7. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

7.1 BACKGROUND OF THE PRACTING PROJECT
Preschools can increase the learning opportunities for at risk children. The general aim of early childhood education is to stimulate cognitive- and social emotional development and emergent literacy of (at risk) children and to prepare them for formal schooling. In the Netherlands, 90% of the children under age 4 receive early childhood education, but only half to two-thirds of the at risk children attend preschool (van der Vegt et al., 2008). The Dutch government aims to increase this number, because it is difficult for at risk children with language delays to be successful in school when they did not have any (pre)school experience before age 5 (the age of compulsory school attendance).

Preschools use ECE programs in order to improve the quality and effects of their education. However, the effectiveness of the different programs is not yet clearly established. Results of evaluation studies of ECE programs are ambiguous: significant effects on the performance of children, especially on the long term, are absent or of small to moderate magnitude.

The lack of clear results in ECE effect studies could be explained by poor implementation of the programs and by the use of global tests and measurements. In other words, it may be hard to find results because programs are not implemented well or because researchers use less appropriate tests and effect measures. A solution to this problem could be to analyse classroom interaction in more detail to understand how programmatic elements are used in classroom and what behaviour and skills children show during preschool interactions. Studies on the effectiveness of ECE and attempts to improve the quality of ECE programs could benefit from additional studies with a stronger focus on children’s experiences in preschool and the language opportunities that different preschool contexts offer.

The current study adds to an understanding of the different interactions children have in preschool and the things they can learn through these interactions. By describing naturally occurring everyday interactions, I showed the classroom routines and practices that children are oriented to in the process of being socialized into the classroom community. My study is inspired by the Bristol Study (Wells, 1981; 1985; 1986), in which the natural language use in everyday situations of a large group of children is studied over several years. In my PRACTING project (an acronym for preschool activities and interactions Groningen), I followed 30 children in their natural classroom environments over time from approximately age 2;6 to 4;0. I recorded the children’s spontaneous interactions by letting them wear a jacket with a recording device inside.
Early analyses of the data showed that children’s language use is very situated: the activities and routines in which the interactions took place appeared to be very important for the children’s language use. Children need to (learn how to) participate in an activity, in order to (learn to) use the language that is appropriate in that activity. This meant I needed to study the contexts of interaction in detail first, before I could make full use of the longitudinal design in my study. I study the practices and routines in the context of Situated Activity Systems (Goffman, 1961) that provide a global structure to specific classroom events. By being oriented to these Situated Activity Systems in preschool, children learn to use language and educational language practices. I worked in the tradition of applied conversation analysis to understand how children learn the practices of their classroom community and what they may learn from participating in these practices.

7.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS
To account for children’s experiences in preschool classrooms, I selected four different preschool activities, varying from the relatively ‘free’ activities pretend play and spontaneous conversations about literacy to the more ‘structured’ activities borrowing a book and doing a crafts assignment. Below, I will provide a short summary of the structure of these four activities and the discourse practices that are part of them. I will conclude with a description of the distribution of speech acts over different contexts.

7.2.1 The increasing complexity of early sociodramatic play
In the study on pretend play, I show how children extend their play with more pretend elements as they get older. During pretend play, elements in the interaction have one meaning in the real world and another in the pretend world (layeredness, Goffman, 1974). In pretend play interactions, children need to know which meaning or interpretation to use during the interaction and when to switch to another interpretation. Elements of play that can be interpreted on a pretend level are: participants, roles, place, time, objects and actions (Clark, 1996).

In a case study of Peggy, I showed that Peggy does not use all these pretend elements from early on. Rather, her early pretend play contains only pretend objects and actions and perhaps place. In her early pretend play, Peggy uses pretend objects and actions. She would for example offer her teacher a pretend cup of tea. The cup of tea and the offering of the tea are pretend elements in the play, but Peggy does not use other substitutions yet. As Peggy’s play develops, she adds more pretend elements to her play and the level of pretending becomes more complex. She would for example pretend to talk with her daddy on the telephone. Imagining a pretend interaction
partner is more complex than using substitutions, like pretending a toy phone is a real phone. Moreover, the situated identities of Peggy and her interaction partner become more complex. Peggy for example pretends to be a ‘caller’: she is still herself, but the situated identity of ‘caller’ structures her interactional moves. Peggy’s play develops into early sociodramatic play, as she starts to include pretend roles and participants. She would for example pretend to be a Black Pete, and participate in the play with this pretend identity. By constructing these pretend situated identities, children can turn early pretend play into sociodramatic play.

