

# Layers of Discourse in Preschool Block Play: An Examination of Children's Social Interactions

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**Abstract** Mikhail Bakhtin's philosophical orientation concerning dialogism offers a challenge to contemporary play theory. This study demonstrates the benefits of a Bakhtinian analysis of double voicing in early childhood programs. Bakhtin's notion of dialogism, specifically Bakhtin's ideas on genre and utterance, has received less attention in the analysis of play. Bakhtin's conceptualization extends the notion of genre to all spoken utterances in play activities. The purpose of the present study was to examine the existence of Bakhtin's typology of double voicing with preschool children as they talked and built structures with unit blocks. Bakhtin identified three basic varieties of double voice discourse: (a) unidirectional, (b) vari-directional, and (c) active discourse. The investigation took place in a preschool classroom that encourages a playful curriculum. Drawing on videotaped preschool classroom examples, preschoolers' use of double voicing in the context of block play was analyzed. The data found the two types of passive double voicing: (a) unidirectional and (b) vari-directional, as well as active categories of hidden dialogicality, parody, and skaz. Bakhtin's view of language acquisition is discussed by only a handful of early childhood play scholars, and this article suggests early childhood professionals use Mikhail Bakhtin's double voicing typologies in classroom as a contemporary view for framing early childhood socialization and discourse.

**Keywords** Block play · Discourse · Bakhtin · Double voicing · Preschool

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**Résumé** L'orientation philosophique de Mikhaïl Bakhtin concernant le dialogisme pose un défi à la théorie contemporaine du jeu. Cette étude démontre les avantages d'une analyse bakhtinienne de la double expression dans les programmes de la petite enfance. La notion de dialogisme de Bakhtine, spécifiquement les idées de Bakhtin sur le genre et l'énoncé ont reçu moins d'attention dans l'analyse du jeu. La conceptualisation de Bakhtin étend la notion de genre à tous les énoncés parlés dans les activités de jeu. Le but de cette étude était d'examiner l'existence de la typologie de la double expression de Bakhtin chez des enfants d'âge préscolaire, quand ils parlaient et construisaient des structures avec des blocs. Bakhtine a identifié trois variétés de base du discours de la double expression: (a) unidirectionnel (b) vari directionnel et (c) discours actif. L'étude s'est faite dans une classe préscolaire qui favorise un programme ludique. S'appuyant sur des exemples enregistrés sur vidéo en classe préscolaire, l'utilisation de la double expression par les jeunes enfants dans le contexte du jeu de bloc a été analysée. Les données montrent l'existence des deux types de double expression passive: (a) unidirectionnel et (b) vari directionnel, ainsi que de catégories actives de dialog caché, la parodie et le skaz. La perspective de Bakhtin de l'acquisition du langage n'est discutée que par une poignée de spécialistes du jeu en petite enfance. Cet article suggère que les professionnels de la jeune enfance utilisent les typologies de la double expression de Mikhaïl Bakhtin en classe en tant que point de vue contemporain pour encadrer la socialisation et le discours de la jeune enfance.

**Resumen** La orientación filosófica de Mikhaïl Bakhtin sobre dialogismo ofrece un reto a la teoría de obra contemporánea. Este estudio demuestra los beneficios de un análisis de prácticas de doble sonoridad en programas de infancia temprana. La noción de Bakhtin de dialogismo, específicamente sus ideas sobre género y elocución, han recibido menos atención en el análisis del juego. La conceptualización de Bakhtin amplía la noción de género a todas las elocuciones habladas en actividades de juego. El propósito del presente estudio fue examinar la existencia de la tipología de Bakhtin de "doble voz" (el habla consigo mismo) con niños preescolares mientras hablaban y construían estructuras con bloques de unidades. Bakhtin identificó tres variedades básicas de discurso de doble voz: (a) unidireccional, (b) vari-direccional y el discurso (c) activa. La investigación tuvo lugar en un salón de clase preescolar que fomenta un currículo basado en el juego. Basándose en los ejemplos obtenidos de grabaciones de vídeo, se analizó el uso de doble sonoridad en el contexto del juego con bloques. Los datos encontrados muestran los dos tipos de sonoridad doble pasiva: (a) unidireccionales y (b) vari-direccional, así como categorías activas de dialogicidad oculta, parodia y sketch. La mirada de Bakhtin de la adquisición del lenguaje es discutida por un pequeño número de escolares de educación temprana durante el juego, y este artículo sugiere la utilización profesional de la tipología de doble voz en la sala de clases de infancia temprana como una visión contemporánea para enmarcar la socialización de la primera infancia y el discurso.

