



Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane Australia

This is the author's version of a work that was submitted/accepted for publication in the following source:

[Theobald, Maryanne Agnes](#) & Kultti, Anne (2012) Investigating child participation in the everyday talk of teacher and children in a preparatory year. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 13(3), pp. 210-225.

This file was downloaded from: <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/43712/>

© Copyright 2012 Symposium Journals

Notice: *Changes introduced as a result of publishing processes such as copy-editing and formatting may not be reflected in this document. For a definitive version of this work, please refer to the published source:*

<http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/ciec.2012.13.3.210>

INVESTIGATING CHILD PARTICIPATION IN THE EVERYDAY TALK OF A TEACHER AND CHILDREN IN A PREPARATORY YEAR

Maryanne Theobald

Anne Kultti

Abstract

In early years research, policy and education, a democratic perspective that positions children as participants and citizens is increasingly emphasized. These ideas take seriously listening to children's opinions and respecting children's influence over their everyday affairs. While much political and social investment has been paid to the inclusion of participatory approaches little has been reported on the practical achievement of such an approach in the day to day of early childhood education within school settings. This paper investigates talk and interaction in the everyday activities of a teacher and children in an Australian preparatory class (for children age 4-6 years) to see how ideas of child participation are experienced. We use an interactional analytic approach to demonstrate how participatory methods are employed in practical ways to manage routine interactions. Analysis shows that whilst the teacher seeks the children's opinion and involves them in decision-making, child participation is at times constrained by the context and institutional categories of "teacher" and "student" that are jointly produced in their talk. The paper highlights tensions that arise for teachers as they balance a pedagogical intent of "teaching" and the associated institutional expectations, with efforts to engage children in decision-making. Recommendations include adopting a variety of conversational styles when engaging with children; consideration of temporal concerns and the need to acknowledge the culture of the school.

Introduction

A democratic perspective that positions children as participants is increasingly emphasized in early years research and policy and to a lesser extent education (Theobald, Danby & Ailwood, 2011). Within these fields, child participation is considered as when children "have a say" and are involved (independently or as a group) in decisions to do with the everyday activities of their lives, and when adults incorporate and respond to children's views (Hill, Davis, Prout & Tisdall, 2004; Alderson, 2008; Theobald, Danby & Ailwood, 2011). The aim of this paper is to examine the everyday talk of teachers and children as they interact in a preparatory class of a school to see *how* teachers include children as participants in their activities. In so doing, this paper contributes to our understanding of the daily experiences of teachers and children. The term preparatory used in the paper encompasses a full-time kindergarten or pre-school program in a school setting, for children (aged four to six years) in

the year prior to compulsory schooling. This paper first examines the driving forces of child participation; and second, discusses the role talk plays in enabling opportunities for child participation in preparatory contexts. Analysis of two video-recorded interactions of a teacher and children in their everyday activities in a preparatory setting, using an interactional approach, highlights some of the issues and controversies for teachers and children in the implementation of child participation.

Two driving forces have dominated the push for a focus towards acceptance of children as participants in the early years: the legal requirements and considerations promoted by the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)* (United Nations, 1989) and theoretical understandings of childhood stemming from childhood studies (Mayall, 2002; Prout & James, 1997). The premise for the work of child participation is the understanding of the child as an active agent and a citizen entitled to have rights to participate in their lives (United Nations, 1989).

Recognition of children as “participants” and “citizens”

The children’s rights movement arising from the UNCRC (United Nations, 1989) has had significant influence in the promotion of children’s interests within policy reforms. In Australia, acknowledgement of children’s rights is finding strength in early years policy frameworks. The latest national strategy in the early years, *The National Framework for Protecting Australia’s children 2009-2020* and *Early Years Learning Framework* (Council of Australian Governments, 2009a, 2009b) acknowledges that children have rights to participate in decisions that affect them, and in which they can then actively use these rights in the daily experiences of their lives (Council of Australian Governments, 2009a). Another document, *The National Agenda for Early Childhood* (Department of Families Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2007), displays a rationale of citizenship as it acknowledges the “immeasurable value” that children offer our society, along with a commitment to ensure children’s rights of participation are included in policy and action.

Understandings of children as participants in their everyday lives have been promoted across theoretical perspectives in research. Within childhood studies, children are recognized as “social agents”. From this standpoint, children’s ideas, opinions and influence are worthy of consideration and their social relationships worthy of study in their own right (Mayall, 2002; Prout & James, 1997). The focus is on the “here and now” of children’s lives, rather than

what they may become (Qvortrup, 1994). These childhood studies stem from pioneering work by sociologists who emphasized the competencies and the practices of the participants, including children, from within the social experience itself (Danby, 2002; Hutchby & Moran-Ellis, 1998; Mackay, 1975; Speier, 1973). Children's competence as participants in this perspective is understood by children actively organizing and arranging their daily events and social relations (Hutchby & Moran-Ellis, 1998; Speier, 1973). Waksler (1991), Cromdal (2004), Danby and Baker (2000, 2001) and Butler (2008) have continued this focus on the competence of participants in empirical research focusing on the social interactions of children in play and school contexts. This research has greatly contributed to current understandings of children as agents and participants *in situ*.

In the context of early years education in Australia, overarching curriculum and policy steering documents have recently made claims to attend to the participatory rights of children. This emerges as a national goal for children to be "active and informed citizens" (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training & Youth Affairs, 2008). Interactions between teachers and children are held as integral to learning, along with relationships between children and the surrounding world. Recent education reforms in Australia for before school settings (for children six weeks to five years) pay attention to children's role as participants and suggest that children "recognise their agency, capacity to initiate and lead learning, and their rights to participate in decisions that affect them" (Council of Australian Governments, 2009a, p. 9). This recommendation directs teachers to respect children's contributions to the learning environment (Council of Australian Governments, 2009a, 2009b). Similarly, a recent international publication on children's rights in schools advises, "girls and boys have the right to participate in decision-making processes in school" (Action Aid & Right to Education Project, 2011, p. 4). Child participation involves adults, including teachers, acknowledging that children have opinions and providing opportunities for children to have influence over their everyday affairs. While much political and social investment has been paid to the inclusion of participatory approaches and citizenship ideas, relatively little is known about how these ideals are played out in the interactions that govern the day to day experiences of children in school settings (Cromdal, Tholander & Aronsson, 2007).

