

Children's Bricolage under the gaze of teachers in Sociodramatic Play

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Abstract

Drawing on the theory of dialogism and the literature on children's culture and resistance, this article investigates the contextual and textual features of the cultural making of a group of children in sociodramatic play in a Hong Kong kindergarten. Different from other, similar studies, this study reports that under the gaze of the teacher, children's culture is largely practised as a reproduction of the teacher's cultural texts. Children's culture or resistance only arises as a bricolage of various cultural texts in which the cultural texts of the teacher and the children are intertwined, dissonant and hybridized. Two major modes of bricolage are identified. They are hybridization and invalidation. This result suggests that the teacher's strategies and authoritarian discourse are suppressive of the children's culture, aiming largely to shape the way and process of their cultural making. Nonetheless, from the evidence in this study, it is believed that bricolage is a creative act as it involves tactful and creative appropriation, orchestration and transformation of all sorts of cultural texts which are at hand. The pretend play corner is consequently reframed and recreated as a heteroglot playing space of the children.

1. The practice of sociodramatic play in Hong Kong kindergartens

Sociodramatic play is always used interchangeably with role-play, pretend play, fantasy play and symbolic play which all refer to plays that are based on mimetic activities and simulation of roles and situations in a real or fictional world. For local preschool teachers, sociodramatic play is also a slippery concept. It always takes place in a dedicated physical place in the classroom which is named 'pretend play corner', 'home corner', 'fantasy corner' or '*wa wa gok*' (literally meaning the doll corner). Although there has been very little research conducted locally on sociodramatic play, its benefits for children's learning and development are emphasized. One of the major reasons to account for this is the overall education paradigm and system in Hong Kong being academic-orientated and function-driven. In the area of early childhood education, socialization and

cognitive development are always prioritized by parents and educators as key goals of education (Pearson and Rao, 2003; Chan and Chan, 2003). Conceivably, the school curriculum and whatever types of play within are applied to realise these key goals. One of the most evident examples is the treatment of play in the official Curriculum Guide to the local early education (2006). In this document, play is interpreted and posited as a means to effective teaching and learning rather than a self-validating end-in-itself. Regarding the actual teaching practice, several local studies reveal that play has been 'taught' in a mode of knowledge transmission that involves teachers' didactic, purposeful and structured instruction (Cheng, 2001; Cheng and Stimpson, 2004; Wong, 2005). It is not the aim of this paper to argue an 'appropriate' treatment of play. Yet as shown in the above studies, the manipulation of adults and the intention of teaching or socialisation in play are evident. Nonetheless, drawing on the theories of Bakhtin's Dialogism (1981, 1986), and also the recent literature on children's culture and language socialization, I interpret language as a cultural phenomenon and product which embodies the knowledge, belief, identity and agency relation of the people using it. Regarding language socialization or education, it does not take place under an expert-to-novice approach but a reciprocal process of cultural transmission and consumption in which children may reproduce and/or resist to the adult's socialized language or transmitted culture. In this study, particular attention will also be given to children's language and culture that are informal, improper or senseless in the eyes of the teacher. They are argued as children's cultural resistance to the domination of the adults (Corsaro and Eder, 1990).

2. Cultural resistance of children in play

There is an increasing research on the practice of play from the perspective of children's culture. Corsaro and Eder define children's culture as 'a stable set of activities or routines, artifacts, values, and concerns that children produce and share in interaction with peers' that embody their knowledge, belief, identity and agency (1990: 197). Although the concept has generally applied to children at an older age, there are a few of studies conducted in kindergarten contexts. Evidences quoted in Corsaro's (2006) studies shows that the use of bad languages in the girls' quarrels and boys' twists of the given play frame make them find the play more exciting. For Roger and Evans, children's culture works in a way of 'constructing their (children's) own stories and narratives' (2008: 115). Apart from the verbal mode of representation, children's culture is defined, in other studies, as a wide range of expression forms and popular media artefacts which include popular narratives, mass and computer games, animations, media catch-phrases, rap and pop songs (Dyson, 2003; Flemming, 2002; Marsh, 2003). In this study, these different types of children's culture with diverse modes of representation are broadly termed as cultural texts which mediate children's meaning making and formation of cultural identity. Scholars also reveal that when children find their rights being deprived of or intention unmet in play situations, these cultural texts would emerge as a resistance to the control of the adults (Canning, 2007; Löfdahl and Hägglund, 2007). As shown in the above examples of these texts, the formation of the material basis of possible children's resistance come from all sources in the children's everyday life which could hardly be separated from the adult and the wider sociocultural context in which they are situated. By further examining

