotiate and mediate social and cultural norms and values, which answers the second research question.

Chapter 6 focuses on the cases of Gabriel and Tyler—the boys who were identified as introverted and less assertive by their teachers. In this chapter, I pay particular attention to the teacher's perceptions of Gabriel, Tyler, Maggie, and Ryan, for whom significant differences existed with regard to the teacher's descriptions of and approaches to the children, differences based on their gender. By comparing and contrasting the teacher's different emphases on certain social features according to these children's gender, I discuss gendered aspects in conceptualizing children's social competence. In this way, I answer the third research question by analyzing how teachers' perceptions of and judgments about these children's social interactions reflect the dominant discourse on social competence.

Finally, in Chapter 7, I summarize the findings of this study and discuss the implications for early childhood education research and practices. As my final thought, appropriating Bakhtin's (1981) concept of *novel*, I provide the image of classrooms where children's diverse ways of living their social world are all appreciated and valued.

CHAPTER 2

"RAISING A SOCIALLY COMPETENT CHILD":

UNPACKING THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL COMPETENCE

In the spring of 2011, while participating in an international conference, I met some Korean scholars and had a casual conversation with them. Because I was meeting some of them for the first time, I introduced myself and explained my area of interest, which was young children's social development and competence. As soon as I said social competence, one of my male colleagues immediately responded, "Oh, please give me some advice. My son lacks social competence; he is too girly." Although I could not grasp the meaning of his immediate comment, this short anecdote drove me to consider the cultural nature of the conceptualization and discourse of children's social competence. I wondered how this colleague envisioned social competence. He seemed to have certain beliefs and assumptions about this concept and made the connection between the notion of social competence and gender norms by offering "too girly" as a reason for his son's supposed lack of social competence.

Bruner's (1996) notion of *folk pedagogy* explains a part of the father's reasoning. According to Bruner, when interacting with others, we are deeply affected by "our everyday intuitive theories about how other minds work" (p. 45). These, in Bruner's words, are *folk psychologies,* which "reflect some deeply ingrained cultural beliefs about 'the mind'" (p. 46). Bruner explains that *folk pedagogy* is an accumulated set of assumptions, beliefs, and notions "about how the child's mind learns and even what makes it grow" (p. 46). Based on the

assumptions and beliefs about the minds of learners, the practice of teaching and attempts at instruction and guidance are shaped and followed. *Folk psychology* and *folk pedagogy* are rarely discussed at a conscious level, although they have a significant influence on people's everyday educational activities.

The father's response about his son's social competence in the above excerpt reflects his *folk psychology* about his son's social competence—his son's performance in terms of social and cultural norms for boys. His assessment of his son's social competence shows how he conceptualizes social competence and the particular aspects of social competence he expects his son to embody. In this case, the father's comment about his son—"too girly"—implies that he particularly thought of children's social competence while relating to socially acceptable male behaviors. Moreover, although he did not seriously attempt to take action, his immediate expectation that the boy's social competence can be improved using appropriate methods also reflected his belief in the benefits of educational intervention.

The meeting with the father caused me to investigate the cultural values and beliefs about young children's social competence that exist in the academic discourse and how they are reflected in the practices of the field of early childhood education (hereafter "the field"). In this chapter, by reviewing numerous studies related to children's social competence and relationships, I attempted to identify the prevalent image of "a socially competent child" in the field. I first provide several researchers' definitions of social competence. Then, by referring to Rose-Krasnor's (1997) four general types of approaches to social competence, I present how children's social competence is conceptualized and treated within the dominant discourses of social development studies. This literature review led me to explore social and cultural value-laden selections in conceptualizing social competence by making a connection with cultural

psychological studies on teaching and the socialization of children (e.g., Hatano & Inagaki, 1998; P. J. Miller & Sperry, 1987; Rogoff, 2003; Shweder et al., 2006; Tobin, 1992). The value-laden selections in characterizing social competence in academia indicate which aspects of social competence are generally promoted in the definitions and attract the attention of researchers and, at the same time, which other aspects are disregarded and devalued. Therefore, the investigation of the cultural image of "a socially competent child" helped me recognize the marginalized and neglected values in dominant discourses, which could also be important characteristics of social competence and of effective social functioning children might employ in their peer culture. Based on the literature review, I present six underlying cultural values in the field's dominant discourse of "raising a socially competent child."

Mode of Inquiry and Data Sources

I reviewed literature related to children's social competence published from 1950 to the present to identify dominant conceptualizations of social competence in the academic discourse of the field. I searched for literature, mainly on Google Scholar and EBSCOhost, using the following keywords and phrases: "social competence (development)," "socialization," "social competence & assessment," "children's social skills," "sociometric (peer) status & children," "social temperament," "influence & social competence," "attachment & social," "teacher & child social competence," "social competence & context," and "social competence & culture." When needed, I retraced some primary sources referenced in the books and articles I found through the initial literature search. The primary books that I reviewed included *Children and Social Competence: Arenas of Action* (Hutchby & Moran-Ellis, 1998), *Children's Peer Relations and Social Competence: A Century of Progress* (Ladd, 2005), *Childhood Social Development: Contemporary Perspectives* (HcGurk, 1992), *Fostering Children's Social Competence: The*

Teacher's Role (Katz & McClellan, 1997), *Handbook of Social Development: A Lifespan Perspective* (Van Hasselt & Hersen, 1992), *Peer Rejection in Childhood* (Asher & Coie, 1990), and *The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Childhood Social Development* (Smith & Hart, 2002).

Theoretical Frameworks

As I briefly introduced earlier, Bruner's (1996) idea of *folk psychology* and *folk pedagogy* guided me to the necessity of investigating the embedded cultural values and beliefs within the thoughts or practices we have in our ordinary lives. According to Bruner, even what we believe to be common knowledge or a universal truth is also culturally grounded. He states, "Consider for example the issue of what knowledge is, where it comes from, how we come by it. These are all matters that have deep cultural roots" (p. 50). Even if academic discourses have been generally based on scientific findings and evidence, which many people have regarded as an essential factor for satisfying the condition of truth, scholars and researchers bring with them their beliefs, assumptions, and expectations, which are inevitably culturally grounded. Although people might assume that the notion of and knowledge of social competence are universal, this seemingly universal knowledge is also related to certain beliefs, assumptions, and expectations with regard to social competence that people hold. Therefore, all of these beliefs, assumptions, and expectations are combined into a collected notion of social competence, and the cultural notions of social competence are reflected in people's life practices and, particularly in this chapter, practices of teaching.

Additionally, Anderson and Messick (1974) discuss the concerns over the value-laden nature of defining goals and dimensions of social competence. They express concerns "with being value free or at least value neutral (the conventional stance of social science), with the pluralistic and sometimes conflicting values of our society, with whether there are transcendent

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values holding for the whole society, and with the fact that values change over time and circumstances" (p. 287). As indicated by their statement, discourses about how social competence has been conceptualized and which aspects of social competence have been studied in academia are all culture- and value-based. The notion of social competence can be defined very differently across cultures, and different issues can attract scholars' attention. Likewise, the academic discourse of social competence both in the field of early childhood education and in the field of social development studies reflects cultural views and practices.

To clarify the purpose of this chapter, I need to discuss Bruner's (1996) emphasis on the diversity in the cultural practices of teaching in different cultures:

> But to say only that human beings understand other minds and try to teach the incompetent is to overlook the varied ways in which teaching occurs in different cultures. The variety is stunning. We need to know much more about this diversity if we are to appreciate the relation between *folk psychology* and *folk pedagogy* in different cultural settings. (p. 48; emphasis added)

According to Bruner, cultural beliefs and assumptions can be manifested in practices in substantially different ways. Hatano and Inagaki (1998) underscore Bruner's statement by comparing American and Japanese teachers' *folk pedagogy*. They assert, "[A]lthough both American and Japanese teachers have basically the same folk-pedagogy, they have adjusted it to different learners" (p. 90). Even if we have the same concept of social competence, how it is practiced in reality can vary a great deal from one cultural context to another. Therefore, in this chapter, I am interested not only in the cultural notion of a "socially competent child" but also in the cultural discourses of "raising a socially competent child," which include both folk pedagogies and cultural conversations around the practices of teaching.

This chapter is also grounded in Foucault's (1972) notion of discourse. While giving

discourse a special meaning, Foucault affirms that knowledge is the aggregate of individual

interpretation through discourse, which is the human activity of social-cultural meaning making.

Lemke (1994) points out "what we call knowledge is a special kind of story, a text, or discourse

which seem pleasing or useful to a particular culture, or even just to some relatively powerful

members of that culture" (p. 69). In particular, Foucault dealt with the relationship between

knowledge and power and their interaction. Shifting away from the question "What is

knowledge?" Foucault asked, ''What counts as knowledge?"; "Who determines knowledge?";

and "How is knowledge constructed?" For these questions, Foucault investigated historically

and socially constructed knowledge through an "archaeology of knowledge" or "genealogy of

knowledge" (Cannella, 1997). Then, he revealed the superiority of specific perspectives or

discourses on a certain phenomenon, exposing historically and socially justified forms and

hidden conditions for the formation of dominant discourses. In other words, Foucault especially

emphasized the production of knowledge and concentrated on power, which is hidden within

discourses. In this chapter, based on Foucault's notion of discourse, by deeply delving into the

meanings of "raising a socially competence child" in academic discourse, I explore what cultural

values and beliefs are implicitly embedded in the dominant discourse of social competence,

particularly in European-American cultural contexts. However, my position is not as critical as

Foucault's in that I do not directly point out a certain group or community of people who are

empowered or disempowered. Nevertheless, I adopt a critical stance in my reading of the

literature. The underlying cultural values in the field's dominant discourse on social competence

broadly imply such power relations, and near the end of this chapter, the investigation of these

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values will be followed by a discussion of social power circulating throughout a culture and a society.

<div align="center">**Discourse of "Raising a Socially Competent Child"**</div>

The Definitions of Social Competence

In previous studies of the social aspects of children's development, many scholars pointed out that there are a wide variety of definitions of social competence (e.g., Anderson & Messick, 1974; Creasey, Jarvis, & Berk, 1998; Ladd, 2005; Rose-Krasnor, 1997; Schneider, 1993; Yeates & Selman, 1989). A sample of researchers' definitions of social competence is presented in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1

Definitions of Social Competence

Author (year)	Definition of Social Competence
Chen & French (2008)	"the ability to attain personal or group success in social situations" (p. 592)
Katz & McClellan (1997)	"an individual's ability to initiate and maintain satisfying, reciprocal relationships" (p. 1)
Ladd (2005)	"a range of behavioral and relational proficiencies, including children's abilities to (1) initiate or sustain positive interactions with peers and inhibit the use of negative behaviors, (2) form affiliative ties such as friendships and peer-group acceptance, (3) sustain positive peer relationships and relationships and roles and negative social-emotional consequences" (p. 193)
Lillvist, Sandberg, Björck-Äkesson, & Granlund (2009)	"a combination of traits or skills within a person and the effective social interaction between a person and his or her environment" (p. 55)
Rubin & Rose-Krasnor (1992)	"the ability to achieve personal goals in social interaction while simultaneously maintaining positive relationships with others over time and across situations" (p. 4)
Schneider (1993)	"the ability to implement developmentally-appropriate social behaviors that enhance one's interpersonal relationships without causing harm to anyone" (p. 19)

Semrud-Clikeman (2007)	"an ability to take another's perspective concerning a situation and to learn from past experience and apply that learning to the ever-changing social landscape. The ability to respond flexibly and appropriately defines a person's ability to handle the social challenges that are presented to us all" (pp. 1-2)
Waters & Sroufe (1983)	"an ability to generate and coordinate flexible, adaptive responses to demands and to generate and capitalize on opportunities in the environment" (p. 79)
Yeates & Selman (1989)	"the development of the social-cognitive skills and knowledge, including the capacity for emotional control, that mediate behavioral performances in specific contexts, which are in turn judged by self and others to be successful and thereby increase the likelihood of positive psychosocial adjustment" (p. 66)

Some scholars view this diversity of definitions positively and conclude that "social competence is an unusually broad and encompassing construct" (Creasey et al., 1998, p. 118). For instance, Schneider (1993) states, "The apparent chaos regarding the basic conceptualization of social competence reflects the richness of the many influences on the field" (p. 19). However, other scholars view the diversity of definitions pessimistically and argue that "[social competence] is vague, fragmented, and poorly defined" (Creasey et al., 1998, p. 118).

The Academic Discourses of Social Competence

The diversity of definitions reflects the different emphases researchers place on the concept of social competence. Dodge et al. (1986) point out that researchers have theoretically different perspectives on social competence, stressing different facets of social functioning and abilities. Therefore, in order to depict the implicit cultural values within the academic discourses in the field, I first discuss such diverse notions of and approaches to social competence in academia by referring to Rose-Krasnor's (1997) four general types of approaches that are helpful in comprehensively understanding the complex nature of social competence: (a) specific social skills, (b) sociometric status, (c) relationships, and (d) functional outcomes.

Social skills approach. The social skills approach regards social competence as a set of desirable skills or traits (Rose-Krasnor, 1997) to produce positive social outcomes. Children who regularly show pro-social behaviors, such as caring, sharing, and less aggressive behaviors, are considered socially competent (Ladd, 1999). In contrast, children who rarely show pro-social behaviors or who regularly show anti-social behaviors, such as aggression or other behaviors linked to negative relationship outcomes, are considered socially incompetent and deficient in social skills (Ladd, 2005). Katz and McClellan (1997) describe social skills as "the ways that children approach each other" (p. 5) and present the examples of "giving positive attention to others, requesting information from others about their activities, and contributing to ongoing discussions among peers" (p. 5). Researchers adopting this approach (e.g., Crick & Dodge, 1994; Denham et al., 2003; Denham & Grout, 1993; Garner & Estep, 2001; Katz & McClellan, 1997; Semrud-Clikeman, 2007) have used a competence correlates strategy that recognizes the components of abilities and personalities considered social competence and the elements regarded as indicators for measuring social competence (e.g., emotional regulation, social cognition, language acquisition, and social temperament). The researchers (Cummings, Kaminski, & Merrell, 2008; Denham et al., 2003) used such specific scales as (a) an angry-aggressive scale, (b) an anxious-withdrawn scale, (c) a sensitive-cooperative scale, (d) frequency of social interaction scales, and (e) pro-social behaviors scales (helpful/encouraging/facilitative behaviors). They also believed that young children's social competence is closely linked to a child's cognitive and language development. According to these researchers' perspectives, children develop social skills as they experimentally discover desirable social behaviors. In contrast, children who show behaviors causing negative social outcomes are considered deficient in social skills (Ladd, 2005).

Sociometric status approach. According to this approach, children who are popular or liked by peers are considered socially competent, while children who are often rejected or neglected by peers are considered lacking in social skills and viewed as socially incompetent (Asher, 1983; Asher & Coie, 1990; Asher, Singleton, Tinsley, & Hymel, 1979; Coie, Dodge, & Coppotelli, 1982; Rose-Krasnor, 1997). Research on children's sociometric status primarily has focused on behavioral correlates of social competence, such as prosocial behaviors, social knowledge, emotional competence, communication ability, and interactional types (e.g., Asher, 1983; Bonney & Powell, 1953; Coie, Dodge, & Kupersmidt, 1990; Dodge, Murphy, & Buchsbaum, 1984; Gottman, Gonso, & Rasmussen, 1975; Hartup, Glazer, & Charlesworth, 1967; Markell & Asher, 1984; Sebanc, 2003). For example, early research conducted by Bonney and Powell (1953) reported that more popular children conformed more to classroom requirements and expectations than unpopular children, who were less frequently nominated as desired playmates. The popular children smiled more frequently, engaged in cooperative group participation, and made voluntary contributions to the group. Hartup et al. (1967) also found that young children who showed positive reinforcement behaviors, such as giving attention and approval, giving personal affection, and submitting to peers' wishes, were more likely to be accepted by peers. In contrast, children who showed negative reinforcement behaviors, such as refusing to cooperate, interfering with peer activity, derogating and teasing peers, and attacking others, were often rejected. The popular children's social behaviors that yield positive social outcomes have been linked to social cognition by Dodge et al. (1984), who paid attention to the relationships between children's social cognition and sociometric status. These researchers argued that popular and average children identified others' intentions more accurately than socially rejected and neglected children.

Relationship approach. From the perspective of the relationship approach, the nature

and the quality of children's social relationships reflect social competence, and children's

abilities to form positive social relationships are considered critical for their healthy development

(Ladd, 1999; Rose-Krasnor, 1997). Recognizing the importance of children's friendships for

social development and adjustment, many earlier researchers attempted to identify aspects of

social competence or behaviors that correlated with children's relationships, still supporting the

social skills hypothesis (i.e., not only do social skills produce improvements in children's peer

relationships, but problematic relationships are also explained in terms of a deficit of social

skills). More recently, studies have been conducted on the nature and functions of peer

relationships in children's development (Ladd, 1999). Researchers (e.g., Berndt, 2004; Sebanc,

2003) differentiated the features of children's friendships, dividing them into positive (e.g.,

companionship, validation, help, guidance, and intimacy) and negative (e.g., betrayal, conflict

resolution, and exclusivity) features and investigated these features in terms of behavioral

characteristics. For example, Sebanc (2003) analyzed the correlation between features of

children's friendships and behavioral and sociometric characteristics and reported that positive

features were associated with prosocial behaviors and peer acceptance, and in contrast, negative

features were associated with overt and relational aggression. With regard to the contribution of

friendships to children's development, Hartup (1992) elaborated on the positive effects, stating

that "friendships serve as contexts for acquiring social skill, sources of information about both

the social and nonsocial world, cognitive and emotional resources, and precursors of other

relationships" (p. 200).

Functional approach. The functional approach to social competence focuses on

children's social goals and social outcomes and is concerned particularly with processes and

specific contexts, which are viewed as leading to certain social outcomes (Rose-Krasnor, 1997).

This approach posits that children's social competence is determined not just by their final social

behaviors, social status, and/or social relationships that are visible but also by their social goals,

their cognitive social knowledge, and their decision making abilities at each step of the social

problem solving process. For example, the information-processing model of social skills

developed by Crick and Dodge (1994) adopts this functional approach in that their model

stipulates that children's social behavior "results from a multistep social-cognitive process"

(Rose-Krasnor, 1997, p. 117) and "is a function of sequential steps of processing, including

encoding of social cues, interpretation of social cues, clarification of goals, response access or

construction, response decision, and behavior enactment" (Crick & Dodge, 1996, p. 993). They

attempted to evaluate children's social cognitive tendencies at each step of the social problem

solving process that might lead to children's social behaviors. As a result, they reported that

aggressive children more frequently attributed hostile intent to peer provocateurs, evaluated

aggressive acts in more positive ways, and were more likely to prefer self-enhancing goals rather

than relationship-enhancing goals, compared to non-aggressive children. These researchers

argued that children's social cognitions and decisions at each step of the problem solving process

are significantly related to their final social behaviors and reflect children's social competence.

In the following section, I look at these four general types of approaches further in order to

discuss cultural aspects in dominant discourses of social competence in social developmental

studies.

Cultural Values in the Discourse of "Raising a Socially Competent Child"

Comparing and contrasting between the discussions of previous social developmental

research and the cultural studies on teaching and socialization, I identified six underlying cultural

values in the field's dominant discourse of "raising a socially competent child": (a) individual orientedness, (b) dyadic relationships, (c) appreciation of social initiative, (d) emphasis on emotional regulation and verbal interaction, (e) devaluation of shyness and sensitivity, and (f) the necessity of adult intervention.

  Individual orientedness. Many researchers' definitions of social competence primarily place the emphasis on individuals' abilities and personal goals in social interactions and relationships. For example, several scholars' definitions disclosed individual orientedness by including such words as "an individual's ability to initiate and maintain satisfying, reciprocal relationships" (Katz & McClellan, 1997, p. 1), "the ability to achieve personal goals in social interaction" (Rubin & Rose-Krasnor, 1992, p. 4), and "a person's ability to handle the social challenges" (Semrud-Clikeman, 2007, p. 2). Individual orientedness is also represented in a great deal of research adopting the social skills approach or correlating social status and relationships with a child's social behavioral characteristics. Many researchers, who are interested in children's social competence and development, have primarily paid attention to individual children's social behaviors and skills, which are considered representatives of children's social abilities.

The components of social competence principally include an individual capability of emotional regulation and social knowledge and skills. For example, the observational instruments to measure children's social competence and development (e.g., Cummings et al., 2008; Denham et al., 2003) focus on an individual's behaviors, such as the frequency of social interaction, cooperative and social initiative behaviors, and negative social behaviors such as disruptive, irritable, and aggressive behaviors, without considering the social and cultural contexts in which the individual is situated. Moreover, linking children's social competence to

academic performance, many researchers have asserted that children's social competence is an important predictor of children's adjustment to school and their academic success in current and later school years (e.g., Birch & Ladd, 1996; Galindo & Fuller, 2010; Ladd, 1990; Ladd & Price, 1987; Rhoades et al., 2010; Shernoff, 2010; Welsh et al., 2001; Wentzel, 1991; Williams & Galliher, 2006). Children's social competence has also been considered associated with their emotional well-being (Parker & Asher, 1993; Rice, Cunningham, & Young, 1997) and having an effect on their functioning throughout adolescence and early adulthood (Foulks & Morrow, 1989). These studies regard an individual child's improvement in academic performance, adjustment to school, and emotional well-being as expected results or goals of social development. Likewise, the foci of the conceptualization of social competence were placed on an individual's abilities and goals, not on the characteristics of a group or social members.

Many cultural studies discuss individualism prevalent in the European-American community (Chen & French, 2008; Hatano & Inagaki, 1998; Rogoff, 2003; Shweder et al., 2006). Individualism is considered *the ontological basis of self* in many European-American cultural contexts, and this "ontology is extensively incorporated in most child-care practices and the main societal institutions such as schools" (Shweder et al., 2006, p. 752). The conceptualization of social competence focusing on individual abilities and goals is also deeply associated with this cultural view of self. For example, Shweder et al. (2006) contrast European-American notions of the self with East Asian views of the self. According to their distinction, middle-class European Americans tend to value the independent self, which is "separate from others and autonomous, efficacious, in control of [one's] actions" (Shweder et al., 2006, p. 753). However, from the East Asian perspective, "the self is not and cannot be separate from others or the surrounding social context, but is experienced as *interdependent* with the social context" (p. 753, emphasis in

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original). Shweder and his colleagues explain that the interdependent self does not mean any conjoined unity of self and others. Rather, the interdependent self requires adjusting oneself to a variety of interpersonal events with a high degree of self-control and self-discipline. Shweder et al. further explain cultural differences in the goal of control:

> Control [in the East Asian cultural context] . . . is directed primarily to personal desires, goals, and emotions that can disturb the harmonious equilibrium of interpersonal transaction. This understanding of self stands in contrast to a European American notion of control that entails asserting our desires, goals, and emotions, and attempting to change features of the social situation. (pp. 753-754)

According to these authors, in European-American contexts control is often considered a means for achieving personal goals while control in East Asian communities is directed toward oneself in order to be in harmony with others. The individual oriented discourse on social competence in many studies reflects the European-American belief in the independent self.

Dyadic relationships. Cultural differences in the beliefs about the self are also reflected in the cultural prototypes of interactional structures in social relationships. Many cultural psychological studies (e.g., Hatano & Inagaki, 1998; Rogoff, 2003; Shweder et al., 2006; Tobin, 1992) show that in middle-class European-American cultural contexts, children are acculturated to individualized and dyadic interactional styles through child rearing practices and schooling experiences. For instance, Katz and McClellan (1997) strongly emphasize individualized instruction for enhancing children's social competence by stating: "Whole-group instruction is not well suited to the way young children learn best, and it is unlikely to be effective in reversing socially disruptive behavior[.] . . . [Individualized guidance] is generally more effective than group instruction" (p. 20). However, in other cultural communities, relational structures are

more multidirectional (Hatano & Inagaki, 1998; Rogoff, 2003; Shweder et al., 2006; Tobin, 1992). Hatano and Inagaki (1998) discuss U.S. teachers' inclination toward individualized lessons, which is opposed to Japanese teachers' emphasis on the importance of large group instruction and discussion. They show how teachers' folk pedagogies shape their teaching practices and interactions within classrooms. According to these authors, U.S. teachers tend to believe that "students benefit most from individualized lessons, [and the U.S. teachers] tried to optimize their instructions by individualizing [them]" (Hatano & Inagaki, 1998, p. 90). This belief in individualized lessons influences the characteristics of classroom interactions; U.S. teachers try to interact more with an individual child or a small group of children than with a large group of students.

Similarly, Rogoff (2003) also discussed typical U.S. classroom interactions. She contrasted dyadic versus multidirectional interactions. According to her, children in the U.S. are accustomed to dyadic, face-to-face, one-partner-at-a-time interaction from their early years of interactions with their caregivers. Likewise, *the dyadic structure of interaction* is prevalent in U.S. classrooms. Rogoff demonstrates this prototypical structure of dyadic interaction: "U.S. classrooms are commonly structured with the teacher taking a speaking turn between each child's turn" (p. 148). Contrasting the culturally preferred dyadic interaction in the U.S., a Japanese teacher in Tobin's (1992) study presented different cultural preferences when it came to her interactional structure. She said, "I believe a teacher should emphasize relating to the class as a whole, rather than to each student" (p. 31). Tobin notes that the "loss of dyadic intensity . . . is an intended effect. [Intense dyadic relationships] would threaten the group ethos that Japanese expect preschools to provide and interfere with children's play with peers" (pp. 31-32).

Cultural structures of relationships and interactions imply social expectations regarding an individual's roles and social functioning. The cultural practice of interactions influences how social competence is conceptualized and which dispositions and skills are valued and promoted in raising socially competent children. In the mainstream European-American culture, which emphasizes dyadic interactional styles, certain social characteristics and behaviors, including social initiative and speakership, are valued, while other dispositions, such as silent participation, listenership, and "sensitivity to and empathy for others" (Shweder et al., 2006, p. 754) in a group, are not equally valued as social competencies.

Appreciation of social initiative. In the dominant discourses about children's social competence, social initiative is considered important, as the researchers define it. For example, as a definition of social competence, Ladd (2005) suggests "children's abilities to initiate or sustain positive interactions with peers and inhibit the use of negative behaviors" (p. 193). Katz and McClellan define social competence as "an individual's ability to initiate and maintain satisfying, reciprocal relationships," (p. 1) which also implies valuing children's initiative behaviors in social relationships. The researchers, who considered cultural aspects of social development (e.g., Chen & French, 2008; Rogoff, 2003), have affirmed that in the European-American community, children are expected to acquire autonomy and assertive social skills, which are regarded as an important index of being socially mature and adaptive. In contrast, children who appear to show less initiative or are less active in social participation are considered maladaptive and socially incompetent.

However, in group-oriented or collectivistic societies, social initiative may not be as highly valued or appreciated as it is in an individualistic society. Rogoff (2003) provides an example of Pueblo Indian students. When the teacher told the children to introduce themselves

to the school visitor, no one spoke, even when the teacher called on one of them to speak.

Rogoff explains: "If the teacher calls on a child, that child may sink down in the seat and do his or her best not to respond, to avoid singling himself or herself out of the group" (pp. 229-230). According to Rogoff, in the Native American Indian community, the children avoid being singled out of the group. Rather, they prefer to blend into the whole group while trying to serve the benefits of the group. As individuals' expected roles in a group are different, based on the cultural values, people's participation patterns in the group are influenced and promoted differently by these cultural values. In addition, describing the different expectations for children's participation in communication between the non-Inuit researcher and the Inuit teacher and between the non-Inuit teacher and the Inuit parents, Rogoff also shows contrasting perceptions on children's actions due to different cultural values. Thus, if a child from a group-oriented society attends a school where individualistic practices are valued, this child might be easily perceived and labeled as lacking in initiative, having a retiring disposition, and being shy (Rogoff, 2003); these characteristics might also be seen as causes of the child's social difficulties (Chen & French, 2008; Coplan, Prakash, O'Neil, & Armer, 2004).

Emphasis on emotional regulation and verbal expression. Emotional regulation and verbal expression are also highly valued as elements of social competence and considered required abilities to control aggression. For example, children's emotional competence, involving the awareness of one's own and others' emotions as well as emotional expression and regulation, is regarded as an essential factor for social competence (Crick & Dodge, 1994; Denham, 2006; Denham et al., 2003) and for the development of peer relationships (Garner & Estep, 2001). Katz and McClellan (1997) emphasize children's abilities to regulate their emotions as a major achievement of their early childhood years and a crucial component of

children's social development. With regard to emotional regulation, they argue that young children need to learn "how to deal with frustration, enjoy others, recognize danger, cope with fear and anxiety, tolerate being alone sometimes, and develop friendships" (p. 3). They refer to aggression as the result of children's lack of social abilities, insufficient impulse control, or high levels of anger and as the most problematic cause of children's social difficulties. They caution that children's aggression can have a negative influence on peer relationships and, thus, require teacher intervention.

Moreover, Katz and McClellan (1997) guide teachers to intervene and encourage children to express their thoughts and emotions in words to each other when a child is in conflict with his or her peer. Teachers are instructed to have children talk about and negotiate their problems together. Many researchers in the field have recognized children's linguistic development as well as their emotional competence as having significant influences on children's social competence (e.g., Crick & Dodge, 1994; Denham et al., 2003; Denham & Grout, 1993; Garner & Estep, 2001; Katz & McClellan, 1997; Semrud-Clikeman, 2007). Affirming a close connection between children's social competence and cognitive and language development, these researchers regarded competence correlates, including emotional regulation, social cognition, language acquisition, and social temperament, as indicators of social competence. For example, Semrud-Clikeman (2007) posits language use and the ability to have a conversation as key elements of social competence. She argues that language skills and social ability cannot be separated and are "jointly required for the development of social competence" (p. 6). Likewise, verbal expression of oneself, one's emotions, thoughts, and opinions, and verbal resolution of social conflicts and relational problems are emphasized for social relationships. These values are also reflected in the discourse of promoting children's social competence.

Meanwhile, many cultural studies reveal that the ways in which children express and deal with their emotions are affected by cultural norms (P. J. Miller & Sperry, 1987; Rogoff, 2003). How children should behave under a certain emotional state and what level of expression is allowed in the culture influence children's aggression. According to Miller and Sperry (1987), children are socialized to acquire socially and culturally appropriate and allowable ways to express their anger and aggression through various social experiences consisting of very delicate and subtle interactional contexts. Children learn to control and express anger and aggression, "influenced by the culturally-patterned assumptions about emotional life that parents intentionally and unintentionally communicate to them" (p. 2). For example, in their study, the children—roughly from 1 ½ to 2 ½ years old—already understood when to express and how to communicate their anger appropriately. Their socialization to anger and aggression was explicitly and implicitly affected by the mothers' responses to the children's anger and aggression, which reflect social standards of morality and the mothers' child rearing beliefs regarding justifiable anger. The child's anger was justified under the goal of *self-protection* but unjustified for other occasions, such as *self-indulgence*. Miller and Sperry's study shows that children learn how to deal with their emotional states through various socializing contexts, including exposure to their caregivers' personal beliefs and the social and moral rules shared in a cultural community. Likewise, the interpretation and evaluation of children's aggression may vary in different cultural contexts, and different standards of appropriateness may apply. Therefore, children's behavioral characteristics, including aggression, should be understood within the social and cultural contexts to which the children have become accustomed and in which they are situated at that moment. Labeling children's aggressive behaviors as socially

deficient and problematic without considering an individual child's social and cultural contexts can result in making hasty and insensitive judgments.

Devaluation of shyness and sensitivity. Individual-orientedness and greater appreciation for children's initiatives, emotional regulations, and verbal expressions are associated with the devaluation of certain personalities and social dispositions. For example, with regard to children's shyness, Chen (2009) explains how children's social behaviors can be interpreted differently in different cultures.

> In Western societies, children who show sensitivity and shyness during social interaction are usually perceived as being anxious or lacking self-confidence. However, these characteristics are usually considered to be indicators of being mature and well-behaved in traditional Chinese culture. (p. 29)

In contrast to such perceptions of sensitivity and shyness in traditional Chinese culture, children's shyness is viewed negatively in the dominant discourse in the field and considered a weakness to be overcome (e.g., Cacioppo, Fowler, & Christakis, 2009; Chen, 2009; Coplan, Hughes, Bosacki, & Rose-Krasnor, 2011; Katz & McClellan, 1997; Rubin et al., 1997; Sanson et al., 2004; Zimbardo & Radl, 1999).

The appreciation of initiative in social participation is also connected to cultural expectation and value. In many U.S. schools, teachers tell children, "Don't be shy; speak up." Children are encouraged to be expressive, particularly through verbal language. For example, contrasting with the whole group discussion in a Japanese class, Hatano and Inagaki (1998) affirm U.S. schools' inclination toward *speakership*: "American students have been trained to be good speakers, for example, to express their ideas clearly and persuasively" (p. 91). In contrast, these authors explain that Japanese children are trained to be attentive listeners.

In mainstream Western society, if a child does not speak up, the child is considered to be lacking in initiative. When it comes to social relationships, the child is perceived as not being active in social interactions and to be socially incompetent because of the lack of initiative and shyness (Chen & French, 2008; Coplan et al., 2004; Katz & McClellan, 1997; Ladd, 2005). Hatano and Inagaki (1998) emphasize the significance of *listenership* and silent social participation in Japan. They argue that silence is not considered the indicator of passive participation or insufficient competence. Rather, in Japan, silence is perceived as another way to participate and is even highly valued by people. However, the dominant discourses in the field tend to pay attention to a child's initiative, emotional control, and verbal interactions in social relationships, while putting less value on a child's silent participation, listenership, and emotional sensitivity in interpersonal relationships.

The necessity of adult intervention. Finally, the conceptualization of social competence is associated with beliefs in how to promote social competence. Throughout their teacher's guidebook, *Fostering Children's Social Competence: The Teacher's Role*, Katz and McClellan (1997) explain principles of practices and teaching strategies and interventions for developing and strengthening children's social competence. All of the contents of this book reflect the assumption of the necessity of an adult's interventions for children's social development and for overcoming social difficulties. They state: "Although we found no experimental studies of the general effects of teachers on young children's social development, experience suggests that teachers can play a significant role in supporting social development, and this is the main focus of our book" (p. 19).

