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WHY 'YUH' TALKING TO 'YUHSELF'? EXPLORING ROLE IDENTITY THROUGH CONVERSATION ANALYSIS: Implications for Curriculum and Teaching

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This qualitative study used a modified form of conversation analysis to explore role identity construction of two primary school-aged children (male and female) in the Jamaican context. The participants were engaged in an informal conversation on imaginary play with an adult. Data were collected via the video conference medium, Skype. An analysis of question-answer, lexical choice and category, and perspective-display sequence of the conversation revealed that the adult and the male child expressed concerns about the female child's engagement in imaginary play. The analysis of the conversation also revealed that both children displayed different stages of role construction during the conversation. Implications for curriculum and teaching are discussed.

Introduction

It is widely understood that play contributes to a child's psychosocial development. Some sociocultural theorists describe play as a natural activity for children and the most critical activity of their early years (Bodrova & Leong, 1996; Vygotsky, 1977). While freely engaging in play, children acquire the foundations of self-reflection and abstract thinking, develop oral language skills and metacommunication skills, learn to manage their emotions, and explore the roles and rules of functioning in adult society (Bond &Wasik, 2009; Verenikina, Harris, & Lysaght, 2003). Various social categories of play have been identified in the literature. They include: (1) onlooker, (2) solitary play, (3) parallel play, and (4) group play. The *onlooker* is the child who observes the play of others. In *solitary play*, the child plays alone; and in *parallel play,* children play along with each other but there is little interaction among the players. G*roup play* represents higher levels of interaction; with children playing together, doing similar things, and coordinating their actions (Dockett & Fleer, 1999).

The Jamaican Early Childhood Commission emphasized that play allows children to refine their motor skills, learn how to deal with their own feelings and emotions, think critically about a range of new

experiences, interact sociably with others, and resolve conflicts in appropriate ways. In addition, play is also important for children to develop their imagination and creativity. Through play they are able to experiment, discover, and dramatize what they see happening around them. In an attempt to make meaning of the world around them, play helps children to integrate knowledge in a meaningful way, learn self-expression, and gain a sense of competence (Jamaica. Early Childhood Commission, 2014).

Imaginary Play

Imaginary play is defined here as solitary play. This is sometimes referred to as private speech; a mechanism which Vygotsky emphasized that children use for turning shared knowledge into personal knowledge. He proposed that children incorporate the speech of others and then use that speech to help them solve problems (Slavin, 2000). Private speech can be seen in young children who frequently talk to themselves, especially when faced with difficult tasks. According to Slavin, studies found that children who make extensive use of private speech also learn complex tasks more effectively than other children. As children grow older, private speech becomes silent but is still very important.

Private speech often manifests itself in different types of imaginary play. According to Huizinga (1955), it is a stepping out of real life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition of its own. Every child knows that she or he is pretending or is only having fun. Nevertheless, the consciousness of play being "only pretend" does not prevent it from proceeding with the utmost seriousness, absorption, and devotion, which passes into rapture and temporarily abolishes that troublesome "only" feeling (p. 8). Soundy (2009) articulated that pathways into play are often influenced by early exposure to picture books. Conditions become ripe for imagery thinking when real experiences are combined with storybook events, allowing children to readily transcend the present reality and playfully engage in the fantasy mode. The imaginary play may take on several characteristics—invisible companions; personified objects, when a child attributes animate properties to an external object, for example, a stuffed animal endowed with human-like personality traits; and children who engage in extended role play by adopting alternative personas (Roby & Kidd, 2008).

Other researchers provided evidence that imaginary play activities are not only enjoyable in their own right, but also have clear intellectual, social, and emotional benefits to children who participate in them (Roopnarine, Shin, Donovan, & Suppal, 2000; Stegelin, 2005). According

to Roby and Kidd (2008), the propensity to engage in pretend play has been linked to several important developmental milestones, including the development of self-recognition and the theory of mind and language. For example, Bouldin, Bavin, and Pratt (2002) demonstrated that children with imaginary companions produced a range of more complex sentence types in a narrative task than matched control children without imaginary companions. In addition, children who engage in a variety of imaginary play tend to become more adept and flexible thinkers. Harris (2000) submitted that this is because they gain more practice at simulating thought processes other than their own.

