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# **The Silent Experiences of Young Bilingual Learners: A Small Scale Sociocultural Study into the Silent Period**

**Centre for Research in Education and Educational Technology (CREET)**

**Thesis submitted to the Open University March 2011 in part fulfilment of the requirements of the degree Doctorate in Education**

**BY**

**Caroline Bligh M.Ed.**

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## Abstract

This ethnographic study focuses upon the experiences of a small number of early years bilingual learners' during the emergent stage of English language acquisition – *the silent period*.

Building upon historical understandings of sociocultural theory, Vygotsky (1986), Lave and Wenger (1991), Wenger (1998), Rogoff (2003) and Gee (2004) provide the platform upon which the evolution of sociocultural learning theory is applied and tested out in relation to the interconnectedness of the spoken mother tongue, thought, and learning.

Legitimate peripheral participation is examined as a workable concept through which to explore the initial learning trajectory of an emergent bilingual learner whilst negotiating participation within, through and beyond the early years community of practice during the silent period.

A multi-method ethnographic approach to data gathering adopts Flewitt's (2005) '*gaze following*', as an alternative means of participant observation through which to identify silent participation within an early years setting. Additional ethnographic methods include unstructured interviews with bilingual and monolingual participants, which are interspersed with significant auto-ethnographic accounts.

Funnelling the data through thematic analysis facilitates both the emergence of significant patterns and the 'encapsulation' of significant data within vignettes. Sociocultural theory is tested out against the research findings through the analysis of nine selected vignettes.

The findings present the silent period as a crucial time for learning; distributed through a synthesis of close observation, intense listening and copying. Examining the silent period through a sociocultural lens tentatively reveals silent participation as a significant but lesser acknowledged contribution to the early years community of practice.

Key words: bilingual; silent period; legitimate peripheral participation; sociocultural; ethnographic; silent participation.

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Finally, I would like to thank my husband, Rory, and daughters Clare, Nicola and Emily for just... ‘being there’.



## **Dedication**

Dedicated to my late mother, for her tenacity and devotion – no matter what.

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**List of Abbreviations**

**CoP:** Community of Practice

**LPP:** Legitimate peripheral participation

**EAL:** English additional language learners

**SLA:** Second language acquisition

**SLL:** Second language learner



# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction – Priming the Canvas**

At 8.30 a.m. when I first arrived at Suki's house, I was met at the door by a very different girl from the four-and-a-half-year-old girl (of Japanese heritage) that I had encountered in school. 'Suki' appeared at her door as animated and smiling. She immediately greeted me by jumping up and down, saying excitedly, 'Mrs Bligh, Mrs Bligh!' She held my hand and guided me quickly through the hall. Suki's mother welcomed me in, opened the door to the lounge and offered me a seat... I found it hard to believe that Suki (who was now singing happily in her mother tongue) was the same young girl who would remain 'motionless' and silent in my reception class. She brought me her school reading book, sat next to me, and attempted to read it to me in English.

### **1.1 Perceptions of the Silent Period**

Sociocultural theorising (Chapter 2.1-2.10) assists in walking the reader through a distinctive period in a young bilingual learner's life world – a time of negotiation, discovery and conflicting tensions. It is called the 'silent period' (Chapter 1.1-1.2). Not every young bilingual learner encounters a silent period because not every child invests many of their hours, days, weeks and years in an environment where their mother tongue may be disregarded (Chapter 2.4). The silent period (in this research) refers to a specific time in a young bilingual learner's life-world when, on entering an early years setting in England, the language of discourse and instruction (English) is not understood.

Both bilingualism and multilingualism are daily features of many societies, with more bilingual people (using two or more languages) in the world than there are monolingual. As defined by Hall (2001) bilingualism refers, 'to pupils who live in two languages, who have access to, or need to use, two or more languages at home and at school. It does not mean that they have fluency in both languages or that they are competent and literate in both languages' (p.5).

For the purposes of this research the terms 'silent, young bilingual learner' and 'emergent bilingual learner' are employed when referring to a young child between the

ages of three and six years of age who is in the first (non-verbal) stage of learning English as a new and additional spoken language within and beyond an early years educational setting in England.

Although there is much conflicting information regarding both the acceptable length of time regarding a young bilingual learner's 'silent period' or 'silent phase', many researchers (Clarke, 1996; Tabors, 1997) regard Suki and Adyta's experiences of passing through the silent period as a normal stage in additional language acquisition. It is suggested (Chapter 3.17) by Tabors (1997) that silence is chosen because the bilingual learner prefers to communicate non-verbally. Saville-Troike's study into private speech described this period as 'linguistic development that has gone underground' (1988, p.568) or, if using private speech (speaking only to themselves), 'social speech that has turned inward' (Saville-Troike, 1988, p.570).

Many factors may or may not have an effect upon the speed at which a child passes through the silent period, including the consequences of psychological withdrawal or an interruption in the child's expected 'language acquisition processes' (Parke and Drury, 2001). Kagan (1989) suggests that children who are temperamentally inhibited will be more cautious, less sociable and perhaps less willing to try; they may be fearful (with no one to share their mother tongue) of making a mistake, therefore prolonging the transition through the silent period..

In Jean Mills' (2004) study, which focuses on women and families of Pakistani heritage, the use of 'silence' is explored, 'as a phenomenon [that] has been viewed in the context of the exercise of power between dominant and subordinate groups... and the ways in which the oral contributions of the "muted group" are excluded, constrained or devalued' (Mills, 2004, abstract).

Drury (2007) also delivers a powerful and agentive (Chapter 2.15) perspective on the 'silent period', referring to it as a period of self assertion, as can be seen, 'when analysing the strategies Nazma uses at school, we see her inside her shell. She clings to the powerful strategy of silence when she is with nursery staff and other children.' (Drury, 2007, p.73)



## 1.2 A Linguistic Perspective on the Silent Period

I am not a linguist. I approach this research from the position of a researcher whose motivation is to unravel the intricacies of bilingual learning through the silent period via a sociocultural exploration. However, to succeed in this quest I willingly hold the linguist's hand for part of the journey (Chapter 2.11-12).