However, Tobin's (1992) interview with a Japanese preschool teacher reveals that this assumption of adult intervention is also culturally grounded. In answer to the question "Isn't fighting a problem?" the Japanese teacher said,

> Fighting at this age is natural. If there were no fights, that would be a problem. Children need to learn how to fight when they're young so they won't have to fight when they get into junior high school and could really hurt someone. (p. 30)

Tobin explains that Japanese teachers did not intervene even in children's physical fighting, because they believed children should learn how to negotiate and make common agreements among themselves. The Japanese teacher's statement quoted above is in direct opposition to U.S. teachers' beliefs in the importance of adult interventions. While Japanese teachers believe that fighting by children is more or less natural and does not require any adult intervention, Katz and McClellan (1997) reveal different views on teachers' roles in children's social development with the term *optimum teacher intervention*. They argue: "The spontaneous and inevitable social problems that arise when children work and play together put the teacher in an ideal position to advance children's social development" (p. 59). According to them, a teacher's intervention should be optimally frequent (not too frequent nor too rare). Through careful and constant monitoring, teachers gain information about children to judge their social abilities to resolve conflicts and make good decisions about when to stand by and when to intervene. Likewise, adult intervention in children's social difficulties is interpreted differently based on cultural values and assumptions, and these *folk pedagogies* are reflected in such cultural practices of raising a socially competent child.

Empowering Diverse Characteristics of Social Competence

In this chapter, first, I reviewed the literature related to children's social competence and development. Then, comparing and contrasting the predominant values reflected in the literature on social development with different cultural communities' practices and their underlying values, I attempted to unpack and challenge the dominant discourse on social competence. I identified and described the following cultural values embedded in the field's discourse on social competence: individual orientedness, individualized and dyadic relationships, appreciation of social initiative, emphasis on emotional regulation and verbal expression, devaluation of shyness and sensitivity, and the necessity of adult intervention. Through this exploration, I argued that the conceptualization of children's social competence reflects the cultural values of a broader society and can, therefore, be better understood with the consideration of cultural values and belief systems. Now, considering different cultural values and perspectives embedded in the discourses on social competence and development, I address the notion of cultural diversity in the conceptualization and practices of social competence.

As indicated by Anderson and Messick's (1974) discussion of the value-laden nature of defining goals and dimensions of social competence, discourses about how social competence has been conceptualized and which aspects of social competence have been studied in academia reflect particular cultural beliefs. Moreover, how the concepts of social competence are manifested in practices is also culturally rooted. Lillvist et al. (2009) investigated Swedish preschool teachers' definitions of young children's social competence and reported that the teachers' definitions are similar to those found in the U.S. literature regarding social development (e.g., Rose-Krasnor, 1997; Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998). As implied in these authors' study, cultural norms and beliefs about social competence influence discourses in

academia and educational practices. In the same vein, the literature about children's social

competence reviewed in this chapter shows how both academic discourses and educational

practices often reflect European-American cultural values or belief systems.

With regard to social and cultural values in educational practices, Bruner provides

profound insights in his book *Culture of Education* (1996). He states, "school is a culture itself"

(p. 98) and describes the classroom as a "living context" (p. 44) where "teachers and pupils come

together to effect that crucial but mysterious interchange that we so glibly call *education*" (p. 44,

emphasis in original). A school classroom itself is a sociocultural context in which children's

knowledge and experiences are shared, negotiated, and constructed. Rather than being the

physical setting of an instructional environment for young children, it is a living context that

reflects the implicit cultural values of the larger society, where shared and negotiated ways of

thinking and collective cultural activities are produced. Bruner adds that "education is never

neutral . . . education is always political" (p. 25); therefore, social values reflected in the school

curricula and classroom culture cannot be free from political considerations of social class,

gender, race, and other prerogatives of social power. I argue that the sociocultural context of

children's experiences in schools is not only an important factor for a child's social learning but

also a mirror reflecting cultural values about social competences in our society. Therefore,

certain aspects of children's social participation and certain socialization practices of children are

implicitly or explicitly promoted or restricted by discourses and practices in schools, which

reflect the value systems of the broader society.

Cultural differences in perspectives, values, and practices for children's social

development, relationships, and socialization discussed earlier in this chapter imply that the

European-American cultural conceptualization of social competence may well neglect or devalue

certain aspects of social competence. Hatano and Miyake's (1996) notion of "the double-sided effect of culture" (p. 275), which I briefly introduced in Chapter 1, explains this characteristic of culture. This notion emphasizing cultural constraints helps us see how we become capable of doing a certain thing that our culture values, while losing other potential capabilities not valued by our culture. And, cultural values are connected to power, distinctions, and rewards.

Considering the notion of *the double-sided effect of culture*, I argue that a cultural historical approach to children's social competence is necessary not only for opening up a variety of perspectives and values but also for appreciating diverse individuals' voices and potentials. When the academic discourses of social competence consider and include diverse world views and voices, cultural constraints can be brought to our attention, and "cultural power to adapt to change" (Hatano & Miyake, 1991) will be animated.

Now, I return to the anecdote with which I began this chapter. The father's comment that his son lacked social competence would be variously interpreted by people with different expectations and assumptions about social competence. Therefore, studies of children's social competence need more consideration of local and larger cultural contexts. As researchers or educators, we come to class with our own beliefs and values influenced by and shared in our own cultural communities involving our ethnic, regional, and adult communities. In order to understand children's social competence, I argue that we need to be aware of the cultural nature of social competence and socialization practices in school and at home. I believe this recognition is the first step toward the appreciation of diversity in cultural practices and concepts of social competence. In our culturally diverse classrooms, empowering diverse social characteristics that all children possess and display in their social relationships is essential for social and cultural equity in education.

For this reason, this dissertation study is intended to provide broader perspectives on children generally regarded as socially incompetent by critically investigating their characteristics. Through this study, I want to highlight the positive roles and social functions that these children play in their social interactions and peer culture. Ultimately, I hope the values of diverse social characteristics are recognized and appreciated in the field and in our society. This literature review was to serve as a good grounding for not only reflecting on my cultural beliefs and assumptions about children's social competence and socialization practices but also for understanding the social and cultural contexts in which the participating children and the teachers of this dissertation study are situated. Therefore, this literature review also became the analytic basis for this dissertation study by helping me understand participating children's social competence, school discourses around the children's social competence, and cultural dynamics within the classroom.

CHAPTER 3

ANALYTIC LENS FOR EXPLORING CHILDREN'S SOCIAL WORLDS AS CULTURALLY SATURATED AND CULTURALLY DYNAMIC

If one has ever had the experience of focalizing one's glasses, he or she might have found his or her vision gradually changing from blurry to clear as the lenses were adjusted and focused. When I first encountered the two theories of cultural psychology and Bakhtin's philosophy of language, I felt like I was focalizing my vision to make it clearer; I was able to understand more clearly not only educational phenomena but also every phenomenon in our lives and our society. In particular, cultural psychology provided me with a frame for understanding children's social lives and peer culture, schooling as a cultural practice, and bidirectional relationships between an individual child and his or her culture. In addition, after reading several of Bakhtin's books, I came to see the world based on his philosophy of language and enjoyed applying his ideas and using his terms to explain everyday occurrences. Just like adjusting a lens prescription to bring the world into focus, Bakhtin's theory of language gave me a clear vision for viewing dialogism in human life. Therefore, the Bakhtinian perspective on language is a nicely tailored lens for me to observe children's dialogical interactions and relationships with peers and cultural dynamics in children's social lives.

In this chapter, I provide more detailed explanations about two theoretical frameworks, cultural psychology and Bakhtin's philosophy of language, that helped me formulate this dissertation study and frame my understanding of the situations and phenomena that I observed

while conducting this study. In the following section, I first provide a brief historical overview of cultural psychology, because it helps to clarify the perspectives of cultural psychology on the human mind and culture by showing an obvious contrast to the other philosophical viewpoints examining them. From this historical overview, I present how cultural psychology guided the purpose of this study and my viewpoints on children's social competence. Second, I explain Bakhtin's philosophy of language by focusing on his general idea of dialogism and three contrasting concepts that help in deepening the understanding of his theory. I also provide my application of his theory to children's social competence and their social lives as well as to academic discourses of children's social competence and development.

Cultural Psychology

The general perspective of this study is grounded in cultural psychology (Bruner, 1986, 1996; Rogoff, 2003; Shweder et al., 2006), which assumes that human development is inseparable from its social and cultural contexts and should be understood in consideration of them (Rogoff, 2003). In the life and development of human beings, culture is a crucial factor that manifests their innate social nature. A human being is "not 'an island, entire of itself' but a part of the culture that he[/she] inherits and then recreates" (Bruner, 1986, p. 149). All the meanings and realities are derived from the social negotiations in which people participate with their own individual meanings in their lives and by which they share and produce a point of commonality, that is, their culture. In this social negotiation of meaning making, not only does culture play a decisive role in constructing human beings' thoughts, beliefs, and value systems, but it is also the source from which their social world originates (Bruner, 1986, 1996; Rogoff, 2003; Shweder et al., 2006). Likewise, cultural psychology puts emphasis on bidirectional relationships between individuals and culture, which are mutually constitutive.

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A Historical Overview of Cultural Psychology

The effects of culture on human mental processes were recognized by earlier scholars during the 18th and 19th centuries, such as Giambattista Vico, Johann Herder, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and Wilhelm Wundt (Cole, 1996; Shweder et al., 2006). Before I introduce these scholars, I first present Cole's (1996) explanation of two distinctive paradigms, because the origins of the scholarly discourse of culture were derived from them and because these two different viewpoints show more obviously the perspectives of cultural psychology on culture and mind. According to Cole, there had been a scholarly dispute between the natural sciences and the cultural-historical sciences, which can be traced to two paths of science set by the Greek scholars: Plato's (428/427 BC–348/347 BC) path, where emphasis was put on "stable, universal processes of the mind that are timeless in their operating principles" (p. 19); and Herodotus's (484 BC–425 BC) path, with emphasis on the influence of people's ways of life on their beliefs. Cole explains that these two viewpoints affected "the founding of psychology and the other 'social-behavioral' sciences" (p. 20) and carried over up to the 18th and 19th centuries.

Descartes (1596-1650), who is called the father of modern philosophy, is well-known for his influences in the field of psychology (Cole, 1996). He had a strong belief in natural scientific methods and argued that they could be applied to studies of human nature, particularly to "the operations of the human body" (Cole, 1996, p. 21). Meanwhile, he excluded the study of the human mind and soul (e.g., study of humanities and history) from the domain of natural science, because "they could not yield precise definitions, quantifiable data, axioms, or clear rules of evidence, all of which were necessary to the deduction of general laws" (Cole, 1996, p. 21). Nevertheless, according to Cole (1996), scholars in the two centuries following Descartes accepted his beliefs in natural science, while neglecting his distinction of the study of the human

mind and soul from the realm of science. They instead argued that natural scientific methods could be applied to the study of history and the human mind, because these two are closely related.

In such a time when natural science blossomed, Vico (1668-1744) was "the champion of a distinctive historical science" (Cole, 1996, p. 22) and the leading opponent of Descartes's belief in natural scientific methods relying on general laws applied to the understanding of the world. According to Cole (1996), although Vico accepted Descartes's qualitative distinction between human nature and human history, he still opposed Descartes's natural scientific approaches to human nature. In the early 18th century, Vico published the book *Scienza Nuova* (New Science, 1725/1948, as cited in Cole, 1996), which "declared that the scientific study of human nature must be based upon specifically human forms of interaction and understanding" (Cole, 1996, p. 22). Vico argued, "human nature must necessarily be understood through an historical analysis of language, myth, and ritual" (Cole, 1996, p. 23).

Herder (1744-1803) is regarded as the earliest scholar who formulated the modern concept of cultural relativism (Cole, 1996). At the end of the eighteenth century, deriving from Vico's view of the study of humans, Herder introduced the notion of *Volk* as "a community of people whose shared language and historical traditions shape the mental processes of its members and provide essential resources for the process of their development" (Cole, 1996, p. 23). Herder argued that the diversity of *Volk* should be valued and that when each is evaluated, its own terms and meanings should be considered. In the early nineteenth century, von Humboldt (1767-1835) introduced the term *Völkerpsychologie* that today refers to the study of humans' cultural character; its meaning was along the same lines as Herder's thoughts about the influences of language and traditions on mentality. Affirming the close relationship between

language and thoughts, von Humboldt argued that human beings' modes of thoughts are different depending on their cultural groups.

By the middle of the 19th century, there were some efforts to reconcile the conflicting viewpoints between natural science and cultural-historical science. Among the several scholars who recognized the importance of historical studies for understanding the human mind, Wundt (1832-1920) was the scholar who created two different psychologies and made a methodological claim "which is central to the history and current practices of the study of cultural psychology" (Cole, 1996, p. 29). Wundt appropriated Herder's term *Völkerpsychologie* to refer to what he called the second psychology that focuses on "higher psychological functions extend[ing] beyond individual human consciousness" (Cole, 1996, p. 28) as opposed to the first psychology—"physiological psychology"—which mainly is concerned with the elements of individual consciousness. He argued that *Völkerpsychologie* "requires the use of developmental–historical methodology" and, therefore, must include "the method of ethnology, conceived of as 'the science of the origins of peoples'" (Cole, 1996, p. 29). Although Wundt argued that these two psychologies should be combined to supplement each other, only the experimental method upon which the first psychology relied on was broadly accepted, while the second psychology's methodologies, such as anthropology, were rejected due to a widespread strong belief in replicable general laws (Bruner, 1996; Cole, 1996). The experimental methods of the first psychology, supplemented with psychometric and standardized tests, were prevalent (Lee, 2010; Shweder et al., 2006) in the field of psychology and social science until the early 20th century.

Since the beginning of the 1980s, Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie* has been revived (Cole, 1996; Shweder et al., 2006), and the interest in *cultural psychology* has been "stimulated in part by the difficulties of cross–cultural approaches and in part by a more general dissatisfaction with

the processes of psychology and social science" (Cole, 1996, p. 101). Within the dominant

paradigm of general psychology, culture has been considered an independent variable for cross-

cultural comparisons. Meanwhile, several scholars in many countries, such as Gestalt

psychologists in Germany, Emile Durkheim and Lucien Levy-Bruhl in France, Charles Judd in

the U.S. and Lev Vygotsky, Alexander Luria, and Alexei Leontiev in the Soviet Union, focused

more on the influences of culturally organized and historically evolved activities of people's

everyday lives (Cole, 1996). With the recognition of "the crisis in psychology," criticism

regarding the dominant paradigm of general psychology, which relied on the framework of

methodological behaviorism, has been raised, and Wundt's second psychology,

Völkerpsychologie, has gained attention.

As indicated by the above discussion of the advent of cultural psychology, the concept of

cultural psychology can be clarified by recognizing its differences from cross-cultural

psychology (Cole, 1996; Shweder et al., 2006). According to Cole (1996), cross-cultural

psychology belongs to Wundt's first psychology and originated from the concerns about the

impact of contextual factors on experimental results and methods. Therefore, the tendency in

cross-cultural psychology is to understand how the dependent variable of individuals is affected

by culture, an independent variable (J. G. Miller, 1997). On the other hand, Miller (1997)

differentiates cultural psychology, contrasting the theoretical presupposition held by it with that

of cross-cultural psychology: "The dominant stance within cultural psychology is to view culture

and psychology as mutually constitutive phenomena . . . . [I]t is assumed that culture and

individual behavior cannot be understood in isolation yet are also not reducible to each other" (p.

88). Rather than merely being influenced by culture, people contribute to the process of creating

culture, and culture also contributes to human development (Rogoff, 2003). Shweder et al. (2006) define cultural psychology as:

> the study of the mental life of individuals in relation to the symbolic and behavioral inheritance of particular cultural communities. It is the study of the way culture, community, and the psyche instantiate one another and are mutually sustaining, and thus, how they become coordinated and make each other possible. (pp. 720-721)

In summary, rather than recognizing culture and human psyche separately, cultural psychologists pay attention to the reciprocal relations between them—individuals mediate and create cultural beliefs and practices, and those cultural heritages simultaneously affect people's ways of thinking and acting.

Implications of Cultural Psychology for Research on Social Competence

Paradigm Shifts in the Discourse of Children's Social Competence

The historical overview of cultural psychology in the above section shows how the different perspectives in academia contradicted and complemented each other. The shifts of perspectives on culture and mind guided me to understand Collins's (2002) chronological overview of research on social development discussed in Chapter 1.[8] An understanding of the multifaceted perspectives on social competence and their historical flows in relation to other perspectives of research on social development helped me clarify the direction in which this dissertation study is headed and my viewpoints with regard to children's social lives, which are in accord with the philosophical perspectives of cultural psychology. Therefore, in this section, by referring to Collins's chronological overview of research on social development, I first present my understanding of the philosophical shifts in the earlier social developmental studies.

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[8] For detailed discussions about Collins' (2002) chronological overview of research on social development, please refer to Chapter 1 (pp. 6-7).

First of all, the academic discourses of children's social competence in the field of early childhood education (hereafter, "the field") have tended to place more weight on the empirically approved aspects of social competence in the realm of natural science and individual children's growth and development. As implied by Cole's (1996) accounts of the predominant paradigm of experimental psychology, until the early part of the 20th century, social competence and social development had been conceptualized within this dominant tradition during the initial period of studies roughly from 1890 to 1919 (Collins, 2002). This early research on social development relied on a dominant modernist view of rationalism and was heavily influenced by psychologists, such as Stanley Hall, John Watson, Sigmund Freud, Jean Piaget, and Lawrence Kohlberg (Collins, 2002). Collins (2002) accounted for the history of research by particularly explaining how these influential figures guided the scholarly discourses of social development. Coming from such a time when rational and scientific generalization was highly valued and when experimental psychology was prevalent, social competence has been predominantly perceived as personal ability, and certain skills or behaviors, such as independence, honesty, low anxiety, low aggression, and sociability, have been used as the criteria for determining a "socially competent child." James (2007) notes that although childhood studies focusing on cultural aspects of human lives were already conducted by early anthropologists in the United States, "interest in children as a social, rather than developmental, category became sidelined . . ., given the dominance of developmental psychological discourses for understanding childhood within the Western cultural tradition" (p. 263). As implied by James's explanation, such developmental psychological grounds regarding young children's social competence have long permeated and are still embedded in academic discourses and educational practices of the field.

Second, the recent trend reflected in a number of studies challenging the unified concept of social competence is associated with an epistemological change in the field of social development studies. According to Collins (2002), since the 1970s, diverse environmental influences on social development and competence have increasingly attracted researchers, and current studies tend to emphasize the contexts of individuals' experiences. However, Collins posits, "Nevertheless, social developmentalists, like other psychologists, face continuing challenges in fully incorporating contexts into studies of development and the developmental process" (p. 13). Although the recent social development research attempts to investigate children's social behaviors and relationships in various contexts and different cultural groups, there are still limitations in specifying all the various contextual variables. Moreover, the social development studies that considered cultural aspects of children' social competence (e.g., Chen, 2009; Chen & French, 2008; Chen et al., 1998) were mostly conducted in the form of cross-cultural research by focusing on various contexts as independent variables. Miller and Goodnow (1995) show the difference in perspectives on the term *context* between developmental psychology and cultural psychology. According to them, developmental psychology treats *contexts* "as static givens, dictated by the social and physical environments" (p. 8), while cultural psychology treats contexts as dynamic and "ongoing accomplishments negotiated by participants" (p. 8). Therefore, the cross-cultural researchers tend to pay attention to the effects of such "static" and "given" aspects of contexts on children's social competence.

The revival of cultural psychology occurred due to the limitations of the dominant experimental psychology emphasizing replicable generalization and relying on methodological behaviorism (Cole, 1996; Nisbett, 2007). In particular, it was partly stimulated by dissatisfaction with cross-cultural studies. As described above by Cole (1996), Miller (1997), and Shweder et al.

(2006), while cross-cultural psychology focuses on cultural differences and perceives people as passive beings affected by culture, cultural psychology regards people as active participants in meaning making, discourses, and various cultural and historical practices. Recently, the concerns for children's rights, power, and subjectivity have increased in the field's discourses. With regard to the research on children's social competence and socialization, Schneider's (1993) critical assertion regarding Piaget's theory shows cultural psychologists' view of children as active agents more clearly, which is distinctive from cognitive psychologists' perspectives. In the discourse of developmental psychology, Piaget's theory is considered to emphasize "the significance of social processes and the role of the child as an active agent in development" (Collins, 2002, p. 5). Collins (2002) continues, "Without denying the role of authority figures in early development, Piaget took the view that children most readily experienced the cognitive conflict necessary for developmental change when interacting with peers" (p. 5). However, Schneider (1993) points out the limitations of Piaget's theory:

> Development according to Piaget is a process of continuous interplay between the individual and the environment, but the origin of the processes that govern this interchange are intrinsic within the organism, and do not depend on socializing agents in the environment for their activation. (p. 5)

According to Schneider, developmental psychology regards young children as socially immature and in need of learning and developing social knowledge and skills. Children are only seen as "the objects of overarching social processes by which they move from being non-adults to being adults" (Hutchby & Moran-Ellis, 1998, p. 8).

The view of children as active agents in their social lives was drawn from the critical awareness that the given criteria of social competence always lead to a judgment of a person's

ability and inability and result in classification of children (Schneider, 1993). The researchers, particularly those who apply cultural psychological perspectives to children's social relationships, regard children as active social participants and agents who negotiate with and mediate cultural meanings in the socialization process. This relatively recent trend in the field allows researchers to pay close attention to the importance of peer interactions and peer culture in children's social lives and socialization (Corsaro, 1979; Elgas, 2003; Elgas, Klein, Kantor, & Fernie, 1988; Evaldsson & Tellgren, 2009; Lee & Walsh, 2003). These scholars aim to appreciate young children's social worlds and their own ways of socialization by considering peer culture as children's unique social worlds that are produced by creatively appropriating what is learned and observed from the adult world (Corsaro & Eder, 1990).

Lastly, the historical overview of the philosophical shifts in social developmental studies in accord with those in cultural psychology provided a clear vision for this dissertation study, which focuses on children's own ways of relating with others, their unique social functions in peer play, and their active participation in cultural activities. In spite of the recent advent of critical perspectives about scientific reasoning and generalization, in the field of children's social competence and development, cultural aspects of social competence still significantly rely on developmental psychology and are predominantly investigated in the form of cross-cultural studies. Those who consider cultural aspects of children's lives focus mostly on children's peer culture, socialization, and peer relationships, with no use of such terms as *social competence* and *social development*. Therefore, in terms of children's social competence and social development, there are only a few scholars (e.g., Hutchby & Moran-Ellis, 1998; Schneider, 1993) who have adopted critical perspectives on the development- and cognitive psychology-oriented field of social development studies. Accordingly, along with the recent mood coming from a time when

more scholars and educators (e.g., Cannella, 1997; Lubeck, 1996; Thorne, 1993) began to criticize the early childhood education field's reliance on developmental psychology, the historical overview showed me the necessity of exploring children's social competence from cultural psychological and critical perspectives. In the following section, I articulate how cultural psychology guided me to formulate my perspectives on children's social actions, social lives, and socialization.

The Reciprocal Relationships between Children and Culture

The cultural psychological perspective on human development supposes that "people develop as they participate in and contribute to cultural activities that themselves develop with the involvement of people in successive generations" (Rogoff, 2003, p. 52). This point of view emphasizes both the individual's agency in the creation of culture and the ongoing process in which a human and culture mutually influence each other. The mutual relationship between humans and culture that cultural psychology posits provides three valuable insights for this study, as stated below.

First, any interpretations or evaluations of children's social actions need to be considered in relation to the cultural context in which they are situated. Such a view of cultural psychology is clearly distinctive from the widespread beliefs in universal and standardized sets of socially competent behaviors. As inferred from cultural psychologists' emphases discussed earlier in this chapter, children's social actions cannot be understood without the consideration of cultural contexts (Schneider, 1993). Children's every action reflects cultural meanings and values. By referring to the social meanings assigned by a peer group or the larger society, children take action in a way that corresponds to social meanings and their intentions or emotions. Moreover, researchers who interpret children's actions are not free from such cultural influences and are

also inevitably affected by micro-macroscopic cultures. Therefore, in order to understand children's social lives and social relationships, the cultural meanings of their social actions in a peer group as well as in the larger society should be considered (Bruner, 1996). In this dissertation study, grounded on such a perspective of cultural psychology, I have paid particular attention to the cultural meanings of participating children's social actions in their peer group, while continuously reflecting on my cultural values and those of the larger society—in particular, by referring to the interview scripts of the children's teacher and the literature reviews.

Second, from the perspectives of cultural psychology, children play a significant role as social agents in their socialization. Children are viewed as being neither passive in their socialization nor isolated from social and cultural contexts; they are seen as active participants in sharing and shaping cultural meanings and cultural practices. Based on the cultural psychological beliefs in the mutually constituting nature of the relationships between individuals and culture, I consider children's socialization as a process in which children participate in social negotiations with others; they mediate and recreate their cultural values and ways of acting, thinking, and feeling that indispensably reflect the culture of the broader society. Children's social lives and social experiences in schools are not only influenced but are also generated by the culture that they themselves mediate and recreate. Such a view of children as active agents, which is different from that of earlier social development studies, affected my perspectives of the participating children's roles in their social lives and social relationships and particularly the teacher's interventions regarding their social behaviors. In this study, I consider how the participating children mediate the cultural values of their peer group, their personal wants and desires, and the values taught by the teacher's interventions.

Third, guided by the perspectives of cultural psychology, this study concentrates on the reciprocal processes in which children negotiate and create their culture and in which culture influences and shapes their modes of thinking and behaving. The foci of this study include not only the diverse roles that children play in their social relationships but also the ongoing processes in which children and the culture mutually affect each other. In particular, I have paid close attention to cultural practices situated in the social world of the children and the mentalities associated with those practices. Because cultural practices come "packaged with values about what is natural, mature, morally right, or aesthetically pleasing" (P. J. Miller & Goodnow, 1995, p. 6), I was able to investigate how children mediate and recreate the cultural values embedded in practices in schools. I ultimately intended to explore the associations between cultural socialization[9] practices in school and embedded mentalities, such as cultural beliefs and values, and illuminate the dynamic process of the negotiations of meaning-making in which children actively participate.

In summary, perspectives of cultural psychology have guided me not only to the realization of the importance of children's initiative roles and agencies in their social interactions and socialization practices in school but also to an inquiry of the dynamic nature of those practices. From the perspective of this theory, I believe that the relationships between cultural practices and human mentalities are mutually constitutive and that the investigation of those relationships can illuminate children's initiatives in their social lives and the cultural aspects of children's social competence and development. While cultural psychology guided me to focus not only on cultural aspects of children's social competence and socialization but also on the reciprocal and ongoing processes of children's participation in social negotiation and cultural

[9] Although I use the term "cultural socialization practices" to recognize the influence of teachers' instructions over young children's social competence, I use this term by following the premise of cultural psychology, which regards children as active participants in their social lives.

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recreation, the Bakhtinian philosophy of language has deepened my understanding of such reciprocal interactions between children, between an individual child and culture, and between cultures. In what follows, I discuss his theory of language.

Bakhtinian Philosophy of Language

Bakhtin's theory of language helped me recognize dialogical processes within children's social interactions and see children's social participation with a heightened awareness of the diverse roles they play in their social relationships. In particular, his theory guided me to appreciate cultural dynamics in children's social lives. That is, children both challenge and employ cultural norms in the development of their social relationships and the creation of their own culture. In this section, I begin with a brief explanation of Bakhtin's notion of dialogue, which is central to his theory of language. Then, I expand this main concept further by articulating three conceptual contrasts discussed by Bakhtin: (1) *unitary language* vs. *heteroglossia*, (2) *monologic dead language* vs. *dialogic living language*, and (3) *poetry* vs. *novel*[10]. Based on an explanation of these concepts, I present my perspectives on children's social competence and their socialization and social lives in school. Finally, I also provide my analysis of academic discourses regarding children's social competence and development based on Bakhtinian perspectives.

Bakhtin's Theory of Dialogism

The major premise that encompasses Bakhtin's ideas of language is located in his notion of dialogism. Bakhtin (1981) states, "The word is born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder within it; the word is shaped in dialogic interaction with an alien word that is already in the object. A word forms a concept of its own object in a dialogic way" (p. 279). In his view, any word,

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[10] I chose these three contrasting concepts among Bakhtin's various conceptual terms, because I used these ideas in my data analysis and often referred to them in my findings presented in the later chapters.

utterance, or speech exists in the exchange of meanings, and these meanings are generated by constant exchanges of dialogue between addresser and addressee. Language is not static but is a part of an ongoing process of constructing meanings through dialogue; it is a ceaseless chain of addressing and responding. Bakhtin (1986) elaborates on his idea of unfinalizability as follows:

> There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and boundless future). Even past meanings, that is those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all)—they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development of the dialogue. (p. 170)

Therefore, according to Bakhtin, a word or an utterance does not exist by itself. Rather, it is given life when it becomes interdependent with another. Bakhtin (1981) explains, "The dialogic orientation of discourse is a phenomenon that is, of course, a property of *any* discourse. It is the natural orientation of any living discourse. . . . [T]he word encounters an alien word and cannot help encountering it in living, tension-filled interaction" (p. 279, emphasis in original). Likewise, Bakhtin argues that any words, utterances, and discourses tend to be directed to other encountered words, such as a recipient's responses and speaking situations.

At the center of Bakhtin's argument about the dialogic nature of language is his careful contemplation of listeners. He argues that linguists regard listeners as only passively understanding a word. Bakhtin (1981) asserts that in the actual life of speech, there is no passive understanding. Rather, listeners are actively responsive in that they not only understand the word by assimilating it into their conceptual world and merging it with the responses but also answer and react to the word spoken. He states, "Any understanding of live speech, a live utterance, is inherently responsive. . . . Any understanding is imbued with response and

necessarily elicits it in one form or another: the listener becomes the speaker" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 68). Considering a listener's reactive understanding and responses, a speaker structures and forms his/her words in speaking contexts that have already been spoken and that are anticipated as needed in the future. That is, a speaker formulates his/her speech based on how a listener has reacted, what he/she has spoken, and what he/she thinks need to be said. Bakhtin (1981) affirms, "every word is directed toward an *answer* and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates" (p. 280, emphasis in original). Therefore, an utterance is "a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 69).

Bakhtin's notion of dialogism can be represented by two types of dialogue—external dialogue between two people and internal dialogue in an individual's self, and these two are tightly interwoven. First, with regard to external dialogue, in the following statement, Bakhtin (1981) shows how words, different points of view, conceptual horizons, and various languages between a speaker and a listener interact with each other and are dialogized through utterances:

> The speaker strives to get a reading on his own word, and on his own conceptual system that determines this word, within the alien conceptual system of the understanding receiver; he enters into dialogical relationships with certain aspects of this system. The speaker breaks through the alien conceptual horizon of the listener, constructs his own utterance on alien territory, against his, the listener's apperceptive background. (p. 282)

As indicated by Bakhtin's description of the dialogical process of languages above, hybridization between two languages, two different linguistic consciousnesses, or two conceptual horizons occurs. A speaker and a listener cross boundaries between them, understand each other, and construct their words through internal dialogues. In this way, languages intersect with one another in various ways, weave in and out of the relationship between them, and are merged into

and reduced in an utterance. Therefore, according to Bakhtin (1981), there is no word that completely belongs to a person. He posits, "As a living, socio-ideological concrete thing, as heteroglot opinion, language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's" (p. 293). No one entirely possesses a word. Any word—any meaning of a word, to state it accurately—is determined by its contexts, which include particular moments and surroundings, social and cultural environments, and the complicated interactions between various languages used by speaking participants.

With regard to the second type of dialogue, which is the internal dialogue within an individual's self, Bakhtin (1981) explains that individuals are surrounded by various languages (heteroglossia) and face "the necessity of having to choose a language" (p. 295). According to Bakhtin, consciously or unconsciously, people choose a certain language based on the place, that is, the social ideological context. Bakhtin describes this concept of an internal dialogue of languages with the example of an illiterate peasant: "miles away from any urban center, naively immersed in an unmoving and for him unshakable everyday world, [he] nevertheless lived in several language systems" (p. 295). Bakhtin illustrates, the peasant "prayed to God in one language (Church Slavonic), sang songs in another, spoke to his family in a third and, when he began to dictate petitions to the local authorities through a scribe, he tried speaking yet a fourth language" (pp. 295-296). According to Bakhtin, the peasant unconsciously chose one among all of these different languages. Bakhtin affirms that "[the peasant] passed from one to the other without thinking, automatically: each was indisputably in its own place, and the place of each was indisputable" (p. 296). Through individual experiences, human beings learn and master

which language is proper to a certain context. In this way, people often choose one appropriate

language unconsciously.

However, an individual's choice of language sometimes occurs in his/her consciousness

when "the ideological systems and approaches to the world that were indissolubly connected

with these [various different] languages contradicted each other" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 296). Then,

individuals need to actively choose one among various languages. Considering others' alien

territories, conceptual horizons, and responses, they stratify languages in proportion to social

significance and choose a proper language based on the contexts. In this process, the

individuals' intentions are reflected in their choices. Bakhtin's explanation of people's

conscious and unconscious choice of language emphasizes how a certain language is prioritized

and empowered in a certain context and time. Of course, even here, Bakhtin's (1981) statement

reaffirms that listeners are highly influential beings with regard to these choices: "Language is

not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speakers'

intentions; it is populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others" (p. 294). Therefore,

within their alien words—various different languages, through an internal dialogue among the

languages, people keep and hand down shared and stabilized language appropriate to social and

ideological contexts.

In summary, according to Bakhtin (1981, 1986), language is neither in isolation nor just a

means of transmitting words' meanings; rather, it is contextually based and, of course, culturally

based and exists in complicated interactions. Therefore, his keen analyses and descriptions of

social and ideological dynamics in language provide a lens for understanding the dialogical

nature not only of human beings' individual social actions and interactions in their social lives

but also of various discourses and ideologies in the broader society. Just as language is dialogic,

people think and act dialogically when interacting with others and in various contexts. Bakhtin's theory of language also provides a lens for viewing various discourses, which collide or coincide, coexisting in academia. For this reason, I appropriate Bakhtin's theory of language in order to understand young children's social interactions and social lives and their socialization practices in the classroom, which are dynamically mediated and negotiated by their peer culture, school culture, and the cultures in the broader society and by those who belong to that culture. I also appropriate his theory to analyze the various discourses of social development in the field.

