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**Tapestries of Nurturance in Children's Role Play: A Case Study of
Children's Expressions of Nurturing in a Preschool Classroom**

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by

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**Tapestries of Nurturance in Children's Role Play: A Case Study
of Children's Expressions of Nurturing in a Preschool Classroom**

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The purpose of my study was to examine children's expressions of nurturance in pretend play and how they appear to understand nurturing in peers' role-play. The study explored the relationship between preschool children's nurturing expressions and the classroom environment. By observing in a University laboratory a core group of five children, and using field notes, video and audio tapes, interviews of the lead teacher and interns, the children, and selected parents, the data suggest the following. Children play through emotion arousing topics that can include danger and even life threatening events, in order

to find ways to express nurturing; nurturance is embedded within an emotional content that includes children's relationships with one another, their families, and with their fascination with popular culture; and a teacher's trust in children's capacity to pretend play, along with a teacher's hands-off approach, can allow for children to begin to understand nurturing through role play about nurturing as well as about intense topics and subsequent nurturance. The study builds on the view of children as playing about their microcosmic understandings (Erikson, 1985) of the world that can include intense and often graphic topics in their pretend play (Katch, 2001). I propose that children's capability to express and understand nurturing can be manifested in the context of pretend play that often includes intense and even violent topics. The classroom environment combined with a teacher's hands-off approach are crucial in fostering nurturing in pretend play.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

CONSIDERING FACTORS OF NURTURING IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

After many years of teaching and observing, I have seen children's classroom environments as rich tapestries with finely woven strands of conversation and pretense. In play children are skillful in expressing emotions, and capable of showing feelings that are often intense. The purpose of my study was to follow an interest in emotional development rooted in my experiences as a teacher and researcher of young children to explore children's expressions of nurturance. I was interested in looking at the features of nurturing in pretend play. The literature suggests that children's relationships with others outside of their own immediate family situations are important to their total beings (Dunn, Brown, Maguire, 1995; Dunn & Cutting, 1999; Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2001; Shim, Herwig, & Shelley, 2001). By my teaching experiences, I had found that children often express in pretend play with their peers the concern and care they may have witnessed in real life situations.

Making Sense of Nurturing

What was I seeing as nurturing in play? It seemed evident to me by my teaching experiences that children in the social world of preschool often express nurturing-like features in their pretend play. In this light, I had often observed children pretending to be mommies and daddies: diapering, feeding, swaddling,

rocking, shushing, comforting, and patting the baby dolls, using terms of endearment. It seemed to me that children in pretending with the dolls and other classroom materials, expressed empathic features or “the ability to feel the emotions of another, . . . thought to motivate caring and concerned actions toward other persons in need” (Denham, 1998, p. 32). How often I had heard concern in children’s voices at play, the cooing, murmuring, and soothing of the baby dolls and other toys such as the hard rubber toy animals or wooden people!

Sharing personal observations

In working with children, I often observed them attending to other children by acting out family and/or friendship situations with peers such as cooking and serving meals, giving tea parties, giving pretend gifts, administering to the pretend sick, comforting the lonely and lost (when children pretend to be puppies and kittens), among other examples. In one such example from my experiences as a preschool teacher, a boy of four spent weeks at a time nurturing a doll. When he came in every day to the Center, he headed for the housekeeping center where he found a miniature rubber baby doll. At that point, the boy would place the doll on his shoulder and pat it gently, a peaceful-looking expression on his face. Sometimes, the boy would stay in the housekeeping center where other children (usually the same two or three girls) would join him and begin to act out parenting roles (dressing the dolls, bedding them, and feeding them).

He held the doll on one shoulder or in the crook of one arm, but would join in with whatever pretend play was going on. Sometimes he would seem to tire of the play there, and would head to the block center or the puzzle table or to

cook, or whatever was being offered that day, and engage with those activities, all the while holding on to the doll. At the time, I viewed the boy's behavior toward the doll as acts of affection and caring, for his demeanor and actions seemed calm and loving. I also was aware that he had a baby sister, and that he may have been imitating some nurturing features he was viewing in his own home.

It was also typical to observe children shelter the rubber animals by placing them in block enclosures representing caves, clinics, dens, and zoos. In one example, from a pilot study (Hoke, 2000), I observed the following:

In the block center was a lone girl of about four, Mary, playing alone. The girl was slight of frame, almost fragile seeming, and wore thick-lens glasses. The sounds from outdoors wafted into the classroom, and as I sat down near to Mary, I realized she was talking aloud, but I could not hear what she was saying. (I remember thinking, "What are you doing in here playing alone when you have the opportunity of being outdoors with other children?")

As I sat down right outside of the block center, Mary was counting the figures, pointing to each one. Then, Mary looked toward the room and said to no one in particular, "Here's the grocery" and then, "The Dad." The sounds from outdoors prevented me from hearing what Mary said next, but I could tell that she was making crying sounds.

Mary looked at her playthings, and then picked up a toy egg made of a resin looking material. From one end of the egg was a baby turtle that looked as if it were emerging from its "shell":

Mary: *Oh, the baby. Can you take the baby out of the egg?* (I continued writing, not really sure she was speaking to me or to an imaginary person.)
Big big baby in the big big nest. See this, it's people. (In sing-song voice)
Look at us. Look at us. Look at us today. Come out, baby.

Mary reached into a plastic tub and pulled out several turtles and began stacking them, counting them, by pointing to each one, then saying, "Five."

Mommy cooked turtles for dinner.

I'll put everything in this. (Into a basket went more of the colored blocks.)

Hi, I'm Little Red Riding Hood. (Directed to me.)

Mary picked up the basket and hurried outside, setting the basket down and getting on a spring horse. (Field notes 2/29/00)

I remember that the rhythm in Mary's play intrigued me. Nurturing the baby turtle may have helped Mary to create a relationship in her play and seemed to assist her in further communications about that relationship. She seemed quite sophisticated at pretense, using a play script that had to do with mother-like behaviors in caring for a baby, then making a transition to the Little Red Riding Hood theme with her food preparations. As a colleague pointed out, children play out their developing understandings and what they are trying to make sense of in the world. What was Mary seeking to understand? It seemed that Mary's pretending provided an opportunity for her to exhibit features of nurturing: taking responsibility and making an investment of time for a creature of nature that in Mary's play was in need.

Nurturing Within Pretend Play

This is how I was making sense of features that I believed to be nurturing. I thought of nurturing as happening mostly in pretend play, with children negotiating roles and creating make-believe plots in their growing ability to explore and to master emotional issues, often creating resolutions to their play situations by using nurturance, caregiving, or protection (Bretherton, 1989), whether toward each other or in their play with toys and materials.

Theoretical notions of pretend play

I was influenced by Gould's (1972) contention that pretend play is "uniquely revealing of a child's feelings and ways of thinking and coping" (p. xxi). I too, went into my study in a similar way that Gould describes as "blissful ignorance" (p. xxi), eager to unveil the number and the nature of pretend play events that I felt sure would occur. I had seen children on many occasions reveal aspects that could lead to nurturing through their pretend play, for example, girls and boys dramatizing the birth of a baby; reenacting a wedding and rehearsal; participating in a graveside service; pretending to be rescue workers of all kinds; acting out doctor, nurse, teacher, and babysitter roles; among others. In many instances, I can remember that the children were playing out the kinds of things they were experiencing in real life, such as the birth of a sibling or the marriage and even death of a family member. To support this, Gould (1972) and other researchers (Corsaro, 1985; Hartley, Frank, & Goldenson, 1952) contend that children are shaped by their own personal histories and that they mold pretend play according to their individual experiences.

For many years, I had worked with various programs involving young children, and had stayed abreast of current literature concerning children's total development. I had observed that children are influenced socially and emotionally through their interactions with their peers in educational settings (Shim, et al., 2001). Shim, et al. expressed what seemed obvious to me in observing and teaching children in saying that "(p)eers are important social agents in young children's development and learning" (p. 149). Furthermore, I saw children as dynamic, changing and growing through interactions with their environment, with other peers and adults, and with the materials (Burton & Denham, 1998). My thinking at the time and now is that this dynamic process has an effect that varies from individual to individual, contributing to the uniqueness of each child.

The process of children's communications with their environments seemed to me to mesh with Vygotsky's (1978) interactionist view. In Vygotskian thought, children grow toward more complex thought through play experiences in which they "depend on and imaginatively transform those socially produced objects and forms of behavior made available to them in their particular environment" (p. 126). In similar thought, Stremmel and Fu (1993) suggest that when children engage in collaborative activities such as those found in classroom settings, their unique perspectives are coordinated. The authors support Vygotsky's notions that children's development is influenced first by the social environment, and over time at the individual level.

A look at children in pretend play

From a pilot study (Hoke, 1999), I recall a play episode begun in a block center during free playtime. When I entered the block center, two children, Alexandria and Cameron, were using blocks to build what appeared to be some kind of animal enclosure. Alexandria and Cameron moved various hard rubber jungle animals in and out of the block structure:

A: Cameron, here are your tigers.

C: Make a little step. We need more, two. And two more of them.

A: Yeah.

C: How can we get them?

A: Oh, oh, oh, oh . . .

C: We like the other ones that are older. They are older to ask. Over here, they are older. (Indicating the adult jungle animals.)

A: And we'll go in there. (Indicating the block enclosure.)

C: I know a good idea. Cover their roof.

A: Well, I thought it will fall.

C: *Well . . . Let's put the roof on.*

A: *Will fall.*

C: *Won't.*

In this particular study, I suggested that the children expressed and defended their ideas; they problem solved; their conversation was reciprocal; there was give and take by both children. It seems likely the children were engaging in symbolic construction play (Reifel & Yeatman, 1993) where a block

structure could stand for protection and shelter, and a script about providing protection for the baby jungle animals had begun and was sustained.

The Early Childhood Classroom Context

The teacher's role

Responsive teachers in early childhood teaching can “create opportunities for children to perform at levels they cannot achieve on their own” (Stremmel & Fu, 1993, p. 339). Howes (1996) emphasizes the importance of adults in demonstrating sensitivity in order to provide emotional support for children’s efforts. In the classroom described above, the teacher was allowing pretend play to flourish and blossom. Having visited this classroom on many occasions, I found it to be rich in conversation, symbolism and pretend play. Moreover, I was also aware that the classroom was facilitated by an ongoing effort by the teacher: her prepared environment with centers and materials; the time allotted for freely chosen play; and her constant presence and active engagement with the children.

Once, in interviewing for a course project (Hoke, 2000), a teacher told me “that she believes children use classroom materials to play out their ideas,” but that more importantly, “It is the atmosphere of the classroom that encourages creative play” (p. 6). It was rewarding to visit this classroom because it supported my belief that children in such a supportive and sensitive environment are able to use as I described at that time, “all of their senses in acting upon their environment and playing out their hopes and dreams through pretend play, sorting out the pieces of information that are confusing and that seem intangible in real life” (Hoke, 2000, p. 6).

I was influenced by the teacher described above and by others who confirmed my belief that children need opportunities to explore the environment, to choose materials, friends and centers, and to be able to investigate the interests that seem so meaningful in early childhood. Moreover, I was guided theoretically by Erikson (1950) in that I considered play as promoting initiative in children and as providing a context for children to discover an identity in it. Play according to Erikson is the one area where children can be assertive and feel competent, the “small partner in a big world” (p. 238). But in addition, I also agreed with Erikson’s view that in children’s play territory, adults assume an important role in supporting the play environment and in allowing opportunities for them “to combine with other children for the purpose of constructing and planning . . .” (p. 258).

In my own teaching, I had considered my role as a supportive facilitator, finding ways to enter children’s play in what I thought were non-intrusive approaches. I am remembering the boy who carried the doll with him throughout his classroom day. His important idea to me was that he needed to nurture the doll in the same way he might be seeing at home between his parents and his baby sister. Perhaps he needed validation for his own nurturing instincts, or maybe he was trying to work through acceptance for a new sibling to whom he was trying to adjust.

When I intervened, it would be to comment on the boy’s gentle handling of the doll, or to relate the doll to his baby sister in some way. At the time, I did not focus on the boy’s nurturing instincts, but I remember thinking that he needed

time to attend to his somewhat ambivalent feelings in the best way he knew to do so. It seemed to me, as Paley (1984) suggested, that his play was “the most effective tension reliever” (p. 71) the boy possessed, and I thought it important to support him in his efforts at coming to terms with a big change in his family structure.

The cultivation of a supportive classroom play environment may offer opportunities for children to connect with others in ways that might build awareness of nurturing. Wasserman (2000) stated that a play environment can allow children to experience an array of emotions and “may be the only in-school experience in which emotions may be naturally expressed” (p. 19). Adding to this, Wasserman stresses the importance of a teacher in staying close to children during play episodes, while remaining obtrusive. Wasserman, reflecting on her own practices said, “(i)t is very difficult for even the most sensitive adults to walk the thin line between doing too much and doing too little, knowing when to intervene and when to hold back” (p. 5). The complexity of teacher intervention does not lessen Wasserman’s contention that children must be allowed to attempt the full range of opportunities that play affords.

When I revisited Wasserman’s (2000) writings and read again how she describes play as “the main source of our creativity” (p. 18) and the well spring of “fertile, inventive minds” (p. 18), I wondered how children’s conceptualization of nurturing features might be fostered by the teacher’s facilitation and what sort of balance the teacher could sustain in a busy early childhood classroom. To truly

nurture play and thus foster children's growth through play, does the teacher intervene in play, participate in play, or stand by as a silent observer?

Fein (1984) suggests that children's role taking offers opportunities for perspective taking, such as when a child pretends to be the mother comforting a baby, the role of baby being the "complementary other" (p. 128). The ensuing role play forces the child to attempt to think and feel as the other person, in this case, a personal relation. Jones and Reynolds (1992) suggest that when teachers pay careful attention to children's pretend play, they may be able to foster the kind of environment that encourages meaningful personal enactment. In order to support children's sustained involvement in play scripts, teachers must intervene "within the script" (p. 33), meaning that the teacher can re-create "children's play in her own words", showing respect for play's "integrity while building on it as one of the shared, recurrent experiences out of which the group's culture can grow" (p. 129).

When children make attempts to convey feeling and thinking in pretend play, it seems likely they have opportunities to learn about nurturing. For my study, the working definition of the construct, *nurturance*, is based upon Weiss's (1986) definition and involves the relationships that children form that encompass a sense of commitment, investment, and/or responsibility for, someone or something perceived as either weak or needful. Given meaningful role play opportunities, features that lead to nurturing may emerge. For my study, the construct, *pretend play*, is defined as children using their imaginations to assist them in role taking (Smilansky & Shefatya, 1990). Even though it is not easy to

know how nurturing truly emerges in children, we must be willing to explore the possibilities that may be presented within their pretend play.

In this introduction, I have shed light on what I was thinking about pretend play and the possibilities of nurturing at the start of the study, attempting to show the kinds of questions that accompanied my thinking about the theoretical views I was reading and the teacher practices I was viewing. The purpose of my study was to explore elements of nurturing in children's pretend play. To restate my study questions, I am looking at: "How do children express nurturance in pretend play?" and, "Do children appear to understand nurturing in peers' role play?" I will turn now to the next chapter, where I will consider the relevant literature on pretend play and on nurturing.

Chapter 2: A Literature Review

In the first chapter, I presented examples that illustrate how I was looking at the features of nurturing in children's play. Moreover, I presented the theoretical notions that shaped my thinking about children's explorations in an environment that might support opportunities for nurturing in pretend play. Furthermore, I stated my research questions. Now, I will turn to the literature to consider how children's expressions of emotions are regarded as contributing to their emotion understanding. Added to this, I will look at how the literature describes children's ways of dealing with their emotions as a starting point in beginning to situate how nurturing might fit into their emotional competence. I will then describe nurturance according to older research, before examining quantitative studies on nurturing features.

Next, I will look at how the literature describes children's social experiences away from the home environment, more specifically in looking at play experiences as an avenue to children's expressions of emotion. Moreover, I will discuss how the literature defines pretend play and how it describes the benefits of pretend play as contributing to the total child. Finally, I will discuss the literature that looks at a teacher's intervention in pretend play and the supportive classroom environment that influences children's opportunities of pretend play.

EXPLORING CHILDREN'S EMOTIONS

There is an array of literature that discusses children's empathy and emotion understanding (Denham, 1998; Dunn, 1993; Eisenberg, 1986; Fabes, Eisenberg, Hanish, & Spinrad, T. (2001), Thompson, 1987). It seems to me that much of the literature suggests that children during the pre-school years are learning about managing their emotions. Moreover, through repeated experiences with their peers and with the adults in their environments, children have opportunities to deal with and handle their feelings.

The literature provides affirmation that children do indeed need to have opportunities to explore their social worlds in order to augment their emotion understandings. In addition, the research reminds us that children's emotion interactions are a necessary foundation for giving children the tools needed to understand emotion signals and to be attuned to others' behaviors (Fabes, et al. 2001). With these thoughts, the literature is helpful in giving us (researchers and practitioners) a broad view to shape us in the way we perceive and guide children in social/emotional growth.

Expressing Emotions

The work of Susanne Denham (1998) highlights the complexity of children's emotional expressiveness. According to Denham, during the preschool period children are capable of establishing personal emotional styles. Some children show predominantly positive emotions while others rarely show positive emotions and exhibit mostly negative emotions or none at all. Still other children show a balance of both negative and positive emotions. Moreover, during the

preschool period, children's growing ability to manage expressiveness voluntarily is demonstrated, "including posing expressions, showing expressiveness according to cultural display rules, and deception via hiding emotions" (p. 21).

From a literature review on empathy and emotion understanding, Thompson (1987) contended that children under two may respond to another's distress out of "prosocial initiative" (p. 140) that indicates egocentric thinking. He gave an example of a toddler who might offer a possession such as a pacifier to an adult who is showing sadness. Although the child's reaction might seem to be a thoughtful gesture, it may be for self-comfort rather than out of empathy, contends the author. However, a lack of empathy may be because of "limited social knowledge about the behavior that can alleviate another's upset" (p. 140). Thompson focused on children as experiencing "reactive distress" (p. 131) to someone else's distress as perhaps an attempt to "interpret or understand another's emotional outburst rather than empathy" (p. 131). This is important to mention because it suggests that empathy develops through repeated experiences with others. In support of this, some researchers view children's emotion interactions as a necessary basis for social and emotional growth in the early years and that "mutually understood emotion signals" enable humans to "assess, interpret, predict, and regulate each other's behavior" (Fabes, et al., 2001, p. 12). By the preschool years, children are capable of "very specific cognitive attainments of self-understanding and rule internalization" (Denham, 1998, p. 31). The emotion of empathy, "the ability to feel the emotions of another, is thought to motivate caring and concerned actions toward other persons in need" (p. 32).

Empathy, Denham suggests, is a social emotion; preschoolers exhibit empathy with words, expressions, and actions.

In the above, I have looked at how the literature has described children's ways of dealing with their emotions. These various views add to our understanding of children in beginning to situate how nurturing might fit into their emotional competence. Children's emotional competence or lack of is common in research on emotional development. I find the literature very helpful in confirming children's growing ability to begin to understand their own and others' emotion expressions. With this established, I turn to the literature that discusses features that could lead to children's expressions of nurturing.

Definitions and Descriptions of Nurturing

A number of studies provide theoretical perspectives that are important to understanding nurturance. There are studies that look at nurturance from a developmental perspective, considering children's background experiences as relevant to their ability to nurture (Berman, 1986; Berman, Monda, & Myerscough, 1977; Berman, Goodman, Sloan, & Fernander, 1978; Edwards, 1986; Blakemore, 1981; Fogel, Melson, & Mistry, 1986; Melson, Fogel, & Mistry, 1986). These studies tend to examine children's responses to others as possible predictors of forthcoming nurturance. Some also include the study of parenting and its influence upon the development of nurturing in children, highlighting the importance of adults in modeling nurturing and understanding.

Possibilities of nurturing features

It may be that children's emotions in the early childhood years are influenced by cognitive thought, meaning that before a child can react to emotions, the child "must attend to the notable event, comprehend it, and interpret it" (Denham, 1998, p. 7). Added to this, children's motivations, their desires and goals that manifest emotions, often work together with cognition to influence emotional situations. We may be able to situate nurturing within children's daily dealings with their emotions. I am remembering a five-year-old girl in my preschool class who reacted abruptly and with intense emotion to another child's rough treatment of a classroom pet mealworm. The little girl screamed out and began crying, then examined the worm, gently turning it over and over to find it was no longer living. As her teacher, I responded by talking with her and attempting to soothe her.

As the girl calmed some, she said, "I should have known not to show it (the mealworm) to him (the offending child)." Later, the girl drew a picture of the mealworm so that she explained, "I can remember him and show my mother." Her motivation for responding as she did was out of concern for the worm. Moreover, she seemed to make a conscious thought-out attempt to rationalize what had happened to the worm and to make sense of the event by commemorating the creature's existence. At the time, I did not think much about my own reaction, but now I am viewing my response to the girl's distress in a different light. My intervention seems minimal in looking back, but perhaps by

taking the child's intense response in stride, I validated her display of emotion, and maybe that is all she needed at the time.

I remember thinking about the care and concern that were manifested in the words and actions of this little girl. In considering the expression of care and concern, Weiss (1986) uses the construct, *nurturance*, to explain the relational bond between persons that seems to be based on a sense of commitment, investment, responsibility for, or desire for responsibility for, someone perceived as either weak or needful. It seems evident that the little girl had invested a great deal of emotion in expressing care and concern for the worm. To examine this view, I will consider a study that seems significant in suggesting that children, even at a young age, are capable of nurturing.

From a study of nurturing interactions involving young children and infants (Melson, et al., 1986), the researchers found that preschoolers are interested in an infants' distress and are willing to respond to that, albeit not always in ways of alleviating the distress. For example, a typical response might be for the preschooler to glance at the mother, expecting *her* to satisfy the infant's need. In addition, young children often lack the skills to interact with infants in appropriate ways. It was common, the researchers found, for a child to attempt "to play with the infant as if he or she were a peer. One child, for example, trying to have a 'tea party' with a baby, became upset when the infant wanted only to bang the cups and saucers together" (p. 88).

In working as a director of a childcare center, I often saw examples of such responding when older infants (around 10 months) would crawl across an

area toward a younger infant, in response to the infant's crying. In addition to this, I have seen toddlers as young as 18 months old respond to one another, such as folding up blankets and mats for one another following naptime, or handing a toy to one another, among other examples. In the midst of what appear to be ways of working through emotional situations, how might children such as the ones discussed above benefit by communicating what appears to be nurturing? Perhaps the contention of Weiss (1986) in suggesting the importance of caring relationships in fostering the bonds needed to maintain children's relationships is appropriate for understanding the benefits of nurturance. As children deal with feelings associated with nurturing such as "positive action to meet the needs of others" (Edwards, 1986, p. 109), they may be sorting out what the researcher suggests are "rational" moral concerns of "harmdoing and welfare" (p. 100).

Providing a secure base

In an unpublished study on siblings' interactions (Hoke, 2000), an older sibling seemed to provide a *secure base* (Bowlby, 1988) for her younger siblings. The three younger siblings played at various activities with one another, returning to their older sister from time to time for comfort or companionship. The security provided by the older sister was one from which the children could go about the business of their daily activities with ease (Dunn, 1993). They seemed comfortable in knowing their sister would respond to them, whether with correction, direction, or guidance. In the absence of the mother, the older sister "naturally fulfilled the category of caregiver, nurturer, and guider" (p. 23).

Although the above study did not look at nurturing, specifically, it suggested to me that a bond develops through the daily interactions among siblings that includes soothing, guiding, correcting, and caregiving, all features that could lead to nurturing. The comforting and comfortableness that stem from having the nurturing guidance from an older sister can provide a comfort zone for younger siblings that assists them in developing relationships with one another (Hoke, 2000). As we have seen in the other examples I have presented concerning children's attempts to deal with their day-to-day expressions of emotion, it is important to recognize that children may need strategies to make sense of moral concerns such as how to respond to others' distress or how to deal with their intense and immediate reactions associated with what they perceive as grief or hardship or wrong doing.

Caring relationships

An array of literature exists concerning the concept of caring (Eisenberg, 1992; Goldstein, 1999; Noblit, Rogers, & McCadden, 1995; Noddings, 1984). Works by these authors have opened my understandings of how children might require – inherently - acts of caring. Moreover, the literature reaffirms that the ability to care may depend upon children's having social experiences in order to develop awareness of what it means to care and to understand.

The literature on caring has enhanced my understanding of the importance for teachers and students to enter into relationships based upon key values and their learning to act upon those values. Moreover, various works on women's development and mothering have provided me insight into the possibility that

nurturing and empathy qualities may be passed on to children by women, primarily (Chodorow, 1999; Gilligan, 1993). Given the benefit of positive primary relationships, children have the capacity to be nurturant (Chodorow, 1999). I am reminded through Eisenberg's (1992) book on caring that the teacher is a considerable source of discipline and values and can serve either as a nurturant model or as an uncaring model. These feminist views are important to my study because I will be looking at one teacher's facilitation of a classroom and at the environment that is influenced by the teacher's socialization practices.

Quantitative studies on nurturing features

Studies concerning caregiving qualities specific to nurturance are rare. Many studies regarding caring acts have focused on children's responsiveness toward infants and/or younger children. It has been suggested that children are capable of feeling an attraction to, playing spontaneously with, and performing prosocial acts toward infants and/or younger children (Berman, 1986). In one such study, Berman looked at children's responses to an infant placed in a playpen in a designated area of a day care environment to examine whether there were age and sex differences in the array of responses to the infant. The children's ages ranged from 32 to 63 months. Features of behaviors were recorded such as looking, touching the playpen, and interacting with the baby.

It was found that more girls than boys visited the area with the playpen and stayed for longer periods of time, but "boys and girls there spent the same proportion of their time there in direct interactions with her" (Berman, 1986, p. 33). It is interesting that many of the children who sought to be near the baby,

having been told they could not touch the baby, instead reached out to touch the playpen. The playpen touches were not interpreted by the researcher as casual seeming and were often coupled with “a period of sustained and deliberate attention” (p. 32) toward the baby. Some of the children seemed to vie for attention from the baby by smiling and blowing kisses, with one child even climbing on a chair in order to see over children who were crowding in front of the playpen. Study results suggested that younger boys spend more time in the playpen area than older boys, but there are no age trends among the girls. Although the term nurturance was not used in this study, it is important to consider the actions of the children I believe, because their attention and interest toward the baby could be features that promote nurturing behaviors. A limitation I think is that qualitative aspects were not considered, such as the words children might have used between themselves and the infant and/or among the children and their peers concerning the infant.

In another study (Fogel, et al. 1986), the researchers looked at sex differences in nurturance. Preschool children’s responses to infants were recorded in one group where the mothers tried to involve the children with the infants, and in another group when the mothers did not try to elicit involvement from the children. The study suggested that overall there were no sex differences in responsiveness toward infants although “(b)etween the ages of 4 and 6, . . . boys seem to shift their object of interest from male to female infants. . .” (p. 63). Studies such as these and others (Melson, et al., 1986) are indirect measures of

children's interest in others, and seem to me to tell little about how children understand what it means to be nurturant.

Each of these theoretical views concerning features that may lead to nurturance adds depth to our understanding of nurturance. Unlike my own research, though, most studies do not look at the classroom context that may foster the expression of nurturance and the way children understand nurturing in role play. In this light, I want to look at the school environment to consider how children within the context of peer groups might begin to understand what Fogel, et al. (1986) say about nurturance as “ ‘giving care to those in need of care’ ” (p. 65). After all, preschool classrooms can offer a system that includes individual children within a group that has the opportunity to engage in “complex interactions” (Sawyer, 2001, p. 20), that to me are important for understanding the features of children's nurturing.

Social Experiences Away from the Home Environment

In school settings, Edwards (1986) contends, children “have also been found to discuss—aggression, harmdoing, sharing, justice. These are acts that seem to the American mind to lie close to the heart of morality and ethics” (p. 96). Children construct knowledge of social norms and of ways of behaving, the kinds of socially transmitted knowledge that is derived from offering suggestions or making corrections toward one another. “The responsible, nurturant child becomes not merely a caring and feeling child, but also a thinking child, acquiring his or her own distinctive brand of social-cognitive competence” (p. 98). Another aspect of classrooms is that when children have opportunities to choose their

activities, teachers “report fewer discipline problems than teachers who force children to engage in the same activities at the same time” (Monighan Nourot, 1991, p. 200).

Children’s responses to others in play

Whiting and Whiting’s study (as cited in Edwards, 1986) suggests that children often demonstrate ‘offering’ behaviors that include: “physical and emotional resources such as diapering care, toys, comfort, affection, entertaining play, and motor practice” (p. 101). In Edward’s view, play experiences among children offer “unique and irreplaceable opportunities for cognitive and social development” (p. 95). “The playing child is seen as the *thinking* child” (Edwards, 1986, p. 95). In my own experiences in teaching, it appears to me that children never lack ideas for roles to play and seem to have an endless list of life situations to dramatize. When play ideas manifest from the children themselves, their play becomes more focused and meaningful, which is affirmed by Reifel and Yeatman (1991) in suggesting that children use the topics that interest them to interact verbally and “to explore those ideas to the extent that seems right to them” (p. 1991).

In looking at studies by Whiting and Whiting, and by Turiel (as cited in Edwards, 1986), Edwards believes that “the most important social encounters for helping children to construct norms of positive nurturance are those of direct interaction between children” (p. 110). Reifel and Yeatman (1993) argue that playmates serve “as human pivots around which playful meanings take shape” (p. 363). In light of this view, we have learned much more about how children’s

relationships with playmates away from their families' environment are related to their emotional expressiveness (Dunn, 1998). Children's play, according to Weiss (1986) may provide opportunities for children to find satisfaction in developing competencies associated with an investment of nurturing. The personal and often intense feelings, emotions, and themes of children are often played out in skillfully formed boundaries of play (Dunn, 1993; Dunn & Dale, 1984). The young child "no longer just reacts but remembers and thinks about emotions" (Bodrova & Leong, 1995, p. 58).

Play provides unique opportunities for children to adjust to school situations (Smilansky, 1990). In group settings, the child has opportunities to respond to others and to recognize that others have feelings and concerns, to be responsive and empathetic with others' ways of thinking. Before the preschool age, children's play exists in a *microsphere* (Erikson, 1985), described by Erikson as a small world, "a harbor which the child establishes, to return to when he needs to overhaul his ego" (p. 221), where the child retreats to play with "unguarded expression" (p. 221).

Once children enter preschool age, or "the world shared with others" (Erikson, 1985, p. 221), their playfulness has reached into the larger world Erikson called the *macrosphere*. Over time as children participate in play with others, they begin to distinguish between what is real and what is fantasized. Moreover, play affords the opportunities for children to learn about "what content can be successfully represented only in the microcosmic world of toys and things; and what content can be shared with others and forced upon them" (p. 221).

These views concerning children's learning about being responsive toward others tend to represent the preschool years as a time Berk (1999) contends it is possible for children to "develop a confident self-image, more effective control over emotions" and "new social skills. . ." (p. 367). These characteristics may contribute to children's competence that Hendrick (2003) suggests is a necessary ingredient for early education, the kind made possible in a classroom that uses play to help children internalize knowledge.

Expressing feelings through play

Fein (as cited in Sutton-Smith, 1997) suggests that children structure their play as a safe way of experiencing intense and even disturbing relationships involved in real life and fantasy events. As Sutton-Smith affirms, "Their play is not based primarily on a representation of everyday events-as many prior investigators have supposed-so much as it is based on a fantasy of emotional events" (p. 158). In pretend play, children negotiate roles and create joint make-believe plots in their growing ability to explore and to master emotional issues, often creating resolutions to their themes of pretend play by using nurturance, caregiving, or protection (Bretherton, 1989).

Through play, children are able to express intense feelings symbolically as a way of dealing with their emotions (Reynolds & Jones, 1997). The symbolic representation offered by play enables "human beings to remember, to manage, to plan, and to communicate with each other" (p. 1). Over time, children become *master players*, a term used by Reynolds and Jones, meaning that children feel competent and satisfied in play. I believe the term becomes useful because as

suggested by the authors, the term articulates a sense of quality in considering play.

Views of play regarding the social experiences away from the home environment confirm the importance of preschool children in having opportunities to interact in the context of school situations. Moreover, the literature views I have presented suggest that play is a necessary outlet for expression of feelings and emotional issues. Furthermore, the literature suggests that play experiences provide an avenue for children to express their emotions in symbolic ways. Since play is considered to be such an important component of the early childhood classroom (Hendrick, 2003; Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2002; Monighan-Nourot, Scales, Van Hoorn, & Almy, 1987; Reynolds & Jones, 1997), in the next section, I will consider how children might cultivate their insight (Hendrick, 2003) in order to gain knowledge about their emotions, namely through imaginative play. As described by Paley (1986), “many fantasies are stored up lying in wait for the first excuse to erupt” (p. 76) and when children are deprived of play “it works against the most effective tension reliever the children have” (p. 71). In play episodes I have witnessed, it does seem that children often help others out in their pretend play fantasies by playing out topics of shelter, protection, and care. In the next section, I will present a definition of the construct, *pretend play*, and then go on to discuss the literature that suggests what children may gain from role play.

Considering Pretend Play

Erikson’s (1985) psychosocial theory suggests that pretend play during early childhood offers up the opportunity for children to freely express emotions,

which may make possible children's meaning making through the experiencing and the re-experiencing of affect that may be present in real and in imaginary situations. There are many terms and descriptions that attempt to define what pretend play represents in children's play (Frost, et al., 2001). The term, *pretend play* is sometimes referred to as *sociodramatic play* (Keating, Fabian, Jordan, Mavis, & Jordan, 2000; Smilansky & Shefatya, 1990) or *symbolic play* (Frost, et al., 2001), or *imaginative play* (Hendrick, 2003). Using the term, pretend play, suggests that children have free reign of imagination (Sawyer, 1997), which seems an apt description given the many examples I have witnessed in observing young children who have opportunities to role play unrestricted and with seeming abandon.

Defining pretend play

For the purposes of this study, when I use the construct, *pretend play*, I am considering the term according to the descriptions of Smilansky & Shefatya (1990) for sociodramatic play. According to the authors when children role play, they are not only imitating people and occurrences from their own experiences, but they use their imaginations to assist them in role taking. Moreover, through repeated experiences with others in make believe, children become more skilled as their play begins to include new ideas and variations. With this theoretical description in place, other factors of children's pretend play will be discussed to include various researchers' views.

Studies on pretend play

Studies on pretend play often focus on the benefits to social/emotional learning when children practice role playing and thus reinforce cooperation and persistence (Smilansky & Shefatya, 1990; Wasserman, 2000) . Others proclaim the benefits of pretend play as a way for children to gain control over emotional issues that are important to their personal worlds (Bretherton, 1989; Carini, 1986; Erikson, 1985; Fein, 1981/1984/1989; Katch, 2001). Still others consider the benefit of pretend play as offering children the opportunities to think about their communications in play (metacommunication), thus fostering their continuity and coherence in play dialogues (Bateson, 1971; Goncu & Kessel, 1984; Sawyer, 1997; Schartzman, 1984). Frost, et al., (2001) emphasize the benefits of pretend play as a vehicle for children to use all their characteristics of development and as an outlet for children to express feelings. Finally, some authors consider pretend play as a significant creative process involving improvisation (Sawyer, 1997) and for making meaning of the world (Dyson, 1997), while others emphasize the importance of children as having sustained time to play in order to gain mastery in social, emotional, and cognitive learning (Hendrick, 2003; Levin, 1996).