Children are good at finding alternative stages to playact their fantasies, especially in circumstances where play is not sanctioned, such as in the classroom. According to Soundy (2009):

> youngsters readily take part in imaginary expression, discover available forums, and release emotions in subtle, but meaningful ways. They engage in visualization and auditory output as a strategy for learning how to create dramatic scenarios for expressing simple and complex information. These moments of play occur in small, precious spaces of time when the integration of language and imagination blossom into dynamic engagement with an idea. (p. 382)

So while play is believed to be an immediate and natural tool for generating and expressing ideas, and for developing vocabulary and language in early childhood; often, imaginative play—such as children talking to themselves on a regular basis—is inadvertently discouraged in some sections of Jamaica. The authors' experience in rural Jamaica demonstrates that this type of play is often discouraged. In some rural districts, it is an unspoken understanding that parents must be curious when their children seem to be talking or playing with imaginary friends. Such attitudes are rooted in old folktales that are steeped in the belief that spirits sometimes communicate with children. These spirits enjoy playing with unsuspecting children who may not be capable of distinguishing between the spirits and real persons. Such views are not surprising, as Klausen and Passman (2007) admitted that "many early descriptions of pretend companions may not be recognized as such because they were depicted in terms of spirits and other supernatural concepts" (p. 351). Interestingly, Anderson, Vanderhook, and Vanderhook (1996) highlighted that even at the end of the 20th century, some groups in the Americas still viewed pretend companions as preternatural powers that sometimes "will result in spiritual bondage" (p. 196).

Play and Role Identity

Levinson (2005) investigated the interface between play and identity in home and school contexts—in particular, the role of play in shaping role identity. He asserted that self-fashioning is a social and cultural space, and, as pointed out by Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998), "remains, more often than not, a contested space, a space of struggle" (p. 282). For example, Szeman (1995) listed a variety of games played by young Gypsy children that she had observed in a Hungarian kindergarten. Most of these games were connected to real-life experience and included activities such as cooking, eating, looking after children, "daddy-mummy games," travelling in groups, jumping, and hunting for rabbits. Children's culture provides a framework within which their social relations can be described (Geertz, 1975). Therefore, play can be perceived as a social practice distributed across a range of contexts and co-participants, and influenced by the tools and symbol systems of the culture (Wood, 2004). According to Levinson (2005), "learning is socially mediated and constructed as children participate in shared and distributed practices that are based on combining real-world knowledge with play knowledge" (p. 503; see also Brostrom, 1999; Hakkarainen, 1999). His study among Gypsy students confirms that play serves the role of learning, cultural reproduction, imitation, and enculturation into rules and norms of society. It also represents a site of contested power relations in which children challenge dominant modes of control.

Interactionism Theory of Play

Berg (1999) maintained that there is a relationship between the emotional abandonment of play and the emotional need to create and develop a personal identity. Speaking specifically about children playing roles, he advanced the thesis that the "fascination of play is born out of the childish unconscious need for building an identity, the need to get a picture of who one is" (p. 13). Contrasting Piagetian theory of cognitive development with Mead's (1932) interactionist theory of play, he indicated that the former theory explains play as a means for cognitive development and for fun and fascination, while providing no linkage to its necessity for identity development. Mead's interactionist theory, on the other hand, identified stages of play, known as the play and game stages, viewing them as stages of development of *Self* or personal/role identity.

Berg (1999, pp. 17–23) provided further clarity to Mead's interactionist theory of play by delineating and describing the various stages. He described them as:

- The Amorphous Stage – at this stage the capacity to differentiate between identities is not developed. The child exercises this capacity through mimicry and imitation without being aware of the possibility of taking on various identities. Their own Self is not crystallized, but is subjected to formation through the child's working with different human stimuli from the outside world. This stage is typical during the first two years of the child.
- The Play Stage – at this stage children gradually discover that they can be a special sort of player or participant rather than just an undifferentiated player or participant. In other words, through play they can assume the role of princess, knight, nurse, or adult. Children develop strong dramatic capacity and empathy. Through their play they start conceptualizing ambiguity and multiplicity of the world. This stage normally persists from ages two to six.
- The Game Stage – at this stage students are able to stick to their role in a game at the same time that they represent and adjust to the role of other players. So while the child explicitly plays a role, she or he implicitly maintains their identity. At this stage the child's identity begins to crystallize through play. There is a mutual adjustment and understanding of the corresponding identities involved; the child as an individual exists in relation to the multitude of identities in the social arena.
- The Stage of Generalization and Maturity – according to Berg (1999), at this stage the individual within the maturation process combines together all the games she or he participated in, and from these sculptures a coherent social whole. It involves complex games the individual plays and the consummation of the individual in a stronger, clearer, and discernible personality. The concept points to all the roles and attitudes that the individual has been in contact with integrated into each other.