the ways of children's cultural making with the concept of 'bricolage' and 'tactics', we can have a more sophisticated theoretical framework to investigate the interplay between the contextual features of the local practice of sociodramatic play without losing insight over the cultural resistance that emerges from within.

Bricolage is a French word originally used by the anthropologist Lévi-Strauss (1962) to describe the spontaneous making of things or the performing of rituals of the tribal people which is mediated with a few tools and limited resources that are ready-at-hand. Over the last decade, this term is widely applied in the field of cultural studies to describe the production of cultural artifacts of the populace or the marginalized social groups which are subversive to that of the dominant high-end culture. Scholars from childhood studies generally agree that the making of children's culture is a non-linear and non-theory-based process armed with no specific knowledge and skill that differs from those of the adults. Terms like 'remix' (Dyson, 2003: 169) and 'collage' (Paley, 1995: 9) are then used to characterize the spontaneity and heterogeneity of bricolage. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's Dialogism (1981; 1986) and its related concept of intertextuality, we further notice that through bricolage, all sorts of cultural texts, including those of the adult, will be appropriated and transformed into something else. According to Bakhtin, there is no word or text originally devised but always borrowed from other people's mouths. This borrowing necessitates active responses of one to the words or texts of others, and reworking them for one's own purpose. Intertextuality is a term coined by Julia Kristeva (1984) to refer to the relationship between texts through which we can trace how the borrower reworks and hence transforms the text. To explore children's cultural making through bricolage from the dialogic perspective, it is interpreted as a dynamic process of appropriating, reworking and transforming various types of texts. It would give rise to complex and multifaceted intertextual connections of bricolage. The resistance of children's culture is relied on what intertextual connections are constructed among the borrowed cultural texts, and through which how are they transformed for proclaiming children's culture and identity.

The studies of children's culture mainly take place in other sociocultural settings where children's free-exploratory and self-directed activities are validated. However, the contextual features of the local kindergartens might not be conducive to the children's cultural making. Given this, I also take into account of the contextual features of this study that would facilitate or hinder the emergence of bricolage. The theory of people's everyday resistance 'tactics' of Michel de Certeau (1984) serves as another theoretical thread which enables us to explain when and how children can bricoleur in the studied sociodramatic play. In 'The Practice of Everyday Life', de Certeau argues that enterprisers, cities and armies circumscribe and construct a place as the 'proper' locus (1984: xix) where they can exercise their power. 'Strategies' are deployed to determine the power relations and control the use of materials within. While the operation of strategies in a place is systematical, rational and stable over time, the struggles of the weak against the powers are however unprepared, tricky, indeterminate and temporary. According to de Certeau (1984), these are 'tactics', analogous to the guerrilla's surreptitious ruses or poaching raids whose operation is largely dependent on both the absence of the power in a place and the clever manipulation of this temporal factor of the weak.

They arm them to subvert a place and its meanings and resources, hence turning it into a 'space' for themselves. In brief, the term bricolage highlights the spontaneous and heterogeneous while the tactics underlines the temporary, serendipitous and surreptitious children's culture production. These concepts support my interpretation of the pretend play corner in this study as a site of power struggle.

3. Methodology

This study is heavily indebted to the traditions and methods of ethnography of communication and language socialization that emphasize a microanalysis of human interaction in social settings. Scholars from these fields argue that language is bound by the social and cultural context where it is situated, and also inscribed in the power relations within (Hymes, 1974; Ochs and Schieffelin, 1984). Echoing with Bakhtin's dialogic view on language, there is also a shift of research interest to examine how children appropriate the adult language to proclaim and construct their culture and identity (Garrett and Baquedano-López, 2002; Li, 2009). The ethnographic perspective and approach to language allow me to discern and illustrate the patterns and routines of children's culture in sociodramatic play. Apart from the contextual analysis, a textual-comparative approach will be employed in this study to explore the similarity and discrepancy between the cultural texts instructed by the teacher and locally practised by the children.