It is through participation in everyday activities and talk between teachers and peers that children create meaning of the social context in which they are a part (Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1934, 1986). Children's influence over their everyday affairs may or may not be

practically achieved due to the local setting and possibilities afforded to children as they interact within that shared space (Bae, 2009, Berthelsen, 2009; Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2003; Siraj-Blatchford, 2007). Before school early years settings are contexts in which children's participation rights and influence may be recognized (Bae, 2009; Hundeide, 2001). However, for preparatory settings that are located within a school environment, it does not always follow that children's initiative and influence occur easily. Teachers and children in schools engage within an interactional space specific to the school setting.

Talk between teachers and children: an influencing element of children's experience

Theoretical and empirical studies have shown that talk is a central influencing element of children's everyday school experience, a main influence in the increase of children's knowledge, and a measure of quality in early years educational settings (Hundeide, 2001; Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2003; Sheridan & Pramling Samuelsson, 2001; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2004; Siraj-Blatchford, 2007). We know that "rich talk" i.e. the discussion that occurs when children and teachers communicate with each other through the shared expression of their ideas as they jointly focus on a particular topic of investigation, leads to "sustained shared thinking" and an increase in children's understanding about the topic (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2008).

Despite an agreement in early childhood education on the importance of talk and interaction for a high quality education experience, talk in formal education settings is typically dominated by teachers, with little opportunities for children to give their opinion or have a say. Classroom talk is most often observed in the form of instruction and recitation with little discussion leading to sustained intellectual inquiry for children (Fisher, 2007; MacBeth, 2004). For instance, in the United Kingdom's longitudinal study of young children's development, *Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE)* (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2008), only 5.5 percent of 6000 questions teachers asked students were open-ended in nature; that is, questions that enabled children to express an opinion. Church (2009), in her study of literacy experiences of children in preparatory settings in Australia, observed that children's contributions to the conversation in shared storybook reading is rarely taken up as a possibility to extend their learning.

It seems little has changed in three decades. Mehan's commonly cited (1979) study of talk between teachers and children identified that most questions asked in educational settings are "closed" or "known information questions". In other words, the teacher already knows the answer when the question is asked. A typical response to the answer of a known information question is as an evaluation by the teacher such as *good, that's correct*. This kind of exchange between teachers and children is not receptive to sustained interactions between teacher and children that constitutes a high quality before compulsory school experience. As a result, children's influence and participation in classrooms can be restrained.

Implementation of child participation in school settings in Australia is limited (Theobald, Danby & Ailwood, 2011). There is little regard for the intricate social negotiations that occur as participatory concepts interlace with the everyday activities and expectations of the members in institutional contexts. The Early Assistance Research Project (Cook & Teachers from the Early Assistance Research Project in South Australia, 2009) examined common pedagogical methods in pre-schools, such as large language group times, and found they lacked children's input and influence. Similarly, Tholander's (2007) study of democratic practices in Swedish schools, showed that democratic approaches were not always attended to in the day-to-day interactions of teachers and children. This lack of careful consideration of how such principles will play-out within the particular setting means that participatory methods if employed are often "tokenistic" in nature (Millei & Imre, 2009). Ideas of children as "citizens" can be easily manipulated and in so doing, are at times presented as an obligation for children for the better of the rather than a right of children (Millei & Imre, 2009). In other words, it is children's responsibility to act in a democratic way at school rather than a right that children can access in their lives.

Including participatory approaches in which children have influence and opportunity to make decisions in the everyday goings on in the preparatory year of school settings means a shift from a pedagogy where teachers design, decide and deliver an education program without consultation with children, to teachers adopting a pedagogy that supports children as decision-makers and acknowledges children's agency in their everyday lives (McGrath, McGrath, Parsons, Smith, Swan & Saitta, 2009). Responsive interactions by teachers to include such approaches are important (Emilson & Folkesson, 2006). For example, Emilson's (2007) study of young children in Swedish pre-schools observes that children's influence in the classroom correlates to teachers supporting children to have some say in the what and

how aspects of their everyday learning. Similarly, in her study of the daily group meetings of teachers and children in Swedish pre-schools, Johansson (2003) found it necessary for teachers to show respect to children as participants who learn from their everyday experiences.

Increasingly, curriculum outcomes, preparation for school and classroom schedules become a key focus of early childhood education in school settings rather than interactional practices that attend to child participation. The name given to the year before compulsory schooling in Queensland, “preparatory”, reinforces the message that the purpose of this year is to “prepare” children for school. There is increased pressure on teachers to prepare children for formal school: teachers face pressure to attend to a curriculum that favours outcomes over process. For example, the prime minister in Australia describes the national curriculum for school settings as a “Back to Basics” program that emphasizes writing, reading and arithmetic (Maiden & Kelly, 2010). Outcomes are highly emphasized and in the national curriculum achieved through a commitment to rote learning and explicit teaching. For example, the Australian Curriculum for “English, mathematics, science and history is organised with explicit descriptions of what is to be taught to students and what is expected of their learning at every year of schooling” (Australian Assessment Curriculum & Reporting Authority, 2010). Teachers also must adhere to school time allocations and audit processes which dictate how much time they are to spend time on specific curriculum areas (Elanora State School, 2011). As a result, matters to do with organisation and socialisation are highly emphasized and there is less focus on the implementation of the affordance of child participation (Bennett, 2007).

Similarly, Bae (2009) observes that the structures and formalities within school institutions may limit opportunities for child participation. For example, an emphasis on routines for the management and socialisation of a large group of children reduce opportunities to seek children’s opinions and participation (Nyland, 2008). Activities within schools “are constructed in part through their temporal organisation” (Clayman, 1989, p. 660). In other words, matters of schedules and timetabling contribute to the institutional context and those matters that make the setting identifiable a “school”. These matters act as a “backdrop” to the interactions that occur between teacher and children within.

