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Examining Teacher Talk During Transition Episodes in a Preschool
Classroom

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts in Education

by

Ève Wendy Sophie Ryan

2016

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Examining Teacher Talk During Transition Episodes in a Preschool Classroom

by

Ève Wendy Sophie Ryan

Master of Arts in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2016

Professor Alison Bailey, Chair

Jeffrey J. Wood

Gerardo Ramirez

While scholars have highlighted the importance of the language environment in the preschool classroom, there remains a dearth of research on the precise nature of the language children encounter in these early academic settings, especially during transitions (i.e., periods when children are involved in personal or classroom activities as they move from one setting to another across the preschool day). This study examined a

teacher's linguistic practices during transitions in a preschool classroom located in a public school, based on video observations and transcripts of teacher talk. Overall, the study found that teacher talk during transition periods is significantly less rich than during other activity settings combined. However, results also suggest that teacher talk varies within transition type. Interestingly, the teacher still managed to a limited extent to seize opportunities to engage in rich extended conversations with students during transitions. These findings point to the need to include transitions in studies of teacher language in preschool, especially given the considerable amount of time spent in such instances throughout the day.

The thesis of Ève Wendy Sophie Ryan is approved.

Jeffrey J. Wood

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University of California, Los Angeles

2016

DEDICATION

À Ma Famille

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In his State of the Union address on February 12th, 2013, President Barack Obama called on Congress to expand access to high-quality preschools for children throughout the nation (The White House, 2013). Indeed, multiple studies have brought to light the short- and long-term benefits of preschool enrollment (e.g., Gorey, 2001), especially for children from poor, immigrant, ethnically and linguistically diverse households (Winsler et al., 2008). In particular, the language that children are exposed to in the preschool classroom has direct implications for their immediate, as well as long-term learning outcomes (Dickinson & Porche, 2011). While scholars have highlighted the importance of the language environment in the preschool classroom, there remains a dearth of research on the precise nature of the language children encounter in these early academic settings, especially during transitions. Understanding the nature and characteristics of exchanges between teacher and children during transitions seems all the more important given the considerable amount of time spent in such routines in preschool (Early et al., 2010). This study will remedy the aforementioned gap in the literature by examining the teacher talk during transitions in a preschool classroom.

This paper is divided into five sections. Firstly, I will introduce the literature review that informed the research questions for the current study. Secondly, I will describe the participants, methods and data analysis procedures. Thirdly, I will present the results for my three research questions, before discussing them in the fourth section. In the final section, I will close with concluding remarks.

CHAPTER II: BACKGROUND

Language development and preschool

Scholars of language development have identified the undeniable contribution of the child's social environment to language acquisition¹, including the preschool classroom, which is the focus of the present literature review.

Importance of preschool for children's language development

Preschool often marks the transition from the home environment to that of the school. Such a change can present challenges for students whose home language practices differ from that of the school (Heath, 1983). Given that children from language minority or low socioeconomic households are often penalized if they start school with different English oral language skills (Hoff, 2013), preschool can alter this course by offering an environment that can positively affect children's language and learning. For example, Gillanders (2007) describes how the adjustment of EL preschoolers was made easier as their monolingual teacher focused on fostering positive relationships between herself and her EL students, as well as between EL students and their non-EL peers.

Preschool classroom social factors that influence children's language and literacy development

Factors that influence the pre-K classroom language environment include the social relations and interactions between teachers and preschoolers. For instance, Guo, Piasta, Justice, and Kaderavek (2010) revealed that teacher's self-efficacy had an effect on preschoolers' vocabulary gains in cases when there was an emotionally responsive

¹ See Hoff, 2006, for an overview of environmental variability factors that contribute to children's language development.

interaction between the teacher and preschoolers. The influence of such social processes may also have long-term effects on children's language development. Indeed, Burchinal et al. (2000) found that, for young children considered at risk for academic problems, affective relationships with the teacher was significantly related to gains in language and reading skills (Burchinal et al., 2000). Similarly, McDonald Connor et al. (McDonald Connor, Son, Hindman, & Morrison, 2005) argued that, even after controlling for family socioeconomic status, the vocabulary and reading scores of first-graders considered "at risk" could be positively influenced by high-quality early learning environments in both the home and the preschool with teachers who were warm, responsive, and who spent more time in academic activities. Taken together, these findings confirm that the relationship between preschool teachers and their students can have a pivotal role on children's language and literacy.

Importance of preschool teacher talk for children's language and literacy development

This study draws on a social constructivist approach to development, in which learning happens through interactions, which are mediated by semiotic tools such as language (Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, in the context of this study, the central role of preschool teacher talk is emphasized, given its impact on children's language and literacy development. To illustrate, Huttenlocher and colleagues (Huttenlocher, Vasilyeva, Cymerman, & Levine, 2002) found that the syntactic complexity of preschool teacher speech was significantly related to growth in children's syntactic comprehension over the school year. Most importantly, the nature of preschool teacher talk has long-term implications beyond the preschool years. For instance, Dickinson and Porche (2011) found that 4th-graders' reading comprehension could be predicted by characteristics of

preschool teacher talk, such as: rare word usage, ability to listen and extend children's comments and number of attention-getting utterances.

Influence of activity setting on preschool teachers' talk

The type of activity or classroom context often influences the nature of preschool teachers' language. For example, Massey and colleagues (Massey, Pence, Justice, & Bowles, 2008) found that the type of questions teachers directed to students varied depending upon the activity: management questions, which were the most frequent, usually occurred in teacher-directed and child-directed contexts; whereas more cognitively challenging questions, which were the second most frequent, arose mostly during shared storybook reading. Gest and colleagues (2006) report similar findings with regards to challenging features of preschool teacher talk: "free play was the setting for virtually all pretend talk, mealtime was the most common setting for decontextualized talk, and book reading was the setting in which teachers were rated as providing the highest overall richness" (p. 308). Within free-play time, it seems that pre-Kindergarten teachers modify their talk based on the role they take (e.g., play enhancer, stage manager) and the activity setting (Kontos, 1999). Similarly, Dickinson et al. (Dickinson, Darrow, & Tinubu, 2008) reported that the speech of the four Head Start pre-Kindergarten teachers they observed varied based on the classroom context. Teacher talk in the blocks area was more instructional in nature, "occasionally taking a didactic form" (Dickinson et al., 2008, p. 421); whereas in the dramatic play area, "teachers tended to talk more slowly and to use a richer mix of novel to total words; they were more likely to engage in recollection of past events or pretend play" (Dickinson et al., 2008, pp. 421–422). Likewise, Durden and Rainer Dangel (2008) found that preschool teachers were more

likely to use language when giving directions and managing materials in small-group activities that had a strongly didactic emphasis.

Together, these studies suggest that preschool teacher talk varies dramatically across activity settings. For this reason, studies on language input in the pre-K classroom should be contextualized and teacher talk should be analyzed with regards to the type of activity setting it occurs in.

Preschool teacher talk during transitions

Early et al. (2010) classify preschool classroom settings into three categories: free choice, teacher-assigned settings, and meals/routines. Most studies on preschool teacher talk have usually focused the first two categories, such as center-time (e.g., Kontos, 1999) and circle time (e.g., Yifat & Zadunaisky-Ehrlich, 2008). In contrast, there seem to be fewer studies on teacher talk during meals (e.g., Gest et al., 2006) and routines/transitions (e.g., cleaning up). (Note that in this paper, the term “transitions” is preferred to the term “routines”².)

This could partly be explained by the fact that transitions are often considered “lost instructional time”, especially in the later years (e.g., Coddling & Smyth, 2008). Even in preschool, with regards to students’ behavior, Vitiello and colleagues found transitions “to be a slightly more challenging part of the preschool day, with children exhibiting

² The original term “routines” used by Early et al. (2010) seems an inaccurate labeling of this type of activity setting. Indeed, many activities that fall under other categories could also be deemed as “routines”. For example, circle time is a well-established ritual in preschool; it is part of the classroom’s routine. For this reason, I prefer to refer to the activity setting “routines” that are the specific focus of this paper as “transitions”. Indeed, the activities that are found under this label usually happen as children transition into free choice, meals or teacher-assigned settings.

lower engagement with tasks and teachers” (Vitiello, Booren, Downer, & Williford, 2012, p. 217) than during other activity settings. Similarly, at the linguistic level, Cabell and colleagues (Cabell, DeCoster, LoCasale-Crouch, Hamre, & Pianta, 2013) noted that, together with mealtime, “routine settings consistently featured the least effective instructional interactions” (p. 827) in preschool classrooms. In other words, during routines, teachers were less likely to display strategies that foster successful instructional interactions, including: concept development (i.e., the extent to which teachers promote higher-order thinking skills in students), quality feedback (i.e., the extent to which teachers promote students’ learning and understanding), language modeling (e.g., teachers’ use of open-ended questions, repetitions, etc.), and literacy focus (e.g., phonological awareness activities) (Cabell et al., 2013).

