Developing the communication skills of early childhood teacher candidates: The case of advice

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Abstract

Teachers in their professional roles are often called upon to give advice, whether to their students, to their colleagues, to their administrators, or to parents of their students. In this article, we investigate advice giving by teacher candidates to parents of young preschool children and consider the implications of this research for early childhood education. This article is of importance in that it demonstrates the use of applied linguistics research in the classroom. Our purpose is twofold: First, we explore the discursive moves and patterns apparent in the major patterns that emerge from the data to understand how the advice giving is constructed and how this aligns with other similar research. Second, we consider how such information can be incorporated into early childhood education courses. We suggest that teacher educators can exploit research such as that presented here to combine content knowledge instruction with a focus on communication skills, skills important for teachers to be successful communicators within the school community. We explore directions for future research and recommend collegial partnerships between applied linguists and early childhood educators.

1. Introduction

Advice is an integral part of people's lives occurring in professional settings, such as at a doctor's, a therapist's, or an academic advisor's office, as well as in personal interactions among friends, acquaintances, peers, or colleagues. Teachers in their professional roles are often called upon to give advice—to their students, to their colleagues, to their administrators, and to parents of their students, especially to parents of very young children, which is a time when teachers and parents often have close relationships (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2004). Advice serves many functions ranging from providing information and options to building a sense of rapport between interlocutors (DeCapua & Huber, 1995; Hinkel, 1997; Yaniv & Milyavsky, 2006). But what exactly is advice? According to miriam-webster.com, *advice* is [a] *recommendation regarding a decision or course of conduct.* A similar definition is offered by dictionary.com, [advice] is *an opinion or recommendation offered as a guide*

to action, conduct, etc. These definitions are very much in line with what would come to mind for most people when asked to define advice. Research on advice in different settings, however, has consistently determined that advice is much more complex and multidimensional than we are led to believe by the dictionary or native speaker intuition.

Working in the tradition of the philosophy of language, Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) proposed the notion of speech acts; that is, utterances that have performative meaning, such as compliments, apologies, refusals, requests, and so on. Initially, these speech acts were conceived of as sentence-level utterances. Although research in pragmatics has, to some extent continued with this perspective (e.g. Akgun, Cagiltay, & Zeyrek, 2009; Golato, 2002), other research indicates that speech acts are "dialogically constituted" within social contexts where roles are co-constructed by interlocutors (Linell, 1998). In line with this, research on advice has regularly determined that advice is an intricate interaction consisting of different linguistic realizations and assorted relational strategies (Angouri, 2012; DeCapua & Dunham, 2012; DeCapua & Dunham, 1993; Hutchby, 1995; Locher, 2006, 2010; Limberg & Locher, 2012). An early study on advice by Hudson (1990) on English radio call-in advice programs indicated that advice is embedded in a larger context. Subsequent studies in a variety of settings have corroborated Hudson's findings and established that advice giving is a complex interplay of factors embedded in larger discourse (e.g. Angouri, 2012; DeCapua & Dunham, 1993; 2012; Butler et al., 2010; Feng, 2009; Goldsmith & MacGeorge, 2000; Locher, 2006, 2010; Morrow, 2006; Pudlinski, 2012; Vasquez, 2004).

2. The nature of advice giving

2.1. Discursive moves

Advice giving includes series of what have been labeled *discursive moves* (Locher, 2006) or *components* (Dunham, 1995). These are interlocutors' turns, or "moves" that serve to describe, inform, assess, question, promote, or recommend. Locher's extensive investigation of advice on a health Internet site (2006) established the presence of discursive moves in conjunction to the actual advice giving sentence-level utterances, or "advice tokens." In considering the complexity of advice giving, attention must also be paid to the relational strategies that impel interlocutors' (sub)conscious choice of discursive moves.