In sum, child participation, in which children are afforded opportunities to influence and make decisions over their everyday experiences, is a significant element to consider for early

childhood education. Whilst research increasingly validates recognition of child participation in early years settings, a gap exists in empirical evidence that examines *if* and *how* these ideals are applied in practice within preparatory settings in schools. This paper serves to close this gap by investigating the everyday activities of a teacher and children in a preparatory setting. Markström and Halldén (2009) suggest that the way pre-school is defined and viewed is dependent upon whose standpoint is used. In other words, the teacher's view of the activities comes from a different frame than a child's standpoint and leading to differing understandings. This paper, investigating how child participation is played out in every day unplanned talk and interaction of the members of a preparatory class, offers an interactional standpoint. An interactional standpoint acknowledges that talk and interaction comes from the joint production of its members, including both adults and children, within a particular setting (Garfinkel, 1967; Sacks, 1994).

Method

This paper analyses video-recorded data of the talk and interaction between a teacher and a group of children (four to six years) in an Australian preparatory (prep) year located within a school setting. Prep is a non-compulsory, full time pre-school year in Queensland state-run (public) schools. Analysis focuses on how the joint production of talk affords opportunities for children's opinions to be heard and how children influence the interaction.

Excerpts from two episodes of video-recorded interactions are included. The first episode of interaction takes place between the teacher and the children as turn-taking is managed for a game. The second episode occurs between the teacher and children as they walk through the playground on their way to attend a specialist lesson. The interactions were chosen because they are spontaneous in nature and reflective of the everyday activities of teachers and children in early childhood education settings. However, these episodes give only a small view into what occurs in the day to day experiences of one classroom and therefore provide a specific insight into one teacher's practice.

Video-recording is useful when observing the talk of social interactions *in situ* (Francis & Hester, 2004). Viewing video-recording of interaction enables analysts with many opportunities for listening and experiencing the everyday, but complex talk in social interactions of children (Evaldsson, 2005; Mehan, 1993). In taking this viewpoint, however, we acknowledge that the transcription process of a video-recorded extract means that a

process of data reduction takes place when real-life interaction is recorded in another form (Bloom, 1993).

We analyze the episodes of talk and interaction using an ethnomethodological perspective in which the organisation of social action is of interest (Garfinkel, 1967). In this perspective talk is seen as a joint accomplishment occurring within a particular context. Typical actions or behaviours associated with the roles or “membership categories” in the context are taken into consideration (Sacks, 1994). In so doing, the setting’s participants co-construct the events within the constraints and allowances that the context affords.

Findings

The next section provides transcripts of the two episodes of extended sequences of talk, which offer possibilities for analytic scrutiny of how turns of talk are taken and how the events of the interaction unfold (Psathas, 1992). Each extended sequence has been broken up into excerpts at points where there is a change in focus of the talk. The data is read sequentially, and the practical achievement of the talk by all members highlighted. Please note all names used in the excerpts are pseudonyms.

Episode 1

The first episode of interaction shows the teacher using a participatory approach when too many children want a turn to act out the story of “the three pigs”. She enlists the children’s help by asking them to decide how this problem should be solved.

Excerpt 1

Teacher: Do we need a bit of a plan? Come over here for a minute. Because there’s a lot of people-Everyone just come out for a minute. come out - Everyone come over here for a minute. ((pauses and points directing children to sit on step close by. Children start to move around)). Let’s just come and sit on the steps here for a minute cos there’s a lot of people and we don’t want anyone to be sad do we. Sit on here. Come around- we’ll make a plan. ((children moving around to sit) Come around here and we’ll make a plan. ((Children talking and moving))Some people can sit here.

?: I know-

Teacher: One moment ((holds up hand using a stop signal)) till everyone’s listening ((turns to child Frederick))We gotta make a plan Frederick because we have a lot of people wanting to place in the house of straw

Fredrick: yeah

Teacher: and already we can see some people getting a bit sad about it so who has a bit of an idea
I do
I do ((Hands go up))

Teacher: What's your idea Toby?
Toby: You can only have three people at a time and you have to make someone a big bad wolf and - go and do another activity until you ring the bell and then it's the other pe-people (fades off)-
Teacher: Oh - so a bit like we did when Mr Pitman was here explaining about the rocks yesterday ah one little group was with him and after a while I rang the bell and they went off and another little group came
Toby: yeah yeah
Teacher: like that. Hands up who likes Toby's idea and thinks that- ((most of group of children put hands up))
Teacher: Aah people seem to like your idea Toby. Okay. So we need three pigs and a big bad wolf is that right?
Toby: Yep

This excerpt starts as the teacher identifies overcrowding in the game making turn-taking a problem. The teacher draws on responsibilities as good members of the class to ensure no one is sad, and decides that this disorder must be managed. Using tag questions, such as “we need to make a plan don't we”, designed for an agreed response (Blimes, 1988), the teacher sets the agenda of the discussion: how will the activity of playing the game be conducted? Whilst the teacher, not the children, has identified a lack of turn-taking as a problem, she uses a participatory approach offering the children opportunity to have influence and participate in the decision making of how turn-taking in the game will be managed. In so doing, the teacher promotes children's agency and participation within the constraints of the institutional setting.

Seeing Toby's hand raised, the teacher selects Toby to offer a solution for the problem she has identified. Toby suggests that they make small groups and take turns to play the game. His solution for the problem of turn-taking draws upon a recent class experience. Toby matches the institutional discourse and requirements of the setting to give a suggestion likely to be favoured by the teacher. At the same time, Toby is able to exercise his influence in the setting.