Berg (1999) cautioned that there is no possible way to distinguish in a definitive way between the stages because one stage begins long before the preceding stage ends. In addition, the stages never go away totally once we are mature.

Since talk is inextricably linked with play, whether individually or in groups, analysing talk during play can open windows into children's actions, interactions, and also how they think about themselves and their environment. One method for accomplishing this is conversation analysis (Butler & Weatherall, 2006; Sidnell, 2010, 2011).

Conversation Analysis

According to Rapley (2008), conversation analysis is undertaken to focus on how social actions and practices are accomplished in and through talk and interactions. Through this analysis, one is able to focus on features of interaction such as how speakers take turns to talk, how talk is shaped by prior actions and shapes what follows it, how talk is designed to perform certain actions, what words people use, and how the broader trajectory talk is organized. Goodwin and Heritage (1990) indicated that the "discipline of conversation analysis essentially emerged as a fusion of the interactive and phenomenological/ethnomethodological traditions" (p. 287). This combination allows interactional material to be used as the basis to investigate the procedural "bases of reasoning and action through which individuals recognize, constitute, and reproduce the social and phenomenal worlds they inhabit" (p. 288).

From its inception, the proponents of conversation analysis insisted that in the real world of interactions, sentences are not treated as isolated artifacts but must be understood as forms of action situated within specific context and designed with specific attention to these contexts (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990). The conversational analytic approach promises to explain not only how the mutual intelligibility of words is ordinarily achieved, but also why various persons from different social categories—such as race, gender, visual and hearing impairments—experience conversational difficulties (Rawls, 2004). While conversation analysis focuses primarily on talk, its research design also integrates nonverbal aspects of interaction. Conversation data are collected by video or audio devices (Peräkylä, 2008). Peräkylä further added that:

> CA studies can focus either on ordinary conversations taking place between acquaintances or family members, or on institutional encounters where the participants accomplish their institutional tasks through their interaction. CA elucidates basic aspects of human sociality that reside in talk, and it examines the ways in which specific social institutions are invoked in, and operate through, talk. (p. 1)

According to Rapley (2008), when analysing conversation, some key features that researchers focus on are: (1) turn-taking organization, (2) sequence organization and turn design, (3) lexical choice and category, and (3) structural organization. *Turn-taking organization* refers to the sequence in which speakers take part in a conversation. These turns can range from single words, sounds, or gesture to "long stretches of talks" (Rapley, 2008, p. 77). Sometimes turn-taking is pre-allocated, as in a

judicial hearing where each person is given a time to speak. In less formal conversations, turn taking is not rigid and pre-allocated. This often imposes specific rights and responsibilities. Single acts are parts of larger, structurally organized entities. These entities can be called *sequences* (Schegloff, 2006). Speakers' specific actions are organized in sequences, and the most basic and the most important sequence is called *adjacency pair* (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973), which consists of two actions in which the first action ("first pair part") performed by one interactant invites a particular type of second action ("second pair part") to be performed by another interactant (Peräkylä, 2008, p. 3). *Lexical choice and category* refers to just which words people used as they talked, *and structural organization* refers to just how the broader trajectory of the talk is organized.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to use conversation analysis to explore the attitude of family members towards imaginary play, and decipher, through their conversation, the role identity construction of the children as described through the interactionistic theory of play (Berg, 1999). The following research questions guided the study:

1. *What does an analysis of the conversation between an aunt, her nephew, and niece reveal about imaginary play?*
2. *What does an analysis of the conversation between an aunt, her nephew, and niece reveal about each child's role identity construction*?

Method

This qualitative study analyses a conversation between three relatives, and situates their conversation within modern interactionistic theory of play (Berg, 1999), in an attempt to explore the phenomenon of child play in a Jamaican context. The method used was conversation analysis. Conversation analysis lends itself to a number of broad methodological precepts. An authentic experience was explored using equipment that captures ordinary conversation between family members and some details about behaviour, allowing the researchers an opportunity to determine what is distinctive about their interactions (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974).