2.2. Relational strategies

In communicative interactions, interlocutors find it necessary to establish their relationship vis à vis one another through facework or "relational" strategies (Locher & Watts, 2005). These relational strategies can consist of the co-occurrence of certain discourse moves within the advice message, often with the goal of reducing the face-threatening potential. The term *face threatening* refers to how intimidating or hostile

interlocutors may find an utterance expressed by another interlocutor to their sense of self-worth, self-esteem, pride, or "face" in communicative interactions (Brown & Levinson, 1987), always a possibility in communicative exchanges (Morrow, 2006; O'Driscoll, 2007). Advice events, because of the implicit asymmetrical relationship between advice givers and advice seekers, are construed as potentially face-threating (Brown, 1987; Morrow, 2006). From the view of the advice giver, the act of proffering advice can also be face threatening. People develop strong bonds to their creations, which include such intangibles as ideas, decisions, and suggestions (Pierce, Kostova, & Dirks, 2003; Pierce, O'Driscoll, & Coghlan, 2004; Van Dyne & Pierce, 2004). A bond of this type can be referred to as "psychological ownership," which is part of a person's identity (Dittmar, 1992). As such, people become protective of these "objects" (Baer & Brown, 2012). Advice givers proffer a course of action in the expectation that advice seekers will regard it as relevant and act upon it (Goldsmith & Fitch, 1997; Jefferson & Lee, 1992). Based on this notion of psychological ownership, if advice seekers reject or denigrate the proffered advice, advice givers experience this as a face-threatening act to their sense of identity. Consequently, advice givers often engage in positive relational strategies with advice seekers to establish a sense of rapport or solidarity and to develop a constructive emotional connection, making it more likely that the proffered advice will be acceptable (DeCapua & Dunham, 1993; DeCapua & Dunham, 1995; Burleson, 2003; Locher, 2006; MacGeorge, et al., 2013).

2.2.1. Elaboration: narratives and information

Advice giving contexts frequently consist of elaboration surrounding the advice, such as information and narrative accounts. Narrative accounts consist of advice givers recounting similar experiences or situations they have encountered for which advice seekers are requesting help. Information is factual, non-normative, non-specific, and non-personal (Heritage & Sefi, 1992; Landquist, 2005; Silverman, 1997). Both information and narrative accounts are relational strategies that can serve to make the advice less face threatening by promoting bonding between advice givers and advice seekers (Harrison & Barlow, 2009; Locher, 2010).

In much of advice giving, numerous narratives surround the actual advice token. The function of these narratives has been posited as a relational strategy that establishes solidarity between advice givers and advice seekers by reducing face threatening potential. Asking for and receiving advice presumes an asymmetrical relationship whereby the advice giver is the "expert" and the advice seeker not, thereby threatening that interlocutor's self-esteem and face (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goldsmith & MacGeorge, 2000; Hutchby, 1995). Even when advice is specifically solicited, there is an underlying perception that the advice seeker is less knowledgeable or less competent than the advice giver (Jefferson & Lee, 1992; Locher 2006). When advice is embedded in elaboration discursive moves, it is less direct, less face threatening and more likely to be palatable to the advice seeker (DeCapua & Dunham, 2012; Harrison & Barlow, 2009; Locher, 2006; Silva, 2005).

2.2.2. Empathy

Expressing empathy is another relational strategy. Empathetic discursive moves can demonstrate understanding and sympathy for the situation for which interlocutor is requesting advice. This serves to mitigate the potential face-threatening act of the advice by developing a positive emotional connection between advice givers and advice seekers (Morrow, 2006).

2.2.3. Expertise

Establishing expertise is a relational strategy employed by advice givers to convey their knowledge and understanding of the situation about which advice seekers are requesting advice. The establishment of expertise can mitigate the face threatening potential of soliciting advice because advice seekers feel more positive about advice offered by confident advice givers who signal their expertise and knowledge (Sniezek & Van Swol, 2001; Van Swol & Sniezek, 2005). However, advice seekers must be careful not to overplay their expertise so that they come across as self-important and patronizing, thereby underscoring the inherent asymmetrical relationship between advice givers and advice seekers and heightening the face-threatening potential of the proffered advice (Vásquez, 2004).