Applied linguistics (Cook, 2010) focuses predominantly on the scientific study of how people acquire new language(s) and how best to teach English as second language acquisition [SLA]. To accomplish this task, psychological models of language and language processing are commonly drawn upon. SLA researchers commonly refer to the child's mother tongue (the preferred spoken language from infancy) as her/his first language (L1) and the new language to be learnt as the second language (L2).

The linguist Stephen Krashen (1985, cited in Spyropoulou, 2008) refers to the silent period as the pre-production stage of SLA when a second language learner is 'unable or unwilling' to speak in her/his developing second language. Krashen suggests that second language learners need time to *listen* to others talk, to *digest* what they hear, to *develop* receptive vocabulary, and to *observe* others' actions (Krashen, 1985, cited in Spyropoulou, 2008). However, it would appear that Krashen considers the silent period rather negatively, as a period of 'reduced output' when suggesting how to 'beat it' – albeit necessitating 'first language' (mother tongue) thinking.

Although Clarke (1997, 2002, 2009) advises that the silent period may be considered as prolonged if it lasts more than one month, from my own experience and observations to date, I have found that it often lasts much longer. Indeed, for a small but significant proportion of young bilingual learners the silent period may last for more than six months and sometimes over a year.

Gibbons' (2006) study implies that the silent period need not last longer than a month if a child is under no pressure to talk. Gibbons (2006) also suggests that this 'pre-verbal stage' is a period of 'silent incomprehension' rather than language acquisition processes. As a result, Gibbons (2006) not only infers that initial silence is undesirable, but also suggests that the adoption of early routines and patterns might support transition through the silent stage of second language acquisition.

Saville-Troike, a linguistic ethnographer, raised a concern that language learning in schools is commonly expected to be reified (Chapter 2.10) through either visible evidence (such as writing on paper) or auditory (through the spoken word) as proof of its acquisition (Saville-Troike, 1988). Responding to Saville-Troike's issue, the sociolinguist Snyder Ohta (2001, p.12) added to this debate, stating that the 'seemingly silent learner is neither passive nor disengaged, but is involved in an intrapersonal interactive process.'

A sociocultural perspective articulates the silent period in terms of the child actively participating (Chapter 2.3) through her/his inner thoughts – deep in her/his mind due to the spoken mother tongue turning inwards (Vygotsky, 1986, pp.249-252) through internalisation of the spoken word. In Vygotsky's view (Fembyhough and Fradley, 2005, p.3), 'private speech represents a stage in the gradual internalisation (Chapter 2, paragraph 2.3) of interpersonal linguistic exchanges whose final ontogenetic destination is inner speech, or *verbal thought*' [my emphasis].

In contrast, the linguist Mc Cafferty (1994) states that private speech serves many functions, classifying them into four categories which are metacognitive and cognitive functions, attentional processes, social functions and affective functions. These categories are similar to the 'strands' described by Bialystok (1990) and McDonough (1995).

However, although the linguists Lantolf and Appel agree (Lantolf, 2000; Appel and Lantolf, 1994) that private speech serves as a means to communication and guides learners' thinking, it is also assumed that bilingual learners only engage in private speech when a new activity appears either too difficult, or is too demanding.

The linguistic perspective on the silent period leans heavily on the gaining of language competences, without recognition of the multitude of shared learning practices that might (or might not) overlap and/or run in parallel to each other. More importantly, new understandings and ways of knowing (meaning making) are acquired and distributed through participation. A sociocultural approach to bilingual learning both recognises and embraces these complexities.



Consequently, the linguistic perspective appears to partly obscure the full picture of the silent period due to its framing within tightly demarcated parameters.

### 1.3 Suki's Silence

Suki's story (Chapter 4.3) guides the reader through this enquiry. Suki (five years of age and of Japanese heritage) is the first of six central characters within the research, including Anyor (Chapter 1.6) Adyta (Chapter 1.4) Tamsin (Chapter 4.6) Kimoto (Chapter 4.5) Nicole (Chapter 4.4) and myself (Chapter 1.5) who will be introduced as the story progresses.

In 2005, whilst teaching a reception class in Leeds, I first encountered a five-year-old girl of Japanese heritage called Suki. She neither spoke in class, nor in the day nursery which she had been attending for two years previously. My perception of Suki at that time was that of a 'bewildered' child, whose facial expression appeared to remain 'fixed' and unsmiling at all times. Suki's prolonged period of silence gave rise to the research question which has driven this exploration into the silent experiences of a young bilingual learner:

What were Suki's experiences during this prolonged period of silence?

At that time I was initially concerned that Suki's prolonged period of silence might be restricting her participation in the early years practices and position her as an 'outsider' (Lave and Wenger, 1991) to participation. For this reason I referred her to the Speech and Language therapist in an attempt to articulate her 'condition'.

The Speech and Language therapist who was viewing Suki through a linguistic lens (Chapter 1.2) interpreted Suki's silence as an extremely complex expressive communication disorder – 'selective mutism' (SMIRA, 2007). She referred Suki to the educational psychologist who (through a psychological lens) focused upon Suki's individual, developmental and cognitive processes and whether they were, or were not, functioning in the 'correct' sequential order.

After 'interviewing' Suki (she remained silent throughout) for twenty minutes, the educational psychologist diagnosed Suki with the anxiety-based disorder 'selective mutism' (Chapter 1.8). I was relieved that a medical diagnosis had been achieved for



Suki, because I assumed that a diagnosis would help solve 'her problem'. However, I feared that the pathologising of Suki as a 'condition' disregarded not only social factors affecting her whole person (Engel, 1980) but also labelled her negatively... as a deficit medical model (McConkey and Bhurgri, 2003).

