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Playing to Belong: Princesses and Peer Cultures in Preschool

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Children's extensive engagements with princess culture have sparked controversy over the potential identity-shaping effects of popular media on young girls, evident in high levels of public debate in social media spheres around recent mass-market books, including, *My Princess Boy* (Kilodavis and DeSimone 2010) and *Cinderella Ate My Daughter: Dispatches from the Front Lines of the New Girlie-Girl Culture* (Orenstein 2011). Educational research in the past decade shows benefits to literacy learning when teachers build upon young children's diverse strengths and popular media interests that show up so often in their play (Dyson 2003; Marsh et al. 2005). For young preschool girls today, these literary repertoires often connect to their deep knowledge of princess characters and stories in popular culture (Sekeres 2009; Wohlwend 2009). At the same time, literacy studies have alerted us to the gendered and consumerist ideological messages in these identity-shaping princess texts (Mackey 2010; Marshall and Sensoy 2011; Saltmarsh 2009). Yet we know little about the ways that the target consumers—very young girls—actually enact princess media messages during play. What happens when girls play together in classrooms where teachers provide princess dolls and encourage children to remake the princess stories into versions of their own? In this chapter, I share findings from a year-long study of critical media literacy in preschool and primary classrooms that suggest when children collaborate during play, storytelling, and media production at school, they work out issues of belonging in friendships,

brand affiliations, and classroom routines in ways that open opportunities for remaking princess texts and mediate children's cultures.

Using mediated discourse theory (Scollon 2001; Wertsch 1991), I examine princess play as a site of engagement: a social space where everyday practices, artifacts (e.g., dolls), and player identities come together as social actors perform naturalized ways of belonging that are expected in each culture (Bourdieu 1977; Scollon and Scollon 2004). During princess play in early childhood classrooms, these ways of being and belonging—in other words, a *nexus of practice* (Scollon 2001)—collide and resonate across the multiple cultures that converge in classrooms (Wohlwend 2009, 2011, 2012). In my studies of sites of engagement, I look closely at pretend play to see how young children use dolls and toys to influence who can participate in local play groups in ways that align with and transgress global gender discourses. In preschool, very young children are just learning how to belong: how to play together rather than playing next to others, how to equitably take turns with scarce classroom materials, how to negotiate who plays which role, and so on. They are also learning tacit gender expectations in these practices of belonging: who can play a princess, whose ideas for princess narratives are followed, who gets access to a treasured doll, or how a favorite princess character might be revised. Further, it is important to recognize the developmental influences in preschool sites of engagement where children are not only learning to belong but also learning to communicate and cooperate through language, literacy, and play. For example, our notions of criticality may need to be retooled for early childhood settings: the verbal critique of princess stereotypes expected in a primary school critical literacy lesson is not well-suited to a 3-year-old child's developing language or passionate attachment to media characters. However, exploratory play is the young child's strength, making doll play a promising site for productive critique that positions the young child as an inventive maker of new play scenarios and materials and invites re-imaginings and alternate identities and ways of belonging.

Elsewhere, I have examined Disney Princess dolls to uncover the expected identities for child fans, consumers, producers, and players that the toys evoke (Wohlwend 2012). In this view, Disney Princess dolls are not just playthings but cultural artifacts that represent sedimented histories of practices (Rowsell and Pahl 2007) as well as anticipated identities that designers and marketers have layered into products (Wohlwend 2009, 2012). For example, Disney Princess dolls come pre-packaged with memorized film scripts, mingled with expectations for who should play with the toys and how they should be used. When children play with princess toys at school, the mix of expectations for belonging expands to include children's histories of friendships in peer cultures and rules and routines in school

cultures. According to my previous analysis (Wohlwend 2012), these ways of belonging include:

- Models of hyperfeminine characters, "damsel-in-distress" fairy tale narratives, and "girly-girl" fans in princess culture
- Embodied responses (unspoken, emotional, sensory/modal, gendered) to meanings fabricated into the pastel colors, vinyl bodies, and silky, sparkly fabrics of the dolls through production processes
- Target demographics in brand identity marketing production and marketing histories in consumer culture
- Negotiated play narratives in children's collectively imagined play worlds (Medina and Wohlwend in press)
- Expected friendship relations in play groups in social histories in peer cultures (Madrid and Katz 2011)
- Classroom roles, relationships, and rules that enact student responsibilities in school cultures

How are preschool children learning and remaking ways of belonging through princess doll play within the nexus of overlapping princess, consumer, peer, and school cultures? In this chapter, I argue that as children pretend together, they also mediate these ways of belonging through artifacts that pivot (Vygotsky 1935/1978) among princess, consumer, and classroom cultures to access more identities and practices. As we shall see, children renamed characters and reimagined restrictive commercial narratives by turning princesses into mothers and sisters to make roles for friends or by making their own materials by turning clumps of tape into princess shoes. The productive power of these remakings derives in part from girls' shared understandings of the Disney Princess franchise and expected practices across cultural contexts.