The teacher does not explicitly assess or agree with Toby's suggestion, however, she is quick to uptake his idea and presents it to the rest of the group. The teacher's voice pitches upward in its uptake of his idea and it may appear to the rest of the group that this suggestion meets the teacher's approval. The teacher asks the children to show, by raising their hand, what they think of Toby's idea. The majority of children present raise their hand to show their agreement. The teacher's actions and words, asking children to vote and describing the children as “people”, shows her consideration of the children as citizens with rights to participate and to influence the decisions made in the setting. By using the term “people”

rather than “children” the teacher here defies the institutional roles and the associated expectations particular to this context. No other children are called upon to offer an alternate solution at this time.

Excerpt 2

Children: I wanna be the big bad wolf - and I'll be the- ((children start to get up to leave))

Teacher: do you think we need to- Now one moment - no no - cos we need a plan now don't we of how we going to decide who the first group is?((Grace sits and puts arm up))how we are going to go about it?

Dylan: I think paddy ah Frederick and number 1

Teacher: oh Go with our groups ((referring to pre-existing groups for class activities) hands up those people who are in group one and want to be in the three pigs and the big bad wolf ((Grace, Charlotte, Brigid, Ella drop hands. Teacher points))one-two-three-four is it?

Paddy: I wanna be the big bad wolf-

Teacher: How about I write some names down here. I think there's some people who don't want to actually go in their groups they want to go with particular people they usually play with okay so howabout you sit on the seat and you tell me- I'll choose one person an they can tell me the three people they want in their group alright.

Teacher: Brigid who do you want in your group?

Brigid Gracie

Teacher: Brigid Grace ((writes names on paper on easel))Grace you tell me someone you want

Grace Maddy

Teacher: Maddy you tell someone you want.

Maddy: Charlotte

Teacher: Charlotte. That's the first group of four okay
. ((Teacher continues to ask children who they would like to nominate. Children select others until all are chosen)).

Teacher: Fantastic now we have four groups of four (points to list on paper). Okay so first of all we have Brigid, Grace, Maddy and C going. Go and have a lovely time and I'll ring the bell. The other people go and choose another activity first.

In Excerpt 2 the teacher further engenders participation as she asks the children to help decide how they will go about making the groups for the game. Some children start to name children who are in their teacher organized learning groups, often used in class activities. The teacher notices Grace; Brigid, Charlotte and Ella's hands drop and detect reluctance by these children to play in their learning groups. She changes her plan and next suggests that children may prefer groups based on friends. Once again the terms “people” and “someone” are used to address the children in this setting and this once again works to challenge typical institutional membership categories of “teacher” and “student/children” (Sacks, 1994).

The children are able to decide who they would like to play with and select one friend each in turn. Whilst the teacher makes the final decision about when the groups will rotate, the

interaction shows the teacher managing a balance between children's rights to participate and influence the decisions of game process and the teacher's responsibilities in managing the class.

Episode 2 highlights some of tensions that arise for the teacher as she balances her pedagogical intent of "teaching" with attempts to respect children's influence in the setting.

Episode 2

Excerpts 3-6 detail a sequence of interaction that occurs as the teacher and children transition through the school on their way to a specialist lesson. Along the way, the children come across a drain where water can be seen gushing down underground, and nearby workers using a digger to dig up the road outside the school. The children stop to watch the digger and crowd around a drain to look at the water flowing. The teacher picks up on the children's interest, by allowing the children to stay and watch the unusual event rather than rush to the next lesson. Drawing on a technique known as "incidental teaching" (Follari, 2011), a method where teachers use incidental interests as an opportunity to further pedagogical and curriculum agendas, the teacher uses a conversational style to collect the children's observations about the event, "What have you figured out? What do you think? Who agrees? Who doesn't agree and has a different idea?"

Excerpt 3

Teacher: who's been there for a while looking down the drain maybe
they can move away so others can have a look
Thank you for being nice and honest

Toby: That they keep on fixing it until it goes slower and
slower

Teacher: (.)okay

Toby: and we don't lose as much water as we do last time

Teacher: okay yes when we first came and looked it was really
pouring quite heavily

Teacher: okay what have you figured out Paddy while we've been
watching what's going on here

Paddy um I figured out that we haven't seen the water coming
from this way -I figured out that it is I think its
coming I think I think they're fixing it a little bit and
I think the water's coming back soon

Teacher: okay so you think they're fixing it because the water's
not running anymore. A bit like Toby's idea

Paddy: yes ah

The ability to stop and ponder the digger and water gushing through the drain when they should be at another lesson, shows how the teacher respects the children's curiosity and thereby makes significant adjustments in the planned timetable of the day. The teacher and

the children are involved in an experience that makes sense to them – responding to their local environment. The teacher further employs a participatory approach by seeking out the children’s opinions and asking them to make a hypothesis about what they see. Hundeide (2001) observes meaning making and extended dialogue occurs when the focus follows children’s initiative. The teacher’s questions engender meaning making as the children ponder their circumstances using environmental clues and draw on their existing knowledge to form a hypothesis.

An interactional focus reveals the institutional order that underlies the joint production of talk and interaction. In order to manage the fact that some children have not had a turn to see the water gushing in the drain, the teacher suggests moving back if they have had a look and commends those who were “nice and honest”. In so doing, the teacher draws upon the concept of a “good citizen” to manage the rowdiness and turn-taking of the group activity. In so doing, we see the values of citizenship used here not as a child’s right, but rather as their “duty and responsibility” (Millei & Imre, 2009, p. 285).

As she asks for their ideas, the teacher sends a message to the children that they are valued participants and their interest in the building is a valid topic for further investigation. The teacher responds to the children’s ideas saying, “Okay”. “Okay” used in this way becomes a receipt of news marker (Beach, 1993, 1995) and means that the teacher’s responses are not explicit evaluations such as “yes” or “no”. Rather, the teacher does a partial repeat of the children’s response. Not evaluating the children’s responses suggests to the children that their viewpoint is valued and respects each child’s right to have an opinion or differing idea. For example, Toby’s summation of the experiences around them is followed by communicative exchange from the teacher, referring to the event that occurred before and a checking procedure to make sure she understood Toby’s point of view. She then follows this with a question to another child, “What have you figured out?” The teacher makes note also of the children’s ideas that are alike; that is, “A bit like Toby’s idea”. The children are able to match or compare their own ideas with those of their peers and add to their own meaning about the topic.