The process of pretend play

Children need ample opportunities to engage in spontaneous dramatic play (Wasserman, 2000). To Wasserman, spontaneous play provides wholeness to the human dimension, providing joy and pleasure. In accordance, teachers must give children many opportunities for free and unstructured play, even more so than the more fettered play Wasserman contends is often associated with a cognitive

emphasis curriculum focus. Fein (1989) suggests that pretend play does require “special mental processes and serves special developmental functions” (p. 346). It is through play experiences that children can build conceptual awareness and foster inventiveness in part when they are involved with play that is meaningful. The “play of their own making” (Wasserman, 2000, p. 54) can encourage generative and investigative thinking.

Fein (1989) goes on to say that pretend play offers a venue for regulating and modulating emotion. It may be that children use pretend play as a means of mastering emotional issues that are of personal significance to them (Bretherton, 1989). Along these lines, Sutton-Smith (1997) contends that children’s play dramas are not only replications of their worlds or even for therapeutic reasons, but “they are meant to fabricate another world that lives alongside the first one and carries on its own kind of life, a life often much more emotionally vivid than mundane reality” (p. 158). Expanding on this notion, Fein (1989) describes an incident when a child might use one object as a primary or a conscious symbol, such as a shell to represent a cat or a potty. But if the primary symbols are connected with “emotionally arousing events” (p. 352), it is also possible that at the moment of pretending, the child may consciously recognize the substitution, but not be aware of a deeper affective meaning. Through repeated experiences of role play in a stable and sound environment, children stand the best chance for working out their feelings (Hendrick, 2003).

Children's needs for repeated experiences of pretend play

Sawyer (1997) suggests that play theories often miss the importance of pretend play and consider it as scripted and as relatively static. In those theoretical frameworks, children's play is a way of learning through practice rather than in a creative and collective sense. Play on the other hand can be improvisational and conditional in character, according to Sawyer. It is important to the issue at hand - looking at the process of pretend play - that we consider improvisation, defined by Sawyer as imaginative play - as necessary to children's emotional well-being. Moreover, children need sustained involvement in play (Levin, 1996), where they have unending opportunities to foster holistic development: social, emotional, and cognitive. Children can gain mastery and learning in rich and meaningful direct experiences in school. But when children are not allowed the time for sustained involvement in play or lack direct experiences to bring to their play, it can have serious implications. It is through repeated experiences of pretend play that children learn to experience a "wide range of emotion under relatively safe circumstances and to learn to deal with these feelings bit by bit" (Hendrick, 1998, p. 47). When play is cultivated early, children are more likely to initiate novel and competent thinking (Wasserman, 2000).

Children's meaning making through pretend play

Through the invention of imaginary situations, children are able to transcend the limitations of situational restrictions (Dyson, 1997), and instead "they infuse their own intentions-their own meanings-into those objects and actions" (p. 13). Through make-believe play children reveal their understandings

of the experiences in their personal worlds. “Child players must agree that babies need mothers, the desired need suitors, and, of course, good guys need bad guys” (p. 13). As children share play worlds, “each player has a clear identity, a place among others” (p. 13), suggests Dyson. In order to role play family events or perhaps characters from movies and videos, children must make sense of the various roles according to their own unique understandings.

In societies that assign work to children, such as caregiving of siblings, children still find time to pretend play, combining their duties with play (Schartzman, 1984). In fact, children in some societies learn “that play and work are integrated rather than separate spheres of activity” (p. 55). In the absence of typical play materials, Schartzman suggests children in both rural and urban settings learn to use whatever materials are available to pretend play, even using materials that might be considered dangerous, such as trash items and abandoned buildings or cars to create materials and play spaces. To summarize the issue at hand, Schartzman suggests that through imaginative play, novel thought is manifested, and the creativity involved is very important to children’s learning.

By the above examples, Dyson (1997) and Schartzman (1984) illustrate the creativity and vigor that are characteristic of children as they express their ideas and experiences freely in pretend play. Added to this, Sawyer (2001) states that imaginative play can be instrumental in guiding children’s ability to improvise in a group. Children become attuned to one another’s play scripts, learning to modulate and invent new texts that can be transferred to still other peer

groups (p. 35). The following study however, gives us a different view of how children express their imaginative capabilities.

Sometimes, play scripts can become “dull and repetitive” (Glaubman, Kashi, & Koresh, 2001, p. 137) when children use the same roles each day and use “play objects mainly at the level of object transformations” (p. 137). In a quantitative research, Glaubman, et al. examined how children’s abilities to use their imaginations could be improved through using specific interventions by kindergarten teachers. In analyzing kindergarten children’s pretend play in naturalistic settings of school, the researchers divided the children into experimental groups and control groups. The experimental group participated in intensive out-of-play whole group and small group gatherings with teachers trained in specific interventions, where they explored play materials, and discussed play actions and roles. Those children placed in control groups received no interventions. It is interesting to note that the control group teachers received the same training as the intervention teachers and were advised to support the children’s in-play situations, “but did not receive any specific directions in the way they should intervene to facilitate it” (p. 142).

The results revealed that the children in the group receiving the intervention activities exhibited more complex play plots than the control group children. This research suggests that the teacher’s role is significant in raising the quality of children’s role play, but in my thinking, it seems to imply that children are not capable of achieving complexity of pretend play unless the teacher intervenes by using specific intervention - such as coaching - strategies. Each of

these examples help us to gain more understanding of children's pretend play. All add to a view that pretend play is beneficial to children's meaning making. To gain a deeper understanding of children's pretend play meanings, I will look at teacher intervention and the classroom environment that influences children's opportunities of pretend play.

Establishing a Supportive Classroom Environment

Although some authors do not use the term *intervention*, the teacher's role in promoting children's pretend play may lie partly in what kind of and how materials are provided in the classroom (Reifel & Yeatman, 1993). In order for a classroom environment to foster pretense, a teacher must offer strategically, an array of materials such as dolls, blocks, and paints and distribute those materials "at times when children can take advantage of their possibilities" (p. 363). In an example of classroom play, two little girls used autumn colored paints to simulate a Halloween like depiction of pretend play while painting at an easel. In the authors' view, we need to observe children closely in play in order to consider the contextual possibilities as contributing to their unfolding play plots, which seems to me to be an indirect intervention of children's pretend play.

Children represent their experiences through using the materials in the classroom to construct and through the actions of their own bodies (Jones & Reynolds, 1992), playing out scripts, described as play themes "based in the child's real or fantasy experiences" (p. 9). In this light, children become more goal oriented when they invent new ideas and dialogue as they collaborate with one another the emerging script. Given opportunities for classroom play, children

have opportunities to practice imaginative thinking and to experience a range of emotions (Reifel & Yeatmen, 1993). It is important to look at

A teacher's role is in establishing a meaningful classroom environment and one that is supportive of children's play, as that of an interested and a *skilled play watcher* (Reynolds & Jones, 1997), meaning "one who makes. . . play possible and helps children keep getting better at it" (Jones & Reynolds, 1992, p. 1). Moreover, these researchers believe that "the quality of the play in a classroom for 3- to 5-year-olds is the measure of a teacher's success" (p. 13). Therefore, by observing children in play, teachers have to decide when to intervene, when to let play continue uninterrupted, and when to redirect.

In preschools, teachers often view dramatic play as the most common type of symbolic play (Monighan-Nourot, Scales, Van Hoorn, Almy, 1987) that takes place in areas where props and other materials provide children the opportunity to play out "themes from their own experiences" (p. 28). Children bring their own personal meanings to their pretend play events (Reynolds & Jones, 1997); moreover, "Play, being pretend, offers room for ingenious interweaving of fantasy and reality, feelings and facts. It can be built on whatever compromises the players are willing to accept; it need not be "true" from the perspective of the larger society" (p. 6).

As mentioned earlier, in many societies, children "are able to construct active and imaginative play lives for themselves although they may do this in ways somewhat different than middle-class children do" (Schartzman, 1984, p. 56), as the researcher found in her study illustrating that children can find ways to

weave play into their work responsibilities. It is more common in middle-class Western and American societies that adults find it necessary to monitor, supervise, promote, and model play.

Reynolds and Jones (1997) suggest that teachers who are striving to understand children's thinking must be avid play watchers who can intervene in children's pretend play to ask authentic questions in order to build curriculum based upon their experiences. The authors contend that such observation skills can be good teaching tools in paying thoughtful attention to the important ideas of children "even a day or a week or a month after the play happened" (p. 88).

Play may be the only in school activity to allow natural expression of emotions, allowing children the opportunities to experience "the full gamut of emotions-joy and pleasure, pain, frustration, anger, exhilaration" (Wasserman, 2000, p. 19). Wasserman stresses the importance of a teacher staying close to children during play episodes. Reflecting on her own practices, Wasserman said, "(i)t is very difficult for even the most sensitive adults to walk the thin line between doing too much and doing too little, knowing when to intervene and when to hold back" (p. 5). When I revisited the author's writings and read again how she describes play as "the main source of our creativity" (p. 18) and the well spring of "fertile, inventive minds" (p. 18), I remember wondering how children's conceptualization of nurturing features might be fostered by the teacher's facilitation, and what sort of balance the teacher could sustain through involvement in play, in a busy early childhood classroom. To truly nurture play and thus foster children's growth through play, does the teacher intervene in play,

participate in play, or stand by as a silent observer (Jones and Reynolds, 1992)? Research does not have all the answers, but I will address this in the next section which looks at various teacher attitudes concerning intervention.

Looking at teacher attitudes

Although teacher intervention may enhance children's early school success (Kontos, 1999), often teachers are too involved with the tasks of facilitating the classroom and spend relatively little time in direct interactions with children. As pointed out by Kontos, many studies have looked at teacher-child interactions from the child's perspective, while ignoring teachers' verbal interactions with children, often limiting studies to sociodramatic play or library settings. In a study of Head Start classrooms, Kontos looked at the way teachers talked with children during free play time in an array of settings. For this particular study, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to understand the extent of teachers' involvement in children's play.

In this particular study, conversations between teachers and children were transcribed and coded from audiotapes according to "the type of verbalization, role of the teacher, and the child's activity" (Kontos, 1999, p. 5). Results suggest the most frequent role of teachers in children's play was as the author termed, *stage manager*, in which the teacher assisted children in constructive play toward a product, such as at the art table. In addition but less often, teachers adopted a playmate type role, such as joining in with children in constructing Legos. Moreover, teachers tried to enhance play by asking questions to assist children's involvement. The data suggest "that teachers do adjust their role depending on the

activity, and that teachers do modify their talk depending on their role and the activity” (p. 9). Kontos noted, interestingly, that the teachers in this study spent time in what they perceived as their role in enhancing and managing play, yet the conversations were “not exactly filled with rich, stimulating content” (p. 12).

In another study that looked at teacher attitudes about the place of play in preschool children’s learning, interviews were conducted with “the five major stake holders in 10 primary schools in the north-west of England” (Keating, Fabian, Jordan, Mavers, & Roberts, 2000, p. 1). In teacher interviews, it was found that the amount of time children had to play was lessened due to curriculum constraints. The play time that was allowed was justified partly as an assessment tool, an opportunity for teachers to observe children and assess learning. Teacher involvement with children’s play even when joining the play, was often conducted to monitor and assess children’s performance in order to inform practices and “to contribute to formal statements about children’s ability” (p. 11).

It was also suggested that teacher attitudes towards play influence children’s perceptions of play. If teachers convey a lack of regard for play, the attitude may cause children to hold less value for play as well. For example in the study by Keating, et al., (2000), when teachers took time to initiate and sustain play, children’s play seemed more effective. On the other hand, when teachers used free play time to tutor readers, children seemed to view the teacher’s focus on academics as “involved in ‘important’ activities . . .” (p. 12), in other words, play time was not the most important.

Calabrese (2003) contends that sociodramatic play offers children opportunities for personal freedom and that teachers can listen and observe without interfering. Further views suggest that the teacher's task is to listen to children, in order to gain entry into their play worlds, where one can learn from them (Paley, 1999; Reifel & Yeatmen, 1993). Katch (2001) suggests that teachers can use children's pretend play topics as substance for classroom conversations and build the curriculum based upon community that might result from the dialogues. In her own classrooms, Katch takes an active role in intervening in children's play to help them to make rules and set limits on the violence they sometimes portray in pretense.

These studies and others (Craig-Unkefer & Kaiser, 2002; Gmitrova, & Gmitrov, 2003; Jones & Reynolds, 1992; Monighan-Nourot et al., 1987; Reynolds & Jones, 1997) illustrate the challenge in the way teachers think about children's pretend play and what kind of intervention is appropriate to guide play in an early childhood classroom environment. It may be possible in today's classroom to share the power with children (Jones & Reynolds, 1992), and to follow "the child's lead in play," the adult having "no agenda other than mutual interaction with the child" (p. 47). Guidance from the teacher may be crucial to understanding play, therefore revealing children's meanings and making it less difficult to capitalize on their strengths. It is important to know whether the mutuality between teacher and child influences children's features of nurturing.

Each of these views of a teacher's role in fostering pretend play in the early childhood classroom adds depth to our understanding of how children

benefit from contextual features in the environment. To add to this, it is important to consider such contextual factors as the classroom environment as offering opportunities for children to express and understand nurturing. In this chapter, I have defined the traditional definitions of children's nurturance characteristics. Each of these psychological views adds to our understanding of children's nurturance as contributing to a tapestry that explains in part their development. In addition, I have provided an overview of various notions from researchers regarding factors of children's symbolic play, referred to herein as, pretend play. Moreover, I have presented various studies that have considered the way teachers think about children's play and what kind of intervention is appropriate to understand play.

These various viewpoints illustrate the complexity of offering any one answer for how children make meaning in their pretend play or how contextual elements such as intervention efforts, both direct and indirect, affect a child's capability to invent and sustain plots for pretend play. These points of view offer insight into the value of pretend play for fostering learning in the early childhood period when children are acquiring basic skills of dealing with relationships. The literature, however, has not looked at how expressions of nurturance might emerge during children's pretend play. My study offers a different view, one that suggests that pretend play is a means for children to try out nurturance and to begin to understand nurturing.

It is important to consider what the research is suggesting about the benefits of the kinds of things children are provided, whether material or human,

in order to begin to understand how pretend play could include children's understandings of nurturance.

It is rare to read about nurturing specific to pretend play. There have been no attempts to explore the nurturing aspects of children's pretend play in naturalistic settings. Most studies on nurturing tend to look at the development of children and not the contextual features that contribute to the characteristics of children's nurturance. We know little about how children's nurturing features are mediated by the classroom context. I propose a shift from traditional research to an alternative that views the context which supports children's nurturance during pretend play.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In the last chapter, I presented traditional definitions of children's nurturance. In addition, I provided an overview of various notions from researchers regarding factors of children's symbolic play, referred to herein as, *pretend play*, with the idea that there are many terms and descriptions that attempt to define what pretend play represents in children's play experiences with one another. Moreover, I presented various studies that have considered the way teachers think about and what kind of intervention is appropriate for children's pretend play. Finally, I proposed a shift from traditional research to an alternative that views the context that supports children's nurturance during pretend play. In this chapter, I will describe the methodology used to look at a case study of a classroom.

DATA GENERATION SITE

To illustrate this view, a case study in a preschool classroom will be offered to address my two questions: "How do children express nurturance in pretend play?" and "Do children appear to understand nurturing in peers' role play?" Within a major university, the classroom of study was an established preschool within the College of Education early childhood program. The classroom reflected an atmosphere that encouraged creative play and a lead/demonstration teacher who believes that the purpose of preschool is that play is supported and taken seriously, and that through materials and the freedom to choose playmates and items, children receive satisfaction each day, as well as

long-term benefits (Pape interview, 3/22/00). I chose the site partly because I had conducted other studies there (Hoke, 1999; 2000) and because I was very familiar with the program, and participated as a demonstration teacher in an identical program at that site, but with my own group of children in an afternoon session.

Program philosophy

My selected research participants were attendees in a preschool setting that was held during the morning hours, from 8:30 to 11:30, four mornings a week, and was facilitated by a lead/demonstration teacher who I will call Mrs. Prince. In discussing the philosophy of this program, I speak from my own experiences as co-director of the Center classroom, a responsibility I shared with Mrs. Prince. As confirmed by Mrs. Prince in consistent and ongoing discussions with interns, parents, and colleagues, the philosophy of this program was influenced by the guidelines of Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) (Bredekamp, & Copple, 1997), a view of children as active and inquisitive learners who derive meaning in their environments by drawing upon direct social and physical experiences. Moreover, DAP guidelines were followed with the understanding that children construct their understandings of the world by drawing upon the kinds of experiences that have been transmitted culturally and socially. In addition, this preschool program viewed children as acquiring meaning through interactions with the environment, elaborated on by Gestwicki (1999) as follows:

Key principles of developmentally appropriate practice are based on the work of theorists such as Piaget and Vygotsky and those who followed

their work . . . they view intellectual development as occurring by a process of constructivism through interaction with other people, materials, and experiences. . . appropriate classrooms create environments that provide the materials and interaction needed for such constructions. (p. 10)

Other key elements in the selected classroom were that encouragement and genuine respect were shown toward children's play. As expressed in DAP guidelines (1997) "(t)eachers stimulate and support children's engagement in play and child-chosen activities" (p. 128). Following DAP principles, the teacher allowed the children extended periods of time to participate in play and projects. Another key component of DAP principles (1997) was that the lead teacher demonstrated a consistent and an obvious regard for the families of the children. Communication with parents was ongoing and reciprocal beginning with initial visits between parents and the lead teacher.

At the beginning and ongoing, the program philosophy was discussed along with open dialogues that would allow the teacher "to learn from parents as well as share their own knowledge and to negotiate increased understandings with them. . ." (Gestwicki, 1999, p. 310). It was evident from the comings and goings of the parents – their participation in birthdays, holidays, field trips, daily visits, and through free entry into the adjacent observation room (To be described in one of the next sections) - that the parents embraced the program philosophy of, "Parents are welcome in the program and participate in decisions about their children's care and education. Parents observe and participate and serve in decision-making role in the program" (Bredenkamp & Copple, 1997, p. 22).

Indeed, in the previous semesters, I had observed many incidences every day with the teacher welcoming and talking with a visiting parent who oftentimes sat with the children to play or read a book, and also on the porch area where parents often arrived early to observe their children at play and to chat with the teacher about how the day was going, right before departure time.

Describing the Interns' Participation

This university program site was set in place as a learning component for interns working toward degrees in Early Childhood Education in the College of Education. The value of this Center was that prior to student teaching, the preservice interns would get firsthand experiences in applying Developmentally Appropriate Practices (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) with young children. Working directly with the children afforded an opportunity for the interns to experience first hand “that children relate best in an environment of acceptance and approval and learn to develop and facilitate lessons that are meaningful, challenging, and engaging for the children” (Hoke, 2000).

Describing the Classroom

The children participated in *freely chosen play time*, a term used in the Center that describes a block of time of an approximate one-hour and forty-five minutes, when children were free to choose centers, activities, and materials, and move from activity to activity, with opportunities for interaction with teachers and peers at the children's own pace. During this free play time, I considered the entire classroom in identifying and typifying features of nurturing, not limiting

myself to play activities, but focusing on specific play centers, two separate mornings each week.

Since my focus of observation was free play inside, I will describe the classroom play environment. The classroom was rather small, approximately 28 x 24 feet, but organized so that the children were able to move freely about. One half of the room was divided into three centers: a housekeeping center; a reading center that contained manipulatives and puzzles as well as a variety of books; and a block center. The areas used for centers were carpeted. The other half of the room contained a large round table used for writing activities and for various math-related manipulatives; two small tables used for science exploration such as sand and water, magnets, sink and float, etc., and small art or craft projects; two rectangular tables, one for puzzles and one for finger painting and collages, sometimes used for cooking; an adult sink for paint preparation and snack preparation; a refrigerator; and an open children's restroom with child-sized sinks and toilets. These areas had tile flooring. Any available wall space throughout the room and even in the hallway outside the Center was used to display the children's work, for example, their dictated stories; signs; drawings; and paintings.

Along one side of the classroom was a glass wall that provided a mirrored image for the children's classroom; on the other side of the glass was an observation room. This room provided visible access through the glass to students who were conducting field experience in education or parents who were interested in observing their children during the activity in the Center.

The block center

Most of my data collection took place in the block center; therefore, I will describe it in-depth. This center area was approximately eight by eight feet. It was enclosed on one side by shelved cubbies, on another side by a shelf unit, above which was a two-way observation mirrored wall, and on the other two sides, by shelved dividers. The cubbies and shelves were furnished with a variety of blocks: wooden unit blocks, cardboard blocks, small colored blocks, and an assortment of play animals divided into bins and sorted by type (jungle, farm, dinosaurs, turtles, etc.). There were several mirrors attached on the walls at floor level and three wooden doll houses furnished with wooden furniture. An assortment of rubber and wooden dolls and people figures were in cubbies close by with traffic signs and wooden vehicles. An entryway could be adjusted to be wider by moving one of the shelf units.

The porch area

A porch play area was directly outside of the classroom. This outside play space was enclosed by brick walls and covered over by a flat roof. The approximate 20 feet x 40 feet area sized porch afforded the children chances for movement activities such as running, hopping, and skipping and provided great latitude for using the wheeled vehicles (trikes, wagons, carts, and scooters); the free standing equipment (a basketball hoop; a rocking boat; an orbiter like steel contraption that rotated and revolved); and multi-purposed equipment (a climbing deck with detachable pieces such as slides and ladders; a sand table that alternated as a water table; a carpentry bench; and a wooden folding unit with a window and

chalkboard sides that was often used by the children for a store, house, or office). The major floor area was made of cement with a painted track for the vehicles which curved around near the outer edge of the porch. A recessed area next to the storage cages was carpeted and served as the climbing deck area.

To one side of the porch were wide cages that were used for storage for all the equipment. Stored within the cages and removed often to add to the porch play environment were an array of blocks: wooden unit blocks; large hollow blocks of various shapes; and cardboard brick like blocks. In addition, a large padded mat was often brought out to provide a soft surface for the children to land on in order to be able to jump from the deck, or to try out tumbling type skills. In addition, a mini-trampoline, a variety of hula hoops and beanbags, and a spring jumping horse were brought out from time to time to provide more variety. Finally, an array of materials offered on the porch included chalk and erasers; plastic and metal type kitchen gadgetry for the sand table; and items that were conducive to water play such as measuring cups, pitchers, plastic tubing, and funnels.

The housekeeping center

Pretend play also took place in the housekeeping center, an area of about 8 by 10 feet, enclosed partially by shelf dividers and child-sized play kitchen furniture. The back wall consisted of cubbies from floor to ceiling; these were filled with an assortment of dress-up clothes, shoes, hats, and purses, as well as an array of baby blankets and play medical kits. On the floor area were a child-sized table and chairs, an ironing board, two wooden doll cradles, and a wooden child-

sized play stove, sink and cabinet, pantry, and chest of drawers. Stored in the pantry and under the play sink were a variety of dishes, pots and pans, a wooden toaster and iron, baby bottles, and cooking utensils.

STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Describing the Participants

My study participants included thirteen 3 and 4 year old children, six boys and seven girls, who participated in the morning group. Two of the children were of mixed race - a Philippine/Anglo child and a Mexican/Anglo child - one Mexican child, and ten Anglo children. The children were from middle-income to high-income families within the area. In addition, another participant was the lead/demonstration teacher, Mrs. Prince, who was in charge of the program. Mrs. Prince had a combined teaching experience of 25 years, having taught in public elementary school and included 18 years in the university study site. Her teaching credentials included a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education, a master's degree in Curriculum & Instruction, and a certification in Early Childhood Education. Furthermore, during the study, Mrs. Prince was enrolled at a major university as a doctoral student in Early Childhood Education.

Also included as participants were a number of university early childhood students working as interns with the children. Preservice interns received firsthand experiences working with the children, spending about 2 ½ hours per week, each. These activities fulfilled coursework requirements toward a degree in Early Childhood Education. Finally, my study included selected parents of the children, with whom I conducted interviews.

Gaining permission

Permission forms were provided all of the children's parents, via a parents' meeting, at which time I explained the study. The parents expressed interest in the study and offered positive feedback; all thirteen sets of parents gave their written permission. In addition, I met with each of the interns who were working with the children, gave an overview of my study, and provided a letter with full details of my research purpose. Moreover, the interns signed permission forms and returned those to me prior to the study. Finally, I followed a similar procedure with Mrs. Prince, the lead teacher, gaining her signed permission prior to study. All participants were informed that they had the right to participate in or to withdraw from the study at any time during the study. In addition, the participants were informed of their right to read the study outcome.

DATA GATHERING

Reactive Field Entry Strategy

I used a reactive field entry strategy to select a child/children for study, as suggested by Corsaro (1985), an approach that minimizes the influence of a researcher in a naturalistic play environment and uses the anthropological methodology of participant observation, or "an adult participating in children's culture" (p.). However, my purpose was to become "an accepted component of the children's environment" (p. 58), . . . accepted by the children, but ignored" (Sawyer, 1997, p. 58). My goal was to be unobtrusive and to appear to be uninvolved so that the children would go about their typical activities as if I was not there.

To implement the reactive field entry strategy, I sat among the children and wrote field notes. Similar to Sawyer's point of view (1997), I did not want "to become a member of the peer culture", and I would "avoid conversational interaction with the children" (p. 58). In addition, I carried a small tape recorder with me that I would hold in my lap or set on the floor beside me. I prepared a stationary video camera in the block center; the process of being videotaped was not unusual to the children since the camera had been placed in the Center at other times for the program's educational purposes. My goal was for the children to accept me as background to their play environment. Over time, I could sit on the floor in the same play center within a few feet of the children, and it seemed that I was invisible to them. They would step around me, talk next to me or above me when they stood. It was as if I was not there.

The Teacher's Input

I was hoping to identify children in the classroom early on who engaged in pretend play. Before beginning observations in the classroom, I visited with the teacher, Mrs. Prince, asking her to talk about pretend play in her classroom and how it occurred among the children. Mrs. Prince addressed this by saying that this classroom of children loved to role play. Moreover, she related that she often observed a particular group of children who participated in what she described as *hard core* pretend play, and that most of their play occurred in the block or housekeeping center. This group, she said, included Lisa, Heather, and Sam, adding that sometimes there would be others.

This particular group of children would arrive in the classroom, with their play ideas in mind, and come together in play to collaborate on the ideas for sometimes an hour at a time, Mrs. Prince shared. She described Heather as one who loved to role play, especially with the hard rubber animals in the block center, and that Heather would often include other children in her pretend play on a regular basis. Moreover, Mrs. Prince said that this group of children was capable of including each other's play ideas in pretend play. She had observed the children as being willing to accept each other's play ideas, and it seemed to her in doing so, they were able to sustain their pretend play, and that it appeared to be very important to them that their play continued. On the other hand she stated, when children in this group failed to accept each other's pretend play ideas, sometimes the play would fall apart.

METHOD OF INQUIRY

The method of inquiry for this study was to locate examples of nurturing in pretend play situations as children played with the materials, and/or other children, and/or teachers. For the purpose of this study, the construct *pretend play* is defined according to the description given for sociodramatic play (Frost, et al., 2001), as when “children carry out imitation and drama and fantasy play together” (p. 186) and which permits children to “include their imaginations in carrying out their roles” (p. 186). When I first entered the study site, I observed that the children had many opportunities to play. On many occasions, they were engaged in some kind of role play that included the above characteristics.

Once the children were accustomed to my visits, I entered the classroom two mornings a week during freely chosen play time. In order “to understand the research setting, its participants, and their behavior” (Glesne, 1999, p. 45), I went in to observe the children, to audio and video tape them, and to take field notes. As a researcher, I would engender a sense of empathy for the children I hoped to know (Eisner, 1997) and attempt to tell the story of their expressions of nurturance in pretend play.

It struck me from the beginning of the study that the children wasted no time in settling into the morning’s activity, that of freely chosen play. There always seemed to be a lot of play going on in this classroom. To address my questions, I focused on indoor freely chosen play time because during outdoor play time, it was difficult to follow the children’s activity; their rapid movements seemed to discourage the kind of sustained verbal engagement that I believed to be necessary in order to understand the children’s features of nurturing.

Writing Field Notes

During each episode, just as Sawyer (1997) stated from his own study, “I wrote continuously into my field notebook, noting bits of dialogue, physical movement, and nonverbal play activity” (p. 66). In a qualitative case study, I would expect the “unexpected” (Goldstein, 1997) and watch for emerging themes or “themes of results” (Scheurich, 2000) in telling a story and making meaning from that. Wolcott (1995) said we must regard “listening as an active and creative role” (p. 111) when doing research. As I sat in the classroom near the children, I tried to immerse myself within their play worlds by absorbing sensory

information, using eyes and ears to assist me in writing rapidly. I found it difficult to move my hand quickly enough to capture the things that leaped out at me from the dramas being played out in the classroom.

I agree with Goldstein (2000) that there is a certain “untidiness” of research, for I had to block out the natural chaos that surrounded me in this busy and productive seeming children’s classroom. On the evenings following my classroom visits, I transcribed my field notes, adding notes in the margins that described my reflections upon the kinds of things I was observing. While I was certain I would find many incidences of pretend play in this classroom, I wanted to lift “the veils that keep the eyes from seeing” (Eisner, 1985, p. 216) and stay open to emerging information, hoping to find some characteristic of nurturing features that would sharpen my senses. As I transcribed my field notes, I would read and reread my data and attempt, as suggested by Erickson (1985), through a time over time reflexive process to develop an interpretive model of what I had witnessed in my observations. With reflection and re-reflection, I hoped to find and be able to interpret a compelling piece of information that would assist me in analyzing the data.

Using Videotaping

After a brief time, I realized that the same group of children gathered in the block center, where they pulled out the bins of hard rubber animals and created constructions on the floor with wooden blocks and cardboard brick like blocks. Therefore, since most of the pretend play appeared to be taking place in the block center, the video camera was affixed to a shelf unit nearby and left on

throughout the morning. I videotaped the children on days when I visited the classroom as well as on days I could not be in the Center.

Using Audiotaping

I carried a small hand held audio tape recorder with me as during my observations of the children, placing it in my lap or on the floor beside me. On several occasions, I affixed the recorder to the shelf unit near where the children were playing in the block center. In addition, I tape recorded the structured interviews with the lead teacher and the selected parents.

Interviewing

My observations preceded any interviewing and were the basis for formulating interview questions (Glesne, 1999). As a way of gaining fuller understanding and a sense of rich complexity, I interviewed the lead teacher and the parents of one of the children, in pre-arranged interviews. As suggested by Glesne, the interview questions were contextual and specific, to increase understandings of the “phenomena in their fullest possible complexity” (p. 93). In prearranged interviews, I used the types of questions advocated by Glesne: structured - specific questions I knew I wanted to ask; open - new questions I developed as the conversation took unexpected leads that would arise during the course of the interview; and depth-probing - pursuing points of interest using open-ended expressions such as “tell me more” and “explain” (p. 93).

Interviews were tape recorded, with notes taken simultaneously. The pre-arranged meetings were conducted for two main purposes, either to learn about how the interviewees’ were thinking about nurturing, or to ask about a particular

episode of the children's pretend play. I transcribed at least half of the interviews, and hired a professional stenographer to transcribe the others. After transcription, I read and reread the interviews, reflecting and re-reflecting, adding comments in the margins according to my thinking, using Erickson's (1985) model of reflexive process.

On several occasions following a play episode, I interviewed children who were, as Mrs. Prince described, core players, following as described by Wolcott (1995) a "casual, conversational approach" (p. 105). The interviews took place in the hallway outside the Center and in a classroom across the hall. My interviews always began by restating something I had observed the children say or do, then asking for clarification. Similar to Wolcott, I tried to "consciously strive to become a creative listener" (p. 111) by talking less and listening more.

Moreover, my questions were open-ended and short, and similar to interviews with the adults in the study, open - new questions I developed as the conversation took unexpected leads that would arise during the course of the interview; and depth-probing - pursuing points of interest using open-ended expressions such as "tell me more" and "explain" (Glesne, 1999, p. 93). These interviews were transcribed by me and read using the same approach as for the other interviews, following Erickson's (1985) suggestions by reading and re-reading, reflecting and re-reflecting, and adding my own thoughts by writing in the margins.

Unstructured Interviews

When I observed situations that were not clear to me, I would either telephone, e-mail, or speak with the lead teacher, Mrs. Prince, to ask for clarification of particular aspects of the children's episodes. In addition, I found moments when I believed it would not seem intrusive in which to ask the teacher or one of the interns to step out of the Center for a brief period of time to clarify, explain, or interpret an aspect of the children's pretend play, their conversation, and/or action. I took field notes during these interviews, then transcribed those notes using Erickson's (1985) model of reflexive process to develop an interpretive model of what I had heard

DATA ANALYSIS

Analyzing Observations

After a few weeks, patterns of play and nurturing features began to emerge. Some of the children's interactions with the play materials and with each other regarding the play materials were rich with actions and words that depicted nurturing qualities that often looked and sounded like terms of endearment a parent might use with a child. As I became more accustomed to the children's routines, I oftentimes observed that Heather – as stated previously, one of the core players - would play alone, but would find ways to interest the other children in her play events, most of which involved the play animals in the block center. Heather's pretend play often presented opportunities for saving and sheltering the animals. Added to this, Heather's play scenarios attracted the other children

because they would either begin interacting with Heather or they would show interest in her role play and use some of her ideas for their own pretending.

Thereafter, I began to look more deeply into the play of Heather and this same group of children who joined her often: Arin, John, Sam, and Lisa. As I began organizing my data, I kept in mind what Wolcott (1995) suggests, as using “some broad categories, however tentative, that provide sufficient structure to guide both fieldwork and deskwork” (p. 202). The reflexive process recommended by Erickson (1985) was very helpful to me because as I read my field notes and added jottings in the margins about my thinking about my thinking concerning what I was reading and rereading, I began to see emerging patterns that formed categories. Viewing the videos, transcribing those, and participating in a reflexive process helped me to compare and contrast with my field notes what I was seeing and reading about my videotapes.

I had been in the environment of the children, and I had experienced the richness of their interactions with one another and with themselves, and had observed the very physicalness of their pretense as they moved in and out of roles. The term, *sensual data*, used by St. Pierre (1996), seemed to describe what could only be gotten through the sights, sounds, and smells that I observed in the pretend play within the children’s classroom. Such rich imagery was revisited through my reflections and rereading of field notes and helped me to organize my data in a rudimentary fashion, filing the information I was gathering into the three categories listed below:

- a. children’s nurturing features within pretend play,

- b. children's nurturing features outside of pretend play,
- c. and the classroom environment that supports both pretend play and non-pretend play.