3.1. The site of investigation: The pretend play corner in Mabel's Class

The study took place in a full-day class in a government-subsidized kindergarten in Hong Kong. The teacher Mabel² has 20 children aged from four to five years. She primarily practised theme teaching in the morning session, while arranging a variety of activities, such as sociodramatic play, block game, drawing and writing for children in the afternoon. I paid on-site visits of 2 hours a day to her class for 2 to 3 days a week. The fieldwork took five months in total to finish. During this period, I mainly focused on observing how children play and communicate in the pretend play corner (or named as corner below). Apart from taking field notes, I heavily relied on videotaping to capture both the verbal and non-verbal language of children in play. Teacher's interviews were conducted to investigate her views on sociodramatic play as well as children's language and culture. The research focus has been recursively framed and reframed as my situated knowledge of children's bricolage accumulated over time through first-hand experience in the field (Stake, 1995; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). First and foremost, since only those children who finished their homework were allowed to play, and not everyone among them demonstrated the same capacity or interest to interact with language in play, I then narrowed my focus on 12 children who had been actively engaging and communicating in the pretend play corner at the later stage of the fieldwork. 50 video episodes were finally sampled and transcribed for analysis and discussion.

Another observation is that sociodramatic play in the studied kindergarten is institutionalized as a teaching instrument which largely echoes to the overall goals and atmosphere of the Hong Kong early childhood education as mentioned. Mabel, like her counterparts, adopted the theme and also

the teaching idea of sociodramatic play from textbooks (Cheng and Stimpson, 2004). In fact, there has been a long tradition of the Hong Kong kindergarten teachers to teach by textbooks (Cheuk and Hatch, 2007). To view this phenomenon from the concept of 'scripted curriculum', a form of curriculum commercially produced as prescribed teaching package with routine and standardized teaching objectives, procedures, materials and activities (Ede, 2006), it suggests that the content, the process and the way of Mabel's sociodramatic play was controlled over by textbooks. She explained that the adapted communication situation and simplified registers of sociodramatic play modeled on real-life situations are conducive to language teaching and socialization (Interview Notes). Hence, the play themes including shopping in a supermarket, going to the beach, taking bus and so on all stressed on functional language use and socialised behaviours in everyday life scenarios. Social genre was also instructed ahead of the play as a prototype of sequential steps of mimicry. For example, in the play of boutique shopping, the steps are '*greeting* → *looking and trying on clothes* → *request and offer of service* → *transaction* → *salutation*'. Apart from these, Mabel preset the roles, props, and setting in a particular play theme in a calculative and subtle way to ensure that the set-up of the corner would serve the teaching purposes. All these arrangements were, as discussed, the 'strategies' of the power which are vital to mastermind and gaze the children's play since Mabel, for most of the time, had been occupying herself with guiding the children to do homework. And yet, her physical absence in the pretend play corner provided the children with opportunity to play on their own in a free approach. Such 'free approach', though limited to participation and response and in turn being substantially different from the child-initiated and directed free play that generally defined in the West (Santer et al. 2007), still gave rise to children's tactics to resist the teacher's scripts and gaze. The situated meanings of sociodramatic play prompted my investigation into the tension between Mabel and her children's desires, interpretations and practices of sociodramatic play.