Reflecting upon this episode in Suki's life-world, I had unwittingly treated her with benign neglect, because I was accepting the 'medicalisation' of Suki's silence. Labelling provided a 'quick fix' solution (prescribed 'programme of treatment') and more importantly, a 'just' reason for accepting Suki's 'condition'.

The diagnosis of selective mutism is sometimes confirmed after as little as *one month* into the silent period. In fact some Education Authority Ethnic Minority Achievement Services advise teachers (Hampshire EMA Service, 2008, p.2) that, 'it is crucial children are diagnosed and treated as early as possible'.

A sociocultural perspective not only surpasses the academic disciplines of linguistics and cognitive psychology but also recognises *the links* between Suki's cultural understandings and her silent negotiation in meaning making. For Gregory (2002, p.2) a sociocultural approach, 'rejects the difference between psychology and anthropology... It's not just interdisciplinary; it actually *transcends* disciplines, as it focuses on the inextricable link between culture and cognition through engagement in activities, tasks, or events'.

Following from Suki's initial diagnosis as a 'selective mute', a 'stimulus fading' programme of 'treatment' (Croghan and Craven, 1982) was prescribed by the educational psychologist.

At this time, the relevance of *my position* in Suki's learning was beginning to emerge. How could I, a white, monolingual teacher, 'bridge-build' between Suki's familiar 'world of home' and the unknown and possibly distrusted 'world of the school'. I began visiting Suki in her home twice a week before school to try and re-establish 'new beginnings' between the school, Suki and her family.

## **1.4 Moving Forward Two Years**

‘Adyta’ (Chapter 4, Table 3) who first attended his local pre-school playgroup aged three and a half years, is the second key character to enter the story in September 2007. Adyta’s mother tongue is Punjabi. From birth, Adyta made sense of his world (Conteh, 2007a; Mills, 2004) through Punjabi – the language through which his mother and close family members had communicated with him from birth.

I observed Adyta’s participation (Chapter 2.3) in the playgroup, reception class and year one. Adyta, who presented as a confident, fun-loving boy at home (recorded from his home visit), remained almost silent in the pre-school setting. I had initially presumed that he would communicate in spoken English because both he and his parents were born in England and his parents were articulate Punjabi/English speakers. However, as is customary in many South Asian communities, the paternal Grandmother, ‘Jasmit’, lived with Adyta’s parents. According to Adyta’s mother, her mother-in-law kept the Punjabi alive and active within the family. Although Adyta’s parents could and would speak English in alternative situations, out of respect to Adyta’s Grandmother, family members spoke Punjabi in her presence.

Cummins (2002) expressed the value of mother tongue contributions (Chapter 2.13) to bilingual learning when stating, ‘When parents and other caregivers (e.g. grandparents) are able to spend time with their children and tell stories or discuss issues with them in a way that develops their mother tongue vocabulary and concepts, children come to school well-prepared to learn the school language and succeed educationally’.

Studies by Cummins (2000), Baker (2000) and Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) demonstrate the value of maintaining the mother tongue for a child’s continued success in learning and development. Speaking Punjabi together inevitably bound Adyta’s family members collectively, as in Jean Mills’ (2004) study of women and families of Pakistani heritage which articulates the inevitable binding between the mother tongue and the maintenance of cultural identity as follows:

‘The associations of the term ‘mother tongue’ were particularly potent of identity through ownership and a sense of belonging to a group, a culture, and a country. It is crucial for them, as mothers, to pass on this language to their children. Identity,



aspiration, and notions of gender came together in their perspectives on the vital importance of language maintenance.’ (Mills, 2004, p.186.)

As both of Adyta’s parents worked full-time (Adyta’s father worked for a property company and his mother worked in a large department store), Adyta’s Grandmother was his main carer and educator during weekdays between 8.00 a.m. and 5.30 p.m. Adyta’s mother (who collected Adyta from pre-school occasionally) encouraged Adyta to refer to Nicole (the play-school leader) as ‘Auntie’. According to Dasgupta’s (1993) study, many families in the Bay area of India (South Asia) commonly adopt the ‘Western’ term ‘auntie’ as an expression of intimacy towards significant others, and pass this practice on to their children.

### **1.5 How the Researcher Fits Into the Research**

As an active participant within this study (Chapter 4, Table 3) not only does my life story contribute in developing the research, but the research also contributes to my developing life story.

I moved through six different educational settings throughout the UK as a child, where I encountered difficulties associated with adjusting to unfamiliar contexts, people and practices including differing regional accents and dialects. Reflecting upon these experiences, I would describe this period as devoid of identity, agency (Chapter 2.15) or a ‘sense of belonging’.

When first attending an early years setting, a young bilingual learner may feel separated from her/his mother tongue because she/he may not be able to communicate with those around her/him through speaking. This experience may be comparable to that of my own when separated from my mother between the ages of eight and fourteen years. Situated on the periphery of participation (Chapter 2.8) I found difficulty in making meaning of my ‘new world’. However, whenever I moved schools I learnt to initially ‘shield myself’ from questions by withdrawing into my private thoughts – forming a ‘safety-net’ of silence until I felt comfortable and confident enough to ‘remove it’.

If my own silent experiences proved noteworthy (as a young, white, monolingual English speaker); then the significance of the silent period must be manifoldly greater

for a young bilingual learner negotiating her/his way into an English-speaking early years setting. I can only assume that my negative experiences were a mere ‘microcosm’ of what might be encountered by a young bilingual learner.

Reflecting back on my experiences, the periods of silence became shorter and more transient as I acquired the confidence and ability to converse around reciprocal commonalities (shared practices). Because I made meaning through the same mother tongue (spoken English) of my peers, we were able to share in our developing understandings of the world.

These learnt capabilities to adapt to unfamiliar cultural nuances (including the ability to learn regional accents with speed) provided the opportunity for negotiation and developing a sense of ‘belonging’. Although initially situated as an outsider, sharing the same mother tongue provided the agency (Chapter 2.15) to move forward from a position of peripherality to more central participation.