Over time, this initial coding helped me to develop a more specific focus. For example, various nurturing features began to emerge from the children's pretend play, according to the following categories:

- Considering the needs of someone other than herself/himself
- Nurturing Arousing Events/Dramatizing Qualities
- Helping
- Acting out family relationships/Acting out comforting and/or soothing
- The use of pop culture characters and terminology in pretend play
- Articulating a sense of good and bad
- Refocusing others to one's own ideas in pretend play
- Articulating protection and care/friendship
- Articulating helping, offering, and/or support

Within pretend play and also in non-play episodes, features began to emerge to include the following categories:

- The context of a particular episode: It seemed important to consider the children's immediate surroundings and how those surroundings might contribute to nurturing features.
- Language and body language: This included the interactions between a child and another child or a child and an adult, a child's body movements, facial expressions, tone of voice, etc.

- The opportunity. Questions I considered were, “Where were the adults in the classroom and how might they be supporting the opportunity for nurturing to happen?”

”What was happening around the child that might present obstacles and/or helps?”

In considering the classroom environment that might contribute to children’s nurturing features, I focused on the following categories:

- The physical environment, posed to the way the classroom was structured
- The emotional environment: This had to do with the feeling tones from the teacher and the interns, the time provided for freely chosen play, the kinds of activities going on, the pace (Were the children rushed in doing the activities? Did the children seem at ease?) and rhythm (Did the children seem engaged in activity? Did they seem confident in going about their day?).

Creating a Rubric

I also found it helpful to create a rubric to look at episodes from my study. I organized features of the core players’ verbal interactions into the following categories to look at the features that could lead to nurturing and whether these features changed over time, i.e., increased, decreased, or stayed the same.

- protection
- care
- helping
- comfort

- concern
- guidance
- creating situations that might lead to nurturing

I continued to return to the three broad categories mentioned previously: children's nurturing features within pretend play, children's nurturing features outside of pretend play, and the classroom environment, to guide me in keeping "important distinctions visible" (Wolcott, 1995, p. 203). The videos were analyzed in a similar way to analyzing my field notes, according to categories of nurturing features in pretend play situations and non pretend play situations, and according to the classroom environment. In addition, I viewed the video tapes for checking and rechecking my interpretations from field notes.

Analyzing Interviews

Through interviewing Mrs. Prince, I sought to understand what she considered "salient aspects" (Glesne, 1999, p. 143) of creating a classroom where nurturing could occur. Because the initial interview was more structured in that I asked Mrs. Prince specific questions, I elicited what Glesne calls, "indigenous classificatory schemes" (p. 143), for example, from her descriptions of how she defines nurturing; her personal history of nurturance; and how she was viewing nurturing in the classroom. With subsequent interviews, I probed for subcategories, looking for concepts and central ideas that could identify specific features to reveal as Glesne suggested "the emerging, evolving structure" (p. 136) of my document.

TRUSTWORTHINESS OF INTERPRETATIONS

Meeting with Colleagues

To check for understandings of the data, I called upon professional colleagues to read and reread my research, sometimes sending portions of my work via email and regular mail. Furthermore, I met with colleagues in weekly group and one-on-one work sessions to read the data together, to reflect openly with one another, and to listen to each others' interpretations and suggestions. It was very helpful to meet with colleagues, some of whom were writing their own dissertations. As confirmed by Wolcott (1990), "our writing proceeded in a climate of mutual help and encouragement" (p. 45). There were eight of us who would in various configurations, meet on a regular basis to share and discuss our research in a round table format. I went into these meetings striving to be open-minded and willing to alter my focus, should as Wolcott (1995) contends "it become evident that either the problem or an effective way to investigate it" (p. 191) needed to be defined or redefined.

Member Checking

It also proved helpful for Mrs. Prince to read episodes from the children's pretend play to check for "accuracy of the depiction" (Glesne, 1999, p. 152) of these events. We engaged in phone and email dialogue as well as face-to-face conversations to discuss these episodes. In cases where Mrs. Prince did not remember an episode, she would respond to what she read, reflecting and re-reflecting upon the pretend play of the children from her classroom, often

providing me with increased insight “to develop new ideas and interpretations” (p. 152).

Affirming Trustworthiness.

As suggested by Glesne (1998), establishing trust in my research participants was very important because I wanted to feel confident that all participants could be as natural as possible. I took time to explain my study to the parents and the interns, and held informal discussions and interviews with Mrs. Prince in the research site, “building sound relationships with respondents” (p. 152). In addition, I strove to be receptive and open to the research setting (Wolcott, 1995), meaning for me through the contextual features such as the classroom; the dialogue between and among the children, my reflections from that dialogue; the feeling tones of the classroom; the imagery within Mrs. Prince’s interview descriptions, i.e., the manner in which she talked about the children’s pretend play and the portrait she portrayed regarding her own childhood experience with nurturing; and the personal stories from the parent interviews.

In this chapter, I have presented my methodology which began with a description of the selected site. I provided an explanation of the selected site’s program philosophy and gave an in-depth portrayal of the classroom and the adjoining porch area. Next, I provided a description of all study participants and the method of gaining permission for study. Added to this, I explained how my reactive field entry strategy helped me to gain access to the classroom in the most unobtrusive way. It was also helpful, I described, for the teacher to identify key pretend players to help me with focusing on pretend play in the classroom.

Moreover in data gathering, my method of inquiry included: field notes, videotaping, interviews, and transcription of those elements, using margin notes and a reflexive process of reading, re-reading, reflecting, and re-reflecting.

To present data analysis, I included the three broad categories of information from field notes and videotapes suggesting nurturing features and also factors of the classroom context identified from the emerging data. I later described more specific categories from each of the three broad categories. I also described how as I transcribed my field notes, videotapes, and interviews, I would read and reread my data and attempt, as suggested by Erickson (1985), through a time over time reflexive process to develop an interpretive model of the data I had gathered. Next, I described a rubric that assisted me in organizing factors of the core players' verbal interactions into categories of features that could lead to nurturing and whether these features changed over time. Furthermore, I discussed how I established the trustworthiness of interpretations through meetings and dialogues with colleagues discussing my transcriptions, through member checking, and through affirming trustworthiness by establishing trust in my research participants.

Chapter 4: Presenting the Data

In the last chapter I provided a description of the data generation site, followed by a description of the study participants. Furthermore, I described the reactive field entry strategy I used prior to data gathering. Then, I explained the method of data gathering, data analysis, and study limitations.

In this chapter, I will first present episodes that demonstrate the multiple features that were showing up in the children's pretend play, using these episodes as a way of taking us on a tour of how I began to see nurturance in the classroom. In this first section I observed a group of core players who in pretend play, enacted topics having to do with lurking danger, saving, sheltering, reassuring, situations involving family members, and popular culture characteristics. Next, I will describe the classroom environment that supports the kinds of things I was observing, including information from interviews with the teacher, Mrs. Prince. The interview descriptions will include the teacher's ideas about nurturing and her philosophical influences, including her personal history and her education.

Initial Observations

I was soon to learn that a large block of freely chosen playtime was a scheduled part of each day. As I entered the classroom on my first day of observations, I noticed a printed document posted on the doorway outlining the schedule that included the kinds of activities planned for the morning. Early on, it seemed evident from my observations that for most of the freely chosen playtime, many of the children grouped together to engage in some kind of pretend play. As

discussed earlier, planned activities were prepared each day by the teacher and the interns. While the children were encouraged to try any of the activities in the classroom, some elected to engage in pretend play for a good deal of the time.

Based upon my field entry strategy observations, I observed that several of the children gathered often in the block center where they would pull out various play materials such as an assortment of blocks and a variety of hard rubber jungle animals. In fact, on my first day to record field notes, several of the children Mrs. Prince had identified as core players - Heather, John, Sam, and Arin - were in the block center.

Episode 1.1:

When I arrived, it was still early, just a few minutes into the morning, and it was evident the children were already involved in the block center. Blocks were scattered about, and some block structures had already been constructed. Several bins were taken down from the cubbies and held various jungle and farm animals, and dinosaurs. Heather searched through a bin of jungle animals, and picked up a rhinoceros.

(1) Heather: Oh no, oh no. Alligator's going to eat her mother. [Heather held the rhinoceros in the air.]

(2) Heather: Here, we'll go with you. [Said to the rhinoceros.]

Heather walked about the block center, holding the rhinoceros and moving it through the air. Although Sam appeared to ignore Heather, he imitated Heather's actions by holding a baby tiger perched atop a play gold coin, and

moving the coin through the air, making “whooshing” noises, as if the tiger was flying.

John worked with a block construction, adding blocks to his creation. Arin rummaged through a small tub container of plastic insects and chose a plastic fly. Arin looked at Sam, and began to “fly” the insect toward Sam’s tiger. Arin hit at the tiger with the fly, making buzzing like sounds. Heather tried to hand Arin a fox.

(3) Heather: Here, here, give *it* to the fly. We order you.

(4) John: May I have it?” (The fox)

(5) Heather: How ‘bout you play with yours?

[Arin continued moving the fly around the block center.]

In the above interaction, early on, we have a life/death event involving Heather’s rhinoceros. A script about danger and rescue had begun. Soon after, Heather left the block center, still holding her rhinoceros.

Can Someone Be My Mommy?

Episode 1:2:

In a little while, Heather returned to the block center where the same group of children was gathered. Another little girl, Lisa, joined the group in blocks. At first, the children did not interact. When Heather returned, however, Sam held a lion and moved it toward Heather’s panther, whom she had named, Simba, after one of the animal characters in the movie, *The Lion King*. Sam spoke for the lion he was holding.

(1) Sam: Do you remember me?

(2) Heather: I now have a little cub named Simba,

(3) and you are not going to hurt him.

(4) Sam: No. [Stated with emphasis.]

Another child in the Center, Lisa, played alone with a group of animals clustered near her. Heather attempted to interact with Lisa, by picking up a baby lion near where Lisa played and saying the following.

(5) Heather: Pretend she calls it 'Sisty.' (Heather referred to her baby panther.)

(6) Lisa: Give me, I was playing with it.

Lisa turned away from Heather and began interacting with John and Arin. Heather played alone for a few minutes, then laid the panther on a shelf divider and used a pretend voice to make the panther whimper. Sam brought a tiger over. Heather screamed a real scream, as if really startled by Sam. Sam looked at Heather and talked to her in an apologetic tone.

(7) Sam: I saved her.

(8) Heather: Mommy's dead. [I believe Heather referred to the panther she was holding.]

(9) Sam: Can someone be my mommy?

(10) Can someone be my mommy?

(11) Heather: Not mine. She's dead.

(12) Lisa: I'll be your mommy.

(13) Heather: You should have saved my mommy.

(14) Then somebody should have.

(15) Who killed her?

(16) Arin: I don't know.

In the above, Heather began her play scenario by calling attention to her panther in saying: *I now have a little cub named Simba, and you are not going to hurt him* (Episode 1:2; lines 2 and 3). She next made whimpering sounds for the panther. After gaining the attention of Sam, Heather proposed a specific danger situation: the mother panther had been killed. She admonished the others by speaking as the cub (*You should have saved my mommy*. Episode 1:2; Line 13), then asked for the cooperation of the other children (*Who killed her?* Episode 1:2; Line 15).

Simba and Hyenas

Episode 1:3:

The children continued moving their animals about in search of who in their pretend world killed their moms. In the following, we will see that Sam took up the pretend notion that his own mom had been killed. The children continued with their play drama.

(1) Sam: Who killed my mom?

(2) Heather: I'm not bad; I'm not bad. [Heather held a lion cub. Arin approached Heather with a dragonfly.]

(3) Arin: Hi, Simba. [Holding the dragonfly toward Heather's lion cub.]

Heather did not respond to Arin and began to play alone, moving the lion cub and a panther among other animals clustered on the carpet. John pretended to

fly plastic insects around the block center. Sam and Arin were also in the block center picking up jungle animals from the floor area and moving them around on the carpet.

John selected a dragonfly from a pile of plastic insects someone had poured out on the carpet. He picked it up and began “flying” it around while making pretend buzzing sounds, and saying the dragonfly was “putting green stuff” on Heather. John approached Heather with the dragonfly and pushed it towards her. Heather responded with the following.

(4) Heather: That didn’t hurt. I don’t have blood. Don’t put his stuff on me. [The dragonfly’s.]

(5) Sam: I’m trying to save you. Eeyow! [To Heather, who moved the panther to a cubbie.]

Next, Heather presented a possibility for more play danger to unfold. She looked at John and stared beyond him, as if deep in thought.

(6) Heather: Listen to the sound, ssss. [Said in a soft and mysterious sounding voice, while looking again at John.]

(7) John: What? [John’s face looked startled, then interested, as he asked Heather what she meant.]

(8) Heather: Hyena.

Heather now had John’s attention and persevered with her ideas, expressing reassurance about the animals’ safety.

(9) Heather: They are safe from the hyena. [Heather placed the animals up as high as she could reach in the cubby.]

(10) John: They are safe. Don't mess with me; I'm just a scorpion.

John was now holding a toy plastic scorpion and appeared to be speaking to Heather's pretend hyenas. He then looked toward Arin and offered reassurance toward the spiders.

(11) John: Don't worry. Oh, spiders, spiders, are you okay?

(12) Arin: We're spiders; we don't need anything.

Heather now turned to Lisa. She appeared to be making an attempt to include Heather into the play protection scenario.

(13) Heather: Remember me? I protected you from the hyenas.

Lisa did not respond. Arin held a spider in one hand and with the same hand, picked up a coyote. I observed next that Arin continued to add to the existing play drama, while Heather presented still a new possibility for play danger.

(14) Arin: Spiders pick up coyote and drop it. Coyote is dead.

(15) Heather: There are fish in the floor. I'm scared of fish. [Heather picked up two elks.]

(16) John: They're sharks. I'm Mr. Ant [Holding a plastic ant.]

Hey elks, I have some bad news.

[Arin approached Heather, carrying two spiders. He issued a warning to Heather.]

(17) Arin: The hyena!

(18) Heather: I heard all the bad hyenas.

In the midst of the drama being played out, a child in another part of the Center played the piano, signaling that it was time to clean up centers and prepare for snacks. Pretend time in the block center was finished, at least for the day. Soon, the children left the block center to join others at the large group rug area, where they would make their plans for clean up of the center areas. In the above episodes, I interpret some of the actions of Heather and those of her peers as characteristic of nurturing features. As defined by traditional researchers (Fogel, et al., 1986; Edwards, 1986), these children were dramatizing nurturing in these ways:

- Heather offered protection and care (Fogel, et al., 1986) for the rhinoceros baby when she moved it through the air and away from the alligator, then cared for the animal by saying she would accompany it (Episode 1:1; lines 1 and 2). Later, Heather sheltered the rhinoceros baby by placing it in a cubbie nearby.
- Heather introduced her Simba cub by proclaiming her protection of him in announcing: . . . *and you are not going to hurt him* (Episode 1:2; Line 3).
- Sam also offered protection when he moved his tiger near Heather's panther, telling Heather he had saved her panther. Later, Sam offered Heather protection from the dragonfly's "green stuff" by telling her he was trying to save her (Episode 1:3; Line 5).
- I also observed comforting deeds (Edwards, 1986) from Heather when she reassured Sam that her lion cub was not bad (Episode 1:3; line 2). In a similar vein, Lisa used comfort in the form of reassurance when she

offered to be Heather's mommy when Heather revealed in play that the panther's mother was dead (Episode 1:2; line 12).

- There are other instances of comforting like actions:
 - Heather told John that the animals were safe from the hyena.
 - John told the spiders not to worry, then asked the spiders if they were okay (Episode 1:3; line 12).
 - A form of comforting took place when Lisa reassured Sam that she would be his tiger's mommy (Episode 1:3; line 12).

Non-Nurturing Factors

Although I was seeing actions that indicated nurturing - feeding, taking care of, protecting, reassuring, comforting, and other actions directed toward the animals in pretend play situations - I was also seeing other kinds of actions from the children during play that were clearly not nurturing. Let us revisit examples of the pretend play episodes presented above, to consider features of non-nurturing.

- Heather: Oh no, oh no. Alligator's going to eat her mother. [Heather held the rhinoceros in the air.] (Episode 1:1; line 1)
Non-nurturing feature: A predator/prey situation threatening Heather's rhinoceros baby
- Heather tried to hand Arin a fox. Heather: Here, here, give *it* to the fly. We order you. (Episode 1:1; line 3)
Non-nurturing feature: Heather offered her fox to Arin's fly - a sacrificial seeming effort to feed the fly.

- Heather: You should have saved my mommy. Then somebody should have [directed to Arin]. Who killed her? (Episode 1:2; lines 13 and 14)
Features: Pretend play dramas of killing and death
- Sam: Can someone be my mommy? Can someone be my mommy? (Episode 1:2; lines 9 and 10)
Heather: Not mine. She's dead. (Episode 1:2; line 11)
Non-nurturing features: Pretend play plots of abandonment, and a child's need to seek a parent
- Heather: Listen to the sound, ssss. [Said in a soft and mysterious sounding voice, while looking again at John.] (Episode 1:3; line 6)
John: What? [John's face looked startled, then interested, as he asked Heather what she meant.] (Episode 1:3; line 7)
Heather: Hyena. (Episode 1:3; line 8)
Non-nurturing features: Danger lurking
- Arin: Spiders pick up coyote and drop it. Coyote is dead. (Episode 1:3; line 14)
Heather: There are fish in the floor. I'm scared of fish. [Heather picked up two elks.] (Episode 1:3; line 15)
John: They're sharks. I'm Mr. Ant [Holding a plastic ant.] Hey elks, I have some bad news. [Arin approached Heather, carrying two spiders. He issued a warning to Heather.] (Episode 1:3; line 16)
Arin: The hyena! (Episode 1:3; 17)
Heather: "I heard all the bad hyenas." (Episode 1:3; 18)

Non-nurturing features: Danger lurking

Describing the Core Players

The term, *master players* (Reynolds & Jones, 1997), is an apt description for what I was seeing in the classroom of my study. I was beginning to see evidence of the skilled play the above authors wrote about in that the children appeared to be playing well and feeling competent in their play. Indeed, the children seemed very confident in their play. When they enacted violent seeming topics, they did not appear to be uneasy or upset. Instead, the children in this group of core players appeared to be in their own play worlds, with no sense of time or commitment to anything going on around them except the scenes they continued to play out.

I went into the study thinking I would find nurturing actions that would demonstrate what the children were seeing in their home and community environments. Indeed, during my observations, there were numerous instances when the children were pretending about family relationships. As contended by Reynolds and Jones (1997), “In play, young children are constructing their knowledge of the world by representing what they know. Play is children’s self-chosen process of recreating experience in order to understand it” (p. 3). Indeed, the representational play of these children also appeared to provide a haven where they could recreate their own life’s experiences (Erikson, 1950). I was puzzled by what I was seeing though. Observing the children’s pretending raised questions about the kinds of roles the children were assuming in their play. I was beginning to recognize that the children’s nurturing was situated within a quagmire of

pretend play pieces that seemed to be unrelated to and even anathema to nurturing, play concepts such as: maiming, killing, abandonment, and other situations suggestive of danger.

Violent topics

The topics used in their role play coupled with the children's expressions about family members and the ongoing relationships represented by the animals seemed to me to provide a tapestry of play that included nurturing. However, I wondered about the violent nature of the children's play events. I was familiar with this University program. Having met and talked with the parents of the children, I had also observed their comings and goings in the children's classroom. In the parents' interactions with the children, I saw only sustained involvement, support of the program, and caring interest toward their children, nurturing at its best.

It was evident that the children were including the influences of popular culture by pretending about the characters from the movie, *The Lion King* in their pretend play. Early on in the above scenarios, Heather transformed her panther cub into the character, Simba. She then made known to the other children that the cub's mother was dead and tried to involve them in finding out who did the killing. The transformation resulted in situations that involved death, abandonment, and Sam's pretending that his mother had been killed.

In their pretend play the children were reenacting their life's experiences that included family members and family seeming situations, as well as the influence of pop culture characters and characteristics. How did the non-nurturing

pieces of their play mesh with the nurturing features? The children's skilled play included so much more than nurturing. I wondered about what nurturing benefits there were in play that included dialogue about killing and animals eating parents. How would the many strands of the children's play, both nurturing and non-nurturing, weave into a tapestry that would address my research questions? I was eager to return to this classroom that offered good examples of pretend play to attempt to bring together the multiple strands I was viewing.

Revisiting the Classroom

I will revisit the classroom to consider more of the children's play episodes. I will show some examples of their pretend play while still early in the semester, about a week after the first episodes.

Episode 2: 1:

On this day, Heather was playing alone in the block center, moving the jungle animals around. She directed her conversation to a toy rhinoceros.

(1) Heather: You are starting to grow taller. [Speaking for the rhinoceros, Heather made the animal climb up the stack of blocks.]

(2) Heather: I climbed and climbed. I did it. [Heather appeared to be narrating a story.]

(3) Heather: It jumped up high. And then he climbed it.

Heather knocked the blocks down, then tried to stack the blocks by staggering each block, but they fell over. When a university intern tried to join

her, Heather said she only wanted children to play with. The intern walked away, telling Heather she would see her later.

John was playing near Heather. Sam had been in and out of the block center, but now returned. Heather moved the rhinoceros on the floor, speaking for it. She continued to develop her pretense, including more family roles and gradually gaining the attention of John and Sam. Rather than speaking as the animals, she appeared to be narrating a scenario.

(4) Heather: Let elephant carry the baby rhino. [She placed two elephants beside the rhinoceros.]

(5) And the big sister. The dad does not care that they have another child.

(6) Time for everyone to go to bed, except. . .

(7) And everybody went to bed. [Her voice was calm sounding and in a low tone.]

John brought a play shark “growling” over to Heather. She ignored the shark and began to enact a situation that called for comforting the animals. At that point, Heather walked two adult animals to a small wooden bed belonging to a dollhouse, describing what the animals were doing.

(8) Heather: Stumbled to. . . pretend they’re scared. [Heather addressed one of the elephants.]

(9) That’s okay.

In the above, Heather nurtured the animals by carrying them about, then putting them to bed. She incorporated family roles into her pretense: the big sister,

the dad, and she wove in guidance (*Let elephant carry the baby rhino*. (Episode 2:1; 4) and more care (*Time for everyone to go to bed*. Episode 2:1; 6). Throughout this episode, Heather soothed the animals. However, just when everything was calm and the animals were put to bed, she created another opportunity for them to be frightened (*Stumbled to. . . pretend they're scared*. Episode 2:1; 8), then comforted them again (*That's okay*. Episode 2:1; 9).

Pretending with Family Roles

Episode 2:2:

Heather continued playing with the elephants as John and Sam played nearby. She made one of the elephants jump out of bed, saying the elephant wanted to be with its dad. She left the baby elephant on the wooden bed and continued her narration by talking softly, as if telling a story.

- (1) Heather: He had a bad dream. In the morning. . . everyone laughed at him.
- (2) The mom and dad asked the others, 'Why did you laugh at him?'

Heather now had the attention of both Sam and John, who were looking toward her. Heather placed several animals in a row and continued to narrate her story.

- (3) Heather: He (a giraffe) went to the living room. [Heather picked up the giraffe, making it speak to a rhinoceros.]
- (4) Heather: Ah, you have a baby rhino.

Heather moved the rhinoceros close to the elephants, saying, “Thank you.” She moved the elephants on the floor, appearing to be speaking for them, and gained the interest of Sam, who soon joined Heather’s dramatization.

(5) Heather: Attention, attention.

(6) Sam: Attention everybody. I swing on vines from Africa,

(7) And I am the bestest.

(8) Heather: No, I chose your fight to make me sad; that’s what I chose.

(9) John: I’m a saver too.

(10) Heather: Look at us swing. [Speaking as the tiger.]

(11) Be quiet. I need a little rest. [Addressing John.]

We see that Heather used family roles to play out offering behaviors, the attending to the animal child by its mom and dad. In listening to Heather’s storytelling-like narration, one could imagine the protective feelings of two parents confronting whomever would laugh at their child. It is interesting to note that even though Heather seemed absorbed in her own play world, she acknowledged the play of John and Sam in talking about choosing their fight (*I chose your fight to make me sad*. Episode 2:1; 8).

Role Playing Family Situations

Episode 2:3:

Now Sam swung his tiger in the air, swooping the tiger near Heather. Sam persevered with his own play ideas about swinging animals.

(1) Sam: I can swing through the vines. I can swing through the vines. [Speaking for the tiger.]

Heather put the adult tiger on an empty shelf, and placed blocks in front of the shelf, hiding the tiger.

(2) Heather: I'm trapped. [Speaking for the tiger.]

(3) Sam: Help us, somebody help us. [Making crying sounds.]

(4) Heather: Remember me when I was a child?

(5) Don't worry, I won't hurt you. I WILL NOT HURT YOU."
[Speaking to Sam in a loud voice as the baby tiger.]

[Sam pulled some animals away from Heather and picked up a baby panther, speaking for it.]

(6) Sam: Help, help. Mommy, mommy.

[Even though Heather had Sam's attention, she seemed more focused on her own play drama rather than on Sam's verbal contributions, though she next addressed Sam.]

(7) Heather: Made the panther. [Looking at Sam and holding an adult panther.]

(8) You made me mad. [Speaking for the panther to the baby tiger she held.]

(9) Go to your room to think about things happy."

(10) Sam: Mommy. [Speaking to Heather's panther.]

(11) I got something. Mommy, wake up." [Heather now spoke to Sam's panther, offering her assistance.]

(12) Panther, what is it? What is it? I'll help you honey. [She appeared to be speaking as herself.]

(13) He did the right things to help out. [Referring to Sam's panther. Sam moved a short distance away from Heather. Heather addressed Sam's departure.]

(14) Heather: Take your pride. Why is your mom so angry with you?

(15) Your father attacked your mother.

At the beginning of this episode, Heather offered reassurance to Sam in letting him know that her tiger was someone familiar to him (*Remember me when I was a child?* Episode 2:3; line 4) and harmless (*Don't worry, I won't hurt you. I will not hurt you.* Episode 2:3; line 5). In both statements, Heather communicated her concern by letting the others know she was harmless. We see family relationships as Sam called out, "Mommy," to Heather when eliciting help for his tiger. In response, Heather took on a care giving role to send Sam's tiger to his room, then to offer help to the panther when she presented an opportunity for another danger situation (*Your father attacked your mother.* Episode 2:3; 15).

Next, Sam appeared to ignore Heather. He continued to move his animals around on the carpet, while Heather played alone.

Emergency Situation

Episode 2:4:

Lisa sat near Heather and pulled out other animals from a cubby. Sam continued to move his animals around on the carpet, while Heather played to herself. John also moved animals around the block construction he had worked on.

(1) Heather: Somebody help us. [Moving the tigers around on the shelf.]

- (2) John: I got emergency.
- (3) Heather: Somebody help us. We're stuck in this wall. [Heather now had John's attention. He approached Heather with a dinosaur. His emergency appeared to have been forgotten as he responded to Heather's call for help.]
- (4) John: How can we knock down this wall?
[Sam began knocking down the block structure, layer by layer. The blocks fell and scattered on the carpet around the animals with which Heather and Lisa played.]
- (5) Lisa: Don't Sam. Don't! Don't! [Lisa and Sam began to play with the same group of animals; Heather brought a handful of animals to Sam. Furrowing her brow, Lisa glared at Heather.]
- (6) Sam: Let her. [Directed to Lisa.]
- (7) Lisa: But, I wanted to play.
- (8) Heather: But, I want to play too.
- (9) Heather: He doesn't have his voice back. He's going to be king soon. [Speaking for her tiger, to Sam's panther.]
- (10) Sam: *Then* he can talk.
- (11) Lisa: I'm going to be the king. [Picking up a lion and speaking for it.]
- (12) Sam: Don't be mean to him. His name is 'Scar.' [Sam's tiger.]
- (13) Heather: This is Simba too. [Holding a lion.]

- (14) Sam: Mommy. [Speaking as a baby panther.]
- (15) Lisa: No, I don't want to be a future king. [Lisa held a lion and a panther, making one speak to the other.]
- (16) Sam: He choked me. The robot shot me, and it hurt me. Now, I can't walk. [Speaking for his panther.]
- [Heather seemed to retreat into her own world again, as she began to play alone. She appeared uninterested in what was happening around her. None of the other children interacted with Heather. She moved toward John and Arin, trying to get their attention, holding a rhinoceros toward them and making growling sounds.]
- (17) Heather: I can escape. I can hide between egg shells.
- [Lisa approached Heather and asked if she could play with her. Before Heather could respond, an intern came into the block center. Heather asked the intern to leave. The intern stood for a few seconds, and then left the block center. Lisa gathered several of the jungle animals around her on the carpet. When Sam took a baby tiger away from Lisa's group of animals, she tried to take the tiger back. Sam held on to the animal.]
- (18) Sam: I want a turn. I haven't had a turn.
- (19) Heather: You could hit somebody. [Directed to Sam.]

In the above, John, then Sam made attempts to rescue the tigers. In spite of Lisa's glaring look, Heather regained control of the play scenario (*He doesn't have his voice back. He's going to be king soon.* Episode 2:4; line 9), opening the play event to include characters from the movie, *The Lion King*. After the other children shared in her play ideas (Lisa: *I'm going to be the king.* Episode 2:4; line 11) Sam: *Don't be mean to him. His name is Scar.* Episode 2:4, line 12), Heather began playing alone, only to return and introduce another opportunity for danger (*I can escape. I can hide between egg shells* Episode 2:4; line 17.).

Heather alerted several children about her animal's state of need. She made certain that the rhinoceros received care, including medical aid and medicine. It also seemed important to Heather to point out her animal's strengths. It did not seem to matter to Heather that her peers did not respond by interacting with her. Heather had played out acts of care giving in making others aware of her play situation, and for now, that seemed to be enough for her.

In these last examples we have nurturing, situated among an array of other topics. Also emerging from the pretend play were scripts about families that included popular culture features, such as characters and terminology from the movie, *The Lion King*. What a rich mixture of drama, intrigue, and adventure! I was seeing firsthand that the players of these dramas were indeed the five core players identified by Mrs. Prince. This group of children gathered together consistently to enact topics having to do with lurking danger, saving, sheltering, reassuring, family situations, and pop culture.

Interviewing Family Members

Because Heather was the first of the core players to introduce one of *The Lion King* characters to the role-play that I had observed, I selected her parents to ask them to participate in an interview. I wanted to hear what they had to say about what they were thinking about the influences of popular culture upon Heather. During the course of the interview, her dad related that Heather loved to role-play about panthers and other jungle type animals. He believed she had gotten into play with the toy animals in the children's classroom, and that her role-play with these toys was a source of comfort for her. In addition, he stated, Heather's rich imagination helped her to enjoy role-play using the toy animals. In spite of this the dad contended, he was bothered a bit by how Heather would make the lions fight and wrestle.

Heather's dad believed she was inspired, however, in her role-play with the jungle animals by watching *The Lion King*, a video that had been a gift to her, and that she loved the book and the story. Adding to this, Heather's mom said that Heather had her own version of the story, and that she liked to play about the main characters, even pretending that large rocks outside were Pride Rock from the movie, or that she was the character, Simba. The dad believed there was "a lot of good stuff", that Heather was dealing with, the fighting by playing through what she was seeing in "dealing with that in her own way." However, he went on to say that Heather was "infatuated with that movie", which to him might be a negative part (Father interview, p. 4). Furthermore, he followed up by stating the following.

Now a lot of that is real positive because she loved the care and the love that occurred between the . . . father. . . and the mother and the two cubs that love each other and all that, but the fighting I could tell affected her some. And so I would prefer that she not watch that at all and so that-but she did like the book, you know. We checked the book out. That's the book she wanted from the library and so we did get that and she read that. (p. 10)

Heather's dad went on to add that he believed the reason Heather liked the movie and the book was because of the animals that were in it. Even though he felt "conflicted about that" because of the fighting in the story, he said it had "enriched her imagination in play. . . and she seems to keep that all in perspective pretty well" in her play with children and "she's never been one to fight herself" (p. 10). Heather's role-play with and about the toy animals that represented the characters from a favorite video and related book appeared to be a conflict that the parents seemed resolved to work with. Heather's dad said that even though he does not like violence, he had to understand that it may be that his daughter just wanted "to have lions fight with each other", and he needed to understand that "it's probably as much my hang-up as anything" (p. 11), and that he had not seen any of the violence from the movie come out in Heather, such as anger.

Hearing the views of Heather's parents provided confirmation of how important popular culture characters and roles were to Heather and perhaps to the other children within the influences from the home. It was not surprising to learn that Heather had viewed the video over and over and had listened to the reading

of the book many times. In my own experiences of teaching, it was common for children to have seen movies such as *The Lion King* in the theaters, only to have the parents follow up by purchasing the videos for home viewing. What about the way these familiar topics of children's favorite popular culture were being enacted in the classroom? What kind of environment allowed the pretend play of these core players?

The children in this tight-knit group of players would come and go and then return to one another in their pretend play situations, sometimes using scripts of intensity and even violence. An intern was sent away when she was asked by one of the children to leave. The teacher did not enter the children's play. The children were in their own play worlds where they advanced their own dramas freely and without, it seems, constraints. What was allowing this to happen? I decided to conduct an array of interviews with the teacher, Mrs. Prince, to better understand how she developed the classroom environment that supported children's play. The classroom reflected an atmosphere that encouraged creative play and a lead teacher who, as suggested by the following interviews, strongly believed that the purpose of preschool is that play is supported and taken seriously, and that through materials and the freedom to choose playmates and areas in which to play, children receive satisfaction each day, as well as what the teacher stated were long-term benefits.

Interviewing Mrs. Prince

Before going into the study I interviewed the teacher, Mrs. Prince. I had known her for many years and had worked side by side with her in various

University programs. From experience I knew that she honored children and had a high regard for play. In our first discussion, I was struck anew by her lack of hesitation in describing her philosophical beliefs regarding young children. I began by asking Mrs. Prince to talk about how she nurtured her classroom environment. She replied that she fostered her “philosophy by staying open to things, ideas, other people’s ideas and the way other people do it that I’ve not done before. I hope I’m open to those things that would be or nurture my own intellectual and philosophical approach to things” (Interview 1, p. 4).

Educational influences

Mrs. Prince went on to say that she was influenced greatly by some of her instructors and teachers as she worked on her Master’s degree, but that she had her own “notions about early childhood and nurturing young children” going on to add, “but I needed some fertilizer and some sun and some rain and other things to enhance the way I saw it and so there were people placed in my life who helped me inform myself and who informed me” (Interview 1, p. 4). Expanding upon this, she said she hoped to always build upon her educational influences through reading and through her work with young children, whom she had worked with in this particular University program, adding:

. . . when I was with the children for 18 years and just, you know, they were teachers to me. And so, I would hope that at this point, you know, I’m not – I think I went back to graduate school for that, to nurture my own ideas and my own philosophy and that then in turn, the fruits of that

fall on children, I would hope, and college students. When I say children, I mean the 20-year olds and the two-year olds. (p. 4)

Mrs. Prince defines nurturance

We went on to explore Mrs. Prince's notions of what nurturing meant and what the characteristics of nurturing were to her. She responded by saying that in the educational setting, nurturing "is taking care of another in the sense of moving them from one spot to another" (Interview 1, p. 1). Nurturing for her, she described, is accepting where the children are, including the college students, she added, and try to create an environment where offering some words and direction can move them along what she described as a "passive development, wherever that might be" (p. 1).