Participants

Purposeful sampling was used. The standard used in choosing participants in purposeful sampling is whether they are "information rich" (Patton, 1990, p. 169). Participants were intentionally selected for the researcher to learn and understand the phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). The participants consisted of an aunt, her 7-year-old nephew, and her 5-year-old niece. They were engaged in a conversation on the video conference medium Skype. The aunt, who was temporarily away visiting another country at the time of the conversation, had made a call to her niece and nephew in Jamaica.

Procedure

The conversation between the aunt, her nephew, and niece via Skype was audio recorded using a digital recording device. The recording was then downloaded to a computer. The conversation lasted for 35 minutes. A verbatim transcript was made of the conversation by repeatedly listening to the recordings from the computer and typing the words that were spoken and the person who spoke them. According to Poland (2002), it is important for transcripts to be verbatim accounts of what transpired. The transcription should not be edited or "tidied up" to make them "sound better" (p. 641). The speaker was identified on the left side of the transcript and what was said on the right side. Two transcribers reviewed the transcript by listening to the recordings several times to ensure the transcript reflected accurately what was said by each person in the recording. The transcript maintained the sequence in which each person spoke. Each person's turn of talk was given a specific line number. The transcribers then listened to the recording a third time adjusting the transcript according to the simplified transcription notation developed by Gale Jefferson. He developed a specific style of transcription notation designed to use "symbols found on a typewriter in order to render certain aspects of talk that are found in everyday interactions" (Rapley, 2008, p. 59). The following is the transcription:

Transcription

1.	Carlton:	I'll call [you ba-]
2.	Aunt:	[No don't call me back] I want to talk about why Donna
3.	Aunt:	(0.3) is talking to herself?
4.	Carlton:	°Ok°
5.	Aunt:	Can you tell me why Donna is talking to herself