### **1.6 Anyor ‘Meets’ Suki: an Ethnographic Account**

Childhood memories of ‘Anyor’, (a Polish-speaking eleven-year-old girl) who I encountered when I attended a Norwich high school) contribute to the researcher’s auto-ethnographic accounts. Anyor’s attempts at conversing in English demonstrated clearly the barriers to participation created when unable to contribute to conversations through a shared mother tongue.

I was privileged to experience occasional ‘golden moments’ with Anyor, who (like myself) had transferred to high school mid-term. On visiting Anyor in her family home, I remember with fascination hearing Anyor and her family members sharing Polish conversations and laughter together. I had no idea that Anyor owned such a rich and flourishing spoken language. I gained great enjoyment from glimpsing briefly into the intricacies and richness of her Polish life-world, because not only did Anyor’s voice ‘come alive’ in her home environment, but so did her physical gestures and facial expressions. It was as if she had been ‘plugged in’ to a new power source – the ‘dimmer switch’ had been turned up to maximum brightness in contrast to her ‘operating’ on a ‘low power setting’ within the school environment.

## **1.7 The Connection**

This is where the connection is made with Suki's (Chapter 5.3) story thus far. When I visited Suki in her home, she too had 'come alive' – just like Anyor. Amongst the family's culturally shared signs, symbols and tools, Suki chatted to me with excitement and showed me her favourite toys. She walked happily with me to school until she reached the school gates, at which point her speech and facial expressions froze – and did not 'thaw' again until she left the school gates at the end of the day. This 'frozen' appearance bore striking similarities with Zahra's experiences in an English speaking early years CoP (Chapter 4.1).

I can only but imagine the initial frustration felt by Anyor and Suki at being unable to draw upon and present their wealth of social, historical and cultural understandings – their 'funds of knowledge' (Moll et al., 2005) – to make meaning of their new worlds. Moll et al. (1992) interpret 'funds of knowledge' as, 'the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being'. Teachers/practitioners may be guilty of neglecting bilingual learners' rich cultural and cognitive resources nurtured within the home environments, and therefore overlooking valuable opportunities for culturally responsive and meaningful teaching and learning practices.

## **1.8 Selective Mutism**

I return to Suki's 'diagnoses' in attempting to differentiate between selective mutism and the silent period. What is this condition which was 'tagged' on to Suki?

Afasic (2004) defines selective mutism as referring to children who are able to speak freely in some situations but do not speak in others. The 'problem' presents in school where there are concerns that a child has not spoken for two terms or more (Afasic, 2004, Glossary 6).

The school speech and language therapist who observed Suki described selective mutism as an expressive language or communication disorder, whilst the educational psychologist referred to selective mutism as a psychiatric, anxiety-based condition. Speech Disorder UK (2010) suggests that selective mutism occurs when a child who has



the ability to both speak and understand language fails to use this ability in some settings – the child appears to freeze and be unable to speak.

Afasic UK (2004) provides an introductory ‘picture’ of selective mutism:

- Selective mutism is a relatively rare condition; the best estimate suggests that fewer than one child per thousand is affected.
- Selective mutism is usually reported between the ages of three and five years.
- Girls are affected slightly more frequently than boys.
- Children who come from a bilingual background are slightly more likely to display selective mutism.
- Children with selective mutism are more likely to have other speech and language difficulties than other children.
- The majority of children with selective mutism are of average or above average intelligence, but some show moderate to severe learning difficulties.

What is of particular significance to this enquiry is that not only are bilingual children considered more likely to display selective mutism (Cline and Baldwin, 2004), but that the age at which it is usually reported (between the ages of three and five years) also corresponds with the age at which children usually attend an early years setting such as Suki (Chapter 1.3).

Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke (2000) articulate the silent period as a time when some young children who are learning a new and additional language in a strange environment do not talk, describing the features these children present as:

- Refusal to interact in any way or be included in interactions.
- Initially no use of non-verbal behaviours.
- Reluctance to respond with gestures or eye contact.
- Rejection of interaction with other children or staff.
- Reluctance to speak (may also be in first language).
- Difficulties in settling into the nursery or school.

(Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke 2000, p.49)

The above features described as normal for a young child passing through the silent period are remarkably similar to those characterising selective mutism. Cline and Baldwin (2004) ascribe the higher incidence of selective mutism in bilingual learners to socio-cultural dissonance resulting from the incongruity of belonging to two cultures, and the need to learn a new and unfamiliar language. Perhaps Drury (2007) is nearer the 'truth' when suggesting that silence is a chosen agentive strategy (Chapter 2, paragraph 2.15). Sage and Sluckin (2004) add that a child may feel isolated if there are no children or adults in the class who speak their mother tongue. Perhaps feelings of isolation initiate the spoken word to turn inwards?

Through the 'lens' of a psychologist, Suki appeared to be presenting with a set of 'symptoms' that required 'fixing'. What concerned me at that time (and still does) is why *Suki* was perceived as the 'problem'.

### **1.9 Scope of the Research and the Initial Concern**

The purpose of the research is to:

- Offer a sociocultural perspective on what is being experienced during the silent period (Chapter 2)
- Provide insight into learning through the silent period (Chapter 5)
- Explore the findings in relation to current early years pedagogy (Chapter 6)

But, how, as a white, monolingual adult English speaker, can I interpret silent experiences when unable to share the signs, symbols and tools embodied within the young learner's mother tongue? How can I articulate internalisation of the mother tongue when it is not visible? How can I make the intangible tangible?

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review – Painting the Backdrop**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I provide a ‘landscape’ through which a sociocultural perspective on learning through the silent period can be painted. Having compared learning during the silent period through two lenses, sociocultural and linguistic, it is apparent that a sociocultural lens contributes additional understandings on how a bilingual learner creates meaning through her/his silent experiences.