Intervention studies to improve preschool teacher talk

Professional development interventions that aim at increasing the quantity and quality of teacher-child exchanges in preschool (e.g., Bradley & Reinking, 2011; Cabell, Justice, McGinty, DeCoster, & Forston, 2015) have focused on strategies that teachers can implement, such as using more open-ended questions. The underlying premise is that teachers’ extension of preschoolers’ discourse using decontextualized language structures and rich vocabulary will improve students’ oral language development, thus positively impacting emergent literacy (Foorman, Anthony, Seals, & Mouzaki, 2002).

However, the effectiveness of these interventions has only been measured in limited settings (e.g., mealtime, small-group activities), leaving routines and transitions out. This seems like a missed opportunity given the large amount of time preschoolers spend in routines and meals (Early et al., 2010). Even though “one cannot assume that teacher

learning within isolated contexts will automatically transfer to improvement within other contexts” (Cabell et al., 2013, p. 829), examining preschool teachers’ language practices during transitions seems like a viable starting point for future research to devise professional development to improve teacher-child exchanges during transitions.

Research questions

This review of the literature has highlighted how preschool coincides with a pivotal period in children’s language development, marking the transition between home language and academic language. The language environment of the preschool classroom can have short- and long-term repercussions on children’s language, as well as their learning experiences. Preschool teachers’ language is influenced by factors such as relationship with students, or type of activity. Interventions have been devised to enhance the quantity and quality of teacher-child interactions in preschool, with the purpose of facilitating children’s oral language development and emerging literacy.

Interestingly enough, most studies that have focused on teacher language in the preschool classroom rely on observations. What’s more, even studies that are based on actual transcripts of teacher talk have focused on limited settings. This study aims at remediating these gaps by examining the transcripts of teacher talk during transitions in a preschool classroom. Transitions were selected as the unit of analysis given the aforementioned dearth of research on such episodes. Transitions are defined as periods when children are involved in personal or classroom activities as they move from one setting to another (e.g., lining up to use the bathroom when transitioning from circle time

to meal). Understanding the teacher's language in such episodes would help paint a comprehensive picture of the preschool classroom culture.

More specifically, this research will answer the following questions.

RQ1 – To what extent are the characteristics of teacher talk during transitions different from the rest of the activity settings?

Given that various factors influence the language environment of the preschool classroom, as the literature review previously highlighted, RQ1 aims at describing the extent to which transitions differ from other settings in terms of teacher talk characteristics. Because of the nature of transitions and informed by previous research, I hypothesize that teacher talk during transitions will be more didactic than other activity settings.

RQ2 – To what extent do the characteristics of teacher talk vary within transitions?

RQ2 aims at breaking down the results about teacher talk characteristics by transition type. I hypothesize that the teacher will display a more collaborative conversational style during the first transition of the day (i.e., arrival time), since children would be coming in from outside, perhaps prompting conversations about non-immediate topics. I also expect that library time will be characterized by richer lexicon, since most conversations will be based on books.

RQ3 – How are transitions used to foster extended child-initiated conversations about academic concepts?

RQ3 aims at examining excerpts of child-initiated extended conversations, in which the teacher and her students discuss academic concepts. In other words, I will look at transitions from a pedagogical perspective by focusing on instances when the teacher

succeeded in providing opportunities for students to be exposed to or to use rich language to support their learning of academic concepts.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

In order to address the research questions, secondary data analysis was performed on previously videotaped observation of a pre-K classroom (Huang, 2013). The original research used the data to examine patterns of teacher talk and opportunities for children's engagement across activity settings, but did not include an examination of transitions, which are the focus of the present research.

This section describes the participants, the methods and the data analysis procedures.

Participants

Data for the present study came from a preschool classroom, which is part of a public elementary school located in a low-income suburban neighborhood in the Los Angeles County. All the children in the classroom come from low-income families, who qualify for enrollment in this state-funded program based on income eligibility requirements. The teacher follows the Houghton Mifflin curriculum ("Houghton Mifflin Harcourt - The destination for lifelong learning," n.d.) set forth by the school district, which advocates explicit instruction of literacy concepts.

Children attend this program from Monday to Friday, between 8:30AM and 11:30AM. The lead teacher (henceforth "*Ms. Belinda*") is assisted by two teaching aides. The classroom includes a total of 25 students (15 female and 10 male students). The student body is 65% Latino, with the rest of the children from African American, Asian, Caucasian, and mixed-race backgrounds.

Ms. Belinda is a middle-aged Hispanic woman with an Associates degree and over twenty years of experience working with young children. At the time of data collection, Ms. Belinda had been Head teacher for ten years, with prior experience as a private preschool director for ten years, and as a long-term substitute teacher at a publicly-funded infant center for three years (Huang, 2013).

Procedure

Observations

Teacher behavior was observed for five full program days in the spring of 2011, with field notes being taken. Only the final day was video-recorded. Videotaping started at the beginning of the day program (8:30AM) and ended when the last student had been dismissed at 11:30AM. The total recording time was 3 hours. Table 2 describes the school day captured on video, detailing the sequence and duration of activities.

Table 2 - Sequence and duration of activities videotaped during the observation (Huang, 2013).

Start time	Duration	Name of activity
8:30 AM	20 minutes	Arrival & table activity*
8:50 AM	54 minutes	Circle time
9:44 AM	2 minutes	Transition to centers*
9:46 AM	30 minutes	Centers time
10:16 AM	9 minutes	Transition to outside time*
10:25 AM	21 minutes	Outside time
10:46 AM	3 minutes	Transition to story time*
10:49 AM	7 minutes	Story time
10:56 AM	4 minutes	Transition to lunch*
11:00 AM	17 minutes	Lunch
11:17 AM	13 minutes	Library time & dismissal*

*: Transition time

As Table 2 shows, there are multiple transitions throughout the day, each of which is described below.

- Arrival & table activity – This transition episode represents the first twenty minutes of the day. During this time, Ms. Belinda greets the students as they arrive. Each child has to place their name card on the attendance board. The child has to write a letter on the smart board, before moving to a table where activities such as puzzles have been placed. Since the students are being dropped off at different times, the teacher goes back and forth between greeting children who have just arrived and checking in on students at the smart board or at the tables.
- Discussion – Once all the children have arrived, Ms. Belinda prompts a short whole group discussion about the letters that the students wrote on the smart board.
- Transition to circle time – Following the whole group discussion, Ms. Belinda instructs the children to clean up the classroom before moving on to the rug for circle time.
- Transition to centers – This transition episode lasts a little over two minutes. The class has just finished circle time and Ms. Belinda assigns children to small-group activities.
- Transition to outside time – This transition episode happens after centers and lasts nine minutes. The children are asked to clean up the classroom and reconvene on the rug. Ms. Belinda encourages them to use the bathroom before lining up to go outside.
- Transition to story time – This transition episode, which lasts three minutes, happens outside. The children are asked to clean up the toys and line up before coming back into the classroom for story time.
- Transition to lunch – This transition episode, which lasts almost five minutes, happens after story time. Ms. Belinda prompts a conversation about hygiene (i.e., the

importance of hand washing). The students are then asked to read their name on a card before lining up to use the bathroom.

- Library time – As the children finish eating lunch, they are instructed to sit on the rug and read a book while waiting for their caregivers.
- Dismissal – This transition episode represents the last eight minutes of the day, starting with the first student being picked up by a caregiver. Since the students are not picked up all at once, Ms. Belinda goes back and forth between greeting caregivers, saying goodbye to the children who are leaving, and checking in on students who are sitting on the rug with books.

Transcriptions

In order to answer the first two research questions, transcription of the teacher talk from the classroom video was done through the Codes for Human Analysis of Transcripts (CHAT) system, which is part of the Child Language Data Exchange System (CHILDES; MacWhinney, 2000). The interactions between speakers are formatted into separate “tiers” by speaker turn for ease of reading and analyses. Units of reference consisted of utterances, which ranged from single words to complex sentences with embedded clauses. All transcriptions were verified by an independent researcher.

In order to answer the third research question, relevant excerpts of teacher talk were transcribed following the Jeffersonian transcription system that is standard in conversation analysis (Have, 2007)(see Appendix II). Indeed, such transcription process “provides the researcher with a way of noticing, even discovering, particular events, and helps focus analytic attention on their socio-interactional organisation” (Heath & Luff, 1993, as cited in Have, 2007).

