Transformation of Participation through collaboration in the first year of school – Teacher and children's perspectives

First International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry

May 5-7, 2005

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

– DRAFT ONLY –

Not for citation. Please contact the author.

Bill Hagan
Department of Social Sciences
Manukau Institute of Technology
New Zealand

bill.hagan@manukau.ac.nz

This paper is based on research conducted for a Doctor of Education thesis at the University of Auckland. This research aims to identify the characteristics and functions of peer interaction in the development of participation in the new entrant (kindergarten) classroom setting, where New Zealand children start school on or close to their fifth birthday. Two studies were undertaken, one of which was a small scale video observational study, from which case studies of children's developing collaborative strategies were described over the term in the analysis of the literacy and numeracy activity sessions. Each discourse episode surrounding four target children was coded using the three main categories of joining, maintaining and excluding. The role of the teacher in facilitating 'social spaces' through negotiation in daily curriculum tasks can sometimes be at odds with the emphasis on classroom management that marginalizes children's participation in the enacted curriculum. The sociocultural perspective on learning and development is a useful one to understand how the new entrant child is disempowered or becomes empowered by schooling.
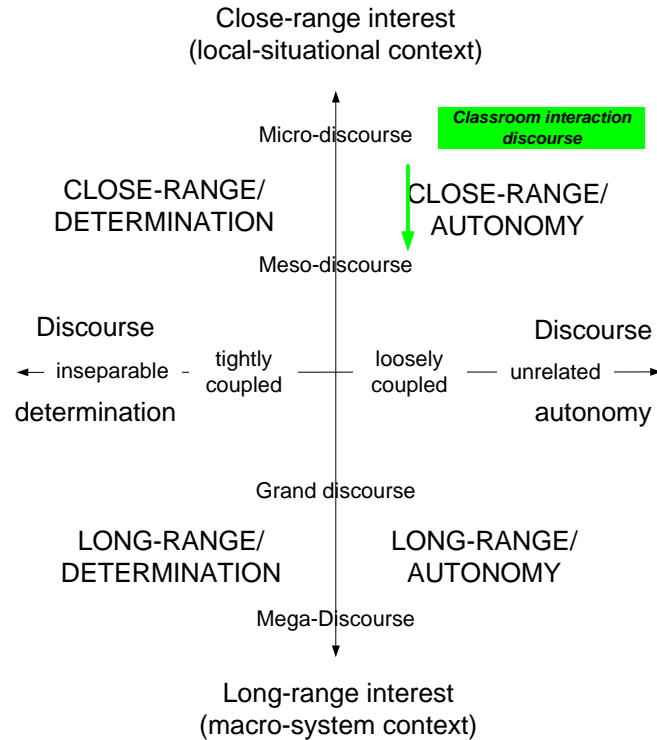
The relative absence of studies in the literature that develop the relationship between curriculum process and social development in facilitating a successful adjustment to school highlights the need for further study in order to develop these links empirically. The prediction was that transition/adjustment to school was influenced by peer interaction and scaffolding in relation to the classroom activities and curriculum. Social participation, Dyson (1997) argues, is negotiated in the classroom between teacher and child and peers. In the new entrant classroom, peers play an important role in providing guidance and support for the new entrant in the first weeks of school, a process called 'peer scaffolding', which has evolved from the social constructivist theories of Vygotsky

(1962), Bruner (1986), Rogoff (1990) and others. Therefore, it is assumed that specific properties or processes of the enacted curriculum (both official and unofficial classroom practices) and patterns of socialization can be identified. This 'transformation of participation' (Rogoff, 1997) that changes the new entrant into a school pupil can be identified as classroom activities develop. The central question is about how the teacher and more expert peers facilitate that transformation.