The development of early sociodramatic play can play a role in the use of complex language. Early pretend play is relatively simple and structured, because children only assign a new meaning to objects and local acts. The pretend play interactions children have at younger ages form the basis for their later episodes of sociodramatic play. When pretend play develops, children start to take roles and interpret their situated identities in the pretend layer. Situated identities allow for a range of possible acts and a sociodramatic storyline. To sustain pretend play with more pretend elements and less routinized acts, children need to direct and organize the play more, using metacommunication. Metacommunication is necessary because specific characters, roles and situations are hard to establish by simple referring and showing. Children do not need metacommunication in early phases of pretend play, but they do when their play becomes more complex and develops into early sociodramatic play.

Sociodramatic play is a rich context for complex language use. The play gives children the opportunity to experience things they would otherwise not experience, and in their new pretend world, children can experiment with language, behavior, social roles and social conventions. Sociodramatic play for example can be a context for using vocabulary and genres that children might not use in their ordinary daily life. Peggy and her playmate Alex, for example, use a ‘pliers’, ‘drill’ and ‘thermometer’ when they are pretending to fix a boat. The more complex joint play becomes, the greater the need to communicate about the play frame and the storyline and to structure and adapt the play, especially when interaction partners have different ideas about details of the play. Children may influence the storyline by using explicit instruction, talking in past tense, marking shifts between the play frame and the real world frame and using character appropriate speech.

Once children have learned to participate in sociodramatic play, their opportunities for using language are endless. The play can be extended and varied, and children can take different character roles and negotiate about details of the storyline. Since the play is organized on the pretend level, children need to use language to explicate the play. Children can either do this implicitly, for example by
using character speech, or explicitly, for example by talking about elements of the play. In the context of pretend play, children use language on the one hand for creating and structuring the play, and on the other hand as part of the character role they have taken on.

7.2.2 Mundane literacy events as genuine practices of the literate community

Emergent literacy includes becoming aware of literacy in the environment, learning about the features and use of written language, and experiencing the personal relevance of literacy. Children who experience written language in joint interactions at an early age can form ideas about the use and function of reading, writing and text. This informal knowledge about literacy is an important basis for later formal reading and writing instruction and further literacy development (Bus et al., 1995; Duke & Purcell-Gates, 2003; Neuman & Roskos, 1997; Teale & Sulzby, 1986b).

One of the goals of ECE programs is to stimulate emergent literacy in children. I analyzed a collection of children’s days from the PRACTING corpus and selected every ‘literacy event’ that took place. I distinguished four types of literacy events: book reading by the teacher, borrowing a book, children reading to themselves and mundane literacy events. The most frequent literacy event is when the teacher reads to the children. Joint book reading is a thoroughly studied literacy event and is found to be beneficial for children’s development (e.g. Berenst, 2006; Hoff, 2003; Weizman & Snow, 2001). Another frequent type of literacy event is the activity of borrowing a book (see paragraph 7.2.3). A third event is a child ‘reading’ to himself, which children can do in silence or out loud. The last type of event is mundane, spontaneous interaction about literacy. I analyzed these mundane literacy events in more detail.

Mundane literacy events are a collection of events in which literacy is relevant to the child in some way and include all interactions in which literacy plays a role and that are embedded in the ongoing activities of the child. There are three types of mundane literacy events: events about reading, writing or use of books. In the contexts of these events, there is an orientation to literacy, followed by an explication of the literacy event. Mundane literacy events can be initiated by teachers as well as children: teachers can orient children to an aspect of literacy, but children can also orient teachers and each other. The explication can take many forms, but always includes some kind of literacy event, for example writing a name, or acting out a bedtime reading routine. In teacher-child interactions, the teacher can function as an expert member of the literate community and provide the child access to the content of text or to the technical skills of writing. In peer interaction, children explicate the
literacy event themselves, by using their knowledge about the literacy event in conversation or play.