The literature review searches beneath the layers of a young bilingual learner’s journey as she/he mediates participation from and through culturally appropriated communities to that of the less familiar community of learners in school.

Building upon Vygotsky’s (1978, 1986, 1987) historical understandings of sociocultural theory, Lave and Wenger (1991), Wenger (1998), Rogoff (2003) and Gee (2004) are critically discussed in relation to learning through the silent period.

Sociocultural theorising not only provides the platform through which the evolution of emergent bilingual learning can be presented, but also the thinking that underpins and contextualises ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ as a concept through which to explore silent experiences. ‘Communities of Practice’ is theoretically critiqued alongside mother tongue thinking, in an attempt to contextualise the initial learning trajectory of an emergent bilingual learner as she/he negotiates participation through an early years community of practice.

#### **2.2 The Development of Sociocultural Theory**

Out of a critique of cognitive and empirically based constructivist understandings, the roots of sociocultural learning theory were born. The Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) analysed the pre-existing belief of his contemporary, Jean Piaget (1896-1980), that depicted learning as something that could not precede the universal stages of development. Vygotsky (1978) disagreed and maintained that every function in the child’s cultural development (learning) appeared on two planes – firstly (and most

importantly) on the social level, and secondly, on the individual level. That is, learning between people (interpersonal) *precedes* learning inside the individual (intrapersonal). It was Vygotsky's reinterpretation of learning as *social*, rather than purely *psychological*, that set him apart from the constructivist theory of learning.

Piaget's constructivist theory was considered the norm until Vygotsky's works (published in Russia in the 1960's) were published in the western world in the 1980's. Until then, Piaget's constructivist perspective continued (and continues) to present children's learning as a *process* acquired through transferable skills and knowledge, which are learnt/taught at age appropriate stages of development.

However, one of Piaget's flaws was that he overlooked examining the significance of social and cultural development within learning. Indeed, his results were based mainly upon researching middle-class, white, monolingual children. Consequently, Robbins (2002) argues that, 'the use of a Piagetian framework ignores or dismisses the multitude of influences on their thinking, and treats knowledge as though it is only important when it "belongs" to individuals... From this perspective children will always be viewed as "deficient" in their thinking – particularly if they do not happen to live within the western-world context in which this framework was developed' (Robbins, 2002, p.20). Rogoff (2003, pp.3-4) adds, 'people develop as participants in cultural communities. Their development can be understood only in light of the cultural practices and circumstances of their communities – which also change'. This 'oversight' in Piaget's research may have borne the seeds from which sociocultural learning theory has evolved.

Fleer et al. (2004, p.175) describe research framed from a sociocultural perspective as, 'less about revealing the external child and more about uncovering the historical child'. Consequently, a sociocultural perspective (Fleer et al., 2004) seeks to see *the whole picture* through understanding the social, historical and cultural aspects of children's daily practices.

Rogoff (2003, p.178) explains how sociocultural research accomplishes painting the whole child, when stating, 'the lenses continually move back and forth from the interpersonal to the cultural/institutional'. Rogoff (2003) also interprets this dynamic and evolving cultural context as, 'a glimpse of a moving picture involving the history of



the activities and the transformations towards the future in which people and their communities engage' (Rogoff, 2003, p.60).

Successors of Vygotsky have further refined concepts within sociocultural learning theory, and/or applied these concepts as analytical tools. Lave and Wenger (1991) employed 'Legitimate, Peripheral Participation', Rogoff adopted the 'Three Planes of Analysis' (2003), and Gee (1999) applied his sociocultural understandings of 'Discourse Analysis' to do so. Therefore, Vygotsky's theoretical understandings of learning have not only been actively explored and built upon, but have also provided alternative and multimodal discourses through which to interpret the complexity of early years pedagogy.

Rogoff and Lave (1984) explored sociocultural theories of learning in their research on 'everyday cognition' as a means of understanding differing patterns of 'everyday' learning through practice. This research not only analysed a variety of learning contexts across educational and everyday practices, but also revealed the significance and versatility of thinking processes in adapting to the demands of any given situated activity.

As a result of Lave's (1988) study on 'cognition in practice', Lave defined situated learning less in terms of individual ownership, and more in terms of *shared* ownership, distributed through and across people and practices. Lave and Wenger's (1991) study of 'legitimate peripheral participation' employed 'situated learning' to demonstrate how learning occurs as 'part and parcel' of social relationships embedded in situations of co-participation. Situated learning implies that understandings of the world are developed through participation in a 'community of practice'.

However, from my own professional experience, individualistic 'formal' tasks (such as writing) are often prioritised over collaborative interpersonal practices (such as play) in many reception and year one classes in England.

In place of solely focusing on how the *external culture* impacts on the child (Rogoff, 2003) the sociocultural researcher attempts to reveal the child's learning through the dynamics of an ever evolving cultural context. The knowing of the individual becomes apparent through their relationship(s) within and through the cultural and institutional



context (Siraj-Blatchford, 2003), thus revealing greater insight, meaning and understanding. Hedegaard and Fler (2008) emphasise that to, 'understand children we must be cognisant of the social, cultural and historical practices in which they live and learn. That is, we need to be aware of the *social situation of children's development*' [their emphasis] (2008, p.1).

Sociocultural research by Moll (1992) into community literacy practices presents and connects the significance of sociocultural understandings to effective learning and teaching of bilingual learners:

[I]n studying human beings dynamically, within their social circumstances, in their full complexity, we gain a much more complete and a much more valid understanding of them. We also gain, particularly in the case of minority children, a more positive view of their capabilities and how our pedagogy often constrains, and just as often distorts, what they do and what they are capable of doing. (Moll 1992, p.239.)

If the importance and strengths embedded in the everyday practices of language and action are disregarded in early years settings, opportunities for significant others (such as teachers) to draw upon and harness bilingual learners' valuable resources, their 'funds of knowledge' (Moll, et al. 2005), may be ignored.