## Introduction

The use of blocks by children has a long history beginning with the introduction of alphabet blocks. Many well-known educators throughout the years have emphasized block building, including Friedrich Froebel and Maria Montessori. Both Froebel and Montessori emphasized specific ways of using block materials, though each also allowed some creative expression. Pratt (1990) introduced unit blocks to American early childhood educators in the early 1900s, and they are still a popular material in early childhood programs today. Historically, block play research has noted the cognitive, social, and physical benefits for young children, but there are few studies that have examined the value of blocks from a Bakhtinian perspective.

This article will espouse a Bakhtinian framework by examining preschoolers' communicative competence using Bakhtin's (1984) typology of double voice discourse, specifically passive and active. Children repeat other people's voices in their play, especially other children, and at times they can reproduce a voice which they have taken on completely from someone else. Children's discourse constantly moves from authoritative discourse to internally persuasive discourse as children appropriate and assimilate others' words.

The purpose of this study was to apply Bakhtin's literary work to early childhood block play with the aim of exploring Bakhtin's (1984) double voicing. An interpretivist methodology (Pushkala 2005) was applied to Bakhtin's theories of double voice discourse by analyzing classroom video data. Cresswell and Hawn (2012) stated Bakhtin "was working towards interpretive techniques for understanding human action" (p. 5). Likewise, this study was seeking to examine preschoolers' communication skills to give some insight into the existence of Bakhtin's (1984) double voice discourse in play. The following questions guided this research:

1. Are Bakhtin's discourse typologies evident in young children's conversations in the context of block play?
2. In what ways do children double voice when communicating with peers in block play?

In this article, I present the main tenets of a Bakhtinian approach by arguing that play is a speech genre. From this point of view, the notion that play genres contain several distinct utterances or voices that frequently change is shared. Next, children's use of Bakhtin's theories of heteroglossia and double voicing is discussed in respect of ways children enact different play roles while building with blocks. Finally, Bakhtin's discourse typologies are analyzed to evaluate children's utterances using video data.

## Block Play: Bakhtin's Concept of Utterance and Speech Genre

Many play theorists draw on the social, cognitive, and physical nature of play from Piagetian and Vygotskian views. Bakhtin's notion of dialogism, specifically Bakhtin's ideas on genre, has received less attention in the analysis of play.

Bakhtin's conceptualization extends the notion of genre to all spoken utterances in play activities. One way of looking at language use in block play is by using Bakhtin's (1986) concept of utterance or a response to a previous utterance. Bakhtin's view that any utterance is linked to a chain of utterances in speech communication is different from such claims by discourse theorists as Chomsky or Foucault. For Bakhtin (1986), "the relation of the utterance to the speaker himself and to the other participants in speech communication characterizes an utterance" (p. 84).

Bakhtin's generic form of the utterance means children select words by borrowing them from other utterances. Children may use silence or borrow utterances from parents, caregivers, or peers. They borrow the expressions and intonations from other words, and this "expression can be regarded as the word's *stylistic aura*" (Bakhtin 1986, p. 88). Stylization is borrowing one voice of a recognizable style of another. It refers to mixing two social languages in one utterance. For example, a child in the play corner shouts, "You can't have dessert until you eat your dinner" is mixing a stern parental voice with their own voice in an utterance. Stylization can take on a variety of forms including parody and *skaz*. Parody consists of two voices, but usually the first voice is ridiculing the second voice. The second form of stylization is *skaz*, an utterance that is common to everyday talk. *skaz* involves utterances that imitate oral monologues, including intonation, mimicry, and sound gestures. Examples of *skaz* in children's block play might include: "Hey, aren't these blocks for play? "Vroom, vroom, the cars are traveling over the bridge!"

An utterance can take a generic property, and Bakhtin's point of reference in conceptualizing communication was to cast communication as the interaction inherent in the utterances of words through genres. Bakhtin (1986) observed, "even in the most free, the most unconstrained conversation, we cast our speech in definite generic forms, some rigid and trite ones, sometimes more flexible, plastic, and creative ones (everyday communication also has creative genres at its disposal)" (p. 78). Speech genres refer to the stable types of utterances that characterize language in social interactions. Whereas utterances are individual in that they reflect the unrepeatable dimensions of the concrete language use, "each sphere in which language is used develops its own relatively stable types" for the thematic content, style and compositional structure of utterances as expressions" (p. 60). Thus, in Bakhtin's view, all utterances engage, use, and transform speech genres.