6. Carlton: (0.2) I::: I DON'T KNOW ASK HER

7. Aunt: Is it is it possible for me to talk to her

8. Carlton: (0.3) .hhh OK

9. Aunt: Please go get her now so we can ask her why she is talking to herself

10. Carlton: (0.4) °She is coming°

11. Donna: Hello ((**whining**))

12. Aunt: He<u>llo</u> Donna my baby how are you?

13. Donna: (0.6) Fine

14. Aunt: I heard you keep talking to yourself, "why do you do that

15. Carlton: (0.6) She not answering you

16. Aunt: Let her <u>talk Carlton</u>?

17. Aunt: Donna.

18. Donna: °ye::::s°

19. Aunt: W<u>hy</u> do you talk to yourself <u>dar</u>::ling

20. Donna: °I'm sorry°

21. Aunt: Why are you sorry

22. Aunt: (.) is it wrong to talk to yourself

23. Donna: Because Carlton not playing with me and I have nobody to play with

24. Aunt: Oh so that's why you talk to yourself.

25. Donna: CAUSE YOU DON'T WANT TO PLAY WITH ME ((**She stares at Carlton with a disappointing look**))

26. Carlton: I AM BUSY

27. Donna: > But yu sey yu on di computer an a ask if yu want to play and yu sey no::o <

28. Aunt: Ok, so what do you talk about when you talk to yourself

29. Carlton: SCHOOL =

30. Carlton: = >When she watch TV she talk to herself about it, when she at school and she [come home she play school]<

31. Aunt: Carlton let Donna answer]=

32. Aunt: =Why do you talk

33. Aunt: (0.3) What do you talk about when you talk to yourself Donna

34. Aunt: (0.4) D<u>onna</u>

35. Donna: hhh HMMMMMMMMM

36. Aunt: What do you talk about when you talk to yourself.

37. Donna: (0.5)Why yu waan to know dat

38. Aunt: Why I want to know that=

39. Aunt: = it is important that I know.

40. Donna: (0.3) (hmm) when a come home from school I talk to myself about school

41. Danna: (.) because I want to be good [in school]

42. Carlton: [you are good in school]

43. Donna: A WANT TO BE GOOD IN SCHOOL ((**staring at her Brother**))

44. Aunt: So:::o.

45. Donna: I want to be **good in school**.

46. Aunt: So you think that will help you

47. Aunt: (0.3) So you think talking to yourself will help you to do good in school?

48. Donna: No I don't talk to myself doing that

49. Aunt: But you just said that

50. Donna: Aun- Aun- Aun-, Auntie Suzie?

51. Donna (0.3) >look at Auntie Annette, do you see her<

52. Aunt: No I don't see her

53. Donna: She is here?

54. Aunt: She is there.

55. Donna: (0.3) She gone into the kitchen

56. Donna: But I still want to kno::w ……

57. Donna: huh huh huh. ((**staring at the chair**))

58. Aunt: Donna

59. Carlton: Every-time yu miss my birthday auntie Suzie

60. Aunt: A miss u birthday?

61. Carlton: Since yu gone you don't come to my seven year old birthday party

62. Aunt: Ok when I come for Christmas I will go to your party=

63. Aunt: =but I still [want to kno:::w].

64. Carlton: [But I don't see you till August]?

65. Aunt: But I still want to [know-]

66. Donna: [IS OCTOBER]

67. Aunt:	But I still want to know <u>why</u> Donna is talking to herself.
68. Aunt:	Donna I still want to know why you talk to yourself so loudly
69. Carlton:	C<u>ause</u> she is playing a teacher?
70. Aunt:	She is playing a teacher.
71. Carlton:	Mek <u>Donna answer</u>?
72. Aunt:	Do you play a teacher Donna (.) Carlton says you are playing a teacher
73. Carlton:	Yes and she talking to h<u>erself</u> saying that she coming and that she is not going to be coming and there is nobody and she talking to herself an- an- an- she say come here I am not going to beat you.
74. Aunt:	Ok.
75. Donna:	.hhh mmmmmm ((**niece begin to cry**))
76. Aunt:	(0.3) So do you want to become a teacher Shari.
77. Donna:	mm[mmmmm] ((**niece continue to cry**))
78. Carlton:	She is crying, she going to <u>cut u off</u>].
79. Aunt:	<u>OK</u> don't cry Donna
80. Nashari:	mmmmmmmm ((niece continue to cry))
81. Aunt:	(**picccch**) I will talk with you another time ((end call))

Findings

The findings are reported according to each research question. Textual evidence is provided without the higher level of details offered by the conversational analysis notations to prevent the reader who is unacquainted with Jefferson notations from being distracted from the clarity of the conversational interaction.

Research Question 1: Imaginary Play

One category of sequence organization in conversation is *question-answer*, where a question is asked and someone offers an answer. A series of questions were posed by the Aunt to her niece and nephew. An examination of the types of questions shows the determination of the aunt to understand why her niece carries on imaginative play. Throughout the entire conversation the aunt altered her questions six times in the following sequence:

> Can you tell me why Donna is talking to herself? Line 5 (*opening question*)
>
> What do you talk about when you talk to yourself? Line 28 (*altered*)

> So you think talking to yourself will help you in school? Line 47 (*altered*)
>
> But I still want to know why Donna is talking to herself? Line 67 (*altered*)
>
> Do you play a teacher Donna? Line 72 (*altered*)

The aunt's persistence, as seen through her questions, shows that she desired to know why her niece talks to herself and what she talks about. The transcript and recording do not indicate what motivates this curiosity, and why she should be so concerned about an innocent activity such as imaginary play. She did mention in *Line 39* that it is important that she knows what her niece talked about when she engaged in imaginary play. Supplemental data collection methods, such as retrospective interviews, could provide insight into why the content of the niece's imaginary talk was important to her.

Donna seemed very doubtful and confused in her answer to the question "what do you talk about when you talk to yourself?" She answered, changed her response, and seemed to try to change the trajectory of the conversation by using distracters, such as indicating that another person was in the room and pointing to a chair (see *Lines 32–58*).

In respect to *lexical choice and category*, in Jamaica the official language is English but there is also a local dialect (known as Patois) which is spoken more often at home, outside of schools, and in social gatherings. When emotions such as disappointment, frustration, or anger are expressed, there is a tendency to switch to the local dialect as seen in *Line 37*.

36. Aunt:	What do you talk about when you talk to yourself.
37. Donna:	Why yu waan to know dat ((**Patois**))
59. Carlton:	Every-time yu miss my birthday auntie Suzie ((**Patois**))

The excerpt in *Lines 19 & 20* shows that the niece was apologetic after her aunt persistently asked her why she talked to herself; she then offered her aunt a reason for talking to herself. Her aunt was, however, unclear why she was sorry so she asked her why she was sorry.