The sociocultural perspective on learning and development is a useful one to understand how the teacher-child-peer relationship develops for the new entrant to school (Bruner, 1996; Cole, 1996). Rogoff (1995) has challenged the prevailing view that learning and development occurs through the transmission of information and ideas to the brain, either from the outside world or through acquisition of information and ideas by the brain. She proposes that people change through transforming their participation in sociocultural activities – in which both the individual and the rest of the world are active. The boundary between individual and environment disappears if development is viewed as participation, since it inherently means involvement (Rogoff, 1997). The 'planes of analysis' in this process are community, interpersonal and personal planes. The central question from a transformation of participation view has to do with how people's participation changes as an activity develops. One question might be how do the activity, its purpose, and people's roles in it transform, or another question could be how do people prepare now for what they expect later, on the basis of their prior participation? The focus for this video observational study was on the personal and also interpersonal planes of analysis. The analysis of the children's discourse made visible children's

voices in describing the enacted curriculum. These underlying discourses provided new insights into classroom activities and participation for the teacher.

Discourse is defined by Gee (1989) as 'saying, doing, being, valuing, and believing' combinations. Discourse from this perspective is seen as coming more from an action orientation, not just a narrow linguistic definition. Primary and secondary discourses can be dominant or non-dominant, and there is sometimes tension or conflict between any two of a person's discourses, for example in a child whose first language is not English, and they are in an English speaking world. These discourses can be studied, in some ways, like language. This distinction between primary and secondary discourses is not meant to be airtight and unproblematic. Many social groups filter aspects of valued secondary discourse into the socialisation of their children in an attempt to advantage their children's acquisition of that discourse, whether they may be school-based, community-based or religion-based discourses (Gee, 1996).

Close-range interest
(local-situational context)

Micro-discourse   **Classroom interaction discourse**

CLOSE-RANGE/   CLOSE-RANGE/
DETERMINATION   AUTONOMY

Meso-discourse

Discourse   Discourse

← inseparable –   tightly   loosely   unrelated →
              coupled   coupled

determination   autonomy

Grand discourse

LONG-RANGE/   LONG-RANGE/
DETERMINATION   AUTONOMY

Mega-Discourse

Long-range interest
(macro-system context)

Elaboration of core dimensions and summary of positions
in discourse studies - Alvesson & Karreman, 2000

Figure 1 – Discourse matrix

Keenoy et al. (1997) make two distinctions between forms of discourse. The first comes from using discourse to make sense of organisations and organisational phenomena. The second distinction is between a position looking at discourse in a social context, including the social and political dimensions which may have a more narrow focus on the text.

Discourse is further described by Alvesson and Karreman (2000) as ranging from 'close-range or micro, to long-range or macro-interest' and from discourse 'determination to autonomy', forming two core dimensions of a matrix (see Figure 1). 'Determination' refers to the way in which discourse can be said to drive the way in which we think of and define our subjective selves and includes the notion of the structuration of society, institutions and individuals by discursive practices (Thompson, Ricoeur, & Habermas, 1981). On the other hand, 'autonomy' refers to discourse definitions that accept that how

we talk and write about an issue or in a particular context can influence meaning, and hence understanding and actions (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000).

The micro and meso-levels of social interaction and conversation are the focus of this study that uses the methods of video observation in the classroom that forms individual case studies of interaction. These belong to the quadrant in Figure 1 called close-range that is between micro and meso-discourse and the discourse is also more loosely coupled as far as autonomy. This perspective emphasises the local and situational context, which is the new entrant classroom in the present study. The discourse data here is relatively sensitive to language use in context, but can link to broader patterns and generalizing to similar local contexts (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), i.e. local schools with a similar range of diversity in an urban area such as Auckland. This position on discourse helped frame the methodology underpinning the discussion of transformation.