Mundane literacy events create a setting for situated learning: they show children how literacy practices are used by the literate community. Children are likely to be active participants in the mundane literacy events, because the events are embedded in the activities of the child. The strength of mundane literacy events is the opportunity they provide for legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991): with some help, children can take part in genuine practices of the literate community.

The importance of mundane literacy events is that children experience literacy at moments relevant to them. Mundane literacy events were infrequent in the preschool classrooms under study. Nevertheless, they may serve as useful additional literacy experiences for children. Through mundane literacy events, children are exposed to the literacy practices of a community and through legitimate peripheral participation in this literate community, they will develop their own literacy practices.

Teachers may stimulate mundane literacy events in two ways. Teachers could make sure a literacy event is explicated after an orientation took place, especially when the child took the initiative and oriented the teacher to an aspect of literacy. Moreover, teachers could orient and actively engage children to literacy events every time they are involved in reading and writing themselves, for example when they write a child’s name on a crafts work or when they look something up on a list.

7.2.3 Learning to participate in the book loan activity

The activity of book loan is one of the programmatic activities of the ECE program Boekenpret. One of the main findings of the analysis of the book loan activity is that children learn how to participate in book loan, but that how to select a book is hardly dealt with. The routine of book loan is fairly straightforward and consists of three basic moves: reorientation to the new activity, choosing a book and acknowledgement of the choice.

The move of reorientation has a prominent position. Children are often involved in free play when they need to enter the activity of book loan. Teachers spend time and effort in reorienting the children to the new activity, because children often do not seem to consider book loan as having priority over their own free play activity: they often accept the teacher’s invitation with only minimal (verbal) agreement.

When the child needs to choose a book, the teacher does not scaffold the child into how to do this. One might expect that the move of choosing the book would be essential in the routine, but in reality, the child receives only a minimal amount of
guidance from the teacher during this move. The teacher points the child to the collection of books, and then the child browses the books (without flipping through them) and often quite quickly selects one. So, children need to choose a book without much help from their teacher. Since the teacher does not provide the child with information about the content of the book, the child can only base his choice on visual information from the book cover. The teacher rejects a choice when a child wants a book that he (recently) borrowed before. The ‘content rule’ that children should choose new books applies in the classrooms, but children are only oriented to this rule when they are about to break it.

When the child made a choice, the teacher may acknowledge the choice by accepting the book. The child may leave the book loan activity at this point. However, two literacy related moves can be added after the choice is acknowledged: the teacher can orient the child to reading the book and the child can be oriented to the registration process. The child is oriented to reading of the book when the teacher and child talk about the topic or main characters of the story or read from the book. Another way of orientation to reading is when teacher and child talk about the future use of the book: the child will take the book home and read it with a parent. The second additional move has to do with the registration process, as the teacher writes down the child’s choice in the registration folder. Through this additional move, the child is oriented to the “power” of the written word in a specific literacy practice (Barton et al., 2000): a choice is only definite when it is written down in the special folder, and a choice can be rejected because it is noted in the registration folder that the child has already chosen the book before.

Both additional moves are optional and do not always occur. The teacher and child influence the occurrence of additional moves. The first move, in which the child is oriented to reading, depends more on the teacher and whether she decides to read from the book or to initiate a conversation. The second move, in which the child is oriented to registration, depends more on the child and whether he chooses to stay while the teacher does her administrative tasks.

The activity of book loan is designed to stimulate emergent literacy. Microanalysis of this activity shows that book loan indeed plays a role on different areas of emergent literacy, not only because children have access to books and therewith are stimulated to read, but also because children are oriented to the activity of reading, the use and purpose of registration and potentially to the practice of choosing a book. These meaningful literacy stimulating elements are mainly found in the supplemental moves and are thus not always realized in the activity of book loan.
7.2.4 Closing a crafts assignment: learning to indicate ‘being done’

One of the central activities in formal education is ‘working on assignments’. Preschool crafts assignments, as one of the more structured activities in Dutch preschool classrooms, resemble later school assignments because the activity is teacher-directed, the teacher defines a clear end-state and often the children get instruction on how to work (Leseman et al., 2001). Furthermore, all end products look alike, the main differences are in the neatness or sloppiness of the work and creativity is often not appreciated.