19. Aunt:	Why do you talk to yourself darling?
20. Donna:	I'm sorry ((**very apologetic voice**))
21. Aunt:	Why are you sorry?
22. Aunt:	Is it wrong to talk to yourself?

A level of frustration was displayed by the niece when she gave as the reason her brother's refusal to play with her, when her aunt persisted in asking her why she was sorry to be talking to herself. Her brother insisted he was too busy and this obviously annoyed her—as indicated by her

rising voice and disappointing stare at her brother. Note also that she resorted to replying to him in her local dialect in *Line 27*.

(*Lines 23–27*)

23. Donna:	Because Carlton not playing with me and I have nobody to play with
24. Aunt:	Oh so that's why you talk to yourself.
25. Donna:	CAUSE YOU DON'T WANT TO PLAY WITH ME ((**She stares at Carlton with a disappointing look**))
26. Carlton:	I AM BUSY
27. Donna:	But yu sey yu on di computer an a ask if yu want to play and yu sey no ((**Patois**))

The niece's objection to her aunt's questions about why she talks to herself, her seeming frustration with her brother, and also her brother's disappointment that his aunt missed his birthday are illustrated in their switching from English to express themselves in Patois.

A level of *perspective-display sequence* was observed in the conversation as the aunt tried to find out why her niece was sorry about talking to herself. As shown in the previous extract, the niece, obviously thinking that something was inherently wrong, used the refusal of her brother to play with her as an excuse. Her brother, in turn, justified his refusal by saying that he was busy with something useful or important. In other words, playing with his sister, to him, was less important than the activity he was presently engaged in on his computer. Engaging in imaginary play was the alternative to satisfy her need for play.

Frustration can lead to avoidance of questions. This is depicted further in the excerpt (*Lines 48–58*), where on two occasions Donna showed this avoidance by trying to change the trajectory of the conversation by pointing out that her other aunt, Annette, was present. When Aunt Suzie indicated she still wanted to know, Donna hesitated, muttered to herself, and kept staring at a chair that was present.

(*Lines 48–58*)

48. Donna:	No I don't talk to myself doing that
49. Aunt:	But you just said that
50. Donna:	Aun- Aun- Aun-, Auntie Suzie?
51. Donna	look at Auntie Annette, do you see her
52. Aunt:	No I don't see her
53. Donna:	She is here!

54. Aunt:	She is there?
55. Donna:	She gone into the kitchen
56. Donna:	But I still want to know
57. Donna:	huh huh huh. ((***staring at the chair***))
58. Aunt:	Donna?

Research Question 2: Role Identity

The conversation between aunt, niece, and nephew also indicated possible stages of role construction or *Self*. For example, Donna's brother told his aunt that his sister talked about school while she played by herself. When pressed further, Donna reluctantly admitted that was the case.

(*Lines 33–47*)

33. Aunt:	What do you talk about when you talk to yourself Donna
34. Aunt:	Donna
35. Donna:	HMMMMMMMMM
36. Aunt:	What do you talk about when you talk to yourself.
37. Donna:	Why yu waan to know dat?
38. Aunt:	Why I want to know that?
39. Aunt:	It is important that I know.
40. Donna:	when a come home from school I talk to myself about school
41. Donna:	because I want to be good in school
42. Carlton:	you are good in school
43. Donna:	A WANT TO BE GOOD IN SCHOOL ((***staring at her Brother***))
44. Aunt:	So.
45. Donna:	I want to be good in school.
46. Aunt:	So you think that will help you
47. Aunt:	So you think talking to yourself will help you to do good in school?

While it is not clear at this point what role she took on—teacher or student—while playing school, the conversation clearly indicated that she believes that playing such a role will help her to do better at school. Later in the conversation her brother revealed that she actually assumed the role of a teacher while engaged in play.

Lines 69–73

69. Carlton:	Cause she is playing a teacher?
70. Aunt:	She is playing a teacher.
71. Carlton:	Mek Donna answer?
72. Aunt:	Do you play a teacher Donna? Carlton says you are playing a teacher
73. Carlton:	Yes and she talking to herself saying that she coming and that she is not going to be coming and there is nobody and she talking to herself an- an- an- she say come here I am not going to beat you.