## **2.3 Learning**

It is not easy to articulate precisely how Vygotsky was thinking regarding how a young bilingual learner makes meaning, and yet it is apparent that he considered it a normal part of a child's cultural development for the spoken word to turn inward (external speech to internal speech). Vygotsky did not discuss the silent period, nor make explicit that internalisation of the spoken word is a language driven cognitive transformation for the purposes of bilingual learning, and yet there are several pieces of evidence in his writing (1978, 1986) that suggest the creation of thought (mother tongue thinking) may result from this transformative act of internalisation.

Sociocultural theory suggests that learning begins as a 'transformative', 'social' and 'interpersonal' action. Vygotsky (1978) states that, 'First it [the child's cultural

development] appears between people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category... It goes without saying that internalization transforms the process itself and changes its structure and functions' (Vygotsky, 1978, p.57).

It appears that practices (such as speech) are transformed into thought under internalisation (Vygotsky and Luria, 1994).

This notion of internalisation not only serves to confirm the importance of 'inner speech' in a mediatory role, but also in articulating how we, 'project our meanings into the world and then we perceive them as existing in the world, as having a reality of their own.' (Wenger, 1998, p.58.) Internalisation (of the spoken word into thought) appears to be a transformational cognitive action – through its action, learning occurs.

Lave and Wenger (1991) emphasised social interaction and collaboration as the essential components of situated learning, defining people who share in the same situated learning as participating in a shared endeavour within a community of practice. Wenger (1998) asserts that interactive, mutual and reciprocal participation (improvised practice) is facilitated by the sharing of a common language ('language driven') and that working towards a common goal not only moves the community of practice forwards, but also enables further development of the members' identities.

If learning is perceived as 'improvised practice' (Wenger, 1998, p.93) then when a young bilingual learner is observing, listening and copying behaviours of other members of an early years community of practice, she/he is building upon her/his expertise as a fractional participant.

Bruner (1996) (a socio-constructivist) suggested that learning might consist of two separate elements – first, the mind as a computational device (gaining understanding of abstract concepts), and second, (the sociocultural position) formed by and in the use of human culture. However, Wertsch (1991) argued that learning was far more wide-ranging and encompassing than could be implied by the concept 'cognition', thus preferring to re-focus upon understanding the 'mind'.

Interestingly, Lave and Wenger (1991) demonstrate that a culturally situated approach to learning has no need for a dichotomy in understandings of mind, because it is *from and through* participative and collaborative learning that *individual* meaning and learning is located and created. Rogoff (1998) and Wenger (1998) emphasise that because meaning and understanding are enacted in social contexts, a young child's 'understanding must be viewed as transient and fluid' (Fleer and Richardson, 2008, p.140).

Rogoff (1990, 2003) has influenced sociocultural thinking on 'what learning is' by addressing the 'workings of cognition' and reinforcing the significance of the cultural tool of thought. Rogoff's (2003) research revised individualistic understandings of young children's learning to that of collaboratively distributed practices through people in shared endeavours. Rogoff (1998, p.690) presents cognition as something, 'that people move *through* to gain understanding, rather than *to* understanding.'

Learning is thus defined as a rich mix of collaborative contributions within, across and through cultural practices – inventing, borrowing, and modifying practices through the cultural tools of thought and language.

## **2.4 Mediation and Cultural Tools**

Martin (2005, p.143) states that, 'Sociocultural theory places mediation at the centre of the learning relationship'. Mediation articulates the relationship between individuals and social environments as they act upon objects in the world. As such, Keating (2005, p.112) suggests that relationships are mediated by the tools, signs or artefacts which themselves are 'shaped by the social and cultural environments within which these actions are taking place'. Enciso (2007, p.52) refers to the cultural tools such as signs, symbols and objects as the *meditational* means with which transformations of 'ways of being and thinking' are generated.

As sociocultural learning theory views language as a crucial cultural and psychological tool for mediating learning (Vygotsky, 1986), it is therefore central to both thinking and the construction of concepts. According to Kozulin (2003), sociocultural learning theory challenges the individualistic identification of agency and in doing so highlights two key concepts in redefining the position of agency within learning - mediation and



psychological tools. Therefore, within sociocultural theory the use of cultural tools (both material and psychological) is viewed as crucial in the development of understandings. Vygotsky (1986) explained *psychological* tools as those that direct the mind and behaviour, while *technical* (material) tools bring about changes in other objects (Daniels, 2001). Examples of cultural tools might include thought and language, numbering and counting symbols and systems, writing methods, art representations (including drawings), diagrams, maps, and other signs. Not only are they believed to shape and transform the development of mental processes (Cole and Wertsch, 1996) but also to, 'mediate social and individual functioning and connect the external and the internal, the social and the individual' (John-Steiner and Mahn, 1996, p.236).

Mediation acts as a means to appropriate future learning, thus creating a 'chain reaction' between language, communication and learning. Thought and language therefore *resource* the necessary communication, build further cultural resources (learning), and facilitate future learning. There are implications for a young bilingual learner who is unable to call upon her/his spoken mother tongue as a cultural tool with which to mediate understandings of the world. Does mother tongue thinking serve this important role, and does the act of silence mediate mother tongue thinking?

In Hall's (2008) study of the transition from middle childhood to 'teenhood', the position and importance of mediation in relation to developing identity and agency are examined. Drawing upon the works of Wertsch (1991, p.88) to define 'mediated action', Hall (2008) refers to mediated activity as:

[A] term designed to bridge the gap between the person and the social world or socio-historical context in which the person lives... interactions are accomplished by the use of *mediational means* or *cultural tools* ... they are acquired in participation and interaction with others and therefore they are always distributed.

It becomes apparent that there is a complementary duality to mediation. On the one hand there is the role played by others in learning, and on the other that played by psychological, culturally appropriated and internalised tools. Mediation provides the agency for a child to master activities which would be far too challenging to accomplish alone.