The activity of doing a crafts assignment has different phases, which are related to different types of language use. I focused on the joint construction of teacher and child of closing the craft task. Closings are complex joint constructions, rooted within the ongoing activity. This phase of the crafts assignment has a complex structure and requires the child and teacher to jointly work towards a mutual end state.

The completion of crafts assignments has a routine structure: the child indicates being done, the teacher acknowledges the child is done and the child enters a new activity. There are some variations to this routine: interactions can include scaffolding, negotiation or other variations. When the child is scaffolded, the teacher helps him to take the slot of indicating he is done by eliciting an indication, so that the child can take his move by simply giving an agreement token. The child’s choice may also be rejected, when the teacher does not agree with the child that the activity could be closed. In this case, the child has to continue working and can attempt a new closing initiative later. There may also other variations to the routine, when action moves are skipped or switched, but even in the marked cases, child and teacher show an orientation to the basic elements of the closing routine: the indication of being done, the acknowledgement and the new activity.

Task completion in an educational setting requires specific ways of talking, including some specific words. The collection of crafts interactions, for example, contains concepts like ‘being done’ or ‘glue enough’. These concepts may seem unspecific for an outsider, but members of the classroom community, who participate in the routine of closing a crafts activity, know what the concepts mean in the context of closing crafts assignments. Children are thus learning the situated norms of ‘being done’ in the context of the crafts activity. One of the competences of a good task-fulfiller is being able to assess your own work and to indicate when you are ‘done’. Preschool crafts assignments can be a context for children to develop this aspect of educational discourse, that characterizes the classroom as a community of practice.

Crafts tasks might be important contexts for socialization into the situated educational practice of working on a task. In later school life, children will encounter tasks and assignments which are obligatory and teacher directed. Children will have to...
learn how to act successfully within such school assignments and preschool work situations may help them to prepare for this. ‘Being a good pupil’ means to know classroom conventions and to act upon them. The cultural practice of ‘finishing an assignment’ is such a classroom practice that children need to know to succeed in school.

7.2.5 Different patterns of speech act use in different contexts

The four activities described above, show how children learn to participate in ‘ordinary’ preschool activities that are structured and, as such, are part of the specific ways of talking in preschool. Each activity requires different ways of acting and talking. To study this in more detail, I analyzed the use of speech acts in different types of activities (pretend play, literacy activities, crafts assignments and free crafts) and in interaction with different types of partners (peers, teachers, mixed group of teacher and peers and solitary). I developed a speech act coding scheme, based on the work of Ninio and colleagues (Ninio et al., 1994; Ninio & Wheeler, 1986) to analyze the distribution of speech act use in the different contexts. I focused specifically on children’s use of complex talk.

I found that the pattern of speech act use is related to the activity the child is involved in, and interaction partner he has. During pretend play, children use relatively many commitments, declarations and reflective statements. During literacy activities, children use relatively many responses to questions and statements and relatively few directives and their speech acts are shorter in length. When children are involved in crafts assignments, they give relatively many responses to directives. Free craft is an activity in which children use relatively many commitments.

The child’s interaction partner influences the child’s use of different kinds of speech acts as well. In interactions with peers, children use relatively many directives, declarations and responses to questions with elaborations and their speech acts are longer. When children interact with the teacher, they give relatively many responses to questions, but few of these responses are elaborative and their speech acts are shorter in length. In interactions with a mixed group of teacher and peers, children give relatively few reflective statements. During solitary play, children give relatively many reflective statements and few responses to questions, but the responses to questions they do give, are relatively often elaborative. There is quite some variation between and within children, though, in the speech acts they use, the length of their speech acts, the activities they engage in and the interaction partners they have.

The use of complex language is related to specific contexts. Longer speech acts (5 words or more) are more frequent during interactions with peers and in a mixed group. Declarations are only used in the context of pretend play, when children
announce a character role. Children do not use many statements during pretend play, but when they do, the proportion of reflective statements is high. Responses to questions with elaborations were infrequent, but when they were used, it was mostly during peer play or solitary play.