Using Bakhtin's (1986) notion of genre, we can say that play can be described as a social performance with interacting participants. Arguably, in observing block play, you witness children talking using a variety of different voices, each associated with a distinct role in a social interaction. "Genre is the type of play activity, and utterance is the communication within the genre activity" (Sawyer 1997, p. 173). Block play has been studied far less frequently than socio-dramatic play. Previous studies (Sluss and Stremmel 2004; Stroud 1995) related to block play and children's language have not contextualized block play as a speech genre. Only a few early childhood researchers (Cohen and Uhry 2007; Sawyer 1997) investigating play have selected Bakhtin's (1986) notion of genre or genre and

utterance (Dore 1995; White 2009) as an analytic tool and discursive framework to help interpret play, language, and social interaction.

The relevance of genres to utterance inheres in the fact that “each play genre may contain several distinct voices, each typically associated with a distinct role in the interaction” (Sawyer 1997, p. 173). The utterance belongingness to a particular genre is based on the relation of the individual child’s word in relation to the word of others. For example, Sawyer (1997) provides an illustration of two 4-year-old children, Jennifer and Kathy, playing with toy animals in the sandbox. They were improvising and voicing the characters of the movie, *Land Before Time*. Sawyer (1997) observed how the children’s voices switched between “director” voice and the toy character (p. 64). This is what Bakhtin (1986) coined heteroglossia or “idea of a multiplicity of ways of speaking in a social environment” (Cohen and Uhry 2007, p. 304).

Examining Bakhtin’s speech genres as an analytical tool for play offers a new direction for play research. Genres are conventional forms speakers bring to bear on their production and interpretation of utterances. “We use them confidently and skillfully *in practice*, and it is quite possible for us not even to suspect their existence *in theory*” (Bakhtin 1986, p. 78). In play practice, utterances between players follow and anticipate one another in a rapid succession of turn taking. Contextualizing block play as a genre is important because children appropriate meaning while building and use a variety of social voices. The idea of a “multiplicity of ways of speaking in a social environment” (Cohen and Uhry 2007, p. 304) has been described as heteroglossia (Bakhtin 1986).

## Heteroglossia in Children’s Play

In Bakhtin’s view, language is a struggle between hundreds of discourses, and he used the term heteroglossia to describe the social diversity of speech types. Bakhtin (1981) theorized that there are many variations of speaking or voicing that position individuals in a social environment. For Bakhtin (1981), discourse represents a worldview in which there are two ideological forces in any society: one is centripetal and another is centrifugal. Centripetal discourses are monoglossic and standardize language, while centrifugal discourses decentralize and diversify language. Heteroglossia, according to Bakhtin (1981), refers to the conflict between these two forces. Heteroglossia describes the fact that cultures or societies are not unified. Heteroglossia is a variety of voices and their corresponding values and views of the world. Heteroglossia tends to move language toward the multiplicity of meanings of individual words or phrases and includes a wide variety of different ways of speaking, as well as “multi-voicedness” (Cohen and Uhry 2007, p. 304).

Heteroglossia is not new to play scholarship (Cohen 2009; Duncan and Tarulli 2003; Cohen and Uhry 2007). Bakhtin is one of Sawyer’s (1997) sources and a starting point for scholarly interest in Bakhtin and pretend play. Sawyer’s (1997) account of play as an improvisational verbal interaction is similar in many ways to Bakhtin’s account of the heteroglossia of play. Similarly, Duncan and Tarulli (2003) compare Bakhtin’s theories of heteroglossia to play. Duncan and Tarulli (2003)

describe how children learn to enact roles of mothers, babies, or animals. While enacting roles, children voice and dialog a particular character. Voices tend to change with enactments of a play role which reflects a variety of voices and social view of rules that govern the role (Duncan and Tarulli 2003).

Children are using dialog and voicing in the social world of play. As they participate in block or dramatic play, “they encounter and appropriate an increasing range of voices and their associated perspectives on the world” (Duncan and Tarulli 2003, p. 283). Hence, consistent with a Bakhtinian account of dialog, children acquire a particular sense of self-understanding by hearing the voices of others and responding to them in conversational contexts. This is Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of “ideological becoming of a human a human being” (p. 341).

Children’s talk while playing is an expression of the concrete voices they have heard and appropriated. In the course of children’s communicative encounters, they appropriate the words of others (parents, siblings, friends, and teachers). In doing so, they re-accent the words of others using what Bakhtin (1984) calls double-voice speech or “double-linguaged representation of another’s words” (Bakhtin 1981, p. 341) to discover new ways of understanding. Double voicing is a stylization of the multi-voiced utterance in which children can recreate and recontextualize social roles in the context of family and society.