3.2. Analytical Frame

Considering that the teaching and learning of social genre played a key role in Mabel and her children's sociodramatic play, this study employs genre analysis as the major frame to explore and examine the children's bricolage of cultural texts and its connections with those of the teacher. The definition of genre in this study stems from Bakhtin's (1986) notion of social speech genre which refers genre to a category of language use or typology of texts. Social speech genre of the same type shares general textual structures, stable form of linguistic features and common communication conventions. These language elements of a genre and the components of the communicative context, i.e. the purpose, the content, the people and the place where it is developed and used are closely interrelated. This genre framework is applied for analyzing the genre taught by Mabel and generated by the children in relation to the artefacts used in a particular play theme,

An initial analysis reveals that the children's culture texts emerge in Mabel's sociodramatic play are largely an imitation of the adult world where they are situated. They mainly include narratives, games, rhymes and social genres. Besides, a routinised and normalized practice of the taught genre of the children is predominant in the data. These results are rather different from those studies

conducted among children at an older age who are found to have derived their culture mostly from popular culture and computer games (Grace and Tobin, 1997; Marsh, 2003). Notwithstanding, there is also evidence of children's use of the bricolage tactics. With this understanding, I would like to evaluate the children's cultural resistance through identifying the intertextual connections between the cultural texts of Mable and the children. I reframe the research questions as follows: (i) What are the cultural texts generated by the children in the pretend play corner? (ii) What are the intertextual connections that have been built among these cultural texts in relation to those taught by the teacher? And (iii) in what ways do these intertextual connections show children's cultural resistance to the strategies and authoritarian discourse of the teacher?

4. Findings and discussion

The results of the field work reveal that the more heterogeneous and hybrid the cultural texts practised by the children, the greater the level of cultural resistance the texts embody. Apart from reproduction, children also hybridise and invalidate the texts instructed by the teacher showing complex intertextual connections between the texts of the two parties. The coming section illustrates and discusses the features of three types of intertextual connections, namely, Reproduction, Hybridisation and Invalidation in conjunction with the sampled and transcribed videotaped vignettes.

4.1. Reproduction

Pierre Bourdieu's notion of 'reproduction' (1990: 31) is borrowed to highlight the process of internalising the social and cultural ideology and identity through language use but not just the language use in itself. In the cases of reproduction, the children threw themselves into the simulated scenario in which they acted out their roles with the proper use of the language, genre and props prescribed by the teacher. It suggests a success of the teacher's strategies, and hence an absence of children's bricolage. Data reveals that those children who are more capable of grasping the play theme and its required genre also simultaneously work as the teacher's spokesman to monitor and manipulate their peers' imitation. In this case, reproduction is not a mere replication of the authoritarian discourse but also that of the power relationships between the social roles in the larger social context where they are situated. Extract 1 is drawn from three children's interaction in the sociodramatic play of taking bus.

Extract 1: Taking bus

In playing 'taking bus', the preparation was meticulous to include a backdrop to simulate the bus compartment, a steering wheel, the sign of the bus station, the seats and the smart card for paying the bus fare. Rather than allowing the children to improvise the roles, the role of the mother and daughter/son as passengers, the driver and the tourist were pre-arranged by Mabel. These were to enable her to explain to the children in the theme teaching session the dos-and-dont's when taking public transport. In the below extract, we can see Linda and Amy played the passengers, and Charles

was the driver, who has internalised and observed the regulations and procedures of bus driving in details (①-③).

- L1 Linda: Hey, I want to go to Sheung Wan¹. (She speaks to Charles when she is following Amy to get on the bus)
- L2 Charles: Beep² the card! (He points at the lower half of the autopay machine for paying bus fare.) ① *Driver enforces the bus riding rules
- L3 Linda: I've done so.
- L4 Charles: How about you? (He speaks to Amy)
- L5 (Linda chats to Amy on the seat.)
- L6 Charles: The teacher said that it's too noisy here. You speak so loudly. You annoy the driver. You gotta get off the bus. ②
- L7 (Linda and Amy get off the bus.)
- L8 Charles: That will get you caught in the door...! Hey, no door here. The door has not opened yet! Not yet open! ③

During the play, apart from reproducing the taught cultural texts, it is also found that the children always step outside of the play world to actively make explicit connection between their play narrative and the teacher's regulations about bus driving and riding (L6). These became applications in play when the children made use of and paraphrased the teacher in acting the roles of the passengers by prompting the driver, 'Hey, driver! Drive safely! You may crash the car! The teacher said that it will get crashed'; and vice versa by ordering the passengers, 'No eating in the bus!', and 'You've to queue up. The teacher told us to do so!', and etc. As shown, these narratives are fused with reported speech and imperatives of the teacher's instruction (L2, L6). They are not an exact reproduction and mimicry of Mabel's texts but the exact strategies she used for enforcing a monologic and fixed way of using the pretend play. This kind of intertextual connections is one of the common patterns emerged from the data of reproduction.