Focusing on Bakhtin's three conceptual contrasts, including (1) *unitary language* vs. *heteroglossia*, (2) *monologic dead language* vs. *dialogic living language*, and (3) *poetry* vs. *novel,* in what follows I further discuss his theory of dialogism and explain how his theory supported my dissertation study.

Three Conceptual Contrasts of Bakhtin's Theory of Language

Unitary language vs. Heteroglossia. Bakhtin (1981) depicts language as undergoing dialogization within the tension-filled dynamics between *centrifugal forces* and *centripetal forces*, that is, between *heteroglossia* and *unitary language*. Because the meanings of any utterance are determined by various contextual surroundings in which a word is uttered, a set of conditions, such as cultural and historical conditions, generates diverse languages. Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia is referred to as a social diversity of speech types, individual voices, or different dialects. It is the centrifugal force that opposes unitary language—historically and culturally constructed norms of language. Unitary language encompasses centripetal forces that "operate in the midst of heteroglossia" (p. 271) and serves as a reigning language—a centralizing and unifying language. He notes, "Every utterance participates in the 'unitary language' (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical

heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces)" (p. 272). According to him, such a "contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies" (p. 272) is prerequisite for a living language. He states, "stratification and heteroglossia widen and deepen as long as language is alive and developing" (p. 272). In other words, a language that does not undergo such dialogization is an authoritative, absolute, dead language.

Bakhtin (1981) directly extends his theory of language as a social phenomenon to the cultural and political dynamics in society by stating that "a *unitary language* gives expression to forces working toward concrete verbal and ideological unification and centralization, which develop in vital connection with the processes of sociopolitical and cultural centralization" (p. 271; emphasis in original). Although he employs linguistic terms to describe the complicatedly intertwined interactions occurring in the process of dialogization, his articulation of language can be extensively used to understand social phenomena—in particular, social and ideological interactions and relationships in our society.

Dialogic living language vs. Monologic dead language. The second conceptual contrast, between *dialogic living language* and *monologic dead language,* depicts the constant generative process of language. A member of the Bakhtinian circle, Vološinov (2000)—a Russian linguist and also Bakhtin's close friend, whose work largely coincides with Bakhtin's— introduces the concept of *dialogic living language* as opposed to *monologic dead language.* According to Vološinov, an *isolated, finished, monologic utterance* is "divorced from its verbal and actual context and [is] standing open not to any possible sort of active response but to passive understanding" (p. 73). Bakhtin's (1981) view of passive understanding amplifies Vološinov's explanation of *monologic utterance*. Bakhtin states that passive understanding is actually not understanding at all; when understanding is purely passive and receptive and when a

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listener does not contribute anything to the word already given and just recites it, such passive understanding "leave[s] the speaker in his own personal context, within his own boundaries" (p. 281). The speaker's discourse becomes just "semantic or expressive self-sufficiency" (p. 281), thus becoming monologue and stagnant.

However, Bakhtin (1986) reaffirms that there is no passive understanding, asserting that individual utterances are not "indifferent to one another, and are not self-sufficient" (p. 91) and that "each utterance is filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances to which it is related by the communality of the sphere of speech communication" (p. 91). Vološinov (2000) also considers *dialogic living language* as "the actual reality of language-speech" (p. 94) and defines *language* as "a continuous generative process implemented in the social-verbal interaction of speakers" (p. 98). Therefore, what makes a word living and dialogic is its orientation toward an addressee. Operating with the listener's responsive understanding, a speaker participates in the dialogical process of language. Likewise, Vološinov's appreciation of the influences and the roles that an addressee has in the dialogue of language is synonymous with Bakhtin's emphasis on listeners' responsive understanding, responsivity, and a word's orientation toward listeners and their answers.

Although Vološinov (2000) and Bakhtin (1981, 1986) focus on the influences that the social contexts and listeners have on the speakers, this does not mean that speakers are just passive beings who are only affected by their surroundings. Rather, they actively mediate and negotiate every value and ideology while going through the social interactions and dialogical processes in the life of language, and these mutual interactions and dialogical processes are what both Vološinov and Bakhtin emphasize.

Poetry vs. Novel. In his essay "Discourse in the Novel," clarifying distinctions between the terms *poetry* and *novel*, Bakhtin (1981) provides deep insights into the notion of dialogicality, which he views as the nature of language. Deriving these terms from the origins of the poetry and novel genres, Bakhtin considers poetic genres as having developed "under the influences of the unifying, centralizing, centripetal forces of verbal-ideological life" (pp. 272-273). According to him, poetry accomplishes "the task of cultural, national and political centralization of the verbal-ideological world in the higher official socio-ideological levels" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 273). In contrast to poetry, novels are historically formed by disunifying, decentralizing, and centrifugal forces; therefore, they have "no language-center at all . . . [so that] no language could claim to be an authentic, incontestable face" (p. 273). Bakhtin portrayed the novel as serving to reflect the dialogical nature of language.

Bakhtin's ideas (1981, 1986) of *unitary language* vs. *heteroglossia* and *monologic* vs. *dialogic language* are all connected to his elaboration of the distinctions between *poetry* and *novel*. He argues that poetic genres have no mutual interaction with other social and ideological languages (*heteroglossia*). A poet "accepts the idea of a unitary and singular language and a unitary, monologically sealed-off utterance" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 296). He also explains that "everything that the poet sees, understands and thinks, he does through the eyes of a given language" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 286). Based on the given precentralized ways of poetic symbols, the meanings of the words, rhythms, and any other poetic style, poets express their meanings directly without meditation. In this way, "the language of poetic genres . . . often becomes authoritarian, dogmatic and conservative, sealing itself off from the influence of extraliterary social dialects" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 287). Likewise, according to Bakhtin, poets use only certain centralized words and forms, while disregarding others' intentions or specific contexts embedded

in the words. Therefore, with a firm assumption of a unitary language, poetic genres are impersonalized and decontextualized, making the poet's language subordinate to a single unitary central whole.

On the other hand, a *novel* reflects human beings' *heteroglot* living world. Bakhtin (1981) defines *novel* "as a diversity of social speech types and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized" (p. 262) and additionally explains that the "diversity of voices and heteroglossia enter the novel and organize themselves within it into a structured artistic system" (p. 300). According to him, the novelist "welcomes the *heteroglossia* and language diversity of the literary and extraliterary language into his[/her] own work not only not weakening them but even intensifying them" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 298) and has the authority to accent "each of them [the semantic and expressive intentions of the author] in a particular way—humorously, ironically, parodically and so forth" (p. 299). Novelists deploy and exhibit words in ways that reflect their intentions. They use their unique artistic systems to stratify various languages in specific orders, which "orchestrates the intentional theme of the author" (p. 299). With such a creative authority, a novelist makes his or her own meanings from a diversity of others' voices, *heteroglossia*.

Bakhtin (1981) particularly advocates the comic novel, considered a vivid form for "appropriating and organizing heteroglossia" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 301). He maintains that "comic literature was infused with the carnival spirit and made wide use of carnival forms and images" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 3). Bakhtin (1984) describes *carnivalesque* discourse in comic novels as "revival" (p. 10), "renewal," "changing," and "playful" (p. 11). According to his description, *carnivalesque* discourse is where heteroglossia is most fruitfully actualized:

At the time when poetry was accomplishing the task of cultural, national and political

centralization of the verbal-ideological world in the higher official socio-ideological

levels, on the lower levels, on the stages of local fairs and at buffoon spectacles, the

heteroglossia of the clown sounded forth, ridiculing all "languages" and dialects; there

developed the literature of the fabliaux and Schwanke of street songs, folksayings,

anecdotes, where there was no language-center at all, where there was to be found a

lively play with the "languages" of poets, scholars, monks, knights and others, where all

"languages" were masks and where no language could claim to be an authentic,

incontestable face. (p. 273)

The image of carnival I drew from Bakhtin's description can be portrayed with such words and

phrases as *revival*, *representation of life*, *embracing all people*, and *liberation from stratification

and formalism*. Bakhtin's notion of carnival represents the context in which various kinds of

voices are heard, flourish, and interact with one another so that genuine dialogue becomes

realized. In the following section, I present my application of Bakhtin's theory of language to

understanding children's social competence, interactions, and lives in school. Based on

Bakhtin's theory of language, I also provide an analysis of academic discourses on social

developmental.

Application of Bakhtin's Theory to Children's Social Competence and Social Lives

First, Bakhtin's (1981) notion of heteroglossia represents the diversity of children's social

competence. Children are born with enormous social potential and hundreds of social

characteristics. In fact, various languages of social competence exist—heteroglot competences.

While responsively interacting with other languages, children mediate and present their

languages with regard to social tendencies or skills of relating to people. I believe that one of the

most influential contexts, which are others' languages, conceptual horizons, or alien areas in Bakhtin's terms, is the cultural norms and values in which children reside. In this sense, Bakhtin's notion of unitary language can be used as a metaphor for social and cultural norms with regard to children's social competence because they are the reigning discourse that acts to centralize the diverse languages of children's social competence. Any language of social competence undergoes dialogization within these two social and cultural forces of unitary language and heteroglossia, both internally—in children's minds—and externally—between people or between cultures.

Second, Bakhtin's (1981) notion of language, which is portrayed as constantly struggling with two types of forces, guided me to consider children's social experiences and socialization practices in schools as involving cultural dynamics between predominant, centralized, and unitary values and decentralized, disunified, and heteroglot values. According to Bakhtin (1981), in the actual life of language, people are surrounded by heteroglot languages and ought to stratify them based on individuals' intentions and inner mediations. In proportion to their social significance, people create their own languages and cultures, while reciprocally interacting with others. Similarly, children stratify the strategies of social interactions while acting in accordance with the social significance of those strategies in the classroom or in their peer culture. Then, considering all the contexts that surround them, they recreate their own ways to participate in social relationships and peer culture. As informed by Bakhtin's (1981) expression of tension-filled dynamics between two types of forces, these stratifying forces in language represent its underlying political aspects. Bakhtin states, "As a result of the work done by all these stratifying forces in language, these are no 'neutral' words and forms" (p. 293). The process of the stratification of languages is associated with the social and political stratification of power,

distinctions, and rewards. Therefore, in this dissertation study, supported by Bakhtin's description of dialogic language, I consider social and political tensions between *unitary* and *heteroglot* cultural values that exist in children's social lives and socialization practices in school and focus on those cultural dynamics that reflect social and political power relationships.

Third, the conceptual contrast between monologic dead language and dialogic living language provided me with a meaningful insight; in a living culture, in which the genuine nature of culture is actually manifested, children's social actions, social learning, and peer culture are dialogically responsive to and reflective of one another and cultural values and beliefs in broader society. Rather than being monologically and unilaterally expressive or just affected by the influential factors around them, children participate in a living dialogue regarding social competence. Therefore, children's social competence, social actions, and social relationships should not be regarded as isolated, intrinsic, and genetically fixed traits of young children, but instead should be understood as the product of the reciprocal relationships between them and others, social circumstances, peer culture, and the broader social culture.

Therefore, children's social worlds are filled with dialogic living culture that is not only constantly mediated and negotiated by those belonging to that culture but also influenced by outside factors. Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) and Volosinov's (2000) notion of a living language, which is characterized as reciprocally interactive, reflective, and responsive, informed me that in living cultural dynamics, children's social behaviors, their own peer culture, and the broader society's culture are constantly generated while mutually interacting with and reflecting one another. Children's social behaviors reflect their peer culture's rituals and anticipated responses, and in the broader sense, their peer culture also reflects the broader society's cultural customs and beliefs. How their social behaviors are interpreted and understood in the peer culture is

influenced by and formed within the larger or the dominant culture. Simultaneously, such children's reflections of peer culture and the broader culture contribute to the recreation of a future social culture.

Fourth, because Bakhtin's (1981) concepts of poetry and novel encompass many aspects of language that he explains, this conceptual contrast brought me a good metaphor to visualize two different images of schools. His views on poetry and novel provided me, as a metaphorical image, with the idea that in the space of poetry or a novel, a poet or a novelist conducts a concert with thousands of words. However, these two conductors adopt different stances in working with these heteroglot words. The poet conductor sticks to centralized and unitary forms and does not interact with other diverse words and forms. In contrast, the novelist conductor welcomes and listens attentively to heteroglot words and works responsively and reflectively with them. These two conductors seem analogous to teachers while the spaces of poetry or novel are akin to schools.

As "language is heteroglot from top to bottom" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 291), schools are full of *heteroglossia*, where children bring their diverse ways of living, including their worldviews, cultural knowledge, cultural practices and values, and social and ideological beliefs. Children have many experiences in their daily lives both in and out of school. Through these experiences, while mutually interacting with others and the various surroundings around them, children recreate their own meanings and beliefs and enact them within social relationships and peer culture. Children's actions and functioning in their society and culture, and the meanings embedded in those social actions and activities are not only formed by individual children but are also influenced by social interactions and cultural-historically constructed meanings. Bakhtin's (1981) conceptual image of *novel* inspired me to depict the social world of children in school as

one where *heteroglot* cultures, worldviews, and diverse voices are merged, mediated, and negotiated.

In addition, Bakhtin's (1981) conceptual contrast between *poetry* and *novel* leads to an acknowledgement of the reality of school culture. Although the social world of children is naturally full of *heteroglossia,* in schools where adults' authority is dominant, the heteroglossia of children's social world can be obstructed by the adults' excessive emphasis on normative customs. Therefore, Bakhtin's conceptual image of *poetry* can illustrate classrooms in which the *heteroglot* nature of children's social world is neglected and undervalued, while the unitary and culturally prevailing values are handed down to children without reciprocal dialogic interactions. However, in classrooms that appreciate the heteroglot nature of language, humor and joyfulness are revived. I liken such settings to Bakhtin's concept of novel, which allows all the children to participate in *carnivalesque* discourse and to be liberated from the formalism imposed by unitary language. Thus, I use Bakhtin's concepts of *poetry* and *novel* to understand the dynamics of school culture, where dialogic living interactions are promoted and constrained by various power relationships.

Lastly, Bakhtin's (1981) illustration of *unitary language* and *heteroglossia* guided me to see changing discourses of social competence in the field. As explained earlier in this chapter about the philosophical shifts in the discourses of social competence, interdisciplinary discourses mutually interacted with each other. While being influenced by and reflecting the philosophical spirit of each age, the field's dominant discourse on children's social competence has moved toward a different phase. Although the mainstream discourses have relied on cognitive and behavioral psychology, they have recently been challenged and deconstructed by other perspectives and approaches to children's social competence, relationships, and socialization.

This dynamic interaction within the field's discourses resembles Bakhtin's description of dynamical interactions between languages.

According to Bakhtin (1981), each language is stratified in the *living* discourses by undergoing and participating in the process of centralization and decentralization. Likewise, diverse languages and voices in the field are in tension-filled dynamics between unification and diversification and between predominant, centralized, and unitary perspectives and decentralized, disunified, and heteroglot perspectives. In the process of dialogization, such *heteroglot* languages in the discourses are stratified in proportion to their social significance (Bakhtin, 1981). Through the stratification of language, a specific perspective gains more of the public's assent along with a particular spirit of the time and becomes the language that typifies the phases of the time and social aspects; the superiority of specific perspectives or discourses on a certain phenomenon, which is a predominant discourse of a field, is created.

Cognitive and developmental psychology has long dominated the field of social development studies along with the strong modernist's belief in scientific verification. Although critical perspectives on these discourses have recently gained attention, these alternative views are still sidelined in the field (James, 2007; Schneider, 1993). Moreover, the field's discourses have been predominantly grounded on certain concepts and standards of social competence (e.g., independence, emotional control, and sociability) that were proven and generalized by cognitive developmental studies (Collins, 2002). Such strong dominance of developmental discourse in the field's history closely resembles Bakhtin's (1981) notion of a monologic dead language, which can lead to dogmatism in academia. Therefore, in order to be a *living* discourse, the field should not be entirely monopolized and controlled by any unified form of knowledge or perspective; rather, many different voices and points of view on theories, discipline, and

particularly, with regard to this study, the concept of children's social competence should be valued.

Just as Bakhtin's (1981) distinction between *poetry* and *novel* provided a warning about promoting only the centralized and unitary aspects of schooling without consideration of complexity and diversity in children's world, I ask for caution against authoritarian and dogmatic academic discourses by using these notions. With the academic field opened to diverse voices, the centralized unitary language is able to overcome possible risks of narrowness and stagnation and of alienating diverse potential values and possibilities. Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia shows the possibility of changes and shifts in discourse or paradigm, specifically in academia. The diversity of language or speech, the diversity of responses to particular views on the world, and the diversity of discourses in the academic field provide a space where dominant discourses shift and move while responding to the world. I believe that this is the power of *heteroglossia*, which pulls away from the unified and predominant view and voice. Bakhtin states that a novelist welcomes the heteroglossia and language diversity and incorporates them into his/her own work while not weakening them but rather intensifying them. Here again, Bakhtin's notion of *novel* provided me with a metaphoric image of the researcher, in the forefront of creating and shaping the field's discourses of social competence—a *novelist* researcher who is attentive to and is willing to include heteroglot discourses, worldviews, and voices. In a field where the heteroglot nature of discourses is elevated, any dogmatic constraints will be possibly overcome, and the power of heteroglossia will also be uplifted.

Conclusion

The two theoretical frameworks, cultural psychology and Bakhtin's philosophy of language, guided me to develop my initial ideas for this dissertation study by showing the

necessity of investigating the diverse social worlds of children, particularly those children considered less social than others. These theories provided me with analytical lenses to understand the children's interactions and relationships with others and supported me in transforming my rough findings into more polished ideas with critical points of view. Through these frameworks, I was able to see the discourses in the fields of social development and early childhood education in relation to social and historical contexts.

CHAPTER 4

"A SHY LITTLE GIRL":

A PEACEMAKER FOR HARMONIOUS PEER PLAY

I remember that when I was a little kid, after school had let out, I usually spent the remainder of the day playing with my neighborhood friends. I liked my friends and especially playing with them. I also had close relationships with some of them. Our everyday lives and the occasional issues with these friends were the most important things to me at that time. I truly enjoyed my social life during my early childhood. I did not have problems developing and keeping these friendships with my peers. However, one day, toward the end of the school year, one of my teachers in elementary school commented that I was introverted. Although I might have gotten many comments from other teachers, this comment stuck with me and was actually the occasion when I became aware of how I was viewed by others, adults in particular, in terms of my social side. Looking back on my school life based on my teacher's comment, I seemed to be an introverted, quiet, and shy child at school. I rarely spoke out and was not usually noticed during lessons. I tried to follow the school rules and teachers' directions because I did not want to be recognized and pointed out by teachers. I think I was sensitive and easily hurt by what others said. At the same time, I tried never to do anything to hurt anyone else.

I start this chapter with my memories of childhood because the first time I saw Maggie, I noticed that she was very much like me in my younger years. Maggie is a European American girl who has fair skin and blond hair. At the time of my observation, she was a little short and

slender. When I asked the lead teacher of this Pre-k classroom, Ms. Gracie, if there was a child

whom she considered not socially competent, she described Maggie with such terms as "shy,

quiet, compliant, and introverted." As I observed Maggie's play during the first two weeks in

January 2012, I recognized what the teacher said. When she played with her peers, she rarely

spoke or took the lead, behaved cautiously, and had a soft voice rather than the kind of assertive

voice some other children had. In the first interview, Ms. Gracie described Maggie's social

characteristics as follows:

> Interview transcripts: 02/21/2012
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> [Maggie] is precious. She is an adorable child. She never had trouble on her. Not a
>
> problem. She is very compliant. She is quiet. She kind of likes to get stuff done. She
>
> likes to do a good job. . . . I noticed that . . . she doesn't pursue relationships necessarily.
>
> But, . . . I don't think she feels she is missing out on anything, because maybe, she is not
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> as interactive as sociable.

According to Ms. Gracie, Maggie is a good student who works diligently and well. However, at

the same time, with regard to her social competence, she pointed out Maggie's quietness and

fewer interactions with peers. Such traits as reticence, passivity in social relations, and

unsociability are generally seen as the main characteristics of shy children (Coplan et al., 2011;

Coplan et al., 2004; Coplan, Schneider, Matheson, & Graham, 2010). In this respect, the

teacher's perceptions of Maggie's social characteristics reflect the general public's perceptions

about a shy child.

General Perceptions of Children's Shyness

Shyness generally has long been considered an undesirable and problematic trait that

needs to be overcome, to be gotten rid of, or at the very least, to be addressed (Cacioppo et al.,

2009; Coplan et al., 2011; Rubin et al., 1997; Sanson et al., 2004; Zimbardo & Radl, 1999).

Recently, a few scholars have disputed the deficit theory of shyness, arguing that some of the world's best-known rich and smart leaders are actually shy (Carducci, Golant, & Kaiser, 1999). However, shyness is generally viewed negatively and as problematic in European-American cultural contexts:

> Not unlike many parents who have written to us or spoken with us, the mother fears that shyness may be ruining the child's life, and she's looking for answers before it is too late. It is apparent that anything that makes your child unhappy, such as being unpopular, not feeling comfortable around peers, and being unable to communicate thoughts effectively or to express feelings directly, is a health hazard. . . . these are but a few of the negative consequences that shyness imposes in its silent mission to destroy the human connection. (Zimbardo & Radl, 1999, p. 2)

The above excerpt is from the introduction of the book *The Shy Child: A Parent's Guide to Preventing and Overcoming Shyness from Infancy to Adulthood*. In this introduction, Zimbardo and Radl (1999) share a letter from one parent who expressed her concerns about her child's shyness and elaborate on how parents are afraid of their child's shyness in general. Their elaboration of the parents' concerns demonstrates how children's shyness is commonly regarded in society: shyness may ruin children's psychological health, and children's shyness should be dealt with in their early years because it could be too late to do so successfully later. According to these authors, most people perceive shyness as "an affliction, an unwelcome state of being that forces them to shrink back from life, sometimes all the way to isolation and loneliness" (p. 11).

In addition to this book, there are many other guides and articles on children's shyness—for example, *Say Goodbye to Being Shy: A Workbook to Help Kids Overcome* (Brozovich &

Chase, 2008), *The Shyness Breakthrough* (Carducci, 2003), *The Shy Child: Helping Children Triumph over Shyness* (Swallow, 2000), "12 Tips to Help Your Child Overcome Shyness" (ahaparenting.com), and "Shyness-How Children Overcome Being Shy" (Parents.com). As these titles imply, people in general agree that children need to learn to manage shyness and that an adult can provide support for shy children. This common discourse in society is reflected in Ms. Gracie's descriptions of the focal children's social characteristics. Among the four focal children—Maggie, Jason, Gabriel, and Tyler—three of them were pointed out due to their shyness and introversion[11]. Accordingly, children's shyness, introversion, and inhibited-nature were the main criteria that the teacher used when she recognized less socially competent children. Shyness is one of the main concerns that adults generally deal with when it comes to children's social competence. Ms. Gracie's perceptions of these three focal children as less socially competent reflect this common discourse in society, which considers a child's shyness to be possibly problematic for his/her future life and a limitation that should be overcome with an adult's help.

Against the backdrop of such prevalent views on shy children in society, I observed three focal children, Maggie, Gabriel, and Tyler, closely. According to Ms. Gracie, Gabriel and Tyler had improved throughout the school year. In contrast, Ms. Gracie did not mention Maggie's improvement in her shyness. Just as Ms. Gracie had said, when I observed them, I found that quietness, fewer social interactions, and passivity that are often considered characteristics of shy children were more prominent in Maggie's case than the other two children's cases. With regard to common beliefs in children's shyness, I decided to focus on Maggie's case and paid particular attention to her peer interaction and play. I explored how she interacts with her peers, surroundings, and situations; what roles she performs during play; and how her social actions are

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[11] See Table 1.2 *Participating Children's Names and Characteristics* (pp. 24-25)

associated with those of other peers. Through this careful observation and exploration, I found

that although Maggie was considered quiet, introverted, and passive in her peer play by her

teacher, she was rather actively interacting with her peers and every surrounding and situation in

order to harmonize with her playgroup.

In this chapter, I first discuss Maggie's interest in peers, which was deeper than that of

other children, although she did not explicitly manifest it. Next, I present Maggie's unique and

successful ways of interacting with peers and participating in social play safely and smoothly.

Finally, I focus on the positions and the values of Maggie's social roles in the interactions and

relationships with others.

Maggie's Social Engagement in Peer Play

Quiet and Careful Interest in Peers

Many researchers have distinguished shyness from social disinterest (Asendorpf, 1993;

Coplan et al., 2004; Coplan et al., 2013). According to them, shyness refers to the state in which

children are afraid of initiating or participating in social interactions and relationships though

they want to interact with others. They used the phrase "conflicted shyness," emphasizing

conflict that arises between shy children's desire to approach others and the avoidance tendency

stimulated simultaneously by social fear. In contrast, social disinterest is shown by those

children who do not have a desire to interact with others and prefer to be alone. In other words,

although shy children have a great deal of motivation to interact and play with their peers, they

are restrained by social fear and anxiety. Corresponding with these researchers' differentiation,

Maggie also showed increased interest in other children's play and their feelings and emotions.

Although Ms. Gracie mentioned, "[Maggie] doesn't pursue relationships necessarily" in the

interview, it seemed that she manifested her social interest in a quiet and inconspicuous way that

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did not create any disturbance and was in compliance with classroom rules. In addition, rather than just suppressing her desire to enter and participate in peer play due to social fear and anxiety, along with her cautious temperament, she displayed social interest quietly while just watching peers' play from a distance. In what follows, by describing in detail Maggie's distinctive actions that were frequently shown during free playtime, I discuss the valuable aspects of her onlooking actions and high interest in peers' play.

Interest in peers' play. As free playtime began, Ms. Gracie assigned the children to play centers. Usually, two or three children were assigned to each center, and they were not supposed to freely switch centers. Under this classroom rule, the children played within their assigned centers throughout free playtime, and when they wanted to move to another center, they asked Ms. Gracie's permission. From the very early phase of my participant observation, Maggie's onlooker behaviors caught my eye. I found that Maggie often looked at other children's play in a different center. At first, this raised questions about the reasons for her onlooker actions. However, I soon came to understand her social interests and interplay with every surrounding after I became aware of the classroom rules and watched her play scenes repeatedly. The following vignette shows Maggie during one such scene:

Vignette 4.1 Video transcripts: 02/28/2012

Maggie and Jason are playing in the science center. Maggie was playing with the dinosaur figure set. The figures are in the beans box, and she is about to cover the box with the lid so that they cannot come out. Jason grabs the lid and says, "Now it's my turn. Now it's my turn." He tries to make the lid stand up and cover the space under the desk. He goes in the space under the desk and covers it with the lid like a door. . . . Maggie helps him cover the space where he is under the desk. She stacks the toy boxes

around the desk so that they block one side of the space under the desk. Jason and

Maggie devise a way to make a passage out. Under the desk, Jason shows the way out

from the space under the desk. Maggie adjusts the direction of one of the toy boxes. She

stands up and goes to the shelf that divides the centers between the science and

housekeeping area. In the housekeeping area, Ryan, Katie, and Tyler are pretending to

go on a picnic. They set the table for lunch. Maggie looks at their play for a while. Then,

she goes to the beans box and fumbles with the dinosaur figures for a little while. She

stands up by the shelf and looks at their play longer, while fumbling with one dinosaur

figure.

As the above vignette depicts, even while Maggie was engaged in the play of making a cage with

Jason, she often stopped her play and looked at the other children's play for a while from the

center to which she had been assigned. Among the children in this Pre-k class, she was the only

child who observed other children's play from a distance during play. Because the children were

not allowed to switch centers without permission, Maggie did not enter the other centers and

never asked Ms. Gracie if she could go to the other centers. Although she complied with

classroom rules by not crossing centers, Maggie's quiet observation revealed her interest in the

play of her peers.

When there was no restriction on switching centers, Maggie participated in another

child's play after watching his/her play carefully. Before intervening in a peer's play, she

observed the play for a while, and then, she came closer to the peer and quietly played with that

peer. Without explicit verbal interaction, she successfully entered the peer's play, sometimes by

adding some toys or ideas, and sometimes by beginning the same play independently.

Vignette 4.2 Video transcripts & Field notes: 02/21/2012

Jason is playing with wooden train rails on the carpet. He constructed a circle shape of

train tracks with the wood rail blocks by connecting them together and put a wood train,

made by connecting several wood cars, on the rail. Maggie looks at his play from a

distance for about three or four minutes. She comes closer to him and sits down on the

carpet, constantly watching his play. Occasionally, she goes to see another peer's play.

Then, she comes back to Jason and watches his play for a while. With two wood rails

and one wood block, Jason starts to construct another railroad next to the circle

construction. He connects two wood rails and places the wood block under this

connected railroad. Maggie looks more closely at it, sitting beside Jason. Pointing at the

construction with his index finger, Jason says, "That is a tunnel. It's a wooden tunnel."

Maggie looks at it quietly. Jason pretends that the wood train passes through the tunnel.

Now, he disassembles the tunnel, and Maggie looks at another child's play, turning her

back to Jason's construction. She repeatedly goes back and forth to see Jason's play and

other children's play. . . . While playing alone, Jason made a Y-shaped railroad with

three wood rails. Maggie asks Jason, "What is this for?" pointing at the circle railroad.

Before Jason answers, she connects the circle railroad and the Y-shaped railroad together.

Then, she steps back from the railroad. Jason grabs the circle railroad, moves it to an

opposite side of the Y shaped railroad, and connects them together in a different way

from what Maggie did. For a while, Maggie just stares at Jason's construction while

touching it occasionally. She sometimes steps back from his construction and sometimes

comes closer to see and touch it. Jason disassembles all the wood rails and connects

them to make a long stretch of road this time. Then, he extends his train track by

connecting more wood train rails to it, making an incomplete circle railroad with a ruptured point. While he is doing this, Maggie sometimes touches the rails, but never makes any changes to his construction. When Jason starts to connect the wood trains together, Maggie comes closer to his wood railroad and connects the wood rails at the ruptured section to make a complete circular train track. Then, she changes her position around the track, looking at it from a different side. When Jason puts the wood train on the track and moves around on it, Maggie places two wood blocks under the circular shape train track to make it look like a tunnel.

In the above vignette, Maggie observed Jason's wood rail construction for a while before she actually performed an action. She asked him a question: "What is this for?" After she comprehended his intention to a certain degree by observing and stepping back and forth, she carefully began to make a slight change to Jason's construction. As seen in these two vignettes, when Maggie took action, she cautiously approached the play while considering all the factors, such as classroom rules (e.g., Do not switch areas), a peer's play patterns, and possible moments for her entry and contribution (e.g., the ruptured part in Jason's train track) to the play. Both Maggie's high interest in her peers' play and her slow approach to the play showed the effectiveness of her social interactions.

Interest in peers' feelings and emotions. If Maggie had shown interest only in other children's play, it would be hard to argue that she has a good deal of social interest directed toward people. If she were only interested in peers' play, this could be because her interest is just directed at a kind of play. However, her social interests were not limited to other children's play but extended to other children's feelings and emotions. When a peer seemed to be sick or

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upset, Maggie was the first or the only child who asked about the peer's condition and showed interest in the peer, as described in the following vignettes:

Vignette 4.3 Field notes: 02/09/2012

Tyler does not feel well today. Ms. Gracie prepares a nap mat and a blanket for him. He lies down in the reading area. Maggie is playing in the science center with a snake toy. She found Tyler lying down on the carpet. Maggie comes closer to him to see his face. She checks his face and hovers around him for a while. Maggie goes to Ms. Gracie, who is organizing the materials in the storage, and asks why Tyler is lying down on the carpet and if he is sick.

Vignette 4.4 Video transcripts & Field notes: 04/10/2012

Katie and Tyler are riding bicycles around the playground. Katie speeds up, and Tyler tries to catch up to her. Tyler speeds up, too, but the gap between Katie and Tyler becomes wider. Tyler suddenly slows down and gets off the bicycle. He curls his lips and goes to the stairs of the playground sliding equipment while stretching his arms down to the ground. With an angry face, he crosses his arms and sits down on the stairs. Maggie is playing by the slide and looks at him. She comes closer and asks him why he is so angry. He explains the reason to Maggie in a grumbling voice.

As these vignettes show, Maggie was sensitive to others' facial or bodily expressions and paid attention to their physical and emotional conditions. Her caring for peers was reflected both in her careful observation of peers' emotional states and in her tranquil actions that created no disturbance.

Many studies discuss how shyness is more problematic than social disinterest. For example, some researchers (e.g. Asendorpf, 1993; Asendorpf & Meier, 1993) argue that

"unsociable" children—children who display social disinterest—do not lack social skills and abilities. Rather, these children are considered to have the ability to interact with others appropriately. In particular, Asendorpf and Meier (1993) argue that once "unsociable" children engage in conversation, they spoke as much as sociable children. Therefore, from the view of the social skills approach, shyness is more likely to be related to social incompetence than social disinterest. However, in this study, Maggie's case demonstrates that her social interest and motivation are significantly important resources for her social relationships and should not be disregarded when her social competence is considered. In the case of Maggie, although she manifested her interest by means of quiet and less noticeable actions, not only did she show more interest in others than anyone else, the nature of her social actions was also more contextually appropriate. Therefore, shy children's high interest in others should be valued as a strong point in their social characteristics. The social competence of these children blooms from their tacit but warm interest in others.

Sensitive and Thoughtful Participation in Peer Play

Reticent behavior is generally regarded as a distinguishing feature of shy children (Coplan et al., 2011; Coplan et al., 2013; Coplan et al., 2010). As noted in the earlier discussion and in the teacher's interview, the distinguishing feature of Maggie's social action was quietness. However, as time went by, I realized that she was not simply quiet but was observing the other children very carefully. She then consistently reacted to her peers based on her observation and understanding. In particular, her understanding resulted from her careful consideration of herself, others, and the situated surroundings. Therefore, her seeming quietness does not mean that she is passive in her interactions and lacks initiative in peer play. In this section, I emphasize Maggie's outwardly quiet but inwardly active participation in peers' play, which involves her active

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listening and observations as well as her sensitive and thoughtful reactions to her peers and play

situations.