3. Advice research and applications

One study, Cheatham & Ostrosky (2011) investigated parent-teacher conferences in an early childhood program. The results revealed an asymmetrical hierarchical relationship between the teachers as advice-givers and the parents-as-advice recipients. The authors conclude with a call for a deeper understanding of communication patterns, expectation, and assumptions for more effective and positive advice giving, but without specifics for incorporating such research into teacher education programs. Another study (DeCapua & Dunham, 2012), analyzed advice by teacher candidates to mothers of young children, suggesting that such work can be used in early childhood education courses to better prepare teacher candidates in offering effective advice.

Given the ubiquity of advice giving in daily life, and the need for teachers to maintain a balance between professionalism and caring when offering advice, prospective early childhood education programs, should, we argue, include some explicit analyses of and instruction in advice giving. How people are trained to enact their roles as advice givers influences how they proffer advice (Butler, et al., 2009; Pudlinski, 2001). Counselors tend to offer little direct advice and more information regarding options (Silverman, 1997), while medical providers offer more direct and to the point advice (Hepburn & Potter, 2011; Heritage & Sufi, 1992). We believe that research in sociolinguistics, with advice as one example, can serve to prepare future early childhood educators to be better communicators within the school community. This is in line with the type of preparation students in counseling programs engage in regularly as they train how to interact best with clients.

Education courses, frequently faulted for being too theoretical, too far removed from the realities of the classroom, have faced many calls for reform (Darling-Hammond, 2012). Lenoir (2011) in his examination of transformation in teacher education asks why practices in teacher education change, what aspects of teacher training need to change, and how to implement such change. One aspect that is rarely discussed in the debate on changing teacher education is that of teacher-parent relationships, except in terms of how to strengthen school and home collaboration and ties (e.g. Grant & Ray, 2010; Sanders, 2008). As pointed out by Danielson (2007), close teacher-parent relationships are highly valued, especially in the earlier years of childhood education when children are more dependent upon their parents and teachers, and there are frequent opportunities for parent-teacher interactions. In early childhood programs and in the initial years of early elementary education, there are numerous opportunities for informal exchanges as children are dropped off and picked up. Parents of young children who have developed a trusting relationship with their children's teachers turn to these teachers for information, support and advice.

Understanding the effective framing of advice is important for teachers. In psychology, the concept of framing has been developed to explain how people's decisions are influenced by how options or choices are described or presented (Shafir, Simonson, & Tversky, 1993), or, to use the terminology of this study, the types of discursive moves present in an interaction. The same information, presented in different ways, influences which choices people are likely to make. In other words, how choices are presented highlights different attributes that will elicit different perceptions. While there is research on how teachers can talk to parents about problems with their students or problems that students are having, (e.g. Brkich & Neukirk, 2013; Dotger et al., 2011), there is a lack of practical information drawn from a sociolinguistic perspective with respect to advice giving from teachers to parents. Knowing how to offer effective, appropriate advice is not something most people do instinctively; like any skill, good advice giving skills must be developed.

This study investigates the parameters of advice giving by prospective teachers of young children; specifically, what patterns are evident in the advice giving and how do these data align with previous research on advice (DeCapua & Dunham, 2012; Locher, 2006). The article concludes with a discussion of how and why understanding the framing of advice giving can and should be included in early childhood programs.

4. Method

4.1. Participants

The participants were enrolled in a graduate child development course, an entry-level course covering theories, research, and applications of child development at a U.S. college located in the greater New York metropolitan area. This was a basic required course for teacher candidates studying for a master's degree in early childhood or elementary education.

Data were collected from nineteen participants, ranging in age from twenty-four to forty-seven years. Eighteen of these were female, a proportion in line with the numbers of female and male teachers of young children in the United States (Feistritzer, 2011). All except three of the respondents had had no prior teaching experience. Two of these three were working as classroom aides where their roles consisted of supporting the classroom teacher and where their interactions with parents were limited. The remaining participant was working in a private preschool program as a teacher, but was not licensed as such and therefore enrolled in the current program. The other sixteen participants had a variety of backgrounds, ranging from recent completion of undergraduate studies with degrees in such areas as English literature or Spanish, to students working in service industries to homemakers.

4.2. Instrument and procedures

In this study, the data were drawn from vignettes, which are course learning tools incorporating actual situations and/or material covered in a course. Vignettes are a powerful training tool for strengthening concept mastery and for helping students apply classroom learning to realistic situations, and have been found to improve learner comprehension and involvement (Hammerness et al., 2002; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Harris & Daley, 2008; Joyce, Weil, & Calhoun, 2009; Tal, 2010).