Computerized language analysis

Transcripts and videos were analyzed thanks to computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software that allow for the organization of large amounts of data in order to facilitate analysis (Merriam, 2009). Child Language ANalysis (CLAN), a series of computer program designed specifically for analysis of CHAT files (MacWhinney, 2000), was used to code features of teacher talk, as described in Table 3.

Coding

To answer the first research question, Huang's (2013) coding scheme was used. The coding scheme included seven broad categories that are presented in table 3 (see Appendix I for the list of codes that could not be automatically entered and that had to be manually recorded, with definitions and examples). All codes are taken from Huang's (2013) study, unless otherwise specified.

- First of all, *amount of teacher talk* was determined by tallying the total number of utterances and words used by the teacher during transitions.
- This information was used to calculate the *rate of speech* by dividing the total number of utterances or words by the amount of time (in minutes) that had gone by during each transition.
- The average MLU in words (i.e., the total number of words divided by the total number of utterances) served as a proxy for *syntactic complexity*³. Indeed, MLU represents the best known and most widely used method to measure syntactic

³ The original study (Huang, 2013) did not measure syntactic complexity.

development, ranging from stage I (one- and two-word utterances) to stage post-V (use of complex sentence constructions, such as embedding) (Brown, 1973).

- Then, *lexical diversity* was measured by looking at two measures. First, the ratio of “sophisticated” words to the total number of unique word types used by the teacher during transitions was calculated. Words were deemed “sophisticated” if they did not belong to the list of 7,875 common words that was updated from the Dale-Chall word list (Chall & Dale, 1995) to include all linguistic forms of the base words. The second measure was the statistic *D*, an index of relative lexical diversity that was developed based on mathematical modeling (Malvern, Richards, Chipere, & Durán, 2009).
- *Conversational balance* was calculated by examining both the ratio of teacher utterances relative to child utterances, as well as the ratio of teacher’s mean length of turn in utterances (MLTu) to the child’s MLTu. The rationale for using MLTu instead of MLU is to account for the fact that a lot of the children’s utterances are unclear since, unlike the teacher, the children did not wear microphones. With MLT, the CLAN program includes symbols like “xxx”, which mark undecipherable utterances, in all counts. “Thus, utterances that consist of only unintelligible vocal material still constitute turns” (MacWhinney, 2015, p.134).
- The functions of teacher talk were established by coding each utterance as either a *directive* or a *question*. Utterances were coded as *directives* if the teacher’s intention was to control a child’s behavior (e.g., “Look at me, please,” or “Can you help me clean up?”). Utterances were coded as *closed-ended questions* if the teacher requested information by asking a question in a format that limited the children’s choices, such as in yes-no (e.g., “Are you hungry?”) or multiple-choice questions (e.g., “Is it sunny

or is it raining today?”). *Open-ended questions* referred to utterances where the teacher requested information in a format that allowed children to freely choose their answer (e.g., “What’s the weather like today?”).

- Each utterance that was part of an extended conversation (i.e., the teacher sustained a single topic of conversation or engaged the student in solving a problem for five or more teacher turns) was coded as *extended conversation*. If a child initiated that extended conversation, it was coded as *child-initiated*. Extended conversations initiated by the teacher were coded as *teacher-initiated*⁴

Table 3 - Coding scheme (Huang, 2013) applied to transitions – Elements that were added to Huang’s original coding scheme have been italicized.

Category	Sub-category	Definition
Amount of teacher talk	Words	Total number of words used by the teacher
	Utterances	Total number of utterances used by the teacher
Rate of speech	Utterances / min	Total number of utterances divided by amount of time elapsed (in minutes)
	Words / min	Total number of words divided by amount of time elapsed (in minutes)
<i>Syntactic complexity</i>	<i>Average MLU in words</i>	<i>Total number of words divided by total number of utterances</i>
Lexical richness	% Sophisticated vocabulary	Total number of “sophisticated” words divided by total number of unique word types
	D	Optimum average value
Conversational balance	Teacher-child utterance ratio	Ratio of teacher utterances relative to child utterances
	Teacher-child MLTu ratio	Ratio of teacher’s means length of turn in utterances (MLTu) to the child’s MLTu
Functions of teacher talk	Directives	Utterances used by the teacher to control a child’s behavior or to gain the child’s attention
	Close-ended questions	Questions or requests that aim at eliciting information from the child phrased in such a way that the child is limited to yes/no or forced choice responses
	Open-ended	Questions or requests that aim at eliciting

⁴ The original study (Huang, 2013) did not distinguish between *child-initiated* and *teacher-initiated* extended conversations.

	questions	information from the child phrased in such a way that the child is free to respond in any way
Extended conversation	<i>Child-initiated</i>	Utterances that are part of an extended conversation <i>initiated by a child</i>
	<i>Teacher-initiated</i>	Utterances that are part of an extended conversation <i>initiated by the teacher</i>

Inter-coder reliability

Inter-rater reliability was established using the point-by-point percent agreement method (Gliner, Morgan, & Harmon, 2001). 60% of the transcript was randomly selected and independently coded by a trained researcher. The number of agreements between the two coders was divided by the total number of agreements and disagreements. The proportion of inter-rater agreements ranged from .84 to .96 for all manually-entered codes.

Data analysis procedures

This study followed a concurrent mixed-methods design (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003), by applying both quantitative and qualitative analyses to qualitative data.

RQ1 & RQ2 – As described before, qualitative data were first coded, with codes being assigned numbers. Then, the number of times codes appeared as numeric data were tallied and analyzed statistically whenever possible. For RQ1, independent samples t-tests were run, comparing transitions as a whole to the rest of the activity settings. Because of the limited number of cases, the ability to conduct statistical analyses for RQ2 remained limited to correlation. There was not enough power to conduct ANOVAs to statistically examine differences within transitions. Most results for RQ2 are thus in the form of raw data.

RQ3 – For the qualitative part of the study, transcripts of teacher talk during transitions were examined and extracts were selected that met the following criteria: (a) a child or children initiated a conversation, (b) the teacher followed up extensively with 5 or more turns⁵, and (c) the goal of the exchange was to further students’ exposure to academic concepts. Such excerpts were transcribed following conversation analysis conventions (cf. Appendix II).

⁵ The child could participate in the exchange verbally or non-verbally.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

RQ1

Raw results for the first research question are presented in Table 4, which compares transition times (highlighted column) to other activity settings (based on findings from Huang, 2013) with regards to the characteristics of teacher talk.

Table 4 – Comparing features of teacher talk between transitions and other activity settings. Data from all the activity settings except for transition were previously reported in Huang (2013).

	Transitions	Circle time (Whole group)	Centers time (Free choice)	Outside time (free choice)	Lunch (meal)
Minutes analyzed	55:58	53:37	29:51	20:25	16:28
<i>Amount of teacher talk</i>					
Words	5851	5835	2966	1814	1544
Utterances	1232	1364	649	406	329
<i>Rate of speech</i>					
Words/min	104	108	99	89	93
Utterances / min	22	25	22	20	19
<i>Syntactic complexity</i>					
MLU in words	4.75	4.28	4.57	4.47	4.69
<i>Lexical diversity</i>					
<i>D</i> – Optimum average value	90.99	117.71	98.48	85.29	92.02
% sophisticated vocabulary	7%	11%	8%	7%	5%
<i>Conversational balance</i>					
Teacher-child utterance ratio	8.15	3.55	2.77	4.41	2.69
Teacher-child MLTu ratio	4.47	2.37	2.05	2.63	2.05
<i>Teacher talk</i>					
Directives	34%	23%	10%	27%	20%
Questions	13%	16%	26%	14%	24%
Close-ended	9%	10%	18%	10%	19%
Open-ended	4%	6%	8%	4%	5%
Extended conversation	21%	8%	74%	11%	36%

In order to determine if any of the variance in teacher talk characteristics between transitions and the rest of the activity settings (i.e., circle time, centers time, outside time, and lunch) was significantly different, an independent samples t-test was performed. Results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5 – Comparing transitions to the rest of the activity settings

	Transitions	Rest of activity settings	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
Words/min	109.67 (28.58)	97.25 (8.26)	.83	11
Utterances / min	22.89 (5.11)	21.50 (2.65)	.51	11
MLU in words	4.70 (.52)	4.50 (.17)	.72	11
D – Optimum average value	68.77 (14.64)	99.12 (13.59)	-3.52**	11
% sophisticated vocabulary	3.78 (1.79)	7.75 (2.50)	-3.29**	11
Teacher-child utterance ratio	6.91 (5.70)	3.35 (.80)	1.21	11
Teacher-child MLTu ratio	5.69 (3.12)	2.27 (.28)	3.24*	8.29
Directives	35.33 (11.01)	20 (7.26)	2.52*	11
Questions	11.67 (5.43)	20 (5.89)	-2.49*	11
Extended conversation	22.11 (22.32)	32.25 (30.53)	-.68	11

Note. * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$. Standard Deviations appear in parentheses below means.