This level of investment in role play, as identified in the conversation, represents identity stage, Play Stage II, spoken about by Berg (1999). At this stage much emotional energy is invested in identifying with a role, such as a teacher, police officer, parent, and so on. As Berg pointed out, the urge at this stage is for a crystallization of meaning, identity, and reflective *Self* in a social world of infinite roles and possible identities. It should be noted that her role playing in her imaginative play is not without focus or goal. She sees it as a means to become better at school. So she is making the connection between playing a role and the performance and attitudinal improvement that may be accrued by doing so. She is beginning to recognize the expectations that are associated with a particular role which is considered appropriate by others. She knows that to receive positive appraisal from others, she must work at improving her performance (Simon, 1992). Using imaginary play as a means to enact a role was a means for her to take steps that will lead to an increase in the appraisal from others.

The analysis also revealed a possible stage of role identity by the brother, although he himself was not engaged in play. His refusal to participate in play with his sister, but rather to focus on working on the computer is indicative of the Stage that Mead (1932) and Berg (1999) characterize as *The Game Stage*; the capacity of the child to carry out and stick to one special identity or role and, at the same time, if necessary, adjust to the role of other players. The nephew refused to be distracted from his task. He focused on his activity even when his sister strongly insisted that he play with her. Yet he readily takes on the role of the older sibling, being willing to explain why his sister engages in imaginary play and initially encouraging his sister to speak for herself (see *Lines 5, 6, & 28–31*).

(*Lines 5&6*)

5. Aunt:	Can you tell me why Donna is talking to herself?
6. Carlton:	I DON'T KNOW ASK HER

(*Lines 28–31*)

28. Aunt:	Ok, so what do you talk about when you talk to yourself
29. Carlton:	SCHOOL
30. Carlton:	When she watch TV she talk to herself about it, when she at school and she come home she play school
31. Aunt:	Carlton let Donna answer

Discussion

What comes to the mind of a parent, relative, or teacher in Jamaica when their children or students are observed talking to themselves in imaginative play? The fact that a call made by an aunt—who was visiting another country—to her niece, primarily centred on why the niece was talking to herself would indicate that there was a level of concern on the part of the aunt. Such concerns shown by the aunt—while not proven conclusively in the data from the transcripts of the conversation—may be reflective to some extent of the sensitivity of some people in Jamaica to what imaginary play may be a symptom of. The Jamaican culture favours and encourages young children to play among themselves, model scenes, and construct events learnt in their classroom, in church, or in other social gatherings. It is understood that play aids in language, vocabulary, and even aesthetic (such as acting and singing) development of children. Equally, it is an unspoken understanding that parents must be curious when their children seem to be talking or playing with imaginary friends. Such attitudes, as pointed out previously, may be rooted in old folktales which suggest that spirits sometimes communicate with children by playing with them. The belief is that these spirits enjoy playing with unsuspecting children who may not be capable of distinguishing between spirits and real persons. So if a child is repeatedly seen talking to themselves, then a parent or observant adult should be curious and ensure that the child is not really entertaining spirits as their playmates. There is less concern if it is not a regular pattern or if the child exhibits this behaviour in the company of their peers while they are playing. Another perception held by many is that this might be an early indication of the onset of insanity.

The reality is that these long-held perceptions can influence parents, and possibly teachers, from encouraging children and students to cultivate the type of play that mediates psychologically and socially in the development of role identities. In order to increase positive evaluation from others, children will construct "ideal identities" and role-play these identities as a form of rehearsal to improve their self-esteem and self-efficacy (McCall & Simmons, 1978). As articulated further by Turner (2013), "as individuals become dependent on confirmation of their identity from others, their role performance have ever-more consequences for their level of self-esteem" (p. 334). When these identities move up in children's salience hierarchy, they become more committed to them and they evaluate their performance through broader cultural definitions and normative expectations. Emotions therefore play an important role in the child's self-evaluation of their role performance. Emotions serve as markers of adequacy in role performance, telling individuals whether their performances are acceptable or unacceptable. The child will therefore read the gestures, tone of voice, persistence, and so on, of others to see if their role performances have been accepted. If the reaction is not positive the child will experience negative emotions such as shame or guilt (Stryker, 1987).