Research studies: Teacher perceptions and participation in the New Entrant classroom

Two studies were undertaken with the purpose to explore the influences of scaffolding in the transition to school that occur between the teacher and child and other children in relation to the classroom activities and curriculum. The first study supported previous work regarding the importance of the role of the teacher in creating an environment conducive to successful transition to occur. Classroom practices that create a 'community of learners' may promote successful transition, and finding out about teacher's beliefs is one way to get a picture of how teachers see the importance of helping children to manage this transition. These included espoused teacher beliefs about approaches to teaching and learning and how young children can become successful

learners. The inconsistency in teacher's beliefs about the best way to manage this transition pointed toward a further understanding and analysis of the role of peers in developing social competency in new entrants to school. This led to a second study that shifted the focus to the processes entailed in children making the transition to school.

Study Two – Transformation of participation in the new entrant classroom

This study attempted to answer the following two questions about the role of teaching practice that changes/develops the new entrant's participation which can promote successful adjustment to school.

1. What classroom/curriculum practices foster or inhibit social participation and peer scaffolding?

2. How do opportunities for 'social spaces' that may encourage peer interaction in the classroom effect the child's successful adjustment to school?

Classroom/curriculum practices

Activity settings are the contexts in which collaborative interaction, intersubjectivity and assisted performance occurs, all of which are part of the teaching process (McNaughton, 1995; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). These settings incorporate cognitive and motoric action, as well as the external environmental and objective features of the occasion. The meanings of activities, and thus the motivations for them, are to a degree given by the goal. In addition, the meanings are developed by the emergent intersubjectivity of group performance in its time and place that allows meaning to continue to develop, emerge,

explain and to perpetuate (Tharp and Gallimore, pg. 73). In the present study, the following contextual parameters relate to categories of participation and collaboration that describe the sequences videoed in the classroom. These are routine activities, teacher assigned curriculum tasks, and child initiated curriculum tasks that occur under less supervision from the teacher that usually maintain the intended curriculum activity and may include other children.

Besides formal sources of assistance for the teacher in order to help children learn, e.g. senior staff, there are also informal sources of assistance, because effective teaching does not always require authority. One of the major forms of nonsupervisory assistance is peers. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized this issue in stating that a child's zone of proximal distance (ZPD) is extended through problem solving under both adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. The three main categories of joining, maintaining and excluding in the peer interaction analysis were derived from the categories from the Jones-Parry et al (2000) activities, and were expanded with the use of Verba's (1994) categories of collaboration in peer interaction.

The categories of collaboration between groups of children in the classroom that attempt to describe participation and peer interaction have been coded from the video transcript for the three final morning weekly sessions that include sessions of mathematics, writing and reading. This helps to begin to understand how extensive peer interaction is and also the quality of that interaction. The activities that support, for example, the literacy and numeracy programme in the classroom foster the child's developing social competence as well as the intention of developing early academic skills. During this transition, children's interpretations (their sense of activities' functional possibilities) change, as do

the social roles (responsibilities) they assume as well as their skills and concepts (Dyson, 1999). The role of the teacher in facilitating these 'social spaces' that may encourage peer interaction in the classroom that in turn may have follow-on effects as far as the child's adjustment to school was also part of the investigation, and is part of the discourse analysis that looks at the classroom within a particular social and cultural context. Successful adjustment to school becomes not only a 'mediating' process between teacher and the new entrant and between the child and peers as far as social participation (teacher and peer scaffolding), but also mediation of curricular 'space' that links activities to the child's social relationships, cultural tools and traditions or routines. In this view, schooling creates intersections with the learning process begun in the home.

At the end of the video filming, selected episodes of video were shown to the classroom teacher in order to provide analysis of these sessions from a teacher perspective. One of the main themes that became apparent from these discussions with the teacher was her own awareness of peers as 'scaffolders', and the role of the video observations in either supporting or discounting her views of the role each child plays in developing participation in the classroom. Another interesting aspect discussed was her view of 'bending the rules' for small group activities that the children engaged in, which the teacher felt was usually 'off task' behaviour, especially during the reading activity group sessions. As a result of viewing the sessions on tape, the teacher made a decision to replace a child with a 'better model' of peer collaboration in a paired writing activity. She was also pleased to find that a child whom she previously had not seen show any leadership, was able to do so when given an opportunity to work with a new child in the classroom.