As Table 5 shows, several features of teacher talk were significantly different between transitions and the rest of the activity settings. Firstly, there was a significant effect for lexical diversity, $t(11) = -3.52, p < .01$ for *D*, and $t(11) = -3.29, p < .01$ for sophisticated vocabulary, with transitions being less rich lexically than other activity settings. Secondly, there was a significant effect for conversational balance, $t(8.29) = 3.24, p < .05$, with transitions being characterized by higher teacher-child MLTu ratio than other activity settings. This suggests that Ms. Belinda was a more dominant conversation partner during transitions. Thirdly, there was a significant effect for the functions of teacher talk, $t(11) = 2.52, p < .05$ for directives, and $t(11) = -2.49, p < .05$ for questions, with transitions being characterized by more directives and fewer questions than other activity settings.

RQ2

While the first research question compared transitions to other activity settings, RQ2 examined the results by transition type in order to highlight potential differences within transitions⁶.

First, Table 6 compares different types of transitions with regards to the amount of teacher talk and the teacher’s rate of speech.

Table 6 - Comparing features of teacher talk within types of transitions

	1 Welcom e Table activity	1 & Discuss ion	1 Transitio n circle time	2 to Transitio n centers	3 to Transitio n outside	4 to Transitio n time	5 to Transitio n lunch	6 to Librar y time	6 Dismiss al
Minutes analyzed	16:36	01:43	02:27	02:24	08:53	02:59	04:53	07:18	08:22
<i>Amount of teacher talk</i>									
Words	1582	194	211	396	1221	339	429	862	617
Utterances	327	52	47	69	252	70	90	186	139
<i>Rate of speech</i>									
Words/min	95	113	86	165	137	113	87	118	73
Utterances / min	19	30	19	28	28	23	18	25	16

As can be seen in Figure 1, the teacher’s syntactic complexity varied within transitions, with discussion receiving the lowest score for MLU in words (3.73), and transition to centers receiving the highest score (5.73).

⁶ The differences within transitions could not be tested statistically (i.e., through ANOVA) because of a lack of statistical power.

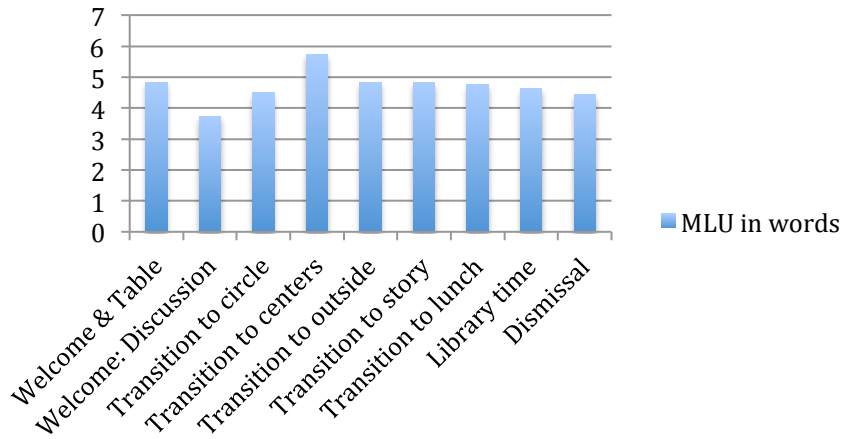


Figure 1 - Syntactic complexity within transitions

As for lexical richness (cf. Figure 2), discussion and transition to story time had the lowest D values (47.38 and 49.25, respectively), whereas welcome and dismissal times had the highest D values (85.24 and 86.14, respectively). On the other hand, the percentage of sophisticated vocabulary remained low for each type of transition (between 1% and 6%).

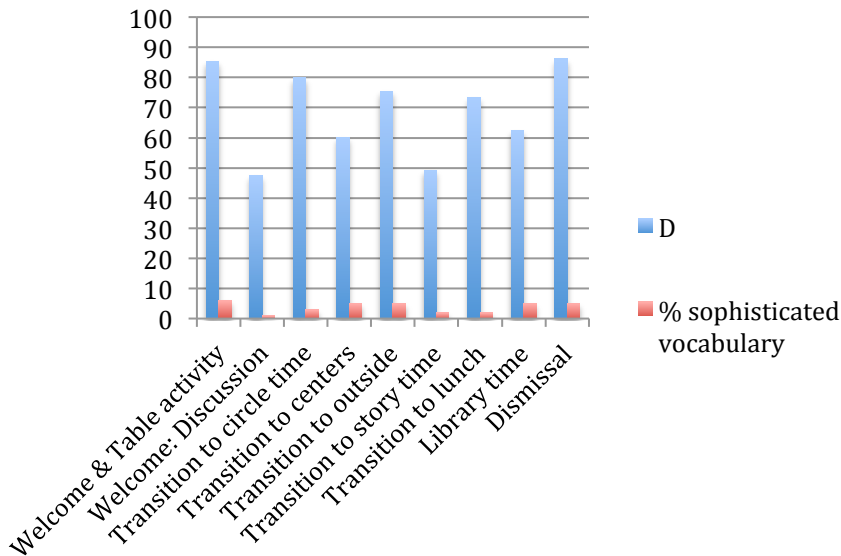


Figure 2 - Lexical richness within transitions

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between lexical diversity and utterance rate. There was a strong negative correlation between the two variables, $r = -0.714$, $n = 9$, $p = 0.031$, which suggests that the faster Ms. Belinda spoke, the less lexically diverse her speech was.

Next, as Figure 3 suggests, some transitions were characterized by weak conversational balance in terms of teacher-child utterance ration and teacher-child MLTU ratio. Most notably, transition to circle time and transition to centers featured no participation from the students.

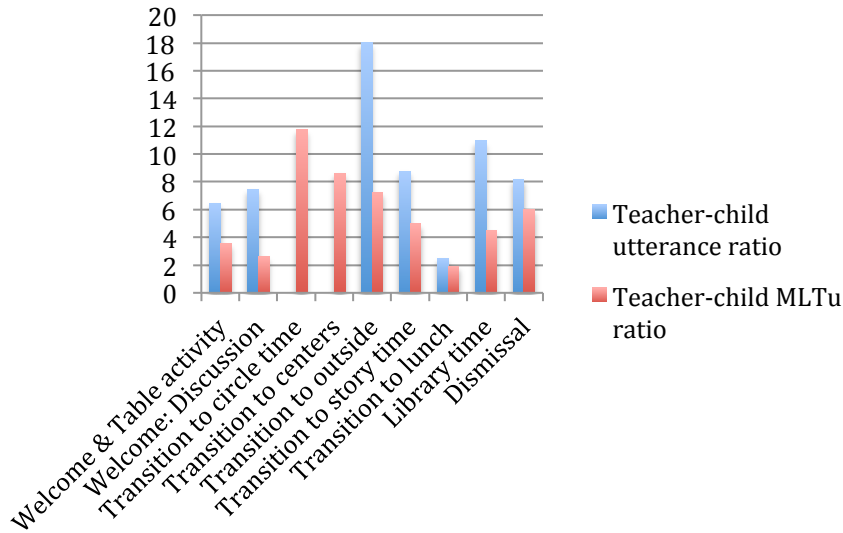


Figure 3 - Conversational balance within transitions

Not surprisingly, directives constituted a moderate to high percentage of teacher sentences throughout transitions (Figure 4). For example, almost half of the sentences in the transition to circle time were directives.

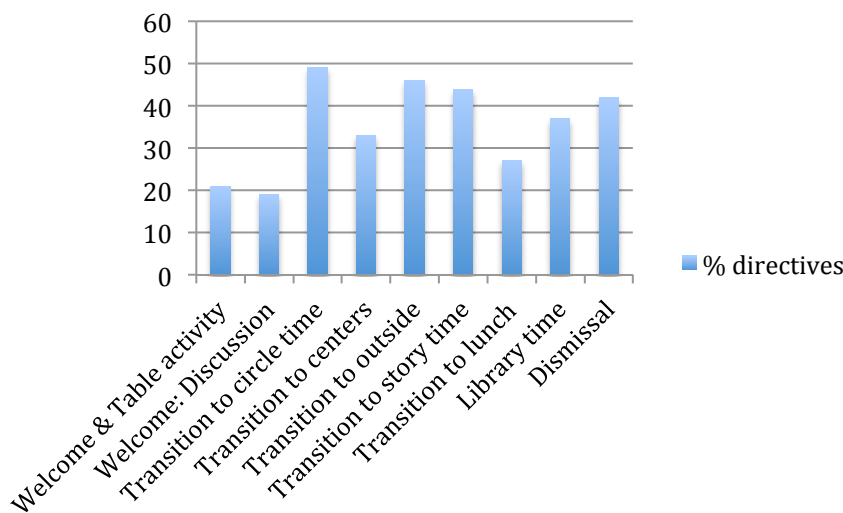


Figure 4 - Directives within transitions

In contrast, all transitions were characterized by a low percentage of questions, most of which were close-ended (cf. Figure 5). Ms. Belinda asked the most questions in the first transition of the day (19%), whereas she asked very few questions (4%) during both transition to circle time and transition to lunch.