A competent listener and observer. When I first watched Maggie's play, she rarely

talked and often just fumbled with toys around peers. She behaved like an onlooker of peer play,

or she played peripherally. Ms. Gracie's comments—"[Maggie] doesn't pursue relationships

necessarily. But, . . . I don't think she feels she is missing out on anything, because maybe, she is

not as interactive as sociable"—seem to indicate Maggie's frequent onlooking and peripheral

play outwardly with no social interactions with her peers. However, after watching her play with

Ryan, as described below, I realized that Maggie's onlooking and peripheral play did not consist

of just passive and less engaged behaviors:

Vignette 4.5 Video transcripts: 03/22/2012

Ryan is playing with the police and firefighter costume boxes. Maggie sits down by him

to see what he is doing. Ryan puts the boxes side by side and the plastic bowls and a

food tray upside down. He tells Maggie that she can watch him playing the drum and

that it will be cool. Ryan crosses his arms and starts beating the boxes and plastic bowls

with a plastic knife and a plastic banana. He pretends to play the drums rhythmically.

Maggie hangs around Ryan and smiles while watching him play. She goes to the drawer

that is filled with toy kitchen tools and plastic foods. She gives another plastic knife to

Ryan. Ryan takes it and gives the plastic banana to Maggie. She brings it back to the

drawer. Ryan follows her to the drawer and says something. Maggie smiles at him,

gropes in the drawer, and collects the plastic bananas. She retrieves three bananas.

Maggie says to Ryan, "You can have two," and gives them to him. Ryan puts them in the

drawer and goes back to his drum. Maggie smiles, takes those plastic bananas, and

follows him. She beats the boxes with the bananas.

In this vignette, Maggie observed Ryan's play for a while and, then, found another plastic knife

for him. This helped Ryan play the drum with two plastic knives that were exactly the same.

Then, she found the same bananas for him, again. In this episode, at first she was quiet and

looked as though she was playing by herself. However, while playing quietly, she always

observed other children's play and skillfully and perceptively added toys to their play. As

presented in Vignette 4.3 and 4.4, Maggie's sensitivity to others' facial expressions was also

derived from her keen observation. She was very perceptive and good at noticing peers' moods

and displayed empathy. When playing with peers, she used her talents for observation to

contribute to and improve their play. Therefore, her quietness was not indicative of her passivity

in peer play or social incompetence. It indicated, rather, an active and deep deliberation

undertaken to understand others' play and an important augmentation step, which allowed the

enhancement of the play situation.

Providing nonverbal and implicit suggestions for peers' play. Maggie's attentive

observation and deep deliberation did not end with solitary meditation. Her observation was

often followed by her participation in peers' play. She contributed to the play, suggesting

creative ideas with no or just a few words and adding new toys or proper materials based on her

keen observation and understanding of the context of the peers' play. This was a good strategy

not only for entering into peers' play but also for being welcomed to contribute as an active

participant in the play. Her indirect and gentle suggestions contributed to expanding or entirely

changing her peers' play, as illustrated in the following vignette:

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Today is a sunny day, and the children in the 3-year-old class and the Pre-k class are playing outside together. Katie initiates making a bird's nest with very slender wood sticks. Tyler participates in her play. Katie and Tyler are gathering wood sticks from the bushes around the playground. Several children gather to see Katie's bird's nest. Among them, Maggie also comes to see. She had been putting sand in a plastic castle-shaped basket from a distant area. When Katie and Tyler run into the bush to get more wood sticks, the children, who are gathered around Katie's bird's nest, start to destroy it by stirring the sticks with their feet. "No!!!" Katie shouts and runs to her bird's nest to stop them. It is already destroyed, and the children scatter. Tyler comes back with more wood sticks. Maggie goes up to Katie. Tyler gathers more sticks from the destroyed bird's nest. Katie and Tyler walk around the playground with their wood sticks, and Maggie follows them. Maggie suddenly runs to the playground equipment that looks like a car. And, she points at the ground on the inside of the wheel under the equipment. I couldn't hear her voice, but it seems that she suggested a new place where they could make a new bird's nest. Katie, Tyler, and Maggie look around at the equipment, and they run to another side of the playground. . . . Katie and Tyler begin to make another bird's nest under the main playground equipment. Maggie brings the sand basket with which she was playing that was empty at the time. Katie takes the basket and puts the wood sticks in it. She uses the basket to gather and carry sticks. After a while, Katie no longer uses the basket and puts it on the ground by the bird's nest. Maggie gets the basket and puts sand in the basket. She comes back to the nest with the basket full of sand. Katie's bird's nest becomes bigger and almost takes the shape of a real nest. Maggie cautiously

pours some of the sand in the middle of the bird's nest. Katie looks at Maggie, and Tyler puts more sticks on the nest. Katie runs to the bush. Maggie pours some more sand on the nest. Tyler now takes Maggie's basket and pours sand on the nest. Maggie grooms the nest to make it look good while Tyler pours all of the sand on the nest. Maggie takes the sand basket and now carries sand to the bird's nest with it. Tyler brings another sand bucket and starts to carry sand, too. Ryan comes over, and he also starts carrying sand and pouring it on the bird's nest.

In this scene of constructing a bird's nest, Maggie rarely said anything during this play, while some of the other children, such as Katie and Ryan, were talkative. Although Maggie was very quiet and did not explicitly lead this play, she actually took the lead by slightly changing the play situation. Very occasionally, she suggested a new idea explicitly, like her first suggestion of a new place for the bird's nest in this vignette. However, mostly, she quietly added another material to the play and made slight changes in the play situation, just like the last suggestion she made by carefully pouring a small amount of sand on the bird's nest. After she started pouring sand, Tyler followed her new idea, and Ryan also participated in this play. About the time when the bird's nest was completed, Maggie opened a new territory of this play and intensified the play of constructing the bird's nest. In this episode, she not only entered into her peers' play successfully but also guided them to another type of play.

Sometimes, Maggie's nonverbal and implicit suggestions resulted in the initiation of an entirely new venture of play, and other children followed her lead. In the next vignette, by suggesting a new material to Tyler, Maggie started a new type of play attracting her peers' attention.[12]

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[12] I do not intend to place more value on initiating a new type of play than on participating in other children's play. The point I make here is that Maggie's silence does not always lead her to passively

Katie and Maggie are playing in the science center. Tyler and Joy are playing in the

housekeeping area. Leaning against the toy shelves placed between the housekeeping

area and the science center, Maggie is looking at Tyler and Joy in the housekeeping area.

Tyler finds her watching him and shows a plastic pot to Maggie. Tyler says to her, "This

is gonna be a sugar." Maggie sees the pot and goes to the box filled with beans. Tyler

keeps looking at her. She puts some beans in the plastic container and shows it to Tyler.

Tyler's eyes widen, and he nods his head vigorously, meaning that he wants them.

Maggie comes to Tyler and pours the beans into his pot. Some of the beans fall on the

floor, and she bends over to pick them up. Meanwhile, Tyler pours the rest of the beans

into the pot and, then, closes the lid. Katie looked at Tyler's pot filled with beans.

Maggie opens the lid to see the beans. Tyler also gazes, alongside Maggie, into the pot.

Katie goes to the bean box and grabs some beans in her hand. She comes back and pours

some of the beans in the plastic container that Maggie had used the first time. Joy comes

to them and takes the container in which Katie has poured the beans. Maggie asks, "Do

you need one more?" She goes to the box and gets some more beans. Tyler slightly

shakes the beans in his pot and looks inside. Katie stretches her hand and pours the rest

of the beans in Tyler's pot. Joy also pours the beans from the container in his pot. Katie

goes to get some more beans and puts them in the pot. Tyler says, "Need more sugar!"

This play continues until Tyler looks into the pot and says, "Now, that's enough. I got

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participate in others' play. I would like to highlight diverse roles that children perform in their play. Although Maggie is usually quiet, she participated in play in a variety of manners. For example, she imitated others' play, participated in peers' play, initiated her own play, and took the lead to guide other peers in play. All the roles she played were active. Therefore, I believe that there is no passive participation in children's play.

enough sugar." Tyler shows the pot to Maggie and Katie, "Now I just got.... Now, I am

pretending I got tea in here."

In this vignette, after watching Tyler's play for a while, Maggie showed him the beans.

Although she did not explicitly say so, her actions seemed to ask if he wanted to play with the

beans. Tyler understood and accepted her suggestion. Katie and Joy showed their interest in this

new play and joined. They enjoyed this play until Tyler announced that he had gotten enough

sugar. Then, in the housekeeping area, Tyler and Joy played with the beans for a while,

pretending they were on a picnic and were having tea. In this episode, Maggie started a new type

of play by suggesting pouring the beans into Tyler's plastic pot. Her observation of Tyler's play

enabled her to contribute to the play by adding a material. Then, her nonverbal and implicit

suggestion invited other children to the play. As shown, Maggie's considerate suggestion based

on her observation and deliberation on her peers' play facilitated their play. Here, Maggie's

quietness was indicative of her thoughtfulness. In her peer relationships, she appeared to be a

considerate participant rather than a "too quiet" or "too shy" child lacking sociability.

A Reflective Mediator for Peaceful Peer Play

Researchers discuss that shy children are passive in their social interaction because they

fear initiating interaction with others (Coplan et al., 2004). Just like Ms. Gracie's view of

Maggie as an introverted child who "is not as interactive as sociable," Maggie did not seem to

actively interact with others outwardly. Moreover, she never appeared to show initiative in peer

play by making imperative or directive statements, such as "Let's play . . ." and "Look at this!"

According to the prevalent discourse, Maggie is a typical "shy" child who takes less initiative in

social interaction and peer play. She appears to be a follower rather than a leader in peer play

(Coplan et al., 2004). In a culture that values initiative and leadership, oftentimes, followers are

perceived as incompetent members of a group (Chen & French, 2008)[13]. However, the seemingly passive follower's role Maggie usually performed during play actually indicated her talents in noting not only the subtle meanings of others' facial expressions and gestures but also the contextual meanings of the play situations in which she was engaged. She was a peacemaker who understood the boundaries of peer play and social interaction with others. In the following sections, I first introduce the small quarrel between the children briefly in order to discuss the necessity of the follower's roles in children's peaceful play. Then, by articulating Maggie's roles in peer play, I challenge the dominant perspective on "followers' actions" as a passive role and discuss the importance and the meaningful aspects of such seemingly passive roles in the children's social play in more detail.

The necessity and importance of followership. In many of the incidents that occurred during free play, intervening in others' play and sharing toys were common issues about which the children frequently fought. These conflicts were often created by children when rushing into others' play aggressively. When Katie, Henry, and Jason were playing with blocks, there was a small quarrel between Katie and Henry. This quarrel broke out because they both wanted to play with the blocks. While observing their quarrel, I found that any rupture occurring in the flow of children's peer play was caused by more assertive actions on the part of the children. When both children vigorously insisted on their claim to the same toy, the flow of their play was severed and no longer amicable and smooth. Therefore, in order to flow smoothly, the play should have proceeded with mutual interplays between the children, with them alternately switching roles between leader and follower. The following vignette of the quarrel between Katie and Henry helps to realize the necessity and importance of the follower's role in social interaction.

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[13] The cultural value of initiative in the European-American community has been discussed in detail in Chapter 2 (pp. 59-60).

Katie, Henry, and Jason go to the big and long plastic blocks piled up by the shelves. They are collecting the blocks to make something. Katie shouts, "Hey, let's make a house, everyone! Hey, I need to put this right here!" Henry shouts, "I need to put it… I am gonna do something." Each of them takes a block and puts it together with another block. Grabbing the longest block, which is the only one left on the pile of the blocks, Katie says, "I need this big...." Jason takes eight small blocks and piles them up to make a cube shape. Jason sits on this block cube and says that it is a chair. Katie calls her peers again: "Everyone! Move them over here! So, we can make a really big…" Henry looks at her and her blocks. Henry grabs the short one that Katie puts on the longer block. Katie shouts, "Hey! Henry, stop taking all of this stuff!" Henry takes another one and says, "I need some." For a while, they individually concentrate on what they are making. Katie suddenly says, "Hey, I need one of those." Henry grabs Katie's block and says, "I need one of these two [thin] ones." Katie hurriedly shouts, "Stop taking! Ms. Eunae, Henry is taking my stuff!" Jason is continuing to make something with what he had already taken. Jason says, "This is a power gun!" Henry looks at Jason's structure and grabs one of his blocks. Jason says, "You can have that one. I need this one." Jason takes a long block and puts it on his structure. Jason says, "This is gonna be a power gun." Henry looks at Jason's block structure. Katie collects the long blocks in front of her and shouts, "Hey! Now, I need to have some…. Can I…? Ms. Eunae, I don't have…." Henry tries to take one of Katie's blocks. She hurriedly shouts, "Hey!" and grabs the one he tries to snatch. They pull on the same block, and Henry shouts, "I need one!" Katie

loses her grip on the block, and with a tearful face, she shouts, "Hey… I don't have

any… Hey! Stop!"

Katie was described as socially competent by Ms. Gracie. Henry's social competence was not a

matter of concern, though the teacher mentioned some conflicts between him and the teachers.

In this vignette, all of these children wanted to play on their own. Katie invited the other two

children to join in her play of making a big house by saying, "Hey, let's make a big house,

everyone." However, none of them followed and joined in her play, as they were all self-

initiating their own and different play situations with the blocks. The quarrel started between

Katie and Henry when they both tried to get the blocks they needed to make their planned

constructions. These two children took assertive action, and any possible cooperation necessary

for social play broke down. With regard to these children's social play, I have no intention of

assessing or discussing their social competence. Rather, my focus is on the social actions

apparent in the vignette that can obstruct or promote more cooperative peer play among children.

While watching their play, I realized that in order to play with peers, a child needed to be a

follower at some point. Just like a conversation, which consists of interplay between a speaker

and a listener (Volosinov, 2000), peer play smoothly proceeds through the constant interplay

between momentary leaders and momentary followers.

A peacemaker, who knows and follows boundaries. As Ms. Gracie introduced

Maggie, Maggie appeared to be introverted because she seemed to take less initiative during play

and usually followed whatever her play peers were doing. However, it was notable that when

Maggie played with other children, no conflict or issue was observed. While I was observing

this Pre-k classroom, she never had a sharing issue, which was the most common conflict

between the children during free playtime. I focused on her roles in peer play. I found that

Maggie's seemingly passive roles in peer play—looking as if she just follows her peers' lead—were rather very active acts, including a variety of roles that she performed, and actually had significant influences on peer play. I also found that the most prominent contribution that Maggie made for her playgroup was maintaining peer play situations peacefully and amicably.

As discussed above, children at times need to assume the role of following the lead of other children, rather than leading their peers or initiating peer interactions. Moreover, children's seemingly passive roles as a follower are actually very active and reflective roles in peer play. When one child leads, the other child follows her/him in order to create a harmonious balance between them. The above vignette about conflict in children's peer play substantiates the claim that Maggie's cautious attitudes regarding others' play and seemingly passive roles as a follower are also needed in order to interact with peers properly and successfully and maintain peer play situations peacefully. In Maggie's case, she joins in the collaboration by slightly changing the play while not attempting to cross the boundaries of other peers' play in a manner that would create conflict. She never attempts to take others' toys. Rather, as already shown in the previous vignettes, she attentively observes and listens to other children's play and carefully approaches them so as not to intrude. She is a conscientious listener and observer of other peers' moods and acts and takes action reflecting her understanding of them. In this sense, Maggie is a very competent member of the group, who knows the boundaries of play, which can ensure that play opportunities with her peers are calm, peaceful, and ongoing.

The following vignette presents Maggie's play with Ryan. Their play was impressive in that Ryan was one of the children who frequently had sharing issues with peers, but Maggie and Ryan played side-by-side with each other and were very cooperative when making a sandwich

together. The excerpt showing their playing together helps us see Maggie's talents in augmenting others' play with a cooperative attitude.

Vignette 4.9 Video transcripts & Field notes: 03/22/2012

Ryan picks up a plastic slice of red bell pepper and says, "Let's make a sandwich… with a tomato." He puts the slice of bell pepper in the plastic saucepan. "Let's do a sandwich." From the drawer in the housekeeping area, Maggie takes a piece of plastic hamburger bread, a hamburger patty, and a slice of cheese in her right hand and grabs a saucepan in her left hand. She sits down and puts all the toy ingredients on the floor. Ryan takes out the slice of bell pepper from the saucepan and sits down by Maggie. He piles up all the ingredients on the plastic bell pepper to make a sandwich and puts them all together on the plate. Maggie stands up and looks in the drawer. She says, "I got a chicken leg!" Ryan says, "I am making your sandwich, Maggie!" He also stands up and puts the plate on the drawer to look for another ingredient. . . . [For a while, they explore other ingredients while calling out their names. Ryan pretends to cook the sandwich while cutting the ingredients for the sandwich. Maggie puts chicken nuggets in the oven for a side dish.]. Maggie serves plastic French fries on the large yellow plate and places it on the top of the drawer. Ryan is making another sandwich with hash browns. He takes one of the French fries from the plate and puts it together with a piece of bread and the hash browns. Maggie burrows in the drawer and finds a patty for him. Ryan gets the patty for the sandwich and puts it together. Maggie starts looking for the potato chips for a side dish. She collects several plastic potato chips and puts them on one side of a yellow plate. Ryan finds lettuce and a piece of bacon. He piles up all the ingredients and puts them on another small plate. Ryan asks Maggie, "Can you put this in the oven please?" Maggie

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says yes and puts it in the oven by the chicken nuggets. Ryan takes the other plate with the sandwich that he made previously and puts it in the microwave. Maggie turns the oven switch. Then, Ryan promptly comes forward and turns the oven switch, too.

After Ryan's pronouncement—"Let's make a sandwich with a tomato"—their play began with Maggie's support for collecting the proper ingredients for the sandwich. Even though they did not explicitly assign the roles, their play flowed seamlessly with their spontaneous collaboration. Ryan made a main dish by searching for the ingredients and putting them together for the sandwiches, and Maggie also searched for the ingredients, handed them to Ryan, and made a side dish for the main dish. Maggie and Ryan's play continued about 13 minutes until Ms. Gracie announced clean-up time. In this vignette, while making the sandwiches, Maggie actually performed several roles by helping Ryan make the main dish in her own way, making side dishes for it, and complying with his request. In particular, when Ryan intervened in her turning on the oven switch, she moved aside for him. Likewise, when Ryan moved forward, Maggie moved backward, even while she was self-initiated. She knew to step aside when necessary so as not to interrupt Ryan's actions. While taking different roles that are sometimes more initiative and sometimes more passive, like stepping aside, she mediated the play with peers smoothly and amicably. Even though Maggie rarely took a lead role in peer play, the follower's roles she performed were indispensably important and influential for the smooth flow of peer play.

Likewise, by supporting the flow of the other children's play and amplifying their play by adding toys or incorporating other ways of playing with the toys, Maggie integrated herself into the rhythm of the play. Her actions in which she followed the lead of her peers were actually very reflective and important roles in social collaborative relationships during peer play, which I call "followership." Although Maggie appeared to be just following other peers' play passively,

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she actually actively regulated the flow of the play by sometimes deeply engaging in her own play, sometimes observing other peers' play, sometimes imitating them, sometimes taking the lead in the play, and sometimes implicitly suggesting other materials or ideas to enhance the play. Maggie's roles changed kaleidoscopically to befit the situation and context rather than being sustained regardless of these factors. Maggie, a little girl generally considered shy and less socially competent, was an excellent peacemaker who adeptly performed her role as a follower, which is actually active and reflective, and a mediator in peer play.

Implications

Through the investigation of Maggie's social actions and roles in the playgroups, I found that in contrast to the general negative connotations of children's shyness, the social play and interactions of Maggie, whose dominant social characteristic was considered by her teacher to be shyness, display her unique social talents and social roles. Maggie had a high level of social interest in her peers, was very observant and perceptive regarding not only others' facial expressions and gestures but also the contexts of play, and performed appropriate roles depending on the playing contexts and situations. Based on the findings of this chapter, I provide some implications for educational practices by sharing my thoughts with regard to society's common concerns about shy children.

First, in European-American culture, children's reticence tends to be regarded negatively and as problematic, not only for their future social relationships but also for their academic performance (Coplan et al., 2011; Rubin et al., 1997; Zimbardo & Radl, 1999). Indeed, children's verbal communication was frequently discussed as associated with social competence (e.g. Garfield, Peterson, & Perry, 2001; Katz & McClellan, 1997; Semrud-Clikeman, 2007). For example, Garfield, Peterson, and Perry (2001) argue that children's social understanding is

developed through conversation and that their language abilities and social understanding are jointly developed. Katz and McClellan (1997) also emphasize fostering children's verbal communication by stating, "Verbal skills play a critical role in social interaction even in the early years" (p. 90). Children's use of prosocial words is usually the focus of teachers' interventions and instructions for children's social relationships. For example, Katz and McClellan guide teachers to help children to strengthen their interactive skills by suggesting specific phrases such as "Say to Thomas, 'I want to use the paintbrush a bit longer.'" (p. 90) and "Go to Jane and say, 'May I work on this side of the building?'" (p. 91). Moreover, Coplan et al. (2011) explored teachers' beliefs toward hypothetical children who varied from overly quiet to overly talkative. They reported, "shy children were perceived as being the least intelligent and as being most likely to experience negative social and academic consequences as a function of their behavioral characteristics" (p. 945). Zimbardo and Radl (1999) elaborated on the negative effects of shy children's reticence: "Shy children are reluctant to ask questions, seek clarification, or ask for help in school when they need it" (p. 27).

However, in contrast to this common belief about shy children's reticence, based on the observations of Maggie's play, I found that her quietness, which seemed passive outwardly, was, instead, a very active and reflective deliberation on playing contexts and her peers' verbal and nonverbal interactions. Moreover, based on such quiet observation and deliberation, she proceeded with careful and considerate action in connection with a peer's play. She also, at times, made a significant contribution to the playgroup by quietly suggesting play materials and ideas to the peers in an appropriate manner.

This finding concurs with Hatano and Inagaki's (1998) explanation of the Japanese emphasis on children's listenership during lessons. While pointing out the cultural value placed

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on speakership in the European-American community, they argue that a child's silence does not indicate his/her passive participation or incompetence. They state, "We believe that American students have been trained to be good speakers, for example, to express their ideas clearly and persuasively. In contrast, Japanese children are good listeners, trained to listen to significant others eagerly and carefully" (p. 91). Maggie's quiet and reserved actions are similar in manner to listenership. For example, as portrayed in Vignette 4.2, her peaceful and harmonious participation was guaranteed by her methodical actions, such as watching a peer's play from a distance for a while, gradually coming closer to the peer's play by sitting near the peer and respectfully touching the blocks, and carefully being involved in the peer's play by providing contextually appropriate supplementary ideas or materials to enhance the play. Likewise, she did not rush to join her peers while observing other peers' play carefully for a while. Reticently, she entered another peer's play more naturally and successfully by taking appropriate actions based on her observations.

Maggie's successful ways of participating in peers' play also resemble the children's strategies studied by Corsaro (1979). According to Corsaro, children's direct and explicit suggestions are easily recognized as intrusions and are likely to be rejected by peers. In this study, Maggie's quiet and indirect entrance induced other peers to accept and welcome her into their play. Although she might be viewed as participating timidly in her peers' play, her quiet but thoughtful ways of entering peers' play and of interacting with peers during play were more easily accepted and welcomed by her peers. The quiet, implicit manner in which Maggie joined in her peers' play manifests her perceptible awareness of what would be accepted and rejected by her peers, that is, her sense of boundaries for playing with others. Therefore, her quietness is not

only an important resource for appropriate interaction with others but also evidence that shows her deep immersion in peers' play.

Second, the valuable aspects of Maggie's less initiative participation in peer play are supported by the Bakhtinian perspective on conversation (Bakhtin, 1981; Vološinov, 2000). Young children's initiative is generally regarded as important when children's social competence is considered in the European-American culture (Chen & French, 2008; Coplan et al., 2004). For example, the definitions of social competence in the previous literature (e.g., Katz & McClellan, 1997; Ladd, 2005)[14] often include the word *initiate*. Even though it has been argued that children's unsocial behaviors during play, such as unoccupied and onlooker play, should not necessarily be viewed as developmentally problematic (Rubin, 1982), a child who plays with peers by expressively using words and usually initiates peer interactions and relationships is usually considered socially competent (Katz & McClellan, 1997; Ladd, 2005). However, I argue that children's interactions during play can be understood as a continuous dialogical process from the perspective of Bakhtin (Vološinov, 2000). Volosinov (2000) states that a conversation is "the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee" (p. 86). Bakhtin (1981, 1986) emphasizes a listener's roles in a conversation by articulating them with the term *responsive understanding*, which is considered active and influential in a dialogue[15]. During peer play, one child speaks to another and initiates a certain play situation, and the other child listens to, observes him/her, and reacts to his/her actions. Such reactions affect the initiating child's actions and are also reflected in future play situations. Therefore, one child's behavior at a certain moment is half the other child's (Bakhtin, 1981). No one can appropriate this play, because the participants build scenarios mutually, adopting each

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[14] Refer to Table 2.1 *Definitions of Social Competence* (pp. 49-50)
[15] The discussion of Bakhtin's view of listeners was provided in detail in Chapter 3 (pp. 85-86).

other's thoughts and serving each other's intentions and ideas. The role of the listener in understanding the speaker's expressions through words and actions and in responding appropriately contributes to the smooth flow of the conversation and interaction. Likewise, the roles of follower, listener, and respondent in children's peer play are also needed as much as the roles of leader, speaker, and initiator to secure smooth social interactions and social play.

In the above section, I highlighted the active, reflective, and responsive aspects of Maggie's seemingly passive roles as a follower in peer play. I discussed, in light of Vignette 4.9, that the role of "follower," which she usually performed in peer play, involved multifarious actions reflecting playing peers and contexts. Moreover, I noticed that her peer play usually progressed smoothly and peacefully and that the roles she performed in peer play were decisive in such collaborative peer play. Maggie's seemingly passive roles in play actually demonstrated her talents not only in perceptively understanding other children's intentions and emotions expressed through diverse channels and contexts of play but also in reacting to them in an appropriate manner. Likewise, in contrast to general negative perceptions of children's lack of initiative and following actions, Maggie's social tendency to follow the lead of other peers does not connote a lack of social skills or capabilities on her part. Therefore, just as Bakhtin (1981) described active and influential listeners' roles with the term *responsive understanding* in his *dialogism*[16], I challenge the general notion of children's following actions during play as a passive act by proposing the term *a dialogic follower*. With the term a dialogic follower, I highlight a following child's active, responsive, and reflective roles while engaging in dialogic interactions with their peers. Maggie, who is often a dialogic follower in peer play, performed

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[16] See the detailed description of Bakhtin's notion of dialogism (pp. 84-89).

multifarious roles while quietly speculating and interacting with her peers and their play contexts in a dialogic way.

In addition, as discussed and as was manifested in the previous scenes in which Maggie suggested new items and a new idea during peer play (see Vignette 4.6 and Vignette 4.7), her roles in peer play were not always performed as a follower. If one looks more closely at the overall oversimplification of the interpretation of a child as a leader or a follower, one sees that the follower does not always remain as a follower, and the leader does not always remain as a leader. With regard to such dialogic role changes between a speaker/a leader and a listener/a follower, Bakhtin (1986) posits, "Any understanding is imbued with response and necessarily elicits it in one form or another: the listener becomes the speaker" (p. 68). Just like a conversation in which each individual takes turns speaking, children participate in play as both speakers and listeners. Even if one child mostly listens to the other and follows what the other child does, this mostly-following/listening child becomes a speaker/leader at some point when he/she responds and reacts. Therefore, there is a more subtle give-and-take, a mutual adding to and sharing, in which Maggie becomes a momentary leader who augments and enhances the peer's play.

Third, based on the literature review and this study's findings regarding Maggie's social characteristics and roles in peer play, I call on early childhood teachers and researchers to reflect upon and reconsider any negative images of children's shyness. In this Pre-k classroom, no adult intervention to deal with Maggie's shyness was observed, possibly because Maggie had no conflict with her peers during free playtime. Therefore, no direct influence by an adult on Maggie's social characteristics was observed in this study. However, several studies (Asendorpf, 1993; Coplan et al., 2011; Katz & McClellan, 1997; Zimbardo & Radl, 1999) have implied

influences of cultural discourses on children's social characteristics. For example, they posit that in the European-American culture, children's shyness often arouses due to the concern of parents and teachers, and as the children grow up, it becomes their own concern, too. Such adults' concerns are associated with the belief that shy children have difficulty developing social relationships and may fail to connect with people around them and have good social and work lives. Therefore, it seems that cultural judgments and beliefs regarding shyness tend to suppress shy children's social talents, while depreciating and devaluing them. Cultural discourses regarding shyness may lead these shy children to develop negative images of their personality and to be concerned about their social characteristics as they grow up. Likewise, Ms. Gracie's comments on Maggie's shyness reflect the discourse of society regarding children's shyness, and possibly, in Maggie's life, such social and cultural discourses may have an influence on her in one form or another. However, the actual influences of the teacher's belief regarding Maggie's shyness were not manifested by this study. Therefore, this may need to be investigated and articulated more fully by future research.

It could be said that this focal child may not have been an extremely inhibited child and that my findings might have been different if I had observed a more extreme case of a shy child who would be considered *too shy* by more common public standards. However, Maggie's case was significant in that even if she has a moderate case of shyness, among the shy children designated as such by the socially and culturally constructed spectrum of shyness, some of those who share many similarities with Maggie would be reconsidered based on these findings. Since Maggie was recognized as shy by her teacher, I believe that there must be many children like Maggie, whose shyness is a matter of concern for their teachers or parents. I believe that Maggie's case, at least, sheds light on the positive aspects of these "Maggie-like shy" children's

social interactions and relationships and their social competence. This finding shows that "so-called" shyness does not always affect an individual's social life negatively and problematically. At the very least, I believe that her case brings about recognition of the possibility of a different and a more complex view of shyness. My findings regarding Maggie in this chapter may also serve as a kind of caution by showing that society's overall negative perceptions of children's shyness may simply be derived from cultural prejudice against shyness and, as a form of discourse, possibly have considerable impact on a child's self-image as a social being, life in school, and social life by indiscriminately slapping labels on children.

CHAPTER 5

A BOY WHO FREQUENTLY PLAYS USING BODILY INTERACTION:
AN ENJOYABLE AND SUCCESSFUL WAY OF PLAYING AND INTERACTING
WITH PEERS

I give her a smile. She looks at me, and the corners of her tiny lips go up. "Wow! Ji-woo smiled! Did you smile, Ji-woo? So lovely you are!" My heart is filled with a feeling of happiness. This tiny 6-week-old baby looks at me and reacts to my smile. "Ji-woo, your smile is so pretty. I love you so much!"

While writing this dissertation study, I gave birth to my first child, Ji-woo. Raising such a tiny newborn baby, I have experienced many thrilling moments, which led me to feel the emotions that almost all mothers in the world probably have felt and made me think of a mother's love, a love that may be common to nearly all mothers in the world. Among these moments, I cannot forget when my baby smiled at me for the first time. Not only was it heart-warming, it was also surprising because such a tiny newborn baby was already showing her social nature. I realized that babies express themselves as soon as they are born and that such self-expression is part of a human's sociality. Even when it looks as if they are playing alone, they interact with people around them by sensing that they are placed among people and that they are one of those people. When Ji-woo was about 7 months old, I found that she concentrated and played alone with toys much longer without whimpering when she was surrounded by several people than when she was just with me. Her awareness of being with

others in one place already involved social interactions, although she was not yet interacting verbally or physically with people.

What I learned from this child-rearing experience helped deepen my understanding of Jason's social interactions during peer play—his joyful and effective bodily interactions with peers. My primary insight is that although such little babies and young children interact with people using their five senses, educators and researchers tend to pay more attention to or place more value on children's verbal interactions. This is especially the case when the children get older and when the foci of researchers are their social competencies (e.g., Garfield et al., 2001; Katz & McClellan, 1997; Semrud-Clikeman, 2007). According to Knott (1979), early research on children's nonverbal interactions or communications has predominantly focused on infants' and toddlers' physical contacts or interactions with their caregivers (e.g., Brownlee & Bakeman, 1981; Iitaka & Yamada, 1977). The studies involving children older than three focused on children with special needs such as Autism, Down syndrome, or language impairment (e.g., Alexandersson, 2011; Chiang, Soong, Lin, & Rogers, 2008; Chung, Carter, & Sisco, 2012; Dammeyer & Køppe, 2013). Nonverbal communication in a classroom was often discussed within its educational value as an alternative mode during lessons (e.g., Stamatis, 2011) and a means of promoting a classroom climate for learning (e.g., Knott, 1979); therefore, the foci of the research were placed on the nonverbal communication between teachers and children. Likewise, in terms of children's social competence and development, children's nonverbal, bodily peer interaction was rarely included as the foci of research, particularly relating to its values in children's peer relationships, social play, and peer culture.

Literature Review on Children's Bodily Play

With regard to children's bodily play, researchers interested in this kind of children's play have used terms, such as *rough-and-tumble play*[17] (Pellegrini, 1988, 1989; Smith & Lewis, 1985; Tannock, 2008) and *physical activity play*[18] (Pellegrini & Smith, 1998), while discriminating these from children's aggressive acts. According to Tannock (2008), children's rough-and-tumble play has been discouraged in the field of early childhood education as demonstrated by early childhood organizations such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). NAEYC discouraged such kind of children's play in the teacher guideline, *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* (Bredekamp, 1986). Tannock continues, "Clearly, the NAEYC now recognizes that rough-and-tumble play for preschool aged children is acceptable. What is not clear is whether rough-and-tumble play is 'desirable' and to be encouraged and supported" (p. 358). Recently, the educational value of children's rough-and-tumble-play has been widely accepted in the field of early childhood education (Pellegrini & Smith, 1998; Tannock, 2008). For example, Pellegrini and Smith (1998) reviewed numerous studies on physical activity play and argued that according to the child's age, different types of physical play—*rhythmic stereotypies*[19], *exercise play*[20], and *rough-and-tumble play*—reach their peaks respectively during infancy, preschool years, and middle childhood. Each offers children particular benefits in regard to physical, cognitive, and social domains. In particular, the authors

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[17] *Rough-and-tumble play* is defined as "vigorous behaviors such as wrestling, grappling, kicking, and tumbling that would appear to be aggressive except for the playful context" (Pellegrini & Smith, 1998, p. 579).