Ways of Belonging in a Princess Play Site of Engagement

Doll Players in Princess Culture

Belonging is at the heart of children's play. When children pretend, they use toys to mediate and participate in their immediate and imagined worlds (Göncü 1999). During doll play, children produce shared pretense with fluid meanings that must be continually negotiated with other players. When they play with princess dolls, the fluidity of these shared meanings moves beyond passive reproduction of commercial narratives and allows children to come up with alternative

ideas that can mediate princess culture—at least in the immediate setting—by revising characters and stories (Wohlwend 2009). At the same time, children are also learning how to share toys, to be friends, and to belong in the surrounding peer culture (Pugh 2009). In this way, princess doll play brings together ways of belonging in both princess culture and peer culture, opening a space to mediate both worlds.

Gendered ways of belonging in princess culture are molded into dolls through commercial designs and children's play histories. Disney Princess dolls trigger more than verbal parroting of film narratives; they also send nonverbal messages through their material designs for their intended uses. Dolls are designed to clearly communicate a player/doll relationship so that children can easily use them for play (Brougère 2006). Dolls elicit performances of imagined characters for doll players in relation to the doll (baby dolls elicit pretend mothers). But dolls can also be proxies that allow children to pretend an imagined self through the doll; (Disney Princess dolls elicit portrayals of players as princess characters). Dolls are identity texts that communicate a gendered play role and anticipate particular identities for children as doll players (Carrington 2003). For example, a snippet of dialog enacted from a movie script as a child plays with a princess doll materializes the fairy tale character as well as an intended player forecasted by marketing teams. The films circulate anticipated identity texts of "girly-girls" in an emphasized femininity discourse (Blaise 2005) in princess culture that is amplified across films scripts in the animated fairy tales and drawn into the princess body images during media production processes (Haas, Bell, and Sells 1995).

Child Consumers in Consumer Culture

The identity texts in Disney Princess dolls are not limited to characters and players, but also include expectations for consumers, manufactured into product designs and circulated through international marketing strategies in a multi-billion dollar flow of goods that seep into all aspects of children's lives. Children's play worlds are furnished with *transmedia* (Kinder 1991), glocalizing franchises that connect princess narratives from television programs, films, video games, and websites to everyday consumer goods such as dolls, toys, collectibles, apparel, beauty products, food, and school supplies (Medina and Wohlwend in press). Bringing in $4 billion in annual global retail sales, this highly profitable "lifestyle brand" (Giroux and Pollock 2010) targets 3- to 5-year-old girls as its primary market (Disney Consumer Products 2011), allowing children to live in character from breakfast to bedtime.

Children participate in consumer cultures through purchases but also through interactions with a brand identity or "brand as person" that marketers develop to establish an aspirational and emotional bond with target consumers, inviting consumers to transact with an imagined person rather than a functional product. The princess characters provide the foundational personalities for the franchise's brand identity, merged into one persona and distilled into its primary identity text. Although the princesses in these films enact individual variations in personality traits that range from demure (Snow White, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty) to curious (Ariel) to plucky (Belle from *Beauty and the Beast*, Mulan, Tiana from *The Princess and the Frog*), the brand identity plays up the glitter and glamour of royal status, reducing differences to color variations in the characters' hair and dress styles (Wohlwend 2009). The *Disney Princess* brand persona is a friendly, always-beautiful, self-sacrificing ingénue on her way to a happily-ever-after with an attractive hero (Orenstein 2011). In the brand-consumer relationship, the Disney Princess offers a lovely loving friend and role model that positions young girls as adoring fans and wannabes, and of course princess product buyers. Children are anticipated as particular kinds of consumers by producers and marketers, so that at birth children already belong, fully immersed in products and their expected brand relationships (Cook 2008). However, it is equally important to recognize the potential for creative production and the agency that children exercise in their relationships with popular transmedia (Buckingham 2007).

Friends and Students in Peer and School Cultures

When Disney Princesses arrive at school, the ways of belonging in princess culture mingle with expected practices in classroom cultures. Dolls become capital that children can wield in their power relations with other children during play as they strategically play in and out of gendered identity texts in ways that affect their status as students in school culture but also their friendships in peer culture (Dyson 2003; Marsh 2000; Wohlwend 2011). *School culture* is the set of official goals, rules, values, curriculum, and teacher-sanctioned activities that organize the classroom. *Peer culture* is the set of "common activities, routines, artifacts, values, concerns, and attitudes" (Corsaro 1985, 171) developed by children for children, further bounded by their play patterns and friendship groups, by school rules and routines, and by gendered expectations of how people interact in everyday life (Kantor and Fernie 2003). The current study examines how children learn from and with each other through their play interactions as they collectively imagine other cultures into the classroom space and negotiate pretended identities with other players (Kendrick 2005; Schwartzman 1976). Children's play narratives are