4.2. Hybridisation

In hybridisation, more than one type of cultural texts are appropriated, juxtaposed or interwoven together under a given play theme or at a particular moment of play. Apart from the taught social genre, they include texts from personal experience, nursery rhyme and performance convention that are acquired from the children's everyday life. It results in a heterogeneous, dissonant and absurd children's bricolage showing their idiosyncratic approach to cultural making. In this study, two types of hybridisation are discerned which mostly emerged when Mabel was busily guiding the other children in writing. The first one is *disarray*, in which the children bricoleur their own cultural texts to disrupt the language, structure and convention of those prescribed by the teacher in the interim of the play. It results in a blending of the themes, languages and other communicative components of the cultural texts of the teacher and the children. The second one is *disguise* by which the children can deceive their teacher into believing that they play in line with his or her requirement. The children keep the given play frame and its given genre unchanged in appearance while tactfully and inconspicuously replacing and transforming part of its components by making

connections with their own cultural texts. Instead of total resistance to the teacher, in the cases of hybridisation, the children share certain common goals and tactics amongst themselves to de-stabilise and subvert the fixed and monologic strategies over the use of the pretend play.

4.2.1. Disarray

As explained in the extracts, a bricolage of diverse and even dissonant language and cultural texts are used in different contexts with mixed purposes under the same play theme. Extract 2 is drawn to illustrate how children's bragging, the nursery rhyme and the Olympic torch relay are simultaneously recontextualised from everyday life experiences to recreate a particular moment of the fire fighting play.

Extract 2: Fire fighting (1)

In the play theme of fire fighting, various props mimicking a fire scene had been prearranged for the children. The fire scene was set at some high-rises represented by cartoon pictures put on the floor. Other props including some hoses made of red plastic sheets with blue stripes made of pompoms imitated running water. Mabel expected the children to be able to act out the narrative using the vocabularies related to fire fighting she had taught before the sociodramatic play. The scripted text was given in the order beginning with *people calling the emergency for help* → *policemen investigating the incident* → *the firemen crews fight the fire and save the people from a burning house*. In Extract 2, Marco was the fire fighter and Sean the police officer. Grabbing the hoses, they fought the fire together. Charles was playing the girl in the fire scene waiting to be rescued. At the very beginning of the play, everything was on the right track as Mabel required. Resistance was noted with Charles's improvisation of an alternative way of 'playing' with the flame props.

- L1 (Marco, Charles and Sean do not follow the assigned instructions to play the roles, but shifts to playing with the flame props)
- L2 Marco: I'm going to primary school when I'm six.
- L3 Sean: you know, my sister is in the 'primary', higher form than you.
- L4 Marco: your sister's studying? Where? brag with each other
- L5 Sean: in primary school!
- L6 Marco: which primary school?? When I'm six I'm going to primary school too!
- L7 (Charles keeps pouring the flame props out of the cartoons and starts singing the rhyme of firefighters that the children learnt in singing class. Marco and Sean follow.)
- L8 All: (sing) Fire fighters together fight the fires. They are real heroes sing rhyme together
without fears... Turn on the tap! Turn on the tap! How courageous we can go...
- L9 (The children laugh while being lax in the pretend play corner.)

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| L10 | Sean: Hey, let's have an Olympic torch relay! (He grabs the hose which lies on the floor and lifts it up.) | |
| L11 | Researcher: How to make the torch relay? | imitate the Olympic torch relay |
| L12 | Marco: This is torch relay too. (He picks up another hose from the floor and imitates the relay.) | |
| L13 | Charles: You get burnt and killed! You get burnt and killed! (He attempts to grab Sean's hose.) | curse with bad language |
| L14 | Teacher: Who gets so rude? (She shouts from the writing corner.) | |
| L15 | Sean: It's Charles! | Teacher's intervention |
| L16 | Teacher: Isn't a fire fighter supposed to save lives? | |
| L17 | (Three of them then stop uttering a word and play quietly according to the instructions.) | |

The bricolage of bragging (L2 to L6), rhyming (L8) and mimicking the Olympic torch relay (L10 to L12) have interrupted not only the cohesion of the fire fighting genre but also the proper and specific use of pretend play corner as preset by Mabel. However, the children could only temporarily and intermittently seize the opportunity under the teacher's sanction or when she was off from awareness. In this light, the children's resistance could only come into view as snapshots taken in and out of the orbit of the given play frame. Once it was found, (L14) the children had to revert to Mabel's prescription (L17).