Profiles of children

Four target children were chosen who entered school since the beginning of the year whose social participation in the classroom with the teacher and other peers was the focus of the video observations. The profiles developed of these children show how they initiate and maintain peer scaffolding or social spaces, and/or exclude and disrupt peer scaffolding or social spaces. These profiles formed case studies in order to give a more descriptive and qualitative account of their adjustment to school, and data was presented as to individual strategies used by the children in their attempts at collaboration. It was also a child centered approach that may give an insight into the enacted curriculum, especially since much of the peer interaction occurred in 'small group' tasks.

The following summary charts for three of the four children (Figures 1-3) show the overall instances of collaboration over the morning activity sessions from Days 3-5. Table 1 describes the categories and sub-categories for joining, maintaining and excluding strategies.

Table 1 - Categories of Collaboration

Category	Sub - Category
Joining	Joint interest
	Repetition of (partner's) action
	Social bond
Maintaining (receiving)	Information gathering
	Request for help
	Expression of ideas
Maintaining (guiding)	Involvement
	Facilitation
	Feedback
Exclusion	Conflicting action
	Aggression

The charts indicate the most used strategies of collaboration by the four children in the activities observed from the coded transcript data. These charts show that Kingi and Toby primarily used joining strategies (joint interest and repetition of action) rather than maintaining ones, although Toby also had high use of feedback. Mere and Kingi used similar strategies across activities, and Mere used facilitation and expression of ideas most of the maintaining strategies. Elena used a wider range of collaborative strategies across activities, especially the maintaining strategies. Generally, most of the interactions were rated as positive, except for one episode for Toby and another for Elena. A brief profile of individual children's strategies is discussed below.
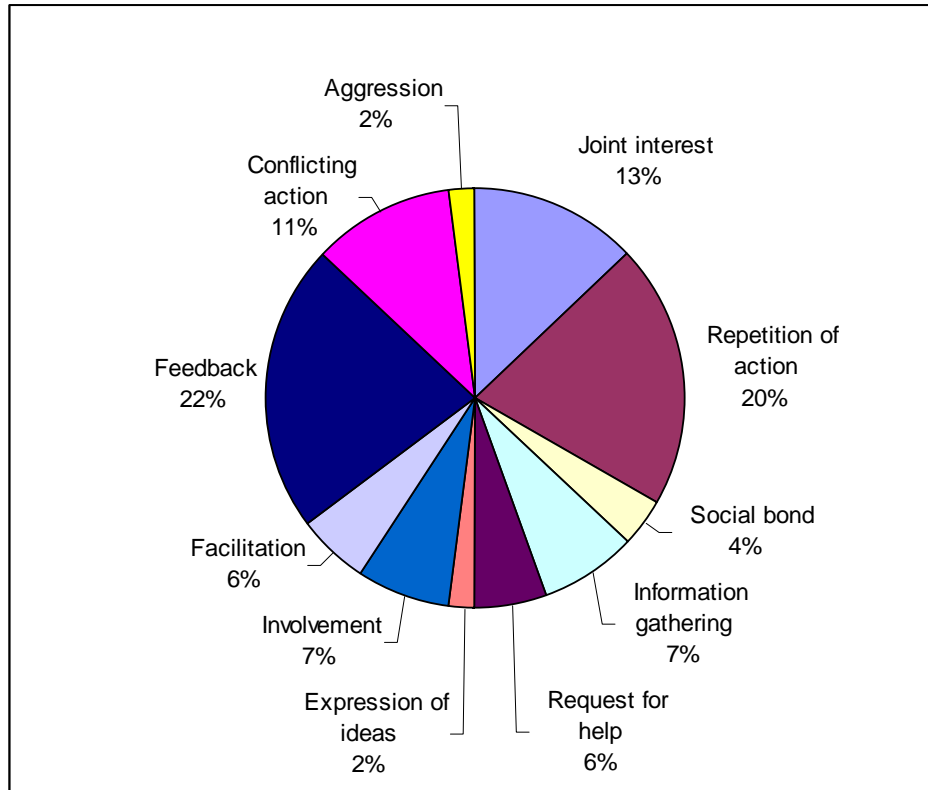
Figure 1 - Toby's collaboration strategies used across activity sessions