So, pretend play and peer interactions can provide children with opportunities for using complex language. Children use less complex language during literacy activities and in interactions with the teacher. Apparently, literacy activities with the teacher are a different type of context, in which the child may hear complex language, but gets less opportunity to produce it. Children thus learn different ways of using language from participating in different activities.

7.3 MEANINGFUL CONTEXTS IN PRESCHOOL CLASSROOM
My studies show how different contexts in preschool are related to the ways children use language. This leads me to the viewpoint that, to understand how children learn in preschool settings and how various sorts of language use can be stimulated best, there is a need for more microanalyses of various activities in preschool settings.

The research question that was at the base of my study was How do young children learn to participate in discourse practices in preschool? I looked at four different typical preschool activities and illustrated how these activities were contexts for children to participate and use language and cognitive skills. Pretend play, mundane literacy events, book loan and the closings of crafts assignments, are contexts for children to use complex language and metacommunication, and to experience emergent literacy and classroom conventions.

Considering the results from chapter 6, on the relation between context and speech act use, one could conclude that interactions with the teacher are not beneficial for children, since especially peer interactions provide children with opportunities for using complex language and children talk less during interactions with the teacher. Indeed, the teacher is not the only source for learning for young children in preschool classroom settings and peer interactions are positively related to children’s language use. The essential role of the teacher, however, seems to lie more in scaffolding the child into participating in different routines and discourse practices. Special language stimulating modules of ECE programs (like Taallijn VVE35) focus on the teacher’s role in stimulating children to use more and more extended language. I would like to argue that teachers may also play an important stimulating role in situations in which they do not merely stimulate children to use language, but in which they scaffold the child into participating in specific activities. Since participation is fundamentally

35 Developed by Sardes, education welfare and youth, Utrecht and Expertisecentrum Nederlands, language education, Nijmegen
connected to language use, these kinds of scaffolding by the teacher may play an important role in the development of language use as well (Snow, 1977; 1989). Teachers may increase rich preschool interactions by stimulating pretend play between peers and by actively involving children in mundane literacy activities like writing a name on a drawing or administrating the choice of a book during the activity of *book loan*.

To illustrate the scaffolding role of the teacher in helping children to participate, I will reproduce the excerpt I presented in the introduction, of Dion (2;8) and Miss Laura. Recall that Dion wanted to join his peers in play, and tried to achieve this by making a less appropriate (because self-centered) request for joining. An effective way of joining others is being group oriented and focussing on the activity and the play materials of the group, whereas it is less effective to focus on yourself or to try to alter the play (Russell & Finnie, 1990). Miss Laura helps Dion to reach his goal by orienting him to the group, the activity and materials relevant in the play.

(1) “I want too” [Dion (2;8); Nicole (2;9), Miss Laura] *(repeated)*

*Situation: the children are playing outside. Dion cruises the playground on a car. He drives up to the sandpit where Miss Laura and some children are playing*

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Dutch original</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dion:</td>
<td>I want too</td>
<td>ik wille ook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0,6)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0,6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Miss L.:</td>
<td>there is Dion!</td>
<td>hier is Dion!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1,1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(1,1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Miss L.:</td>
<td>but I see Dion is not alone=</td>
<td>maar ik zie dat Dion niet alleen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>is=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Dion:</td>
<td>=yes!</td>
<td>=ja!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0,6)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0,6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Miss L.:</td>
<td>Dion brought somebody</td>
<td>Dion heeft iemand meegenomen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0,3)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0,3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Dion:</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>ja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0,4)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0,4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Miss L.:</td>
<td>who did you bring?</td>
<td>wie heb je meegenomen?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0,4)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0,4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Dion:</td>
<td>doll!</td>
<td>pop!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0,2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0,2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Miss L.:</td>
<td>do::ll! ((takes Dion’s doll))</td>
<td>po::p!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0,3)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0,3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Miss L.:</td>
<td>doll I’m baking a cake ((with low voice))</td>
<td>pop ik bak een taart</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
First, Miss Laura makes a broadcast announcement\textsuperscript{36}, for everybody in the group to hear: there is Dion! (line 3). By announcing Dion has arrived, Miss Laura brings Dion’s presence to the attention of the other children in the sandpit. She then invites Dion’s doll as a partner to the interaction and orients Dion to the activity the group is engaged in, by saying: doll I’m baking a cake (line 17). In a playful way, she involves Dion in the activities and objects that are relevant to the play activity. Finally, Nicole