collaborative but also full of contradictions that must be negotiated as children sort out who-is-being-what in both the imagined and the here-and-now contexts. To stabilize their shared pretense, young children use toys as tools to anchor their pretend roles; they also use access to toys to open and restrict group play, so that a doll stands not only for a particular character but also has a role and the right to participate in the play group. As conflicts arise over who plays what, children spend much time negotiating and protecting their fragile play frames built upon hard-fought investments of cultural capital. Sociologist and play theorist William Corsaro (2003) views these conflicts as productive catalysts for meaningful nego-tiations that allow children to preserve their pretense while they work out social relationships in a multiparty space. Young children negotiate who gets which ma-terials as well as who plays which roles as they try to reconcile their individual, often contradicting, meanings within a collectively imagined play frame and in the peer culture (Corsaro 2003). Galbraith (2011) found that as preschool children took up superhero roles in play, they assumed leadership positions in peer culture, changing the superhero media narratives to allow friends to participate in ways that strengthened the children's friendships, supported by negotiations mediated by their teachers. When teachers acknowledge and engage peer cultures, they "take play seriously" as an important resource for developing curriculum that matters to children (Kontovourki and Siegel 2009, 37). In this way, princess play practices offer children opportunities for pleasure and cooperation, a means of transforming social relationships, and a source of empowerment in peer culture. Of course, play is never innocent; it is also a site of tears and contestation as children struggle over highly valued toys, vie for coveted roles, or insist upon portrayals of dominant stereotypes (Davies 2003).

Studying Princess Doll Play in a Preschool Classroom

Classroom Context

This chapter reports findings from ethnographic research conducted in class-room *literacy playshops*, emergent critical media literacy curricula that we devel-oped with teachers (Wohlwend, Buchholz, Wessel-Powell, Coggin, and Husbye 2013), designed to help children engage popular media as producers and not just consumers. In these playshops, young children collaborated within and around a played text, that is, as they played together with popular media dolls and action figures, they recorded their own stories with simple handheld digital cameras. The data presented in this chapter are excerpted from a larger study in a U.S.

midwestern community that took place during one school year with six early childhood teachers in three preschool and K–1 classrooms as teachers developed and implemented play-based literacy curriculum using popular media and filmmaking. The study was conducted at two sites: a K–1 classroom in a public charter elementary school and a university childcare center. This chapter focuses on several weeks of princess play in one preschool classroom with two teachers and twenty-three 3- to 5-year-old children during the spring semester of the project; the children also played Dora the Explorer, Transformers, Star Wars, pirates, and others as they created their own films with popular media toys. The classroom, situated in a university childcare center, served families of faculty, graduate students, and community members.

During the fall semester, the teachers worked together to develop a curriculum called Literacy Playshop (Wohlwend et al. 2013), an early childhood approach to critical literacy using play, filmmaking, and popular media. The curriculum aimed to:

1) Draw upon children's media expertise and utilize peer culture interests to enrich students' reading and writing and expand their participation in classroom literacy activities (Dyson 2003; Fernie, Madrid, and Kantor 2011)
2) Encourage critical awareness of commercial product messages and help children see popular media (films, video games, toys) as pliable texts that can be revised through playful production to create their own storylines and character identities (Wohlwend 2011)
3) Incorporate filmmaking as a key literacy activity for producing action texts that integrate play and drama

Teacher study groups met regularly about every other week to read early childhood research on critical literacy (Vasquez 2004) and technology (Vasquez and Felderman 2012), play and popular media (Marsh 2005), and media production (Bazalgette 2010; Nixon and Comber 2005; Riddle 2009). Teachers also used this time to analyze samples of children's media, learn filmmaking technologies, talk through issues, and plan classroom activities. For example the teachers worked together to analyze fast-food media toy commercials for film conventions and composition. The teachers then developed activities that supported children's collaborations to write scripts, draw storyboards, animate media toys and handmade puppets as main characters, and produce their own films with popular media themes. The teachers set up a "moviemaking" center with popular media toys and two Flip video cameras to allow children to independently explore and produce

their own films during pretend play. I focus here on the negotiations in children's play with eight princess dolls; the children's films of princess play and filmmaking explorations are beyond the scope of this chapter.

Method

I was assisted in this research by a team of university graduate students who video-recorded classroom activity, visiting each classroom two to four days a week during the spring semester. During classroom visits, the research team observed and talked with teachers and children, photographed storyboards and writing samples, and videotaped children during dramatic play, storying, and filmmaking activities. The research team videotaped classroom activity as teachers tried out their planned media engagements with their students. Children's activity during play, writing, and filming with media toys was analyzed for mediation levels (teacher-led, tools, and child-led) and processes (playing, storying, collaboration, and media production). Finally, the research team analyzed three sets of video data (child-produced films, classroom play and filmmaking activities, and teacher study group discussions) to identify and compare patterns across levels and processes. The vignettes in this chapter are excerpted from classroom activity video data as some children played with dolls and others engaged in making shoes as part of costume- and set-making for filmmaking.