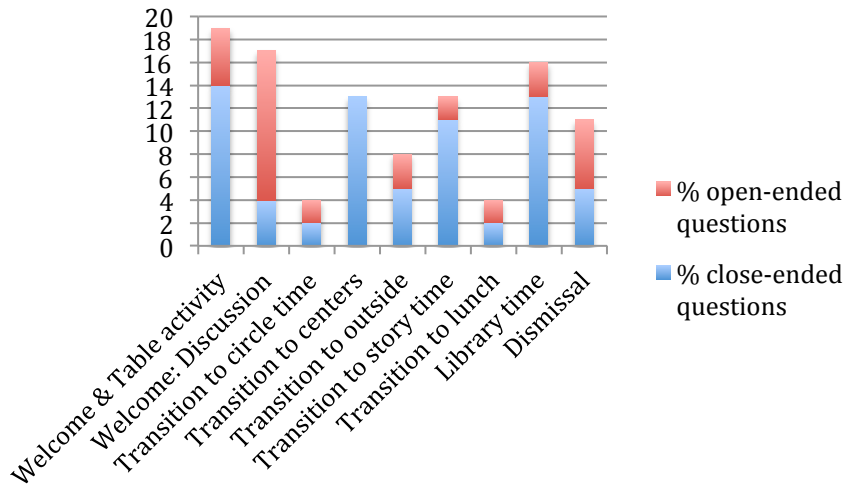


Figure 5 - Questions within transitions

Finally, as Figure 6 shows, transitions were heterogeneous in terms of extended conversations, with some displaying no extended conversations (e.g., transition to circle time and transition to centers).

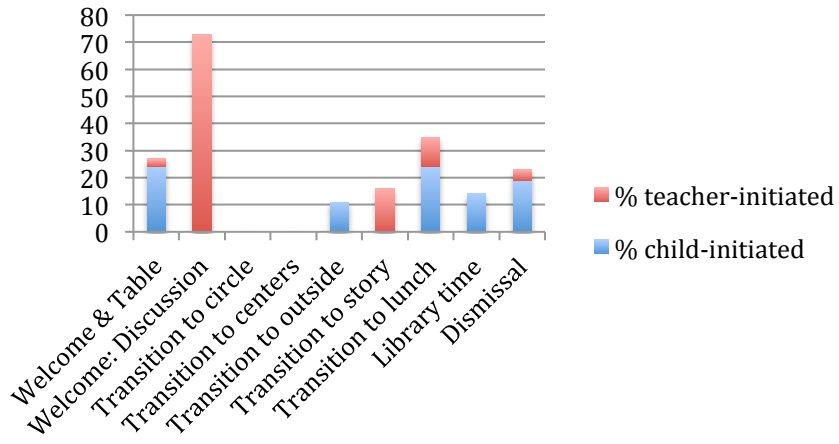


Figure 6 - Extended conversations within transitions

RQ3

For the qualitative part of the study, transcripts of teacher talk during transitions were examined to select excerpts of extended conversations between the teacher and students with a focus on academic concepts.

I counted a total of 16 extended conversations between the teacher and her students during transitions, four of which were teacher-initiated, and twelve of which were child-initiated. Only four of these extended conversations met the criteria that were highlighted earlier (i.e., (a) a child or children initiated a conversation, (b) the teacher followed up extensively with five or more turns, and (c) the goal of the exchange was to further students' exposure to academic concepts). Indeed, many child-initiated extended conversations remained on trivial topics that did not necessarily advance students' exposure to academic concepts. Below is an example of a child-initiated extended conversation that would not have been selected since it did not meet the last criterion (i.e., the exchange did not promote students' learning of academic concepts).

Child: Teacher, who is that on her shirt?
Teacher: Do you know who that is on her shirt?
Child: xxx.
Teacher: It is.
Child: xxx.
Teacher: Mhm, it's a TV show.
Child: Teacher, I watch it.
Teacher: Did you watch it?
Child nods.
Teacher: Did you like the show?
Child nods.
Teacher: Yes?

In contrast, the following four excerpts that were transcribed following conversation analysis convention and that will now be analyzed met all of the aforementioned criteria.

Excerpt 1 – “Drizzle”

This excerpt is taken from the first transition, as Ms. Belinda is supervising students at the activities table while waiting for the remaining students to arrive.

1. ((*Ms. Belinda is facing the tables where some children are doing activities. Many children are speaking indistinctly at once.*))
2. Child: (go outside.)
3. Ms. Belinda: ((*Leaning towards some children to better hear them.*))
4. I (0.1) th:ink so.
5. We'll have to look outside and see if it's rai:ning.
6. Ms. Belinda: But I think the rain is going to **stop**.
7. I think it will stop by ((*Shifts her gaze to boy 1 sitting at the table*)) (0.1) the time we go outside.
8. Boy 1: ()
9. Ms. Belinda: It **was** raining?
10. Boy 1: [()
11. Ms. Belinda: [Uh uh. You felt the rain [on your way to school?
12. Boy 1: [()
((*Boy 2 at another table speaks indistinctly and touches his head. Ms. Belinda leans towards him.*))
13. Ms. Belinda: It was on top of your **hea:d**?
14. ((*Stands up facing the whole class.*))
15. Was it a **lot** ~f rain? Or just ((*Holds her hands up in the air and rubs her fingertips together.*)) a **li:ttle** bit?
16. Boy 3: A lo:t.
17. Ms. Belinda: ((*Nods towards boy 3.*))
18. Little bit.
19. ~W~z just a **ti::ny** bit of rain. Th~ts called a drizzle.
20. ((*Holds her hands up in the air and rubs her fingertips together.*)) J~st a **light** rain a very **light** rain.
21. ((*Turns towards Adriana.*)) Hey Adriana? Adriana?
22. ((*Crosses her hands and taps her shoulders.*))
23. Look at me please.
24. ((*Walks closer towards Adriana and leans towards her.*))
25. Adriana you need to **ca:lm** down. [Thank you.
26. Boy 2: [It was drizzling.
27. Ms. Belinda: ((*Leans towards boy 2.*)) ~t w~z ((*Enunciates very clearly.*))

drizz:ling.

In this apparently banal conversation about the weather, Ms. Belinda is able to capitalize on children's experiences in order to make predictions and to introduce a new academic term, namely "drizzle".

The conversation begins with a prediction ("I think the rain is going to stop. I think it will stop by the time we go outside."), which prompts some of the children to refer to their own recent experience and mention that it was raining earlier. Ms. Belinda echoes children's turns with confirmation questions ("It was raining?", "It was on top of your head?"), as an acknowledgement of their participation. She then moves the conversation to a more academic level by asking the children to characterize the rain ("Was it a lot of rain or just a little bit?"), to which one of the children answers that it was "a lot". Ms. Belinda acknowledges his participation by nodding but embeds a correction in her next turn ("little bit"). Afterwards, she provides a definition of the new term she introduces ("... a tiny bit of rain. That's called a drizzle"). Ms. Belinda then emphasizes the major characteristic of a drizzle by repeating herself ("just a *light* rain, a very *light* rain."), insisting on the adjective "light", and further embodying the smallness of the rain by her hand gesture (rubbing her fingertips together). The exchange is almost brought to an end by a child's misbehavior. The teacher first tries to reprimand the child non-verbally (crossing her hands and tapping her shoulders), perhaps in an attempt to minimize the disruption to the ongoing conversation. Indeed, despite this interruption, Ms. Belinda purposely returns to the conversation and finishes it by exposing her students to the verb form of the new term they just learned. She enunciates very clearly "drizzling", showing that "drizzle" is also a verb that can be conjugated.

In sum, in this short exchange with a small group of students, Ms. Belinda capitalizes on children's observation of the weather to introduce the concept of "drizzle".

Excerpt 2 – "Letter of the week"

This extract is taken from the third transition of the day's schedule, as the class is about to go outside.