As an active participant in this interaction, however, the expectation is that one’s contribution will fit into the unstated criteria of “having figured something out”. The joint production of talk is evident here as the children give responses which are constructed as “having figured something out”, and follow the pedagogical focus of the teacher. For

example, Toby shows that his response is relevant and on task by using a preface of “I figured out”. In so doing, Toby packages his turn to explicitly match the discourse used by the teacher.

Excerpt 4

Teacher: okay. What have you figured out Charlotte?
Charlotte: That they're digging a hole that and that and that um the truck is going down, down, down and then and then the water comes down. under the ground.
Teacher: The truck's digging deeper and deeper
Charlotte: yeah [And it's going under the ground]
Teacher: is [that what you mean by down and down?]
Charlotte: Under the ground
Teacher: Under the ground
Teacher: Why are they digging down under the ground - what's down there?
Charlotte: Mud
Teacher: Mud?
Ella: No
Children: No
Teacher: oh
Ella: Water it's water
Teacher: So if we dug under the ground we'd find water too would we?
Ella: yes (nods)

When the meanings of the children's responses are not immediately apparent, the teacher persists in trying to understand. For example, the teacher repeats Charlotte's contribution and does not dismiss Charlotte's attempts. Instead, the teacher continues to probe as she tries to understand what Charlotte is saying. The teacher does not explicitly evaluate what Charlotte says as right or wrong, however, the teacher reframes Charlotte's contribution by suggesting another object that might go down in the ground– the truck or diggers rather than the water. Charlotte's answer, “the water comes down”, does not quite fit with the construction of the question as it does not make sense. In so doing, the teacher scaffolds the experience in a positive manner (Hundeide, 2001).

However, whilst the teacher uses a participatory approach by following the children's topic choice, the children's influence as the conversation unfolds is constrained at times. During the interaction the children do not ask each other their opinion or ask the teacher her opinion. The teacher has not given space for this to occur nor has she instructed them to ask each other.

The teacher's talk reinforces social practices and contextual perimeters regarding the appropriate way to signal a turn in a school setting. The children raise their hands and wait as

the teacher selects the next speaker by name. This shows the typical and at times necessary work of a teacher as they manage a group of children (Payne & Hustler, 1980). However, this type of action places the interactional activities that occur in the setting under the teacher's sequential organisation.

Excerpt 5

Teacher: what do other people think - do they agree with that - Who doesn't agree with that and thinks they're digging down for another reason? ((Children put up hands))

Teacher: What do you think Griffin?
Oh one moment Griffin we can't hear you because someone else is speaking there
Stop stop - is it Dom or Dylan can't see - someone is asking you to listen to him ((turns back to Griffin))

Griffin: Well that water's flowing down because the I think the water's running out.

Teacher: It's run out.

Griffin: Um the water's slowing down because it's getting a little bit deeper
Uh we're asking about uh - Griffin that wasn't our question our question was who agrees with the last person who spoke or who didn't agree

Griffin: so then

The teacher repeats part of the children's comments to demonstrate her interest in what the children are saying and to provide an opportunity for shared thinking about the common phenomenon. Evaluative statements such as "you are right", "that is correct" work to close down the communication rather than open it up for further discussion. The teacher promotes children's participation by asking if they agree with their fellow classmates.

As Griffin starts to contribute, the teacher stops him and instructs another child in the class to be quiet in order to let Griffin speak. Whilst Griffin did not ask the other child to listen, the teacher draws on an unspoken understanding in the class that the children respect the rights of children to speak. In so doing, the teacher implements a culture of citizenship.

However, an interactional view brings considerations of social order into play as the conversation progresses. The teacher asks the children if they agree with the response given by the previous child or if they have another opinion of the digger's activity. Griffin is selected by the teacher to speak. Griffin's contribution is "on topic", however, does not quite answer the teacher's prior question. The teacher explicitly tells Griffin that his comment is not appropriate saying, "Griffin that wasn't our question our question was who agrees with the last person who spoke or who didn't agree". In this exchange, Griffin attends to the activity of offer an opinion as a member of the class, however, fails to attend to an implicit

agenda of the rights to participation that is also evident here. An agenda of “institutional relevance” (Cromdal, Tholander & Aronsson, 2007) is privileged. In other words, the children’s contributions are judged according to how well they “fit” the specific organizational framework of the teacher. In the previous excerpt, Toby shows his skill in framing his talk so that it aligns with the teacher’s expectations. However, it is clear by the teacher’s response to Griffin that Griffin has not managed to accurately negotiate the unstated expectations of this interaction. In so doing, the role of teacher is privileged over the children’s. The teacher’s position in the interaction enables her to query, prompt and assess the children’s contributions (Richards, 2006), and in this way, the children’s right to participate is constrained by the unstated expectations of the school context.

Excerpt 6

Ella: The water's coming down from the road
 Teacher: How do you fix water coming down from the road?
 Ella: You dig a hole to...
 Dominic: It's a loose pipe
 Teacher: Ah did you hear what Dominic said. Say it again Dominic
 Dominic: A loose pipe
 Teacher: He said it's a it's a to do with a pipe
 Dominic: mmm
 Teacher: Is that what you meant by the water coming down in a pipe. What do you think's happened to the pipe, Dominic thinks the pipe might be loose.
 Ella: Might be a broken pipe
 Teacher: Anyone any other ideas what do you think's happened to the pipe
 Teacher: What do you think's happened Sawyer?
 Sawyer: um maybe they're digging a hole because there's no water coming through
 Teacher: ooh
 Sawyer: Because there's um there's dirt blocking it
 Teacher: There's dirt blocking it you think. (.) oh That's an idea. What do you think is going on Maverick?
 Maverick: I think they need they need they get more water um and they're digging a hole so they can get so they can um so they can find the pipe that's underground and then find the loosen bits so they can put all the water back in.
 Teacher: Oh how are they going to put the water back in? (4 children raise arms)
 Maverick: With The- They're gonna pour it through the gap (questioning tone)

Whilst the teacher controls the turns of talk (i.e. who can speak and when), her pedagogic practice here does not follow a typical initiation (teacher asks question), response (children answer), evaluation (teacher evaluates the answer) (IRE) formula identified by Mehan (1979). Rather, the interaction is conducted as a conversation in which she seeks to explore the children’s ideas. Following a discourse of inquiry-based learning in which children are (Cam, Fynes-Clinton, Harrison, Hinton, Scholl & Vaseo, 2007; Follari, 2011) the teacher

attempts to give the children an opportunity to participate in the discussion giving their opinion.