Mediated discourse analysis (Scollon 2001; Scollon and Scollon 2004) makes expected ways of belonging visible and identifies how belonging is mediated through artifacts such as dolls, including the making and remaking of artifacts (Norris and Jones 2005). Close analysis of video data located princess play practices in which children used dolls in ways that affected their shared meanings and their social positioning in the play group. Interaction segments of social conflict and meaning negotiation were chosen for close analysis to identify how children enacted valued ways of belonging in particular cultures and how these overlapped and interacted across cultures. For example, during conflicts, teachers and children explicitly referred to rules and routines, making these normally tacit valued practices of belonging visible and available for analysis. (See Table 1 for an example of close analysis.)

Table 1: Sample of Close Analysis of Ways of Belonging and Mediation of Cultures

	Actor	Mediated Action with Doll	Talk	Enacted Ways of Belonging	Using Tensions/Openings/Bridges in Belonging to Mediate Culture
1	Teacher:	[Stacy notices that Chloe has two dolls]	Chloe, you may take one and take it back to the table.	Comply with teacher directive Follow school rule: Take turns with toys	*Tensions as Openings* School Culture: Compliance with turn-taking rule to teach equitable sharing and belonging
	Chloe:	[Chloe clutches both dolls to her chest]	No! I want to take two.	Holding Jasmine and Tiana	Princess Culture: Passionate emotional connection to princess dolls
				Holding two dolls Holding more dolls than peers	Consumer Culture: Possession of new dolls Peer Culture: Status of holding two markers of highly valued commodity among children
2	Teacher:		The purple girl [Jasmine] or the green girl [Tiana]?	Offers choice but repeats directive for turn-taking rule	*Enforcing Ways of Belonging:* School Culture Imposition of Turn-Taking Rule Upheld
				Princess identities unnamed and reduced to dress color	Consumer Culture: Emphasis on color variation of dolls and devaluing of individuality of princess characters: consistent with franchise brand identity
	Chloe:	[Chloe holds up Jasmine and waggles the doll, considering with lips pursed, frowning.]		Nonverbal signaling with doll to indicate compliance with turn-taking rule; retains one doll	School Culture: Concedes; will comply with turn-taking, unhappily
3	Chloe: Megan:	[Chloe approaches Megan and hands her Tiana in a trade for Snow White. Chloe picks up Snow White.]		Complies with teacher demand to give up one doll but also retains two through friendly trading with another child	*Mediate Culture through Bridging:* School Culture: Literal compliance Princess Culture: Third princess held Consumer Culture: Material possession Peer Culture: Friendly trading, Retains commodities and greater status

Mediated discourse analysis of physical actions with a doll within play events linked doll handling to practices of belonging to answer the following questions:

- Who gets access? How?
- Which practices seem routine (natural, expected) and necessary for participation in the princess play group?
- Which princess identities are expected and which alternate identities are imagined? For dolls and for players?
- How are artifacts used for making and remakings of imagined and immediate identity texts such as princess characters, player roles, cooperating friends?

The data vignettes in the following sections are excerpted from one event in which children's play with Disney Princess dolls prompted moments of conflict or negotiation that made visible how children engaged ways of belonging in the intersecting cultures in the classroom. Pseudonyms are used for all participants.

Showing and Sharing Princess Dolls: Making Belonging Visible

On an afternoon in early spring, the preschool teachers decided to add eight Disney Princess dolls to the moviemaking center: the heroines from *Snow White* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), and *Tangled* (2010).[1] The teachers had conducted an informal transmedia audit, noting which popular media characters decorated children's backpacks, clothing, and school supplies (Galbraith 2011). After their audit identified Disney Princess as a common media interest among the girls in the preschool class, the teachers provided a set of dolls to ensure that all children would have equal access, whether or not they personally owned a princess doll. Stacie, one of the preschool teachers, stationed herself at this center on the first day that the dolls were introduced, anticipating that many children would be interested in playing with the dolls. Twelve girls in the class immediately clustered around the table, their attention consumed by the dolls. Grace picked up Ariel, the princess from the *Little Mermaid*, and began talking with her teacher. Grace preferred talking with the teachers and rarely played with other children, a matter of concern to the teachers who actively looked for ways to involve her in social activities. Today, Grace talked about bringing her own doll—Sleeping Beauty—to school for Sharing Time: a period when preschoolers held up favorite toys in front of the class and answered the teachers'

questions about their "treasures." A surprising plan emerged: Grace decided, better still, she would bring the entire class to her house to see her doll *and* her room.