[18] *Physical activity play* is explained that it "may involve symbolic activity or games with rules; the activity may be social or solitary, but the distinguishing behavioral features are a playful context" (Pellegrini & Smith, 1998, p. 577). For exmple, it includes "running, climbing, chasing, and play fighting, the latter being a component of rough-and-tumble play" (pp. 577-578).

[19] *Rhythmic stereotypies* are gross motor movements (e.g., body rocking and foot kicking) without goal or purpose (Pellegrini & Smith, 1998).

[20] Pellegrini and Smith (1998) defined *exercise play* as "gross locomotor movements in the context of play" that "may or may not be social" (p. 578).

put more emphasis on the physical benefits of exercise play for young children than on the other domains by explaining that "exercise play functions primarily to develop physical strength, endurance, and economy of movement" (p. 584). In Tannock's (2008) study, the educators considered rough-and-tumble play a mechanism for "[learning about] self-control, compassion, boundaries, and their own abilities in relation to other players," "learning to make judgments," "learn[ing] to adapt their rough-and-tumble play depending upon the abilities of other players," and "learning about themselves" (p. 360).

However, although children's rough-and-tumble play has been perceived positively in the field and academia, in my preliminary literature search, I found only a few studies (e.g., Lindsey & Colwell, 2013; Pellegrini, 1988) that related rough-and-tumble play or physical play to children's social competence. For example, Pellegrini (1988) investigated the association between children's sociometric status (popular vs. unpopular/rejected) and the possibility of rough-and-tumble play moving into aggression or games-with-rules. As a result, he reported that the "unpopular/rejected" children are more likely to move rough-and-tumble play into aggression and that "popular" children are more likely to lead their rough-and-tumble play into games-with-rules. Lindsey and Colwell (2013) examined the association between children's physical play and their affective social competence. According to them, whereas rough-and-tumble play contributed to children's emotional expressiveness and emotional regulation, exercise play contributed to their regulation. Likewise, although children's rough-and-tumble play, physical activity play, and bodily play have recently received more consideration within the area of child development, they are still rarely investigated with consideration paid to their own values in children's social relationships and peer culture.

Moreover, with this term *bodily play*, there was only one researcher, Knut Løndal (2010, 2011), a Norwegian scholar, who used this term to investigate the association between children's experience with place, their spatial cognition, and their understanding of place and bodily play. Although he did not explicitly explain, the term *bodily play* seemed to be derived from his theoretical perspective—the phenomenological concept of body, which he described as follows: "The relationship between the human being and the world is constituted on a perceptual, bodily level" (Løndal, 2011, p. 389). Although my use of the term *bodily play* may reflect the meaning of Løndal's description, without reference to his term related to the phenomenological concept of body, I refer to Jason's physical play by *bodily play* for my own purpose. While observing Jason's play, I found that the term *rough-and-tumble play* (Pellegrini, 1989), which usually has a targeted peer, is too narrow to express his play. Jason often engaged in body movement for self-expression without any physical contact with peers, which I consider to be a part of his social nature and a way for him to socially interact with others and his surroundings. I also think that the term *physical activity play* (Pellegrini & Smith, 1998), which includes *rhythmic stereotypies*, *exercise play*, and *rough-and-tumble play* with the broader meanings of physical play, reduces the meaning of the social aspects of Jason's seemingly solitary play. As opposed to my emphasis on the social nature of Jason's bodily expression, *rhythmic stereotypies* is viewed as nonsocial, and *exercise play* is distinguished between nonsocial solitary play and social play. In other words, by naming Jason's play *bodily play*, I intend to emphasize his nonverbal, bodily interactions with peers, that is, the social aspects of his body movement while disambiguating it from the term *verbal interaction*.

The Teacher's Perceptions of Jason's Social Characteristics

Jason is a little boy with brown hair, fair skin, and blue eyes. When I asked Ms. Gracie, a lead teacher of this Pre-k classroom, to point out a child who was less social than the other children, Jason was the child whom she mentioned immediately. When I asked her to describe Jason's social characteristics, she answered as follows:

Interview transcript: 02/21/2012

Ms. Gracie: Jason, I think he is a competent little boy. . . . I think he is confident in himself. I think he is confident in who he is. And, I think, he is relaxed in who he is. . . . He seems very content, just taking a toy and playing by himself. And, it doesn't seem to me . . . [that] he feels he is missing anything. He is fine with us. And, that is just what he wants to do. . . . He had anxiety, separation anxiety with his mother, when he first started [at the] beginning of the year. He has improved in that. . . . He doesn't take the lead. . . . So, like I said, for him, a few months ago, I would have said, he has separation anxiety, and he is dealing with some of those issues. And, he is improving. So, I don't know. It's not as prominent anymore. He's fit in to the routines; he's adjusted.

With regard to Jason's social competence, Ms. Gracie particularly mentioned his previous separation anxiety, infrequent social interaction, and preference for non-social play. Ms. Gracie relates Jason's social competence to his separation anxiety, and this shows her belief that a child who quickly becomes stable and relaxed in an unfamiliar setting is more socially competent. Considering that Ms. Gracie mentioned Jason first when asked to point out a child less social than his/her peers, it seems that she regards children's ability to feel secure whenever, wherever, and with whomever as an important aspect of their social competence.

However, among the participating children, Jason was the only child whom I found confusing and perplexing whenever I observed him. From my point of view, he had no problem playing with other children. When I first met him, he welcomed me more so than any of the other children by following me and asking me several questions, such as "Do you know my name?" and "Do you know what it is?" while pointing at the voter sticker attached to his T-shirt. He looked like an active boy but not overly so. During free playtime, he crawled under a desk in the science area, stamped his feet repeatedly, jumped up and down, wallowed in the block area, or walked on his tiptoes. Even when he was playing with the manipulative blocks, he used whole body motions by walking in a leaping manner while holding the blocks in different ways. In my earlier observation, I did not find any particular characteristic that would have caused him to be considered less social than other children.

Because Ms. Gracie had already mentioned that Jason's separation anxiety was no longer prominent, he might have appeared to play with peers well at free playtime during my observations. What I noticed was that he was more likely to be playing alone and enjoying his independent play. In this respect, my observation concurred with Ms. Gracie's comments regarding Jason's social characteristics, such as "He is confident in himself" and "He seems very content, just taking a toy and playing by himself." He seemed not to necessarily prefer playing with peers, because he looked very happy when playing by himself, and he enjoyed his independent play very much. Even while he played with peers, his social interactions were more likely nonverbal.

I wondered if Jason's seeming non-preference for social play and his infrequent verbal interactions raised Ms. Gracie's concerns about his social competence. I noticed that Ms. Gracie often instructed the children to use words when they played with peers, had conflicts, and

entered in other's play. She usually emphasized the manners that the children should embody when they interacted with others and when they played in the classroom. She often said: "We need to learn manners." "Is that a good manner?" "Use your words!" "Talk nicely with each other." "Ask nicely, then you are welcomed to play." The manners that she referred to were mostly intended to restrict children's bodies inside the classroom and to guide the children to interact with peers in a way appropriate for verbal interactions. Her primary intervention and guidance for the children's social interactions focused on interacting with others verbally and solving problems with verbal interactions. She emphasized the specific phrases or statements (e.g., "I am sorry." "Can I play with that?" "Can I try it?" "Thank you.") that the children should use in certain situations.

As opposed to Ms. Gracie's emphasis on using words and showing good manners, Jason displayed a special preference for bodily play and a tendency to interact with others through his body. Jason usually played with peers in a bodily way (e.g., making a funny face or movement, walking with his arms swinging, and saying nonsensical words). Among the reasons for Ms. Gracie's nomination of Jason as a child less socially competent—previous separation anxiety, infrequent social interaction, and preference for non-social play—I focused on the latter two, because they seemed to be associated with my observations on and initial findings of Jason's frequent bodily play and bodily interactions. I noticed conflicting values between the teacher and the children with regard to ways of interacting with others and the meanings of bodily movements during play. While Ms. Gracie frequently instructed the children to use their words and show good manners, Jason's ways of relating with others were usually non-verbal, and he was often active in his movements, making his play look non-contextual and non-social. Therefore, I found that Ms. Gracie's comments about Jason's infrequent interaction and social

play were significantly related to his frequent bodily play and interactions. Since his separation anxiety was not observable any longer, I decided to explore the meanings of Jason's bodily play in his peer culture while making a connection to his social competence.

When observing his bodily social interactions with peers, I learned that children seem to have their own body culture that is somewhat different from that of adults. The meanings that children project in their physical contact and interactions appear different from those of adults. In this chapter, while narrating Jason's social and bodily play with peers, I focus on the various ways in which children interact and connect with others and their peer culture of bodies. In the following sections, by providing examples of Jason's bodily play and humor, I discuss the positive aspects of his social tendency in his peer relationships and social play. I particularly focus on the values of children's bodily play in their own peer culture and the roles of Jason, the boy who showed more initiatives in bodily play than any of the other children in this Pre-k class, in the children's peer play and peer relationships.

Jason's Nonverbal and Bodily Play

While Ms. Gracie emphasized "using appropriate words" and "conducting good manners" to the children, they expressed and shared their emotions and thoughts with peers in a variety of ways. Without any verbal interactions, Jason and his peers rolled around and laughed together. He interacted with other children through hugging, holding other kids, following his peers' movements, and laughing with his friends. Although the children were required to control their bodies in school, by expressing themselves through these whole body movements, they had fun making one another laugh and shared their thoughts and emotions with play peers. The children, Jason in particular, spoke in invented languages, made funny faces, and acted strangely when playing with peers. These were all their ways of socially interacting and were occasionally

more effective than mannered behaviors and words. In the following sections, I present

examples of Jason's ways of bodily social play and interacting with peers, which were successful

as well as enjoyable to him and his peers.

Bodily Play: An Enjoyable Means of Peer Interaction

The most distinct characteristic of Jason's play was that he often expressed himself and

interacted with peers bodily. Although there were also times when he played quietly,

particularly while concentrating on his solitary play, when he played with peers, he mostly

interacted with them bodily. Even while playing alone, he would leap up and down holding a

toy in this and that way and crawled into the space under the workbench, and so on. The

following vignette illustrates one such moment.

Vignette 5.1 Video transcripts: 02/21/2012

Jason is playing with a wheel and a stick from a toy vehicle construction set in the

manipulative area. The stick is inserted in the hole of the wheel so that it can roll on the

floor when pushed properly in a quick and strong way. Jason rolls it on the floor, runs,

and follows to catch it. After catching the wheel, he rolls it again in the opposite

direction. He comes and goes in and out of the manipulative area several times. He

makes another wheel construction identical to the previous one, and then, he grabs the

ends of the sticks. (At the other ends of the sticks, the wheels are fixed.) Looking at each,

one at a time, he cautiously swings them from side to side, making pendulum movements

and walks around. Joy comes to Jason, watches his play for a while and, then, goes back

to the block area. Jason has these two wheel-constructions leaning slightly on the desk to

hold them firmly and hops, turning his body around. . . . Ms. Gracie gets all the

children's attention. She reminds the children of the inside play rule.

Ms. Gracie: "Look at me! One, two, three, eyes on me. We are where? Are we at the playground? We are in what? Inside. We have classroom indoor play rules, right? Now, unless you want to stop, you go with your toys and sit back at the table. And, you need to bring down the level and follow the rules. I want you to have a good time, but we are not outside, O.K.? O.K., have fun. Enjoy yourselves, but we are not gonna be so loud. Do you understand? Yes, Ma'am? [The children reply, "Yes, Ma'am"] O.K., have fun." Jason now inserts a stick (like an axle) into two of the wheels. He comes to me and explains how his construction moves, "Look how my small motions I made. …" He goes back to the table and hops and turns his body around, while tilting this construction to one side and to the other side repeatedly so that the wheels hit each other and make a sound.

As shown in the above vignette, even when playing alone, he usually explored toys and expressed himself in a bodily way using whole body movements. He seemed to have pure fun just by using his whole body freely. Just as my daughter Ji-woo plays with toys longer when she is surrounded by several people than when she is just with me, Jason seemed to enjoy himself when playing in the same place together with peers or when expressing himself bodily and through facial movements.

Jason's joy in his bodily play for its own sake can be explained by Løndal's (2010) study, which investigates the influence of children's bodily play on their sense of coherence (SOC)—their experiences of "the world as comprehensible, manageable and meaningful" (p. 404). He argues that being together with peers and having an impact on what they are doing are important basic experiences for children that promote their SOC, which is decisive for their health and well-being. In other words, even while engaged in solitary bodily play, Jason joyfully engaged

in this play, because he was with peers whom he knew well and with whom he felt comfortable.

In addition, he also experienced the achievement of successfully balancing and managing his

body while manipulating objects and simultaneously engaging in such bodily movements as

hopping, leaping, and swaying and bending his body from one side to the other. Løndal explains

children's pleasure derived from their manageable bodily experiences as follow: "Managing such

skills in bodily play appears to be important for the child in order that he or she shall experience

life as manageable. This seems to result in a noticeable feeling of pleasure and satisfaction" (p.

400).

In addition, Løndal (2010) continues: "[children's pleasure and satisfaction] is associated

with attention from other persons. The movement contributes to locating the child in relation to

others when someone responds with an immediate reaction to the accomplishment" (p. 400). As

he noted, observing Jason's solitary play, I came to think that his play was actually not solitary.

Although Jason appears to play alone in this vignette, I found that as long as he was placed

among the children and surrounded by everything in the classroom, he was continuously

interacting with others and even things. Even when he looked like he was playing alone, his

facial and bodily expressions during play were often directed to his peers. On the date of this

vignette, Jason outwardly played alone throughout the whole free playtime without any

particular peer interaction. However, he occasionally looked at another child's play and called

others' attention to his play. For example, in this vignette, he captured my attention to explain

his wheel construction, particularly its motions resulting from his whole bodily movement. Joy

also came and watched his bodily play and expressions with the wheel construction for a while.

Therefore, although it appeared as though he was playing alone, without any explicit social

interactions, while exploring toys bodily and expressing himself bodily, he seemed to have fun interacting bodily with people and things.

Jason's bodily play was also frequently observed while he was playing with peers. He often reacted to peers with comical gestures or sounds that sometimes seemed to have no particular meaning. However, his gestures or sounds led his peers to engage in bodily play, and Jason and his peers happily enjoyed this type of play, which was continuously accelerated by their bodily interplays often embedded with a playful sense of fun and laughter. In what follows, I discuss the functions of Jason's bodily actions or reactions in children's peer play and children's nonverbal, bodily interactions during play in more detail.

Vignette 5.2 Video transcripts: 03/29/2012

Jason and Joy are playing in the manipulative center. Joy is connecting several plastic pipes together and constructing a big entangled pipeline on one table. . . . Jason comes to Joy's pipe construction. He sits at one end of the pipe construction, and Joy is standing at the other end of it. Joy makes a sound, "Burrrrrrrr." She repeats the sound, "Burrrrrr," and pretends that something is passing through the inside of the pipeline and coming out from it to Jason. Jason suddenly stands up, lifts both of his arms over his head, and covers his face with his hands. He walks to Joy with short and quick steps and lightly bumps into her. Joy laughs and pushes him from her. Jason comes back to the seat where he has sat and repeats this type of play several times while making slightly different poses. When Jason comes closer and bumps into her, Joy laughs and pushes him. Then, Jason stops playing this game and blows his breath through the pipelines. He makes a sound, "Ewuuu," and points at Joy. Joy reacts to him by doing the same thing. Jason looks inside of the pipeline and, then, places his ear to it. Joy follows him. Jason

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says, "I can't hear you!" . . . Jason and Joy exchange positions, and Joy blows through

the pipe. Joy laughs and blows again. Jason laughs and has a comical facial expression.

Joy blows again. Now, Jason makes a bigger gesture while shaking both his arms with a

comical face and turning around. Joy laughs aloud. They laugh together and exchange

positions. Looking at Joy, Jason pauses his blowing for a while. Jason blows, and Joy

also shakes her arms, turning around with a huge laugh. Jason now comes to Joy with a

jump and says, "My turn!" They exchange turns several times. As they continue to take

turns making comical gestures, their gestures become bigger, and their laughs become

louder. At that point, Ms. Gracie calls to them in a firm voice, "Hey, Jason and Joy. Is

this how we behave at the table toys in the classroom?" Joy quickly sits down on the

chair in a correct posture and answers her, "No, Ma'am." Jason also answers, "No,

Ma'am."

As seen in this vignette, Jason reacted to Joy's blowing action with exaggerated gestures and by

touching her. His seemingly nonsensical body movement became a very fun game for Jason and

Joy. His comical bodily reaction sparked Joy's laughter and motivated her to repeat her blowing

in order to continue this fun game. When Joy repeatedly blew again and again, his postures and

bodily movements changed in response, and his comical and unexpected motion made this game

more fun and prolonged it. After repeating this type of active play several times, at the moment

when her or his interest was declining, Jason found another way to elicit laughter, which was to

make a joking sound "Ewuuu." It seemed that he was blowing his breath on Joy and saying

"Ewuuu," like "Yuck," jokingly meaning his breath or her breath stunk. This alternative way of

playing the game attracted Joy's interest and made her repeat his action. Then, Jason prompted

her to make a sound, placing his ear closer to the end of the pipeline and saying, "I can't hear

you!" After interacting with each other in such a bodily way with few words, they changed their previous game slightly. They exchanged positions and rotated their roles of making silly motions and blowing through the pipe. I found that while playing these bodily games, their fits of laughter grew in intensity. Even after Ms. Grace's intervention, they continued to play a similar game, and on the day of this observation, they played together joyfully until the end of free playtime.

Likewise, Jason tended to react to his peers by using bodily movement, and his bodily reaction often elicited his peers' laughter. In addition, when he made funny actions, other peers engaged in his play with a lot of laughter. In this respect, although Jason was the child who most frequently played with peers in such bodily ways among the children in this Pre-k class, it seemed that making funny gestures and sounds, and other such mutual bodily interplay of the children during play, was in the nature of their social interactions and play and, therefore, naturally stimulated laughter, interest, and fun. With regard to such joyfulness in children's bodily play, Pellegrini and Smith (1998) also mentioned that "[exercise play] is self-motivated, playful, and associated with enjoyment, self-efficacy, and mastery" (p. 586)[21]. As implied by this statement, children's bodily interaction and play is a natural part of their social lives and should be valued as a part of their joyful social lives.

In the above vignette, Jason and Joy's bodily play was initiated by Jason's bodily reaction to Joy's play. While playing together with peers, Jason showed his initiative in bodily play with peers by appropriately sensing a peer's cue of fun in bodily motion and by suddenly beginning active play, receiving the peer's baton. His bodily action was related to his peers'

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[21] Among the three kinds of physical activity play that Pellegrini and Smith (1998) distinguished— rhythmic stereotypies, exercise play, and rough-and-tumble play—the children's play belongs to the category exercise play in that they exchanged playful movements without aggressive actions.

bodily expressions. While slightly changing the peers' bodily movements to modify them in

playful ways, he continued the same types of motions, and his bodily actions were frequently

followed by his peers' repetitive actions. Such bodily interactions between the children

continued sometimes for a little while and sometimes for a long time, and then, this became a

new type of peer play. The following vignette provides a detailed description of Jason's roles in

children's bodily interactions and play. In addition, while narrating the functions of Jason's

social characteristics in children' peer play through the vignette, I discuss the beneficial aspects

of Jason's bodily mode of peer interaction. In this vignette, Jason, Henry, and Tyler played

together with spinning tops in the block area. Each of them had a spinning top and tried to spin

his top in different places, such as on the floor, the workbench, and the top of the toy shelf.

Vignette 5.3 Field notes: 03/02/2012

Tyler, Jason, and Henry get together around the toy shelf in the block area to spin their

tops at the same time and spin their tops one after the other. The tops are spinning fast.

Suddenly, Jason hits Henry's and Tyler's tops so that their tops fall down on the floor.

Then, he grabs his own to stop it, too. "Jason!" Tyler shouts. Jason laughs jokingly.

Henry smiles, makes a sound, "Booh, boohk," and hits Jason's top with the toy that he

grabs in his right hand, pretending as if his toy is a robot that attacks Jason's top. Jason

escapes from Henry's attack and raises his right hand, holding his top in his hand.

Keeping his right hand up, Jason hops and moves to another side of the block area.

Looking at Jason, Henry smiles. Turning around, Jason makes a sound, "wae, wae, wae,

waek!" and moves like a robot. Henry laughs again, turns around, and giggles at Jason.

Jason puts his hand down and keeps both his hands motionless at his sides. He moves by

Henry, continuing his robotic movement and sounds, "Wae, wae, wae, wae, waek!" He

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moves one more step towards Henry making the robotic motion and sound again. As soon as Jason turns his body to face Henry, Henry copies Jason's robotic motions and sounds and approaches Jason with smile, "Wae, wae, wae, wae, waek!" Jason sidesteps and faces another side of the block area. He moves in that direction with the same robot motion and sound, but a little faster. After reaching the edge of the area, he sits down on the floor and stops the robot motion, but still continues making the robot sound repeatedly, "Wae, wae, wae, wae, waek!" Playing with his spinning top, he consistently makes the sound. A little later, Henry follows Jason. Jason suddenly looks up at Henry and speaks to him, "Wae, wae, wae, wae, waek!" Henry reacts to Jason, "Wae, wae, wae, wae, waek!" raising his arms up over his head.

In this vignette, Henry jokingly attacked Jason's top with a sound, "Booh, boohk!" Sensing the fun in Henry's robot action, Jason quickly received the baton—Henry's first bodily motion—and he suddenly started moving like a robot. Then, Henry reacted to Jason's action by copying his robot motions and sounds. Such an exchange of identical motions and sounds became another form of play, though they played this robot motion game only briefly. Jason slightly changed Henry's short bodily expressions and created a bigger and more exaggerated robot motion and sound that heightened Henry's interest and elicited a smile and laughter. They both enjoyed this robot-style bodily interaction, and despite Jason's mischief, their play went on naturally without even a small quarrel or conflict.

Jason was very active in using his whole body and enjoyed making funny movements and sounds for his peers' enjoyment. Many of his interactions with peers were nonverbal as seen in the above vignettes. Because he often made seemingly nonsense movements and sounds, his nonverbal interactions looked just like meaningless mischief, having nothing to do with his

social competence. However, his peer interaction, mainly through bodily movements, was an effective means of social interaction that his peers truly enjoyed. His bodily interaction with his peers had its own meaning, not only in that it is surely one of the ways children interact socially, but also in that the children who participated in this type of bodily interaction indeed had fun. Moreover, his bodily interaction required an ability to provoke laughter and identify situations or cues of fun in every moment of play. Therefore, his frequent bodily play and bodily reactions to peers were actually a beneficial characteristic for him and his playmates; his bodily play amused his peers and diversified the forms of their peer play. In the following section, I discuss how Jason's bodily interaction influenced the children's peer play in more detail.

A Nonverbal, But Successful Way of Dealing with a Peer's Rejection

In Chapter 4, exemplifying Maggie's quiet and implicit entrance into peers' play, I discussed her successful ways of engaging in peer interaction without conflicts as one of her contributions to peer play. In that chapter, I focused on how she could avoid conflicts with peers and enter into her peers' play more peacefully than any other child who directly and explicitly asked to join in the play. I highlighted her cautious attitude regarding other children's play, her perceptible awareness of playing situations, and the appropriate roles she performed to continue the smooth flow of her peer's play.

In this chapter, I concentrated on Jason's humorous bodily reactions that contributed to his successful ways of playing with peers. In contrast to Maggie's case, Jason usually asked for peers' acceptance explicitly and was rejected by peers more often than not. Nevertheless, I noticed that although he could not be involved in a peer's play, he enjoyed and kept playing with the peer as a unique way of dealing with the peer's rejection. It is noteworthy that the meaning of *successful* in a situation involving a child's entrance into a peer's play does not always mean

his/her successful entry. The meaning of *successful* can also imply a child's successful ways of interacting with peers by dealing with a peer's rejection and continuing his/her own play or playing together with the peer. In the following vignette, Jason and Ryan were playing together in the block area. They played bodily while tumbling, holding on to each other, sometimes speaking nonsensically, and laughing together. In the middle of their play, Ryan played with a toy fire truck and a Lego block box. He installed the ladder of the fire truck as a standing microphone and the Lego box as a drum. He pretended to sing a song with a standing microphone and play the drum while beating the box with toy wrenches. Jason also wanted to play with the fire truck and tried to play together with Ryan.

Vignette 5.4 Video transcripts: 03/08/2012

Ryan sings a song and beats the Lego box. Jason approaches the toy fire truck and pulls it to him. Ryan pulls it back. Jason says, "I want to play with that." Ryan shouts, "No! I got this first! I got this first!" Ryan takes the toy fire truck and puts it where it was. Jason approaches the fire truck again and tries to touch it. Ryan snatches it from Jason's hands so that he cannot touch it and starts beating it again and singing a song. Jason moves closer to the toy. Ryan shouts, "Stop!!!" Jason moves his hands away from the truck. He watches Ryan's play for a while, lying down on his stomach and resting his chin on his palm, and says nonsensical words rhythmically, "Rou-dang-dong!" Pretending to play a drum with the fire truck, Ryan repeats what Jason says, "Rou-dang-dong!" They repeat and exchange the same words several times. Jason tells Ryan, "When it goes like this," and pretends to play a drum by beating a doll's house with a toy hammer for a little while. Ryan repeats what Jason said, "When it goes like this. When it goes like this," and sings a song using gibberish. Ryan laughs and says, "Play with what

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I've got!" He continues to sing a song, pretending to play a drum. Jason lies down on

his back and listens to Ryan's song. Ryan shouts to Jason, "Bang!" Jason rolls on his

body and laughs.

Although Jason repeatedly expressed his explicit desire to play with the toy fire truck, Ryan

rejected his attempts adamantly. In this situation, which could possibly have become a conflict

over the toy, Jason nonetheless resolved the tension between them by stepping back from Ryan's

more aggressive initiation of play and making a silly sound, "Rou-dang-dong!" While uttering

this silly word, he observed Ryan's play for a while. Their repetition of the silly word became

another type of play and served as momentum to elicit laughter. Then, while calling for Ryan's

attention, instead of the fire truck, Jason played with another toy in the same way in which Ryan

played with the fire truck. Ryan repeated Jason's words again and called for Jason's attention to

his singing and drum playing. Jason reacted to Ryan's play with laughter and continued playing

bodily with Ryan by rolling his body on the floor.

The following vignette is another example of Jason's humorous and nonverbal

interactions with Gabriel that resolved the tension between them after failing to enter Gabriel's

play:

Vignette 5.5 Video transcripts & Field notes: 04/26/2014

Jason is playing with pipe construction toys on the carpet, and Gabriel is building a forest

with Legos on the table. Jason shows his interest in Gabriel's construction and comes

closer to look at what Gabriel is doing with the Lego blocks. Jason sticks his head out

toward Gabriel. Then, he comes back to the carpet and starts to clean up the pipe toys.

Jason seems to want to play with the toys that Gabriel is playing with. Jason says, "I

want to show you something. Can I show you something?" Gabriel refuses "No!"

While Gabriel is looking at the unicorn's house, Jason looks in the container that contains

unicorns and other toys. Jason grabs two unicorns and brings them to the teacher's desk.

Gabriel looks embarrassed by Jason's sudden interference and follows him. The unicorns

have magnets on their feet, so Jason attaches them to the teacher's desk. Gabriel looks at

them. But, after looking at them briefly, he snatches the toys from Jason's hands. Jason

snatches one unicorn from Gabriel. Gabriel tries to get this unicorn back, but he fails.

Jason goes back to the manipulative center. Gabriel follows him and says, "I don't want

you to play with me." Finally, Gabriel gets the unicorn that Jason had taken. When

Jason tries to take it back, Gabriel repeatedly says, "No! No!"

Jason: When you are done? When you are done?

Gabriel: No! (He replies tersely.)

Jason: When?

Gabriel: You can. But, I just said, not now.

Jason: Not nahh-woo! Ohh-kay! (He repeats what Gabriel just said rhythmically and

playfully.)

Jason abruptly snatches one unicorn from Gabriel. Gabriel tries to get it back. Jason is

smiling. Jason says playfully again, "Not nahh-woo!! Ohh-Kay!" and pretends to snatch

another toy from Gabriel. Gabriel smiles but obstructs him, saying "Stop! Stop!" Jason

repeats, "Not nahh-woo, Ohh-Kay!!" with a playful rhythm and puts his hand in the

container to be funny with smile. Gabriel puts the lid on the top of the container. And,

Jason goes to pick out another toy.

Jason was trying to enter Gabriel's play. Although he failed to do so, he made this situation

playful and created no serious conflict with Gabriel. Jason mitigated Gabriel's terse rejection

with his rhythmical and playful repetition of Gabriel's words, "Not now." Although Jason

snatched the toys that Gabriel was playing with several times, he continued to guide this situation

playfully by repeating his rhythmical and humorous reactions to Gabriel's defensive actions.

Eventually, Jason's joking reaction was followed up with a smile from Gabriel, and this

situation, which could have become an argument about sharing, became another example of play

thanks to the playful mood that Jason elicited.

As these vignettes show, Jason humorously dealt with his peers' rejection without any

specific verbal expression of his emotions or thinking. Jason often used humor to resolve any

possible conflict by making situations playful and making silly faces, gestures, and sounds at his

peers as the above vignettes show. Such beneficial aspects of Jason's bodily interplay with peers

during play can be explained by Løndal's (2010) comment on children's bodily play:

> It is also important to note that self-chosen bodily play is thought of as being one way to
>
> bring about a change in mood from negative thoughts and low spirits. . . . Bodily play is,
>
> as such, an activity that has the potential of drawing children away from negative
>
> thoughts and emotions. Thus, bodily play can contribute to strengthen their subjective
>
> wellbeing. (p. 400)

Just like Løndal's accounts of the roles of children's bodily play in "situations involving

accidents, disappointment and antagonism" (p. 400), Jason's rhythmical and playful repetition in

the above examples served as a humorous way during play situations to influence his peers'

mood and to make the atmosphere relaxed and fun. Therefore, rather than using words, such as

"Sorry" and "Thank you," which are generally considered necessary for children to learn,

Jason's silly faces and sounds and his funny pranks that elicited laughter were very effective,

more natural, and more enjoyable to the children.

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Implications

While observing Jason's play, I found that his tendency to play through active body movements and to interact with peers by performing funny actions and making funny sounds was a significant part of the children's play and their social life. Moreover, Jason's enjoyable attempt to make others laugh reflected his social nature and competence, which not only contributed to peer play but also revealed his ability to notice subtle signs of others' emotions and social cues that evoked laughter. Based on the findings of this chapter, in the following sections, I discuss two main implications by examining them through the lens of Bakhtin's theory of language: children's diverse ways of playing and interacting with peers and the meaning of humor in children's culture.

Children's Diverse Ways of Playing and Interacting with Peers

First of all, whether direct interactions with peers occurred or not, Jason's bodily expressions and play were deeply associated with the way he related to others. As noted in the discussion of Vignette 5.1, he often played alone while expressing his thoughts and feelings through his bodily movement and facial expression. Just by doing so, he seemed to have fun and enjoy his time and space. However, while observing his play, I realized that Jason's activeness in bodily expression was relevant not only to his contentment in self-expression but also to his social longing. Just as Vygotsky confirms that "personality is social in ourselves" (as cited in Valsiner & Veer, 1988, p. 129), Jason's tendency to express himself bodily was also social by itself in that it was related to others. Vygotsky explains, "The concept 'personality' is . . . a social, reflective concept that is built on the basis of the child's use in relation to oneself, of those means of adaptation that he uses in relation to others" (p. 129). While playing alone, Jason often called for his teachers' or peers' attention, saying, "Look at this!" in order to share his bodily

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expressions and play. Although sharing his bodily expressions and play was meaningful to him in that he seemed to enjoy it for its own sake, it was also meaningful in that his willingness to share with peers not only naturally resulted in a bodily peer interaction or a new type of peer play but also came from a desire to have fun with his peers. Even when he was not interacting with others, it seemed as if he was experiencing and practicing things to see how he could work them into his "act" or comedy routine by exploring things and people around him with his whole body movement. Likewise, bodily expressions and play during his solitary play were, strictly speaking, not solitary unless he was actually alone in the room.

Not only did Jason enjoy expressing himself bodily for its own sake, while making others laugh, but he also actually tended to long for social rewards such as the laughter his actions elicited from his peers and the social attention his actions attracted. According to Ms. Gracie, Jason was "confident in himself" and appeared not to care about others because of his infrequent peer play. However, her comments about Jason rather perplexed me at first due to Jason's display of interest in me during my observation visits. Observing his play more and more, I was able to confirm that he was socially interested in others, at least as much as the other children. His actions that served to amuse others represented his social interest and eagerness for others' attention. For the sake of both his self-contentment and social-contentment, he joyfully attempted to play with his peers while amusing them through his own ways of interacting bodily, nonverbally, and playfully. Jason was a humorous boy who was interested in others and loved his peers' laughter.

Second, although Jason's interest in his peers was displayed in a bodily manner that was not regarded as meaningful or even as appropriate (Garfield et al., 2001; Katz & McClellan, 1997; Semrud-Clikeman, 2007), such bodily interactions were not only a natural part of the

children's ways of socially interacting but were also a very successful and joyful means of peer play and interactions in their culture. Although I found that Jason, in particular, especially tended to react to his peers bodily and to initiate bodily play most often among the children, most of the other children also enjoyed this kind of bodily play and bodily interaction (Løndal, 2010; Pellegrini & Smith, 1998) more often than verbal interaction. When Jason played bodily, his peers not only showed their interest in his actions or sounds but also joyfully engaged in his play. They also often mimed any gestures or sounds with peers, and whenever they did so, laughter was naturally evoked. Moreover, as shown in Vignettes 5.4 and 5.5, Jason escaped social conflicts with peers by dealing with conflictive situations through nonverbal and bodily reactions such as humorous sounds, rhythmically repeated words, or funny actions (Løndal, 2010). Likewise, children's bodily interactions and play are not only an important means of interacting with others but also a very joyful and successful part of their social lives.