1. ((*The children are lined up to go outside. Ms. Belinda opens the door.*))
2. Ms. Belinda: ((*Halts the students while she sticks the door open*)) Stop right the:re.
3. Child 1: (1.1) Nick.
4. Ms. Belinda: Nick is the star of the week.
5. Because what's the letter?
6. Child 1: *N*.
7. Ms. Belinda: *N*.
8. ((*Holds her hand to her ear pretending she cannot hear.*)) ~W~s the letter of the week?
9. Children: ((*In chorus.*)) [N.
10. Ms. Belinda: [N. And what sound does it make? (.6)
11. [Nnn.
12. Child 2: [Two Nicks. ((*Holds two fingers up in the air.*))
13. Ms. Belinda: There **are** two Nicks.
14. One's in the morning class and one's in the **afternoon** class. That's **another** Nick.
15. Child 3: Nick.
16. Child 4: Nick Nick.
17. Ms. Belinda: Nick and Nick.

What is interesting about this brief exchange is the fact that it echoes previous conversations about literacy that took place earlier during the day. For instance, when leading a whole-group discussion about letters that children had written on the smart board as they arrived, Ms. Belinda reminded her students that *n* was the letter of the week. In addition, during circle time, Ms. Belinda led several literacy activities focusing on *n*, the letter of the week: first, she pointed her wand on *n* on the rug; she also read a book chapter about *Nyle Noodle* that focused on words that start with *n* and then played

the accompanying song; and finally, the “letter tub” contained items that all started with the letter *n* (a nightgown, a newspaper, a napkin, etc.). In the present excerpt, we can see how Ms. Belinda uses an informal setting (i.e., transition time) to reinforce a concept she taught in a formal setting (i.e., at circle time). Furthermore, Ms. Belinda insists that the whole class take part in this exchange and uses hand gesture (pretending she cannot hear) to entice whole-group participation. Not only does she expect the children to recognize the name of the letter (“what’s the letter of the week?”), but she also asks them a question about the pronunciation (“what sound does it make?”). This serves as a subtle reminder to the students that the name of a letter does not always match its pronunciation.

It is not clear what the purpose of Child 1 was when he said “Nick”. Regardless, Ms. Belinda seized this opportunity to engage students in a literacy conversation about the letter that is the focus of that week’s curriculum (“Nick is the star of the week because what’s the letter?”).

Excerpt 4 – “Dog and scale”

This extract is taken from the final transition period. Children have been asked to sit on the rug and quietly read books while waiting for their caregivers to pick them up. Ms. Belinda is sitting on the rug with some children.

1. Charlie: I have ~n all black one.
2. Ms. Belinda: ~n all black what?
3. Charlie: A dog.
4. Ms. Belinda: A **dog**. It’s-
(*Another child talks to Ms. Belinda from afar. Ms. Belinda nods and silently says “okay”.*)
5. Charlie: It’s a yab. ~s a yab.
6. Ms. Belinda: A-. It’s a **lab**. A lab.
7. And is he big or is he a puppy?
8. Charlie: Just grow up.

9. Ms. Belinda: ((*Pushes Charlie's hair off of his face. Nods.*))
 10. He grew up? So he's an adult dog? He's a big dog?
 11. Charlie: No he's five.
 12. Ms. Belinda: Oh he's five?
 13. ((*Lifts her hand up and nods.*)) So yes he's a big dog.
 14. ((*Looks at Judy.*)) [He's all grown up.
 15. Judy: [My my my dog is like this ((*Pointing her book.*)) ~n ~n ~n it ~n it (I don't know it all grown.)
 16. Ms. Belinda: Mm mm. Now look at this. ((*Points at the image in the book.*))
 17. These dogs are sitting on a (0.5) **scale**.
 18. And it's telling the (0.7) people **how** (0.7) much the dogs **weigh**,
 19. It's measurin~ th~m.
 20. Charlie: (I saw I wanted to wear a squickle.)
 21. Ms. Belinda: ((*Smiles and nods*)). Did you?
 22. ((*Looks towards Katherine and points at the book, in a singing voice.*)) That's called a **scale** Katherine.
 23. Do we have a scale in the house area?
 24. Judy: E- e- [even at the] market.
 25. Ms. Belinda: [Do we have a s-
 26. ((*Hand gesture, nods.*)) Even at the **market** there's a scale.
 27. Right?
 28. ((*Lifts both fists up in the air before putting her hands back on her knees.*)) What do you weigh at the market?
 29. Judy: U:::h veg~tables.
 30. Ms. Belinda: ((*Nodding.*)) Veg~tables. = That's right. Fruits ~n veg~tables.
 31. ((*Points at the book.*)) **This** scale's weighing the puppies.
 32. ((*Points at the house area.*)) ~n we ~av a **scale** in the house.
 33. Right? The- ((*Hand gesture.*)) Our white scale that we c~n (0.5) step on?
 34. = ~n ~tells us how many **poun:ds** we are.
 35. **How much** do we (0.4) weigh. Very good.

This conversation begins with Charlie referring to his dog. Ms. Belinda follows up for several turns, but only asks close-ended questions (e.g., “Is he big or is he a puppy?”), which runs the risk of discouraging Charlie from extending his speech.

Perhaps because she senses that the conversation is dying out, Ms. Belinda redirects it to the book that Judy is reading. She seizes the opportunity to expand on the children's vocabulary by teaching them the term “scale”. The pauses and the emphases in her next two sentences (“These dogs are sitting on a (0.5) *scale*. And it's telling the (0.7) people

how (0.7) much the dogs *weigh*.”) signal the key elements of her definition: a scale indicates how much one weighs. In order to reinforce the children’s acquisition of the term *scale*, Ms. Belinda ties it to a familiar context – the classroom – by asking “Do we have a scale in the house area?”. One of the children further extends the conversation to a realm outside of the classroom (“Even at the market”). Ms. Belinda signals her agreement both verbally and non verbally and asks the students to elaborate (“What do you weigh at the market?”). However, her question only prompts students to answer with a single word (“vegetables”).

Once again, perhaps because she senses that the discussion is stalling, Ms. Belinda skillfully redirects the exchange. It seems that she has decided to put an end to the conversation, but not until she walks her students through what they have just learned one more time. Ms. Belinda first refers back to the book that prompted the exchange (both by pointing to the image and by emphasizing the deitic reference in the sentence “*This scale’s weighing the puppies.*”). Ms. Belinda then points at the house area, a place that is familiar to her students, to illustrate another context in which a scale is used. Finally, Ms. Belinda ends the conversation by reminding children of the definition of the term *scale*. Once again, the pauses and emphases in her speech serve to signal the key elements of her definition (“... tells us how many *pounds* we are, how much do we (0.4) weigh.”).

Excerpt 5 – “Subtraction”

This extract is taken from the final transition period. Children have been asked to sit on the rug and wait for their caregivers. Ms. Belinda is monitoring the pick up process.

1. ((*Ms. Belinda is standing up, her arms folded in her back. Some children are sitting on the rug next to her, while other children are getting ready to exit the classroom.*))

2. Rian: (Now there's) ((Points at children every time he says a number.)) one.
3. Two.
4. Three.=
5. Ms. Belinda: ((To the child that is leaving.)) B~a~by:e,
6. Rian: Five.
7. Ms. Belinda: How many kids are left ((Shifts her gaze from Rian to another child.)) Rian?
8. Rian: ((Holds his hand up.)) Five.
9. Ms. Belinda: ((Shifts her gaze back to Rian, in a singing voice.)) **Five** kids are left.
10. How many are boys?
11. Rian: One.
12. Ms. Belinda: ((in a singing voice.)) Ju(h)st one boy is here.
13. Teaching assistant: (Delia and Caroline.)
14. Ms. Belinda: ((Shifts her gaze towards Delia. Singing voice.)) Delia's turn
15. ((Steps out to make some room for Delia to stand up.)) and Caroline.
16. ((Bends towards Delia.)) Bye Delia.
17. Delia: Bye.
18. Ms. Belinda: ((Pats Delia on the back.)) See you tomo:row.
19. Rian: Now there's[three:.
20. Ms. Belinda: [There it is.
21. ((Shifts her gaze back to Rian, nodding.)) Now there's three.
22. ((Holds her hand up.)) We had five.
23. ((Points at the two girls leaving the classroom.)) and **two**: left.
24. ((Puts her hands behind her back.)) Now there's
25. (0.6) **three**:.
 26. Now there's three.
27. Rian: (Now there's) almost zero.
28. Ms. Belinda: **Al**most.
29. ((Walks closer to the children on the rug.)) We're getting there.
30. **Who** do you think is gonna go home **next**?
31. Take a guess.
32. Jordyn: ((Points at Rian.)) Uh, Rian.
33. Ms. Belinda: You think Rian's going home next?
34. Abigail: Jordyn.
35. Ms. Belinda: ((Shifts her gaze towards Abigail and points at Jordyn.)) You think **Jordyn**'s going home next?
 (0.2)
36. What about you Rian?
37. Who do you think will go home next?=
 38. ((in a singing voice)) You gotta take a guess.
39. You ~cn~t.