4.2.2. Disguise

In disguise, the children keep the roles, the props and the overall setting of the play frame but changed its communicative theme and purpose, as well as the related genre to meet their own agenda of play. During this process, the children transform the given genre and its related communicative components to tactfully and yet spontaneously 'smuggle' their own so as to replace the former. The term 'smuggle' is used to depict the children's tactics devised for deceiving their teacher in a subtle and cover-up manner. One of the major tactics found in the data is appropriation of the props prepared by the teacher as the camouflage. This tactic makes the children's play have certain connection to the text instructed by Mabel on appearance, yet in a degraded and diluted tone from the serious and formal one assumed in teaching and learning.

Extract 3: Fire fighter (2)

In Extract 3, Marco played the role of the police officer and Cecily was a fire fighter. In the same manner, they played the sociodramatic play according to the pre-given instruction of Mabel. After some while, Marco took the fire fighter props as a broom and kept sweeping the carton-made high rises. Soon the hose was broken into two pieces. While he was holding the red hose and Cecily was picking up the water flowing from the hose, they both threw a glance in the direction of their teacher. The teacher did not take any notice of the broken props. Thus the children carried on to explore their way of play.

- L1 Cecily: Ok! Sprinkle something over it. Spray some detergent onto it! (He speaks to Marco and sweeps the cartons on the floor.) ① *sweeps and washes → sprays detergent
- L2 Marco : Hey! Wash it! (He squashes the hose and pretends to fill up the carton-made high rises with detergent, and orders Cecily to wash them)
- L3 (Cecily and Marco keep imitating the play of washing) ②
- L4 Marco: Here! It's filthy.
- L5 Cecily: Good gracious! I saw a crockcoach. (She points at one of the cartons.)
- L6 Marco: Spray it with liquid soap. That kills it. (He directs the hose towards the water in Cecily's hand, as if filling it with liquid soap.)
- L7 Cecily: You see! (Another child, Man, enters the corner.) Tons of cockroaches on Man's shirt. (She then splashed the water onto Man and washed him) Ha! Ha! I want to bathe him. Cockroaches on his weeny foot. (At the same time, she washes Man's foot.) ③
- L8 Researcher: What're you washing?
- L9 Marco: The police gotta clean the stuffs.
- L10 Cecily: See? It's disinfectant. (She pointed at the hose in his hands.)
- L13 Researcher: Do the police always do cleaning?
- L14 Marco: Housework. Yep, they do. Because...if they grow up, the police gotta do housework.
- L15 Cecily: Just some cleaning.
- L16 Marco: But we are in the police station. Now, stuffs elsewhere. Gotta use detergent to wash them.
- L17 (They continue their cleaning mimicry) ④

In Extract 3, the fire hose prepared by Mabel was spontaneously transformed into cleaning tools. The communicative theme, the context and its related genre in the fire scene were subsequently changed and displaced by the cleaning duty in the police station. The new communication purpose was clearly articulated with repeated exploration and construction of the genre of cleaning supported by simulated gestures (①-④). What remained unchanged were the roles of the police officer and the fire fighter which became in the children's collaborative communication a cover-up of their new play frame and transgressive appropriation of the corner. The improvisation of the comic and the exciting plot of killing cockroaches (L5-L7) further transformed the specific acts and scenario preset by the teacher.

Extract 4: Frying fish

Linda, Sean and Lily had repetitively enacted the teacher's taught story for several times. One of the plots in the story is about the animal characters fishing in a pond in the forest. Mabel had prepared some animal masks, paper fishes, fishing rods and a blue carpet to mimic a pond in the corner. In the middle of one of the enactments, Linda and Sean suggested amongst themselves to play a game pretending to fry fishes with a basket prop. They then started catching fishes from the pond and converted the basket into a frying pan. By doing so, a cooking play frame was tactfully recontextualised from the fishing frame and eventually replacing it.