I guess a characteristic would be certainly acceptance of the person as they are and I think of -- a characteristic of nurturing is that you have to love others, you know, whether it's loving mankind, but having that feeling of genuine caring about them enough to want to help them grow and develop into something beyond what they are now. I think the -- I don't know, the characteristics is an interesting question to me because I think it can be as different as the people who are nurturing, you know. I've been nurtured by people all my life in very different ways and sometimes it was in a way that might not at the time seemed to be nurturing, but it was exactly what I needed, you know. (p. 1)

Childhood experiences with nurturing

I was glad Mrs. Prince wanted to talk about her own life experiences, and I believed hearing them would help in my analysis of this classroom environment where children seemed to play without reservation. Mrs. Prince went on to describe her childhood experiences that she thinks contributed to her sense of nurturing. I present this portion of her interview in a direct quote, because for me to paraphrase her individual historical view might distort what for me seems to be a very personal story.

A real -- a huge influence on me and I didn't realize this until I started doing my own doctoral research is the influence of my grandmother because I started thinking about my own history of care in my family. My mother's a good one, I mean, I could write my whole dissertation on her and that's kind of a given I think for a lot of people in their families, that their parents -- but my grandmother, I was thinking back to when we used to go visit her and when we'd drive hours and hours. We'd leave in the morning before dark, we could have _____ and get there and she was -- they were blue collars.

My granddaddy worked in the oil field and once he was a painter for the oil companies, and he was not a happy man. I was always afraid of my grandfather. I know now that probably he was an alcoholic, so he had a horrible life. He was just a -- not a happy man. But we would get to my grandmother's house and she sewed for other people, but no matter what she had on her plate, and she was still rearing children, because I had an uncle actually who like three years older than I was. She had a very late child.

No matter what she had on her plate, I thought that the only thing on her plate was us and that we had arrived and she played games and she was a wonderful story teller and we had a game – she didn't have two nickels to rub together, but none of that mattered because none of her games required buying anything. And she would use, you know, old spools that she had from her sewing and she would outstretch her arm, at which we would walk up her arm with our fingers up to the hill and go to the little store. And we would spend hours with her, of course, her head was the storekeeper, so she would ask what kind of groceries we needed and how we were going use them. And looking back, then it just seemed so simple.

Of course, that was another thing my mother ever did with us because it wasn't how she interacted with us, but I just thought it was so interesting that – what my grandmother did and we fought to play store and we stood in line to play store and she would spend hours with us doing that and word games and you know, all kinds of things from a woman who never graduated from college. She never took a class in child development, but she intuitively knew that the way to care and to nurture, and I think they're interwoven, is number one to pay attention and to respond and to you know, put that person in the forefront of what you're doing at that moment. And so she really set a beautiful example for me and you know, my mother was a very caring person.

I had an aunt who I was very close to who you know, nurtured me. She nurtured me in some ways that I didn't like. She was the only aunt I ever had who spanked me, but as an adult I understand why, you know. I was visiting her in

Houston. I crossed a very busy street and went two blocks to watch a train go by and she didn't know where I was and it scared her to death! Of course! And you know, in thinking back I think my Aunt Polly loved me so much, you know, and she spent hours with me playing. You know, so it's that looking back and seeing people who took the time to take me where I was and just spend time with me and nurture me along and try to help me become, you know, maybe a better relative. I don't know what she was working – I don't know what her goals were. It didn't matter, but looking back, I know that I felt loved and taken care of and enriched, although I couldn't have said that as a young child, but those are feelings now that I have. And then you know, some teachers along the way, not all teachers, and it doesn't mean that those teachers weren't good; it just means that some give you the feeling of being nurtured more than others. (pp. 4-5)

Children's Interpersonal Connections

Listening to Mrs. Prince discuss her own childhood home and school experiences, I was reminded of Chodorow's (1978) contention concerning parenting, in particular, mothering. In the author's view, parenting extends beyond behaviors to include involvement that is psychological in the sense that other roles are not. Parenting "requires certain relational capacities which are embedded in personality and a sense of self-in-relationship" (p. 33). The nurturing experiences that involved an aunt and a grandmother helped me to understand that Mrs. Prince is shaped in her thinking by the mothering from these two women in her life as well as an array of nurturing she had experienced throughout her lifetime.

Moreover, Chodorow's (1978) description of mothering seems to mesh with something else discussed by Mrs. Prince. She said that in the classroom setting, the way she tried to facilitate nurturing was through "loving people for who they are, accepting them, and trying to find what they need and that's so difficult because some children and college students need a great deal of attention or hand-holding" (Interview 1, p. 1). Her view about nurturing children seemed paradoxical though, because I had not observed Mrs. Prince paying a great deal of attention to the core players as they went about their pretend play so freely within the classroom.

Caring relationships

In her focus on caring relationships, Goldstein (1999) acknowledges interpersonal connections between a teacher and child as important to the child's success and productivity in the classroom, contending that "caring relationships are a central part of intellectual growth and development" (p. 669). Mrs. Prince expressed that she finds it difficult sometimes to figure out what individuals need in the way of care, and stated that she hopes she can help children to grow holistically in a way that they can become better nurturers.

. . . children come to school, especially the pre-schoolers, most recently they've been cared for in the deepest of ways. I mean, their infant needs being met and they're so in tune with having been cared for as little ones and I think we see a lot of that in the classroom. They play out what they know and they play out what they've experienced. Maybe they're trying to make sense of it, putting a baby to bed, cooking for a baby, all the

things that they see that nurture another, but it comes to them so naturally, I believe a lot because it's so fresh for them. They are being and have been nurtured so recently and their very existence was dependent on that nurturing.

So I think that's a part of who they are and so, yeah, I hope I encourage that right along with cognitive and functional and affective. I think you can separate it. I think that's a strong part of their affective and emotional well-being, is how they were cared for and then they turn around and reenact that in their play. (Interview, p. 2)

Allowing sustained play

Mrs. Prince's classroom environment was allowing the children engagement in play that was intense, involved, and sustained, and included many topics that were being acted out without hesitation or inhibition. Indeed, pretend play was at the very heart of this early childhood classroom (Paley, 1988). In the time I was in Mrs. Prince's classroom, I had observed the children in consistent involvement with the rubber animals and with each other. Their active and sustained engagement in enacting intense and sometimes violent topics suggested to me that this classroom environment had become for the children "a way of life that carries its own value and pursues its own course . . ." (Paley, 1988, p. 13). It was indeed evident that pretend play was of value to these children, but it was not clear how the children were situating nurturing within the tapestry of drama they enacted with such intensity.

Observing Heather

In this section, I look at the classroom again to continue the journey of one of the core players, Heather. It was still early in the semester when Heather entered the housekeeping center one day. Another child in the classroom, a boy named Matt, stood at a small table with a play stethoscope draped around his neck. Matt held the stethoscope to his eye and peered at Heather, as if looking through a lens. Heather, who held some of the animals from the block center, stared at Matt, then picked up a plastic armband from the play medical kit and placed it around a rhinoceros. Heather introduced a play scenario.

Episode 3:1:

(1) Heather: Look, the rhino broke his back. [Directed to Matt.]

[Heather carried the rhinoceros and some tigers to Blocks to show Sam.]

(2) Heather: Even with his broken back, he can go. [Spoken to Sam.]

(3) Heather: The rhinoceros is hurt. While he can still go, he needs help.

Sam did not respond, and Heather took the rhinoceros to the play dough table where Mrs. Prince was sitting with Arin. Heather presented the rhinoceros' situation to Mrs. Prince.

(4) Heather: He had to go to the doctor.

(5) Mrs. Prince: A couple of his friends go to see him? [Referring to the other animals Heather held.]

(6) Heather: He has to eat medicine. He doesn't like it. And *now*, he'll have to eat the rest of it.

(7) Mrs. Prince: It's good he takes it even if it tastes bad.

Heather sat at the table with Mrs. Prince and began to roll the play dough, slicing it with a plastic knife and calling it, medicine goop. She continued her narrative.

(8) Heather: The tiger hurt him. Broke his back. The tiger pushed his back.

An intern approached the table and asked Heather if the animals would try to make up. After the intern arrived, Mrs. Prince left the table to join another group of children. Heather appeared to ignore the intern, and continued manipulating the play dough, pummeling and pounding it with one of the tigers she held. Arin sat at the table working with play dough, but the two children did not interact.

In the above, Heather alerted several children and her teacher about her animal's state of need. She made certain in her pretending that the rhinoceros received care, including medical aid and medicine. Moreover, it seemed important to Heather to point out her animal's strengths. It did not seem to matter to Heather that her peers did not respond by interacting with her or by reciprocating in her play, or that her teacher interacted in only a minimal way. Heather had played out acts of care giving and making others aware of her play situation, and for now, that seemed to be enough. In the following, I observed Heather picking up the rhinoceros and speaking for it.

Episode 3:2:

(1) Heather: No, I'm going to eat you up. The tigers are making the medicine.

At the writing table nearby, John was making stamped designs on paper. On the table beside him were several plastic dinosaurs. John looked over toward the play dough table and addressed Arin and Heather.

(2) John: Guys, the dinosaurs are walking in here.

(3) Heather: You want to see what they're going to do?

Heather used one of the tigers to pound the play dough, and then pretended the tiger was slicing the dough. She described to John what the tiger was doing.

(4) Heather: She makes the medicine really fast.

At that point, Heather looked at the intern, who was still sitting at the table. Heather again sounded as if she was narrating a story.

(5) Heather: The tigers are cutting his ears off. After they get hurt, they have to cut their ears. [Spoken to the intern.]

(6) Intern: But that would never happen to a person.

The intern's attempt at instructing on a "life lesson" point seemed to be of little, if no interest to Heather. Heather ignored the intern, stood up and left the table, taking her animals to the carpeted area, where Mrs. Prince was reading a book to several children. Before sitting down though, Heather took the rhinoceros back to the housekeeping center and returned to the carpet to sit down beside another intern who was reading.

In the above episode, Heather rebuffed the intern's attempts to interact with the drama concerning the rhinoceros. From observing Heather, it appeared to me that she was presenting the rhinoceros' dilemma - its illness and treatment – to others as part of an unfolding drama, but that she was not seeking input into her pretense. Perhaps Heather was looking for validation of her attempts to care for the rhinoceros she was pretending to be ill. Although she did not ignore or discourage Mrs. Prince's participation in the ongoing script, Heather did not appear to encourage interaction with her teacher. Heather seemed to have been piecing together her own world of caring and protection, without the help of adult intervention.

WHAT IS THE TEACHER'S ROLE?

Intervening in Pretend Play

Reynolds and Jones (1997) portray the teacher as one who is accountable for the pretend play environment, stating “the quality of play in a classroom for 3- to 5-year-olds is the measure of a teacher's success” (p. 13). Teachers may not always teach children to play well, contend the authors, and as a result may intervene in ways that control the play. Instead, it is important for teachers to intervene to sustain play in ways that may facilitate more complex thought in children. In order to support play complexity then, the teacher must be a keen observer of play and a reflexive planner of play interventions, the authors add.

Did Mrs. Prince view Heather's play script - a tiger's broken back and the unconventional seeming treatment of cutting its ears – as complex play? I noticed that Mrs. Prince's reaction when Heather sheltered the rhinoceros and then moved

about the Center narrating a story about a sick tiger was to issue a brief comment and then move away. Perhaps the confirmation of Mrs. Prince's acknowledgement of the rhinoceros needing to take the medicine was enough to help Heather sustain her pretense. Heather seemed to be taking hostile themes and turning them into nurturing themes: she seemed to be conveying, "We have to hurt the tiger even more by cutting his ears in order to make him better." How might Mrs. Prince be thinking about Heather's intense topics?

In one of our interviews, Mrs. Prince said that part of her responsibility was to allow children to play with whatever was going on in their life and that she did not need to be "present in every moment of play" (Interview 1, p. 7).

I mean, but there are times, but when you do step in, I hope as a teacher that you can enrich their play, that is, bring it up a notch, give some opportunities, give some ideas, some confirmation, some steering in a different direction to take it to a higher level or to maybe even connect it to another experience, but I think, you know, I think you could enrich by the materials you put out, by trying to put children together who maybe haven't played together before, where you may see that there might be a little – there would be an enriching experience for both of them to spend some time together. So I would say enrich, enhance, help, I don't know. I mean I might have to just talk it out and as I go along maybe hit on words that would be descriptive. (pp. 6-7)

Mrs. Prince had encouraged the children to engage in pretend play by establishing an environment rich with play materials, by giving them the

opportunity to play in large blocks of time, and by giving them what seemed to be unlimited freedom to choose peers, materials, and centers in which to play. Her interventions in the children's pretend play so far seemed "genuinely respectful of children's intent" (Reynolds & Jones, 1997, p. 91); indeed, Mrs. Prince did not appear to be trying to change the play, but instead she seemed to be "attending thoughtfully to the children's play ideas" (p. 91). I was curious to see if there would be any constraints put upon the children's pretend play, and if so, how the play activity would be affected. I had an opportunity to observe an intervention by Mrs. Prince one day. The group in this next episode included children who were usually not with the group of players I was accustomed to observing in the block center.

Bird's Nests and Shooters

Today, Matt was playing in the housekeeping center with Ron. On this particular day in the housekeeping center, there were two cardboard boxes filled with shredded paper that the children were calling "birds' nests." The two boys had moved a mirror on a wooden stand and a reading barrel to block the entrance way, calling the partition, "the moving wall". Matt left the housekeeping center to seek out Mrs. Prince, who was sitting with a group of children at the puzzle table, to tell her that Ron wouldn't play what he called, "Super Heroes". Mrs. Prince answered by saying, "Well, sweetheart, Heather is not here, but who else played Superhero yesterday – Lucinda?" (Heather was absent this day.)

Mrs. Prince smiled at Matt. He smiled back, then rushed to get a cape for a student named Lucinda, who abandoned what she was doing in another center to

join Matt in Housekeeping. Lucinda went for a crayon and began to color on one of the two cardboard boxes in Housekeeping. Sam by now was laying in one of the boxes.

Example 4:1:

(1) Matt: If someone wants to come in, they can't. [Mrs. Prince heard this and looked over at Matt.]

(2) Mrs. Prince: Would you want someone to not let you play?

(3) Matt: Well, only children.

(4) Mrs. Prince: If they want to come in, can you move the moving wall?
[Matt did not answer.]

(5) Matt: Want to come in? [Called out to Arin.]

Arin and John joined Matt. Arin, however, began scattering the play food over most of the floor of Housekeeping. When John tried to pick up one of the foods, Arin screamed a real scream. John let out a yell at Arin, the two boys glaring at one another. Mrs. Prince walked over and said to Arin, "You can have some, but you can't have all of them." "What if someone came in and took all the telephones? You love the telephones. John can pick some that he wants." Sam continued to lay in one of the cardboard boxes. Matt crawled into the other box, saying to Lucinda, who continued to color the box, "Lucinda, come in." Then, Lisa entered Housekeeping and made a growling sound toward Sam, then at Matt.

(6) Lisa: This is not yours. [Said to Matt about the box.]

(7) Matt: Well. . . go back to your nest. [Lisa crawled into the box with Sam.]

- (8) Lisa: Let's be ox tigers. Did you know that ox tigers are real?
- (9) I am one of those for real. I was born on May 15th – right Sam? [Lisa looked at Sam, then at Matt.]
- (10) He [Sam] is telling the truth.
- (11) Matt: Ready to fly guys?

Sam and Lisa crawled out of the boxes and into the book center. In the housekeeping center where Ron had been setting play foods on the plastic table, Lucinda put a plastic band from the medical kit on her arm. Arin, Sam, and Lucinda joined Ron in Housekeeping. Arin tried to slide one of the boxes out of Housekeeping.

- (12) Ron: Mrs. Prince. Arin is teasing; I built a nest. [Lisa lay on the carpet; Sam sprawled beside her. Still lying in one of the boxes, Matt called to an intern standing at the entrance of Housekeeping.]
- (13) Matt: Arin spit at me.” [Still lying in the box, and calling to an intern standing at the entrance of the housekeeping center.] [The intern called Arin to her; he appeared to ignore the intern and began rummaging through the jewelry stored in the wooden chest of drawers.]
- (14) Arin: Too busy.
[Arin did not look at the intern as he answered. He sat and played with some plastic armbands he found in the drawer. The intern looked over at Arin.]

(15) Intern: Did you spit?

(16) Arin: No.

(17) Matt: I heard it.

(18) Arin: I can hear my spit.

[Arin looked in the direction of the intern, but did not go over to her. She did not call Arin again. John had entered the center and looked at a book beside Arin. Lisa moved into one of the boxes.]

(19) Lisa: Meow! Who wants milk?" [Lucinda joined Lisa, and the two girls snuggled together in the box.]

(20) Lucinda: Pretend y'all wanted more milk. [To Lisa, as she waved a strip of paper she found in the box. Lisa mewed.]

(21) Lisa: Can't do that. . . can't get them out of box." [Lucinda waved the paper toward Matt's face.]

(22) Lucinda: Matt, Matt, get me if you can.

(23) Matt, Matt, get me if you can.

(24) Then, you have to kiss me; I mean, if you get me. Get me.

[Matt tried to touch Lucinda, as she and Lisa crouched in the box and tried to move away from him. Matt flailed his arms toward the girls. Sam came over and threw paper from the box at Matt. Matt looked angrily at Sam.]

(25) Matt: Don't. [He got out and moved the box away from Sam. Then he blocked the doorway with the box.]

(26) It's fun to play house. [Arin continued playing with the armband.]

(27) Lisa: Arin called me a baby. He called me a baby. [Lisa said this to me. I suggested she tell one of the teachers, which she did not do.]

(28) Arin: I was talking to my robot. [Said to Lisa]

While the above interchange was taking place, Matt fell in one of the boxes; his feet hit the shelves with a loud noise. He looked startled; his face turned red. One of the interns checked to see if Matt was alright. The intern then asked Arin if he would move just a little so that Lisa could walk by. Arin had a pouty look and did not move from his spot. Lisa managed to squeeze by him.

Several of the children gathered in the book center, a narrow center between Housekeeping and Blocks containing books, puzzles, and various plastic bricks and blocks that could be fitted together. John, Lucinda, Arin, and Sam worked with a container of plastic blocks in the book center for a few minutes. Lucinda left the group to go back to Housekeeping, calling back to Sam to join her there. Arin and John continued to tinker with the blocks. When an intern approached them, Arin said in an angry sounding voice, "Get away from here."

In Housekeeping, Sam, Matt, and Lucinda managed to squeeze in a space between a play stove and the glass wall. Sam began throwing plastic teddy bears all over the housekeeping center. Sam then pretended to shoot with a plastic manipulative construction he had created. Arin brought his plastic creation that looked like some kind of a weapon into the housekeeping center. As Sam

continued pretending to shoot, he tipped over the construction Arin had built. Arin began crying, and said, “You messed it up.” Mrs. Prince entered the housekeeping center as Sam went back into his hiding place next to the toy stove.

(29) Matt: But, Mrs. Prince, he (Arin) was shooting at me.

(30) Mrs. P.: What were you thinking when you came in? [To Arin]

(31) Arin: We was going to throw something

(32) because it was too loud.

[Mrs. Prince called Sam out from his hiding place. Sam said he was “fighting with his shooter.” Arin said his plastic creation was called a “tramper.” Mrs. Prince said that when they would fight, the shooters would come apart and she suggested that the boys take them to another place. Sam told Arin they could be friends, but he moved to the book center and continued constructing his “shooter,” working by himself.]

The Teacher’s Role

It did not appear that Mrs. Prince took an active role in facilitating the children’s play. In fact, I was realizing more and more how much freedom the children had for movement, play experiences, and interactions with one another, and Mrs. Prince did not interfere with this. At this point, I am reflecting upon something she said in our first interview when she expressed that she thinks children grow through the kinds of intense topics that seem to encompass their play.

They mean well and whether or not they're in there trying to extend the concept or do I interfere before it gets to say a crisis point, you know. Piaget would say you're robbing them of learning opportunities because he believed in that arguing, that they were learning and constructing knowledge through arguing and negotiating and I believe that. And so sometimes, even though I want-it looked like not much fun and I might want to go in there, if they didn't need me, I just generally err on the side of not going in there because I trust them. I think they can carry on without me. I am dispensable. And, but that's exactly what I want to become. (Interview 1, p. 7)

A hands-off approach

By now, I was gaining an understanding of Mrs. Prince's hands-off approach to the children's play. Intense though their play topics were, Mrs. Prince was creating opportunities for the children's play topics to unfold by giving them sustained time to play and allowing them choices of peers and materials, and all this, with little or no intervention by the adults in the environment. I valued what I was seeing, the absolute freedom among these children in their play environment, more freedom than I had ever seen in any other teaching environment, including my own.

So far, I had seen little intervention from the adults in the environment, and I was seeing the children take initiative in whether to allow adult participation in their play. But, I was not sure how nurturing was being encouraged by such a hands-off approach, and in fact, I was not sure that the features the children were

displaying through their pretend play scripts were more about nurturing or more about violent topics that somehow were part of their life worlds.

CHILDREN'S OWNERSHIP OF PRETEND PLAY

Taking the Lead in Pretend Play

From collections of stories of children at play (Jones & Reynolds, 1992; Reynolds & Jones, 1997), the authors suggest that children must be allowed to take the lead in play even when teacher intervention is necessary. Intervention on the part of the teacher is to help sustain play or to redirect the play if it is not safe. "They both contribute good ideas, but the child retains the lead-because play is, after all, is the child's world" (Reynolds & Jones, 1997, p. 49). Unskilled players may need frequent intervention according to the authors, while skilled players can benefit from "cognitive challenges" from discussions with the teacher within the realm of the children's play topics.

These core players appeared to be very skilled and able to sustain their own play without direct intervention from any of the adults in the environment. In the initial interview with Mrs. Prince it was revealed that this particular group of children had been playing with one another for almost two years. She described their play in the block center as stemming from "all of the fascination with animals connected to Lion King," (Interview 1, p. 11) that may have provided spark for the play, "but the children left the original plot in the dust and built their own nurturing community and I think nurturing in their play and nurturing the animals in their play and nurturing their friends in their play" (p. 11). By this, Mrs. Prince explained, she meant that the children nurtured by supporting each

other's play ideas, "going along with the plot, by supporting ideas, by building on ideas" (p. 11).

Viewing the Children's Sustained Involvement

I asked Mrs. Prince if she saw nurturing going on in one area - such as blocks - more than another. She responded by saying that nurturing happened more in pretend play in the block or housekeeping center, and that sometimes a child would take the hard rubber animals under the furniture and care for the animals by bringing them play food or building shelters. She described the animals as being like the play baby dolls, as if through care of the animals, they were generalizing nurturing and taking "what they know about nurturing and now they're applying it in this setting" (Interview 1, p. 10-11).

Mrs. Prince went on to say that Lisa, Heather, and Sam would often arrive and begin playing right away. One child might take charge and then the others would join in, sometimes leaving the group, then returning with different ideas, but giving and taking, and sustaining the play, sometimes for an hour or more. Other children would join as well, in particular, John and Arin. Sometimes, Mrs. Prince described, the children would not want to go along with the lead child's ideas, and the play would break up.

And it seemed to me that those children were very capable of incorporating – maybe they didn't like the idea in the beginning and they might have been a little resistant at the beginning, but there were ways in which they could change the story thread and begin to incorporate others' ideas and of course, then that ensures that everyone stays there playing.

And I really believe that without knowing it, children will almost sacrifice anything to sustain play, but it just – it's that important to them and they want the play to go on and they want it to continue and sometimes they can't accept others' ideas and it falls apart. But I think they work hard and I think those older children worked pretty hard to keep the play going with one another. (p. 16)

Through Mrs. Prince's dialogue about the children's perseverance with their play ideas, I was reminded of Heather's pretending about caring for a sick rhinoceros (Episode 3, lines 1 - 4). I recall that Heather alternated between talking about the animal's illness and proclaiming his strengths. She did not appear to encourage either her peer's or her teacher's participation in her pretense, but she managed to elicit their attention even if she had to pretend to hurt the rhinoceros in order to make him get well (*The tigers are cutting his ears off. After they get hurt, they have to cut their ears.*).

OTHER EXAMPLES OF PRETENDING ABOUT INTENSE TOPICS

Storms, Floods, and Hurricanes

Let us turn again to the classroom to observe more examples of the sustained pretend play the teacher describes and to observe the kinds of topics that emerge in the children's pretending. On this day, Heather was playing alone in a corner of the block center. Even though Ron and Lynne, two other children in the Center, were also playing in Blocks, there was no apparent interaction among the three. When John entered soon after, Heather picked up a large rubber sea turtle and spoke for the turtle, looking at John.

Episode 5:1:

- (1) Heather: Hi everybody, remember me?
- (2) I was very young when my mom died.
[John began playing with some of the animals near Heather, watching her. Heather walked over to another shelf unit and spoke for the turtle she carried.]
- (3) Heather: Hey, remember me, I am the turtle of _____.
- (4) John: Oh no, the turtles are going to be in the flood. We've got to be safe. [He placed the animals on a toy wooden boat.]
[At first, Heather appeared to be interested. She moved beside John, bringing her turtle, but turned back to play in a corner of the block center. John continued by placing a dinosaur on the top of the boat. He persevered with his pretense.]
- (5) Oh no, nobody will come over. Oh, help, help. We need help. [Heather held up a giraffe in one hand, speaking for it, and moved the turtle along with the other hand.]
- (6) Heather: We already got help from this little young one [the turtle].
- (7) Hey, everybody, the flood is still here.
- (8) We can stay in the water.
- (9) We have long necks.
- (10) John: Nobody will come over. [Heather picked up a plastic eagle and pretended to fly it over the other animals.]

- (11) Heather: I'll help. [Holding up an eagle.]
- (12) Maybe the one who flies will have magic. I'm giving help.
 [Now that she had provided an idea for saving the animals,
 Heather created more danger.]
- (13) Heather: Oh no, we don't know what to do.
 [John soon followed her lead by inventing his own danger.]
- (14) John: We already got help. Just get on the boat, and we'll help.
 [John placed several wooden roof pieces from the wooden
 playhouses around the boat.]
- (15) There's no shore.
- (16) Heather: Oh no, no shore. No, no, I hate no shore.
- (17) Hey we'll have to. . . watch my magic.
- (18) John: There's a tornado. Play like there's a tornado.
- (19) See if there's a tornado.
- (20) Heather: Yep, there's a tornado. Tornado, a rain storm.
- (21) A tornado and a rain flood. I can't get to my barn anymore.
 [Speaking for the giraffe.]
- (22) We're in the flood; somebody help us, we're in the flood.
- (23) We're under the flood.
 [John looked at Heather, and then glanced around him, as if
 searching for something. Seeing a plastic spider, John
 grabbed it up and pretended to fly it to Heather as he
 reassured her.]

- (24) John: Oh no, you don't need help.
- (25) Heather: Yea, we do. We already got help.
- (26) John: Get on my web. [Speaking as the spider.]
- (27) And then, you'll be over the flood. I'm a water spider.
- (28) Heather: What's the matter?
- [John did not answer her, but he continued to move the spider around the block center. Heather next reassured John, while presenting even more danger.]
- (29) Heather: Oh no, the flood. We're okay. There is a tornado too.
- (30) John: Let's get in a hole. (He placed the roof pieces over and around a wooden play house, forming a barricade.)
- (31) Come on, get in the house. (John placed the animals inside the barricade.)
- (32) Heather: It's stuck. He's stuck. He's stuck in a hurricane.
- (33) John: He's not.
- (34) Heather: But the tornado stopped.
- (35) John: The hurricane. So be careful. The hurricane is not stopped.
- (36) Heather: A hurricane is something on a shipwreck.
- (37) John: No, it's not. Well, I heard it from a book.
- (38) A hurricane is something that is ...dangerous."
- (39) Heather: So is a shipwreck.
- (40) John: A hurricane is something that is dangerous,
- (41) And it comes from water. My Grandma said.

(42) Heather: Sure.

In the beginning, an opening was created for a responsive pretend scenario to unfold when Heather implied the neediness of her turtle (*I was very young when my mom died*. Episode 5:1; line 2). Getting John's attention, Heather reminded him of her turtle's situation (*Hey, remember me*. Episode 5:1; line 3). When John responded by imposing a flood on the turtles, Heather turned the play toward an opportunity for the giraffes to save. John played off Heather's pretense by finding ways to save too, and the two children seemed to be vying for who could create the most dangerous of situations. Each perilous event required rescuing then led to further play ideas for more rescue, then danger. Next, we will see new danger as John piled some animals on the wooden boat.

Floods and Hurricanes

Episode 5:2:

(1) John: It's the flood.

(2) Heather: Somebody, they need help. . . for my child. [Heather moved some animals to a cubbie nearby. John turned to get other cardboard blocks to build the barricade.]

(3) John: There's a flooooood. There's a giant flood.

(4) Heather: Somebody, they need help." [Heather's animals.]

(5) John: There's a flood." [He moved a toy alligator around.]

(6) Heather: Mister alligator, we need help. [Said to the alligator]

(7) John: What?

[Events escalated as Heather's animal child became more ill. We will see that John thought of a solution to save the animal.]

- (8) Heather: Mister alligator, we need help.
- (9) My child is sneezing from storm.
- (10) She's allergic to it, always. Remember this morning,
- (11) She was outside? She always gets sick.
- (12) John: AHHHHHHH." [He turned the boat over and dumped out the animals]
- (13) Heather: Mommy [Spoken as one of the animals. She moved her animal onto a shelf unit nearby.]
- (14) Somebody, we need somebody's help.
- (15) My baby's allergic to flood. We need somebody's help.
- (16) John: I know what to do. Alligators get the magic.
- (17) Alligator can stop the flood. He got the flood.
- (18) Heather: Well, is it still dangerous out there?
- (19) John: No.

[Heather began playing with a balance scale on the shelf unit divider. She stood for a moment, fiddling with the scale, as if deep in thought. Still standing, Heather again continued her role play by proceeding with warnings about the pretend flood.]

(20) Heather: Uh oh, another one's coming. Another one's coming [The flood].

(21) Ah choo. [Moving the animals back to the cubbie]

(22) Better go inside. EEEEEEE" (A neighing sound).

[Heather became quiet and stared into space. John sat on the floor with his animals and also stared into space. Heather moved beside John. When Sam came into the block center and moved to Heather's side, she turned away and walked over to her animals, as if guarding them. Seeming to ignore Sam, Heather proposed more danger. John responded by adding his own danger element.]

(23) Heather: There's another one. There's another one.

(24) Ah Choo. Ah Choo. Ah Choo. Ah Choouu.

(25) John: There's a hurricane. [John moved his alligator around inside the barricade he had created. Heather brought a hippopotamus over to John's barricade.]

(26) Heather: It's another one.

At that time, a child in the Center played the signal, indicating the children were to gather on the rug area for a circle time. Heather, John, and Sam soon joined the other children on the rug.

As in the previous episode, Heather took the lead in the pretense by first getting John's attention (*Somebody, they need help. . . for my child.* Episode 5:2; line 2), then focusing the pretend play to her animals' need. Heather elicited

John's protection by calling for help and by presenting constant perils for her animal. Heather added intensity to the danger from the flood by reenacting her pretend child's allergy and resulting illness from the flood.

As Heather became more and more protective of her pretend child, she gained John's attention as he found a way to save the child by giving the alligator magical powers. When the danger seemed to subside, Heather took time to play alone, but she continued to focus on her play drama by protecting her animals from Sam and presenting more ideas for pretend danger from floods and allergic reactions.

In considering these play dramas and the intensity of the children's topics - the dangers from the elements that seemed to be lurking everywhere - I wondered if the children had to create such dangerous situations in order for nurturing to occur. In older research, Mussen and Eisenberg-Berg (1977) suggested that children's expressions of distress, assertiveness, and dependence may indicate responsiveness and "may be prerequisite for the development of prosocial predispositions in the early years" (p. 70). Indeed, it seemed to me that both Heather and John were vying for who could establish the most danger, of outdoing each other, perhaps, in creating dangers that might only be abetted through rescue and protection.

MRS. PRINCE'S VIEW OF THE CHILDREN'S INTENSE TOPICS

I was curious to hear Mrs. Prince's views on the children's play about the dangers from storms and floods. Did she see any evidence of nurturing? She responded by discussing the concept of nurturing and saying that "at first blush,

nurturing might appear as a simple concept. We nurture by encouraging something to grow or flourish” (Interview 9, p. 1), but that it becomes more complex when considering that children are in what she described “as the beginning stages of nurturing” (p. 1). Mrs. Prince went on to say that children reenact mundane experiences they have observed in their brief lives such as: feeding, holding, cradling and rocking, changing clothes, and protecting others from dangers of one sort or another. She added that she thinks children receive comfort when they role play the everyday activities they have experienced in being nurtured and that they find joy in being the nurturer whether with the dolls, animals, their peers, and even the adults around them.

What does not factor into their nurturing, I believe, is the power of reflective thinking. For instance, as a parent or teacher, adults are aware that nurturing growth and development also includes stepping away and allowing the child to make decisions and experience consequences. These independent experiences nurture a growth not possible when the adult is in control. Their limited life experience, coupled with their inability for abstract thinking, makes pondering the pros and cons of intervention an impossibility. (1)

In the episode of the flood, Mrs. Prince believed that John was the initiator of nurturing when he stated the turtles would be in the flood and when he said “we” must be safe. Moreover, Heather expressed the young animal’s capability of protecting by saying, “We’ve already got help from this little young one,” acknowledged Mrs. Prince, adding that Heather “sees herself as very capable,

positioning herself in play (both as Heather, as well as through her animal characters) as the protector, the mother, the judge, the savior” (p. 1-2).

Through her problem-solving skills, assessing the situation and analyzing the options, she takes care of the others by explaining they have nothing to worry about and why. After John displays a skepticism, she reassures him through her eagle figure. “I’ll help. Maybe the one who flies will have magic. I’m giving help.”

Lest one think Heather is the sole nurturer, John displays those characteristics of the nurturer as well. He offers solutions to the problem of rescue from the flood, in the guise of his spider's web onto which the stranded one(s) can climb. He subsequently constructs a (storm) shelter into which he invites the animals, saying, “Come on. Get in the house.”

Later, John is talking again about the flood, and Heather responds, “Somebody, they need help, for my child.” Using the animal props of the classroom’s block center, the children go beyond the simple play of jungle animals. These children superimpose their own life experiences (needing help from their parents/other adults; responsive parents/adults; vivid television images of flood-stage Central Texas rivers raging) with their fears and uncertainties (Will I be taken care of? Can I do _____ by myself? Will someone always be there to protect me? Take care of me?, etc.) They create disasters and challenges which they can master safely in their own play. Day by day, they attempt to gain a measure of control

and/or master a world far bigger (scarier) than what they can comprehend.