Nevertheless, such nonverbal social interactions and bodily play by young children are rarely perceived positively and are rather regarded as behavior, which should be regulated by a certain standard of "appropriateness." Teachers often curtail children's body movements when the movements exceed certain bounds set by each individual teacher. Their bodily expressions and play are often regarded by their teachers as mischievous, dangerous, and disruptive behavior or as undesirable actions that possibly could cause harm to other children or the "indoor" atmosphere of the classroom. This is somewhat understandable in that teachers should consider classroom management and children's safety during free play (Tannock, 2008). In Vignettes 5.1 and 5.2, Ms. Gracie intervened in the children's play in order to regulate their boisterous conduct—"uproariousness," according to her standards of appropriateness. However, I note that in this Pre-k classroom setting, even though Ms. Gracie occasionally intervened in the children's

play, she tended not to take a restrictive attitude toward the children's conduct during free play. Although I did not systematically compare the Pre-k classroom used in this study with a different Pre-k classroom, I was actually impressed by the children's more frequent bodily play and the more permissive atmosphere with regard to children's large body movements in this classroom than was the case in other classrooms in my previous experiences. It seems to me that this is partly due to the smaller number of children in this Pre-k class, which was mostly about 8 and always fewer than 11. This might also be the reason why I was able to observe that Jason's and other children's bodily play and interactions were more frequent and more natural. Nevertheless, despite Ms. Gracie's permissive standards, the children's bodily play and interactions were regulated, and they were often taught to "use words nicely."

Ms. Gracie's intervention and discipline aimed at restricting body movements and her advice to use nice words is common in Pre-k classrooms (Katz & McClellan, 1997; Tannock, 2008). For example, Katz and McClellan's (1997) guidance for teachers to foster children's social competence provided various strategies to strengthen children's interactive skills such as "Fostering verbal communication," (p. 90) "Offering suggestions for verbal openings," (p. 90) and "Helping children develop negotiating skills" (p. 91). Although the authors included children's appropriate nonverbal interactions in the observation list for assessing social competence, throughout the book, teachers are mostly guided to teach children how to interact with peers by suggesting specific phrases or statements and showing direct modeling. In addition, in many studies, children's verbal skills they display when interacting with others are often perceived as a measure of their social ability and an important component for social development (Garfield et al., 2001; Katz & McClellan, 1997; Semrud-Clikeman, 2007). In contrast, children's non-verbal interactions with peers received relatively less attention from

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teachers and researchers and were less valued as important means of relating to others. Likewise, the nature and function of bodily interactions are often neglected and less valued as important aspects of social competence.

Third, Bakhtin's (1981) theory of language provides valuable insights into the coexistence of children's diverse ways of social interactions and peer play and teachers' norms regarding these kinds of actions in classrooms. In particular, Bakhtin's (1981) concepts of *unitary language* and *heteroglossia* and the dynamic interaction between them[22] guided my understanding of the dynamic relationship among the various cultural values regarding children's social competence and social life in school—mutual influences between the social and cultural norms of children's social competence and relationships and children's diverse ways of social interaction and play. According to Bakhtin (1981), a tension-filled-dialogic process between centralizing values and diversifying values coexists in a living language[23] and in each utterance. Children's diverse languages of social interaction, including bodily movements, invented sounds, and facial expressions, which may appear to have no meaning and to be out of context in adults' views, reflect Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia. On the other hand, any norms of socially and culturally accepted and valued behaviors—the social behaviors or skills that teachers value and emphasize—reflect Bakhtin's notion of unitary language. For example, teachers occasionally intervene in children's bodily interaction and bodily play and remind the children to restrict their bodies in a manner appropriate to "indoor play" and to use nice words to solve any arguments with their peers. At the same time, the varieties of language that children use when they interact with others can be seen as diverging from the social and cultural norms of interaction. Children continuously try to use their inherent languages, for example, by making silly faces and sounds,

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[22] I presented Bakhtin's notion of *unitary language* and *heteroglossia* in Chapter 3 (pp. 89-90).
[23] While discussing the application of Bakhtin's theory of language, I used the word *language* according to Bakhtin's notion of language. His notion of language is explained in Chapter 1 (p. 14) and Chapter 3.

using facial and bodily expressions, and engaging in physical contact, which diversify the modes of maintaining social relationships, as long as such languages do not break the rules and exceed the limits teachers set.

Fourth, in such classrooms, where the dynamic interaction between the cultural norms of interactions and children's diverse languages of interaction exists, Bakhtin's (1981) concept of *monologic dead language* serves to caution us about our indifference to or depreciation of the diverse ways in which children interact socially. His concept implies a classroom where a particular participant in a conversation—the teacher—loses his/her responsive understanding, reflectivity, and orientation toward an addressee. In other words, when an adult simply attempts to teach children social and cultural norms regarding social relations and interactions without consideration of children's diverseness, this unilateral instruction becomes monologic dead language that is characterized as authoritative and dogmatic.

As previously mentioned, children's verbal social interaction is more likely to be considered desirable and appropriate social behavior by early childhood educators and researchers. We particularly tend to associate such linguistic competence with their social competence. However, in general, social interaction is usually perceived as including not only verbal interaction but also nonverbal bodily interaction, communication that is not measured in words but helps achieve clearer understanding. Nevertheless, when it comes to children's social competence, verbal interactions are frequently emphasized and valued without any consideration of an individual child's social tendency or the contextual situation of play. In such a classroom, as Bakhtin's notion of monologic dead language implies, the classroom becomes oppressive and dogmatic, particularly for those children whose social characteristics do not fit into the culturally valued ways of social interaction. Children can lose the opportunity to enjoy joyful nonverbal

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interactions with peers and to learn and practice various ways of connecting to and interacting with others.

Meanwhile, from Bakhtin's view, unifying and diversifying interaction among languages is natural and "the actual reality of" (Volosinov, 2000, p. 94) living language. This means that dialogic coexistence between children's diverse languages and the cultural norms of social interaction and relationship in children's lives is natural and reflects a living classroom culture. Just as Bakhtin describes a living language as reciprocally interactive, reflective, and responsive, as far as children's various ways of interacting with others are reflected in and have an influence on teachers' appreciation of and interventions in children's social interaction, the culture of this classroom is alive and possesses educational changeability according to individual children's differences in social competence. Therefore, in this respect, a reflective and responsive atmosphere in the classroom should be guaranteed in order not to suppress children's natural and diverse social personalities and characteristics.

The Meaning of Humor in Children's Peer Culture

While observing Jason's bodily interactions and play, I was deeply impressed by his sense of humor, which made everybody laugh and be happy. His willingness to make others laugh was worthy of notice in that it manifested his social interest in his peers and his social talents. Several researchers (Groch, 1974; McGhee, 1989; McGhee & Pistolesi, 1979; Southam, 2005) have argued that children's sense of humor is associated with their cognitive development as well as their social development. In particular, some of these researchers (McGhee, 1989; McGhee & Pistolesi, 1979; Southam, 2005) identified children's humor as an important aspect of their social relationships and development and articulated its developmental characteristics according to cognitive and linguistic developmental stages.

Previous research on children's humor supports Jason's sense of humor as an important social skill that served in the formation of his social relationships, although less appreciation is still shown for children's bodily humor. For example, according to Southam (2005), as toddlers (20-24 months) grow, they start using words for fun and to make others laugh. Rhyming and making up nonsense words are major characteristics of toddlers. Pre-k children begin to enjoy intellectual play using conceptually unreasonable *words* and hearing and repeating silly rhymes. Likewise, the researchers of previous studies (e.g., McGhee, 1989; McGhee & Pistolesi, 1979; Southam, 2005) identify children's verbal joking as a more highly developed ability and concentrate on children's use of words for humor while providing only a few descriptions of children's bodily joking and humor. According to their description of the developmental stages of humor, Jason's types of humor mostly belong to the toddler stage. However, Jason's bodily humor and use of nonsense sounds cannot be ranked as more or less valuable or intellectual than any other means of humor. As noted in the discussions of Vignettes 5.4 and 5.5, his use of humor was not intended merely for fun; it was also used to quell tension or resolve conflicts with peers. His performance of bodily humor and repetition of rhythmical words and silly sounds involved a more complicated intuition about social and playing contexts, because he was intuitive about which behavior gave rise to another's laughter and in what context. Moreover, his humor contributed to the continuation of his and his peers' joyful play.

My recognition of the social and educational values of Jason's bodily social interactions was derived from Bakhtin's (1984) description of *carnivalesque*. Jason's bodily expressions and interactions and every child's display of joyfulness while playing bodily reminded me of Bakhtin's concept of carnivalesque. While observing the children's joyful bodily interaction and their sense of humor and the laughter that always followed, I came to think that the scene of their

bodily play closely resembled Bakhtin's elaboration on carnival and carnivalesque during the medieval period:

> [C]arnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed. . . .
>
> This contemporary suspension, both ideal and real, of hierarchical rank created during carnival time a special type of communication impossible in everyday life. This led to the creation of special forms of marketplace speech and gesture, frank and free, permitting no distance between those who came in contact with each other and liberating from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times. (p. 10)

Resisting the medieval cathedral's hierarchical, authoritative, monologic, and dogmatic rule, medieval people actualized a time and place in which all people were equal. Carnival is a festival where there are no privileged and centralized norms or values and where *all* people freely participate and experience "an escape from the usual official way of life" (p. 8). During carnival, social hierarchical rank is turned upside down, and equality is activated with chaos, laughter, and satire.

Although children are under a certain amount of and influenced by adult surveillance or control during free playtime, free play is, relatively speaking, the most "free" time in terms of having their own authority over their play and escaping from the usual official lessons and instructions. Children express themselves in their own ways and interact with others and materials more freely during free playtime than during times that include more formal aspects of the curriculum. In contrast to a medieval carnival, the children in this study are expected to

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follow the classroom rules, for example, staying in one play area and using indoor voices. Yet, free playtime has a great resemblance to Bakhtin's (1984) description of carnival in that children's diverse ways of expressions and interactions are activated more freely during free playtime, when the teacher's authority is relatively less prevalent than at other times; their heteroglot languages flourish during this time. Therefore, although children's free playtime does not perfectly reenact the medieval carnival that Bakhtin elaborates, in contrast to the formal instruction time when a teacher usually gives them directions or lessons, free playtime is a children's festival where they can enjoy their freedom to choose their play, express themselves, and interact with peers freely to a certain degree.

Bakhtin focuses on carnivalesque, which is a special speech genre of the marketplace where all heteroglot languages are activated in a lively manner and where there is no stratification of languages. Carnivalesque is a literary mode that liberates one from and overturns socially established order and socially constructed norms and values through grotesque bodies and satire, which arouses people's laughter. In carnivalesque, laughter is caused by liberation from authority and socially established norms and values and is the result of a freedom that is temporal and unavailable in reality. With regard to its comical characteristics, the children's natural expressions and interactions with their peers, using their bodies and making silly sounds during *free* playtime, resembled Bakhtin's *carnivalesque*. The children's diverse modes of languages during free playtime and Bakhtin's carnivalesque are alike in that the children's laughter frequently occurred during free playtime while the children played in a bodily way, which is not valued in the prevailing norms of larger society. They are also alike in that they are available during a certain time and in a certain place under authoritative conditions.

Moving beyond a simple comparison between them, I want to emphasize what the children's laughter means to the field of early childhood education. During free playtime, tension evidently existed between Ms. Gracie's intervention and her instructions to use nice words and behave in a well-mannered way and the children's diverse ways of social interaction. In other words, a unitary language, which includes the social boundaries that the teacher sets and that reflects the larger society's norms, coexists with heteroglossia, which includes the children's attempts to express themselves and interact and play with their peers in their preferred and joyful ways. While constantly striving to have fun in the way their own culture allows, children negotiate between their heteroglot ways of social interaction and the social and cultural norms of interaction in the larger society. In this sense, children's laughter can be seen as arising from their enjoyment of the freedom to resist socially established orders and norms. Children's laughter represents their real enjoyment of freedom and liberation from any existing social regulations placed on them.

Bakhtin's notion of carnival depicts a utopian world where all people are equal and where heteroglot languages are most fruitfully activated. Of course, the chaotic atmosphere of carnival would not be welcomed in school. However, with respect to educational equality, I argue that his notion of carnival has an important implication for the field of early childhood education. Bakhtin's carnival reflects the image of a classroom where children's heteroglot languages, diverse ways of interacting and playing together, flourish most freely, where the characteristics of every child are appreciated, and where equality in education is actually guaranteed. Even though utopia already means an unrealistic world, the utopian world of carnival is still meaningful to the field of early childhood education, because it reveals a classroom that the field needs to pursue and promote—a place where children are in fits of laughter.

CHAPTER 6

SENSITIVE *BOYS'* PEER INTERACTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS

Besides Jason and Maggie, Gabriel and Tyler were the other two children whom Ms. Gracie considered less socially competent than other children. Similar to Ms. Gracie's description of Maggie's social characteristics, Gabriel and Tyler were considered not socially competent due to their introverted personalities and quietness—"problem in using words," "too quiet," "shy/introverted," and "problem with standing up for himself" (Ms. Gracie, in the interview on 02/21/2012). During the interviews, Ms. Gracie directly mentioned that Maggie, Gabriel, and Tyler have commonalities such as introversion and quietness. However, when she described each of them in more detail, she described these traits with somewhat different words. After reviewing the interview transcripts of Ms. Gracie repeatedly, I found that the words she used in her descriptions of the children were grounded in beliefs and values about gender roles, particularly beliefs about "a socially competent boy."

This initial finding reminded me of the Korean scholar whom I mentioned in the beginning of Chapter 2, who was concerned about his son's social competence because of his "too girly" features. With regard to this father's assessment of his son's social competence, I referred to Bruner's (1996) *folk psychology* and discussed cultural beliefs and values about social competence related to gender norms—socially acceptable male behaviors. Although I did not examine this anecdote further, making a connection with deeply ingrained cultural beliefs about young children's social competence, I discussed the influential aspects of cultural beliefs on

perceptions and actions of human beings. Cultural beliefs and values embedded in expectations about gender roles in social relationships have influences on Ms. Gracie's and the Korean father's views on the children's social competence (Martin, 1995; Rogoff, 2003, p. 51). This line of thinking guided me to investigate the gendered aspects of conceptualizing children's social competence. I thought it would be meaningful to discuss Gabriel's and Tyler's "introversion" that Ms. Gracie identified, while considering her expectations about gender roles embedded in the words that she used.

The issue of gender is actually too large to allow for the exploration of general discourses on gender norms with regard to children's social competence. Therefore, I narrow down this topic to general discourses on *boys' introversion*. In this chapter, while focusing on the social characteristics of Gabriel and Tyler pointed out by Ms. Gracie, I particularly consider social and cultural norms of gender in relation to boys' social competence. By contrasting and comparing Ms. Gracie's descriptions of these two boys' social characteristics and those of other children based on gender, I examine the reasons why Gabriel and Tyler were regarded as less social than their peers. By doing so, I consider gendered aspects of her beliefs and values with regard to children's social competence, which are, in particular, the specific social characteristics that are culturally more or less valued and desired especially for socially competent boys. Additionally, in the latter part of this chapter, I attempt to reconsider such general images of socially competent boys by thoroughly investigating how Gabriel's and Tyler's social characteristics that were regarded problematic worked in their social relationships and peer play. I challenge such culturally emphasized social competence for boys by articulating how the social characteristics of these boys actually harmonized well in play situations and played beneficial roles in their peer group.

Before continuing, because I consider social and cultural beliefs about gender roles seriously, I need to clarify my theoretical standpoint in this study to avoid any possible confusion. Although I discuss social and cultural biases of gender regarding children's social relationships and interaction, I place myself at a certain distance from feminist approaches, which generally deal with gender norms and values in society. In terms of a critical perspective, feminism focuses more on the male gender hegemony in patriarchal society, which is constructed as a combinative form of heterosexuality and hierarchy. However, the focus of this study is on the reconsideration of the concept of social competence—specifically speaking, social characteristics that are regarded as features of less social children. Therefore, even though I also deal with power issues by approaching this theme from a critical point of view, I deal with power issues related to social and cultural biases regarding children's social competence, which exist as a form of discourse, rather than social structural issues related to patriarchal society, such as the masculine gender hierarchy of society.

Gendered Aspects in a Teacher's Perception of Children's Social Competence

Ms. Gracie's Perceptions of Gabriel and Tyler

Gabriel is an African American boy who is tall with a healthy physique. When he talked, he spoke slowly with a tender smile. He behaved gently and cautiously, particularly compared to other boys. In the first interview, Ms. Gracie described Gabriel as a child who is too quiet and who has problems speaking up for himself:

Interview transcripts: 02/21/2012

Gabriel is an excellent student. I mean a good role model. He is very, very dependable. Gabriel, I think, at first, had a problem [with] standing up for himself, speaking for himself. So, I have talked with him. Actually, I told him to use his words and talk to the

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kids, you know, because sometimes they kind of take advantage of him in playtime. And I can tell, sometimes, he seems a little frustrated. . . . He is doing a lot better. But at first, he definitely had a problem verbalizing and using his words. . . . Like I said, if you would have asked me at the beginning of the year, I would say, "Yes, I have concerns, because he is just too quiet." He was just too quiet, too perfect.

Gabriel was described with such phrases as "problem [with] standing up for himself," "problem [with] verbalizing, using his words," and "too quiet." Likewise, Ms. Gracie particularly emphasized his unassertiveness as a problem she had to deal with throughout the past school year.

Tyler is a Latino American boy who has brown eyes and a crew cut. He is of medium build and has a soft voice and a sweet smile. Tyler is the most talkative child among the four children whom Ms. Gracie pointed out as being less socially competent than other children. During my initial observation, I was not concerned about him because he usually played with his peers during free playtime and seemed to have good relationships with them. However, after I interviewed Ms. Gracie, while observing him, I was able to understand what she might have meant. She was concerned about Tyler's excessive sensitivity:

Interview transcripts: 02/21/2012

Tyler is extremely… introverted. At first,… he was real quiet and a little hesitant, when he came here, a little quiet and a little hesitant. And then, he picked Katie. And, I think, he and Katie are very close. . . . Tyler, I think he is very sensitive, very sensitive. If you say even anything like, "Oh, no no. Don't do that," big tears come. You are not really upset with him that much. And, you just say, "Alright Tyler, I already told you. Now, you need to turn around and push up your chair just like that." He might be teary. . . . I

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would just say that he is very sensitive. I am not sure that he is real confident. I don't

think that he is that confident with his peers really. I think, he functions and gets through,

but I don't always feel like that even, sometimes, he speaks up for himself, maybe.

As a problem in Tyler's social competence, Ms. Gracie pointed out such characteristics as

"extremely introverted," "quiet and hesitant," "sensitive," and "[not] speaking up for himself."

Ms. Gracie directly mentioned that Gabriel and Tyler were similar and pointed out their

problems with regard to social competence with the same standard of "[not] speaking up for

himself." She particularly emphasized that Tyler was hurt easily and moved to tears too often.

She also connected his excessive sensitiveness to his lack of confidence. Likewise, Ms. Gracie

mainly considered Gabriel's and Tyler's unassertive actions and Tyler's excessive sensitivity

problematic for their social competence.

Contrasting with Ms. Gracie's comment on Maggie, a girl who was also described as

introverted like these two boys, I found that Ms. Gracie put particular emphasis on the problems

the two boys had in speaking up for themselves and on Tyler's sensitiveness, placing different

expectations on these three children based on their genders. In what follows, based on this initial

finding, by comparing and contrasting her descriptions of the children's social characteristics, I

discuss the gendered aspects in her perceptions of children's social competence.

Gendered Aspects in Ms. Gracie's Perceptions of Social Competence

As briefly described above, Maggie, Gabriel, and Tyler were perceived similarly in that

they were all introverted; Ms. Gracie directly mentioned that Gabriel and Maggie were the same

and that Gabriel and Tyler were similar. The following excerpt presents Ms. Gracie's concerns

about Gabriel and Maggie in more detail:

Gabriel was the same as Maggie. He spoke two words the first three months, seriously.

He just did everything, again just like Maggie. Everything is done, obey the rules: they

are just awesome kids from a teacher's perspective. I think as a teacher, I was concerned

"Yeah, they are great! But, what are they thinking? What's going on? How are they

really feeling?" And so, that's what concerned me about them. "Were they

overwhelmed? Were they feeling like [they should be] perfect? Were they scared?"

And, that's why they scared me, too.

Likewise, both Gabriel's and Maggie's social characteristics concerned Ms. Gracie because of

their quietness and introversion. However, as mentioned above, although their social

characteristics were considered as "the same" and "similar" by Ms. Gracie, her descriptions of

each child demonstrated her different expectations for each of them based on their genders. The

following table shows the comparison of the specific phrases that Ms. Gracie used to describe

Gabriel's, Tyler's, and Maggie's[24] key social features.

Table 6.1

Comparison of Ms. Gracie's Descriptions of Gabriel, Tyler, and Maggie by Gender[25]

Focal Child	Gabriel	Tyler	Maggie
Ms. Gracie's Descriptions	"quiet"	"quiet	"quiet"
	"[not] speaking up for himself"	"[not] speaking up for himself"	
	"problem with standing up for himself"	**"too sensitive"**	"[not] pursuing relationships" **"not as interactive as sociable"**

[24] Ms. Gracie's descriptions of Maggie's social characteristics were excerpted from the interview transcript presented in Ch. 4 (p. 103).

[25] The phrases in bold were what Ms. Gracie particularly emphasized when describing these children.

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As seen in Table 6.1, Ms. Gracie commonly specified Gabriel's and Tyler's problem in speaking up for themselves in contrast to her comments on Maggie, although all of these children had been considered similar in that they were deemed introverted and quiet. In addition, Tyler's sensitiveness related to his soft-heartedness was described with more emphasis, and Maggie's quietness was considered in terms of the relational aspects by using words such as *relationship* and *interactive*. As shown, Ms. Gracie put a different emphasis on each child's social characteristics.

Because my focus in this chapter is on social and cultural values regarding children's social competence that are placed on these two boys' social characteristics, I contrast Gabriel's and Tyler's cases with that of Ryan, a boy who revealed stark differences in social characteristics and whom Ms. Gracie directly pointed out as a socially competent child. Gabriel, Tyler and Ryan were the boys who had distinctly different social characteristics, particularly with regard to social roles in a group and assertiveness in peer interactions. In addition, Ms. Gracie's positive description of Ryan's social characteristics is colligated with her concerns about Gabriel's and Tyler's problems in speaking up for themselves. Therefore, the comparison of the teacher's perceptions about these boys' social tendencies more clearly shows the gendered aspects of the teacher's values in her assessment of the boys' social competence. In the following interview excerpt, Ms. Gracie's comments on Ryan's social characteristics and peer relationships are presented.

Interview transcripts: 02/21/2012

In my opinion, Ryan, he has such a rough [characteristic]. . . . I think, [his] daddy teaches him manly man and, you know, tough, and . . . stereotypes, behavior[s] from the male, what we call that, the old macho. He gets along. He is that type [of] personality

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that the kids like Ryan. He is kind of a leader. He seems to get along, but sometimes…

[kids are] angry, because he is bossy. You know, he tells everybody what to do. And, I

have to say to him, "Ryan, who is the teacher in here?" You know? He is really bossy. I

think still, on the other hand, I think, he seems to, kids like him. I like him.

In this excerpt, Ms. Gracie regarded Ryan's "rough," "manly man," and "bossy" kind of

speaking and acting as his distinctive social characteristics. As indicated by Ms. Gracie's

comments at intervals such as "he gets along," "kids like Ryan," "He is kind of a leader," and "I

(the teacher) like him," Ryan's characteristics were described from a more positive perspective

relating to his social competence. Corresponding to Ms. Gracie's initial description of Ryan as

"rough," during my observation, his words and actions were likely to be aggressive and tough.

Ryan usually spoke in an assertive tone of voice, particularly when he was insistent with his

peers. His assertive way of speaking sometimes made peers burst into tears. Although Ms.

Gracie did not directly indicate Ryan's assertive and aggressive way of speaking as a competent

aspect of his social characteristics, Ryan was recognized as a socially competent boy who had

leadership abilities and was well liked.

Ms. Gracie's perceptions of these four children's social characteristics are similar to the

findings of several studies (e.g., Martin, 1995; Sandnabba & Ahlberg, 1999). For example,

Martin's (1995) study, which examined adults' views about gender traditional and gender

nontraditional children, found that characteristics, such as "enjoy rough play" and "aggressive,"

were desirable in boys but undesirable in girls, whereas "soft-spoken" was found to be desirable

in girls but not in boys. In addition, characteristics such as "dominant," "independent," and

"competitive" were especially desirable for boys, whereas "gentle," "sympathetic," and "eager to

soothe hurt feelings" were desirable for girls. Likewise, characteristics, such as a less assertive

nature and excessive sensitivity, that Ms. Gracie pointed out as the reason for the boys' lower

social competence closely resemble the views of the participants of Martin's study, who were

mostly Caucasian middle-class undergraduate students. Ms. Gracie's assessments of these two

boys' social competence are beyond the personal dimension and are closely associated with the

sociocultural level of beliefs and values regarding gender and social competence. Her

perspectives on Gabriel's and Tyler's problematic social characteristics reflect general beliefs

about gender roles in the European-American community that are more expected and desirable

for boys than for girls (Rogoff, 2003), which are, for example, the attitude of assertiveness

involving the role of leader in a group, assertive speaking and acting, and strong character.

Ms. Gracie's points of emphasis on each child's social characteristics were also reflected

in her more detailed explanations of the efforts she made with regard to the problems of these

two boys during the school year. The following are excerpts from the second interview with Ms.

Gracie and present her interventions associated with Gabriel's "not speaking for himself" and

Tyler's "too sensitive[ness]":

Interview transcripts: 05/09/2012

Kids like Henry and Ryan, they just run over him [Gabriel]. So, I have talked with him

one day. I talked about… that it is important—that it's OK to say, "I don't like when you

do that. Would you please stop?" It's OK to say, "No." [You can say,] "I would like

that toy. When I am finished, you can have it." Now, I think he is comfortable now,

much much more.

Interview transcripts: 05/09/2012

I really work on that [Tyler's excessive sensitivity] with him. "Oh, I am so sorry. My

tone of voice hurts you. I am not mad." I always have to tell him, "I love you," "You are

doing a good job." . . . He is still very sensitive. But, he has changed a lot. . . . He is

really kind of coming out of himself. So, I was really glad about that.

While no intervention for Maggie was described by Ms. Gracie during the interview, Ms. Gracie

specifically mentioned how she had dealt with the boys' particular problems during the school

year and how much they had improved in these aspects. Ms. Gracie's comment indicates that

she took these two boys' characteristics more seriously and assumed a more active role in

instructing them than in the case of Maggie.

Various researchers (e.g., Engfer, 1993; Radke-Yarrow, Richters, & Wilson, 1988; Rubin

& Coplan, 2004; Rubin, Coplan, Bowker, & Menzer, 2011; Sandnabba & Ahlberg, 1999;

Simpson & Stevenson-Hinde, 1985) have identified adults' differing attitudes regarding

children's social characteristics based on gender. For example, Engfer (1993) asserts that

"shyness in boys would be actively discouraged while shyness in girls would not only be

accepted, but also implicitly rewarded by parents, thus leading to a greater temporal continuity of

shy behaviors in girls" (p. 51). Rubin, Coplan, Bowker, and Menzer's (2011) statement adds

more explanation about these researchers' argument; they affirm that "shyness is less socially

acceptable for boys than for girls because it violates gender norms related to male social

assertion and dominance" (p. 442). In support of this notion, Aina and Cameron (2011), who

particularly consider teachers' instructional differences based on gender, note that "a teacher's

stereotypes may lead to interactions with children that are neither gender-fair nor gender-

congruent" (p. 13). As implied by these researchers' argument, Ms. Gracie's instruction of the

children differed based on beliefs and expectations that she had regarding boys' and girls' social

behaviors (Aina & Cameron, 2011; Rubin & Coplan, 2004). Moreover, her different

instructional approaches to the children reflect not only her beliefs about socially competent boys

and girls but also, more generally, social and cultural gender norms related to preferred social characteristics for boys or for girls.

According to the above excerpts, both Gabriel and Tyler had changed significantly and definitely "improved" with regard to their respective perceived issues—Gabriel's "[not] speaking up for himself" and Tyler's "too sensitiveness." Because my regular observation began in spring 2012, I could not observe the children's earlier play and had to rely on the interviews with Ms. Gracie. Therefore, the boys' play behaviors that I saw might be those that had become better and less problematic in the teacher's view than those from an earlier school year. Nevertheless, as I observed Gabriel's and Tyler's play, I was able to speculate about the influence of Ms. Gracie's instruction on their social characteristics and peer interactions. I noticed several instances in which Gabriel spoke up for himself. For example, he sometimes refused peers' requests to join him as he played, particularly when he was playing with blocks. He also sometimes complained to his peers and went to Ms. Gracie to tell her what the problem was. In Tyler's case, I had not seen him crying during free play. In this respect, although I could not directly observe the influence of the teacher's intervention in these two boys' social actions, from both the interview with her and the observations of these children's play, I supposed that her interventions had at least partly influenced the boys' social actions.

Reconsidering Boys' *Unassertiveness* in Peer Play

As noted above, I started observing Gabriel and Tyler relatively late in the school year (from the end of February, 2012). Therefore, considering Ms. Gracie's interview, I might have had limited ability to see the "improvement" in their social competence that she described. I actually noticed that Gabriel was speaking up for himself more often when he was playing. Especially in certain situations, he complained immediately to his friends when he felt he had

been treated unfairly by them. However, while reviewing such scenes repeatedly, I gradually

began to call into question the view of Gabriel's "improved" assertiveness. This question also

guided me to reconsider how a child's assertive speaking works in a peer play situation and

whether the child's assertiveness should always be seen as more desirable than unassertiveness.

Therefore, while providing an example of Gabriel's assertive speaking in peer play, I will first

discuss these two issues in more detail. Then, I will focus on the social characteristics of each

boy that were often regarded negatively and describe how these actually worked in a peer

interaction during play.

Gabriel's "Improved" Speaking up for Himself

While reviewing videos of Gabriel's play repeatedly, although he was usually quiet and

tended to follow the lead of others during play, I found some scenes showing that he staked his

claim when playing with them. These scenes directly reflected what Ms. Gracie mentioned

regarding Gabriel's "improvement" in speaking up for himself. The following vignette displays

his occasionally more assertive actions in encounters with his peers.

Vignette 6.1 Video transcripts: 03/16/2012

Gabriel and Maggie are building "super high stairs" with TRIO blocks together. Henry is

playing with a toy fire truck and other kinds of trucks alone. Henry comes closer to them

and asks if he can have one of the blocks. He convinces them by saying he can make a

very high tower. When he is about to reach the block storage, Gabriel prevents him from

taking one. Henry goes to Ms. Gracie and tells her about it. Ms. Gracie instructs Henry

to use his words, and he answers sulkily that he already spoken to them, but they didn't

let him in. Henry comes back to Gabriel and Maggie and tries to get some blocks several

times in the same way. However, his attempts are obstructed by Gabriel's defensive

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actions every time. Then, Henry goes to Ms. Gracie to tell her about it. . . . After a short

while, Maggie gives Henry a bag and suggests putting some blocks in it. Henry grabs it,

and finally, they start to play with the TRIO blocks together. . . . Gabriel makes a long

stick with blocks. Henry has a similar one. They began to sword fight with these two

long sticks. When Gabriel's sword is broken, they stop the sword fight. Gabriel fixes his

sword and hits the stairway that he made earlier with it. . . . Henry and Gabriel hit the

toys around them with their swords. Henry suddenly attacks Gabriel's sword, and his

sword is broken again. Gabriel shouts, "Hey! Henry. You almost hurt my elbow!" with

a grimace. Gabriel looks at Henry with an angry face and goes to Ms. Gracie. Henry

quickly follows Gabriel to call him, saying "Hey!" Henry tries to block Gabriel's way to

Ms. Gracie. However, eventually, Gabriel tells Ms. Gracie what happened. As a result,

Henry is called to Ms. Gracie and given time-out for a while.

In this vignette, Gabriel took a defensive attitude during block play, and when his sword was

attacked and broken by Henry, he assertively expressed his displeasure with his peer and told Ms.

Gracie about it. Due to Gabriel's defensive actions, Henry continuously was unable to play with

the blocks with which Gabriel and Maggie were playing. In addition, when Gabriel told Ms.

Gracie about Henry's attack with the sword, she listened to Gabriel's complaint and put Henry in

time-out.

However, after reviewing these kinds of scenes closely, I became more doubtful about

the meaning of being *assertive*, which is, in Ms. Gracie's words, "speaking up for oneself."

Although Gabriel expressed himself more freely to his peers, the mutual harmony between him

and his peers in their interactions during play seemed ruptured. In many cases, assertive

exchanges, not only by Gabriel but also by other children, easily interrupted the flow of their

play. Just as Maggie's roles as a *dialogic follower*[26] significantly contributed to smooth and amicable peer interactions during play, when one child takes a more assertive attitude, there is more of a need for another child's reactions to be less assertive and more receptive so that their interaction flows smoothly and amicably. Gabriel's case led me to the question, "Is encouraging children to speak up for themselves really more desirable for their social relationships and peer play than helping them learn to be flexible, considerate, and patient?" I do not mean to devalue children's assertive speech and actions. What I found from such instances and what I am suggesting is that valuing children's assertiveness and ability to speak up for themselves is grounded in cultural beliefs and values, particularly with regard to gender[27] (Aina & Cameron, 2011; Martin, 1995; Rubin & Coplan, 2004; Rubin et al., 2011).

Additionally, based on this finding, I also suggest the necessity of challenging any socially and culturally negative connotations implied by the social characteristics of boys who seem less assertive, milder, more introverted, or quieter. Because our perceptions of children's social characteristics are very cultural by nature, such characteristics can also be viewed differently according to the prevailing cultural beliefs and values (Rogoff, 2003). Therefore, in what follows, I attempt to critically reconsider the boys' "unassertiveness" and "sensitivity—weak character," which are socially and culturally regarded as less desirable for boys in the European American community. By doing so, I also attempt to challenge such negative connotations attributed to social and cultural gender norms while carefully examining Gabriel's and Tyler's characteristics displayed in several instances of their play.

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[26] I discussed the roles of followers in children's peer play in Chapter 4 (pp. 119-201) in detail.
[27] I will discuss the gendered aspects of assertiveness in more detail (pp. 196-198).