The children in excerpt 6 follow the classroom social order of raising their hand to show their willingness to participate. In this excerpt, the institutionalized code of conduct of the school setting; that is, raising hands to indicate a willingness to be selected for a turn and weakens the participatory act of asking the children's opinion. The expectation by the teacher is that the child whose hand is raised has something relevant to say. Maverick's questioning tone at the end of his contribution indicates his anticipation that his peers and the teacher will assess his comments.

Discussion: The practical achievement of child participation

Recognizing and responding to ideas of child participation in which children are to have a say in and influence everyday matters to do with their own lives provides challenges for policy makers, curriculum writers and early childhood educators alike as they plan for and interact with children and the daily practices of preparatory settings. The purpose of this paper was to use an interactional lens to examine *how* the ideas of child participation and citizenship are enacted. The episodes of interaction presented in this paper were chosen because they display the everydayness and unplanned nature of situations and decisions that teachers face as they go about the activity of "teaching". We remind the reader that the excerpts above provide a very limited insight into one teacher's practice. We also stress that the interactional exchanges by the teacher with the children display high quality teaching methods as described and measured by early childhood education standards. The teacher's pedagogical talk in Episode 1 was calm, respectful and organized as she managed an unruly event of overcrowding in a game. In Episode 2 the teacher's talk matched a discourse of inquiry-based learning in which "a catalytic event" provides a stimulus and the teacher posed questions to illicit a hypothesis by the children (Cam, Fynes-Clinton, Harrison, Hinton, Scholl & Vaseo, 2007; Follari, 2011). The teaching example showed a teacher displaying "good" early childhood practice in which the teacher significantly delayed the transition to another lesson in order to follow the children's interests, one relevant to their local context and with "authentic materials" (Follari, 2011). In so doing, the teacher employed a participatory approach that took opportunities to afford children agency and influence in the early years setting.

The preparatory setting as an institution

Preparatory programs occur as group institutions where socialization becomes a priority as children must be “managed” (Payne & Hustler, 1986). As a consequence, factors associated with “group care” and the “collective” govern the opportunities for child participation and citizenship (Berthelsen, 2009; Markström, 2010). Through interactional practices in group institutions, the categories of teacher or student and their associated expectations are made relevant and influence how each party can act and contribute. The analysis highlighted the implicit social orders that exist in the institutional setting of school as matters that children are active participants in negotiating. Children were seen to “interpret the opportunities and resources” (Markström & Halldén, 2009, p. 120) available to them as they interacted within the teacher’s pedagogical agenda of having relevant to say. Examining the sequential organization and interactional features of the talk in Episode 2 showed that the practical achievement of a participatory approach was limited at times. Whilst the teacher respected the rights of children to give opinions, the sequential analysis of the talk demonstrated an underlying social order that shaped how their contribution should be framed. For example, Griffin resisted responding to the teacher’s prior question as he employed his right to give an opinion freely. In this instance, he was rejected and told he was “off topic”. As the teacher and children interacted within the context the institutional roles, expected codes of behaviour and the social order of associated identities (“teacher” and “student”) were talked into being. The teacher’s pedagogical intent (Church, 2009) managed how and when children’s influence was recognized in the interaction.

In the interactional and institutional context of a school preparatory setting, categories of teachers and children and organizational matters come into play. Schools themselves are “local cultures of knowledge production” (MacBeth, 2004, p. 704; Rogoff, 1990) where teachers and children are expected to behave in particular ways. The analysis shows how the teacher and children’s participation is tied to the wider culture of being in a school. The institution of a school invokes a school culture in which a specific way of acting is understood by the members, teachers and children alike. In other words, within school, members orient to school “rule and norms” that reflect the shared understanding by members to the local setting and the circumstances within (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990, p. 286). Such alignment allows for a consistency and assemblage in the behaviours and actions of teachers and children as they move across various arenas within a school setting, including

classrooms, specialist lessons and playgrounds. In so doing however, child participation is externally “managed” and, at times, outside teachers and children’s immediate control.

Tensions for teachers

An interactional analysis highlighted the day-to-day tensions placed on teachers. Identified in the analysis was the delicate nature of the everyday interactions in school settings, the many facets of teacher-child interaction as participatory approaches are implemented. Teachers are faced with a constant exchange between adhering to curriculum documents, applying pedagogical approaches, and the different intentions of children (Johansson & Pramling Samuelsson, 2006). This paper has demonstrated how a participatory approach in conjunction with inquiry-based learning was used to effectively manage disruptions in the class. In so doing, the complexities of the member’s work and dynamic roles of teacher and children were highlighted. These findings are a reminder that the practical application of directives outlined in policy, research and curriculum documents require more than a belief by teachers in these ideas. This exchange is amplified by the multi-faceted, untheorized and ambiguous concepts of child agency, participation and citizenship (Millei & Imre, 2009; Valentine, 2009; Theobald, Danby & Ailwood, 2011) and complex social order of a school context.

Conclusion

In exploring the notion of participatory approaches in a school preparatory setting, the data presented here is limited. However, three recommendations for the implementation of child participation are now outlined.