(1-2)

The Unseen Curriculum

Mrs. Prince seemed to be addressing the “unseen curriculum” (Scales, 1987, p. 89) that can be viewed in pretend play, meaning children’s fears and experiences that emerge from everyday life experiences and that surface in their role play (Monighan-Nourot, et al., 1987). In considering the children’s pretending, Mrs. Prince thought that Heather was seeking to be cared for as she explained that her animal child was “sneezing from the storm” (p. 2). She went on to say that when Heather got “no satisfaction from John, she broadcasts her invitation into some kind of nurturing of her child by another” (p. 2) in calling for help and crying that her baby was allergic to flood. When John offered magic as a solution, Heather decided “her own tack by saying, ‘better go inside’” (p. 2). Believing the children to be weaving their own experiences into their pretend situation, Mrs. Prince thought it was unique when Heather and John argued back and forth about the hurricane and the flood and what each had been taught. She said she believed many children would not even pick up on such distinctions.

Perhaps Mrs. Prince’s acceptance of the children’s intense topics and violent language was a way of considering those as a natural outlet of typical childhood anxieties and/or uncertainties. To me, it was as if she was more than willing to accept the negative seeming things that children expressed in pretend play in order to understand the nurturing that might emerge from that. It was not long before I began to select other examples of the children’s pretend play to ask

Mrs. Prince for her views. I will return to the classroom now to view another episode of pretend play that took place in the block center.

More Impending Danger

On this morning, Heather arrived in the block center, picked up a tub full of animals, dumped them out, and searched through them. She picked out several animals, and moved to a shelf unit by the wall. In a corner of the block area near Heather, Sam and John placed animals in an enclosure they had built of wooden houses and cardboard bricks. Heather played with her back turned away from the two boys.

Episode 6:1:

Sam and John alternated between moving the animals in the enclosure and “flying” the animals about the block center. Heather looked up from her animals, observing the two boys from time to time. John continued to wave various animals around the block center. He picked up a plastic fly and approached Heather.

(1) Heather: We’re not in your destiny.

(2) John: Not in your destiny?

John joined Sam again. They each held a plastic insect, pretending the insects were flying. The boys sat on the carpet near Heather, who watched them.

(3) Heather: Hey, what are y’all doing? [She used a different voice that appeared to be for one of her animals.]

(4) You’re a tornado.

- (5) Sam: I have got that tornado out. [Sam began moving his gorilla around in the air. Heather moved one arm in a circular motion, imitating Sam.]
- (6) John: Tornado.
- (7) Sam: Tornado out. There's a tornado. [Sam and John moved their animals in the air, as if pretending to crash them on the carpet. Heather held an animal and made her arm go round and round, as if imitating a tornado's motion.]
- (8) Heather: Here we go. [Said in a loud voice, it appeared Heather was talking to her animals.]
- (9) John: There's a tornado. [John moved a dinosaur about.]
- (10) Sam: Tornado, tornado, tornado. [Said in a loud voice.]
- (11) I've changed. I've changed. I've changed. [Sam spoke in a shrill sounding voice as he moved the buffalo through the air. Sam joined John.]
- (12) John: All the animals are going underwater.
[The two boys placed some animals in the enclosure made of wooden houses and cardboard bricks. Inside the enclosure, cardboard bricks formed the "water." Heather joined the two boys, placing some animals of her own in the enclosure of play water. Heather turned back to a cubby she had filled with animals, observed the two boys, and

crawled toward the boys. Sam held a gorilla and looked at John, who held a plastic fly. Sam addressed the fly.]

(12) Sam: Are you gonna sting me? [Sam moved the gorilla toward Heather.]

(13) Heather: Look, lookie, I protect, and I'm bad; I'm with y'all.

(14) John: Okay.

(15) Sam: Poopy head. Stop right there.

While Heather seemed aware of what was going on in the pretending of her peers, she seemed focused on her own role play and her own animals. Sam and John played off Heather's comments to them as she announced impending danger (*You're a tornado*. Episode 6:1; line 4), then offered protection (*Look, lookie, I protect, and I'm bad; I'm with y'all*. Episode 6:1; line 4)

Playing Heroes and Killers

A few minutes later, John thrust a plastic fly at Sam. The play topics take on more violence as being bad becomes the rule and killing assumes a major role in the pretending.

Episode 6:2:

(1) Sam: You know what, that doesn't hurt us.

(2) Try to get us, angler head.

(3) John: We're bad.

(4) Heather: Hero, hero, hero. [Speaking to her deer in a loud voice.]

(5) Her name is Bambi, and she died. [Toward John.]

[Sam approached Heather and John, speaking for the buffalo he held.]

(6) Sam: I am bad. I'm gonna kill. I am bad.

(7) Heather: And we're all bad.

(8) I'm trying to kill my mommy, and she roared at me.

(9) Sam: And, I'm gonna kill her too.

(10) Mommy, mommy, mommy, I'm bad.

(11) I'm bad, I'm bad, I'm bad.

(12) Heather: But, I'm going to be too...

(13) Sam: Try to be bad. I'm bad. Bad mom, bad mom." [To Heather]

[Sam left the block center to join an activity in another area of the Center. Heather and John remained in Blocks, kneeling beside the cardboard brick enclosure. She turned to John and presented a new dilemma as she moved the animals into the enclosure.]

(14) Heather: They are alone since the mom died.

(15) John: The mom died?

(16) Heather: Yep, it was very sad.

[Heather stood up, telling John she would be back. Before leaving the block center, she picked up a plastic bug and talked to it in a soothing sounding voice before issuing a warning.]

(17) Heather: No problem. Stay back! Stay with the sand, bug. [Looking down at the other animals on the carpet, Heather repeated her words of caution.]

(18) Heather: Stay with your family, young turtle. No fighting.”

In the above, Heather created a danger situation when she announced that she was the perpetrator (*And we're all bad. I'm trying to kill my mommy, and she roared at me.* Episode 6:2; lines 7 and 8). Once Sam reacted by talking about his “badness,” and even joined Heather in expressing his intent to kill, Heather expressed her concern for the animals (*They are alone since the mom died.* Episode 6:2; line 14). When John questioned Heather whether the mom died, she followed this by showing even more concern (*Yep, it was very sad.* Episode 6:2; line 14). Finally, Heather’s warning to her bug (*Stay back! Stay with the sand, bug.* Episode 6:2; line 17) and her admonishment (*Stay with your family, young turtle. No fighting.* Episode 6:2; line 18) offered the animals shelter, protection, and guidance.

CONSIDERING MRS. PRINCE

Children’s Tenacity in Pretend Play

When I talked with Mrs. Prince about the above episode, I asked her what she considered to be worthy in the children’s play. She responded that she did not remember this particular event, but that it did not surprise her because the players involved were what she called, “the consistent block players” (Interview 6, p. 1). Adding to this, Mrs. Prince said that John had such a scientific mind and was “so precise” (p. 1), and that Heather was “always in charge” (p. 1); that in fact,

Heather was “respected for, the children loved and respected her for her knowledge and her skill in play” (p. 1). When other children - Arin, Ron, and Sam - came along and entered into the play, “(n)one of that surprised me, but it was just business as usual in the block center; actually in the whole room, but in the block center” (p. 1). What Mrs. Prince considered as worthy was that “the play was wholly child-generated, which you know I think is best” (p. 2). When I asked her to expand on her notion of “best”, Mrs. Prince responded:

And I also thought that and I saw and I believe it to be their way to support the play and they all wanted to keep the play going, but it seemed to me that there was a tremendous amount of cooperation, particularly between John and Heather. And even and at times a little negotiation when they didn’t agree or when one of them would bring a new character, is this when he brings the spider in and talks about the web, and jump on the web from the flood? And even when Sam comes in and says, “I’ve changed, I’ve changed” and he’s working his way in. And I’m thinking, “The tenacity of children to play when they’re ignored!” Now, somebody in here must have been ignored along the way, because they kept coming back. (2-3)

Jones (2003) states that children “need to be skilled players who enjoy encountering the unexpected” (p. 33). Mrs. Prince said she was fascinated by the children’s way of weaving in vocabulary such as, “You’re not in my destiny” (p. 3), that seemed to fit their play topics. She went on to add that the play seemed worthy because the children used cooperation and negotiation, and that “someone

in here seemed really tenacious about wanting to play because they kept going in their theme” (p. 3). Mrs. Prince described the children’s play as “pure play”, that required no adult being present, but “just play at its best” (p. 3). At this point, the description given by Jones (2003) is apt when she stated “young children develop the basic skills they will need to become effective contributors to the health of a changing world” (p. 33). In affirmation of this notion, Mrs. Prince said that the children not only supported sustained play, but also the children were fostering concepts, such as weather patterns and protection from weather inclement.

A hands-off approach

It seemed evident from Mrs. Prince’s conversations that she made no apology for staying out of the way of the children’s play. However, I was not quite ready to broach the subject of the violent nature of some of the children’s play topics. I instead expressed to Mrs. Prince that I had noticed that she did not intervene in the children’s play in this last episode, and if she thought she was supporting the children’s play by staying away. She responded with the following (Interview 6):

My feeling about this is by allowing it to happen. I’m afraid, and I think I went into this in an earlier interview, I have gone in to selfishly join children’s play before and felt like I snuffed out the best of it. And the question I ask to your question is, “What could I have offered that is richer than the scenario? And my answer would be, “Nothing.” And I did support it by staying away; I mean it was just great play. (3-4)

Mrs. Prince went on to say that in her experience of working with this group of children, she had found that going into their play to observe them, she had “such a relationship with my children that it was difficult for me to go in and just observe because they would start talking to me and we would start – they would hand me something to play with” (Interview 6, p. 4). In general, she went on to say, she would ask herself the question, “Do they need me?”, and sometimes they do for example, when a child is younger and has not developed the play skills that allow one to play without teacher intervention. But, “if they were in charge of the play and it’s going well and moving forward and they’re engaged, I guess I just don’t see what my intervention would contribute. Why, why, would I do that?” (p. 4).

The children’s strong language

While I agreed that the play might be going well, and that the children seemed involved deeply in their play, I could not help but think that the strong and sometimes harsh language the children so often used in their pretending might be graphic enough to be unsettling to children playing nearby, or to children who might not be directly involved with the core players in this classroom. The harsh language did not seem to be incumbent to nurturing. I reread research and other readings (Erikson, 1950; Vygotsky, 1978; Corsaro, 1985; Paley, 1986; Klugman, 1996; Cooper, 1996; Dyson, 1997) to reaffirm my own philosophy of pretend play as creating opportunities for children to recreate aspects of their own culture and community, and I believed Mrs. Prince was guided by similar beliefs.

Mrs. Prince had said more than once that children play out what they know and “their ideas about themselves and their roles in their own world and a larger world” (Interview 5, p. 3). At that time, I could not help but consider that the children’s real life roles did not include, certainly, killing and devouring one another or their parents. To begin to understand the intensity of the children’s pretending, I recalled a quote from Klugman (1996) that he included from his research with college students regarding their remembrances of childhood pretend play. One of the students responded by writing, “(w)e made up intricate and complicated stories about life, where we were, and what we were doing” (p. 2). I wondered at the value of letting such intense play continue unchecked however, but was reminded of Hartley, et al. (1954) when they suggested:

. . . if adults are to make a fruitful study of children’s dramatic play, they must first recognize that it reflects the interaction of their inner needs with external events; and second, have some knowledge of the real circumstances with which they have to cope. (21)

Children’s conflicting topics

While I understood the children’s need to express themselves through play, there seemed to be such contradictions in their play; the violence was explicit. Yet their sensitivities somehow emerged through the relationships they formed with the play props and with each other as they shielded, protected, and guided the jungle animals. The children seemed preoccupied with conflicting topics – danger/rescue; joy/sadness; life/death; sheltering/harm doing – features

that they wove with family relationships, mothering, and elements of popular culture.

Playing out elements of popular culture

To encourage the children's play environment and thus their play ideas, it was obvious that Mrs. Prince had invested much planning and time into arranging the centers and adding materials that would "support solitary play or the more social levels of play," providing "even duplicates of favorite materials," such as more of the hard rubber jungle animals. The children used the animals often as the characters, such as Simba from *The Lion King*, playing out situations involving abandonment, bravery, sadness, good versus bad, etc. The children appeared to know of "the universe of possibilities in these stories" (Dyson, 1997, p. 40), and did not seem to stick to the plots of these movies or to challenge one another in their usage of character names or dialogue.

Mrs. Prince had said that she believed her role as teacher was to encourage play. Did nurturing behaviors emerge from the violent topics I was soon to observe encompassed many of the children's pretend play episodes? At that point, I reflected on what Mrs. Prince had said in an earlier interview about setting up the play environment, that she strives to create an environment where trust is reciprocal between the children and the room and between the children and her. Moreover, Mrs. Prince contended, children's ideas are played out through the kinds of materials that can "offer what they need" and act as "springboards for their play needs. Things that stir inside of them, attempts made to connect with peers, emotions that are bigger than they are" (Interview, p. 2), can be manifested

through materials that are “appropriate to their particular play situation” (Interview, p. 2).

It seemed obvious that Mrs. Prince had a high regard for children’s use of the play materials, and in one of our interviews (E-Mail Interview, 5), she talked again about the importance of providing open-ended play materials, such as the hard rubber animals, as expressed in the following.

An open-ended nature to the materials was always a plus for me, however, I will say that the most open ended element in the play equation is the child’s imagination. Just as in your play episodes, the children could play out those issues with which they were familiar or with which they were grappling with animals with ease. It’s interesting to me, always, that they choose to play out their own lived experiences with animal props in blocks more frequently than with the human props. (2)

Trusting children

Finally, Mrs. Prince closed this interview by reaffirming her idea of trust in the classroom.

I can’t finish without saying something about trust. This is a topic I must write about at some point because I believe that it lies at the heart of the chasm between developmentally appropriate and inappropriate practices. I truly trust children in their play. Heather knew exactly what she needed in her play when the intern approached her and was rebuffed by her. Heather was confident enough in herself to stand up for what she needed in her play. . . (3)

Mrs. Prince's conversation interested me in that I wanted to understand how her hands-off seeming approach fostered the trust she often spoke about. How did this notion of trust play out in a group of children who incorporate such intense topics into their everyday play? Did Mrs. Prince trust the children to resolve conflicting issues? Was trust reciprocal, manifested by the children, with part of that trust stemming from their total freedom to play out ideas and topics? If Mrs. Prince was indeed building trust in the environment, how might that trust contribute to nurturing in the children's play? Perhaps she recognized children's "ability to negotiate complex interactions" (File, 1994, p. 237) and was aware of the need to fine-tune her skills to include a hands-off seeming approach. To explore the idea of trust, I turn again to the children's classroom to observe the core players in the block center.

Avalanche

Episode 7:1:

Sam and Arin were in Blocks with John; the three boys had pulled a good number of the wooden blocks from the shelves, emptying at least six shelves, and covering most of the floor area. As they pulled out more blocks, the boys would say as if in chorus, "Avalanche. Avalanche," in loud and excited sounding voices. Mrs. Prince soon joined the three boys.

- (1) Mrs. Prince: Oh, be careful, people can be hurt in avalanches.
- (2) All three boys: Avalanche, avalanche.
- (3) Mrs. Prince: Children can't use the blocks when they are all on the floor.

- (4) Sam: But, an avalanche. [To Mrs. Prince]
- (5) Mrs. Prince: You want some help? [Referring to picking up the blocks]
- (6) Arin: I don't need. . .
- (7) John: Remember, the more we help, the more it gets done faster.
- (8) Sam: It's an avalanche.
- (9) Mrs. Prince: After an avalanche, people come along and clean.
- (10) Then the skiers can ski and the skaters can skate.
- (11) Arin: Nobody can clean this stuff up.
[Sam made no attempt to pick up the blocks. Mrs. Prince re-shelved some of the materials including a few blocks, clearing out the play area somewhat, then left the block center to join a group of children in another part of the Center.]
- (12) Sam: I swing on the vine. I swing on the vine. [Speaking as the baby tiger he held. Sam placed the tiger on top of a tower of blocks.
- (13) You're not on the vine anymore, I am. [To Lisa]
- (14) Sam: On top of your house. On top of your house.
- (15) You're not my Mom anymore. It's dark in there. [A block structure.]

- (16) Lisa: No! Leave him alone. [Indicating a panther she was holding]
- (17) Sam: I don't remember you. [Meaning the panther.]
- (18) Lisa: Yes, you do. I'm just like your father and mother.
- (19) John: People have different. . .

John was interrupted by Arin, who was flying a rocket through the block center, as Lisa picked up an eagle and flew it about. At that time, Heather arrived late to the Early Childhood Center and went directly to the block center. John began to talk about a pretend flood that had dried up. Sam joined John by saying, "This is a flood." Arin flew his rocket around the block center, saying over and over, "Kaboom; kaboom." When a signal played on the piano, the children looked up, then moved immediately to the carpet for a large group circle time. Later in the morning, Heather returned to the block center where one of the interns joined her. Heather entered the block center.

Episode 7:2:

- (1) Heather: There are spiders there.
- (2) I'm really scared of those. They are *biting* spiders. [Heather pulled out some jungle animals and a bin filled with plastic insects and spiders.]
- (3) Heather: Elephants need to drink water. All they do is drink water. [To the intern.]
- (4) Intern: Water helps them grow.
- (5) Heather: I'm the spider. [Moving a plastic spider about.]

- (6) Intern: Maybe I'll be the bear.
- (7) Heather: Well, these two [elephants] are pals together.
- (8) They live together. They eat snot. [Heather laughed.]
- (9) Yummy, yummy. They eat snot.
- (10) Now, they're putting snot in their mouth.
- (11) Intern: Why do you do that? Maybe you shouldn't do that.
- (12) It might make you sick.
- (13) Heather: No, it wouldn't.
- (14) Intern: I think so.
- (15) Heather: You are deaf. [To the intern.]
- (16) Intern: I am not a deaf person.
- (17) Heather: These are sisters and their Dad." [She indicated two baby elephants and an adult elephant.]
- (18) Intern: Do they have a mommy?
- (19) Heather: Well, the mommy goes hunting everyday.
- (20) Intern: I think they just drink water.
- (21) Heather: They protect themselves with rocks in water.
- (22) It's near the beach."

It was interesting that Mrs. Prince entered the block center by intervening "within the script" (Reynolds & Jones, 1997, p. 86); her approach seemed to be non-intrusive since the children did not "miss a beat" in continuing their play. It may have been that the children were being too loud, or that Mrs. Prince perceived the play as escalating toward being disruptive; I was not sure. Also

interesting was that the children did not make an attempt to pick up the blocks, and that Mrs. Prince left the area without further encouragement of clean-up efforts. Later, I would question her concerning this (Interview 6). I began by commenting that Mrs. Prince had encouraged and allowed the children to continue to play with the blocks, even when the play appeared chaotic, then asked her why.

Mrs. Prince: I guess I would ask, “Why not?” Because my job as teacher is to facilitate the play. I think the play was rich particularly because of the . . . you know, I hated the “avalanche theme,” because John and Arin would come in and pull out every block from the shelves and make a huge mess on the floor of the block area. Which if they were the only two children at school, it would be perfectly fine with me. They would need to pick up it up at the end of the day, which was not always perfectly fine with them. But, if they were the only two, I wouldn’t even have a problem then.

But, it just proves that blocks is such a rich medium, that those little guys could go in there and even putting them on the floor, could come up with something that was so meaningful to them. So, yes, I let it go, I let it go because again, I really did try to give the children as much freedom as I could, keeping them safe and considering the other children. Considering that they were imagining and what they were creating in there, I let them play on.

Initially, at the beginning when I went in and said, oh, you know, made my pitch about how you need to clear a little bit away for people to ski and skate to try to move it to their play frame but anyway, that's why I let it go on. I didn't feel like anyone was in danger at that point and no one else was in there. (10-11)

Next, I asked Mrs. Prince why she left the situation alone with the scattered blocks, and she replied that she had struggled with the "whole avalanche thing" with Arin and John, and that it had come along in the second year the two boys were in the program, then was "pretty consistent" (Interview 6; p. 11). However, she sees the scattered blocks as having been her problem, since it did not seem to bother the children, and she "had to really think about it was their play and I try to let it be their play" (p. 11). Mrs. Prince has conflicting emotions however, and struggled with the blocks being scattered about by questioning whether it was safe for the children; she worried some children might fall over the blocks, strewn unevenly in the area.

And part of me comes back and says, but that's a good natural consequence to their actions, and then they learn not to litter the floor. But I also try to consider there, "Would other children come in and play if there were no play space there?" so just trying to grapple with all the issues in my head about not liking the scattered blocks in a way I can see them being constructive, yet the children don't see it that way.

But, I do worry about the safety aspect and more than that it robbing the other children of play space and blocks. And it's a delicate

balance that I struggled with every time it happened. If it continued to be John and Arin in there, sometimes I would let it go, because it didn't seem to be bothering them. Other times, what made it one thing or another, it was just one of those split second decisions.

I would go in there and encourage them; I wanted them to pick up the blocks. But, then I get in there, and they're playing and I think, "Dianne, this is not about you." This is about their play, so I guess that's what I did that day. (pp. 11-12)

Because Mrs. Prince was suggesting the social benefit of the play of Arin and John in the block center, I probed further to ask what she believed to be worthy from the activity of the avalanche play. She responded with the following:

Just all the ideas about their play. Who would have thought of an avalanche in the first place? Then, they would go on and develop that in their play. I had to respect those boys. They were a part, they were wonderful players. And together, they were more than the sum of the parts. They were most of the time so good to one another and they were so good at moving the inertia of the play along.

They are little soul mates; they live next door, they play at home. They come to school to play; they had a deep respect for one another. If one got in there before the other, they would shepherd the favorite toy for one another. If Arin got in there first, he would grab the whale and the alligator for John, and likewise, if J got in there first, he would grab his and take care of Arin. They each had a favorite toy, and how important it

was to the other one. I think it is a dear regard; it would be like you were to go shopping and pick up something for me. Really watching out for each other. (p. 13)

Researchers' Views on Play Interventions

Mrs. Prince's approach seemed consistent so far; it appeared to be valuable to her to intervene very little, if at all in the children's play. In contrast, Vivian Paley (1986) as teacher, intervened in play in order to learn more about the children's ideas, and used the children's play topics as fodder for further discussions in hopes of fostering the children's story writing. In a similar vein, Reynolds and Jones (1997) contended that a good intervention strategy is for teachers to wait until the play is over, then to take an "adult's turn" (p. 87) to discuss the play topics in a group in order to establish an agenda for extending upon play. Mrs. Prince's explanation of staying out of children's play seems comparable to what Corsaro (1985) observed in research about the effect of intervention, that often a minimal disruption can cause children's play to break down. According to Corsaro, it is not unusual for children to discourage "the access attempts of others" (p. 175) in order to guard their play.

Trusting Children in Play

At this point, it is important to consider again Mrs. Prince's notion of building trust. In encouraging children's freedom in play, she described the following (Interview 4):

You are in a safe environment. I trust you in your play. I know that you will bring life, stories, and learning to these materials. . . and sometimes

fun. I also guess at some intuitive level I am saying to the children, I trust these materials to do for you what adults have not (even temporarily). We fail to make children feel secure, included, etc. and what only you can do for yourself, i.e., feel competent, capable, in charge, etc. (p. 4)

This brings up my other point of contention in this last episode. When the intern tried to enter Heather's play, Heather continued to take the lead in the pretense and seemed to discourage and even rebuff the intern by saying her animals ate snot and asking the intern if she was deaf. If Heather was protecting her play space, she might be perceived by some to be "selfish and uncooperative" (p. 176) as Corsaro (1985) contends may often be the case in the reaction of teachers who interpret children's acts in such a manner.

I am remembering what Mrs. Prince had stated earlier about children protecting their play at all costs and how they will do anything to keep play going (Interview 4). Moreover, she had stated, "I think sometimes even by excluding others they're not nurturing that person, but they're probably nurturing the play ideas of the person with them and most certainly nurturing the play" (p. 2). I wondered whether Heather was nurturing other's play or her own. But, let me consider what happened as I return to the children to observe how they dealt with a play entry attempt from a peer who was not a member of the core players.

Preventing Others From Play Entry

Later in the morning on the same day as above, another girl in the Center, Mallory, entered the block center, where Heather continued to play with the animals. Sam played nearby, constructing with the blocks, although not

interacting with Heather. Mallory began pulling out some animals, saying, “I want this one,” picking up an elk. John stood at the entranceway and came into the block center as Heather picked up a panther, made a growling noise, and handed the panther to John. None of the children made an attempt to invite Mallory into their play.

Episode 7:3:

- (1) Heather: He has a fish in his mouth. [The panther.]
- (2) John: Here is a saber toothed tiger. [Standing over Heather.]
- (3) Heather: What’s up there? [Inquiring about what John was holding.]
- (4) Intern: That’s a saber toothed tiger.
- (5) John: Yep.
- (6) Heather: We have a new friend; it’s a rhino.
- (7) John: So, why do you have a new friend, if he is a rhino?
- (8) I have a grabber.” [He laughed.]
- (9) Heather: What’s so funny as an animal?
- (10) John: Well, I’m a grabber. [John held a small plastic rocket ship.]
- (11) Heather: Take me in [to the rocket].
- (12) Well, we don’t want you to grab us, because he always can.. .”
[Holding a baby tiger and using a high pitched voice.]
- (13) John: Here, you can fly on it. [Directed to Heather’s baby tiger.]
- (14) Heather: Hippo says, I’m going to help ‘em. [She indicated the elephants on the floor beside her]

- (15) I don't see anything funny about the. . .
- (16) I'm not scared of tiger sharks at all." [Using a gruff voice]
- (17) You are not?" [Using her own voice.]
- (18) No. [Gruff sounding voice]
- (19) Heather: Trapper, get your daddy. [She took an elk to John.]
- (20) Intern: The saber-toothed tiger is kind of watching everything.
[Said to John and Heather.]
- (21) Mallory: I'm going to see it." [Meaning John's rocket ship. John put his other hand over the rocket ship he held in one hand and furrowed his brow. He then took the rocket over to a shelf.]
- (23) Heather: I just need your help for some reason.
- (24) We need this house, the bed. Need you to take it up.
(Heather directed this toward John, using her tiger voice.
John handed Heather a wooden doll bed. Heather acknowledged the bed by saying thank you to John. Then, looked at the baby tiger
- (25) Heather: Child, you have a new bed. [Mallory sat near Heather holding two giraffes.]
- (26) Mallory: Where are you going little girl? [Pretending one of her giraffes was talking to another. Heather seemed to ignore Mallory. John had constructed a building from the cardboard bricks, but it had fallen.]
- (27) I'll make you a house. [She began to construct from the

bricks as Arin entered the block center.]

(28) Arin: John, I want to play with the airplane [rocket ship]. [John appeared to ignore Arin, walked over to Mallory and rearranged the blocks she was using. Mallory hit and scratched at John. John hit Mallory.]

(29) Heather: Enough fighting, but don't fight. Just say, 'I don't like it.'

(30) 'I don't like it and give it back.' [She placed the elk on -a small wooden bed as Sam entered the block center.]

(31) Sam: You make me maaaaad!" [Said toward Mallory.]
[Arin took the rocket from John. Sam looked toward John.]

(32) Sam: Are you still going to play with me?

(33) I don't want her [Mallory] to build it [Indicating the tower of blocks]

(34) She doesn't know how.

(35) Sam: I'll ask my mom if you can come over [Directed to Arin].

(36) And she might say, 'Can you come over?' [Using a higher pitched voice.]

(37) Arin: Well I don't. . . [His voice sounded uncertain.]

(38) Sam: You're my best friend, not Mallory.

(39) Sam: Mean, mean, mean, mean, _____." [Looking toward Mallory. She made an angry looking face at Sam.]

That doesn't scare me." [Mallory looked for an intern outside of the block center and reported to her that Sam would not let her play. Sam looked at the intern.]

(40) Sam: Playing with everyone, but not letting her play.

(41) Intern: Is that nice?

(42) Sam: But John is my best friend." [Heather, who continued to play with the baby tiger and the elk, looked toward the intern.]

(43) Heather: I told John just the same; that's not a nice thing. [Mrs. Prince entered the block area. She looked at the scattered materials on the floor.]

(44) Mrs. P: Do you want any of this, or shall I move it? [Without waiting for an answer, Mrs. Prince began to move some of the toys, re-shelving them.]

In the above, Heather's pretend play seemed to be all about the animals helping and protecting one another. The tiger needed to be taken into the rocket ship; the hippo was helping out the elephants that might have been threatened by John's tiger sharks. Heather elicited help from John, who seemed to play off her ideas by offering the help she requested, such as handing her a small wooden doll bed for her tiger. Arin entered and then left; Sam played nearby; and an intern sat among the children, yet Heather and John were engrossed in their own play and seemed to ignore the others.

Mrs. Prince was not near the children in the block center, nor did she appear to know what was being played out among them, such as Heather's concern for the animals and John's assistance in supporting Heather in her pretending about protection and care. But also, we have other "scripts" taking place, an array of social conflicts among the children: Mallory and John fought over the blocks; Heather ignored Mallory's and the intern's attempts to enter the play in progress; and Sam rebuffed Mallory.

TALKING WITH MRS. PRINCE

When Mrs. Prince read my transcript from the episodes above, I asked her to consider the kinds of things that were taking place in the block center that day. I truly believed I was observing pretend play talk that created opportunities for nurturing to take place, although I did not express this to her. In addition, I continued to recall Mrs. Prince's notion, expressed often, about trusting children that play would happen.

I had witnessed pretending, where protection, sheltering, and caring like characteristics were being played out with the animals, but what would she say about the other kinds of things I had observed going on outside of the pretend play? It was as if the nurturing like actions of Heather and John were embedded within a tapestry of multiple strands that included what some might perceive as rudeness, aggression, and even cruelty. Below, is Mrs. Prince's response (Interview 6):

But, I think what was not good; and this was not backing off. This was not being there. I don't think the play was supported by someone not being there when the stuff was going on with Mallory.

I thought no one was served in that situation. I thought if an adult had been there to talk them through it; you know, that didn't solve the problem. To me, that was a scenario where it would have been good if an adult had; been there to do some talking, perhaps, "remember when" statements. In these situations, children are trying to figure out how to "do friends." (pp. 13-14)

I asked Mrs. Prince what was worthy in this episode. She responded with the following:

It was all about the children's play. The play can go on and be sustained, even in a cramped space. The space doesn't deter them. They were doing it their way. And I think that's worthy. I think the more we can let them play and support them in play; it addresses all the selves. Nothing else does that. I believe it is crisis proofing. Children deal with loss. I'm not one to give them sugar-coated experiences. (p. 14)

I was reminded of Mrs. Prince's deep respect for children's play experiences. In her classroom environment, Mrs. Prince was offering the children many opportunities for sustained pretend play and trusting them to play without adult intervention, but also giving them multiple opportunities to have choices in everything that they did: choices of peers, materials, areas of the room, whether to include others or not to include them. Wasserman (2000) contends that teachers

must be available to observe children closely in order to help them resolve conflicts, if needed. But, Mrs. Prince allowed the children to work out their own problems in play; as she stated before, Mrs. Prince erred on the side of not intervening. A further glimpse provided me with the view that Mrs. Prince was also willing to accept the responsibility of the children's arguments that may or may not have been solved.

Certainly, the intern's presence did not deter the children from carrying out their disputes. And Heather's admonition - *Enough fighting, but don't fight. Just say, "I don't like it." Say, "I don't like it" and give it back.* - did not seem to affect the dispute taking place. Mrs. Prince shared that she was willing to shoulder the responsibility of the situation as not being handled and expressed regret that she was not present to prevent a child from being hurt. Vivian Paley (1999) contends that children are "more often kind to each other than unkind" (p. 129) and that the "early instinct to help someone is powerful" (p. 129). Perhaps Mrs. Prince's trust in the children included a feeling that the children would be kind or would return to kindness on their own, following some kind of upset in their play together.

Children imitate one another's acts of "helpfulness, caring, and generosity" (Eisenberg, 1992, p. 123), and in reacting to one another, help shape one another's altruistic behaviors. In this light, did Mrs. Prince believe that children's helpful and caring acts in pretend play would provide a model for children who displayed uncaring or aggressive acts? In an early interview

(Interview 1), Mrs. Prince described how she thought she did not meet the children's needs when she decided to intervene in their play.

I don't think I met the children's needs at the end. Your transcript shows that I came in and asked some question, and I just did not listen; I started picking up the blocks. No, I don't think I was meeting their needs by doing that. I think my job is to continually provision for the children, and for their exploration of ideas and for their learning to take responsibility for themselves. And I clearly robbed them of any opportunity to speak up for themselves: "No, we don't want to move it, or no, we don't want to clean up," whatever their choice was, I didn't wait, I just filed in. No, I don't think I met their needs at all, in that situation. (13)

Working at Intervention

Mrs. Prince had expressed she would rather err on the side of not going in to children's play than to take the chance of disrupting the play by interfering. Contrary to her approach, as discussed earlier, the literature suggests there can be benefits to teacher intervention in play (Jones & Reynolds, 1992; Monighan-Hourot, et al., 1987; Reynolds & Jones, 1997), that include opportunities for the teacher to understand the children's "hidden curriculum" (Monighan-Hourot, et al., 1987, p. 113) providing a knowledge base for teachers in planning for social opportunities in the curriculum.

Corsaro (1985) contends that teachers must first observe disagreements among the children to determine if those acts are a part of their pretending, and thus intervene to stop real acts of aggression, taking the children aside to help the

children problem solve more appropriate ways of solving conflicts. I continued to be amazed at the freedom these core players had, without intervention from the teacher, and the opportunities this freedom afforded for the children to experience sustained pretend play that encompassed many threads.

On one occasion during the semester, Mrs. Prince interrupted the children's play when they were being very loud in the block center. Heather and Sam were there that day playing with the jungle animals, while Arin flew a plastic grasshopper around them. With a baby animal, Sam made a growling sound toward Heather's panther. Heather watched John use his hand to try to swat at Sam's animal. John came close to Heather, and went back toward Sam.

Tiger Cubs and Grasshoppers

Episode 8:1:

- (1) Heather: Don't go in there. [Speaking as the panther]
- (2) John: Exile!
- (3) Arin: Your baby is going in jail. [Arin took an animal out of Heather's hand. Heather grabbed the animal from him.]
- (4) Heather: Child. [Sam laid his tiger cub near Heather.]
- (5) Heather: Come here! [Said toward the cub.]
- (6) Sam: I'm to the rescue. I'm stronger than everybody.
I can stick. [Speaking as a tiger he held tiger on the side of a cubby.]
- (7) Arin: You can't stick to our machines.
- (8) Sam: I'll come back to y'all. I'll never come here again.

[Heather moved her adult panther to Sam's side. Both children were sitting on the floor. Arin made a loud noise intended to pretend startle the animals Heather and Sam were playing with. Heather "jumped" the panther to a shelf.]

(9) Arin : Never said about bug. [Picking up a plastic grasshopper.]

(10) Heather: Eat him. [Meaning, eat the grasshopper.]

(11) Sam: Yeah, eat him.

[Heather picked up an eagle and rushed it toward Arin, making smacking sounds as if the eagle were eating the grasshopper. Sam ran across the blocks that were scattered on the floor. It very noisy in the room. Mrs. Prince played the signal on the piano]

(12) Mrs. Prince: I love the busy work. But, you've got to stop screaming.