Grace:	Stacie, I'm gonna bring *my* doll.
Teacher:	Your doll? What is your doll?
Grace:	My doll is … I'm gonna bring Sleeping Beauty. Her have a skirt. I'm gonna bring her. [Twirling doll as she speaks.]
Teacher:	You're gonna *share* her?
Grace:	Yeah.
Teacher:	On Monday?
Grace:	Yeah. … [Head down, looking at doll.] I think I'm gonna take her. I want you to go to my house.
Teacher:	You want me to go to your house?
Grace:	You need to, you need, you didn't see my room.
Teacher:	I haven't seen your room yet. You're right.
Grace:	On [Monday], you might go to my house.
Teacher:	Maybe you can take pictures and show us pictures.
Grace:	Okay. I'm gonna take the whole class there!
Teacher:	Oh, wow. The whole class.

As in many early childhood classrooms, regular "Show and Tell" sessions allowed children to bring possessions from home to "share," that is, to stand in front of the class, show the featured object, and talk about it. Beyond the obvious attraction of displaying valued capital to admiring peers, this activity is often the site of identity-building as teachers shape children's narratives to fit gendered discourse expectations (Gee 1996). For example, Kamler (1999) critically analyzed a kindergarten Show-and-Tell session for gender, demonstrating how a teacher's prompts, "Look at this lovely doll who's come to school," limited a preschool girl's talk to description of the doll's hair and clothing, instantiating teacher assumptions about displays of appropriate femininities, or ways of belonging in local communities of feminine practice (Paechter 2006).

Grace's desire to take her teacher and, moreover, the entire class to her house to see her princess doll demonstrates the attraction of the practices of "sharing"—or more accurately *showing*—among the preschoolers as a way of belonging, valued within both peer culture and school culture. Grace's expressed desire to have her class come to her house to see her princess collection was remarkable as Grace seldom showed any interest in playing with other children, despite the teachers' efforts to encourage her to join in. Additionally, the practice of showing and talking about toys was valued in peer culture as well as school culture, with social positioning that extended beyond the official class sharing time. The teachers reported

that during lunch, many girls invite one another over to their houses to see their princess dolls.

The practice of showing dolls demonstrates belonging in another sense: Dolls belong to their owners as material possessions and purchases. In this way, the routine of Show and Tell is an intersection of consumer culture and school culture that enables problematic "showing off" or displays of consumer wealth that emphasize children's relative socioeconomic status. The preschool teachers actively worked against inequitable displays in the classroom: by limiting the number of "home toys" children could bring for sharing time and by supplying a set of classroom princess dolls for play and media production so that all children could have equal access whether they personally owned a princess doll or not.

Despite the teachers' efforts, claims of doll ownership abounded and access to the classroom set of dolls caused disputes and intense negotiations, apparent in the following vignette. While Grace talked with the teacher, the rest of the children tried several strategies for solving the problem of sharing eight highly coveted princess dolls among twelve girls. Some tried to physically wrench dolls away from other girls; in these cases, Stacie intervened immediately to encourage children to ask for a turn.

[Melanie tries to get one of Chloe's dolls; both girls hold tightly to one of the dolls.]

Teacher: Girls, if you pull on them, they will break [falling pitch, sorrowfully].
Teacher: Melanie, did you ask anyone? Or did you just try pulling?
Melanie: I didn't puuuull.

[Olivia silently hands the Cinderella doll to Melanie.]

Teacher: Oh look at that! Thank you [talking to Olivia but modeling an appropriate verbal response for Melanie]. You can ASK someone for a turn [talking to Melanie].

However, the school culture rule of "asking for a turn" did not work in actual toy-sharing conflicts in the peer culture. Children found that a verbal request for a doll was often no more successful than a physical attempt to simply take it, unless enforced by a teacher. The expected sharing practice as an appropriate way of belonging in school culture required children to take turns with popular materials, that is, to give up a doll when a player was "done" playing or to play with only one doll rather than two so others could have a doll.

Teacher [noticing that
Chloe has two dolls]:   Chloe, you may take one and take it back to the table.
Chloe: No! I want to take two [clutching both dolls to her chest].
Teacher: Pick one.
Chloe: No!

Teacher [firmly]:   One girl [doll]. Because we have a lot of people wanting to use them. Which one would you like? [Chloe continues to look down at the two dolls.]

[Chloe holds up Jasmine and waggles the doll, considers with lips pursed, frowning.]

Teacher: The purple girl [Jasmine doll] or the green girl [Tiana doll]? [Chloe waggles the Jasmine doll again.] The purple girl. OK. Put that [Tiana doll] back on the table. I think Victoria wanted one. Where did she go? [Stacie, the teacher, leaves to find Victoria but in the meantime Chloe approaches Megan and hands her Tiana in a trade for Snow White. Chloe picks up the Snow White doll and is now holding both Jasmine and Snow White (Fig. 1).]