In the course, discussion and analysis of vignettes to simulate students' authentic learning experiences about child development were regular homework assignments over the course of the semester. At the end of each chapter of the textbook were vignettes to which students were required to respond as a final chapter homework assignment. The purpose of these vignette assignments was to help students reflect on and apply the information provided the textbook chapters (Feldman, 2009). Although the textbook author's intent was not to practice giving advice per se, responding to many of these vignettes entailed advice giving. The students read and individually prepared written responses at home to the vignettes after each chapter, then brought in these written responses to class for exploration and discussion, first in small groups and then as a full class. Before turning in these homework assignments, students were given the option to revise their responses based on the class discussions and the insights provided by their classmates and the instructor. Over the course of the semester, students completed ten such assignments.

The data in the current study were drawn from vignettes given as the final take-home assignment in Fall Semester 2011. These vignettes, like the previous homework assignments, reflected situations that teachers were likely to encounter with parents of their young pupils, and were based on the content in the course textbook. Unlike the textbook vignettes, the vignettes in the final assignment were designed by the course instructor to focus specifically on students' ability to provide appropriate advice based on knowledge gained from the entire course, not just a particular

chapter. Each student was asked to write responses to four vignettes (See Appendix A). As in the previous homework assignments, students were instructed to write their responses as though they were actually speaking to the mother. However, since this was a final assignment, the students' responses were not subsequently discussed in class, but turned in to the instructor on the last day of the course with no options for revision. Later, the vignettes were available to the researchers. The students completed a total of eighty vignette responses, but only seventy were included in the data analysis. Ten responses had to be eliminated because of problems in the data.

The vignettes were:

Vignette #1:   *Sports.* The mother is concerned about her four-year old son's difficulties in catching a ball.

Vignette #2:   *Birthday Party.* The mother of a two-year old is anxious because her child cried and hid at her own birthday party.

Vignette #3:   *TV Watching.* The mother wonders about a young child's television viewing.

Vignette #4:   *Computer Purchase.* The mother is considering whether or not to buy a computer for her three-year

4.3. Data analysis

Data analysis and coding were based on previous research on advice conducted by Locher (2006) and adapted by DeCapua & Dunham (2012). Locher identified the discursive moves and relational strategies evident in over 2,000 advice messages. Not all of those identified in the this study of over two thousand question-answer sequences collected from a professional online advice site were present in the current data, nor in DeCapua & Dunham (2012). This was due to several factors, including the more limited scope of the data and the fact that these advice data did not consist of question-answer sequences but vignettes, thus obviating such discursive moves as greetings and farewells. Nevertheless, Locher's system of coding advice data, developed for written text, is appropriate for a qualitative analysis of such as these here, even if not all categories are evident in the current data.

The data were initially coded independently by each researcher, after which they met to compare and discuss their results to reach a consensus. In cases where there were discrepancies or uncertainties in the coding, the researchers together examined the data to reach a conclusion. Once the initial coding had been completed, the results were put aside. After a period of about six weeks, the researchers revisited the data and the results of the coding analysis to verify the initial codings. This process furthered their understanding of and insight into the data, and confirmed that their coding was systematic and accurate.

5. Findings

5.1. Discursive moves

Almost all of the data in the current study fall into six types of discursive moves: *elaboration*, *advice*, *advice list*, *empathy*, *expertise,* and *assessment*.). These six discursive moves align with those found in other studies on written advice messages (e.g. DeCapua & Dunham, 2007; Locher, 2006; Morrow, 2006), and were the same primary six found in DeCapua & Dunham (2012), which also examined written advice texts from teacher candidates. The overall occurrences of these discursive moves diverged somewhat from those here, due to the different topics of the vignettes of the two studies.