Arin, can you have your talk without screaming?

The children continued playing, but in a quieter way. Even in her intervention, Mrs. Prince conveyed to the children that she valued their play by saying she loved their busy work. On only two other occasions did I observe Mrs. Prince enter the core players' area; it was to straighten materials, and she did not interact with the children.

In this last episode, the children used the animals and the blocks to pursue their topics of pretense that included helping, protecting, sheltering, saving, as well as danger, death, killing, and children's pop culture language and characters. How did the teacher's trust contribute to all this, the trust that according to her, was an essential element in her classroom design? Did the aggressive topics the children chose to incorporate into their pretend play help them to understand nurturing or contribute to the nurturing that was prevalent in their play?

In one of our interviews (Interview 5), Mrs. Prince discussed how she had learned to trust the children's play through providing materials that seemed to encourage play that reflected "families, and all that transpires within families" (p. 2) as well as "the themes of good vs. bad, elements of fantasy, and diversity" (p. 2) she was seeing in the classroom pretend play. Therefore, the play props were crucial to her and influenced the way she selected materials. Going on to express her marvel at children's "insightfulness and intuition about adults in their world" (p. 2), although she realized the children's ideas were still not maturely developed, she expressed that "their ideas are very often the cruder 'folk art' version of reality" (. 2), and similar to her regard for the real folk art, she found the play to be "rich and complex" (p. 2).

It helps to have some understanding of the history of the teacher's philosophy in creating an environment that allows freedom in pretend play. It seemed to me that the sociocultural context allowing the children's pretend play to unfold was critical to my understanding how nurturing might be happening in this particular environment, the classroom being "the stage setting and the theater

for” (Sawyer, 1997, p. 79) the children’s pretense. Let us turn again to the children’s classroom where on this day three of the core players had abandoned the block center to sit at the puzzle table.

Pretend Play at the Puzzle Table

Episode 9: 1

An assortment of puzzles was laid out on a rectangular shaped table. Heather sat at the table playing with a wooden puzzle consisting of a variety of wooden people figures. Lisa sat at another chair next to Heather, also working on a puzzle. John approached the table, carrying a resin panther from the block center. Heather picked up a puzzle piece, a wooden figure of a little girl and looked at Lisa.

- (1) Heather: Pretend this is the sister, and you took her out of bed.
- (2) John: So what are you doing? [Heather appeared to ignore John, who sat down at the table and stared intently at her.]
- (3) Heather: She [The wooden child figure] went to bed, and the next day. . .
Pretend the brother pushed her away. [Lisa picked up some of Heather’s puzzle people.]
- (4) Lisa: Pretend to be nice.
[Heather picked up the resin puppy, got up, and walked to Elizabeth who was standing nearby observing the children at puzzles. Heather made a barking sound toward Elizabeth. Heather then walked back to the table, addressing Lisa.]

- (5) Heather: Pretend the brother fell down. [Lisa pushed a dog puzzle piece to the floor.]
- (6) Lisa: And pretend again like that. [Lisa made two wooden figures walk and seemed to speak for one of them.]
- (7) Lisa: I'm just gonna be nice.
- (8) Heather: Pretend somebody came when they were not looking.
- (9) Pretend to tell the snotty person. . .
- (10) Lisa: Pretend he came again and he fought at her." [Interrupting Heather.]
- [Heather moved a puppy puzzle piece to one of the resin animals, a panther, then made a growling sound for the panther toward Lisa's puzzle pieces.]
- (11) Heather: Pretend another naughty person came and she was lying down and pushed the doggie down. Pretend it's nighttime, and puppy laid down in her bed.
- (14) Lisa: Puppy, you're all growing up. Wake up honey, it's morning.
- (15) Puppy, you're all grown up. [To Heather's puppy.]
- (16) Heather: Pretend it was night already.
- (17) Pretend someone said 'naughty sheep.'
- (18) Lisa: No, it's not.
- (19) Heather: Pretend this guy jumped on the dog.
- (20) Lisa: No no no.

- (21) Heather: But, the puppy only got shot and was hurt.
- (22) Lisa: Pretend. . .
- (23) Heather: Pretend dog shot, but not killed.
- (24) Lisa: These are all the children. [Indicating puzzle pieces of puppies.]
- (25) Heather: The doggie's always brave.
- (26) Pretend it is nighttime, but the puppy is older.
And then it was morning.
- (27) Lisa: Puppy's all grown up.
- (28) John: And then dog had puppy.
- (29) Heather: It is a girl. This one had a baby; now it's back in bed.
[Heather picked up a wooden dog from a larger puzzle.]
- (31) Ruff Ruff.
- (32) Lisa: Puppy, how did you get dirty? Good puppy.
- (33) Heather: Pretend puppy's Clifford.
- (34) Lisa: Pretend this is bad guy. [A puzzle piece figure]
- (35) Can I be this one? [A small resin dog]
- (36) No, No, run puppy run." [Speaking to the smaller dog.]
- (37) Heather: But we have to stay here. [She held two resin dogs.]
- (38) Lisa: No, she can't.
- (39) Heather: Pretend they would take her to the pound and to jail.
- (40) Pretend cat was right.
- (41) Pretend they locked themselves in there.

(42) What's the matter?

(43) Lisa: Well, I can't find her.

(44) Heather: Pretend the circus people didn't see her run off. [Next, speaking to the puppy.]

(45) Puppy go in jail. Called mommy 'bad.'

During this episode, Heather implied danger for the wooden puzzle child when the pretend child was pushed away by the brother. Next, danger lurked, as Heather pretended that night was approaching (*Pretend somebody came when they were not looking*. Episode 9:1; line 8). When Lisa failed to join into Heather's ideas of pretend danger, Heather intensified the danger further (*Pretend this guy jumped on the dog*. Episode 9:1; line 19). When Lisa protested, Heather soothed Lisa with comforting words (*But the puppy only got shot, and was hurt*. Episode 9:1; line 21), and demonstrated affection toward the puppy (*The doggie's always brave*. Episode 9:1; line 25). It is interesting to note that when Heather's dramatizing assumed a less dangerous tone, Lisa then proposed a new idea for danger (*Pretend this is bad guy. No, no, run puppy run*. Episode 9:1; line 34). Not to be outdone, Heather again took the lead and intensified the danger to Lisa's puppy (*Pretend they would take her to the pound and to jail. Puppy go in jail. Called mommy bad*. Episode 9:1; lines 39 and 45)

In using the puzzle pieces as the leading characters in their pretend play, there were paradoxes at work: danger/rescue and good versus bad. Embedded within these topics are the actions and routines that play out the family situations and the everyday kinds of things that parents do for their children: brothers fall

down, parents wake children, parents praise children, and parents have other babies. These are familiar topics from the children's everyday experiences being played out with a twist: the world depicted has "naughty people" who come upon families unaware and threaten their young. The young run away and cannot be found. And yet another paradox exists; these intense and often violent topics take place within what Mrs. Prince described as the safe environment of the classroom and where she trusted kids in their play. In the following, she elaborated upon her thinking about what her classroom environment might have conveyed to the children (Interview 5).

I know that you will bring life, stories, and learning to these materials. . . .and sometimes fun. I also guess at some intuitive level I am saying to the children, I trust these materials to do for you what adults have not (even temporarily we fail to make children feel secure, included, etc.) and what only you can do for yourself, i.e., feel competent, capable, in charge, etc. (p. 4)

No one could argue that Mrs. Prince was confident in her belief that the children in her classroom had a right to pretend play and to incorporate whatever they chose as their topics for play scripts and scenarios. Over the next month, I was to observe other occasions when the children played out similar scenes.

The Baby Found her Mother

Episode 10: 1:

It was mid-morning; Heather, Lisa, and Sam were in the block center. Heather held a resin calf as she walked over to the housekeeping center and

brought a play baby bottle back to Blocks with the calf. Lisa held a small resin dog and a panther.

(1) Heather: We have a youngster for you to see. [Sam walked over, but turned away.]

(2) I've got a surprise for someone to see. Right over here. [Lisa walked over to Heather.]

(3) Heather: See, I'm a cow.

(4) Lisa: What's her name?

(5) Heather: Her name is 'Tossie'.

(6) Lisa: Hi, Tossie. [Lisa looked at the panther she held.]

(7) Honey, look at the baby fowl.

(8) Heather: Not fowl, a baby calf. It's a calf.

(9) Lisa: Don't kill my baby. [As the panther, speaking to Sam, who was holding an adult giraffe.]

(10) Sam: I can kill." [Speaking as the giraffe.]

(11) Heather: Look, the mother is here all the time. [Holding the cow.]

(12) Sam: Pretend this is the bad guy. [Holding the giraffe.]

(13) Heather: The baby found her mother. [Speaking toward Sam and Lisa.]

The baby had wobbly legs and the dad was there all along.

(14) Good guy or bad?" [Looking at Sam's giraffe.]

(15) Sam: He's finding who killed my mother. [Speaking as the giraffe.]

[The children were interrupted in their play when a little boy entered Blocks saying that Heather was snack helper that day.]

In this episode, Heather was in her own world, choosing not to get involved in the other children's pretending about bad guys and killing. She was very much aware of what was going on around her though. Rather than adding to the danger situation though, Heather made comforting-like statements (*Look, the mother is here all the time* and *The baby found her mother*. Episode 10:1; lines 11 and 13) that provided a change of direction for Sam. His giraffe went from "being bad" to one who was looking for the one who killed his pretend mother.

Ladybugs and Scar

Episode 11: 1:

Heather arrived in the Center, bearing her sack of valentine cards. After placing the cards into each child's decorated sack, she went into the block center, and dumped out a bin of animals. John and Arin were constructing something out of the wooden blocks they called a "machine." Heather looked through the animals. John picked up a plastic ladybug, then mad it walk over to Heather. Heather growled with the baby lions toward John.

Next, Lisa entered the block center and asked if she could play. Heather joined Lisa beside a cluster of animals on the carpet, handing her an adult panther. Lisa had a sad look on her face and handed the panther back to Heather. Heather then gestured toward the lions as she and Lisa began to pass the lions and tigers back and forth.

- (1) Lisa: I love you Scar. [Holding a panther and speaking to Heather's lion.]
- (2) Heather: Don't be mad at me. [Spoken as the lion, to Lisa, Heather next turned to John.]
- (3) What on earth are you anyway? [Speaking as the lion.]
- (4) John: I'm a ladybug. [Holding a plastic ladybug and pretending to fly it toward Heather.]
- (5) Heather: Ladybugs? I used to eat ladybugs, and I haven't seen you.
- (6) My name is Scar, and I think you met him when he was good.
- (7) Have you?"
- (8) John: Yes.
[Heather grouped several lions together, then turned to the cubby behind her and moved a lion there. John brought the ladybug over to the two girls.]
- (9) Heather: Hey. [Heather "walked" her lion to a group of animals, speaking toward Lisa.]
- (10) You have to take care of them. [Spoken for the lion.]
[Sam joined the two girls, as Arin and John continued working on their machine construction.]
- (11) Heather: Help the mommy, oh, the queen. Help her, help her.
[Heather moved her animal away from the shelf to a cubby.]

Oh, the queen. Oh, help me. [Lisa moved to where Heather now played.]

(12) Heather: Everyone needs to help us.

Heather proclaimed the goodness of her lion named Scar, followed by a demonstration of Scar's protective qualities when she moved him toward her other animals and expressed her concern for them (*You have to take care of them.* Episode 11:1; line 10). Heather next changed the direction of her role play to include danger (*Help the mommy, oh, the queen. Help her, help her.* Episode 11:1; line 11), making possible opportunities for more protection and care.

Next, Heather left the block center and headed for the art table where various paints and papers in the colors of Valentines were prepared for the children to work with. Later, Heather returned to the block center, where Sam joined her to play with the animals. Lisa also was in the block center and approached Heather. Heather placed several animals in a shelf cubby; her head was very near the cubby as she manipulated the animals with both hands. She seemed to be guarding them. Both girls were saying, "Run, run," as if speaking for their animals.

Saving and Protecting

Episode 11: 2

(1) Lisa: Heather, coyote has some hay.

[Heather turned outward facing Lisa and holding one of her animals. Lisa, and Sam made the animals scuffle.]

- (2) Heather: Oh no, we're next to the bad guys. We got to fight with our hands.
- (3) Oh no.
[Heather moved her animals to a higher shelf unit. She turned back as one of the other children played the piano signal. Mrs. Prince said there would be five minutes to play before clean-up time.]
- (4) Heather: I'm not near the bad guys. Let's put our kitties in here.
[Sam walked across the center away from the two girls and seemed to be playing by himself. Lisa joined Heather.]
- (5) Lisa: Hi, my name is _____. [Sam returned to the two girls.]
- (6) Sam: Ahhhhhhhhow.
[Sam crawled on top of the blocks toward the two girls. He scattered out a cluster of Lisa's animals.]
- (7) Lisa: STOP!
- (8) Sam: Never playing with y'all again. [Looking angry and turning as if to leave.]
- (9) Heather: Why?
- (10) Sam: Cause. And I'm never coming back. [Lisa looked upset.]
- (11) Heather: I know what. Y'all took all of them.
- (12) You know what, there's a baby. [Heather pointed to a baby tiger. Sam crawled back over to Lisa.]
- (13) Lisa: Hi, doctor, doctor, my little cub is _____. [To Sam.]

(14) Heather: Well, I got some colored sauce; it might help.

(15) I'll get some coughing one,

(16) Some coughing powder to make the world so good.

[Sam made animal whimpering sounds.]

(17) Heather: Sorry but we have to go to lunch.]Speaking to her animals.]

[Heather walked to the cubby and picked up another animal.]

(18) Heather: Hey look, I'm the doctor, and I'm the doctor, and I'm

(19) Lisa: Only if you help.

In the above, Heather let the others know she was sheltering the kittens from what she referred to as the bad guys. When Sam threatened to leave the block center, Heather found a way to gain his interest by drawing attention to her remedies to treat the baby tiger with the “coughing sauce” and “coughing powder”. Sam began constructing with the wooden blocks. Heather stood and watched him. When the signal played, Lisa moved to the Circle rug area for large group time, followed by Heather, then Sam.

Danger from Spiders and Shocker Towers

Episode 12: 1:

After the large group time, several of the children went into the block center. Sam used two wooden blocks to pretend to spray a block tower he began constructing with Arin. We will see that another child in the classroom, Matt, had joined the group playing in the block center. He added some blocks to the tower,

creating an enclosure extension from it. Heather began pulling out animals from a plastic bin: first a panther, then a giraffe. She crawled to the block shelf.

- (1) Arin: Here come the spiders, you better watch out.
 - (2) Matt: You're going to the water, spider.
 - (3) Arin: Let's shoot the bad guy. We can make bombs in there.
 - (4) Matt: Let's go for it.
 - (5) Arin: Bam bam boom boom boooooooooom.
 - (6) Heather : We're bad like y'all guys. We're bad like y'all.
 - (7) We'll help you.
 - (8) Matt: No, you can't, 'cause we're angry, and you're not helping.
 - (9) Heather: Yes, 'cause, we're always helpers
 - (10) to every bad person that ought to kill good animals.
 - (11) Matt: No, 'cause you know what? Remember what I said.
 - (12) You can't touch it [the brick enclosure].
 - (13) You can't help each other.
 - (14) Heather: Yeah, you can't do it. It rained water and. . .
 - (15) Well, I guess . . .
 - (16) Well, I guess young friends can help; she's big.
[Referring to one of her animals.]
[Heather returned to her animals, but stood by the shelf unit. She looked at Matt.]
- (16) Heather: Here's some more blocks. Let me help you.

Heather found a way to participate in the pretending of the other children around the block tower. When Matt rejected her help, Heather was even willing to be *bad* (*We're always helpers to every bad person that ought to kill good animals.* Episode 12:1; lines 9 and 10) in order to help. If Matt was not willing to let Heather help, then perhaps her animals could offer care in some way (*Well, I guess young friends can help; she's big.* Episode 12:1; line 16).

Episode 12:2

Next, I observed that Heather continued to move her giraffe and panther on a shelf near the block constructions referred to as *shocker towers*. John walked over to see the constructions in progress, and knelt beside a block construction nearby he had begun earlier, adding blocks to it. Arin *flew* a block around his play road, making pretend flying sounds. As an intern came into the block center, Heather looked toward her.

(1) Heather: We're building a *shocker tower*.

(2) If we don't finish in time, it will shock everyone.

[Heather continued to warn the intern that the tower would shock her [the intern] if she touched it.

(3) Matt: And we won't let anyone come in.

[John stood up abruptly next to the tower.]

(4) Heather: Don't touch this [the tower].

(5) Hey, guys, want to build a shocker building?

[Heather moved to the block shelf and began to stack blocks.]

- (6) Matt: Ya gotta hurry up.
- (7) Heather: We don't need the time; we can do it ourselves.
- (8) Matt: Sorry. I got one. I got one. [Matt reached for a giraffe near Heather, putting it on a wooden boat he moved around on the carpet.)
- (9) Da da da da da da da.”
- (10) Heather: Sorry. The building's finished. The building's finished.
- (11) Matt: Sorry, it's going away. Ha ha ha ha ha.
- (12) Heather: C'mon, let's knock down the building that shocked people.
Pow!
[Heather threw a block between Matt and John.]
- (13) Oh no, I'm sorry.
- (14) John: Uh oh, I think this one is hurt. [He handed Heather a plastic spider.]
- (15) Heather: I was trying to shock the other people
- (16) 'cause they were too hard on him. Always.
- (17) Not the bug, but the people. Now, I'll have to start over.

At the beginning of this episode, Heather constructed a danger situation (i.e., *We're building a shocker tower. If we don't finish in time, it will shock everyone.* Episode 12:2; lines 1 and 2). After she gained the interest of the children near her, Heather averted the danger with her explanation about why she was building a shocker tower (i. e., *I was trying to shock the other people 'cause*

they were too hard on him. Always. Not the bug, but the people. Now, I'll have to start over. Episode 12:2, lines 15-17), which was out of concern for her animals.

A short time later, someone played the piano, signaling it was ten minutes until clean-up time. Matt placed other animals on the boat, and said, "All aboard. All aboard." Heather carried some animals and left the block center for another area in the room. Lisa entered the block center, picked up a few of the animals, and walked back out. Soon after, Matt and John went to other areas in the classroom to join the activities taking place. Heather stayed in another area of the Center for a few minutes. When she returned to the block center, Heather went back to the shelf divider.

Giving Care

Episode 12: 2:

(1) Heather: We are all the future. The mother one is back."

[At that time, Matt and John entered the block center; Matt walked over to Heather. John carried an alligator and walked around pushing at the blocks with his feet and hitting at them with the alligator. Heather looked at Matt.]

(1) Heather: Don't build any tower anymore.

(2) John: Bad tower.

(3) Heather: You know all my horses are good ones?

[John, who still carried the alligator, approached Matt.]

(4) Matt: I'll get you, Hoosier boy. [The two boys began to scuffle. Using the objects they each carried, they thrust out at one

another, Matt laughing and John looking serious. Heather observed the boys as they continued to hit out at each other.]

(5) Heather: You go somewhere else, I'm not into wild animals. [She turned back to her animals.]

(6) Sharp tooth, I'll go get your baby. I'll go get your baby.
[Heather crossed the block center, holding a stegosaurus from the dinosaur bin, stepping over the blocks scattered on the carpet. Matt turned from John and walked from the block center, smiling as he left. John soon followed Matt. Heather knelt at the block shelf and began to rummage through other animals on the carpet nearby. She looked at the dinosaur she was holding.]

(7) I'll take care of your animals.
[Picking up a baby dinosaur from the pile of animals, Heather used it to hit at the stegosaurus.]

(8) Giddup, giddup, giddup, giddup. [Now, it looked as if Heather was pretending that the adult dinosaur was biting the baby; she made the animals struggle.]

(9) Come on.

(10) Warning y'all,

(11) that you killed the other that wanted to be killed.

After a bit, Heather walked out of the block center, tripping slightly on some blocks, on her way out. A few minutes later, the piano played, signaling that it was time for clean-up. Mrs. Prince began singing a clean-up song, and said she would meet the children in the block center. Several of the children joined Mrs. Prince and an intern, where they worked together to put the materials away.

It is apparent that Heather did not want to participate in the *shocker tower* pretense (*Don't build any tower anymore*. Episode 12:2; line 2) any longer and that she wanted the disruptive play of Matt and John to stop (*You go somewhere else, I'm not into wild animals*. episode 12:2; line 5). It seems to have been a way for Heather to avert danger for her animals, because soon after, she comforted one of the dinosaurs (*Sharp tooth, I'll go get your baby. I'll go get your baby*. Episode 12:2; line 6)), reassuring it by promising to take care of the dinosaur's animals. However, before leaving the block center, Heather opened up a new possibility for pretend danger when she caused the dinosaurs to fight one another, then issued a warning to them (i. e., *Come on. Warning y'all, that you killed the other that wanted to be killed*. Episode 12:2; line 10 and 11).

Simba, Scar, and Danger Events

Episode 13: 1:

On this day, Heather entered the block center with her sister, who was visiting with their mother. John, who was constructing a building from the wooden blocks, made a growling sound. Lisa sat on the carpet pulling out the resin animals.

(1) Heather: But, John, my sister wants to play with you.”

- (2) Lisa: I want to play too. And this is Scar. [Holding up a lion.]
- (3) Heather: Yeah. [Arin held a plastic spaceship, flying it about the block center.]
- (4) Lisa: This is a dog. [She held a wolf.] Is this one bad?
- (5) Heather: This is good. [Picking up a lion.]
- (6) Arin: Boom; I shot the fire at them. [Referring to the animals.]
[Heather's mother entered Blocks, and Arin made the sound, "boom," toward her. Heather's Mom said something about no shooting being allowed. Next, Arin pretended to fly the spaceship toward the wooden building.]
- (7) John: If you didn't build it, you can't knock it down. [To Arin.]
- (8) Lisa: Remember when we used to be best friends? [To Heather's sister.]
- (9) Heather: This is dangerous. [Holding out the lion.]
- (10) Lisa: I missed you. [Holding another lion toward Heather's lion.]
- (11) Stay out of here; it's dangerous, 'cause they're fighting.
[Looking at Heather's sister.]
- (12) Scar and this guy are fighting. He'll never kill her.
[Heather made a lion pretend to bite the ear of another lion she was holding.]
- (13) Lisa: That's the momma, right? [Speaking about Heather's lion.
Heather made the lion she was holding growl at her sister.]
- (14) Heather: ZaZu's baby. Here you go baby.

[Heather threw a baby lion cub, and it landed on the carpet beside her. She then put several lions in a cubby, sheltering them with her hands and arms. Lisa approached with a coyote.]

(15) Heather: This is a lion.

(16) Lisa: Well, I want to play.

(17) Heather: Coyotes aren't allowed.

(18) Lisa: I am Simba. [She held up her lion and made a roaring sound.]

(19) Heather: I am Simba."

(20) Lisa: I am too.

(21) Heather: I'm going to be all grown up.

(22) Lisa: I'm fifteen.

(23) Heather: I'm sixty-seven.

(24) Lisa: Well. . . We have the same name.

[Lisa tried to put her hands into the cubby Heather was using, but Heather furrowed her brow and pushed at Lisa.]

(25) Heather: He's not your dad.

(26) Lisa: This is a Daddy. [An adult tiger she was holding.]

(27) Heather: I am judge. I am a mother. [Holding up an eagle.]

(28) Lisa: Well. . . Mother's can come.

In the above, Heather made it clear that she was in charge. She established a play pretense by declaring that the situation was "dangerous." Lisa wasted no

time embracing the danger idea and weaving in the characters from *The Lion King*, but Heather maintained leadership. A bit later on the same day, John and Arin began to pull out the blocks from the shelves.

Episode 13: 2

- (1) Heather: Mommy, mommy. [Heather held a baby goat and made crying sounds for it.]
- (2) Lisa: Pretend cow walking along, and it didn't have a mommy." [Holding a calf.]
- (3) Heather: Have you seen my mom?" [Holding a duck] [Matt walked in with an armful of play capes from the housekeeping center.]
- (4) Matt: Want to get a cape? [To Heather.]
- (5) Heather: Never, never. [Speaking as the duck.]
- (6) Just throw them." [Directed to Lisa, and the two girls began to throw the capes.]
- (7) Have you seen my mother? [With a sheep.] [Lucinda entered the block center and looked toward Lisa.]
- (8) Lucinda: May I play with you?
- (9) Lisa: You can be anyone you want.
- (10) Lucinda: Okay.

[Heather held a handful of animals and made crying sounds for them, moving them around in the cubby unit. All three girls attempted to manipulate their animals in the cubby

Heather was using. Heather did not speak to the other two, but glared at Lisa.]

(11) Lisa: I'm not playing with you.

Let's don't play; she's being ugly.

[Lisa and Lucinda left Blocks and went to housekeeping.

They sat at a small red plastic table with a group of animals. Soon after, Heather left the block center to work at the art table.]

For Heather, the issue in this episode was one of concern for her own animal's need to find its mother. It did not seem to matter to her that the other two girls were making attempts to join her or that they became upset with her; she was focused on her animal's need.

Episode 14: 1

When I entered the classroom, some of the children were making hats from newspapers. Mrs. Prince was working with two boys, wrapping newspaper around their heads, using masking tape, and helping the boys to shape into hats. Lisa was at the play dough table. Heather walked up to the play dough table beside Lisa, and pushed it (Perhaps by accident.). Lisa looked around at Heather, then walked away to Blocks to join Ron, who was lying on his back with his feet propped on one of the shelf units. Lisa went to the cubbies and selected an animal bin.

When Lisa picked up a resin animal, she jabbed her eye with the animal's tail. She looked upset and began rubbing her eye. About that time, Heather arrived

in the block center. Ron told Lisa not to touch her eye, but to close it. Heather held an alligator; she had placed a lion in its mouth, Heather looked at Lisa.

- (1) Heather: He's going to the hospital. He's going to the hospital, girl.
[Lisa began playing with a group of animals and did not mention her hurt eye again.]
- (2) Heather: I'm going to eat your friend. [Holding the alligator toward Lisa.]
- (3) This is a statue. [Pointing to one of Lisa's animals.]
- (4) Lisa: No, it's not; it's my babysitter. Leave her alone. [She made a baby tiger growl at Heather.]
- (5) No, this is my daddy; I don't want him to be hurt.
- (6) Heather: Alligators never need help. [Lisa tried to pick up a tiger near Heather.]
- (7) Heather: I wanted that. I need that. [Lisa furrowed her brow, but did not say anything.]
- (8) Heather: You can't use it.
[Arin and John entered Blocks, followed by Sam. Heather handed her alligator and a dinosaur to John.]
- (9) Heather: This is to help you get your game started. [John took the animals without saying anything, but smiled.]
- (10) I wanted to help you. [Arin bumped into Lisa, who responded by Hollering out.]
- (11) Lisa: I hurt my finger.

- (12) Arin: Nail, had to pull out.
[Arin then picked up a plastic fly and made a “buzzing” sound at Lisa; she walked quickly out of the block center, then walked around the classroom with Arin and the fly in pursuit, stopping at the block center, calling it “base.” Arin was right behind her, but walked back to the block center and thrust several of the plastic insects at Heather’s giraffe, making buzzing sounds. Heather glared at Arin.]
- (13) Heather: You liar – liar, liar, liar.” [She looked at the bugs.]
Liar bugs. Liar bugs.
- (14) Arin: We will suck your blood.” [Speaking as one of the insects]
[Sam lay on the carpet on his stomach and kicked his legs up and down, then began to play with some of the animals.
Lisa returned to the block center]
- (15) Lisa: Can I play with y’all? Excuse me Arin, that’s where I was.
[Lisa walked over to the spot where Arin lay. Arin would not move.]
- (16) Lisa: Arin, that’s where I was. [She found another spot nearby and began picking up some of the play animals.]
- (17) Lisa: Momma, can I go where my friends are? [She held a panther with a baby tiger, and appeared to be speaking for the tiger.]

- (18) Heather: Here [with a giraffe]; I killed something for you to suck.
[Directed to Lisa's tiger.]
- (19) Lisa: I want to be y'all's friends. [Speaking as the tiger to Heather's giraffe.]
- (19) Heather: We're killing things for him to suck blood. [To Lisa, referring to Arin's bugs.]
- (20) Lisa: I'm a tiger." [Speaking for her tiger.]
- (21) Heather: My name is grizzly. [Speaking for a grizzly bear she held.]
Does someone want to help us kill? [Arin "crashed" one of his bugs into a group of animals Heather had collected on the carpet. She made a play screaming sound for the animals as they scattered.]
- (23) Lisa: Hey hi, I'm a cub. [Speaking for her tiger.]
- (24) Arin: Don't come over here; there's danger.
- (25) Danger, danger, danger, danger. . . [This became chantlike as Arin continued to repeat the word, "danger".]
- (26) Lisa: Arin *really* says there's danger." [Her face showed a look of disgust.]
- (27) Arin: Earth shake.
- (28) Heather: Help my friend; we need help. [It was not clear which animal Heather was speaking of.]
- (29) Arin: Earth shake. [Arin carried a bin of animals around Blocks.]

(30) Lisa: But, Mrs. Prince's not here. . . [It was not clear why Lisa referred to the teacher's having stepped out of the room.]

(31) Arin: Earth shake is starting.

At the beginning of this episode, Heather ignored the fact that Lisa had hurt her eye, but instead, she let Lisa know that her alligator needed care (*He's going to the hospital. He's going to the hospital, girl* episode 14:1; line 1.) When Lisa did not respond to Heather, Heather introduced a possibility for pretend danger from the alligator (*I'm going to eat your friend.* Episode 14:1; line 2). Not able to draw Lisa into her play ideas, Heather handed over her animals to John, expressing to him an act of care (*This is to help you get your game started. I wanted to help you.* Episode 14:1; line 9).

But it is Arin who presented a new opportunity for Heather to find solutions to the implied threat of the buzzing flies. To avert danger, Heather admonished the plastic insects Arin held (*You liar – liar, liar, liar.* Episode 14:1; line 13), then later referred to the tiger she held as a way of appeasing the insects (*We're killing things for him to suck blood.* Episode 14:1; line 19). Later, Heather chose another ferocious animal, a grizzly bear, to let the others know she would find nourishment for the plastic insects (*My name is grizzly. Does someone want to help us kill?* Episode 14:1; line 22). When Arin, then Lisa play off Heather's ideas by announcing the presence of danger, Heather tried to change the direction of the scenario by protecting her animals (*Help my friend; we need help.* Episode 14:1; line 28).

Next, Arin began to pull out blocks, scattering them on the carpet. Heather sat on top of the shelf unit across from where the blocks were being yanked out. She moved several animals on top of the shelves. Rebecca came to the block center and beckoned for Lisa to come out. Lisa and another girl, Deirdre, followed Rebecca to Housekeeping, taking a handful of animals. John joined Arin in pulling out blocks. Heather looked toward John and Arin.

Episode 14: 2

- (1) Heather: Hey, I'm grizzly. Can I help?
- (2) Arin: No way, no way. No way.
- (3) Heather: Don't fly; it's dangerous. Stay with me. [Heather held a bear up, speaking for the bear to no one in particular.]
- (4) Sam: I wish my mom was here. [Speaking for one of the animals he was holding.]
- (5) Heather: I'll get her. [Picking up an adult panther and placing it close to Sam's animal.]
- (6) Mother, we were afraid you would get lost.
- (7) Sam: I go... [Sam moved an adult panther along the carpet with the baby animal. He moved the animals onto Heather's back.]
- (8) Heather: No, that hurts my back, remember?
- (9) I hurt my back and can't carry you. [Speaking to Sam's animals.]
- (10) Sam: But can I get on back? [As the baby animal.]

- (11) Heather: Yeah, but don't be heavy. You are heavy child. Can get on grizzly. [Picking up a panther and a bear.]
- (12) Heather: You're going to have a baby boy. No, a baby girl.
- (13) She's going to be pretty. [Pretending her panther was speaking to Sam's panther.]
- (14) You're going to have to walk instead of me carrying you.
- (15) Sam: I can't walk. [As the panther]
[Heather gathered up several of her animals.]
- (16) Heather: You are all my children.
- (17) Hey y'all guys, you're not supposed to help him.
- (18) We're going to have to go to the family now,
- (19) so we're going to have to be good. Come on, sweetie."
[Picking up the panther.]
[Arin walked around the block center, similar to an animal stalking its prey. With a baby animal, Sam made a growling sound toward Heather's panther.]
- (20) Heather: I hate you child!" [To Sam's animal.]
- (21) Sam: I can't change. [Emphasizing each word.]
- (22) Heather: Everyone, you have a great sleep. [Holding up a bear.]
- (23) Don't go in there.

In the above, Heather, transformed the Grizzly from a killer animal to one who acted out care (*Can I help?* Episode 14:2; line 1), protection (*Don't fly; its' dangerous. Stay with me.* Episode 14:2; line 3) and guidance (*Don't hurt my back,*

remember? I hurt my back and can't carry you. Episode 14:2; line 3). She pretended that her panther conversed with Sam's panther, demonstrating affection as she commented on how the new baby would look and showing care in letting the expectant panther know it would have to walk, instead of being carried by Heather.

Later, Heather proclaimed the animals as *all my children*, then provided guidance (*We're going to have to go to the family now, so we're going to have to be good. Come on, sweetie.* Episode 14:2; line 18 and 19) Heather appeared to be in her own play world, behaving responsively toward the animals, but interacting little or not at all with the other children. For example, when Sam responded to Heather's angry statement (*I hate you child!* Episode 14:2; line 20) in saying he could not change, she seemed to ignore him and instead comforted the animals (*Everyone, you have a great sleep.* Episode 14:2; line 22), then protected them (*Don't go in there.* Episode 14:2; line 23).

Throughout the episode, Heather appeared to be intent on protecting and caring for her own and others' animals. Her pretending with the animals was of interest to the other children; Sam and Arin seemed to play off Heather's ideas. When the play shifted from Sam's and Heather's calm interactions concerning Sam's baby animal and the expectant panther to Arin's aggressive behaviors with the grasshopper, Heather once again protected her animal – the panther – while assisting Sam in searching for his animal's mother.

Over a period of weeks, I was seeing more and more instances of the core players in this classroom as they played out intense topics in centers that

contained simple animal figures that seemed to represent many things. I continued to observe that the children acted out situations with the animals involving danger of such magnitude that it included killing, even of family members, accompanied by expressions of grief and indignation. Other situations included danger or threat of danger and rescue attempts, followed by caring that included bedding down, feeding, and sheltering the baby animals within the block constructions or shelving that surrounded them, only to return again to another dangerous scenario.

What a tapestry of play topics, emotions, and personal experiences I was seeing! And what a paradox that woven into the fibers of these intense play dramas were features of nurturing: comfort and affection (Edwards, 1986) and guidance, protection, and care (Fogel, et al., 1986). What seemed striking to me were the freedom and the opportunities the children were given to enact and reenact these situations. Their teacher had established a classroom that nourished pretend play, allowing the pretending to happen, freely and forthrightly. Mrs. Prince trusted the play environment where expressions of nurturing could occur in pretend play. I could imagine by this she might say, “In children’s play, I have to make it happen (play) in order to *let* it happen (nurturing).”