## Double Discourse Typology

Double voice discourse is when two distinct utterances that can occur in a dialogic interaction. Bakhtin (1984) characterizes this type as discourse directed both toward the referential object of speech, as in ordinary discourse, and toward *another’s discourse*, toward *someone else’s speech* (p. 185). According to Bakhtin (1984), our utterances are influenced by a dialog touched by preceding and subsequent voices “which inevitably arises under conditions of dialogic interaction, which is, under conditions making possible an authentic life for the word” (p. 185).

Double voicing is encountered in our everyday speech as we introduce another’s word into our own speech. When children play with blocks, they engage in dialogic interactions as they communicate, plan, and negotiate turn taking. Lytra (2007) studied play frames and talk with children in a Greek primary school and found that play can strengthen a shared sense of belonging among players, as well as regulate the behavior of other group members. The interlocutors act out adult roles in play frames (Lytra 2007) going through a range of stylizations. This type of talk in play corresponds to Bakhtin’s (1984) double voiced discourse.

Double voice discourse can be either passive or active. With the passive variety, the speaker is in control and uses the other’s discourse for his own purposes. Passive double voiced discourse is the word of the other and the speaker is in control. Active double voice is the word of the other that “resists the author’s intentions, thereby reshaping the meaning and stylistic profile of the utterance” (Morson and Emerson 1990, p. 150).

Bakhtin (1984) classifies passive double voicing as (a) unidirectional and (b) vari-directional. With unidirectional double voice discourse, the speaker

employ's someone else's discourse "in the direction of its own particular aspirations." (p. 193). Unidirectional discourse includes stylization. "The stylizer adopts the discourse of an earlier speaker or writer whose way of speaking or writing is regarded as essentially correct and in accord with the task to be accomplished" (Morson and Emerson 1990, p. 150). It is first person narration in which characters speak for or about themselves. In contrast, vari-directional double voicing, the author again speaks in someone else's discourse, but... introduces into that discourse a semantic intention directly opposed to the original one" (p. 193). The speaker and the other want to go in different directions. In most cases, the discourse of the other is at odds with the discourse of the speaker, who, in order to evaluate the other critically, parodies his speech. This type of discourse includes all forms of parody, including what Bakhtin (1984) calls "parodic skaz" (p. 193) or a style of speaking used to take on the persona of a particular character. With young children, this may take the form of ventriloquation and intonation (Cohen 2009, 2011; Guilda 2014; Junefelt 2007). Communication in block play can take the form of double voicing and include appropriating noises and sounds of objects children are using in play (e.g., "Uaah, Uaah"), naming and inventing objects, playing with the linguistic system (e.g., saying "uh, oh!"), or assigning roles.

With active double voiced discourse, the discourse of the other resists the exclusive purposes of the speaker's intention, enters a dialog with the author's discourse, and is able to modify, persuade, and affect the author's intentions. Bakhtin (1984) claims that in discourse of this type, "the other's words actively influence the author's speech, forcing it to alter itself accordingly" (p. 197). This type of discourse is a struggle between two equally valid voices and introduces an element of internal dialogization. Under this category, Bakhtin (1984) discusses several forms of active double voiced discourse, including "hidden dialog," "hidden polemic," and the word with "a sideward glance" (p. 197). Akin to Dostoevsky (1969), the active category includes (a) internal polemic, (b) soliloquies, and (c) hidden dialog. Active double voicing, including hidden dialog, has been used in previous pretend play research (Cohen 2009, 2011; Duncan and Tarulli 2003).

In sum, Bakhtin's (1984) discourse typologies have been described above could possibly be used to identify young children's word, utterance or act of speech in a verifiable way. The following describes how Bakhtin's (1984) discourse typologies were used as an analytic tool to examine children's utterances in block play.

## Method

Drawing on video data in which several discourse strategies were identified in preschool block play, Bakhtin's double voice categories were explored. This naturalistic inquiry was based on a 3-week immersion into the environment of a preschool classroom and employed an interpretivist methodology (Pushkala 2005). As stated earlier, Bakhtin wrote that he used interpretive methods for understanding human action. An interpretivist approach recognizes that we try to "make sense" of circumstances "within a cultural framework of socially constructed and shared

meanings” and that we “create and re-create our social world as a dynamic meaning system, that is, a system that changes over time” (Hughes 2001, p. 35). Interpretivist methodology thus involves trying to “understand socially constructed and shared meaning and re-present them as theories of human behavior” (p. 36). Thus, the focus of inquiry is the relationship between block play (one aspect of human behavior) and Bakhtin’s dialogic process.