40. You can't look.
41. Rian: (Caroline.)
42. Ms. Belinda: Who? (*Looks at the door.*)
43. No.
44. (*Moves closer to the children on the rug and points at them in a circular movement*)
45. Out of *the*:se three Rian.
46. Who's going home?
47. Rian: (*Looks towards the door.*) Jordyn
48. Ms. Belinda: (*Looks and starts walking towards the door.*) Well.
(0.8)
49. You think it's Jor-
50. it's Jordyn?
51. Teaching assistant: Rian.
52. Ms. Belinda: Oh.
53. (*In a singing voice*) It's Ri:an. Ri:an's next.

As the children are leaving, Rian initiates a math activity in which he counts the number of children who are left. Ms. Belinda takes part in the activity and prompts a short question and answer game. She extends Rian's one-word answers into complete sentences (e.g., "Five." becomes "Five kids are left."), but her singing voice softens her corrective stance. As more children are leaving, Ms. Belinda seizes the opportunity to echo a lesson on counting taught previously at circle time. Indeed, earlier that day, children had to select a certain number of toys from a container based on the digit that came up on the die that Ms. Belinda was rolling. During this activity, Ms. Belinda was able to convey notions of addition and subtraction (e.g., asking children how many more toys they needed to reach the target number). In the present excerpt, once again, Ms. Belinda uses the informal setting of a transition to instruct children on a concept that she previously taught in a formal setting (i.e., circle time). Not only is she acknowledging Rian's counting game, but she also makes it more challenging by explaining out loud the process of a subtraction ("We had five and two left. Now there's three."). The math operation she conducts is illustrated by her gestures (holding her hand up for the number

five and pointing at Caroline and Delia to show the *two* children who are leaving). Next, Ms. Belinda expands the activity by asking the children to make predictions (“Who do you think will go home next?”). She reminds Rian of the rules of that game: Rian has to decide between the children who are left (“Out of *these* three Rian; who’s going home?”), and cheating is not allowed (“You gotta take a guess. You can’t look.”). Ms. Belinda’s melodious prosody at the end of the exchange is a reminder to Rian that, even if his prediction failed, they are just playing a game.

In short, in this previous excerpt, despite the complexity of the notion introduced to the students (i.e., subtraction), Ms. Belinda is able to keep the children entertained by remaining playful throughout the exchange, which reflects the informality of the transition setting.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

RQ1

Perhaps the most striking result for the first research question is the fact that Ms. Belinda's classroom spent almost a third of its day in transitions. This is slightly higher than what Early et al. (2010) found, namely that both meals and routines constituted about a third of a pre-kindergarten day. At any rate, this finding highlights the important role that transitions play for the preschoolers in Ms. Belinda's classroom.

The hypothesis that transitions would be more didactic than other activity settings was confirmed on several levels. As the significant difference in teacher-child MLTu ratio shows, Ms. Belinda was a more dominant conversation partner in transitions than in the rest of the activity settings. She gave more directives and asked fewer questions, which most likely restricted the opportunities for children to participate in the exchanges. Ms. Belinda's lexicon was also less rich during transitions than other activity settings. Together, these results support Cabell and colleagues' (Cabell, DeCoster, LoCasale-Crouch, Hamre, & Pianta, 2013) findings that instructional interactions were the least effective during routines, in that preschool teachers failed to display strategies that would foster richer language use among their students. In the case of Ms. Belinda, not only did the language that she modeled was poor lexically, but she also failed to systematically use strategies that would prompt her students to talk more (e.g., asking open-ended questions), which created a conversational imbalance between herself and her students.

Such findings may be explained by the teacher's perception of transitions or the students' behavior. With regards to the former, it would be interesting to examine how

Ms. Belinda regards transitions (by interviewing her, for instance), and more precisely the extent to which she assigns instructional value to such routines. With regards to the latter, the reason why Ms. Belinda used more didactic and less rich language during transitions may be related to the fact that the children's behavior was more challenging. Indeed, Vitiello et al. found that transitions were a challenging part of the day with low student engagement (Vitiello, Booren, Downer, & Williford, 2012). In other words, Ms. Belinda may have focused more on aspects of classroom management during transitions in anticipation or in response to the students' challenging behaviors, which may have influenced the language she used (e.g., using more directives).

In sum, results for the first research question point to the fact that the nature of transitions does influence Ms. Belinda's speech.

RQ2

Even though it is not possible to determine whether the variance within transitions is statistically significant, results from the second research question hint at differences between types of transition.

- The first transition of the day (i.e., welcome and table activity) was the longest of all of the transitions. It is most notable on the lexical level since it had the second highest *D* value (that captures lexical diversity), and the highest percentage of sophisticated vocabulary of all the transitions. It had relatively few directives compared to other transitions, and it is the transition in which Ms. Belina asked the highest percentage of questions. It is also one of the two transitions with the highest percentage of child-initiated extended conversation. Together, these findings paint a positive picture of

such a transition and point to several possible explanations. First, it could be that the exchanges between Ms. Belinda and her students were relatively rich because the children were coming in from outside, wanting to relay their unshared experience to their teacher, which required them to use more language. Another possibility is that Ms. Belinda may have been more “relaxed” in her interactions with her students because she did not feel that she was on full teaching duty yet.

- The second transition (labeled “Welcome: Discussion”) was the shortest. Its format resembled that of circle time, with Ms. Belinda initiating an extended conversation with the whole class, asking questions about the letters they wrote on the board. The focus on one topic only (i.e., letters written by students) may explain the low level of lexical diversity in that particular transition.
- Next, the transition to circle time was most notable because of the didactic nature of Ms. Belinda’s talk. The children did not participate orally in this segment, and almost half of Ms. Belinda’s utterances consist of directives. This transition in particular did not seem to yield rich linguistic exchanges between Ms. Belinda and her students.
- Ms. Belinda’s syntax appeared to be the most complex during the transition to centers. But here again, the children did not participate orally.
- The transition to outside time was the second longest transition. Despite the high number of directives, 11% of Ms. Belinda’s utterances were part of child-initiated extended conversations, which indicates that Ms. Belinda was able to take the time to promote a long exchange with at least some of the students.
- Ms. Belinda’s speech during the transition to story time was also remarkably didactic, with many directives.

- The transition to lunch seemed to have the highest conversational balance of all the transitions. As the children discussed hygiene routines (hand washing) and waited for their turn to go wash their hands before lunch, Ms. Belinda was able to sustain extended conversations.
- Surprisingly enough, Ms. Belinda’s linguistic practices did not improve during library time. Contrary to what I had hypothesized, Ms. Belinda’s lexicon was not particularly diverse or sophisticated compared to other types of transition. The presence of books did not seem to support particularly rich exchanges between the teacher and her students, which may be a missed opportunity on Ms. Belinda’s part.
- Finally, dismissal seemed to foster richer and more diverse lexicon in Ms. Belinda’s speech. This result may be explained by the fact that Ms. Belinda slowed down at the end of the school day (as the results for her rate of speech show), taking the time to engage in some child-initiated conversations.

To conclude, though it is not possible to assess the statistical significance of these results, RQ2 seems to point to the fact that not all transitions are created equal, and that the teacher’s speech may vary based on the type of transition.

RQ3

What is most striking in the qualitative excerpts is the fact that Ms. Belinda managed to utilize ostensibly non-institutional moments such as transitions to reinforce concepts that she previously taught in formal settings such as circle time. This suggests that transitions do not necessarily constitute “instructional lost time”, but rather opportunities for academic and language enrichment. As the following discussion will show, in order to

further her students' language and academic development, Ms. Belinda resorted to different strategies.

Interestingly enough, some of Ms. Belinda's language support maneuvers (e.g., using high pitch and exaggerated intonation contour, producing speech in response to children's attentional focus, spending multiple utterances on a single topic) share characteristics of motherese (cf. Hoff, 2009). Indeed, it seems that several of Ms. Belinda's strategies are supported by research on children's language development. To begin with, despite the few number of open-ended questions she directed at the children, in the above excerpts, Ms. Belinda was able to prompt spontaneous speech from her students and engage them in extended conversations, probably because she often followed the children's lead. Indeed, one way in which preschool teachers can encourage children to become competent conversational partners is to encourage child-initiated enquiries (Durden & Dangel, 2008). This teaching strategy pertains to research that shows that capitalizing on episodes of joint attention positively affects young children's acquisition of language (Tomasello & Farrar, 1986). Ms. Belinda often repeated and expanded on children's talk (e.g., the child said: "Even at the market", to which Ms. Belinda responded: "Even at the market, there's a scale."). This type of adult elaboration (both at the semantic and syntactic levels) is typical of children's language input experiences in some cultures and has been hypothesized to support children's language development (Hoff, 2009). Also, Ms. Belinda's exaggerated prosody in some exchanges may be a strategy to emphasize teachable concepts, just like mothers' prosodic emphasis facilitates infants' speech processing (Fernald & Mazzie, 1991). Alternatively, it may be a way to keep students engaged during challenging periods such as transitions. Furthermore, most of Ms.