Gabriel's and Tyler's *Unassertiveness* in Peer Play

Gabriel's unassertive attitude. Gabriel's unassertive attitude was displayed mainly in two kinds of situations. First, his unassertiveness was manifested in the role of follower in peer play, a role that Gabriel usually assumed while playing with his peers. Second, it was also occasionally manifested in situations in which conflicts with peers occurred. As I discussed above and as was shown in Vignette 6.1, Gabriel no longer always assumed an unassertive attitude in this second kind of situation. However, his occasional display of an unassertive attitude provided me with insight regarding a beneficial aspect of boys' unassertiveness.

With regard to the first situation, Gabriel's roles in the playgroup were very similar to those Maggie performed. Because I have already dealt with Maggie's contribution to her peer group and the valuable aspects of her roles in her peer group in detail in Chapter 4, I will discuss briefly Gabriel's unassertiveness in his roles in peer play situations. Just like Maggie, Gabriel rarely took the role of leader. When he approached a group of peers who were playing, he did not rush in but cautiously collaborated by taking on less influential roles, such as just following the peers, adding some toys or stories to play situations, and asking questions regarding peers' play. Although Gabriel rarely took the initiative during play, he performed the roles as a *dialogic follower* for peer play. Just as Maggie's seemingly passive roles and unassertive attitude in peer play contributed to the avoidance of conflict, Gabriel's unassertive attitude was also beneficial for peaceful and harmonious peer play.

Regarding the second situation, Gabriel's ways of speaking and acting looked less assertive because he usually behaved gently, mildly, and softly. More specifically, as a representative example, his attitude of unassertiveness was particularly displayed in a situation in which a peer refused his requests. In order to enter peers' play, Gabriel sometimes asked if he

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could play with the toys that peers were playing with, whereas Maggie never seemed to pose such questions. Gabriel's requests were often refused. Nevertheless, I noticed that he usually accepted his peers' refusals by saying, "Oh-kay!" with his uniquely gentle tone of voice and smile. This gentle attitude seemed to allow cooperative and peaceful play to continue, as shown in the following vignette:

Vignette 6.2 Video transcripts: 05/15/2012

Katie is playing with a baby doll and a toy phone. Holding the baby doll with her left arm, she fiddles with the phone. Gabriel also has another toy phone. Gazing at Katie, he places the phone to his ear and says, "Hello!" There is no answer. He taps the phone twice and puts it on the table. Only then does Katie answer him, "Hello!" Gabriel looks at her and comes closer to her, "Can I take care of the baby?" Katie takes a step backwards and hugs the baby doll more firmly. Gabriel says, "Oh-kay" rhythmically and takes a blanket from the baby crib. He unfolds the blanket and tries to spread it on the crib. . . . Pulling a shopping cart, Katie comes inside the housekeeping center. She shouts, "Pack up! Pack up! We are going to beach." She pours some plastic fruits and vegetables into the cart and organizes them so that they look nice. Gabriel says, "I will pack up the vacuum," lifts up the toy vacuum, and carries it here and there. He takes something (I could not recognize what it was) from the table and puts it in the cart. He asks, "Where is the car?" Packing up the fruits and vegetables busily, Katie answers, "Car? We don't have to drive." . . . Katie packs up all the stuff that is needed for the beach picnic. She pulls the cart to leave. Gabriel keeps following her around. When the plastic bell pepper falls onto the floor, he picks it up and puts it in the cart.

I noticed that in many cases, when a child's request was refused by peers, the child took an aggressive attitude, insisting that a peer share or complaining to Ms. Gracie about it. Gabriel's amiable reaction—a gentle smile—to a peer's refusal was very beneficial for the children's peer play because it kept their play peaceful and joyful. In the above vignette, even though Gabriel's request was refused by Katie, he accepted it graciously by saying "Oh-kay" rhythmically in a mild voice and by picking another task to assist her in caring for the baby doll. In spite of Katie's refusal, he continued his role of helping her prepare for the imaginary picnic. Likewise, just like Maggie's case, Gabriel's mild personality and seemingly passive roles in peer play, which could make him appear introverted, were actually rather helpful and desirable for children's peer play situations.

Tyler's unassertive speech. As expressed by Ms. Gracie's concern about Tyler's lack of confidence with peers and unwillingness to "speaking up for himself," his type of speech was similar to Gabriel's in that he did not insist with an assertive voice or action during play, particularly when conflicts occurred. Just as in the above discussion regarding beneficial aspects of children's unassertiveness in peer play, possible conflicts or troubles with peers were also avoided by Tyler's comparatively less assertive reactions. The following vignette particularly displays Tyler's and Ryan's distinctive speaking styles regarding their assertiveness. Through a short quarrel between Ryan and Tyler, I discuss the children's assertiveness in their interactions during peer play in more detail.

Vignette 6.3 Video transcripts: 02/28/2012

Tyler, Katie, and Ryan are playing in the housekeeping area. Tyler is preparing for camping on the floor. He takes plastic toy foods from a drawer and serves dishes on the floor. There is already an array of well-organized dishes on the floor. Ryan is playing a

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drum at the other side of the center. Ryan suddenly stops playing and comes closer to

Tyler to intervene in his camping play. Ryan looks into the drawer where the toy foods

are and stretches out his hand to take one, singing an impromptu song, "Hey, meats! Hey,

meats!!" Tyler tells him in a somber voice, "No, not yet. Don't take all the things…"

and lightly pushes Ryan's hand away from the drawer. Ryan inserts his hand more

forcefully into the drawer and rummages around for toy foods. Not taking his eyes off

the drawer, he tells Tyler, "You tell me what to do" in a commanding tone. Tyler moves

back and sits on the floor; looking at Ryan, he says, "Hey, I was going to make all the

camping" still in a somber voice. Ryan takes a plastic banana from the drawer and hands

it to Tyler; he says, "Here." Tyler takes it and serves it on the floor. Tyler repeats, "I

was going to make…" in a lower voice. It is barely audible. Before Tyler ends his

sentence, Ryan argues in a stronger and firmer voice, "I am trying to help you out. This

is not your center. It's everybody's center." In a louder voice that shows his intention

for Ms. Gracie to hear, Ryan glances at her and shouts, "Tyler is not sharing, Ms. Gracie!"

Tyler mumbles, "No, I was gonna…" in a low voice. Ryan interrupts Tyler in the middle

of what he is saying, "No!! You are not sharing!" Then, Ryan continues playing right

away, saying lightly, "I need some food to eat." He pretends to eat a lemon. From a

distance, Ms. Gracie tells them, "Use your words!" Ryan goes around the center and lies

down on the floor by the camping dishes. For a while, he pretends to sleep and watches

Tyler's camping preparations.

In this vignette, regardless of which child's words were more right or wrong[28], I focus only on

their ways of speaking and acting—the more or less assertive tone of voice and action, when

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[28] With regard to children's sharing, I do not think that they always should share with peers. There are
times when children want to play in their own way just as adults sometimes do. The issue of children's

they have a problem with peers. This kind of incident usually ended after a brief moment

without the situation worsening when Tyler called the peer's name less assertively, using the

tone of his voice to express his emotions—"He-y! Ry-an!" This vignette was the longest

description of a quarrel involving Tyler and his peers, even though Ryan prompted this argument.

In this vignette, Tyler challenged Ryan's sudden entrance with a tone and actions that were a bit

more assertive than usual in that he was holding his ground, as well. Perhaps because of his

longer than usual insistence, this quarrel might have lasted a bit longer comparatively.

The conversation between Ryan and Tyler in the above vignette directly shows their

different ways of speaking and interacting with peers during trouble. Ryan suddenly rushed into

Tyler's play, and Tyler did not allow Ryan to work his way into his camping play. Then, Ryan

spoke up and strongly asserted himself with various reasons supporting his claim, even by

cutting Tyler off in mid-sentence. Ryan also claimed his legitimacy by borrowing the teacher's

authority, which included the teacher's usual comments for children regarding sharing. Then, he

quickly chose the most effective way to confirm his claim by telling the teacher about Tyler's

refusal. When Tyler attempted to clarify that he did not intend to monopolize the toys, Ryan

immediately refuted Tyler's words and affirmed again that Tyler was not sharing with an

aggressive tone of voice. In contrast to Ryan's seemingly "confident" assertion, after Tyler

refused Ryan's attempt to join in his play, Tyler was able to work in only one complete sentence.

Tyler's words were cut off by Ryan's more aggressive assertion. As the quarrel continued,

Tyler's voice became weaker, and he looked dejected after this quarrel with Ryan.

Reviewing this scene repeatedly and other similar scenes, while focusing on the

children's less assertive actions, I began to see that Tyler's (and Gabriel's, as well) seemingly

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sharing should be understood in a variety of contexts such as ways of interruption, instant situations of
play, children's personalities, types of play, and so forth.

weak and unassertive actions rarely led to any severe conflicts. Although more assertive

children looked as though they were controlling all of the situations and incidents, less assertive

children were also influential participants in the incidents and played significant roles in making

choices regarding how the situations developed. Therefore, both of the boys in this vignette

were participating in the incident. The quarrel in this incident did not last long, even though it

was the longest exchange among Tyler's conflictive conversations with peers. While paying

special attention to Tyler's role in this quarrel with Ryan, I noticed that his seemingly weak

reaction significantly affected every moment of their quarrel and played a role in ending it more

quickly and peacefully. In particular, the main reason for this seemed to be that the way Tyler

refused or his complaints, which were less assertive and less strong, rarely hurt others' feelings

and rarely aroused others' negative feelings.

Likewise, the boys' less assertive attitudes during play, which were perceived as

problematic, not only by Ms. Gracie but also more commonly by people in the European

American community (Martin, 1995), actually promoted peaceful peer play and were rather

helpful in that they helped resolve conflicts during play. Assertive speech or action may also be

needed for children in certain situations. However, having observed incidents involving

assertiveness during play, I argue that children's, particularly boys', unassertiveness can also be

desirable for their social relationships and social lives and should be also valued as a natural

social characteristic.

Reconsidering Boys' *Sensitivity* in Peer Play

Tyler's excessive sensitivity was the other trait that concerned Ms. Gracie with regard to

his social competence. Through a search of the literature, I found her concern was closely

related to the cultural image of "sissy" boys. According to Evans and Davies (2000), "The label

of 'sissy' is given to boys who avoid tough aggressive play, including sports, and those who

exhibit any 'weakness' through affection or tenderness" (p. 267). In addition, I also found many

similarities between Ms. Gracie's concern about Tyler's "too sensitive[ness]" and "[easily]

becom[ing] teary" and the parents' concern about "excessive emotionality (especially frequent

crying) and passivity in their sons" (p. 161) that was investigated by Kane (2006). Kane

explored parents' responses to children's gender nonconformity, and in her study, most

participating parents of sons negatively perceived their sons' excessive emotionality. The

following excerpt presents examples of such parents' views:

> A white, upper-middle-class, heterosexual father, concerned about public crying, said
>
> about his five-year-old son, "I don't want him to be a sissy. . . . I want to see him strong,
>
> proud, not crying like a sissy." Another father expressed his frustration with his four-
>
> year-old son's crying over what the father views as minor injuries and indicated action to
>
> discourage those tears: "Sometimes I get so annoyed, you know, he comes [crying], and I
>
> say, 'you're not hurt, you don't even know what hurt is yet,' and I'm like 'geez,
>
> sometimes you are such a little wean,' you know?" (white, middle-class, heterosexual
>
> father). . . . [F]or most parents, across racial, class, and sexual orientation categories, it
>
> was indeed evident. (pp. 161-162)

Although Ms. Gracie did not directly use the word *sissy*, her elaboration of her concern about

Tyler indicated that she was wary of Tyler being a sissy. Several studies considering children's

violation of gender norms (Connell, 1996; Kane, 2006; Martin, 1995; Sandnabba & Ahlberg,

1999) reported that, for boys, being a sissy was negatively perceived not only by children but

also by adults. Consequently, boys are likely to be encouraged to be emotionally stronger and to

stand up for themselves.

Martin (1995) also reported that such characteristics as "gentle," "sympathetic," and "eager to soothe hurt feelings," which are indicative of children's sensitivity, were considered less desirable for boys than for girls. While observing Gabriel's interactions with peers, I found Gabriel acted cautiously and mildly, often with a gentle smile. I noticed several situations in which he showed empathy in regard to his peers' emotions and actively tried to console them. However, such characteristics were not mentioned by Ms. Gracie and rather seemed to influence her perception of him as less socially competent. Therefore, corresponding to Martin's claim, Gabriel's sensitivity to and empathetic caring for others' emotions were not appreciated and valued as a strong point of boys' social competence. In this section, this social characteristic— excessive sensitivity, being a sissy—which is deemed less desirable for boys, will be examined by closely looking into Tyler's and Gabriel's peer interactions during peer play.

Tyler's Excessive Sensitivity

Although Tyler did not cried during my observations, I noticed several situations with regard to his "excessive" sensitivity that Ms. Gracie described during an interview. For example, he showed sadness or discontent with his peers easily; he became sulky easily while playing with his peers. When he disliked what one of his peers did, he usually called the peer's name in an irritated voice and sat in sulky silence. Consistent with the teacher's comments, Tyler's tendency to become sullen occasionally seemed to be regarded as reflecting his excessively sensitive reactions toward little interruptions or dislikeable actions by his peers. He seemed to get hurt easily by others and expressed his negative feelings through less assertive speech and actions.

There were two kinds of situations in which Tyler became sulky or in which he expressed his hurt feelings. First, when a peer interrupted what he aimed to do in his play or when a peer

broke in on his enjoyable play activities, he usually called the peer's name in an irritated voice. Actually, the first kind of incident occurred frequently with other children as well, although there were differences in the ways they expressed themselves. They expressed their negative feelings and their intentions for play in various ways; for example, they strongly objected to peers' interruptions by saying "No!" or by blocking their peers' approaches with their bodies. However, Tyler tended to express his negative feelings—his refusals or discontent with peers—in unaggressive ways, not using assertive words or actions, usually with his voice intermixed with tears. Therefore, he looked more sensitive and weak due to his less assertive ways of expressing negative feelings, insisting on his needs, and defending himself. With regard to his less assertive speech and actions, I have already discussed their positive aspects during peer play previously, particularly when a conflict occurred between children (See the discussions regarding Vignettes 6.2 and 6.3). Corresponding to my earlier discussion, Tyler's seemingly excessively sensitive reactions to peers characterized by unassertive speech do not simply represent weakness and lack of competence. Rather, they are examples of children's natural social characteristics and often work beneficially for a peer group by relieving discord with peers or reducing the likelihood of conflict during play (See Vignette 6.3).

The second type of situation that negatively impacted Tyler's emotions involved difficulties with his favorite friend, Katie. When Tyler's feelings were hurt because of something Katie said or did, he typically stopped playing with her and looked morose. This type of incident was hardly noticed in the other children's cases. Ms. Gracie mentioned Tyler and Katie's friendship in the interview: "Tyler and Katie are very close." Tyler's close relationship with Katie was obvious. Most children did not have any specific friends they played with, although there were some children who played together more frequently than others. However,

when the children went out for outdoor play, Tyler and Katie always played together, because during outdoor play, the children were totally free to choose friends with whom to play.

Katie tended to be a leader in the playgroup; along with Ryan, she was also considered a socially competent child by Ms. Gracie. The following is Ms. Gracie's description of Katie in an interview.

Interview transcripts: 02/21/2012

Katie? (Laughter) Katie… She is just a sweetie. But, she is just a bundle of energy. . . . I think, Katie probably is pretty social. Yeah. I think, she is probably popular in school, leads things, and probably is doing very well. I don't see her pulling back from anybody really.

Just as Ms. Gracie described, Katie was very vivacious and daring in her play. She usually led the children's table talk during lunchtime. She was less concerned with the delicate emotions of others than were children such as Maggie, Gabriel, and Tyler. She always assumed the role of commanding and controlling other peers during play, whereas Tyler was more likely to follow her orders. Likewise, they played in harmony with each other and got along very well; however, she sometimes made Tyler unhappy inadvertently. I found that Tyler's seemingly sensitive reactions were very contextual and relational. Although these kinds of incidents did not occur very often, I noticed some instances in which Tyler became sullen because of Katie.

Vignette 6.4 Video transcripts: 04/10/2012

Katie and Maggie go inside the main play equipment first, and then, Tyler follows them. The play equipment has two sets of stairs, and they enter through the hole to get in the downstairs section of the play equipment. (There is a steering wheel inside of the downstairs area.) Katie shouts, "Let's drive! Let's d-rive!!" Tyler said something. (I

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could not hear what he was saying because he said it very quietly.) Katie says, "No! We

are going to get Tyler. We are going to get a certificate?" Maggie holds onto the steering

wheel with both hands and pretends to drive a car. Katie shouts to Tyler, "Hey, go to the

Jungle Gym!" Tyler has been engaged in playing with a caterpillar. He looks around on

the ground to find a caterpillar with which to play. (Katie has one in her hand, and he has

been trying to touch it several times.) When he is just about to enter through the hole to

be inside with Katie, she obstructs him and shouts, "Just go! Go! Go to the Jungle Gym.

You go, [otherwise] you'll be late!" Tyler says, "I need a… I need a chance to play with

the caterpillar." Katie pretends to be in a hurry and shouts, "No, no! Go into the Jungle

Gym because you have to be la…, because you are going to be late soon." Tyler runs to

the Jungle Gym. Katie shouts to him, "We will pick you up around one o'clock." . . .

After a while, Tyler runs back to them and reports that there is something (I could not

understand what he meant) in the Jungle Gym. Maggie shows a surprised look, and Katie

commands him to go to another area that is nearer to them. Tyler sits down there and

waits for them. . . . After about one and a half minutes, Katie calls Tyler to come to them.

Tyler now gets inside. Katie says, "Now you can have it." Tyler's face brightens up, and

he looks excited. However, while Maggie and Katie talk about another issue, Katie just

holds the caterpillar and does not hand it to Tyler. Tyler looks glum. Katie teases him by

lightly sprinkling sand on his knee. Tyler shrieks and sprinkles sand on her knees. Katie

laughs and shouts, "O.K. Stop!" . . .

A little later, Katie and Tyler are riding tricycles around the playground. Katie speeds up,

and Tyler tries to catch up to her. Tyler speeds up, too, but the gap between Katie and

Tyler becomes wider. Tyler suddenly slows down and gets off the tricycle. He curls up

his lips and goes to the stairs of the playground sliding equipment with his arms slumped down to the ground. With a sullen look, he crosses his arms and sits down on the stairs. In this vignette, although Tyler had wanted to play with a caterpillar, Katie did not give it to him while continuously enticing him into her imaginary picking-up play. While expressing his desire at times, he followed her play scenario by going to the Jungle Gym and waiting for her to call him to come over. Finally, he expressed his desire more strongly with his morose look, again in his unassertive way of expressing himself. Later on that same day, Tyler became sullen again because Katie rode her tricycle faster and farther away from Tyler.

Such reactions by Tyler to Katie's actions seemed to have relevance to their relational interactions with each other. According to Ms. Gracie, Tyler "picked" Katie as a close friend and developed a close relationship with her. Although Katie seemed to like playing with Tyler, Tyler seemed to be more attached to Katie. For example, in this vignette, even when he was mad at her while riding a tricycle, he eventually followed her, although she was not concerned about his angry look. Specifically, Tyler was more dependent on Katie, and his emotionally negative reactions were mostly aroused by incidents in which Katie disappointed him by her less considerate actions such as ignoring his desire to play with a caterpillar and riding her tricycle too fast for him to catch up with her as in the above vignette. Rather than being attributable to just his own problematic characteristics, Tyler's seemingly "too sensitive" reactions seemed to arise from relational interactions, that is, interactions in his relationships with Katie as representative examples. Moreover, his sensitive reactions were founded not only on his affection in social relationships but also on his sensitivity in social interactions. Additionally, again, such reactions by Tyler were perceived as problematically "too sensitive" by Ms. Gracie,

particularly due to his less assertive styles of speech and actions and the gender norms for boys, which are strictly against boys' "being sissies."

Gabriel's Sensitivity to His Peers' Feelings

While observing Maggie's, Tyler's, and Gabriel's play, I thought that they were *quietly* sensitive to peers' feelings and emotions, and this quiet sensitivity fostered good peer relationships. I noticed several situations in which Gabriel cared for his friends' feelings and emotions and made a particular effort during play to comfort them. As I mentioned in the section in which I discussed Maggie's sensitivity toward others' feelings, Gabriel's quiet and sympathetic caring for others' states of mind reflected his interests in others and thoughtfulness regarding peers' emotions. His roles during peer play looked passive due to his quietness but were actually thoughtful and rather active in that he brought his sympathy into his caring actions at those moments. The following vignette is one of the examples that show Gabriel's careful thoughts and actions with regard to peers' feelings.

Vignette 6.5 Video transcripts & Field notes: 05/15/2012

Katie, Maggie, and Gabriel are playing in the housekeeping area. They are preparing a party for someone's birthday. Katie places the policeman costume on the floor in front of her and says to Maggie and Gabriel, "I will play the drum!" Ryan is playing in the science center next to the housekeeping area. He shouts to Katie, "No, Katie!! No~! You make your own and enjoy it. I planned to play the drum." Katie stands up and looks at Ryan. Katie whines and shouts to Ryan, "No, I wanna play the drum still." Ryan shouts, "No, I will play the drum." Katie breaks down in tears. Gabriel was concentrating on placing dishes on the party table. He finds Katie is crying and comes closer to her. He pats her on the shoulder. However, she doesn't stop crying and goes to

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Ms. Gracie. Gabriel looks at her going to the teacher and follows her. Katie tells Ms.

Gracie, "Ryan doesn't let me play the drum in there." Ms. Gracie steps in to mediate the

dispute between Katie and Ryan. Ms. Gracie has a short conversation with Katie and

calls Ryan. Gabriel comes back to the center and continues his play while occasionally

gazing at them. He grabs two plastic toy knives and crosses his arms rhythmically

making sounds with the knives on the chair. Katie comes back to the center, and Gabriel

grabs one plastic bowl and asks Katie with smile, "Shall we play the drums?" Katie gets

one plastic banana and one plastic rolling pin from the drawer, and Gabriel looks around

to find another proper plastic knife to play the drum. Katie and Gabriel sit on the floor

side by side and play the drums together.

In this vignette, Gabriel displayed his concern about Katie's emotions. When Katie talked to Ms.

Gracie, he followed and stood by her. A short while after Katie came back, he prepared the

drums for her and him and gently invited her to play the drums with him. He considered Katie's

emotions and sensitively reacted to her emotional condition.

The following vignette is another example that represents Gabriel's caring for peers'

emotional states. In this Pre-k class, there were four children who attended intermittently. On

the day when one of these children, Sophie, was visiting this class, she was allowed to play in the

housekeeping area where Gabriel, Katie, and Maggie were already playing. Sophie seemed

unfamiliar with the classroom peers and circumstances. She diffidently came in, looking around

the play center and fiddling with her hair that she wore in pigtails. As she wandered around the

center, the peer who first smiled at and talked to her was Gabriel.

Katie, Gabriel, and Maggie are in the housekeeping area playing independently. Katie is playing mother. She lays a baby doll on the shopping cart that is full of plastic fruits and vegetables and carefully covers up the doll with blankets. Gabriel takes another baby doll and a necktie from the toy container and puts on the necktie. Maggie is playing mother with another baby doll. Ms. Gracie is talking with Sophie and says to Katie, Gabriel, and Maggie in a louder voice that Sophie wants to play in the housekeeping area. (Because Sophie came to the class late, Ms. Gracie seemed to be asking her in which center she wanted to play.) Gabriel looks at her and answers, "Okay, you can." Looking at Sophie coming into the play center, Katie gives a warning in advance, "Don't mess up this stuff. This's packed up." Sophie approaches and comes in the center treading cautiously. Gabriel puts a bib on the baby doll and comes near Sophie. He talks to her and smiles. (I could not hear what he told her. I was able to hear some of the words that Sophie and Gabriel said. Sophie said, "I don't know." And later on, Gabriel said, "I am your brother." Gabriel seemed to invite her to play with him.) He whispers into her ear and goes to the other side of the center with a smile. Sophie smiles without saying a word and follows him. After a little while, Gabriel gives her the baby doll with which he is playing. She takes it and adjusts the doll's clothes. While not engaging in play, Sophie just stands up with the doll, looking around the center. Crawling under the table and climbing on the chairs placed in the middle of the center, Gabriel occasionally creates a story about playing mother and father. . . . Sophie comes closer to Gabriel and puts the necktie on Gabriel's clothes. Gradually, she begins to play mother and pats the baby doll, pretending to take care of a baby.

Gabriel usually followed other peers' directions and play situations rather than inviting peers and initiating peer play. However, in this scene, he took the initiative in playing with Sophie, who was less familiar with this Pre-k class. When Sophie came into the housekeeping area, he not only approached her first but also invited her by engaging in a game of make-believe that involved playing mother and father and voluntarily relinquishing the baby doll to her. Although it took a little time for Gabriel to get her to participate willingly in his game, his attempt to help her demonstrates his consideration of the emotional states of others.

Like Tyler's "excessive" sensitivity, about which Ms. Gracie expressed concern, Gabriel's sensitivity was not viewed as positively impacting his social competence. Just as in Maggie's case, Gabriel's and Tyler's sensitivity created foundations for their relationships with peers. Moreover, their sensitivity seemed to have contributed to their harmonious interactions with peers. They never initiated any conflicts by rushing into peers' play in a cavalier manner or by behaving mischievously to provoke their peers. Although there were also some conflicts between Tyler and other children and between Gabriel and other children, these mostly resulted from the peers' abrupt interruptions of their play. Just as I explained with regard to these children's unassertiveness, their deliberate actions helped them avoid words or actions that would cause negative reactions from other peers.

To sum up, by comparing and contrasting the teacher's descriptions of some of the participating children, I found that certain social characteristics were more or less valued and more or less promoted in judging and fostering children's social competence based on their gender. Gabriel's and Tyler's quietness, unassertiveness, and excessive sensitiveness—unlike similar characteristics displayed by Maggie—were considered as particularly problematic actions that the teacher had to deal with and that the boys should overcome. By investigating these two

boys' play and peer interactions closely, I found that they had similar, although slightly different, sensitivities and unassertive attitudes. Regardless of the differences between Gabriel and Tyler, speaking and acting in less assertive ways were their own means of expressing themselves and actually helped them reduce the number of conflicts that occurred during play. Their sensitive reactions were also derived from their sensitivity in social interactions and reflected their interests in others. These two boys' social characteristics, which concerned the teacher and might concern other teachers as well, were actually positive attributes that contributed to peaceful interactions with peers during play and that enhanced their peer relationships.

Implications

Now, while discussing some key issues of the findings further, I provide some implications for research and practices for early childhood education. First, teachers' or adults' perceptions about children's social competence are closely related to cultural values and beliefs regarding gender roles in community. Rogoff's (2003) discussions of social expectations about the roles of girls and boys in social relations support this study's findings. According to Rogoff, perspectives on gender roles in communities are related to the biological roles of women as mothers and men as fathers. She affirms, "It is not surprising that gender differences among children are consistent with the adult roles of the current generation of women and men in many communities around the world" (p. 193). Rogoff also states:

> Differences between boys and girls in social relations, such as aggression and nurturance, reflect a clear relationship to the roles expected of men and women in many cultural communities. . . . [B]oys [were] more physically aggressive than girls and girls more often engaged in nurturant and responsible behavior. (p. 192).

Likewise, children's social characteristics reflect and are affected by socially and culturally expected roles of men and women, and of boys and girls, in social relations.

While also reporting that certain characteristics of men and women are attributed to social expectations about gender roles in ordinary life practices, Draper (1975a), who is the scholar discussed earlier interested in social and cultural gender roles, more specifically explains certain male and female behavioral characteristics as follows:

> [T]he greater assertiveness, achievement, and self-reliance widely reported for males (both young and adult) has been interpreted as deriving from characteristically masculine experiences. Females are reported to be more nurturant, obedient, sensitive to the needs of others. . . . [T]his results from pressure for particular kinds of behaviors in anticipation for eventual motherhood and primary child rearing responsibilities. In many societies girls get direct practical training in nurturant and prosocial behaviors because they are expected to take care of younger children, whereas boys typically are not. (p. 602)

As implied by Rogoff's (2003) and Draper's statements, in this study, a boy's more aggressive ways of speaking and acting are understood as characteristics of a "boyish" boy and regarded naturally and more positively with regard to children's social competence. According to Draper, these are also promoted by everyday life practices and social interactions. On the other hand, a boy's more sensitive and dependent characteristics, which are more closely associated with girls' nurturant and responsible behaviors, are considered less desirable and even problematic for his social competence. Likewise, different social and cultural expectations for boys and girls— expectations for them to be "girly" girls and "boyish" boys in social relations, respectively— affected the teacher's perceptions regarding the children's social competence and instructions for each of them.

Such *gendered* beliefs and values regarding children's social characteristics are grounded in the culture of a community. Different cultural communities have different emphases on gender roles in social relations and, consequently, different perspectives on each social characteristic. For example, Rogoff (2003) posits, "gendered aspects of assertiveness vary across communities" (p. 192). According to her, European American preadolescent girls and African American girls tend to act differently with regard to assertiveness; European American girls tend to become "less confident and more deferential" (p. 192) at this age, whereas many African American girls become "more assertive and self-sufficient" (p. 192). Likewise, based on different perspectives on gender roles in their communities, desirable characteristics for girls and boys vary, and these characteristics also seem to affect children's social tendencies. Therefore, teachers' *gendered* perspectives on boys' and girls' social competence can be determined differently depending on culture.

Consistent with the setting and the participants of this study—a child care center operated by a local church in the state of Georgia and a teacher who is a European American Christian woman in her sixties living in the South, this study exclusively involves the perspectives of European American society on children's social competence. This also arouses the issue of the intersectionality of gender and race/ethnicity in this study. As discussed in the limitations of this study[29], the focal children's familial information was limitedly reflected in the interpretation of the data, only depending on the interviews with the teachers. Because the participating children's ethnic characteristics and the cultural values in their familial community are not fully considered and discussed in this study's findings, conflicts in cultural beliefs and values between the teacher's and the participating children's communities can possibly exist. For example, the

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[29] See the discussions on the limitations of this study (p. 40).

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meaning of assertiveness can be different depending on the cultural values in communities. Moreover, particularly in this chapter, considering the fact that the boys—Gabriel and Tyler— whose less assertiveness and sensitivity were regarded problematic, are African American and Latino American respectively, I cannot exclude the possibility that the teacher used different standards for these children's social characteristics based on her beliefs and values regarding ethnically-specific gender roles. Therefore, although this study only focused on the perspectives of the teacher, a European American woman living in the South, without consideration of the children's ethnic and familial backgrounds, it is notable that a more complicated intersectional cultural value system may work when we perceive children's social competence. Nevertheless, I found that there is a lack of research on gendered aspects of culturally valued social competence, that is, cultural perceptions of and cultural beliefs and values regarding social competence that are intermingled with gender norms. In this respect, I call for further research in this area of study that includes more diverse cultural values regarding gendered aspects of children's social competence and that focuses more on everyday practices and interactions between teachers and children with regard to children's social competence, gender, and various cultural contexts.

Second, Draper's (1975b) comment informs us of the necessity of critical reflection on our cultural values and beliefs. While establishing differences in the social status of men and women according to the different lifestyles and the differently imposed duties for men and women, she states, "In societies where aggressiveness and dominance are valued, these behaviors accrue disproportionately to males, and the females are common targets, resulting in a lowering of their status" (p. 91). Draper's statement affirms that social values regarding gendered social characteristics are closely associated with the social status of men and women. In other words, according to her, when social characteristics that are relevant to a majority of

men are more valued in a community, women are likely to be considered less competent, and the cultural values and beliefs with regard to gender roles generally benefit men and produce male-centric social stratification. From her explanation, it is noteworthy that certain cultural values and beliefs regarding social characteristics can produce inequality among those who do not fit this cultural standard. Moreover, these values are frequently related to gender.

As example of this type of production of inequality can be seen in the Pre-k class, where the characteristics of assertiveness, extroversion, and initiative were more valued, and the children who had such characteristics were recognized as socially competent. On the other hand, the children who did not have such characteristics were considered less socially competent than others, and some of the boys, in particular, were instructed to overcome their own social characteristics. In addition, Gabriel's and Tyler's unassertiveness was considered more problematic in contrast to Maggie's case in that her unassertiveness did not concern Ms. Gracie. In other words, Ms. Gracie applied more rigorous standards to boys like Gabriel and Tyler, with regard to their quietness, and this prompted her to make special efforts to deal with their "problems." Such different standards regarding children's social actions based on gender have been discussed by many researchers (e.g., Engfer, 1993; Radke-Yarrow et al., 1988; Rubin et al., 2011; Sandnabba & Ahlberg, 1999). These researchers discuss parents' "*gender-specific* perspectives" (Engfer, 1993, p. 51; emphasis in the original) on children's social characteristics and argue that parents' reactions to children's social characteristics are associated with children's gender. For example, Rubin et al.'s (2011) statement addresses this study's finding: "shyness in girls is more likely to be rewarded and accepted by parents, whereas shyness in boys is more likely to be discouraged and result in more negative interaction" (p. 442). Moreover, several researchers (e.g., Kane, 2006; Martin, 1995; Sandnabba & Ahlberg, 1999) report that girls'

cross-gender behavior is more accepted by adults than boys' in both the North American and the

Finnish cultures. If a boy does not meet the community's standards for being a socially

competent boy, but instead has social characteristics closer to "girly features"[30] from the

perspective of the community, he is more likely to be perceived negatively based on social and

cultural values. A boy's "girly" characteristics are imbued with the community's negative

connotations, and a boy with such characteristics can face harsh criticism. Here, I do not mean

to argue about which gender is at more of a disadvantage. This issue may need a more thorough

examination of social and cultural structures regarding gender norms from a macro point of view.

Rather, from this study's findings, I argue that we need to pay particular attention to social and

cultural values that attach negative connotations to a certain social characteristic that makes

some boys or some girls appear socially incompetent.