First, teachers who adopt a variety of differing groupings and conversational styles within the daily activities (to enable children opportunities to exert influence and offer opinions) foster child participation. Promoting fair and collaborative relations with young children is possible when early childhood educators redefine their role when working with children (MacNaughton, Hughes & Smith, 2007). Detailing the organic participatory exchanges as they occur with children either one-to-one or in a group, builds a collection of participatory practice to advance child participation.

Second, teachers who commit time and give consideration to the processes required in participatory approaches, foster child participation. Temporal concerns are part of the “stage

set” of a school and impact on the day-to-day activities afforded teachers and children. The teacher in these episodes gave a remarkable amount of time using a participatory method for the children to solve turn-taking in a game and explore an interesting event as they transitioned to a specialist lesson. Schools that give child participation processes priority when planning timetables and schedules foster participation rights in practicably achievable ways.

Third, the context must be carefully reflected upon. How child participation fits within the whole school culture requires ongoing discussion and reflection by all members of the school. Child participation does not involve a “one size fits all” approach; teachers and schools must reach a compromise between supporting children as individuals, group identity, and overarching development requirements. In so doing, child participation can be engendered rather than endangered.

There is still much to learn about children’s everyday lives. This paper supports others in suggesting that a “continuing dialogue” (Millei, 2007) is necessary between key stakeholders, policy makers, teachers, parents and children to consider how child participation in school is enacted. More empirical research is necessary to detail how teachers and children experience child participation in the interactional spaces of school learning environments.

Acknowledgement

The authors sincerely thank the reviewers for their helpful and constructive comments. The authors thank also Susan Danby, Barbara Comber and Sandy Houen for their feedback on earlier drafts of the paper. The authors are indebted to the participants of the study who willingly shared their everyday activities with the researchers.

References

- Action Aid., & Right to Education Project. (2011) Promoting rights in schools: Providing quality public education. <http://www.right-to-education.org/sites/r2e.gn.apc.org/files>.
- Alderson, P. (2008) *Young children's rights: Exploring beliefs, principles and practice*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Australian Assessment Curriculum and Reporting Authority. (2010) *The Australian Curriculum*. <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au>.
- Bae, B. (2009) Children's right to participate: Challenges in everyday interactions. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 17(3), 391-406.
- Beach, W. (1995) Conversation analysis: "Okay" as a clue for understanding consequentiality. In S. Sigman (Ed.), *The consequentiality of communication* (pp. 121-162). Hillsdale NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Beach, W. (1993) Transitional regularities for 'casual' "Okay" usages. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 19, 325-352.
- Bennett, J. (2007) Early childhood education, democracy and citizenship. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Research in Early Childhood Education*, 1(1), 65-81.
- Berthelsen, D. (2009) Participatory learning: Issues for research and practice. In D. Berthelsen, J. Brownlee & E. Johansson (Eds.), *Participatory learning in the early years: Research and pedagogy* (pp. 1-12). New York: Taylor & Francis.
- Blimes, J. (1988) The concept of preference in Conversation Analysis. *Language in Society*, 17(2), 161-181.
- Bloom, L. (1993) Transcription and coding for child language research: The parts are more than the whole. In J. Edwards & M. Lampert (Eds.), *Taking data: Transcription and coding in discourse research* (pp. 149 - 166). Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Butler, C. W. (2008) *Talk and social interaction in the playground*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Cam, P., Fynes-Clinton, L., Harrison, K., Hinton, L., Scholl, R., & Vaseo, S. (2007) *Philosophy with young children - a classroom handbook*. Deakin West, ACT: Australian Curriculum Studies Association.
- Church, A. (2009) Opportunities for learning during storybook reading at pre-school. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 1(1).
- Cook, P., & Teachers from the Early Assistance Research Project in South Australia. (2009) Whose language is group time anyway? In G. MacNaughton, P. Hughes & K. Smith (Eds.), *Young children as active citizens: Principles, policies and pedagogies* (pp. 193-209). Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars.
- Council of Australian Governments. (2009a) Belonging, being & becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia. <http://www.deewr.gov.au/EarlyChildhood>.
- Council of Australian Governments. (2009b) Investing in the early years - a national early childhood development strategy. <http://www.deewr.gov.au>.
- Cromdal, J. (2004) Building bilingual oppositions: Code switching in children's disputes. *Language in Society*, 33, 33-58.
- Cromdal, J., Tholander, M., & Aronsson, K. (2007) 'Doing reluctance': Managing delivery of assessments in peer evaluation. In A. Hepburn & S. Wiggins (Eds.), *Discursive Research in practice: New approaches to psychology and interaction* (pp. 203-223). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Danby, S. (2002) The communicative competence of young children. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 27(3), 25-31.