The six discursive moves are illustrated in Table 1 with examples from the data. Of the six discursive moves present in the study, three, *elaboration, empathy,* and *expertise*, have relational functions as discussed previously. Table 2 provides a summary of these major discursive moves, both the numbers of incidence of occurrence and the percentages of the total. The last category in the table, *Other* refers to discursive moves without a significant presence in these data (<4%). This includes moves such as *referral* in which the advice giver recommends consulting a specialist or *criticism* in which the advice giver censures the advice seeker. Unlike DeCapua & Dunham's previous findings (2012), there was only very minor evidence of *referral* and *criticism*. This can be attributed to the nature of the vignettes, which neither evoked critiques of the mother's actions, nor required professional intervention, in contrast to the earlier study.

Table 1. Definitions and examples of major discursive moves

Discursive Move	Definition	Example
Advice	Opinion, recommendations or counsel	*You need to be prepared…*
Elaboration	Background information, additional information, discussion, clarification of prior statements	*Children's different personalities and skills shine…*
Advice List	Consecutive multiple advice moves	*I suggest…continue keep your son active…and try other activities…Make sure your child…*
Empathy	Phrases providing sense that their problems matter to the advice-givers.	*I understand your concern…*
Expertise	Greater knowledge, e.g. life experience, circumstances, education	*Studies have shown that reading…has…advantages…*
Assessment	diagnostic questions to elicit more information	*Are you and your son finding time to read . . .?*

5.1.1. Elaboration

Elaboration, a relational strategy discussed earlier, provides background information, additional information, discussion, narratives, and/or clarification of prior statements. Elaboration generally consists of a series of utterances that are not categorized separately when they occur successively as in: *Children enjoy repetition of stories. Reading enhances their knowledge of their surroundings and exposes them to*

more vocabulary words. Elaboration is by far the most commonly occurring discursive move in all four vignettes (35%), the reasons for which we explore later.

5.1.2. Advice

Advice is construed as consisting of a single advice token. A single token refers to a single instance of a syntactic structure identifiable as advice such as suggestions, recommendations, or counsel as in *You might think about* or *point it out to him that . . . .* Frequently advice consists of multiple advice tokens, which, following Locher (2006), we identify as *advice list*. Here we find two or more sequential syntactical structures identifiable as advice as in: *I suggest that you continue. . .* followed by: *Make sure that.* Advice (22.2.%) and advice list (10.5%) together closely follow elaboration in frequency of occurrence (32.7%).

5.1.3. Empathy, expertise, assessment

The next three discursive moves, *empathy, expertise,* and *assessment,* although occurring less frequently in these data (10.1%, 9.6% and 4.8% respectively), have been shown to play important roles in advice giving in other research (e.g. DeCapua & Dunham, 2012; Dunham, 1995; Goldsmith & MacGeorge, 2000; Locher, 2006; Morrow, 2006), and are important to the subsequent analysis and discussion.

Empathy provides advice-seekers with the sense that their problems matter to the advice-givers, as, for example, *You must feel horrible but know it is not your fault.* When empathy occurs, it often introduces or comes very close to the beginning of an advice giving sequence, setting the stage for establishing a sense of rapport or connectedness between advice givers and advice seekers. When empathy did occur in these data, it primarily occurred in the first two vignettes, Sports and Birthday Party. In these two cases, the mother is concerned about something that is developmental and commonly occurs, rather than something unique to that child and a cause for worry. Thus reassurance, or empathy, was a natural lead-in here to the advice sequence in these two vignettes, with such utterances as "*I understand why you may be worried . . .*" (Sports. M.A.) and " *I'm so sorry the party didn't go well . . .*" (Birthday Party. D.M.).

Expertise refers to the greater knowledge of the interlocutor for whatever reason, including life experience, circumstances, socio-cultural factors, education and/or background (DeCapua & Dunham, 2012). Depending how expertise is expressed, it can convey capability and competence to advice seekers; alternatively, poorly expressed expertise can convey arrogance and condescension on the part of advice givers (Goldsmith & Fitch, 1997; Goldsmith & MacGeorge, 2000). While this discursive move did appear, it was not common to any one or other vignette. An example of assessment is *how often you have practiced playing catch with your son?* [Sports, D.J.].