As I began to analyze my data, I read anew what Hartley, et al. (1954) said about viewing dramatic play as beneficial to children’s learning and that through pretending, children have “potentiality to change” (p. 91), and that “subtle, unobtrusive guidance from the teacher can make dramatic play an instrument of growth, not only for the timid, hesitant child, but for the scattered, aggressive youngster as well” (p. 91). Mrs. Prince had said that she viewed nurturing - and

seemed to mesh her convictions each day in her work with children - as helping children to grow, moving them from one place to the other. How did her hands-off approach, her near non-intervention approach to pretend play facilitate change in children? How did her play environment that included play about violent things promote growth that included children being able to express nurturance and understand nurturance in peers' role play?

In this classroom, I had noticed many features in the children's play that had nothing to do with nurturance. In addition, I had found nothing in the literature that talked about a classroom environment that allowed such freedom for the children to explore play topics, in particular violent play topics, and its facilitation of children's nurturing. In more current research, Katch (2001) talked about her own university lab school kindergarten in which she observed the way the children used violent play topics in their pretend play.

Often, the children's play included violent themes they had viewed on television or in movies. The author (Katch, 2001) found that children who were often not included in other children's pretend play would retaliate with physical or verbal aggression. The children often excluded others by using name-calling or some other kind of physical or verbal hurt toward the child who wanted to join the play. Rather than eliminate violent pretend play, the author worked with her university students to explore issues concerning the children's fantasies. They began to guide the children in problem solving and negotiating change in the kinds of rules that might work out ways of regulating what could and could not be verbalized in the classroom, while still permitting expression through pretend

play. Katch suggested that the children learned empathy through the process of collaboration and negotiation.

Katch's descriptions and other research are not what my study is about. I am exploring how this classroom context that encourages pretend play where children are free to play out such intense topics might promote nurturance. One result of such ultimate freedom may be that the children can reach a point where nurturing can happen and they are able to share among themselves pretend opportunities for helping, concern, and protection. Before presenting my analyses, it is important to consider what the children had to say about their pretend play. In the following examples, I will describe interviews that I conducted with some of the core players in the children's classroom.

INTERVIEWING THE CHILDREN

It was difficult to find an opportunity to interrupt the children from their usual routine in order to have a private conversation with them because they were usually very preoccupied with pretend play, and I did not want to intrude upon that. In my attempt to interview, the children often appeared uninterested and even restless. On one occasion, when we gathered in the hallway, one of the children kept asking when she could return to the Center to play. Another interview opportunity seemed to be unproductive when several of the children and I went into a classroom across the hall, and the two girls, Lisa and Heather skipped around the empty room the entire time talking about the play date they were planning.

Interviewing Heather

I was never able to get all five of the master players together at one time for an interview. It was very difficult to get the children to turn loose of their play. On several occasions over the course of the semester, I had observed these children turning down invitations from the interns to join one of the structured activities that day. The children were not willing to give up their pretend play. In spite of the problems of getting the children organized, several interviews were obtained. An opportunity arose one day when Heather was sitting in the block center by herself, holding a plastic spider. Other plastic insects and crustacean looking creatures were grouped on the carpet beside her. I was sitting on the floor near her and could hear her speaking softly to the spider. I asked her if the spider she was holding was the leader and she replied that the spider was the mommy checking to see if it was dangerous before taking the others out “one out at a time” (April 15 Interview).

It was a spontaneous interview, and thus seems to lend itself to discussion within the body of the text, which I will do, rather than presenting it in a script format. Heather went on to say that the mother spider was watching out for danger, and that she would take the others out only one at a time, adding, “The lobster’s not allowed-it’s spooky”. Heather said that the mother was leaving to go on vacation. It would be a long trip, she elaborated, but the mother was leaving one of the spiders in charge of the others. She went on to say that the spider that was left in charge could not do any of the work but care for the babies who “are very tired” adding, “and she has to take care of them.”

It is interesting to think about the way Heather wove her plot together as we talked, using human family roles to shape the animals' story. She transformed "human family role play with some elements intact" (Corsaro, 1985, p. 110), interjecting elements of parenting: protection, arranging for care, watchfulness, and wariness. Heather was relying on her knowledge of family roles while constructing what Corsaro contends is the "transformative power" (p. 111) of pretend play in which children add elements that are not typical of human family situations. I saw evidence of this when Heather next picked up one of the spiders from the carpet and said that the baby was aware of danger "out there" and that it could take care of itself by "squirting on the thing," calling the thing, a "level." She then moved the baby spider next to the mother spider.

Heather was joined by Ben who entered the block center, looked at Heather playing with the spiders and proclaimed, "It's a dog, right there. It's a dog; it's a dog; it's a dog." Heather picked up an elk and declared to Ben, "Look, it's eating grass, and it's taking it to it's baby." She then made a barking sound toward Ben. The interaction between the two children aptly illustrates Corsaro's (1985) contention that children often intersperse family characteristics with animal pretend play in activities that are unrelated. In the process children "*mutually construct a play context* which transforms human family role play so that it includes personally valued behavior like mobility and aggressiveness while at the same time preserving many of the human family texts and structures. . ." (p. 111). Corsaro suggests that children share the social knowledge of their families to help them organize and maintain their interactions with one another.

A Group Interview

On another day, I talked with Heather, Sam, and Lisa. The three children had been playing in the block center and it was time for clean-up before gathering for a large group time. On this particular occasion, the four of us went out into the hallway for the interview. John and Arin seemed very involved in clean-up away from the block center, and I decided not to disturb their activity.

Researcher: I am interested in learning from you about the way you play. A little while ago Will, I heard you say for the baby tiger you were holding, “I defeated the buffalos.” Then, you said, “Nobody wants me,” for the baby tiger. Then Lisa, you brought over the adult lion and set it close to the tiger. What was going on?

Lisa: The lion was the baby tiger’s real mom. They match.

Researcher: What were you thinking about as you moved the mom to the baby?

Lisa: Because they all match.

Researcher: Why the *real* mom, though?

Lisa: His real mom. The real mommy, that was her baby. The mommy wanted to be helpful.

Heather: Well, I wanted a turn to talk.

Researcher: What are you thinking about?

Heather: The lion eats baby dinosaurs, and the baby ran to the mom.

Sam: Sometimes you hear someone say, “Don’t harm my baby.”

Researcher: What would the mommy do?

Heather: Run to mommy because they are scared and think it might really be real, and something would eat them.

Heather went on to say that when she felt scared at night she would run to her mother, and her mother would let her sleep with her. I asked her how that made her feel, and she said she felt protected. It is worth noting that the three children were contributing to our conversation according to their shared understandings about the features of families, both human and animal: Babies get scared and mommies help and protect babies. The fantastical elements of babies being exposed to the danger of lions that eat baby dinosaurs combined with the realism of what Corsaro (1985) calls “elements intact” (p. 110) (in this case, a mother’s help and protection) may have helped the children to make sense of their pretend play and to articulate what they were understanding about nurturing within family relationships and roles.

Interviewing Heather and Lisa

On a day when a posted sign announced that Heather was snack helper, Sam asked if he could be Heather’s assistant. Heather appeared to be excited and walked about the classroom letting others know about her responsibility for that day. When Sam asked if he could be her assistant with snacks, Heather smiled and answered, that yes, he could be. As Heather walked into the housekeeping center where Lisa was, I heard the following interchange between Lisa and Heather.

- (1) Lisa: But, I wanted to be your assistant.
- (2) Heather: But today is the day when you can go to my house.
- (3) Welllllll, maybe not.

(4) But maybe we can say it to make you feel better.

I decided to interview Lisa and Heather before Heather had a chance to get busy preparing the snack tables. As I sat on the floor in the Housekeeping center, I asked the two girls if they would join me for a few minutes.

(5) Researcher: I heard you talking about making a play date
for today. Can you tell me about that?

(6) Heather: Because she plays with me. Friends are playful.

(7) Researcher: In what way?

(8) Lisa: It is helpful to be nice.

(9) Researcher: What do you do if someone is not nice?

(10) Lisa: Tell teachers or mom. Say: Are you okay?

(11) Heather: Sorry.

(12) Lisa: The one's that hurt you, I forgive you. 'Cause one time

(13) when I was hurt, with my friend, Ashley. She called me,

(14) "Just a baby."

(15) Researcher: What did you do?

(16) Lisa: Well. . . "I forgive you."

(17) Then, we played together.

(18) Sometimes, we wrestle with Dad.

(19) Researcher: What if someone gets hurt?

(20) Lisa: My sister and I hug each other.

(21) Wrestling is fun. If someone got hurt. . .

(22) Heather: Say, "It's not fair."

- (23) Lisa: One day, well my sister was playing, and I had to be the
(24) audience. First, she was nice, then mean.
(25) Heather: Once my sister pushed me and she said, “The shut-up girl,”
(26) and she said she’d never play with me again.
(27) And I said, “Cassie, that’s not okay because
(27) I want to give. . .”
(28) I don’t know why she didn’t want that.
(29) She said, “Your mommy is all mine.”
(30) And I said, “She’s the only mom I have.”
(31) Mommy told her that’s not okay.

These examples suggest to me that Heather was thinking about the reactions and responses around her; she recognized disappointment in Lisa’s comment that she wanted to be snack assistant. Then, Heather tried to cheer Lisa by inviting her to her house, and saying that at least extending the invitation might make Lisa feel better.

The above interviews are revealing to me in several ways. First of all, the children appeared to have no problem in expressing what they were thinking about their pretending. Their clarity of speech and confident seeming manner reaffirmed to me their great capacity to pretend play. Moreover, the children were demonstrating “stylistic flexibility” (p. 265), a term suggested by Bateson (1971) describing children’s ability to recognize role taking as a way to play out what they know and fit their understandings into the context of their pretending. In fact at times during the interviews, the children seemed to continue their role play,

weaving the plot into our discussions. There were emotions implied through the children's collective talk about mothering; it may be that these children were constructing the nurturing features of mothering as a text within the subtext of danger involving the animals. The children were able to talk about hostile themes, turning them into nurturing features: for example, there were "spooky" elements nearby, and the mother spider made sure things were safe before taking the baby out; they pretended about a lion that eats baby dinosaurs, and the baby animal ran to its mother.

In considering the way the children were able to talk about how they were using the animals to construct texts that had to do with features of nurturing, I have to think about how my presence, questions, and comments may have caused them to respond in less than reliable ways. Perhaps they wanted to please me, the adult observer, with their answers. The children's comments, however, helped me to reflect upon the classroom context that was allowing the pretend play to happen among these participants.

LOOKING AT NON-PRETEND PLAY SITUATIONS

Most of my observations of the children were conducted during their freely chosen play time. On only rare occasions during these times were the children (the master players} engaged in activity outside of pretend play. However, I had the opportunity to observe several non-pretend play situations, two of which I will present here.

Being Snack Helper

The first one I will present is related to the above interview concerning snack helper (p. 166, line 1). As evident in the above conversation, the snack helper responsibility in this Center was a much sought-after task for these children. On each day, a different child would get to put out the snacks, counting out and placing napkins, cups, snack baskets, then water and milk pitchers, all preparations in readying two tables for the children's refreshments. The names were rotated so that each child would get a turn before starting the names again. Each day I observed children approach the snack helper sign to attempt to find out who would be snack helper. A child would read the name, sometimes with help from the teacher, then inform the snack helper child or even another child about who would be assuming that responsibility.

From the attention given to the assigned role, it was obvious that the task was one the children looked forward to. Earlier in the semester, the children began requesting to be the assistant to the snack helper. This happened often enough, and I observed the teacher posting the children's names on a sign displayed on the wall. The assistant child's name would be removed from the top of the list as the job was completed each day, narrowing the choices each day until all children completed a turn. On this day, the teacher guided Heather to the list and reminded her she could choose from the three names left on the list. Heather went to one of the children, Elizabeth, and said, "Helper?" Elizabeth moved to the snack tables and began setting out napkins. Sam's name was not on the list. However, instead of moving to the carpeted area to sit and read with the

college interns, as was the usual procedure, he went to wash his hands. The following scenario was observed.

- (1) Heather: Why are you washing hands? [To Sam]
- (2) But, why are you really washing hands? [Sam ignored Heather, and started passing out napkins.]
- (3) Mrs. Prince: Sam, you'll need to get a book. [Sam stomped off and hid under the piano, then went to the door leading to the outside, as if to open it. Mrs. Prince gently closed the door and led Sam away.]
- (4) You can be angry, but you have to stay in the classroom. [Heather and Elizabeth continued to put out the snacks, with the teacher guiding them. Sam walked over and stuck out his tongue toward the teacher. She either did not appear to notice or pretended not to notice, for she did not look his way. Sam stayed in the snack table area.]
- (5) Heather: Sam, go. You can't be assistant.
- (6) Sam: No! [Sam walked to books and hid his face toward the bookshelf. He walked around the room, carrying a book, looking at the pages.]
- (7) Heather: That's not nice. [I am not sure why Heather said this to Sam.]
- (8) Sam: 'Cause I wanted to be helper. [He approached Heather.]
- (9) Mrs. Prince: Your name wasn't up there. [Indicating the assistant list.]

- (10) It's not Heather's fault. It is not your turn.
[When the children gathered to sit at the snack tables,
Sam sat at one end of the table next to where Heather sat.]
- (11) Heather: It's not my fault. [Looking at Sam]
- (12) Sam: I'm never playing again. [He crossed his arms and
turned his head to face away from the table.]
- (13) Heather: I'm making you. It wasn't your turn. [Sam spit at Heather.]
- (14) You can spit at Elizabeth.
- (15) Sam: No. You were the snack helper. [Sam filled his juice to the
top of his cup. Lisa sat at the same table.
- (16) Lisa: It's half a cup.
- (17) Sam: No! I didn't. . . I'm very thirsty. [He filled the cup
again, full. Sam smiled and poured more juice.]
- (18) Heather: You're getting the juice. [Said to Sam in a soft toned
voice. Sam turned his back on Heather, looking behind
him.]
- (19) Don't get really mean. It will hurt his feelings too much.
[Said to Lisa. Sam kept his back turned and held onto the
chair. Sam spit at Heather again. Now, Heather faced
backwards in her chair.]
- (20) Lisa: Maybe we could stop. I've got a plan.
[Heather noticed that Elizabeth was pouring the last of
the juice.]

- (21) Heather: Don't take all of it.
- (22) Lisa: I've got a plan. When we go outside. . . [Sam looked at Heather with a glare.]
- (23) Heather: You are thinking Sam is not my friend. [Said to Lisa. Heather looked at Sam.]
- (24) Sorry. I'm sorry, Sam. [Immediately, Sam looked less angry.]
- (25) Sam: Rooster's doing it," "Cock a doodle-do. [He moved from side to side and opened his mouth, with food inside.]
- (26) Heather: Oh, gross, Sam. [Sam put his napkin in his mouth.]
- (27) Sam: It tastes like paper.
- (28) Heather: But, paper tastes. . . . [Sam smiled at Heather.]
- (29) Sam: Was that your first time? [He repeated this three times.]
- (30) Heather: For what?
- (31) Sam: First time to eat paper?
- (32) Heather: No. [She smiled, but she did not put her napkin in her mouth.]

The children continued at the snack table for a while. As I left, they were still eating and talking, and laughing. Circle time would be next, followed by outdoor play. In this scenario, the children were responding to some real-world situations that demonstrated their need to be responded to in intense and immediate ways (Hendrick, 2003). Early on, Heather seemed to be showing a

sense of justice in finding out whether Sam was going to respect the snack helper signs (Lines 1 and 2), follow Mrs. Prince's direction to find a book instead (Line 5), and convince him it was not her fault, but the procedure of the classroom (Lines 11 and 13). It is interesting to me that Heather gave Sam an alternative to being mad at her in telling him he could "spit on Elizabeth" instead of on her (14). It may be that Sam was not able to reason about the rules of the classroom, given his stressful seeming circumstance; perhaps he returned to more immature thought, expressing wishful like actions (Gould, 1972) without considering the consequences of that.

It seems clear that Heather was very aware of Sam's discomfort and was responding to him by offering "physical and emotional resources" (Edwards, 1986, p. 95) such as giving direction to him to follow the rules and by offering an alternative to his spitting on her, even if these solutions might be construed as unorthodox. Sam rejected the offer to spit on another child and tended to blame Heather instead (Line 15). Heather was very careful about responding to Sam, using a soft voice to remind him he was getting all of the juice (Line 18), then warning Lisa to not get mean toward Sam (Line 19). There was a responsiveness manifested from Heather's constant watching over of the situation at the snack table that very much included Sam's being upset with her. She seemed to be "dancing around" Sam, being careful to facilitate dialogues that might soothe the situation and reestablish a relationship with him. I was reminded of how it has been written that children can provide a secure base for one another, giving comfort or companionship in the absence of the mother (Bowlby, 1988; Dunn,

1993), fulfilling “the category of caregiver, nurturer, and guider” (Dunn, 1993, p. 23). I marveled at Heather’s intuitive seeming thinking when she conveyed to Lisa that she knew what she was thinking (Line 23), that she thought Sam was no longer her friend.

I am remembering what Edwards (1986) contended is a part of nurturing, the way children sort out what they think are cogent concerns of others’ well-being. Heather pushed for a solution finally in saying she was sorry to Sam (Line 24); it was at this point when Sam could once again laugh and say funny things to draw Heather to him. I am reminded of the lines from the children’s book, *The Dance*, (Evans, 1999), “She lay her face against his, took his hand, and they swayed back and forth. In this way, they danced once more” (p. 24). After the struggles of sorting through the emotions (Edwards, 1986) that happen sometimes amidst the day-to-day experiences children undergo in building relationships (Edwards, 1986) , Heather and Sam were able to renew their friendship and start anew.

Understand Me

On an occasion later in the semester, I was able to observe a situation that began with pretend play, but worked into a non-play situation that I feel is important to include. This was later in the semester. Sam was in the block center and began building a construction with wooden blocks, looking at and trying to duplicate another block structure near him. Lisa joined Sam. The two children engaged in conversation about Sam’s block construction. Heather was also in the block center, playing by herself. She lined up an assortment of animals, counting

them, and talking to them. As I had observed her doing other times, Heather was enacting a theme that had to do with the protection of animals, saying, “Come in to protect for wild,” as she gathered several baby tigers from the assortment on the carpet. Sam seemed to be focused on building and on interacting with Lisa, but seemed not to notice Heather. Lisa moved by the other construction.

(1) Sam: Don’t mess with that! [Lisa watched Sam move animals away from the construction.]

(2) Would you be super mad at me if I broke it?

(3) Lisa: No.

(4) Sam: We could build it back up. [Sam made a few blocks fall.]

(5) I didn’t mean to scare you.

(6) Lisa: You didn’t. [Commenting on the block structure was the focus of their play. More than his interest in building, Sam seemed more focused on Lisa’s reaction to the falling blocks. Neither child responded when Heather began to build with blocks, dropping them hard enough to make a loud sound.]

(7) Sam: I didn’t mean to scare you.

(8) Lisa: But, you always sit by me? You can sit by me. [Sam continued to build by alternating the blocks, placing one on top of the other in a crisscross design.]

(9) I need to attach these. [He attempted to connect the two constructions.]

(10) Lisa: Very smart! Pretend. . .” [She tried to place some animals on the construction.]

(11) Sam: No, don’t put it on there. They’re moving to face me. It’s okay. [Sam set the animals on top of the construction.]

In the above, we have mutuality between Lisa and Sam. Lisa complimented Sam’s block construction; she made it clear they would sit together at snacks. Sam was considerate of Lisa (Lines 2, 5, & 7); there was give and take between the two. All during this time, Heather had continued playing alone, appearing to ignore Sam and Lisa. Heather left the block center then returned to the entrance carrying a piece of paper.

(13) Heather: I made something for you. [Both Sam and Lisa stood, then walked toward Heather.]

(14) Lisa: Sam is going to sit by me. [Heather looked at Sam.]

(15) But, you were my first friend.

(16) Lisa: But, he wants to marry me.

(17) Heather: What if yall forget?

(18) Sam: Well, I will never forget.

(19) Lisa: Sam wants to marry me.

(20) Sam: Stop fighting. Mom said I could marry who I wanted to.

(21) Heather: But, mom said I had to marry you.

(22) Lisa: Well, you can marry whoever. . .

(23) Heather: How about two?

(24) Lisa: No! Only one boy and one girl.

(25) Heather: But, mommy was daddy's first friend. [Heather paused a couple of seconds before going on.]

(26) Then, I could cry to never see you again.

(27) Sam: But, you could live close to me, and we could have grass together.

(28) Heather: I never get to see Sam again. [Using a loud, cry sounding voice.]

In the above situation, the children tried to understand and to set each other straight on the rules and customs of marriage. We see Sam making some attempt to soothe Heather. He sought to alleviate her distress somewhat at least, by offering an alternate solution. But Heather persevered, trying to figure a way to be part of the scenario Lisa and Sam had created. Her intense arguments suggest implicitly a caring on Heather's part, her desire to be included. Through her perseverance, Heather tried to make clear her hurt and her feelings of rejection, both through her negotiations and through her cries. Heather's offering behaviors (giving Sam a paper) have introduced novelty in a metapragmatic way to regulate the play of her peers (Sawyer, 1997) and to identify her emotions.

Now, Sam and Lisa went back to Blocks and Heather took her paper to the writing table, where she began to compose a note; an intern sat at the table next to Heather. Heather told the intern that Sam said he would not marry her. The intern responded with, "Oh." Heather wrote Sam's name at the top of her paper, then asked the intern to help her with spelling, carefully forming letters to compose the following: UNDERSTAND (the first line) and Me (the second line).

Heather then got up, taking her paper with her, approaching Mrs. Prince who was working at the art table nearby. Heather related her experience with Sam and Lisa, explaining to Mrs. Prince that Sam was the first boy she had ever known and that he needed to marry her. Mrs. Prince replied with the following.

(29) Mrs. Prince: You don't have to marry the first boy your know,
Heather.

(30) I remember when I was in college and met Mr. Prince.

(31) I had dated many boyfriends. Mr. Prince had dated a lot of
girlfriends.

(32) We each had many friends before we ever married.

(33) You'll have lots of friends before you marry someday.

[Heather looked around the room.]

(34) Heather: I think this will be better. This says, "Understand me."

(35) "Understand that I love you." [Heather then colored on the
paper, using crayons. She walked to the housekeeping
center where Sam and Lisa were now playing. Sam was
setting the little kitchen type table with dishes. Heather
handed her written paper to Sam.]

(36) This says, 'Understand me.' Now maybe you will
understand.

(36) Sam: I'll put it in my locker.

(37) Heather: That [Sam's name.] starts with 'S.' It starts with a "S."
[Heather took the paper and put it in Sam's locker.]

As in the previous segment, Heather found ways to convey her need to belong and to share in the relationships formed through the play of her peers. Products of her writing and creative skills (the written note and the collage) were harbingers in assisting Heather to influence her peers. Actions such as these demonstrate Heather's ability to attain social goals, which I believe demonstrates her ability to communicate her feelings and to understand the behaviors of others (Denham, 1998). What from these non-pretend play episodes conveyed nurturing? In the first situation, we have Heather's responsiveness to another's distress (Melson, et al., 1986), in this case, Sam's unwillingness to accept that he could not be snack helper. In the second situation, we may have what Thompson (1987) refers to as reactive distress, a means for Heather to understand why Sam was not returning her wish to commit to a long-term relationship, such as marriage someday. Perhaps Heather's reaction was not one of responsivity, but one of self-interest. However, Heather and Sam in their disagreement over who had the right to claim him, with the intense feelings and emotions that were involved, may have created a situation that called for nurturing features to emerge.

I recall what Reifel and Yeatman (1993) discussed about playmates serving as human pivots - in this case a series of actions between Heather and Sam - that might have nudged emotions that created opportunities for nurturing to occur. When Heather could not convince Sam to commit to her, she wrote a message to Sam and offered it to him. Was she trying to persuade him or sway him into committing to her? I cannot know for sure what she was thinking, but she engaged in an action many would consider as responsive and even caring. I

cannot help but reflect on Heather's influence on her own actions and those of the other children through these reality-based situations. As noted in the literature (Gould, 1972; Katch, 2001), children are capable of reality-based communication with the peers and adults in their environments. What was Mrs. Prince's influence?

The shift in focus from the children who were participating in pretend play that could lead to nurturance to the classroom context that supports such play is important. It allows one to consider how it is possible that nurturing features can emerge through classroom play. In this chapter, I have presented my data. These are the things I have found:

- In their role play, children used expressions of nurturing such as saving, protection, sheltering, helping, and reassurance.
- Children used the toy animals and each other to pretend about topics that appear to require nurturing features, such as abandonment, death of family members, the killing of family members, and other threats of lurking danger.
- Non-nurturing features occurred in pretend play.
- Nurturing features occurred in non-pretend play situations.
- The classroom environment provided a context for nurturing.
- The teacher orchestrated the classroom environment that allowed pretend play to happen and nurturing features to emerge.

I will turn now to my discussion, which will be conducted within the episodes of the children who are members of the core players in the same

classroom. In addition, I will discuss the relationship between the classroom environment I have presented in these chapters and how the children express nurturance and how they appear to understand nurturing in peers' role play.

Chapter 5: Discussion/Conclusions

My study finds that children express and appear to understand nurturance in the context of pretend play. Through pretend play, children have an array of opportunities to experience features of nurturing. Having been immersed within the children's pretend play episodes, I have found their process of pretending to contain a complexity that indeed weaves together multiple strands that form a tapestry of emotions and reenactments of what to children may be the most important components of their lives.

My study offers a view that suggests that pretend play is a means for children to try out nurturance and to begin to understand nurturing. I have found a classroom context that allows nurturing to emerge through the teacher's actions and beliefs and the children's expressions of responsiveness, and am viewing these through the lens of pretend play. My study reveals that some of children's nurturing happens after they have "played out" features that have nothing to do with what one thinks about when considering nurturance. Moreover, the classroom context has a critical role in allowing nurturance to happen among children. Inclusion of two aspects of children's pretend play competence - children's expression of nurturance and their understanding of nurturing - illustrates how the classroom environment makes unique contributions to children's interactions with their peers. In the following, I will list and describe my findings.

FINDINGS

1. Children play through emotion arousing features that can include danger and even life threatening events in order to get to a place where they can begin to express nurturing. Children appear to understand nurturing in peers' role play by playing out these intense features that seem to have nothing to do with nurturing.
 - 1a. The nurturing and non-nurturing features are threads in a tapestry that consists of paradox like aspects, such as: danger/rescue; sadness/joy; life/death; and harm doing/sheltering.
2. Nurturance must be seen as embedded within a tapestry woven of emotional content that includes children's relationships with one another and with their families.
3. A part of the tapestry is that children express nurturance by playing out their fascination with popular culture characters and roles.
4. A teacher's trust in children's capacity to role play about how they are making sense of the world appears to foster children's expressions of nurturance and includes a teacher's hand-off approach that can allow for children to begin to understand nurturing through role playing about nurturing and about intense and even violent topics.

My findings are embedded within the expository text of this chapter. Finding one is discussed beginning on p. 216. Finding one (a) is discussed beginning on p. 223. Findings two and three are discussed beginning on p. 224. Finally, finding four is discussed beginning on p. 228. Before discussion of the findings, I will present the three topics that were present within the classroom of my study. These topics answer my research questions of, “How do children express nurturance in pretend play?” and “Do children appear to understand nurturing in peers’ role play?” Within each of my topics are subtopics; therefore, I will present these subtopics as well. Next, I will discuss each of these topics and their related subtopics, beginning with: children’s expressions of nurturing within pretend play, going on to discuss: the classroom environment that supported pretend play and non-pretend play, and finally: how children expressed nurturing outside of pretend play. Then, I will present my conclusions: the implications for practice, the implications for research, and the limitations of my study. Last, I will discuss the threads that make up the tapestry of the classroom.

Topics of Nurturing in an Early Childhood Classroom

Based upon their pretend play and classroom interactions, nurturing was revealed in a number of ways. There were three topics present within the classroom context of my study in answering how children express nurturance in pretend play and how they appear to understand nurturing in peers’ role play. The first topic addresses how the children expressed nurturing features within pretend play. Within this first topic, there are several subtopics. The children in my selected classroom participated in pretend play on an ongoing basis throughout

the semester. The pretend play environment was all about the children's interactions with each other. In their pretending, nurturing features were observed. The following characteristics entailed in the children's expressions of nurturing appeared.

- The children expressed nurturing features within pretend play.
- The classroom environment supported both pretend play and non-pretend play and provided the children with opportunities to express and to understand nurturing in their peers' pretend play.
- The children expressed nurturing features outside of pretend play.

Features Within Pretend Play

The children participated in pretend play on an ongoing basis throughout the semester. The pretend play environment was all about the children's interactions with each other. In their pretending, nurturing features were observed. With the first item - how the children expressed nurturing features within pretend play - I observed a number of subtopics in children's pretend play interactions.

- The children used the following nurturing like features in their pretend play such as saving, sheltering, helping, comforting, concern, and guidance.
- There were also counter-examples of non-nurturing features in the children's pretend play that included nurturing arousing events and demonstrated dramatizing qualities in their pretend play.
- The children embellished their pretend play by alluding to characters and events from pop culture.

- The children pretended about family relationships.

Features of the Classroom Environment

I also found an array of subcategories embedded within the classroom environment that reveals features about the teacher's approaches in facilitating the children's activities.

- The classroom environment provided a context for nurturing. The teacher, Mrs. Prince established a physical environment that included defined centers filled with an array of materials that were developmentally appropriate.
- In addition, the schedule of activities that included freely chosen play time allowed the children opportunities to demonstrate features of nurturing in their pretend play.
- Moreover, the teacher orchestrated the classroom environment that allowed pretend play to happen and nurturing features to emerge.

Subcategories Outside of Pretend Play

Although nurturance was revealed primarily in the children's pretend play, there were also situations in non-play situations that warrant discussion. There are two subcategories I will discuss, as follows.

- Children's conflicts and resolutions during non-pretend play situations,
- Children's expressions of nurturing during non-pretend play situations, and

- Children's attempts to maintain friendships.

I have presented the features of the classroom environment and topics and subtopics of feature of nurturing I observed. I will now present a discussion of the findings and will then present the conclusion with a discussion of the implications for practice and research, and the threads in the tapestry.

Discussion of Findings

Children's Nurturing Features Within Pretend Play

To address finding one, that children play through emotion arousing features that can include danger and even life threatening events in order to get to a place where they can begin to express nurturing; and that children appear to understand nurturing in peers' role play by playing out these intense features that seem to have nothing to do with nurturing, I will discuss the following.

My findings offer a comprehensive view of the way children are developing awareness of their own as well as others' nurturing features. Children use responsive acts that appear to consider the needs of others by using the following aspects of nurturance: saving, helping, comfort, concern, and guidance, among others. More specific to my study is that these acts of nurturing were manifested through the children's pretending with and about the toy animals in the preschool classroom. Moreover, children experience nurturing by the way they dramatize relationships and danger in their role play with one another and with materials, such as toy animals. First, we will look at how children play through emotion arousing features that can include danger and even life threatening events in order to get to a place where they can begin to express

nurturing. Children appear to understand nurturing in peers' role play by playing out these intense features that seem to have nothing to do with nurturing.

Responsive acts of emotion arousing features

The responsive acts among the children indicated early on that a close-knit relationship existed among them within the context of pretend play. The children in my study were establishing relationships with one another during the course of the semester. At the beginning of the semester, it was clear that the group of children I viewed as “master players” (Reynolds & Jones, 1997) were immersed in pretend play that was revealing of nurturing features. During my first observation in the classroom (p. 56), one of the children in this group, Heather, demonstrated helping actions toward the toy rhinoceros; another one of the key players, Sam, provided protection for Heather’s panther by pretending that his tiger used saving efforts (p. 58). Soon afterward, Lisa, still another member of the master players, demonstrated concern toward the animals that the children were pretending lost their mothers by offering to be the animals’ mommy (p. 58). Later during this time period, Heather showed care by saying she was not bad, appearing to reassure the lion cub (p. 59).

The ongoing drama of the toy animals being abandoned following the killing of their mothers required responsive acts; nurturing did indeed happen. Heather seemed instrumental in setting up the conditions for responsive actions to unfold as part of the drama taking place. The other children began to tweak her ideas, playing off her ongoing drama and were soon joined by Arin, then John, the other two members of the master player group. These two boys were able to join

the drama by pretending using the plastic dragonflies. The entry of “new” characters – the dragonflies - and the characters’ threat of “putting green stuff on the children” (p. 70, Episode 1:3; line 4) added to the plot in progress and presented opportunities for the children to respond, in this case, with Sam’s statement of, “I’m trying to save you” (p. 70, Episode 1:3; line 5) The dragonfly routine was followed by Heather’s presenting a new danger to John, this time a pretend hyena, followed by her reassurance about the animals’ safety and John’s acknowledgement of reassurance as well.

I found that there was a rise and fall of self-created crises in the children’s role play. Many have written about how responsive features can emerge in preschool aged children through their repeated experiences with one another, suggesting the benefits of such experiences to emotion understanding (Denham, 1998; Dunn, 1993; Dyson, 1997; Eisenberg, 1986; Erikson, 1959; Fabes, et al., 2001; Fabes, et al., 2000; Fein, 1984; Jones & Reynolds, 1992; Katch, 2001; Paley, 1984/1988; Reifel & Yeatman, 1993; Reynolds & Jones, 1997; Thompson, 1987). Moreover, many write that children create situations with characters who have immediate and intense needs, suggesting that through their interactions in pretend play, the children nourish one another’s ideas, playing with high intensity and dramatizing about relationships and intense topics (Corsaro, 1985; Dyson, 1997; Gould, 1972; Hartley, et al., 1952; Jones & Reynolds, 1992; Katch, 2001; Paley, 1984; Reynolds & Jones, 1997; Wasserman, 2000). What these studies do not address is that in pretend play, the intense dramatic events children portray with the toy animals and with each other allow for the actual pretend expressions

that include nurturing features. Nurturing cannot take place in a vacuum. In their role play, the children allowed danger to have an effect on their pretend play scripts. The children would construct a pretend play script by acting out a danger. For example, in the first episode. Heather created a subtext in proposing danger for the toy rhinoceros (*Oh, oh no. Alligator's going to eat her mother.* (Episode 1:1; line p. 56), then followed up with a text of offering care and protection (*Here, we'll go with you.* Line 2). As Heather moved the rhinoceros through the air, Sam began imitating her actions, using his toy tiger.