Teacher: Victoria, Victoria? We have a girl [doll]. Oh! [Stacie, the teacher, looks down and sees that Chloe's dolls have changed; she seems momentarily puzzled but restates the directive to Chloe.] Never—yeah, pick ONE, Chloe, and give Victoria one.

Figure 1. Choosing between Snow White and Jasmine

A closer look at the interaction in this doll-sharing conflict makes visible the overlapping desires and identities that Chloe engaged in as she juggled the rules of school culture with princess and consumer culture (see Table 1). In this inter-action, Chloe is caught between conflicting ways of belonging: giving up one doll to obey the teacher as a good student in school culture and keeping two dolls and

satisfying consumer culture desires. In consumer culture, she enjoyed multiple satisfactions of possession: 1) having two (new) material toys, 2) wielding the power of possessing two objects that others wanted, and 3) the sensory pleasure of holding princess dolls with long shiny curls and silky dresses. These desires conflicted with school culture expectations for participation, circulated through the practice of sharing (both showing dolls and taking turns with dolls) and in the practice of complying with teacher directions or at least voicing compliance. In interaction 2, school culture dominates and Chloe agrees to comply and give up one doll while Stacie de-emphasizes the individuality of the dolls by ignoring their meanings in princess culture by referring to the dolls only by their dress colors: "the purple one" or "the green one." In interaction 3, Chloe strategically resolved the conflict in a way that allowed her to comply with expectations across cultures: She actively resisted giving up one of the dolls, complying at a literal level by giving away one of her dolls but only in a trade that replaced it with another doll. This kind of friendly trading among children was a valued practice in peer culture as a way of avoiding conflicts. Interestingly, children rarely objected if one child had more toys than others, and appeared only concerned when they did not have a toy of their own.

Gendered expectations in school culture prohibitions against physically taking materials caused Victoria to stand by Chloe patiently and quietly asking, then passively waiting for a turn. By contrast, Carter, a 3-year-old boy, asked for a toy immediately when he approached the table, evoking immediate teacher assistance. Tacit gender-differentiated teaching practices make boys more likely to receive teacher attention, assistance, and turns in classroom interactions (Grumet 1988). Stacie's references to the dolls as "girls" further foregrounds gender differentiation as a primary concern of the doll play.

Carter:	I want one.
Teacher:	You want a girl [doll] too? Well, Victoria is next. You can ask someone for a turn, Carter.
Teacher [noticing that Chloe has two dolls … again]:	Chloe. Which one are you using?

A few minutes later, Isabel who had been more interested in a spin-off project (making shoes for the dolls) than in playing with the dolls, stepped in with an undisputed and unsubstantiated claim of prior ownership of the Snow White doll that Chloe was holding. Isabel largely ignored the teacher's attempt to have children resolve the conflict verbally and enforce the toy-sharing routine in the school culture. Instead, Isabel solved the problem physically and quickly

by handing the doll to Victoria. This decisive physical action—sanctioned by the teacher and contradicting the earlier prohibition—was a far more powerful means of ending the dispute. By sidestepping the school culture turn-taking procedures with its verbal requests, Isabel's silent trade enacted the typical trading practices valued in peer culture, including Victoria in the play with no objection from Chloe.

Isabel [comes in from the art center, holding paper and scissors]:	This one is mine [pointing to Snow White].
Teacher:	Oh, that's where the extra one came from.
Isabel:	Okay, give it up. [Isabel drags the Snow White doll away from Chloe and hands it to Victoria.]
Teacher:	Thanks, Isabel.

Mediating Cultures through Making and Remaking Artifacts

Meanwhile across the room, several girls, including Isabel, had decided that the barefoot princess dolls needed shoes and Stacie suggested that they could make some.

Olivia:	How do you make shoes, Stacie? [Olivia is holding the Belle doll.]
Teacher:	I don't know. How could you make shoes?
[Olivia shrugs.]	
Teacher:	I've never made shoes before.
Olivia:	I never either.
Isabel:	Can I make shoes for this princess? [to Olivia, indicating the Belle doll]
Teacher:	You can make shoes if you would like.
Girl, off camera:	I want to make shoes. How to make shoes?
Teacher:	I don't know. You'll have to come up with something. What could you use for shoes?

A few minutes later, Isabel returned to the table to invite Melanie to join the shoe-making activity, which required Melanie to leave the princess doll play, and the doll.

Isabel [to Melanie]:	Okay, come and make shoes now?
Teacher:	Oh, you're making shoes!

Isabel:	Yeah, we're making shoes.
Teacher:	Did you come up with an idea?
Isabel:	Come and make shoes now. [Melanie runs across room with Cinderella to make shoes with Isabel.]
Teacher:	Melanie! The girl [doll] has to stay at the table.

[Melanie returns, handing Cinderella to Victoria.]

Melanie [to Victoria]:	Can you save this for me? Can you save this?
Teacher [to Melanie]:	You can't save it but you can come back later.
Melanie [to Victoria]:	I'm gonna get some paper. [Melanie leaves with Isabel to get more paper.]
Teacher [to Victoria]:	Keep the girl [doll] at this table and they're going to make shoes.