It can be seen that sociocultural approaches to learning theory (inspired by Vygotsky) not only lay emphasis upon interpersonal relationships between people, culturally situated contexts and actions, and the importance of the cultural historical in meaning making (Wertsch et al., 1995) but also the *significance* of cultural tools and artefacts. Vygotsky and his contemporaries appear to have redefined learning as a reciprocal process, contextually situated, guided in participation by others and *mediated* through shared cultural tools and artefacts. Fundamental to this research is an articulation of how silence mediates a young bilingual learner's access to participation.

Geertz (1973, p.5) described culture as, 'located in the minds and hearts of people who are at the same time actors and creators of social interactions' (cited in Gregory, 2002, p.7). Does Nicole (the pre-school leader) play the crucial role of creator of social interactions (Sylva et al., 2004)? Mediating the movement of one culture through another draws upon sociocultural understandings, which may not be apparent to all practitioners/teachers. Cole (1998) refers to the need to document the crucial role of mediators like Nicole in different contexts, such as the early years environment, so that new and existing practices (sharing of commonalities) come together. But is this crucial role in mediation understood by practitioners?

According to Crawford (1996), Vygotsky focused upon *thought* and the *connections* between people and the sociocultural context in which they interacted in shared experiences, most commonly termed the 'Zone of Proximal Development'.

## **2.5 ZPD, Guided Participation and Synergy**

Vygotsky presented the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as a *connecting* concept which articulates the 'space' within which a child is currently learning, and her/his potential learning capability when 'bridged' through active support (Wood et al., 1976) in collaboration with a knowledgeable other(s) and/or capable peers.

Within the ZPD the cultural tools of thought and language act as 'key players' as a means of *connecting* through the use of culturally mediated tools. Bruner et al. (1976) applied the term 'scaffolding' to the 'supportive' role of a 'knowledgeable' *other* in mediating learning across and through the ZPD. As with many sociocultural concepts,

over a relatively short period of time they have been adopted, redefined and reapplied through the development in the thinking of many contemporary researchers.

Rogoff's (1990) research into situated learning through engagement in 'peripheral participation' resulted from the reworking of Vygotsky's ZDP, in relation to the pivotal role of 'guided participation' (apprenticeship and mastery) between children and adults (apprentice and master) in children's learning. Rogoff (1995) attempted to reinterpret scaffolding by looking beyond purely educational settings, and established three mutually responsive aspects to mediation – apprenticeship, guided participation and appropriation. Rogoff (2003) drew the conclusion that guided participation (rather than mediation of learning) both in schools and any given community was essential for human learning and development.

Concerned that 'guided participation' might suggest an unequal partnership, Gregory's (2001) ethnographic study (of siblings playing and working together) speaks of a reciprocal experience – 'synergy'. Gregory (2010, p.165-6), in her cross-generational study, applies the terms 'synergy' and 'syncretic learning' to describe bilingual learners creating new ways of meaning making through *blending* known and new cultural repertoires together – a transformative process, which creates new cross-cultural understandings. Fler's (2002) study on assessment in the early years adopts the term, 'assessing beyond the actual and into the potential' to articulate the crucial role of *mediation* in the learning process of young children.

## 2.6 Situated Learning

'Learning traditionally gets measured on the assumption that it is a possession of individuals that can be found inside their heads...learning is in the relationships between people...in the conditions that bring people together and organize a point of contact that allows for particular pieces of information to take on relevance; without the points of contact, without the system of relevancies, there is no learning, and there is little memory. Learning does not belong to individual persons, but to the various conversations of which they are a part.' McDermott (1999, quoted in Murphy, 1999, p.17)

Returning briefly to the constructivist theory of learning, which focuses predominantly on (McCormick and Murphy, 2008, p.5) ‘individual internalisation of knowledge’, there is still need for change if learning is to be perceived, ‘...as a process of participation in cultural activity.’ In the re-examination of meaning making through participatory culturally appropriated activity, ‘situated learning’ is fundamental. Thus, rather than learning being considered as, ‘...a process of transfer of knowledge from the knowledgeable to the less knowledgeable’ (McCormick and Murphy, 2008, p.5); meaning making is redefined as a distributed, rather than individualistic, concept.

Barton and Trusting (2005) emphasised the importance of context in thinking when presenting a range of learning practices both in and outside formal learning environments – these included the work place, skiing and shopping. Lave (1988) developed these ideas further by demonstrating that the position of practice within learning is not only central and fundamental, but also *distributed between people* (Barton and Trusting, 2005, p.4).

The concept ‘distributed knowledge’ may need to be considered in relation to a silent young bilingual learner’s meaning making, because the opportunities for engagement in culturally authentic activity may be severely limited in early years settings when the practices operate through white, middle-class, monolingual, mono-cultural and mono-faith discourses. In these situations (which are not uncommon), negotiating participation in the early years community of practice will take longer for the emergent bilingual learner, as she/he may not feel able to contribute to, and/or access, distributed knowledge.

Gee (2005) suggests that learning, which is considered as essential to any cultural group’s survival, should be learnt as a situated, cultural process taught through copying modelled practices by a more knowledgeable other (Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990). Gee (2005) employs ‘everyday cooking’ as an example of a culturally situated learning activity where the learner not only learns through seeing, but also through taking an active part in problem solving – because the learning is culturally situated. Gee (2005) adds that if a cultural group was only taught cooking via the academic language of instruction in schools, then survival of the community would be placed at risk.



For example, a community of biologists or chemists utilise the benefits of culturally situated learning to gain an understanding of the 'facts' of their particular community of learners. The facts in the text book are used as tools to support their situated learning activities: experiments, using microscopes, dissecting etc. The learner who is copying the situated activity (for example, by participating in dissection or an experiment) needs active participation. One would assume that the academic language of instruction (English) is to be comprehensible to all the participants of the learning community for learning to occur. A silent young bilingual learner (to whom the academic language may be incomprehensible) is reliant on situated and culturally embedded practice (including her/his mother tongue) to mediate her/his learning.