## Setting and Participants

A single school was used as the research site to ensure that all participants were working with the same population of students. The curriculum was generated, negotiated, and constructed by all members of the classroom. There were large blocks of time for play and exploration and teachers valued and encouraged play.

Nineteen children participated in this study, 10 boys and 9 girls, with three teachers. At the time of data collection procedures, the average age of the class was 5.2 years. The majority of the children came from middle- and upper-income families. The ethnic composition of the sample was approximately 79 % white and 21 % other. Of the nineteen children, fifteen were monolingual and four participants spoke English in school and a language other than English at home, or spoke another language in combination with English at home. Languages spoken in the home were English, Hebrew, Korean, Indian languages of Telugu, and Punjabi.

## Procedures

### *Data Collection*

This study took place with written parental permission, permission from the preschool director, and child consent. A participant status as a typical, less powerful adult had been established prior to entry (Corsaro 2005) because the researcher had spent 3 months in this classroom conducting dissertation research, as well as providing professional development for teachers. Additionally, prior to videotaping, the researcher always asked students whether they were comfortable being recorded in a way that was “consistent with their understanding, interests, and ways a preschooler communicates” (Woodhead and Faulkner 2008, p. 35). Children that did not want to be videotaped were given the choice to play in another center. On one occasion, several children did not want to be videotaped, so the researcher honored their request and built structures with them.

The design involved qualitative observational research in the natural setting of a preschool classroom. Data collection involved collecting observational videotaped data. The researcher sat in the block area and used a digital video camera to videotape conversations and interactions as they unfolded among children. By using an interpretive approach on empirical examples from children’s block play, the aim was to identify, describe, and develop an understanding of how Bakhtin’s dialogic process relates to early childhood play, and more specifically, if and how Bakhtin’s (1984) discourse typologies were evident in young children’s conversations.

## Results and Discussion

To analyze block play, it is important to understand the role of the utterance in a Bakhtinian conception of language. Several early childhood researchers (Dore 1995; Junefelt 2007; White 2009, 2014) have used Bakhtin's (1986) notion of utterance, "the understanding of an entire utterance" (p. 125) to interpret dialogic interactions. Utterances, in Bakhtin's view, are enacted, and there can be no utterance without a speaker or an audience and without an intention or a situation of use. An utterance was the unit of analysis for the present research, and data were examined and interpreted for the dialogic expressiveness of children's utterance. Transcriptions of children's utterances, gestures, and actions were prepared from video recordings. Multiple readings of transcriptions were completed in initial stages of analysis to examine the research questions: Are Bakhtin's discourse typologies evident in young children's conversations in the context of block play? In what ways do children double voice when communicating with peers in block play? What follows are two examples from the data, snippets of dialogic interactions, to illustrate children's use of double voicing, specifically passive and active double voicing.

*Example # 1—Making a house* In example 1, three children, Sean, Laurel, and Ivan, were building a house with unit blocks. Sean and Laurel worked together to make a square enclosure. They used double unit blocks and unit blocks to make the enclosure. Ivan was building in another corner of the block area.

**Utterance 1:** Sean > Ivan: Do you want to build?

**Utterance 2:** Ivan > Sean—I don't know.

(Sean gets more blocks from the block self).

**Utterance 3:** Ivan > Sean—What are you making?

**Utterance 4:** Laurel > Ivan—We're making a house.

**Utterance 5:** Sean > Laurel—Get some more. We need more. You need to get the blocks so I can build this house for us.

(Laurel goes to the block shelf and gets Sean more blocks. Ivan goes to block shelf and begins to talk to himself).

**Utterance 6:** Ivan—I need two long blocks for the foundation and short ones.

(Ivan whispers) (Laurel shows Sean a boy figurine. (Ivan continues to build his own house in another area of the block center).

**Utterance 7:** Laurel > Sean: Oh, do you want to put these on top?

**Utterance 8:** Laurel > Sean: She repeats, do you think we should put this on top?

**Utterance 9:** Sean > Laurel: Now we need a girl!

**Utterance 10:** Sean > Laurel: We need the right girl! Look for it in the basket! (Laurel looks through the basket of block accessories and gives Sean a girl figurine).

(The structure falls down. Sean rebuilds it, and Laurel puts figurines inside the house).