Making props and costumes constituted an important way of recording story meanings by creating anchors that held roles and story actions, providing bookmarks that allowed children to pick up where they left off when they returned the next day (Wohlwend 2011). Making things is also a key way of demonstrating in a tangible way to children that commercial media products and their messages are open and available for children to revise by adding additional content.

In this preschool, doll play narratives were simple, often limited to naming the dolls or their relationships to each other or changing doll clothing or placing the dolls in various locations. Two girls spent the rest of the play period absorbed in making shoes for the dolls using pieces of multi-colored masking tape. Making shoes constituted a way of mediating the dolls so they would fit to the models and belong in princess culture. Each packaged Mattel doll included shoes, tiara, and combs, but these small accessories had not been placed in the play center as they could be so easily lost in the preschool classroom. In this case, the girls' spontaneous shoemaking reinscribed the hyperfeminine discourse and fashion focus of princess culture.

Remaking Meanings and Ways of Belonging

Among a number of goals, teachers aimed to help children critique and produce alternatives to stereotypes in the commercial culture. Toward this end, the teachers encouraged children to create their own products as in the shoemaking project, but they also modeled this by helping children to produce their own movie sets as alternate contexts for doll play scenarios. For example, Stacie modeled playing with the princess doll using the commercial dollhouse but found that the children were not very interested in doing more than putting the dolls in and out of the front door.

Carter: I need to fit in the house.
Teacher: Oh, she's going in the house?
Carter: Yeah, she can't fit [vertically]. [Then Carter tries pushing the doll's head into the closed door of the small dollhouse.]
Teacher: Oh, no. She's a mighty tall girl.
Carter: Ee-yah! [Carter opens the door and puts dolls in sideways.]
Victoria: That's because she's tall, that's because she's a big girl.

When teachers invited children to create three-dimensional scenes, several girls built a "swamp" with small pebbles, clay, plastic grass, and craft materials and studded it with twigs and pipe cleaner trees (see Fig. 2). The scenes inspired new play narratives such as princesses who wandered through the swamp and met new characters such as a "swamp monster."

Figure 2. Princesses in the Swamp

Allison: Don't touch that [monster] because you die really quickly.
Teacher: Be careful of the [intoning slowly] Swamp Monster, or what's his name.
Allison: Um, Delicate.
Teacher: Delicate! And what is he again?
Allison: A creature, a swamp creature who eats people.

When teachers entered directly into children's play as co-players, they could inspire remakings in productive and collaborative ways by modeling and

supporting changes in the commercially given storylines within the imaginary context, in this case princesses wandering in a swamp and, later, fighting a swamp monster—which Stacie made male and Allison remade as weak through the name Delicate. These remakings of commercial narratives created ruptures with expected characterizations, mediating princess culture by opening up possibilities for less stereotypical roles in children's storying.

Similar verbal remakings through renaming of the princess dolls combined with revised roles in which players turned princesses into mothers or villains. But this met resistance when other players upheld the "real" or authorized names of characters they knew, sparking renegotiations as children worked through their conflicting ideas. These negotiations allowed children to demonstrate their affiliation with princess culture as they upheld the proper names of the princesses. Grace, Melanie, and Allison challenged the renamings and upheld commercial princess culture.

Grace [holding Ariel doll]:	And I'm Ariel.
Allison [holding Sleeping Beauty doll]:	And mine is Minishawn [inventing a new name for Sleeping Beauty].
Grace [picking up a second doll, Snow White, rejects Allison's renaming of Sleeping Beauty]:	No, her name is Cinderella.
Melanie [holding Cinderella doll]:	*My* name is Cinderella!
Allison:	This is Sleeping Beauty!
Grace [higher pitch, shifting into character to voice Snow White and affirming Allison's claim]:	"And this is my friend Sleeping Beauty. Hello!"

[Allison bounces Sleeping Beauty across the tabletop to meet Grace's Snow White doll.]

Grace:	"And this is your friend Snow White."

By including Allison and reinstating the commercial names of all the dolls, Grace resolved the conflict and upheld princess culture. However, she also assumed a leadership role in the play group in peer culture by bringing all players back into the scenario and moving the play forward. For Grace, this collaboration with other girls was a key moment in mediating the peer and school cultures and to participate more actively.

At other times, renamings enabled more children to play as children altered the commercial narratives and character relationships among the dolls to make room for meaningful roles for friends. For example, in one scenario, the Belle doll

became Sleeping Beauty's mother so that the girls could enact a familiar domestic storyline. In this case, friendship bonds and play goals in peer culture supported and strengthened children's remediations of princess culture. In these remakings, children imported familiar contexts and cultural resources. Like other play groups I have studied, children played the stories they knew best, drawing upon scenes and scripts from family life for collaborative play. In preschool, the typically brief stories involved lots of physical movement of toys, simple greetings and labeling, and extended physical manipulation and exploration of the dolls, dresses, and materials.