Toby used joining strategies, especially showing joint interest and repetition of action 37% of the time (see Figure 1). However, he did use a range of maintaining strategies 50% of the time, with giving feedback 22% of the total instances. His range of strategies is broader than Kingi's, as evidenced during a reading session when he and another child were doing a letter bingo activity, and Toby introduced the game and the other child couldn't get the hang of it, so Toby introduced some new rules and they were able to play after that. After viewing this episode, the teacher was pleased he was using more "leadership strategies". Although some of the verbal interaction was not within recording range, in the last reading session, he used at least once all of the maintaining strategies, and there were 8 instances of giving feedback, only one of which was negative. An

example was when Toby was in a group at a table doing a picture letter identification activity. A girl is calling out letters to him and another child.

> **Girl:** Whose got a B?
> **Toby:** Not me. (Boy points to his sheet – girl hands it over)
> **Girl:** Who's got a… (Before she can say it Toby identifies it and puts his hand up. She hands it over)
> **Girl:** Who's got an I? (Toby puts his hand up, but holds his sheet close to his chest)
> **Girl:** Let me see, let me see. (Toby grins, shows them his sheet)

He most often showed conflicting action/opposition during writing time, with 2 or 3 instances in each of the sessions.

An analysis of Toby's interaction showed he was developing a discourse of empowerment in relation to the classroom setting and activities, especially during mathematics and reading activities. Toby overall used joining strategies one third of the time and maintaining ones nearly half of the time, especially feedback (22%), which was higher than anyone else. He may have found that in the paired reading activities and games where he was observed using feedback several times, that he found this strategy a useful and enjoyable way to keep the activity going, especially since he had difficulty using a broader range of strategies in other activities.
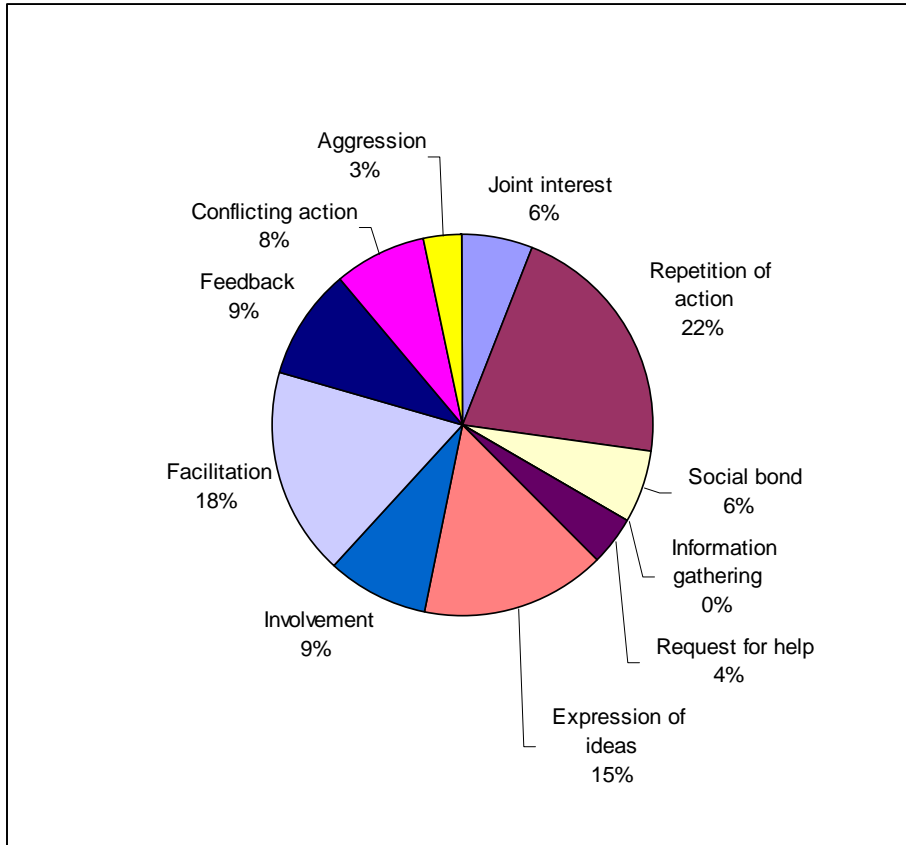
Figure 2 - Mere's collaboration strategies used across activity sessions