**Utterance 11:** Ivan (Talking to himself) Let's get some figures to put in my house.

**Utterance 12:** Laurel > Sean: We need the police and little kids.

**Utterance 13:** Laurel > Sean: Here's some kids.

**Utterance 14:** Laurel > Sean: We need some people.

*(Ivan leaves the block area and goes to play with table toys)*

Laurel connects two double unit blocks in what appears to be a road. She lines several figurines (police, children, and a mother) on the blocks. She moves them around as if they are walking. She begins to dialog with the figurines.

**Utterance 15:** Laurel dialogs to self. I think you need to get into the house. It is past your bedtime, and children need to be in bed in night. No, no, no! We don't want to go into the house, we want to play outside. Please let us play outside a little while longer. You can't stay outside the police will lock me up if you are outside in the night.

**Utterance 16:** Sean > Laurel—Look. I'm making this.

*(Sean builds a higher structure and takes one of Laurel's figurines)*

**Utterance 17:** Laurel > Sean—That's mine! That's mine! These are the children. *(Several blocks fall on top of Laurel's pretend children. They both work together to rebuild the structure.)*

**Utterance 18:** Laurel > Sean: It can't be like that!

*(Laurel doesn't like the way Sean is rebuilding the house with children as figurines)*

**Utterance 19:** Lauren > Sean: We won't balance and see them!

*(Laurel wants to see the pretend children)*

**Utterance 20:** Sean > Laurel: No, these are the windows. The windows!

**Utterance 21:** Laurel dialogs to self—Go to sleep children. It is your bedtime. She whispers and moves figurines to the pretend windows.

*(Laurel ignores Sean and begins to dialog to self with figurines. Sean takes double unit blocks from shelf and makes a square structure)*

**Utterance 22:** Laurel > Sean—We need a children's bed.

*(Laurel takes another figurine. Sean looks at Laurel's figurines)*

**Utterance 23:** Sean > Laurel—She's the bad girl. She's the bad guy.

**Utterance 24:** Laurel > Sean—I need a bigger one.

**Utterance 25:** Sean > Laurel—Here's the locks.

*(Sean puts the bad children inside the house)*

**Utterance 26:** Laurel > Sean—Ooooooh!

**Utterance 27:** Laurel > Sean—This is the placemat where they sit. This is the placemat where they sit.

*(Laurel takes a roof board from the shelf. She arranges the figurines on the roof board)*

*(Sean places a curve block on top)*

**Utterance 28:** Sean > Laurel—Look at this!

*(Laurel places a figurine on the structure. Sean's curve block falls down. Teacher calls children to clean up.)*

Unidirectional discourse was used in the beginning of the episode. The speaker's thought considered another's discourse and “made its home in it, does not collide with the other's thought, but rather follows after it in the same direction, merely making that direction conventional” (Bakhtin 1984, p. 193). The example begins

with as Sean asks Ivan if he wants to build with Laurel and him (utterance 1). Ivan replies, "I don't know." "What are you making?" (utterances 2 and 3). Laurel says, "We're making a house" (utterance 4). Sean and Laurel would like agreement. The agreement is the voice of the other. Stylized discourse uses "discourse precisely as other" (Bakhtin 1984, p. 189). Ivan decided to join Sean and Laurel. Ivan used unidirectional discourse (utterance 6) when he told his play partners that he will build with two long and short blocks. His discourse shifted to an active voice or hidden dialog as he talks to himself about his building (utterance 11). Sean and Laurel do not include Ivan in their conversations, and as a result, Ivan leaves the block center.

Throughout most of the play scenario, Sean used a vari-directional discourse and voiced the words of authority figures. He appropriated the words of others. In doing so, he re-accented the words of parents and teachers. We saw Sean's need to become an authority figure and simultaneously his attempt to win status over Laurel. For example, Sean said, "you need to get the blocks so I can build the house for us" (utterance 5) or "look in the basket for the right, girl figurine" (utterances 9 and 10).

After complying with Sean's demands, Laurel began to use an inner dialog, whispering and voicing the role of mother with the block figurines (utterances 15). Lauren employed Bakhtin's (1984) active double voice typology (hidden dialog) as well as unidirectional (stylization) and vari-directional discourse (voicing and parody) as she voiced the role of mother. Bakhtin's notion of hidden dialogicality accounts for speech directed to self in play (utterances 15 and 21). Laurel has appropriated and assimilated words in her everyday interactions in the context of her family and home environment as she self-verbalizes. Laurel wants the block figurines to go to bed and accentuates the words, "No! No! No!" (utterance 15). The use of intonation in children's speech during play is a fairly common practice (Corsaro 2005; Kyratis 2010). Laurel's speech is stylized with expressive intonation, and according to Bakhtin (1986), "expressive intonation is a constitutive marker of the utterance." Guilda (2014) states that stylization includes a high pitch, melody, and rhythm and "opens up the opportunity of using the other."