\textsuperscript{36}I would like to thank prof. Charles Antaki to pointing me to this descriptive term.
announces that the cake is hers (my cake, line 30). Miss Laura acknowledges the ownership (that’s Nicole’s cake, line 32) and Dion accepts and confirms (yehehes! (2,0) it’s Nicole’s! (0,2) ye:::s that is Nicole’s! lines 34-38). Miss Laura then asks Nicole about the kind of cake she is making (what kind of cake is it Nicole; line 42).

At this point, Dion is introduced to the group, to the activity the group engages in and to some of the features and social relations operating in the activity. Dion is now in a position to join the others in their activity and his request to participate is finally granted.

With the example of Dion and Miss Laura, I illustrated how teachers can help children to reach their interactional goals. As I already pointed out in the introduction, Dion’s language use is not particularly extended or complex. The richness of the situation is in the scaffolding role of the teacher. Thus, preschool interactions may also be meaningful to children, not because they are stimulated to use (complex) language, but because they are oriented to appropriate ways of acting and talking.

7.4 RELEVANCE AND FUTURE RESEARCH

With this study, I emphasized the importance of studying elements of educational curricula and other preschool interactions in daily life, to understand what children experience, what they might learn from these experiences and how learnability may be increased. Although this study is not an effect study and it was not designed to evaluate different ECE programs, it can add to the insight about the meaningful elements of ECE programs and the role of preschool in preventing developmental delays of at risk children.

This study provides a wealth of information on the things children experience in preschool classrooms, what they do and what they might learn. The PRACTING database contains much more information than I could use in this study. Some additional work is done by students from the University of Groningen. For example, detailed analyses are made of pretend telephone calls (Duursma, 2007) and instruction during crafts activities (Hamstra, 2009; Hamstra, Deunk & Berenst, 2009), but many activities and interactions are still unexplored. Furthermore, not all 663 hours of interaction in the corpus are transcribed. For reasons of efficiency, I transcribed only a selection of events, in which the children participated (relatively) actively. The parts of the data that are yet untranscribed, in which children are perhaps less actively involved and participate in other activities (e.g. circle time and transit moments, like dressing up to go outside) may be very interesting and meaningful as well. Furthermore, there is a clear longitudinal design in the study, which is yet underexplored. The interactions I studied were so highly connected to the contexts they appeared in, I decided to focus on specific contexts first, as I mentioned before. I
could only start analyzing development of individual children within and across these specific activities, after detailed analyses of the children’s discourse practices. It would be very interesting to explore the longitudinal data in the PRACTING corpus in more detail.

The PRACTING database also contains unique information on preschool experiences from the perspective of individual children. Because the children were wired during complete days at school, there is information on everything they do and hear while they are at preschool. Classroom studies often focus on the activities of the group, for example, a group is involved in a teacher-led discussion about the zoo and contributions from individual children are taken as contributions to the group discussion. However, during such an activity, an individual child may talk to another child, quietly give an answer which gets lost in a louder group answer or perhaps say nothing at all. This information on individual experiences is easily lost in studies with a group perspective, but is available in the PRACTING corpus. Studying what classroom activities look like from the perspective of individual children, could lead to very valuable information for the development of ECE programs. The detailed approach of applied CA, as an extended form of video interaction guidance, could be useful in teacher training as well. Mercer and colleagues (Mercer et al., 1999), for example, used conversation analysis in the development of a teaching program to stimulate collaborative thinking of 9 and 10 year old children in classroom. Detailed analyses of children’s joint reasoning led to the formulation of a series of ‘ground rules’ for effective collaborative thinking. This example shows how qualitative methods and close analyses of classroom interaction could play a role in the development of educational programs.

To conclude, the PRACTING corpus contains many more contexts and interactions to study in detail, and offers possibilities for longitudinal analyses and extended case studies, for future studies of the daily lives of children and for the development of practical applications. Although I may have only used a fraction of the rich data on children’s preschool lives, I hope my studies will contribute to the insight in how special ‘ordinary’ preschool activities are for the development of young children.