Mere used joining strategies 28% of the time, and maintaining strategies were used over half the time (55%), with expression of ideas and facilitation used most. In mathematics and writing time, Mere used more joining strategies and requests for help. In the first maths session observed, Mere was trying to play a card game of memory. She knew how to set out the cards in rows, but didn't know what to do next and she tried to watch the others in order to learn. After the teacher asked her to show her what she was going to do next, she tried a couple of times to find a like card unsuccessfully and turned to a boy next to her and said "I don't know how to do this." Even after the teacher showed her how to find two cards that matched, she still found it difficult to continue playing the

game on her own. By day 3 and 4 in the following weeks, she was using more maintaining strategies such as expression of ideas and feedback.

These interactions show Mere's developing confidence and awareness of peers as scaffolders as well as beginning to use the language of scaffolding to guide others. Most of her instances of collaboration were rated as positive, except for some instances of conflicting action. In fact, the reading sessions showed a wide range of strategies used with a high amount of facilitation during a Day 4 episode when Mere passes some activity packs to a girl:

> **Mere:** Can you see about that? (she counts the packs, and Mere takes one pack and counts all the pieces out)
> **Mere:** What one are you doing? (other girl continues sorting, passing a set and a bag across to a boy to complete)
> **Mere:** Have you already done yours? (girl nods)
> **Mere:** We have to put them back in here (touching bowl)…ummm I wonder where…is? (picks up large plastic pouch), says to girl:
> **Mere:** You read this and we'll check them off. (starts to put small packs into big plastic pouch)
> **Mere:** We're tidying up…(to group)

Even though the conversation is one sided, the involvement and facilitation to maintain the activity is there. The context of conversation here is teacher role-playing for Mere that works for her in this instance as others join in happily, but did not always happen that way. The teacher described Mere in these instances as often using a loud voice or attracting attention in some other way to do an activity that wasn't really helping, but just a loud noise. Mere often did not have a position of power in the classroom, and according to the teacher was still very reliant on her for guidance, especially if she 'feels out of her depth' and in these circumstances she stops and waits, and usually someone will come over or if not she will then call out for help. This shows her scaffolding behaviours were developing, but she often got frustrated with the outcome when she was