Assessment indicates that the advice giver needs more information before proffering advice and usually consists of one or a series of diagnostic questions (Bonaccio & Dalal, 20006; Hepburne & Potter, 2011; Locher, 2006). Assessment is typically found

in instances where advice seekers have not furnished enough details to provide advice givers with a clear understanding of the situation. The few examples of this discursive move in these data (4.7%) occurred in Sports (e.g. *Have you noticed difficulty in other areas that involve gross motor skills*? [K.B.]) and Birthday vignettes (e.g. *Is your daughter used to having many people around her?* [R.R.]).

Table 2. Distribution of major discursive moves

Discursive Move	Total	Percentage of each component in data (n=712)
Elaboration	249	35%
Advice	158	22.2%
Advice List	75	10.5%
Empathy	72	10.1%
Expertise	68	9.6%
Assessment	34	4.8%
Others	56	7.8%
Total	712	100%

5.2. Advice patterns

While teasing out the occurrence of discursive moves can provide us with some insights into advice giving, of greater interest here is the co-occurrence or patterns of these discursive moves and what this tells us. In these data, four principle patterns emerged: (1) advice /advice list with elaboration to provide reasons and supporting detail; (2) advice /advice list with empathy to promote bond in advice giving; (3) advice /advice list with expertise to convey the knowledge of advice giver and to help to carry out the function of advice; and (4) advice /advice list with assessment to evaluate problems of advice-seekers before giving advice. These patterns are illustrated in Table 3.

5.2.1. Advice/advice list with elaboration

In this first pattern, we see that elaboration frequently follows advice. Occasionally, the pattern varies such that elaboration precedes advice, or advice will be surrounded by elaboration, that is coming both before and after the actual advice move. Elaboration does not only support advice; it also occurs as a support for the other discursive moves. This *advice/advice list with elaboration* is the most commonly occurring pattern and frequently appears as a series of utterances.

5.2.2. Advice/advice list with empathy

In the second pattern, we find empathy co-occurring with advice/advice list. Empathy generally comes at the beginning of an advice sequence, but on occasion occurs at the end or even the middle.

5.2.3. Advice/advice list with expertise

In the third pattern, *advice/advice list with expertise* are found together. The expertise usually conveys the knowledge of advice giver to enhance the authority of

the advice giver. Expertise generally comes before or after advice, but unlike elaboration, rarely in both places in the same advice sequence.

5.2.4. Assessment with advice/advice list

And finally, in the fourth pattern, *assessment* introduced the advice/advice list. Assessment consists of one or more diagnostic questions that serve to ascertain more pertinent information about the advice seekers' situation to provide the advice giver with a clearer understanding of the problem. Although this pattern is not as prevalent in these data as in other studies (e.g. DeCapua & Dunham, 2012; Locher, 2006), it forms an important part of advice giving, depending upon the situation.

Table 3. Advice patterns and examples

advice with expertise	*I would suggest that you try forming social bonds with her by . . . (advice) She could be dealing with stranger anxiety. (expertise) This simply means that after the first year of an infant's life, they develop stranger anxiety when they encounter an unfamiliar person . . .* (elaboration).
assessment with advice	*Does your child regularly attend events where there are crowds like that? (assessment) Invite a couple of moms over for a playgroup . . .* (advice).

5.3. Discursive moves and relational strategies

In examining the four patterns, we find that the co-occurrence of the discursive moves with advice/advice list in the first three of these functioning as relational strategies that promote bonding. The fourth pattern, *advice/advice list with assessment,* is more strictly informational and restricted in these data, given the written form of vignettes versus face-to-face interactions or question-answer Internet advice sites since there is no possibility of response move from the advice seeker.

In all four patterns in these data we find extensive instances of elaboration. Why do advice givers include so much elaboration? There are several reasons for this, which requires we examine the role that elaboration plays. Advice giving, to optimize success, must be a balance; in other words, to be effective, it must be framed in a context that makes it acceptable and palatable to advice seekers (Cheatham & Ostronsky, 2011; Morrow, 2006; Vásquez, 2004). It must be helpful, supportive, and/or instructional without coming across as interfering, critical, or intrusive. One such context is one that serves to convey the impression that the advice giver is knowledgeable or has "expertise" (Harrison & Barlow, 2009) as one respondent does by beginning her response with *I've watched kids for a majority of my career* (Sports. D.S.), and another by referring to a familiar higher authority, familiar to many U.S. parents, *"The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that exposure to television should be limited . . .* (TV Watching, I.E.). Another is to promote some sort of bond or relationship between advice givers and advice seekers (Locher 2006), e.g. *"Have you tried soccer? My daughter has never been really good at catching a ball but she excels in soccer* (Sports. M.A.).