The transcript did show at the end that the niece began crying. It would be informative to know why she cried. Was it because of the persistent questioning of her aunt? Did she somehow feel that her brother would still refuse to play with her? Did she feel that somehow her engaging in imaginary play was unacceptable to her aunt and her brother? Again, using another type of data collection method could provide better insight into this interaction. Interestingly, Stryker (1987) did indicate that if a child feels a sense of disapproval by others, the child may be moved to feel guilt or shame and question their actions in a particular type of play—resulting in withdrawal and the failure to benefit from the social and psychological gains that can be attributed to the integration of roles through play.

Implications for Curriculum and Teaching

Vygotsky (1977) described the role of children's self-directed talk in guiding and monitoring thinking and problem solving. Research also supports his ideas (Emerson & Miyake, 2003; Woolfolk, 2013). If teachers and parents were to embrace the psychosocial importance of imaginative play—and other types of play—it would be beneficial to the overall development of the child as they interact at home and in school. Play in its various forms, including imaginative play, assists in the child's development of intellectual skills and abilities, and aid in their social

development and how they make sense of the world around them. Schools should play an active role in fostering this development as this is where formal learning takes place.

Addressing the parameters of conversation analysis as a tool to understanding learning through observed conversational interaction, Macbeth (2011) said, "taking a turn in an ongoing conversation is itself an analytic task and achievement of understanding ….To take a turn is to evidence understanding" (p. 440). In addition,

> this turn–by–turn understanding displayed in each turn in a sequence is not the same as the understanding objectives of lessons, such as the learning of grammatical form, scientific principles, or how to make a request in a particular language, but it can provide evidence for how such educational goals of learning some pedagogic object, knowing some subject-relevant fact, mastering some disciplinary procedures are achieved: the temporally–situated practices for displaying an emergent and coherent series of understanding. (Gardner, 2013, p. 607)

Mondada and Doehler (2004) claimed that analysed extracts from classroom interactions, which show how tasks are collaboratively interpreted and transformed in order to solve problems as they arise, actually show how these transformations shape the context of learning, and even understanding of what learning is.

Private speech is often used by children when they are confused, having difficulties, or making mistakes (Duncan & Cheyne, 1999). Conversation analysis offers an effective ethnomethodological technique that researchers in curriculum and teaching can use, in conjunction with other methodologies, to study extensively the confusion or confliction students may have relating to their self-concept, self-worth, and self-efficacy in a particular task—important elements of role identity. As articulated by Woolfolk (2013), it is a widely held view by many psychologists that self-concept is the foundation of both social and emotional development. Positive self-concept, self-efficacy, and also self-worth have been shown to relate in various degrees to achievement in schools, job satisfaction, sports, pride, and enjoyment (Byrne, 2002; Goetz, Cronjaeger, Frenzel, Ludtke, & Hall, 2010). The various subcultures that are emerging in Jamaica and other Caribbean islands because of socio-economic stratification and the widening gap between the wealthy and the poor—which manifests itself through violence in its various forms, mistrust of authority, drugs, and entertainment—can produce conflict in role identity and *Self* in young people. Students' perception and attitude toward education in general and certain types of training, authority, gender, and a

wide range of sociological issues are evolving rapidly. Researchers and educators can use this technique to delve deeper into these issues so that a better understanding can be derived, and more effective frameworks can be developed to influence constructive change.

Maladjusted perceptions ultimately will affect students' behaviour and performance in schools and, by extension, society. Curricula informed by research must present effective pedagogical interventions that teachers, particularly during the formative years of children, can use to create learning environments that are conducive to the adjustment of incorrect perceptions about their roles and other social functions and interactions, produce positive social behaviours in students both in schools and at their homes, and provide a classroom atmosphere of tolerance and cooperation.

Conclusion

Conversation analysis as an ethnomethodology that can be an effective technique in analysing students' interactions. Used in conjunction with other research methodologies, researchers and educators can gain deeper insight into students' perceptions, attitudes, evolving role orientation, and other socio-structural issues that are presently faced in Jamaica and the rest of the Caribbean. Using conversation analysis along with other research methods can give researchers and educators a deeper understanding of students' perception of *Self*, efficacy, and self-worth. This can inform differentiated teaching approaches, as well as the development of various types of interventions to help students to grow socially and academically.

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