met with little participation from others. Her developing discourse at this stage of the term was one of disempowerment in relation to peer interactions. Until she was able to receive help with her vision and hearing difficulties, this discourse of frustration did not improve.
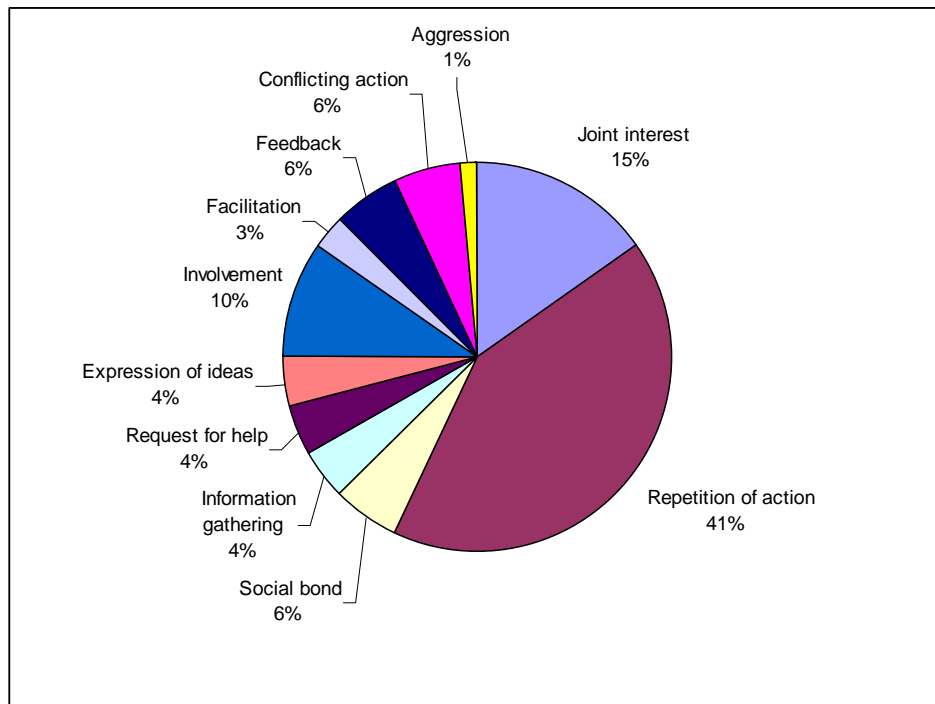

Figure 3 - Kingi's collaboration strategies used across activity sessions

Despite his verbal ability, Kingi's use of verbal language strategies with his peers to develop collaboration was not very high during these sessions observed compared to the other children. Although his attempts were not always successful, his use of involvement strategies and requesting help during writing time shows a development of collaboration and increased maintaining skills after his first few months at school. These comments about individual strategies must be taken in context of the different activities in the maths, writing and reading sessions observed. As discussed previously, the strategies

used by individual children varied by activity as well as the curriculum area. Perhaps having a wider range of strategies available in their repertoire makes it easier for the children to negotiate these curriculum spaces and that in turn encourages fuller participation. In the child's developing discourse of participation, there must also be opportunities available for them to utilize these strategies successfully, and the teacher must facilitate these empowering discourses.

Discussion

The resources that become available to new entrants may be particular goals, social relationships, cultural tools and traditions or routines that link activities. In this view, schooling creates intersections with the learning process begun in the home.   Besides the motivations for activities being given by the goal, they are also developed by the 'emergent intersubjectivity' of group performance in its time and place that allows meaning to continue to develop, emerge, explain and to perpetuate (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). The key learning dispositions at all levels of education of being communicative and sharing responsibility, joint attention and responsive and reciprocal relationships (Carr, 1998) that relate to the children's developing strategies of collaboration in this study expand their participation repertoires and meaning. The Mäori concept of 'nga hononga' or distributed competence or cognition that Carr (2003) describes as learning 'stretched over' peers, teachers and/or culturally provided tools is a useful concept to describe this unfolding participation in the classroom, and each child described in the study developed skills and capacity in this area in addition to the cultural capital they brought to the classroom.   In this way, all four of the children were 'successful participants' and were engaging with learning, even those whose range of strategies were

more 'limited' depending on the particular activity context. A key aspect of their developing participation repertoires was the awareness of peers as a source of learning, even through observation. The challenge to teachers to manage sometimes competing demands of classroom management and control alongside expectations regarding the 'crowded curriculum' is considerable. The test for successful participation and adjustment will be if the children in the classroom pick up this new classroom discourse and begin to use it in their everyday classroom interactions, such as the example of Mere responding to another child by saying "oh, you're thinking" in the appropriate context. Critical discourse analysis as evidenced in these case studies of classroom participation can help to contribute to a greater understanding of classroom practices and power relations that can foster or hinder the developing discourses of successful adjustment to school.

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