Sean used unidirectional speech as he tried to subvert Laurel's play with the figurines. He took one of her figurines and requested her approval (utterance 16). Laurel responded with a high pitch and intonation saying, "That's mine! That's mine!" "These are the children." (utterance 17). Laurel's speech becomes authorial and oppositional and in Bakhtin's (1984) terms vari-directional, clearly telling Sean he can't take her figurines for his own block structure (utterances 18 and 19).

Sean and Laurel both negotiated the block figurines and began to build together. The discourse became vari-directional as both players parody locking children in jail. Two pretend children (figurines) are bad (utterance 23), placed on a mat (block roof board) (utterance 27), and locked up in the house. Sean and Laurel's vari-directional communication is exercising control from authoritative others to suit their own purposes. Punishment for bad behavior is a societal norm that young children experience. Block play has afforded Sean and Laurel the opportunity to internalize the words of adults and provide creative license to speak and role play the words of adults. Lauren and Sean borrowed the voice of their parents "in skaz, in parodies and in various forms of verbal masquerade" (Bakhtin 1981, p. 275).

*Example 2* In example 2, Bruce, John, and Jim are building a farm. Animal figurines and props from the dramatic play center were used with their buildings.

**Utterance 1**—John > Bruce and Jim—How about we make our own (inaudible) store and the animals come out one at a time to take their medicine.

**Utterance 2**—Jim > Bruce and John—YEAH!

*(Jim is building a farm with double unit blocks, while Bruce and John pretend to give animal figurines medicine)*

**Utterance 3**—John > Jim and Bruce—Jim, take the medicine and come out one at a time to take the medicine.

*(Jim ignores John's request)*

**Utterance 4**—Bruce > John and Jim—We call them to get it!

*(Bruce is referring to the animals getting their medicine. Jim continues to build a rectangular farm)*

**Utterance 5**—John > Bruce—I'm waiting, you're going first!

**Utterance 6**—John—Yeehoo! Yee Whoo!

*(John voices a horse. Bruce gives John a yellow plate to represent the medicine)*

**Utterance 7**—Bruce > John—He takes the drinking one. He takes the drinking medicine.

*(John takes a cow figurine and pretends to have it drink from a plastic pan)*

**Utterance 8**—Bruce > John—The ones on the plates are chewing, okay? Use all the chewing medicine! Okay?

*(Jim uses several different block shapes and builds at the other end of the block structure, while Bruce and John play with the animals.)*

**Utterance 9**—Jim > self—Let's see.

**Utterance 10**—John > Bruce—Everybody, they can share medicines.

**Utterance 11**—John > Bruce—They can get it only if they got twin like this cow gets twin

*(John holds another cow figurine and has the cow figurine drink next to the first cow figurine)*

**Utterance 12**—Bruce > John—Or if they're the same animal they can share.

**Utterance 13**—John > Bruce—These!

*(John holds up two horses to show Brian)*

**Utterance 14**—Bruce > John—Well, they're both horses so they can get the same kind of medicine. They get the chewing medicine. They get the big drinking medicine.

**Utterance 15**—Jim > Bruce and John—Hey, look at this!

*(Jim builds a large farm structure with silo. He is excited about the farm structure he's building and wants his play partners to look at his farm)*

**Utterance 16**—Bruce > Jim—That is awesome!

**Utterance 17**—Bruce—AEEE AEEE AEEE

*(Bruce voices a horse)*

**Utterance 18**—John—Whoo-ooo

*(John voices a horse) (Bruce and John pretend to give medicine to the horse and cow figurines, while Jim builds the farm and voices to himself as he takes blocks from the shelf and decorates the farm structure).*

John, Bruce, and Jim were building a farm. The boys' discourse was centered on giving medicine to animals. John used unidirectional speech in the beginning of the play episode. He invited Bruce and Jim to build with blocks. Jim agreed with a loud stylized, YEAH! (utterance 2). Jim's utterance was representative of "another's whole utterance" (Bakhtin 1986, p. 89), another's voice. The children continue to use unit blocks to build the farm. A vari-directional speech type emerged as John and Bruce ventriloquate an authorial parental style of speech (utterances 3 and 4) to give medicine to the animals. Jim continued to build with blocks, ignoring the request of his play partners to give the animals medicine (utterance 4).