Traditional views on nurturing contend that children have capabilities to nurture and that they practice nurturing even at a young age by being responsive to others (Berman, 1986; Fogel, et al., 1986; Melson, et al., 1986). My study suggests that children appear to understand nurturing in each others' role play. The metapragmatics of that, the way the children worked out the sequences of their pretend play (Sawyer, 1997), may have been their effort to decide what the danger meant to their text of care and protection. What Sawyer does not talk about is how pretend play that uses topics fraught with intense topics can provide a vehicle for nurturing to occur. The children in my study created characters that had needs that provided a condition for the children to attend and respond to. Exploration of events requiring saving, protection, sheltering, and care provided opportunities for exploration of nurturing like features. A situation was invented by Heather that her toy rhinoceros' mother was going to be killed by an alligator. When threat came along from Arin and the toy fly toward Sam's tiger, Heather interrupted her own play drama to intervene by sacrificing one of the other

animals, in this case by giving Arin the fox to feed his fly, in place of the tiger. Heather created one life/death event after another, and the other children “played off” her drama to provide help by saving (Sam: *I saved her*. Episode 1:2; line 7) and by helping (Lisa: *I’ll be your mommy*. Episode 1:2; line 12). The rapid succession of these life/death pretend events did not fragment the play; instead, the children moved fluidly in and out of danger events, interjecting nurturing features along the way.

Even later, Heather permitted further pretend danger to unfold in her drama and gradually Arin, then John joined in the dramatizations. The sequence was acted in rhythmical fashion of a drama containing the threat of death and dying followed by attempts to save, followed by more danger-filled drama, followed by attempts to protect, followed by drama from a dangerous animal, followed by reassurance and other features of nurturing. At first blush, Sam’s participation may seem to be mere imitation of Heather’s pretend play actions (moving the animals through space). It may be that children’s personal experiences and individual experiences contribute to the way they think about the various roles they play (Corsaro, 1985; Gould, 1972; Hartley, et al., 1972). But these traditional views of children’s role taking in play cannot account for the range of play scripts created and embellished upon by Heather, Sam, and the other three children. Heather introduced the drama of danger, and Sam played off her threatening pretend themes of a mother’s death (*Can someone be my mommy? Can someone be my mommy?* Episode 1:2; line 9), implying that his tiger had also lost a mommy. Moreover, in this same episode (p. 58), Lisa entered the play

drama to get involved by being responsive to Heather's cub (*I'll be your mommy*. Episode 1:2; line 12). The reality is that the danger elements had to occur in order for the nurturing features to happen.

Nurturing showed up in a number of ways over the course of the semester. In the children's role play, there were always crisis situations going on among the animals in the block center. I found that someone had to create a scenario to be played out in order for nurturing to occur. At times, Heather was the one in charge of the play script. In looking at Episode 2 (p. 78, Episode 2:1; lines 4, 5, and 6), we can see that she used the toy animals to play out an everyday like family situation of a dad bedding down his children, but then brought in a hint of danger ("Stumbled to...pretend they're scared." - P. 78, Episode 2:1, lines 5 and 6). Again, we have family roles and relationships, a peaceful seeming situation, then danger occurring. We see Heather's peers entering her play script already in progress.

My study found that the intense topics in the pretending of the children allowed them to express nurturing and to begin to understand how others in their play worlds, in this case the five master players, could express nurturing as well. During Episodes 2:2 and 2:3 (pp. 79-82), Heather created crisis after crisis; Sam and John joined in Heather's play and even offered other ideas for the play script. By the time Heather offered help then presented another crisis (*Take your pride. Why is your mom so angry with you? Your father attacked your mother.* p. 82, line 14), John and Sam seemed merged into Heather's pretense so that all three of the children appeared immersed in a common script. The literature points out that it is

not unusual for children to use intense and even violent scripts in their pretend play (Gould, 1972; Katch, 2002; Paley, 1982). My study however, illustrates that children must play through features such as danger and life threatening events in order to get to a place where they can begin to express nurturing. Reynolds and Jones (1997) might say that the children were expressing their feelings symbolically in order to deal with their emotions. Dunn (1993) has contended that children in their secure relationships with one another seem to realize that others will respond to them. While these researchers views are helpful in suggesting how children might be constructing understandings about one another's emotions, my study advances our thinking in suggesting that these children had to go through intense and even violent pretend play situations in order to reach a point where they were able to respond to the animals' plight.

I am reminded of older literature that suggested children's responsiveness could be a preface for prosocial predispositions to show up in children's pretending (Mussen & Eisenberg-Berg, 1977). I see the possibility of this when the play drama continued to unfold in episode 2:4 (p. 82) with the children again playing off Heather's ideas. Heather called for help, that the animals were stuck in a wall (Line 3). John asked how he could knock down the wall (p. 83, line 4). Heather said her lion did not have his voice back (p. 83, line 9), and Sam reassured her that then the tiger would be able to talk (2:4, line 10). It seems likely that the responsiveness toward the animals could be an important part of fostering prosocial skills.

My study suggests though that the responsiveness toward others was all about nurturing as situated among other topics; features of nurturing such as helping, protecting, assisting, and reassuring were observed, but other threads such as intense and even violent acts were also seen. Through my study, I see these features as being expressed among the children as a way of exploration leading to an understanding of nurturing.

Nurturing and non-nurturing features

To discuss finding one (a), that the nurturing and non-nurturing features are threads in a tapestry that consists of paradox like aspects, such as: danger/rescue; sadness/joy; life/death; and harm doing/sheltering, I will present the following. At the heart of the children's pretend play was responsiveness to the toy animals' needs; elements of nurturing served as the text of their pretending. However, there were many counter-examples of non-nurturing features in the children's pretend play that served as sub-text. Considering examples 3: 1 and 3:2 (pp. 94-95), it is evident that a nurturing need is established at the beginning of the episode (Heather: *Look, the rhino broke his back*. Line 1). It is as though Heather was taking her hurt rhino on a journey to the doctor that took her through the classroom where she told a continuing story of the rhino's need, narrating as she moved from person to person in the classroom. Heather's text tells us there is need – the rhino has a broken back, and must go to the doctor. He has to eat medicine, and even though he does not like it, he'll have to eat it all. Heather responded to the rhino's needs by accompanying him on the

journey and by seeing to it that the medicine was made “really fast” and by insisting that he take it all.

There was also subtext that included elements having nothing to do with nurturing, but aspects of danger and violence: Heather related that the rhino’s back was broken from being “pushed” by a tiger; she also made it known that the injured rhino was still in control (*No, I’m going to eat you up*. Episode 3:2, line 1), and even pretended the tigers were making the medicine for the rhino. Just when the medicine was almost done, Heather added to her story by telling the intern that the tigers were cutting the rhino’s ears off. There are paradoxes of themes embedded within Heather’s role play, a predator versus prey situation; there is care, protection, and helping, yet constant threat of further injury, even brutal seeming inflicting of pain.

Heather was instrumental in setting up the conditions so that nurturing could occur. She said very early in one episode (p. 108, Episode 5:1) “Hi everybody, remember me? I was very young when my mom died” (Lines 1 and 2). In this particular episode John joined Heather and added his own elements of danger by saying, “Oh no, the turtles are going to be in the flood. We’ve got to be safe” (p. 109, Episode 5:1, line 4). Heather and John established a reciprocal relationship weaving danger in and out of the scenario of the storms and floods. In reading through this episode, we see crisis after crisis, with nurturing elements occurring in between (pp. 109-111, Episode 5:1, lines 5-40). We have a tapestry that consists of paradox like aspects that include: danger/rescue; sadness/joy; life/death; and harm doing/sheltering.

Emotional content, relationships, and fascination with popular culture

In the above, I have presented a description of the way the children were communicating responsive acts that suggest they were expressing nurturance and appearing to understand nurturing through their role play. Next, I will discuss both findings two and three, that nurturance must be seen as embedded within a tapestry woven of emotional content that includes children's relationships with one another and with their families; and a part of the tapestry is that children express nurturance by playing out their fascination with popular culture characters and roles.

Emotional content

By viewing pretend play as an opportunity for children to experience engagement in responsive acts, I see the emerging possibilities of nurturance features they express and also attempt to understand. It may be that the relational bonds (Weiss, 1986) between the children and the toy animals and other children and the investment in each other (Weiss, 1986; Melson, et al., 1986) contribute to those understandings, but they cannot account alone for the understanding of nurturance in peers' role play.

As mentioned, there were often a group of five children in the block center, with Heather the most vocal of the group. For me, Heather was the biggest window into this classroom. The other children tweaked her ideas for play scripts and played off her pretending. With Heather, there was a constant rise and fall of self-created crises. She kept the others involved in the pretend play episodes. In

the following, I will describe the various threads of relationships that seemed embedded in the children's pretend play.

Family relationships

Nurturance must be seen as embedded within a tapestry woven of emotional content that includes children's relationships with one another and their families and their fascination with popular culture characters and roles. Given Erikson's notions (1985), we need to see that the children's microspheres, their individual and unique understandings of the world, provided the children with an array of opportunities to try out family roles that were a part of their lives each day ("Let elephant carry the baby rhino." "And the big sister. The dad does not care that they have another child." P. 67) and the routines and happenings of home that were familiar to them ("Time for everyone to go to bed, except. . . And everybody went to bed." "He had a bad dream. In the morning. . . everyone laughed at him. The mom and dad asked the others, 'Why did you laugh at him?'").

Moreover, the family roles could be tried out and practiced and the relationships embedded within these situations could be dealt with by using characteristics from their favorite movies such as *The Lion King*. The unique microcosmic understandings and ideas of these five children were tried out on a daily basis and appeared to be important threads to be woven into the tapestry of expressions of nurturing and children's attempts to understand nurturing. As described by Dyson (1997) and Schwartzman (1987), the children were using the

classroom materials (the toy animals) to express how they were making sense of the various roles in their personal worlds.

Popular culture features

Similar to Dyson's study of superhero play, the children in my study used character features from popular culture to help form identities with which to play out their plots. Heather's pretend play topics often included the lion cub, Simba, from *The Lion King*, as did the other children's. Unlike the children in Dyson's research, the children in my study were not focused on social consequences or with negotiating solutions that would be satisfying for all. The children's relationships with one another appeared to be important in the way they dramatized the relationships having to do with the pop culture characters and the danger they pretended about with the toy animals.

Heather was the glue, the binding force behind the texts that were created using the animals. She and the other four children often followed the stereotypical plot features that are prevalent in the movies and videos of popular culture: the animal babies were orphaned following the deaths of their family members. There were good characters and bad characters. Some of the animals showed acts of courage, while other animals were presented as threats of danger. It was noted that Heather's mere mention of the animal, *hyena*, and her accompanying sound of "ssss," whispered toward John appeared to startle him and to gain his attention to her ongoing play script. (Further exploration of *The Lion King* cast of characters is that the hyenas that were a part of the movie were considered to be sociopaths of the plains who slunk among elephant graveyards!). The children

pretended that the animals hurt and were hurt by other animals, but these subtexts were not just duplications of what the children had experienced. The texts of caring, helping, protecting, and assisting – all nurturing features – were indicators of the children’s preoccupation with real world responsiveness that was happening within the relationships they formed with one another and with the animals.

It is likely that the toy animals the children referred to as Simba and Scar provided the safe harbor Erikson (1985) talks about for children to explore and even venture out of to share with other children and adults in the macrosphere of their classroom world. The case presented here is that the children were participating in nurturing features and were doing so through the tapestry they were weaving of multiple strands that included one another, the toy animals, relationships involving family members, and scripts of danger. The children were learning about offering acts, that when one is in need, others can respond to those needs. In fact, they were learning that sometimes needs are crucial – people are hurt by extreme situations sometimes and need comforting and reassurance; and in order for nurturing to happen, there has to be something to nurture about.

I observed what Edwards (1986) suggests that nurturing can be for children in bridging their concerns with the well being of others, in this case, the welfare of the toy animals. The case presented here does demonstrate that children do think about the welfare of others in the midst of pretending in role play, but that they add experiential intensity that creates a rich tapestry of nurturance understandings. But what allows these various elements to be played

out? It would be impossible to this study to leave out the classroom context and how it influences the children's role play and ensuing expressions of nurturing.

The Classroom Context

The teacher's facilitation of the classroom

Last, I will discuss finding four, that a teacher's trust in children's capacity to role play about how they are making sense of the world appears to foster children's expressions of nurturance and includes a teacher's hand-off approach that can allow for children to begin to understand nurturing through role playing about nurturing and about intense and even violent topics. Although the features of nurturing were constructed by the children, it was the teacher, Mrs. Prince, who set up the classroom context and allowed pretend play to occur and nurturing to happen.

No other literature that I know of suggests that nurturing can occur among children in a classroom context that allows such intense pretend play to happen. My study is in part about the context, and the relationship between the context and the children's pretend play. It is about the influences of the classroom and the trust of the teacher in the children's play. At the heart of the children's pretending and their expressions of nurturing is the nourishment of the classroom context by the teacher, Mrs. Prince. Mrs. Prince nourished a pretend play atmosphere by establishing and maintaining an environment that included the kinds of play materials and play spaces that were treasured by the children: the block center where the group of master players gathered every day; the toy animals; and the blocks and other materials the children used in the block center. She spoke of her

respect for children and her high regard for play and of being nurtured by people who believed in her and shaped her in her philosophies of how children learn best through the experiences that are the most meaningful, in this case, pretend play opportunities.

Indeed, Mrs. Prince's educational and personal philosophies were put into practice in developing and maintaining a classroom where children could "play out what they know and. . . play out what they've experienced" (Interview, p. 79), going beyond Paley's (1988) description of the ideal classroom as being a way of life for children. Pretend play was a way of life for the master players in this classroom. Mrs. Prince's trust in the children's ability to role-play, without her intervention, gave them opportunities in which to express nurturance even while in the throes of acting out intense and even violent topics. As she related in her interviews, Mrs. Prince has been nourished throughout her lifetime by family ties and influences, by her educative experiences in undergraduate and graduate classes, and by her experiences in working with children. She has opened herself to learning from a variety of life's experiences and from the compelling stories that have arisen from her array of classrooms. I have found that the classroom of my study has been shaped by Mrs. Prince's facilitation and guidance.

In all of my experiences in educational environments I have known of no other classroom that has been created and facilitated with as much care and concern for children's learning needs as Mrs. Prince's classroom. We know from the literature that children do indeed need ample opportunities to engage in dramatic play in order to enhance learning in all the ways that contribute to the

human dimension (Hendrick, 1998/2001; Sawyer, 1997; Wasserman, 2000). Further, classroom play must include developmentally appropriate practices (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997), be supported by a teacher who is willing to provide plentiful opportunities and appropriate materials (Dyson, 1997; Reifel & Yeatman, 1993; Scharzman, 1987) and spaces designated for children's explorations (Kontos, 1999; Reifel & Yeatman, 1993). These views may be applied to Mrs. Prince's classroom, but my study suggests that it is impossible to think of this classroom as put together from only the elements of time, opportunities, materials, and best practices. There was much more going on in this classroom where pretend play was the hallmark of children's learning needs.

A hands-off approach

In the spirit of Paley (1988) and others (Jones & Reynolds, 1992; Reynolds & Jones, 1997), the time given to the children to engage in pretend play and within that to have choices of friends, centers, and materials, may have accounted for the master players becoming more skilled at sustaining play thus reaching a point when they could express nurturing. However, the case presented here is that the children had absolute freedom to use large blocks of time to act out all kinds of topics, including scripts that included brutality, and even killing. My findings suggest that what Mrs. Prince called freely chosen play time, presented the children with free rein to explore their emotions, their experiences, and their interests, with limited if any intervention from her or from the interns in the classroom.

Some suggest that teachers need to initiate play experiences and sustain the play in schools (Keating, et al., 2000; Kontos, 1999), even entering into mutual engagement by intervening in the pretend play situation (Jones & Reynolds, 1992; Monighan-Nourot, et al., 1987; Reynolds & Jones, 1997). These are useful approaches in assisting children to sustain play. These and others (Smilansky & Shefatya, 1990; Wasserman, 2000) have advocated useful approaches for assisting children in sustaining pretend play. My study however, illustrates that these children do not always need adult intervention, even in large blocks of play time.

Mrs. Prince discussed how she saw children play out what they know about nurturing and how they applied it to the settings of the classroom. She went on to say that given the time the children had to pretend play, they would weave their own stories with what they were learning about from the other children's stories as well. In Mrs. Prince's own words, the children would "almost sacrifice anything to sustain play. . . and they want the play to go on and they want it to continue. . . ." (p. 88). The planned schedule that allowed large blocks of time for pretend play was respected and carried out consistently by Mrs. Prince. The master players as well as all the children had the opportunities for nurturing to occur and were able to play out intense and even violent topics. I believe it would be a mistake to apply teacher intervention approaches to Mrs. Prince's classroom when a range of emotional features can be seen including expressions of nurturing.

Mrs. Prince orchestrated the classroom environment that allowed pretend play to happen and nurturing features to emerge. The literature contends that it is not unusual for children to hold fascination for violent topics that they use in pretend play (Gould, 1972; Katch, 2001), and appear to suggest that children's pretend play scripts can be guided or redirected or even used as the basis for class discussions. My study illustrates that children's expressions of nurturance occurred in Mrs. Prince's classroom partly because she allowed freely chosen play that offered time, materials, space, and unlimited expressions of all kinds of topics. By looking at the pretend play of the master players, it is clear there was a full range of emotions being expressed in the tapestry of their play scripts. Added to this Mrs. Prince allowed the children to act out all kinds of emotions, even those that involved killing, maiming, and other similar violent appearing topics. In Episode 6:1 (p. 119-120) and Episode 6:2 (121-122), we have dialogue between the children that embellished the roles of the plastic insects and toy animals as Heather presented a new script (*We're not in your destiny*. Episode 6:1; Line 1) Two of the other master players, Sam and John, joined Heather and helped move the play script along. We have danger from tornados and then protection from the children by forming an enclosure for the animals to have safety underwater.

The children included bravado (I have got that tornado out. Episode 6:1, line 5; Poopy head. Stop right there. Line 15; Try to be bad. I'm bad.), proclamations of danger, both direct and implied (There's a tornado. Line 9; Are you gonna sting me? Line 12), and graphic violent statements (I am bad. I'm gonna kill. I am bad. Episode 6:2; line 6; And we're all bad. I'm trying to kill my

mommy, and she roared at me. Episode 6:2; line 7 and 8; And, I'm gonna kill her too. Mommy, mommy, mommy, I'm bad, I'm bad... Episode 6:2; lines 9 and 10). Mrs. Prince did not question the children or draw them into discussion about their play or attempt to guide their play, but allowed it to happen, even the most violent kinds of pretending. In order for the nurturing to happen, and it did occur in the play script (pp. 122; lines 14-18) when Heather reminded John that the animals were alone now, and she protected the other animals (the bug and the turtle) by reminding them to be safe, the intense and violent pretending had to occur first. Having played itself out, nurturing features could begin to occur.

Some studies have considered limiting children's play in using intense topics by looking at a teacher's intervention and the value of that (Jones & Reynolds, 1992; Katch, 2001, Reynolds & Jones, 1997) in redirecting the play to less intense topics. My study found that Mrs. Prince allowed intense topics to be played out. In no way am I suggesting that Mrs. Prince ignored the children's pretend play content. She was always present in the classroom, working with the children with their various activities. She would sometimes go into the block center where the most intense play was happening to get some materials from the wall shelves. Sometimes she would straighten the materials, or bend down and move some blocks out of the traffic areas. The children would go on with their play as if she was not there. Their pretending would continue without pause as their scripts and actions unfolded without Mrs. Prince interfering in any way.

Her theoretical beliefs are supported she said by Piaget's theories that children need to be in social environments where they are allowed opportunities

to use negotiation and be able to argue. But more than that, Mrs. Prince appears to be shaped in her thinking about the way children need to act out the topics that are meaningful to them in pretend play by her philosophical underpinnings. As a child, Mrs. Prince's love of play was nurtured through the unlimited time a loving grandmother and an aunt devoted to play with her and in other family situations, she related that she was nurtured with guidance, protection, care, and even punishment. She remembered her grade school teachers who had what she said was "genuine caring" (Interview 1, p. 1), offering her words and direction. Without reservation, Mrs. Prince talked about her early influences as formative in giving her notions about how children should be nurtured in learning and in life; she went into her formal education, her undergraduate and graduate classes, already apprised of what needed to be done to provide the "fertilizer, sun and rain" to children's learning needs. Mrs. Prince used words such as "enriched" and "enhanced" to describe how she had been shaped in her thinking, speaking of her life's influences as molding her in her ideas of nurturing.

It is clear to me that Mrs. Prince has been nurtured through acts of caring throughout her growing up years, school experiences, and formal training. Nurturing and empathy appear to be inherent values she believes in. She enters into her teaching based upon her key values of how children need social experiences in order to develop awareness of what it means to care and to understand about caring (Goldstein, 1999; Noddings, 1984). But, what about her complete hands-off approach when the children were playing out intense topics of life and death and using dialogue in their scripts about killing and maiming?

Mrs. Prince practiced a hands-off approach, intervening little if at all in the children's pretend play episodes. My study suggests that a hands-off approach from a teacher can allow for children to play out intense topics in order to get to a place where they can express nurturing in pretend play. From interviews and conversations with Mrs. Prince, it is evident that she views life according to the early and the late influences in her life that she described as people who have been placed in her life to teach her and to help her teach herself. Mrs. Prince is a masterful practitioner who trusted the children in her classroom to play according to what they knew and how they were trying to make sense of the world they live in, whether those personal experiences were including family relationships, popular culture, or intense emotions and feelings, or all of those things. She stated that she accepts people for who they are and knows that the children under her care have been cared for in what she described as "the deepest of ways" (Interview, p. 2) from their families. She viewed the children in her classroom as ones who played out what they knew from that nurturing.

In considering the conversations between Mrs. Prince and me, I am reminded of what Goldstein (1999) said about the interpersonal connections between a teacher and child as providing opportunities for caring to occur and become the foundation for cognitive development. I believe that Mrs. Prince and her children were indeed connected by their mutual respect for pretend play. She trusted the children to play through the process of pretending about how they were making sense of the world as they knew it. But more than that, my study suggests that the children trusted Mrs. Prince to maintain the pretend play context

where not only nurturing could be expressed, but also where she allowed expression of the intense topics that appeared to be important to them. An understanding appeared to be in the classroom between Mrs. Prince and the children. My study suggests that transformations of emotions had to be played out in the children's pretend play scripts - the daring episodic adventures fraught with danger and fear then saving then more danger and cries for help then protection and on and on and on – and had to happen in order for children to sort out the meaning of what it means to care for someone, whether assisting, guiding, helping, protecting, or saving, and thus begin to understand nurturing in peers' role play. Mrs. Prince allowed the children to act out all of these emotions in order to be able to sort things out to express nurturance and appear to understand nurturing in peers' role play.

Children's Non-Pretend Play Situations

Children's conflicts and resolutions in maintaining friendships

As discussed previously, on only rare occasions were the children (the master players) engaged in activity outside of pretend play. But even in non-play situations, members of the tightly-knit group of core players found ways to be together. The conflict in who could be snack helper (See p. 202.) caused a flare-up between Sam and Heather, and it was interesting to note that the two children were allowed the process of working through their situation with little intervention from their teacher. Reynolds and Jones (1997) discuss the complexity of when to intervene in children's conflicts and the importance of adults in letting children find acceptable ways to express feelings. In my classroom of study, the

teacher set few if any limits on the children's attempts to negotiate and even to argue with one another, such as during the preparation of snacks and at the snack table. Mrs. Prince responded to Sam's attempt to walk out of the classroom door, then reminded him his name was not on the helper list and that it was not Heather's fault, once reminding Sam it was not his turn. Next, when Sam flared up at Heather and even spit at her, and Heather responded by telling him to spit at someone else, Mrs. Prince did not interfere.

In considering this situation, I recall Mrs. Prince's interview when she talked about not wanting to rob the children of the chances to negotiate and to argue. As I found, the children had chances to interact during conflicts as well and then later, during resolutions. Heather appeared to be soothing Sam by telling Lisa not to "get really mean. It will hurt his feelings too much" (p. 204). From Edward's (1986) study, one might suggest that the two children were "using a social-cognitive base of nurturant and prosocial behavior" (p. 118) to negotiate with one another. Indeed, Heather's attempts at appeasement toward Sam may have been her way of reaching out to him in a nurturing way. The situation in my study goes further however, to highlight the teacher's stepping back from the two children's conflict in a non-intervention way and letting the children work things out on their own in both conflicts and resolutions, which they did finally, at the snack table.

CONCLUSION

Implications for Practice

If we can understand the layers of pretend play that include the emergence of nurturing characteristics, it may encourage us to view such pretending as an opportunity for children's social/emotional competence to be fostered. In terms of classroom practice, my study challenges us to see that pretend play offers practitioners the chance to nourish responsive acts, even in the course of violent seeming content in children's play scripts. When children create nurturing arousing events that can include intense topics that can even include killing and other acts of harming others, it is possible for nurturing qualities to be expressed. As my data show, a classroom designed in careful ways by a teacher who understands nurturing qualities should include developmentally appropriate play materials, play spaces, and planned time that is met consistently on a day by day basis.

The hands-off, non-intervention approaches of the teacher should also be of interest to educators. It is imperative that teachers understand that sometimes very intense topics have to be explored in children's pretend play scripts in order for nurturing to occur. Children use graphic language to design pretend play scripts. They tend to try to perform and outperform each other in acts of danger and saving in their pretending.

The oft-violent play dialogues add elements to their pretend play with treasured play materials such as toy animals and plastic insects. The dialogues contain elements of intense emotions that the children hear and see in the popular

culture characters they are exposed to and in the family and peer relationships they are a part of every day. These emotions include both violent elements as well as more nurturing like features. Erikson opened our eyes to the “unguarded expression” (1985, p. 221) that children must experience in order to begin to share play worlds with others in the larger world of the macrosphere. Educators can appreciate even more the children’s attempts to distinguish between what is real and what is fantasized given the experience of pretend play in a classroom that offers a non-intervention approach, such as Mrs. Prince’s.

Applications to other classroom settings

It is important to think about how children are influenced in their pretending in play by the popular culture characters that appear to be so important to them. As suggested by Dyson (1997), many educators are not supportive of children’s playing out in the classroom the kinds of intense topics that seem to be prevalent in videos and movies such as *The Lion King*. In reading my study, some practitioners might ask how a teacher’s non-intervention approaches with play of such intensity could be carried out in classrooms comprised of children who may not have had the same kinds of experiences as the children in my research.

In my own experiences of working with programs such as Head Start, Even Start, and others that include low socio-economic populations, I have found that children often come into preschools having limited social interactions in group settings outside of their homes and thus need direct intervention approaches by a teacher. But as with all children, these children may just need consistent and ongoing guidance from the teacher in order to learn to interact with other children

in sustained and appropriate ways for getting along in classroom play settings. Given this view, my suggestion is that teachers keep an open mind concerning how they think about their thinking concerning the value of trusting children in their pretend play, even when the topics are intense.

Once their social skills of give and take with one another are guided to more mature levels, children in any classroom setting may be able to engage in pretend play without the teacher's constant presence. It may have to do with the teacher giving up control of children's pretend play while understanding there may be times when it *is* necessary to step in and intervene, such as with any situation that would cause emotional or physical harm. We cannot discount the epistemological implications of viewing the classroom as offering a contextualized view of children's learning that includes their fascination with Simba and other popular culture characters that seem to hold such fascination for children.

Implications for Research

Pretend play is acknowledged as a developmentally appropriate activity in the early childhood classroom (Bredekamp & Copple, C.,1997). The literature that has focused on children's pretend play has given us insights into children's social and emotional experiences (e.g., Reifel & Yeatman, 1993; Reynolds & Jones, 1997; Sawyer, 1997), particularly in the benefits of giving children opportunities to role-play. The opportunities created for children to express nurturance and to begin to understand it are topics that receive little attention. I hope that studies will begin to discuss what non-intervention approaches by a

teacher can mean without diminishing the importance of allowing children to include an array of emotions that encompass both nurturance features and even graphic elements that could include violent topics, when experiencing pretend play.

Limitations of study

From my case study of one classroom, I cannot make generalizations to all preschool children about how children express nurturing and how they appear to understand nurturing in peers' role play. Limitations to my study could be viewed by some as that I studied Mrs. Prince's classroom for one semester only, beginning when the children returned on the last class day of January and ending in late April. In addition, there were special days when the children were out of the classroom for field trips and holiday outings, as well as the entire week of Spring Break. Added to this, I was out for several days attending an early childhood conference. Also, some might consider my observation of for the most part one group of five children as limiting. In addition, I was not in the classroom for the entire morning. I would have liked to have been in the classroom every day for the entire morning each time, but it was not possible, given my teaching schedule.

There were also some frustrations with my video equipment. There were several days when I tried to set up the video camera in the block center with a special microphone taped nearby, and the sound did not translate to the video tape. In spite of my attempts to have technicians to retrieve the sound, it proved useless. On those times when I did not use the special microphone, the sound was

not perfect given all the background noise, but it was audible. A plus, I believe, was that I used a small tape recorder that I taped to the front of the shelves in the block center whenever I sat in the classroom to write field notes. On only one occasion did the children ask about the recorder, and that was just a comment from two of the children who noticed it above the block construction they were working on. I answered briefly that it was a tape recorder to help me learn about the playing in the block center. After that, no one seemed to even notice it was there.

In further study it would be interesting to try to place attachable tape recorders on each of the children. Although I do not think these recorders would have enhanced my classroom study, I can see the benefit of using these for outdoor play. I chose not to use these because I realized early on that most of the five children's pretend play was happening right in the block center. Since the entire Center was rather small and the block center contained, the small tape recorder worked just fine as an accompaniment to my field notes.

I also would have liked to have conducted interviews more often with all of the children who were in the main group of pretend players I studied. As mentioned before, it was awkward to approach the children and ask them to give up their play when I had made every attempt to be unobtrusive and to be ignored in my daily observations in the classroom. On the few occasions when I did have an opening to speak with the children, I tried to be respectful and to step in at a time when their play was lagging or when they were nearing the time to transition to more structured activities in the classroom.

Threads in the Tapestry

My study demonstrates that there are multiple strands that exist in young children's pretend play; these strands are like threads waiting to be woven into an intricate tapestry. One of the threads is that through pretend play children feel the pull and tug of conflicting emotions through acting out topics of violence as well as topics of great tenderness and care. Added to this, there are strands that involve what I can only describe as comfortable feelings that children have in pretend play. By this I mean that they develop trust in one another through the repeated opportunities of pretend play, providing for each other a secure base. They can call for help for themselves or for their toy animals and know that someone will respond to that call with saving, protection, assistance, guiding, and other nurturing features.

It is also suggested from my findings that an important thread in the tapestry is children's fascination with popular culture icons, such as Simba and Scar from the movie, *The Lion King*. Practitioners and researchers cannot ignore the influence of movies and other media that may be a part of children's family experiences even before entering peer groups outside the home and that appeal to children in the most compelling of ways. Indeed in my study, the characters mentioned above were imbedded in the fiber of the children's pretend play as an everyday occurrence. These characters and other elements from popular culture can not be discounted from children's pretend play; they are fodder for acting out adventure, danger, bravery, love, care, and compassion, if only children are given the opportunities to enact these features that seem so important to their being.

Entwined within children's fascination with popular culture characters and topics are the children's relationships with their families and with each other. It is through the children's pretending with the toy animals and with each other that we can understand the way their emotions are shaped by family experiences and the situations at home and in peer groups that appear to contribute to their total being. One can sense the kinds of nurturing children experience on a day to day basis – the guidance, the assisting, the care, the love and compassion, the protection and sheltering. But woven into these threads are also the discipline, the admonishing and warning, and yes even the punishing, that also are forthcoming from families toward their children and which contribute to the richness of the tapestry. I can only imagine how important it is for children to be able to express the nurturing and discipline that are a part of their familial experiences as a way of attending to their emotional expressions. Added to this is the day to day playing out of emotions and feelings in settings outside of the home such as school that include peer relationships and the give and take of social interactions that are manifested through role play. I found that pretend play offers the opportunity for educators to begin to understand the complex weave that forms the tapestry of children's emotions that include nurturing.

There is also a thread of the tapestry that cannot be ignored. Many of the children's pretend play topics included situations that seem to have nothing to do with nurturing, such as hurting the toy animals in the most intense ways (cutting their ears or sacrificing one animal to the other) or finding out about killers of mothers, or even pretending the animals were killing their own mothers, or

inflicting hurricanes, threats of drowning, and abandonment on the animals. My study suggests that nurturing happens in response to conditions that the children pretend about, even if some of those situations are very intense and violent. Perhaps children demonstrate “stylistic flexibility” (Bateson, 1971, p. 265) in being able to enact such an array of events. We as educators and researchers must recognize the complexity involved in children’s ability to weave what they know from the world they live in with such an array of thoughts, feelings, topics, characters, and play scripts to construct texts that have to do with features of nurturing.

I end my conclusions with addressing once again the classroom context of my study. My study demonstrates that within this particular classroom, we see the weaving of an array of threads that begin to take shape to become a rich tapestry of nurturing that contributes to children’s overall emotional competence. It would not be possible to weave the threads into a tapestry that explains how children express nurturance in pretend play or how they appear to understand nurturing in peer’s role play without acknowledging the teacher’s creation and facilitation of this early childhood classroom. Mrs. Prince nurtured the children’s right to engage in play without intervention or guidance from the adults in the classroom. She protected their pretend play, appearing to shelter the children from intervention, proclaiming her trust in the children as human beings capable of guiding and sustaining their own pretend play situations. With the benefit of Mrs. Prince’s complete hands-off approach, the children were able to choose their own

play materials, their play spaces, and their play peers, and even had the choice to lock others out of their play (their peers and the interns) if they chose to.

Mrs. Prince admired the tenacity of the children, their created play scripts and their boldness in acting out the topics often represented in their pretending. She stated that she could add nothing to their play by intervening. She was understanding of their expressions of violent topics in their pretending and acknowledged the tenderness in their expressions of nurturing that were manifested through the freedom of their play world that existed in the classroom context. She did not pretend to be an infallible teacher; she admitted her mistakes, knowing that she might have missed opportunities to correct the children's unkind seeming acts toward one another when she erred on the side of not intervening. Erikson (1989) looked at the macrosphere of classroom play as a context for children to begin to distinguish between what is real and what is fantasized. My case study of one classroom suggests that children must play out fantasy worlds in order to experience the reality of nurturing features toward the animals and toward each other.

We cannot know for sure whether children translate from pretend play what they begin to understand about nurturing to their non-pretend play situations, such as classroom interactions involving everyday activities (preparing snacks and discussing who they will marry someday). My study demonstrates however, that nurturing is expressed both through pretend play and also through everyday mundane activities involving children and their peers. One can only imagine what further studies will suggest regarding the classroom that fosters nurturing through

offering children chances to live life to the fullest in both pretend play and non-pretend play experiences.

Nurturing transcends “giving care to those in need” (Fogel, et al., 1986) for it cannot be woven into the tapestry of emotional understandings until something transpires that others can be responsive to and about. It may be that the classroom that offers the gift of pretend play opportunities without interference is crucial to fostering nurturing expressions and understandings in young children. It may be that the most crucial thread in the tapestry is the trust that is built in an early childhood classroom among the children and their teacher. Mrs. Prince said in one of her interviews that children are nurtured in the deepest of ways before they enter formal schooling, and that the nurturing they have experienced is a part of who they are and how their emotional well-being is nourished. It seems clear that the nurturing Mrs. Prince has received throughout her lifetime is a thread that must be included in the tapestry of the children in her classroom and their expressions of and learning about nurturing.

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Vita

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