Advice givers often engage in relational strategies such as elaboration to promote the credibility of their advice. As discussed previously, elaboration incorporates narratives, displays of expertise, and information dissemination (DeCapua & Dunham, 1993; Cheatham & Ostronsky, 2011; Harrison & Barlow, 2009; Richardson, 2003). The more advice givers elaborate the advice token(s), whether by relating narratives, by providing details, or by disseminating information, the more it displays an important relational strategy or psychological role—namely representing advice givers commitment to and support for the advice they are offering. The following is a short excerpt of a longer elaboration move:

> What if you bought the educational software you want to expose your daughter to and simply installed it on one of your own computers? That way, she can play with those programs but she won't have access to a computer at all times. She will still have time to play and use her imagination without craving time on the computer. If a child knows something is theirs, they might feel like they deserve to have access to it at all times. Knowing that the computer she is playing games on is Mommy's or Daddy's however, might help deter her from feeling like she can be on the computer whenever she wants (Computer Purchase. K.H.).

Elaboration as a relational strategy can reduce the possibility of face-threat by managing the possible resistance to or rejection of the proffered advice. Advice or advice list by themselves are generally not enough. It is not just the content of discursive moves that is important, but how the advice itself is framed overall (Limberg & Locher, 2012). In the case of teacher-parent advice and in line with other research (e.g. Angouri, 2012; DeCapua & Dunham, 2012; Cheatham & Ostronsky, 2011; Harrison & Barlow, 2009; Locher, 2006), elaboration as a relational strategy allows the construction of the teacher-as-advice giver role while minimizing the face-threatening potential to parents as experts and authorities on their own children.

6. Discussion

The results of the data analysis indicate that the discourse moves, patterns, and relational strategies produced by the teacher candidates align with results of other research on advice giving. The question we now address is of what use is such analysis? In the ongoing debate on improving teacher quality, how well teachers communicate with parents, students, colleagues and administrators cannot be neglected in teacher training (Lea, 2006). Prospective teachers need to develop an understanding of how their communicative interactions influence others perception and acceptance of them as professionals (Hunt, Simonds, & Cooper, 2002). Learning to understand the framing of advice is one example of what we mean by understanding the how and why of communicative interactions. Teacher educators can draw from research such as that presented here to facilitate discussion and reflection on communication skills in teacher education courses. After all, how teachers structure their communicative interactions shapes how parents' and caretakers' perceive a teacher's approachability, capability, and sense of caring (Chaeatham & Ostrosky, 2011, 2009; Lawson, 2003). In the case of advice, how the

advice giving is framed is critical to how it is interpreted and subsequently acted upon (Limberg & Locher, 2012).

Effective teacher training programs include emphasis on observation and reflection on communicative interactions as part of developing teachers' competencies and professionalism (Danielson, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2012). Advice giving is one important form of communicative interaction that teachers regularly engage in. Understanding how to offer effective, appropriate advice is not something most people do instinctively. Although educators may feel that they have enough course content to cover without adding the development of communication skills, we argue that such skills are indispensible, and that attention to the how and why of successful and effective communicative interactions can be embedded within a course without detracting from content material. To this end, vignettes can be used. In addition to providing opportunities for students to reflect upon and apply what they have learned, vignettes can also serve to develop students' awareness of what constitutes successful communication. Students reflect upon and discuss what to say and how to say it while problem solving real-world situations in vignettes. In a discussion of vignette responses, attention can be drawn to effective ways of offering advice.