John and Bruce began to parodize a parental role. The animals need medicine and the boys' communicated a discourse of power and authority (utterances 5 and 8). Their voices reflected a semantic intention of opposition with an accentual shift (Bakhtin 1986). Their discourse typology changed to unidirectional speech (utterances 10–14) as John and Bruce discussed sharing the medicine with the animals. The dialogic utterances represented a relationship of agreement between John and Bruce. The use of the words *everybody* (utterance 10), *they* (utterances 11 and 12), *they're* (utterance 12), and *these* (utterance 13) were compatible with the notion of alterity or otherness and double voicing. For Bakhtin, dialogism celebrates alterity because "it is not a substance or essence in its own right but exists only in a tensile relationship with all that is other and, most important, with other selves" (Clark and Holquist 1994, p. 65). Jim continued to build a large farm structure with a silo. "Hey, look at this!" he says to Bruce and John (utterance 15). Bruce responded with agreement using unidirectional communication, "That is awesome!"

John (utterances 6 and 18) and Bruce (utterance 18) stylized a discourse of a horse, voicing AEEE AEEE AEEE and Whoo-ooo. Previous play researchers (Corsaro 1986; Cohen and Uhry 2007; Sluss and Stremmel 2004) have labeled this type of voicing as a paralinguistic form of communication. From a Bakhtinian view, John and Bruce were using oral skaz to represent the voice of a horse. Further, according to Bakhtin (1984), "a whole series of intonational, syntactic, and other *language* phenomena in skaz (when the author is oriented toward another person's speech) can be explained precisely by its double-voicedness, by the intersection within it of two voices and two accents" (p. 192).

## Conclusion

The block area in an early childhood classroom is an interactional space within which children confront a heteroglossic social world. In Bakhtin's (1984) discussion of ideological becoming, he distinguishes between active and passive double voicing. Although Bakhtin (1984) applied his discourse typologies to passages of Dostoevsky's polyphonic texts, in the data presented the children used double-voiced utterances in their meaning making, group work, and self-understanding. Double voicing was used by the participants to try to form their own individual identity by appropriating others' words, language, and forms of discourse.

By using Bakhtin's notion of speech genres as an analytic tool for block play, educators can see how children stylize the voices of their parents and others to form their own identities. Block play is a multi-voiced world that reverberates with others' words, accents, intentions, and voices. Children's talk in playful situations is invariably the speech of others as they socially and dialogically interact in an effort to know their world and themselves. A child's capacity for *alterity* is important for their cognitive and communicative development and can be developed through dialogic interactions, either with others or through inner speech. The early childhood field recognizes the importance of socialization and cooperation. A dialogical analysis of play has the potential for examining the socialization and self-esteem of children as they exhibit pride in their finished building structures.

The data presented demonstrate how block play nurtures language as well as group work. Children developed important social skills and higher levels of critical thinking. The hands on nature of block building allowed the children to be more engaged in using abstract and spatial concepts as they talked about their structures. The building process (balancing blocks to build a home or farm) provided authentic cause and effect experiences and allowed children to test solutions to real-world problems through thought and language.

Bakhtin (1984) argues that stylization, parody, and skaz are double voice phenomena. There is an absence in the early childhood literature that discusses the "twofold direction" that characterizes the Bakhtinian notion of double voiced discourse. To develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of young children's discourse in block play, early childhood teachers can begin to examine children's double voicing. Look at children's utterances for ways children stylize the voices of parents and others. Examine children's use of skaz as they use high pitched voices, gestures, and intonations while building structures. Conversations in block play are filled with reverberations of animal, car, and voices of people. This is supported with several studies of voicing and replica play (Cohen and Uhry 2007; Corsaro 1986; Sawyer 1997). The data provided evidence that children frequently engage in hidden dialogs or voice to themselves as they try to build a castle or farm with blocks. Stylization, ventriloquation, parody, and hidden dialog are forms of double discourse, "discourse with a twofold direction" (Bakhtin 1984, p. 185) that are present in early childhood play.

The typologies were used in the present study as an analytical tool to better understand the ways children double voice in play. Similar to Bakhtin's (1981) view in which linguists and philosophers "have ignored dialogized heteroglossia" (p. 273), early childhood educators have ignored Bakhtin's theories. Mikhail Bakhtin's philosophical orientation concerning dialogism offers a challenge to contemporary play theory. Play is interdisciplinary in nature, and a Bakhtinian framework for play pedagogy would add to the existing play research.

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