The following statement by Rogoff (2003) elaborates on the implicit influences of

cultural values and beliefs regarding gender in our daily lives:

> Subtle information about gender in young children's daily lives may be especially likely
>
> to be accepted because it is taken for granted. … [I]nformation about gender role
>
> expectations is pervasive and is not just in the form of purposeful lessons or regulations
>
> but is conveyed also in differential treatment of boys and girls, men and women. (p. 76)

Because our cultural values and beliefs permeate all of our life practices, we are normally

unaware of them and do not recognize the ways they shape our words and actions. Therefore,

without critical reflection, we, as adults, unconsciously reinforce and teach children our

community's gender roles, which can be biased and which can inevitably produce and reproduce

inequality in our communities. For this reason, considering the power of such cultural values

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[30] By the phrase "girly feature," I meant to indicate that this boy's characteristics are directly counter to the community's expectations regarding a boy's role in social relations. Based on Draper's (1975b) statement, these "girly features" are usually less valued than "boyish features."

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and beliefs, I call for critical reflection on and reconsideration of our cultural values and beliefs regarding gender roles and the gendered types of social competence of young children. In particular, with regard to gendered aspects of social competence, I argue that we need to critically reflect on our beliefs about *so-called* girly girls and boyish boys and to determine whether or not we undervalue or fail to recognize the unique abilities and the positive characteristics of those children who do not fit into our gendered standard of social competence.

CHAPTER 7

"NO WAY. THE HUNDRED IS THERE."

No way. The hundred is there.

The child

is made of one hundred.

The child has

a hundred languages

a hundred hands

a hundred thoughts

a hundred ways of thinking

of playing, of speaking.

…

The child has

a hundred languages

(and a hundred hundred hundred more)

but they steal ninety-nine.

The school and the culture

separate the head from the body.

- Loris Malaguzzi in *The Hundred Languages of Children*

This quote is from Malaguzzi's poem "No way. The hundred is there" (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998, p. 3), which possibly has been cited by "a hundred hundred hundred more" educators and researchers. I used the title of this poem as the title of this chapter of my dissertation, the chapter on implications, because it actually contains the main messages that I wanted to address throughout this study. I encountered this poem about 13 years ago at a Reggio Emilia exhibition. I was deeply touched and impressed by this poem, which represented children's voices calling for adults' and society's recognition of their various ways of exploring the world and being in the world. While observing the children's various ways of interacting and relating with others, I was reminded of Malaguzzi's poem, and I consistently noticed the children's "ninety-nine" languages that are often ignored by the one way of thinking, behaving, speaking, and being promoted by school, which is a reflection of standardized criteria.

I revisited Malaguzzi's poem one day while I was writing this dissertation study. And, in this new look at the poem, the sentence "the school and the culture / separate the head from the body" caught my attention. Previously, I had focused only on "the school." However, Malaguzzi included "the culture" along with school and considered it as stereotyping children based on certain characteristics that ignore an individual child's uniqueness and autonomy. According to him, not only "the school" but also "the culture" disregard children's diverseness and teach them to act without thinking and to think without acting. In this sense, I was impressed by his keen insights into the close connection between school and culture. Furthermore, identifying my focal children's unique ways of interacting and relating with peers, which were often undervalued by adults and which often worked just fine in their peer groups during play, I confirmed what Malaguzzi represents in his poem: "the one language," as

culturally valued components in children's social competence, that undervalues and even "steals" children's other "ninety-nine languages" in peer interactions and relationships.

Throughout this dissertation study, I particularly considered the diverseness of children's social characteristics—children's "ninety-nine languages," which they use as social beings—and the influential powers of "the school and the culture" over them. On these grounds, I attempted to look closely at the roles that the children who were regarded as less social than other peers performed in the peer groups during play. I also attempted to challenge not only any standardized set of concepts about a socially competent child in our society but also my own values and beliefs with regard to social competence. I focused on how my focal children played their roles in the peer groups in their own ways, which were diverse, unique, and harmonious. While trying to exclude any negative biases about these focal children's "problematic" social characteristics, I paid particular attention to the contextual meanings of their social actions during play. By doing so, I attempted to understand what their actions meant and how their roles worked in their play with peers and were harmonized within the play situations. In this way, I also attempted to see the diverse sides of their social characteristics as they interacted with their peers.

In Chapter 1, I introduced the overall idea of this dissertation study and discussed the methodology and theoretical frameworks that I used for conducting this study and understanding children's social competence with regard to cultural contexts. Chapter 2 provided my literature search with regard to a general conceptualization of children's social competence in academia and particularly discussed its cultural aspects by articulating several values that are culturally appreciated or disregarded in the European American academic society. In Chapter 3, I explained the theoretical frameworks of this dissertation study—Cultural Psychology and

Bakhtin's theory of language—in more detail and the ways in which these theories guided this study. Additionally, by examining the history of cultural psychology and several of Bakhtin's theoretical concepts, I provided an analysis of the philosophical shifts of previous research on children's social competence and social development. In Chapters 4, 5, and 6, while closely examining the social characteristics of each child that were regarded by the teacher as the reasons for his/her insufficient social competence, I respectively presented my findings on each focal child's unique social characteristics in peer play. In Chapter 4, by taking a closer look at Maggie's "quietness" and "introversion" during peer play, I illuminated the value of shyness by challenging the general negative perceptions of the European American community regarding shyness. In Chapter 5, I investigated the meanings of Jason's uses of body in his peer interactions and play and discussed children's joyfulness in and their amazing capabilities for using their bodies during peer interactions and play. In Chapter 6, I explored two introverted boys' social roles in peer groups and discussed the gendered aspects of children's social competence by contrasting the teacher's different conceptions and approaches to boys' and girls' introversion.

In this chapter, based on the findings that I presented previously, I summarize the key implications of Chapters 4, 5, and 6 synthetically and extend them further to discuss practical implications for educators and researchers in the field of early childhood education. As my final thoughts on this dissertation study, I provide the image of Bakhtin's (1981) concept of *novel*, which is used to depict classrooms where children's diverse ways of exploring the world and being in the world are all appreciated and valued.

Before providing my implications for and final thoughts about this study, I would like to share the concern that I had while presenting this study's findings. I had a certain wariness about

presenting my findings about my focal children's social actions as displayed in their play with peers. I was concerned that my findings might be seen as a description of newly discovered social skills or desirable social behaviors. Therefore, before beginning this chapter, I would like to emphasize that my focus for this dissertation is on the actual roles and functions of the children when playing with their peers, though they are recognized as socially incompetent. Rather than making a list of the social skills and abilities they assume, the findings are part of my effort to reverse my own and generally accepted standpoints about these children's social incompetency. That is, my findings are detailed descriptions of these children's unique social talents as displayed in their play with others, the result of a reversal of general viewpoints about children's social competence, and a suggestion that a different view of these children's social characteristics is needed. I certainly believe that there is not one unified and absolute set or list of attributes regarding social competence, social skills, and social behaviors. Any standard or assessment tool commonly shared and used for educational or academic purposes is actually an aggregate of social and cultural beliefs and values that are frequently held to be true but, actually, are intrinsically mutable based on time and place. A child's social characteristics are manifested in multifarious ways depending on the situational contexts, and I hope that my findings are understood by readers as just some of the ways a particular child might interact with people and situations.

Implications for Early Childhood Educators and Researchers

First, while presenting the study's findings throughout this dissertation, I repeatedly called for a heightened awareness of children's diverse ways of interacting with and relating to peers. From this study, by describing positive aspects of the focal children's social characteristics that were regarded as problematic for their social development by their teacher, I

argued that these children played unique roles in their peer groups and that their seemingly

"problematic" characteristics actually contributed to peer play and interaction in each situation. I

found that they performed a variety of roles in their peer groups and that the meanings of their

actions were derived from situational contexts. In addition, I also affirmed that a kind of

individual value system is at work when one looks at a child's behaviors and that common

beliefs and values exist, shared by people in the same cultural community. Because cultural

values and beliefs are closely associated with an individual's value judgment and lifestyle,

certain social traits can be more valued than others by the people in the same community, even

though the other traits can work very well in social relationships or be valued in another cultural

community. Likewise, the social significance of each social trait is assigned based on people's

cultural beliefs and values, and they occasionally blind him/her to diverse facets and perspectives

when he/she adopts them without critical thinking. Therefore, just as I argued repeatedly

throughout this study, early childhood educators and researchers should not only consider

themselves as being affected by the discourses and social and cultural value systems of their

cultural community but should also recognize the values of children's diverse ways of interacting

and relating with others. Based on this, when they think about a child's social competence,

while challenging any existing negative connotations carried by a certain social characteristic,

they should consider more carefully how the child's unique social characteristics actually work

in peer groups.

Nevertheless, in the academic area of young children's social competence, a child's

unique social characteristics are often assessed by certain social and cultural standards associated

with the concepts of social competence. Mostly, research based on developmental perspectives

and dealing with concrete developmental criteria supports the dominant discourse in the

academic field (e.g., Asher et al., 1979; Cohn, 1990; Han & Kemple, 2006; Hartup et al., 1967; Hebert-Myers, Guttentag, Swank, Smith, & Landry, 2006; Ladd & Price, 1987). Only a few studies have provided perspectives critical of the dominant discourses based on developmentalism (e.g., Hutchby & Moran-Ellis, 1998; Thorne, 1993). Although these researchers approached children's social lives with increased consideration paid to children's agency, the primary foci of this research were placed on children's peer culture and socialization. With regard to children's social learning and social competence, research focusing on children's diversity and agency in their social lives is greatly needed in academia. In this sense, I promote researchers' appreciation of children's diverse and unique social characteristics as they are and respect for children's identities and agency as social beings when conducting studies regarding children's social competence.

Second, early childhood researchers and educators should be mindful that they can exert great influence not only on discourses around children's social competence in educational practices but also on an individual child's perceptions of himself/herself as a social being. Although this argument was not thoroughly discussed in the earlier chapters, I found that the teacher's perceptual descriptions of the young children's social competence were remarkably consistent with academic discussions on the topic. For example, in Chapter 2, by reviewing the academic literature regarding children's social competence, I found that children's social initiative, verbal interaction, and emotional regulation are more valued, whereas children's sensitivity to and empathy for others and shyness are relatively less valued in the European American community. Such values were significantly reflected in the teacher's descriptions of the children's social competence. This finding is also consistent with Lillvist et al.'s (2009)

report that teachers' definitions of *social competence* were very similar to those in the academic literature.

In addition, early childhood teachers are those to whom children usually give relationally special meanings and also who play particularly significant roles in their social development (Davis, 2003; Farmer, Lines, & Hamm, 2011; Katz & McClellan, 1997; Kindermann, 2011; Manke, 1997). Several studies extended mother-child attachment theory and suggested that "childcare teacher-child relationships can have many of the attributes of mother-child attachment relationships" (Howes & Hamilton, 1993, p. 17). While both authors affirm the dynamics of the teacher-child dyad in relationships and children's social and academic learning, Davis (2003) explains that teacher-child relationships significantly influence children's social and cognitive outcomes, and Manke (1997) suggests that teachers influence children's social and academic behavior via implicit and explicit expectations about them. Farmer et al. (2011) more specifically describe the two kinds of teachers' roles with regard to children's social development as follows:

> [T]eachers operate as an authority on society's rules and expectations for social behavior. In this role, teachers impart information, reinforce appropriate behavior, and provide guidance and correction for actions that are viewed as outside the typical norms for children and adolescents. . . . [A]s a facilitator of students' social interactions, opportunities, and general peer dynamics, . . . [via] teachers' dyadic interactions with toddlers as elaborative interchanges . . . [they help] young children establish skills and patterns of engagement to be used in peer-to-peer activities. (p. 248)

Likewise, although no direct scholarly discussion was found regarding teachers' influences on young children's self-perceptions of their social efficacy, several researchers manifested

considerable influences of teachers' attitudes about and descriptive norms for particular social

behaviors or tendencies on children's social behaviors and peer relationships (e.g., Barth,

Dunlap, Dane, Lochman, & Wells, 2004; Farmer et al., 2011; Gest & Rodkin, 2011; Mercer,

McMillen, & DeRosier, 2009). In particular, Farmer et al. (2011) state that "Through their

relationships with students, teachers have the ability to communicate to class members both the

general social value of specific social characteristics as well as their perceptions of a particular

student" (p. 249). Their statement implies that a teacher's evaluation of children's social

characteristics can considerably affect children's conceptions of social characteristics as well as

of themselves and others as social beings. Although I acknowledge children's autonomous roles

in their self-conceptions of themselves as social beings, I pay particular attention to teachers'

significant influences on children's development of self-concepts in this particular argument.

Bakhtin's (1981) concepts of *authoritative discourse* and *internally persuasive discourse*

help to amplify this discussion of researchers' influences on common discourses regarding

children's social competence as well as those of teachers on children's self-perceptions of social

competence. Bakhtin's concept of authoritative discourse reflects the common opinion of the

public, which influences people's consciousness of the world because its authority has already

been acknowledged by many people. Because authoritative discourse is the words of others, it is

"located in a distanced zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically

higher" (p. 342). Therefore, from Bakhtin's perspective, authoritative discourse plays a

significant role in human beings' consciousness. Our consciousness of the world is derived from

the constant dialogical process of struggles between authoritative discourse and internally

persuasive discourse. For example, when we try to understand a word's meaning, we refer to its

dictionary meanings—authoritative discourses—which contain "the authoritative tradition, of

generally acknowledged truths" (p. 344). We bring them into our personalized context and try to understand the word from our own perspectives in the existing contexts while referring to the privileged meanings of the word. We reformulate the word's meaning based on the situational contexts.

As implied by Bakhtin's concepts, the discourse in academia has a direct influence on early childhood teachers in that it has been acknowledged as an authoritative account based on scientific proof, although nowadays more diverse and critical perspectives exist in academia. For example, applying Bakhtin's perspective, when Ms. Gracie perceived each child's social characteristics in everyday life, the authoritative discourses, such as cultural values and discourses in her community and academic discourses that might be informed through professional training, might have had a significant influence on her understanding of them. At the same time, based on her individual life history, she might have had her own internally persuasive discourses regarding children's social competence; and by applying and examining—dialogizing—these two types of discourses in the existing contexts, she might have reformulated and modified her perceptions about the children. This application of Bakhtin's theory is supported by the close consistency between Ms. Gracie's descriptions and the scholarly discourses on children's social competence.

With regard to children's self-perceptions regarding social competence, although this study's finding did not fully address the direct influences of the teachers on the focal children, various scholarly findings presented above suggest the possibility of applying Bakhtin's theory to speculate on teachers as one of the greatest influences on children's self-perceptions. From Bakhtin's perspective, by referring to teachers' implicit and explicit expectations regarding children's social competence and making connections to what is considered better and worse,

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more valued and less valued, children become more perceptive of the cultural values reflected in social characteristics and come to perceive themselves and others with regard to social competence. Likewise, as discussed in the above sections, even though teachers' and children's consciousness are derived from dialogized processes between authoritative discourses and internally persuasive discourses, the discourses of an acknowledged authority (academic authority in the former and teachers' authority in the latter) exert significant influence on their judgment and evaluation. In this sense, it is critical that early childhood researchers and educators cautiously approach the issue of children's social competence, carefully considering the powerful influence they have on discourses in practices and on children's self-perceptions regarding social competence.

Third, as a follow-up to the previous argument, in order to promote discourses of young children's social competence that emphasize understanding of diversity, early childhood educators and teachers should be at the forefront of such discussions, critically reflecting on and refraining from value judgments about right or wrong and better or worse. In the above sections, I paid a little more attention to the influences of authoritative discourses—academic discourses and cultural values or beliefs—on people's perceptions and understanding, which were demonstrated by Bakhtin's (1981) explanation of an individual's dialogical process of selection between the two types of discourse. However, the supportive explanation of Bakhtin's concept of internally persuasive discourse is enlightening with regard to people's autonomy and creativity in their ideological development. He states, "The essence of the internally persuasive word, such as that word's semantic openness to us, [is in] its capacity for further creative life in the context of our ideological consciousness, its unfinishedness and the inexhaustibility of our further dialogic interaction with it" (p. 346). Therefore, although cultural values and beliefs and

public discourses significantly affect our understanding of children's social actions and social competence, we have many chances to challenge them by examining and applying them in the existing situations and contexts. *We* reformulate our *own* ideological consciousness from the intensive dialogical struggles within us. Likewise, although we are always surrounded by the significant influences of culture and public discourses in everyday life, we are actually influential subjects who have the ability to examine and reconsider them through our critical reflections.

While an individual's internally persuasive discourse is considered as not usually acknowledged by people and society, Bakhtin (1981) shows that it can produce creative and newly acknowledged language. He posits, "When someone else's ideological discourse is internally persuasive for us and acknowledged by us, entirely different possibilities open up" (p. 345). His statement provides us a hopeful message that a certain bias in our cultural values and beliefs and in public discourses can be reviewed and examined in various contexts and that when its authority is denied and when a new internally persuasive discourse is acknowledged by many people, "such discourse is of decisive significance in the evolution of an individual consciousness" (p. 345). Bakhtin explains, "[An internally persuasive word's] creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words, that it organizes masses of our words from within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition" (p. 345). Based on Bakhtin's explanation of internally persuasive discourse, individuals' critical reflections that challenge the power of cultural values and beliefs of a community can make a huge difference in people's consciousness. Just as Rogoff (2003) affirms that "all people participate in continually changing cultural communities" (p. 62), our cultural values and beliefs have been changing according to the passing of time, and we are the main agents of such changes. Early childhood researchers and educators, who can exert influential

power on public discourses and an individual child's social competence, are also those who can actualize the creative potential of internally persuasive discourses more influentially in the academic field and educational practices. Therefore, I argue that early childhood researchers and educators should be at the forefront of critical reflections on authoritative discourses regarding children's social competence and that they should guide public discourse toward a more equitable view of the possible social characteristics of children.

Fourth, early childhood educators and researchers need to pay particular attention to the contextual meanings of children's social actions in a peer group. Throughout this study, I reaffirmed that the field of early childhood education tends to concentrate on superficial factors, such as a child's words and attitudes. For example, the teacher's descriptions of each focal child were likely grounded on his/her behavioral aspects of social characteristics. She identified shy and introverted behaviors, less expressiveness in their verbal exchanges, excessive sensitivity, and lack of confidence when interacting with others (unassertiveness) as problematic characteristics of the focal children. Accordingly, she usually intervened in the children's social issues by simply telling them to use their words and urging them to control their bodies. Such interventions and perceptions of the children's social competence also reflect general academic discourses of the field. As briefly discussed in the earlier chapters, children's linguistic competence is frequently discussed as associated with social competence (e.g. Garfield et al., 2001; Katz & McClellan, 1997; Semrud-Clikeman, 2007). In particular, fostering verbal communication is an important part of teachers' interventions and instructions for children's social relationships (e.g., Katz & McClellan, 1997). Moreover, researchers' assessments of children's social competence tend to focus on behavioral characteristics and social skills (e.g.,

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Cummings et al., 2008; Denham et al., 2003), for example, the frequency of social interactions and angry-aggressive, anxious-withdrawn, sensitive-cooperative, and prosocial behaviors.

However, based on my findings, I clarified that children's seemingly problematic social characteristics actually worked effectively, peacefully, and harmoniously in peer play mostly in ways that are hardly recognizable. For instance, a shy child's silent participation in peer play and nonverbal interactions are viewed by early childhood teachers or researchers as worthy of neither interest nor praise. Children's bodily play and interactions are often viewed as undesirable for indoor play and are rarely regarded as positive aspects of their social relationships and social lives. In contrast, a child's intrusive social behaviors, such as directing peers and interacting verbally during play, draw teachers' and researchers' attention easily and are promoted for the social development and relationships of the child. However, this study's findings challenge such perceptions of and interventions for children's social competence. As presented in Chapter 4, Maggie's seeming inhibition and low frequency of peer interactions were actually her active considerations and reflective reactions to peers, although these actions were manifested quietly. Based on her thoughtful consideration, she, at times, made a significant contribution to the playgroup in an appropriate manner. Jason's bodily interaction and play with peers in Chapter 5 were also significant parts of children's successful social interactions and enjoyable social play. His use of bodily interactions often relieved conflictive situations and elicited peers' laughter. Therefore, although these children might have appeared to be less socially competent, they actually enjoyed their peer play in their own ways, participating considerately, reflectively, and also appropriately.

Children's outward social actions are easily acknowledgeable and assessable by teachers and researchers. However, as discussed earlier in this study, children's social actions are

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oriented to situational contexts as a response to certain people and situations. Therefore, without close consideration of the contextual meanings of children's social actions, early childhood educators and researchers are unable to approach the actual roles and values of their social actions in peer groups and play situations and might be easily led to make hasty judgments about them. Therefore, I argue that early childhood educators and researchers need to pay particular attention to the contexts of children's social actions in order to understand children's social competence.

Last, free playtime in the Pre-k class was a venue for the children to exercise their social competence in their own unique ways. There has been a substantial amount of research reporting the recent trend that the time for free play has been remarkably reduced in early childhood settings (e.g., Ginsburg, 2007; Henley, McBride, Milligan, & Nichols, 2007; Meier & Wood, 2004; Pellegrini, 2005; Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005). They attribute the main reason for this trend to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. According to them, the school districts have responded to the emphasis on accountability in preschool and primary school education by maximizing time for more academics and minimizing non-instructional time such as recess and free play. These researchers raise voices of concern while stressing the important values of free play.

This study gives more weight to the previous researchers' arguments. In Chapter 5, I have discussed the resemblance between children's free playtime and Bakhtin's (1984) notion of *carnival*. During free playtime, children are allowed to express themselves in their own ways and interact with peers most freely among the other structured time. Although there were some restrictions, such as classroom rules and the teacher's interventions during play, under such slight surveillance, the children, the focal children in particular, were able to exercise their own

ways of interacting and relating with others, and the worth of their social characteristics was displayed more fruitfully during free playtime. Therefore, children's diverse ways of expressions and interactions—*heteroglot languages*—are most activated during this time. The previous studies (e.g., Ginsburg, 2007; Pellegrini, 2005; Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005) placed the emphasis on free play and recess time from developmental perspectives. For example, Ginsburg (2007) states, "Play allows children to use their creativity while developing their imagination, dexterity, and physical, cognitive, and emotional strength" (p. 183). However, the findings of this study supplement the value of free playtime from a different point of view. I argue that because free playtime is a venue for the children—particularly minority children whose characteristics are less appreciated and less valued—to exert their personalities and natural social characteristics more freely and more influentially, free playtime has an important significance in the diversity and equality of education.

Suggestions for Future Research on Young Children's Social Competence

In this section, based on the findings and the implications of this study, I make suggestions for future research on young children's social competence.

First of all, I suggest further studies on the cultural values and beliefs of different communities regarding social characteristics of young children. In Chapter 6, I have discussed the limited perspectives of this study in that I was only able to reflect on European American cultural beliefs and values regarding the focal children's social competence—specifically, a child care center operated by a local church in the state of Georgia and a teacher who is a European American Christian woman in her sixties living in the South. While conducting this study, I began to wonder more about what the perspectives of different cultural communities on these focal children's social characteristics would be. I also came to wonder about the kinds of social

characteristics children in other cultural communities might have that would cause concern for their teachers or parents and about how these characteristics might actually work in the children's peer culture. Moreover, the specific characteristics of the setting and the participants of this study may have influence not only on the teacher's perceptions of the participating children's social competence but also on these children's play actions and peer relationships. Therefore, different perspectives from other cultural communities and from other contextual settings may provide additional explanations of this study's findings. Further studies will contribute to a better understanding of the diverse cultural values and beliefs about children's social competence because we can learn from different perspectives on other cultural communities and see ourselves differently, as well. In this way, further studies will help illuminate various cultural aspects of social competence.

Second, research on children's social competence based on diverse cultural contexts need to include individuals' subtle and complicated value systems, which are intertwined with those various *cultural* contexts (e.g., nationality, ethnicity, gender, generation, and etc.) and works differently based on *situational* contexts (e.g., more specific situational time and place such as free playtime, outdoor play, academic lessons—small group activity or large group activity, and etc.). Throughout this study, I found that each child's social characteristics could be interpreted differently according to an individual's complicated value system, which operates intersectionally among the various contexts. Although overarching values and beliefs about social competence exist in a cultural community, the contextual meanings and values of a social characteristic are derived from an individual's complicated value system functioning in diverse contexts. For example, in Chapter 6, I discussed the intersectionality of gender and ethnicity that could affect the teachers' perspectives on two boys'—an African American boy and a Latino

American boy's—unassertiveness and excessive sensitivity. These two boys' ethnic characteristics might have influences on the teacher's views of their social characteristics. It is possible that she might have different standards about gender roles in social interactions based on ethnic characteristics. It is also possible that there can be a conflict in cultural values between these two boys' familial communities and the teacher's community regarding boys' assertiveness or sensitivity.

In addition, in this study, I found that the teacher's value system was applied differently according to situational contexts. During play, Maggie's quietness and compliance raised the teacher's concern with regard to her social competence. However, during lesson times, such characteristics were rather desirable because Maggie did not cause any trouble and followed the teacher's directions very well. Gabriel was also described as an excellent student by the teacher. She affirmed, "Everything is done. [Gabriel and Maggie] obey the rules. They are just awesome kids from a teacher's perspective." With regard to Tyler, she also explained, "He hasn't ever given me any discipline problems at all." Likewise, the children's social tendencies were recognized differently according to the context. Even if certain characteristics of children are recognized as positive in a certain context, when it comes to children's social competence, these same characteristics can be re-evaluated and undervalued based on cultural standards regarding social competence. Since situated contexts change from time to time, the same social characteristics may appear favorable in one context and unfavorable in another. Certain kinds of social characteristics shine more brightly than others because of the social and cultural values implicitly embedded in us, whereas the same social characteristics can pale in significance or become problematic in terms of social and cultural values in a certain context. This initial

finding should be investigated thoroughly through systematic analysis with more data in order to be arguable. However, it is still worthwhile in that it opens up the possible issues of research.

This dissertation study did not engage in an in-depth exploration of the relationships between the teacher's perceptions of children's social characteristics and the various contextual factors. I argue that exploring such intertwined relationships would be meaningful because an investigation of this sort would shed light on teachers' situational judgments and educational approaches with regard to children's social learning, which are also culturally grounded. Further studies on teachers' value judgments of appropriateness and desirability in more varied kinds of contexts and the cultural messages embedded in them will provide more detailed explanations of teachers' instructional interventions for children's social competence and social learning.

Third, I suggest further research that focuses more on the voices of children who are regarded as less social than other peers. This study placed more emphasis on critically examining and challenging dominant cultural values and discourses about socially incompetent children rather than on exploring these children's actual social lives. However, while writing this dissertation study, I could not stop thinking that this study's findings would have been more fruitful if I had encouraged the focal children to tell the stories of their social lives and their peer relationships, issues regarding their social relationships, and their perceptions not only of their social competence generally but also of their own sociability. Children's social worlds shown from their perspectives may be different from those that are observed by their teachers and by researchers. Therefore, I suggest that their stories about their own social worlds would challenge social and cultural biases and judgments about them and help us understand their social lives from their perspectives.

Last but not least, while conducting this study, I found that the video data were very useful for exploring children's social lives, social relationships, social interactions, and play. Although engaging in the participants' ordinary lives and the research site is decisive for understanding the collected data synthetically, video data were very useful in that they allowed me to revisit my memories after observations, review the children's play repeatedly, identify subtle issues that might be related to the research questions, and compare my preliminary findings with the teacher's interviews. Even though other data, such as jotted notes, a research log, and field notes, were all significant for opening my understanding and for clarifying and refining my findings, video data contained a great deal of information that helped deepen my comprehensive understanding of situations. Moreover, they were also utilizable in the interviews with the teachers in order to get the teachers' opinions about the video scenes and also my findings. Because of the time gap between the data collection and data analysis and writing, I was not able to have a conversation with the teachers regarding all of my findings. Nevertheless, I have used some videos to have the teachers' views about the focal children's social play and found using videos in interviews effective to have deeper and more detailed conversations. Interviewing children with video data would also be a good way to motivate them to tell their stories.

Final Thoughts

Now, I am at last nearing the end of this journey of exploration. Before ending this study, I would like to share the overall thoughts that I have had during the long journey of this dissertation study. By providing critical discussions of the prevailing cultural values and beliefs about children's social competence, this study intended to illuminate the uniqueness and variety of children's social competence and the agentive social roles and activities that children who are

regarded as less social actually enact in social interactions and relationships. Although

nowadays our society emphasizes and pursues the idea of diversification in education while

eschewing monolithic education, the social inclination to judge people and phenomena based on

unified social norms and values still persists. Accordingly, I present here my overall thoughts on

educational equity issues. Then, finally, borrowing Bakhtin's notion of *novel*, I provide a

metaphoric image of *schools as novels*, visualizing my hopeful reimagining of school as a place

where all the languages of children are valued and appreciated.

While conducting this study, I became more conscious of the social and educational

inequality produced by our cultural values and beliefs. In fact, this study was begun with the

recognition of the different cultural meanings and values placed on a given social characteristic.

This initial recognition led me to view myself as a cultural being surrounded and affected by

powerful cultural discourses. Additionally, I was constantly reminded of Bakhtin's (1981)

statement, "The word in language is half someone else's" (p. 293). As a cultural being, I

consciously and unconsciously cherish particular values and beliefs and conventional

thoughts/thinking under the immense power of culture and someone else's words. Throughout

this study, I realized that a particular belief developed and cherished over time aligns with a list

of various values hierarchically, attached with more or less importance, and right or wrong

judgment. This can be said to be rather natural in that social norms and values are the agreed-

upon and accumulated common ground that people have inherited from time immemorial.

However, due to this feature of cultural values and beliefs, we sometimes realize that certain

thoughts are deep-rooted biases. I discussed Bruner's (1996) elaboration of school as a culture in

Chapter 2. Bruner argues that cultural factors in school are not neutral but political and that

social and cultural inclinations toward some values and ideas can be the cause of the educational inequality experienced by children.

Many educational experts in a variety of areas have paid special attention to equity in education by focusing on minority children in the context of social class, gender, race, and so forth. These factors have significant influences on children's social lives and educational opportunities. Regardless of the intrinsic values of each individual child, the social, economic, and cultural background of each child often determines his/her social and educational life. Likewise, inequality in education is produced by social and cultural hegemony, political power, social structure, and so on. However, from this study, I have learned that the root of inequality does not always reside in such external factors but often in our value system—a certain belief that attaches more or less importance and right or wrong judgments to self and others. My learning about the implicit possibility of inequality embedded in cultural beliefs and values also corresponds to Bruner's (1996) perspectives on political aspects of school culture.

There are a considerable number of studies that have explored the close relationships between social competence and academic achievement. Many researchers have asserted that children's social competence is an important predictor of children's school adjustment and academic success in concurrent and later school grades (Birch & Ladd, 1996; Galindo & Fuller, 2010; Ladd, 1990; Ladd & Price, 1987; Rhoades et al., 2010; Shernoff, 2010; Welsh et al., 2001; Wentzel, 1991; Williams & Galliher, 2006). According to these studies, children's prosocial behaviors serve as a positive foundation for their successful academic performance. Although there is no specific explanation of how the social values and expectancies work and of how they affect children's school performance, some inferences can be drawn from the assertions in these studies. First, some fortunate children, whose social dispositions and tendencies are well suited

for their cultural norms and values, advance to academic success and social success more easily and comfortably. Second, the particular social abilities that our ability-oriented society acknowledges and values are, thus, associated with social prerogatives.

I admit that our value system—judgments about right or wrong—is necessary for us to maintain our moral life. However, it also contains certain biases about people, things, and even immaterial values, as well. As discussed above, minorities in education are not always determined by external conditions, such as race, social class, gender, and so forth, but often by our value and belief system, our ideology, and our particular biases[31]. In this study, regardless of their race, social class, or other external values, the focal children, whose social characteristics are undervalued and treated as undesirable and whose intrinsic natures are questioned, can be considered minorities that are produced by our cultural values and beliefs—specifically, particular biases. Borrowing Melaguzzi's words in his poem, I argue that "school and culture steal" these children's "Ninety-nine languages" and their agency in their social lives. Sadly, this is part of our current educational practices and a cultural phenomenon. Therefore, while minority students, such as racial minorities and low-income students, should receive the attention of educational scholars, I believe that there are numerous other minorities produced by our particular value and belief systems and that they also should be of concern to educational scholars. In the hope that my findings in this study can ultimately contribute to a more equal public appreciation of the various kinds of social competence and agency of children in their social lives, I call for greater attention by educational scholars to these minority children whose intrinsic natures are undervalued and sometimes oppressed by our social and cultural values and beliefs.

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[31] I admit that these elements are also often intermingled with and closely connected to external conditions.

Finally, I end this dissertation study by proposing the re-imagination of school as a *novel*[32]. I have already discussed in Chapter 3 how Bakhtin's (1981) notions of poetry and novel led me to visualize two different images of schools. Based on his notions, I present the image of *school as a novel*, which pictures a school where the heteroglot nature of children's social competence and relational tendencies is welcomed, included, and respected. In school, there naturally exist tension-filled dynamics between the centralized norms and values regarding children's social competence and the diversified social characteristics. The existence of such tension confirms that the community is alive. A lack of tension indicates that the community is dominated by arbitrariness, stagnant and inert dogma, and lifeless reverberation. Therefore, I argue that schools should revive their natural heteroglossia and be open to children's diverse social characteristics and tendencies.

Schools should be a place where children's *heteroglot* living world and natural instincts for social relations are welcomed and valued and where children can become novelists who create their own novels by orchestrating and stratifying all of the heteroglot languages around them. In such *schools as novels*, with their own unique dispositions, children can freely join in their social spaces with their own agency, liberated from the stigmas of social deficit that are imposed by centralized and unified social norms and values. In particular, such schools shed light on and boost the social abilities and skills that children regarded as socially deficit actually possess and that are rarely acknowledged as "socially competent attributes" by mainstream points of view. When schools are opened to diverse *heteroglot* social natures, the centralized *unitary language* will be able to overcome the possible risks of cultural narrowness and stagnancy and of alienating potential values. I hope that by elaborating on the effectiveness of

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[32] I explained Bakhtin's notion of *novel* in detail in Chapter 3 (pp. 92-93) by contrasting it with his notion of *poetry*.

and the need for such social characteristics, this study can contribute to the promotion of an educational atmosphere in which the unique and diverse social characteristics of children are respected as representative of their identities as they live their lives in their social worlds, rather than disregarded as deficits.

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