Teacher candidates can take turns roleplaying advice seeking and giving on a topic related to course material, and evaluating how the advice is given and how it might be perceived by advice seekers, e.g., How can teachers thoughtfully address the concerns of parents by incorporating certain discursive moves and engaging in various relational strategies? What might be considered face threatening to advice seekers and how can advice givers frame their advice to lessen potentially negative interpretations? How much and what kind of elaboration supports the proffered advice? Why might it be important to establish expertise? What constitutes appropriate demonstrations of expertise? Advice givers, to convey their knowledge and understanding of a topic, provide information that establishes their expertise. This is an important relational strategy since people feel more positive about advice given by knowledgeable and confident advice givers (Sniezek & Van Swol, 2001; Van Swol & Sniezek, 2005). Yet, advice givers must be careful to walk the fine line in establishing their expertise without overwhelming, intimidating, or threatening the face of advice seekers. These and much more can be fruitful topics for dialogue.

7. Limitations and further directions

Like any skill, advice-giving skills develop with practice, practiced not in isolation but in authentic contexts where teacher candidates apply course knowledge to situations they are likely to encounter in their professional lives. This brings us to limitations of the current study. First, we did not investigate the development of participants' advice-giving skills over the course of the semester, by, for instance, collecting and exploring pre- and post-test advice-giving data; in other words, what were the advice parameters and patterns before and after instruction? Questions to explore in a future study should include: What do participants' initial advice-giving

responses look like in comparison to their final ones? What changes took place? How much of this change was informational, i.e. reference to and demonstration of understanding material from the course, versus change in advice-giving skills?

In addition, although the data revealed that the general patterns of advice giving were aligned with that of other research on advice, we did not explore whether any of the respondents had specific knowledge or expertise that might impact their responses to a particular vignette topic. For example, did participants with coaching experience produce different advice-giving messages than did those without such experience? How did their development of advice-giving skills compare with those who had no coaching background? Such questions could be addressed in a follow-up study by collecting detailed background data on the participants, either through questionnaires or interviews.

We also strongly urge researchers and course instructors to collaborate more closely to put theory into practice (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Korthagen, Loughran, & Russell, 2006). In early childhood education settings, parents and caretakers often turn to their children's teachers for advice and perspectives on developmental processes, and behaviors on how to support their children at home (Cheatham & Ostrosky, 2011). Yet concerns have been voiced that pre-service programs do not adequately prepare teachers to work with the parents and caretakers (Freeeman & Knopf, 2007). One area to consider is that greater understanding of and practice in effective advice giving is more likely to lead to positive feelings and outcomes, as well as provide context for examining when and why advice giving may lead to communicative failure and breakdown (Fantuzzi et al., 2012) Advice giving, like other types of communicative interactions, can be misconstrued if the delivery is inappropriate or at least perceived as such (Chen, 2014; Kádar & Haugh, 2013. One step we suggest here is that an early childhood education course instructor and an applied linguist, for example, might work closely together, the former focusing on the applications, the latter on analyzing the data, and the two jointly exploring how the candidates' advice giving skills develop over the semester, something which did not occur during this study. Such an interdisciplinary approach would be an example of the type of collaboration in higher education that others have called for (e.g. Ellis, 2011; Hegarty, 2009; Pharo & Bridle, 2011). Collaboration across fields of expertise and areas of research, such as that of applied linguistics and early childhood education, could better equip future preschool teachers to develop new understandings, foster stronger critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and cultivate better communication skills.

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Appendix A. Vignettes

Read the following situations. Respond as though you were actually speaking to the mother.

1. The mother of a 4-year old boy says,
    "He seems to have a problem. You're not going to believe this, but he can't even catch a ball. I keep telling him to keep his eye on the ball, but he can't seem to do that. Sports are important. They prepare you for life and for any kind of work."

2. The mother of a 2-year old girl says,
    "Last week I gave a birthday party for her. Lots of friends came and I thought   she would be happy and have a wonderful time. Instead she cried almost the whole time and hid in her closet."

3. The mother of a 5-year old boy says,
    "He loves TV and watches about four or five hours a day, sometimes more on weekends. This gives me a chance to get on the computer and make some important work calls, which I need to do since I work from home."

4. The mother of a 3-year old girl says,
    "We're thinking of buying a computer for her. There's a lot of educational software available now and we want to jumpstart her school readiness skills."

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