Remakings were physical as well as narrative. Melanie spent twenty minutes intently tugging and stretching Belle's yellow dress onto the Cinderella doll's body, working the sleeves over the doll's arms and struggling with the fasteners. Melanie's re-costuming of the doll successfully ruptured the princess culture color scheme that Stacie unknowingly reinscribed when she described the "purple girl" or "green girl." Melanie focused on the doll's sensory aspects as she concentrated on the task of pulling a tight satin sleeve over the stubborn stickiness of the soft vinyl of the doll's arm. Interestingly, a child could almost always be found sitting and stroking the silky hair of one of the dolls; this accounted for the popularity of the Rapunzel doll, with smooth, straight hair longer than its body. The sensory pleasure of handling the doll's materials made it more difficult for children to relinquish a doll or to forgo the satisfaction of clutching a doll and wielding social capital in the classroom.

Importantly, another aspect of remaking or revising the standard story was the repositioning of 1) children as experts in relation to teachers and 2) girls as experts in relation to Carter and other boys who were also interested in playing with the dolls.

Teacher:	Oh, Carter, you found one. [Carter is holding Tiana.] Who did you find?
Carter [looking down at his doll, puzzled]:	Ahhh, Cinderella.
Teacher:	Cinderella?
Megan:	No that's Tiana.
Teacher:	Who?
Megan:	That's Tiana.
Teacher:	Who's Tiana?
Megan:	Tiana has a green—green dress on.
Teacher:	Does she always wear a green dress?
Megan:	No. Because my, my Tiana at my house what has a blue dress.

The teachers noticed that, like Carter, boys were interested in playing with the Disney Princess dolls but did not know the characters. This created slippages that enabled girls to display media knowledge and wield this expertise in renaming and remaking doll identities and storylines.

The ability to draw on girls' shared princess attachments and expertise had transformative effects on peer culture participation, particularly for Grace. Throughout the school year, the teachers had repeatedly and unsuccessfully attempted to involve her in a play group. However when Grace began regularly playing princesses, she joined easily in collaborative play with other girls through the princess dolls. Both teachers felt that Grace's combined passion for princesses and shared media knowledge motivated her play with other girls. It is important to acknowledge the emergent nature of preschool children's social friendships, which often needed teacher support, as did their collaborative play and storytelling. It was not uncommon for children to play along but side-by-side with the dolls; this parallel play—a sort of separate togetherness—is also a valid way of belonging in peer culture at the preschool level.

These excerpts show that princess media are undeniably major resources of pleasure, shared understandings, and social status for young girls—in short, the stuff of belonging in children's play worlds and peer cultures. All too often, peer and school cultures do not mesh comfortably and children's outside interests in princess culture and consumer culture are not recognized at school. In some classrooms, children's media knowledge and peer culture purposes are devalued and supplanted by a school culture constrained by "the basics" (Dyson 2006, 2008), overriding attention to mastering a set of simplistic skills in math and reading (Paris 2005). However, in order to help children critically and productively engage the ubiquitous transmedia that they read, play, and live in, we also need to thoughtfully consider peer culture and school culture issues to effectively help young children navigate the conflicts, social relationships, and emotional attachments that constitute belonging within complex mixtures of childhood cultures.

In this chapter, the focus has been on princess play rather than on other aspects of a critical media literacy curriculum, such as critique, collaboration, storying, or children's media production. All these components must be closely examined and reinterpreted to fit the emergent understandings, strengths, and needs of early childhood learners; this work is ongoing (Vasquez and Felderman 2012; Wohlwend et al. 2013). However, an existing and growing body of research on play in preschool classrooms shows that children draw upon their knowledge of popular media in their literacy practices in school culture and to participate and even assume leadership positions in peer culture (Dyson 2003; Wohlwend 2011). For example, one study found that children invented new superhero narratives

that allowed more players or honored peers' contributions in ways that strengthened children's friendships, with the support of thoughtful negotiations by teachers (Galbraith 2011). It is important to recognize the productive opportunities in what appears at first blush to be a conflict between children's popular media passions and school culture concerns for appropriate content, as these can lead to innovative practices (Sanderson 2011). If teachers acknowledge and engage peer culture interests in princess culture and consumer culture, cultures can converge "in ways that create a very mutually supportive intersection …" (Fernie, Madrid, and Kantor 2011, xii). [If] teachers take play seriously, that is, as a way to learn more about children and their literacies, they may come to treat it as a valuable resource for child and teacher learning" (Kontovourki and Siegel 2009, 37). In this way, princess play, despite its problematic portrayals of gender, can offer a source of pleasure and a resource for critical spaces that enable children to make and remake media texts and transform social relationships in classroom cultures.

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