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| L1 | Researcher: | What're you doing out there? | |
| L2 | Linda: | We're frying the fishes. We need some soya sauce. (She rocks the basket rhythmically with other group-mates) | ① *flavours the fishes |
| L3 | Sean: | And some chocolate. | ② |
| L4 | Lily: | Chocolate sauce! | ③ |
| L5 | Linda: | And pear sauce. | ④ |
| L6 | Lily: | Orange juice, orange sauce and roasted pork sauce. | ⑤ |
| L7 | Sean: | Apple sauce. | ⑥ |
| L8 | Sean: | Fruit juice sauce. | ⑦ |
| L9 | Linda: | Lemons, mangoes and durians... | ⑧... |

In the above extract, one can see how a cooking play frame is devised and unfolded as the children recursively and quickly improvised the cooking procedure of flavouring (① to ⑧). This tactics of iteration contribute to exploring a new play theme while lingering the play of their own, and hence the time and space of resistance.* The result is a reframed cooking theme improvised on a bricolage of the cooking genre, the children's rhyme and a language play that is idiosyncratic, absurd and yet sensible and well-structured.

4.3. Invalidation

In invalidation, the teacher's cultural texts of a particular play frame serve as stimulus or resources for children's making their own culture. During the process, they are cannibalized, transformed and gradually replaced by a new play frame, which is mainly constructed of children's cultural texts such as various kinds of self-devised game. However, the new play frame or the emerged children's cultural text does not have much connection with the given one. The examples found in the data reveal that this category of cultural resistance not only is unofficial and senseless in the eyes of the teacher, yet disruptive enough to break the general classroom norms and regulations leading to an invalidation of the teacher's strategies. The children are fully aware of the transgressiveness of their act. As a result, as illustrated in Extract 6, invalidation happens surreptitiously and promptly.

Extract 5: Game of 'zyun zyun hyun' (Brandishing round and round)

In another episode of animals fishing in a pond, we find Sean and Howard firstly picked up their fishing rods and waved them in the middle of the play. Cecily followed. The fishing rod prop was comprised of two parts: a straw and a piece of string. When the children turned the straws in a

circular motion, big circles were formed on the strings. The children cackled together quietly with delight. A few minutes later, Sean left the game to check if Mabel knew what they had been doing. After finding the teacher staying in the writing corner, he then returned to the corner and continued the game until all the strings of his playmates are tangled together. Sean shouted aloud, 'Hang on!', and then untangled the messy strings. At that time, it seemed to be Howard's turn to check out what Mabel was doing. Sean counted from one to three to restart the game after Howard's return. To avoid tangling their rods again, the children made the circular motions a little upwards in different direction.

- L1 Researcher: What're you playing?
L2 Sean: We're playing the "zyun zyun hyun".
L3 Howard: We're making a big circle!
L4 Researcher: How to play the game?
L5 Sean: Make a small circle first, then make a big one. Lastly, do an exchange.
(Pointing at Howard's fishing rod, and turning his rod to demonstrate)
L6 Researcher: What comes next?
L7 Sean: Just wave it, and wave it! If...if you stop in the middle, the strings will get into a knot.
L8 (Howard noticed that the teacher was staring at them as they were not actually playing the fishing role play. He immediately knelt down near the pond and pretended that he was fishing. He shouted out loudly, "Wow! I got a fish!")

By bricoluering the fishing rod given by the teacher and the everyday play experience, the children devise their own game called 'zyun zyun hyun', a game bears a name and with clear methods and rules to play. The game acquired an under-ground element as the children had to counter-scrutinise the moves of the teacher and devise their own solutions to minimize possible technical problems. Reliable intelligence enabled them to maximise the game time and stealth to enhance the pleasure of play. Eventually, the pretend play corner was transformed into the children's own play space, despite that it is dependent on the resumption of order by the teacher.