- Danby, S., & Baker, C. (2000) Unravelling the fabric of social order in block area. In S. Hester & D. Francis (Eds.), *Local educational order: Ethnomethodological studies of knowledge in action* (pp. 91-140). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Danby, S., & Baker, C. (2001) Escalating terror: Communicative strategies in a pre-school classroom dispute. *Early Education and Development*, 12(3), 343-358.
- Department of Families Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. (2007) The national agenda for early childhood. <http://www.facs.gov.au>.
- Elanora State School. (2011) *Elanora State School subject time allocations*. <http://elanorass.eq.edu.au/wcmss/images/Subject%20Time%20Allocations.pdf>.
- Emilson, A. (2007) Young children's influence in pre-school. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 39(1), 11-38.
- Emilson, A., & Folkesson, A. (2006) Children's participation and teacher control. *Early Child Development and Care*, 176(3-4), 219-238.
- Evaldsson, A. (2005) Staging insults and mobilizing categorizations in a multiethnic peer group. *Discourse & Society*, 16(6), 763-786.
- Fisher, R. (2007) Dialogic teaching: Developing thinking and metacognition through philosophical discussion. *Early Child Development and Care*, 177(6), 615-631.
- Follari, L. M. (2011) *Foundations and best practices in Early Childhood Education: History, theory and approaches to learning*. New Jersey: Pearson.
- Francis, D., & Hester, S. (2004) *An invitation to ethnomethodology: Language, society and interaction*. London: Sage.
- Garfinkel, H. (1967) *Studies in ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Hill, M., Davis, J., Prout, A., & Tisdall, K. (2004) Moving the participation agenda forward. *Children & Society*, 18(2), 77-96.
- Hundeide, K. (2001) *Vägledande samspel: Handbok till ICDP* (Vol. 1). Stockholm: Rädda barnen, ICDP Sweden.
- Hutchby, I., & Moran-Ellis, J. (1998) Situating children's social competence. In I. Hutchby & J. Moran-Ellis (Eds.), *Children and social competence: Arenas of action* (pp. 7-26). London: Falmer Press.
- Johansson, E. (2003) *Möten för lärande. Pedagogisk verksamhet för de yngsta barnen i förskolan (Pedagogical meetings)* Stockholm: Skolverket.
- Johansson, E., & Pramling Samuelsson, I. (2006) *Lek och läroplan. Möten mellan barn och lärare i förskola och skola (Play and curriculum)*. Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis.
- MacBeth, D. (2004) The relevance of repair for classroom correction. *Language in Society*, 33, 703-036.
- Mackay, R. (1975) Conceptions of children and models of socialization. In R. Turner (Ed.), *Ethnomethodology: Selected readings* (pp. 180-193). Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- MacNaughton, G., Hughes, P., & Smith, K. (2007) Early childhood professionals and children's rights: Tensions and possibilities around the United Nations General Comment No.7 on children's rights. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 15(2), 161-170.
- Maiden, S., & Kelly, J. (2010, 1 March) Gillard takes schools back to basics under national curriculum. *The Australian*.
- Markström, A. M. (2010) Talking about children's resistance to the institutional order and teachers in preschool. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 8(3), 303-314.
- Markström, A. M., & Halldén, G. (2009). Children's strategies for agency in preschool. *Children & Society*, 23(2), 112-122.

- Mayall, B. (2002) Towards a child standpoint. In B. Mayall (Ed.), *Towards a sociology for childhood: Thinking from children's lives* (pp. 112-139). Buckingham: Open University Press.
- McGrath, G., McGrath, Z., Parsons, S., Smith, K., Swan, G., & Saitta, S. (2009) "You're not going to like this but" Learning to hear children as experts in early childhood classrooms. In G. MacNaughton, P. Hughes & K. Smith (Eds.), *Young children as active citizens: Principles, policies and pedagogies* (pp. 148-159). Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars.
- Mehan, H. (1979) "What time is it, Denise?": Asking known information questions in classroom discourse, theory into practice. *Communicating with Young Children*, 18(4), 285-294.
- Mehan, H. (1993) Why I like to look: On the use of videotape as an instrument in educational research. In M. Schratz (Ed.), *Qualitative voices in educational research* (pp. 93-105). London: Falmer Press.
- Millei, Z., & Imre, R. (2009) The problems with using the concept of 'Citizenship' in early years policy. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 10(3), 280-290.
- Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs. (2008) *Melbourne declaration on educational goals for young Australians*. www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources.
- Nyland, B. (2008) The guiding principles of participation: Infant, toddler groups and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. In J. Brownlee & D. Berthelsen (Eds.), *Participatory learning and the early years* (pp. 26 – 43). New York: Routledge.
- Payne, G., & Hustler, D. (1980) Teaching the class: The practical management of a cohort. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 1(1), 49-66.
- Pramling Samuelsson, I., & Asplund Carlsson, M. (2003) Det lekande lärande barnet i en utvecklingspedagogisk teori (The playing learning child in a developmental pedagogical theory). *Temanummer Pedagogisk forskning i Sverige*, 8(1-2), 70-84.
- Prout, A., & James, A. (1997) A new paradigm for the sociology of childhood? Provenance, promise and problems. In A. James & A. Prout (Eds.), *Constructing and reconstructing childhood: Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood* (pp. 7-33). London: Falmer Press.
- Psathas, G. (1992) The study of extended sequences: The case of the garden lesson. In G. Watson & R. Seiler (Eds.), *Text in context: Contributions to ethnomethodology* (pp. 99-122). Newbury Park: Sage.
- Qvortrup, J. (1994) Childhood matters: An introduction. In J. Qvortrup, M. Brady, G. Sgritta & H. Wintersberger (Eds.), *Childhood matters: Social theory, practice and politics* (pp. 1-24). Aldershot, England: Avebury.
- Richards, K. (2006). "Being the teacher": Identity and classroom conversation. *Applied Linguistics* 27(1), 51-77.
- Rogoff, B. (1990) *Apprenticeship in thinking: Cognitive development in social context*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sacks, H. (1992) *Lectures on conversation* (Vol. I & II). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Sheridan, S., & Pramling Samuelsson, I. (2001) Children's conceptions of participation and influence in pre-school: A perspective on pedagogical quality. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 2(2), 169-194.
- Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2007) Creativity, communication and collaboration: The identification of pedagogic progression in sustained shared thinking. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Research in Early Childhood Education*, 1(2), 3–23.
- Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Manni, L. (2008) Would you like to tidy up now? An analysis of

- adult questioning in the English Foundation Stage. *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development*, 28(1), 5–22.
- Speier, M. (1973) *How to observe face-to-face communication: A sociological introduction*. Pacific Palisades, California: Goodyear Publishing.
- Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Taggart, B. (2004) *Technical paper 12 The final report: Effective pre-school education*. London: Institute of Education University of London.
- Theobald, M., Danby, S., & Ailwood, J. (2011, in press). Child participation in the early years: Challenges for education. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*.
- Tholander, M. (2007) Working with rules: Lived democracy in school. *Ethnography and Education*, 2(1), 109-126.
- United Nations. (1989) Convention on the Rights of the Child.
<http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>.
- Valentine, K. (2009) Accounting for Agency. *Children & Society*, 1-12.
- Vygotsky, L. (1934/1986) *Thought and language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Waksler, F. C. (1991) Studying children: Phenomenological insights. In F. C. Waksler (Ed.), *Studying the social worlds of children* (pp. 60-69). London: Falmer Press.