Belinda's corrections of children's talk were embedded within the ongoing talk (Jefferson, 1987). This concurs with findings that "adults reformulate erroneous child utterances often enough for learning to occur" (Chouinard & Clark, 2003, p. 667). However, Yifat and Zadunaisky-Ehrlich (2008) warn that despite the pedagogical needs it serves, revoicing from teachers tended to discourage children from joining the discussion during circle time in the preschool classrooms they observed.

On the other hand, Ms. Belinda similarly deployed several strategies to facilitate her students' learning of academic concepts. For example, whenever Ms. Belinda introduced specialized terms, she did so by not only providing a formal definition, but also by contextualizing this definition in an environment that was familiar to her students. To illustrate, Ms. Belinda introduced and defined the term *drizzle* to her students after asking them questions about the type of rain they felt on their way to school. Indeed, one way in which teachers can enhance children's vocabulary acquisition is by frequently engaging students in "authentic discussions – give and take conversations in which they are given the opportunity to thoughtfully discuss meaningful topics" (Graves, 2008, p. 59). In addition, Ms. Belinda facilitated her students' acquisition of new concepts by drawing their attention to key elements in her definitions. She used several strategies to achieve that goal: incorporating gestures (e.g., pinching her fingers to embody the smallness of the drizzle - "just a little bit of rain"), elongating vowels in her description of the rain (e.g., "a *ti::ny* bit of rain"), and inserting long pauses before key words (e.g., "These dogs are sitting on a (0.5) *scale*."). Furthermore, the fact that Ms. Belinda focuses on foundational words and concepts represents a developmentally appropriate way to teach

academic vocabulary, preparing students well for later Kindergarten instruction (Bailey et al., 2010).

In sum, the excerpts attest to the numerous strategies Ms. Belinda resorted to, which most likely positively affect her students' language and academic trajectory.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

The quantitative results of this research painted a disappointing picture of transitions in this preschool classroom. Compared to other activity settings, Ms. Belinda's speech during transitions was significantly more didactic (i.e., low conversational balance, more directives, and fewer questions) and lexically less rich. Indeed, Ms. Belinda dominated most of the conversations, gave more directives and asked fewer questions, and also used a lexicon that was less diverse and sophisticated than the rest of the activity settings. Such results can be all the more alerting as almost a third of class time was spent in transitions. At the micro-level, the results for RQ2 hint at the possibility of certain transition profiles. For example, both the first and last transitions of the day fostered more lexical richness in Ms. Belinda's speech, perhaps because Ms. Belinda felt that she was not on full teaching duty yet/anymore and allowed the children to initiate conversations at a higher rate. In contrast, during some transitions such as the transitions to circle time or to centers, Ms. Belinda sought no contribution from the children and gave them many directives. What's more, the fact there are so few excerpts that met the criteria highlighted in the third research question suggests that transition periods do not seem to lend themselves to long academic exchanges between the teacher and her students.

However, the very existence of these rich child-initiated extended conversations raises the possibility that transitions could in fact be used to spark "moments of occasioned knowledge exploration" (Goodwin, 2007), which Goodwin defines as moments when caregivers and children connect new knowledge to existing knowledge following the child's expression of interest. For example, in some instances, Ms. Belinda very skillfully used input from the children to reinforce concepts that she had previously

taught at circle time. In that sense, the informal setting of the transitions was used to supplement curriculum covered in formal settings. Transitions were also used as opportunities to advance children's language development. It seems that Ms. Belinda used different strategies not only as a way to adapt her language to the students' varying proficiency levels in English, but also as a means to foster language growth among the children. Such linguistic strategies seem developmentally appropriate, and will most likely help students transition well into Kindergarten (Bailey et al., 2010).

Based on these findings, a call is made for more research with a view to design and pilot interventions that promote rich exchanges between teachers and preschoolers during ostensibly non-institutional moments such as transition periods. Indeed, as the excerpts showed, even in transition settings, the teacher in this study uses a number of language support strategies to facilitate extended conversations with students on academic topics. Such findings suggest that transitions should not be regarded as "lost instructional time", but rather as opportune moments during which informal learning can take place.

APPENDIX I

Coding handbook

The following were manually coded in CLAN. Additions or edits to the original coding handbook (Huang, 2013) have been bolded.

Category	Sub-category	Definition	Examples
Functions of teacher talk	Directives DIR	Utterances used by the teacher to control a child's behavior or to gain the child's attention Can be in the form of an imperative or a question. <i>Directives and Questions are mutually exclusive codes.</i> <i>If both codes apply and the question is open-ended (e.g. "Stand up and tell us about your drawing."), the utterance should be coded as a Question. If both codes apply and the question is close-ended (e.g. "Can you clean up the table?"), the utterance should be coded as a Directive.</i>	"Let's just clean it up." "Can you move please?" "Find a space where you can see." "Stand up okay?" "I think we need to calm down." "Be a helper."
	Close-ended questions QUE:CLD	Questions or requests that aim at eliciting information from the child phrased in such a way that the child is limited to yes/no or forced choice responses Can be in the form of a question or request. <i>Do NOT include questions when the teacher is asking the child to repeat what he/she said because the teacher did not hear it clearly.</i>	"Right?" "Do you want to go now?" "Are there any patterns?" "Was it big or little?"
	Open-ended questions QUE:OPN	Questions or requests that aim at eliciting information from the child phrased in such a way that the child is free to respond in any way <i>Directives and Questions are mutually exclusive codes.</i> <i>If both codes apply and the question is open-ended (e.g. "Stand up and tell us about your drawing."), the utterance should be coded as a Question. Do NOT include questions when the teacher is asking the child to repeat what he/she said because the teacher</i>	"How are you feeling?" "What do you think?" "Tell us about that." "The opposite of big is...?"

		<i>did not hear it clearly.</i>	
Extended conversation EC		Utterances that are part of an extended conversation: teacher attempted to deepen a single topic or scaffold the child in solving a problem over the course of five or more <u>teacher</u> turns. There should be at least one verbal or non-verbal response from the child during the exchange. <i>Conversations can be with one or multiple children.</i>	
	Teacher-initiated TEAINIT	The teacher initiated the conversation.	Teacher: "Where should our bus go?" Child1: "A party!" Teacher: "Where else?" Child2: "Dinosaur museum!" Teacher: "A museum." Child3: "Doctor." Teacher: "A doctor." Child4: "The zoo." Teacher: "The zoo."
	Child-initiated CHINIT	The child initiated the conversation (verbally or non-verbally).	Child shows TEA a broken rubber band. Teacher: "What happened to the rubber band?" Child: xxx. Teacher: "You found it on the table?" Child: "Yeah." Teacher: "What happened to it?" Child: "It broke." Teacher: "It broke. Can we use this as a rubber band anymore?" Child: "No." Teacher: "No, it's broken. Rubber bands break."

APPENDIX II

Jeffersonian transcription symbols used in the analysis of classrooms conversations

Transcription symbol	Definition	Example
Bold italics	Emphasis (e.g., change in pitch or amplitude)	Teacher : Out of <i>the</i> :se three Rian.
Overlap bracket	Left bracket signals current talk being overlapped by other talk. When two speakers speak simultaneously, each line begins with a left bracket.	Rian: Now there's [three:. Teacher : [There it is.
Colon	Lengthening of the immediately preceding sound	Teacher : Out of <i>the</i> :se three Rian.
Period	Falling intonation contour	Teacher : <i>Horizontal lines o::r</i> (0.1) a horizontal line.
Question mark	Raising intonation contour	Teacher : Which one ~s this?
Comma	Falling-rising intonation contour	Teacher : B~a~by:e,
Equal sign	Latching between the end of a prior turn and the start of the next turn	Rian: Three. Teacher : =B~a~by:e,
Asterisk followed by a series of <i>h</i> 's	Inbreath	Teacher : *hh Lawrence.
Tilde	Slurred speech	Teacher : Which one ~s this?
Double parentheses	Comment by the transcriber	Teacher : <i>Horizontal lines o::r</i> (0.1) a horizontal line. ((<i>Holds her finger up.</i>))
Numbers in parentheses	Silences in seconds and tenths of seconds	Teacher : Well. (0.8) You think it's Jor-.
Single parentheses	Speech that the transcriber was unsure about	Lawrence: I think I have (horizontal).
<i>h</i> in parentheses	Plosive aspiration	Teacher : Ok(h)ay.

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