5. Concluding remarks

Drawing on theory of Dialogism and the literature on children's culture and cultural resistance, I have investigated the contextual and textual features of the emergence and making of children's culture of a group of children in a Hong Kong kindergarten's pretend play corner. Different from the other studies about children's culture, this study reveals that under the gaze of the teacher, children's play is largely practised as a reproduction of the teacher's cultural texts. Children's bricolage can only be deployed when the teacher's surveillance is temporarily absent. Nevertheless, substantial examples could be drawn from the data to illustrate the tactics of bricoleur which are based on the appropriation, as well as the dissembling and re-assembling of different cultural texts to make various intertextual connections with those of the teacher. In the concluding remarks, I would like to highlight the educational value of children's bricolage. This understanding could

empower us with a new perspective to review our attitude toward children's culture and hence the practice of sociodramatic play or play in general.

The young bricoluers in this study tend to draw on a particular component(s) from a whole text and then hybridise it with the others. This process in Vygotsky's word is called 'disassociation', the breakup of a complex whole into a set of individual parts' (2004). As Vygotsky argues, once the individual part is disassociated and reused, it generates new meanings. By looking into the context of communication, Pennycook (2010) also agrees that disassociation always gives rise to creativity as it involves relocating an old text (or a part of it) in a new communication time and space which has different social norms and conventions. In this study, the children's bricolage emerges in the context of sociodramatic play which is strived for a more pleasurable play frame. This condition facilitates children's active scrutiny, cannibalization, remaking and recontextualization of the cultural texts and their components that are available to them. Examples like children degrading the heroic and serious fire fighting task into a mundane housekeeping theme which even includes a whimsical and comic storyline of killing cockroaches. The fishing plot which was supposed to train the children about fine-motor skills and quietude was turned into a rhythmic and bizarre cooking game. These new bricolages illustrate children's creative cultural making.

Apart from the process of disassociation and the play context, the tactics of smuggling and sustaining a new play frame through iteratively exploring and experimenting an alternative meaning of the given prop also deserve our attention. The iterative skill can be viewed from the notion of 'craft of play's' of Richard Sennett (2008: 271). Sennett believes that there is a strong link between the children's play and craftsman's work as both parties would engage in a dialogue with the physical materials on hand by working and reworking the rules of playing/crafting them so as to make the play/craft more complex. One would recall the children's attempts to keep renewing the meaning and the use of the fire hose and fishing rod, resembling a similar effort of crafting and re-crafting that Sennett describes. This understanding of the connection between play and work illustrates the complexity of children's bricolage which is an improvisation but serious; it is a craftwork, though irrational. The 'zyun zyun hyun' in extract 5 can serve as a footnote of this oxymoron. Given these, the emergence of bricolage is not simply a matter of a free play setting. It, in turn, prompts the pedagogical issue of the sociodramatic play.

This study reveals that even in a situation that was set up with the teacher's strategies, the children are able to seek opportunity to use tactics to transform them. The complex and creative ways and processes of bricolage also illustrate that children are capable players, language users and culture makers. In this view, the setup in children's play might not be a problem, instead it is the teacher's attitude toward children's cultural making and their pragmatic approach to the use of sociodramatic play that is critical. More attention should be paid on the possibilities of, firstly, promoting the heterogeneity and plurality of the cultural texts used in class. Secondly, children's free creation and re-creation of those texts should be sanctioned. Two commonly observed features found in the local kindergartens, namely i) the assumption, definition and classification of the

competent players, language users and cultural makers against the less competent ones, and ii) the imposition of fixed meanings and monolithic strategies in sociodramatic play. They are the major obstacles to suffocating the children's culture and re-evaluation of the educational value of children's bricolage. In brief, the situated meanings of the children's bricolage and pedagogical use of play are vital aspects that should be introduced in the evaluation and promotion of the local practice of sociodramatic play or other genres of play in Hong Kong.

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Notes

1. An area in Hong Kong.
2. 'Beep' is onomatopoeia, which serves as a verb in the Cantonese variety of Hong Kong. A beep sound is made by the autopay machine to indicate completed payment of the fare with a stored-value smart card.

3. All names of the teacher and children are pseudonyms.