## **2.7 Communities of Practice**

A belief that learning is social and comes largely from experience of participating in daily life formed the basis of a significant rethinking of learning theory in the late 1980's and early 1990's by two researchers from very different disciplines – Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger. In their study of situated learning (1991), Lave (anthropologist) and Wenger (social theorist) presented a move in emphasis to that of practice being situated within communities, based on the premise (Dysthe and Engelson, 2008, p.107) that situated learning is, 'a process of enculturation into a community of practice'.

Their model of situated learning proposed that learning involved a process of engagement in a 'community of practice' (Wenger, 1998, p.3) with the belief that learning occurred 'in the context of our lived experience of participation in the world'.

The basic argument made by Lave and Wenger (1998) is that communities of practice (CoPs) are everywhere and that we are generally involved in a number of them – whether that is at work, school, home, or in our civic and leisure interests. In some groups we might be core members, whilst in others we are marginal – on the periphery of the community.

The concept 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 1998) serves as a useful conceptual tool with which to situate learning which Lave and Wenger (1991, p.49) perceive as, 'increasing participation in communities of practice... an evolving, continuously renewed set of relations'.

Wenger's (1998) identification of 'Communities of Practice' (CoPs) as a central theoretical concept with which to make meaning reflects many of Vygotsky's key theoretical sociocultural understandings of learning, and Lave's (1988, 1991) anthropological insights into situated learning.

Fleer and Richardson (2008, p.141) discuss how learning is 'more than an individual construction...Ideas are socially constructed and reside not in individuals but are constituted in collectives, such as a particular community of practice'.

Smith (2009) articulated that CoPs are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. CoPs are formed by people who engage in learning collectively as a shared endeavour, such as a tribe learning to hunt, a band making music together, or a group of school children defining their identity together.

Although the characteristics of CoPs may appear to vary, none the less, members are brought together by joining in common activities and by, 'what they have learned through mutual engagement in these activities' (Wenger, 1998). In this respect, a community of practice is different from a community of interest or a geographical community in that it involves a *shared practice*.

Lave and Wenger (1991) re-examined perspectives on cultural development through researching how meaning, communities and identity, are emphasised as social interaction and collaboration - essential components of situated learning. Using examples from observations of 'apprenticeships' (Lave and Wenger, 1991) to illustrate his theory, Wenger (1998) defined people who are sharing in the same situated learning as participating in a CoP. The model describes how 'newcomers' who are initially on the periphery of the CoP gradually move to the centre, as they become more competent masters and 'inherit' the same knowledge as the central members of the CoP - 'old timers'. The reader must 'hold on' to the notion of 'newcomers situated on the periphery of a CoP'.

Wenger (1998) confirms the importance of participating in a CoP through interactive, mutual and reciprocal practices which are facilitated by the sharing of *a common language* – participation is therefore 'language driven'. The significance of learning

being language driven will become clearer as the research progresses. Wenger (1998) also asserts that the interactive process of working towards a common goal *changes the dynamics* of the CoP and moves it on – enabling it, and the participants, to evolve. This suggests that the CoP (through the sharing of a common language) is a transformational learning environment.

CoPs may initially present as a possible theorizing concept for interpreting bilingual learning during the silent period – bilingual meaning making may be achieved through participating members distributing shared knowledge.

However, two questions surface in relation to adoption of CoPs as an exploratory lens. Firstly, if a CoP is essentially language driven (members share a common language), how can a young bilingual learner gain membership of an early years CoP when the language of instruction is not the mother tongue? This suggests that participation is mediated through thought (internalisation of the spoken word) and other culturally shared communication practices?

Wenger (1998, p.7) affirms that CoPs are not only an integral part of our daily lives, ‘so informal and persuasive that they rarely come into specific focus, but also quite familiar’, defined by groupings of people who are drawn together for a common purpose.

CoPs are characterised as having three fundamental elements:

- Mutual engagement – they interact with each other.
- Joint enterprise – they have a common endeavour.
- Shared repertoires – they have common resources of language, styles and routines with which to express their identities as members of that group (e.g. actions, stories and artefacts).

Implicit in these characteristics (though not explicit) is the assumption that CoPs also encompass, ‘an ideologically laden set of beliefs, actions, and assumptions’ (Lewis et al. 2007, p. xv).



If shared beliefs, actions and cultural tools are essential mediators of learning, what happens when an emergent bilingual learner attempts participation in a CoP where the cultural tools are not shared? How is participation accessed? Is there an expectation that participants share common histories of participation and common anticipated experiences? Does silence play a part in gaining participation?

Because participation in a CoP is based on mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire, early years CoPs may at times be potential sources of ‘conflict and disjuncture between participants’ (Rogers and Fuller, 2007, p.80). Gee (2004) suggests that the term ‘community’ may lead to participation being contended in relation to decision making on membership and boundaries which may appear to newcomers as immovable. Adopting Gee’s (2004, p.78) position, it remains questionable whether children in an early years CoP should be considered as belonging to a given community of practice on the sole premise that they are contained within the same four walls.

Whilst there is much discussion to be had over who is in, who is out, how far in and out of any given CoP, it is worth considering whether such action of ‘disharmony’ might actually open up spaces to peripheral members – newcomers with differing histories of participation. This opens up the possibility of silence acting as a meditational tool through which the practices of an early years CoP are reinforced.

Indeed, Wenger (1998) utilises the concept of participation to articulate aspects of action and connection that encompass all forms of activity and relationships, such as ‘doing’, ‘talking’, ‘thinking’, ‘feeling’ and ‘belonging’. Dysthe and Engelsen (2008, p.107) not only describe participation as collaborative and social, but also as a personal activity, including both conflictual and competitive elements. Without the ability to communicate verbally within the early years CoP, is it possible that the emergent bilingual learner adopts an alternative means to gain a sense of belonging?

Engagement in participatory practice, not only mediates new understandings of the world, but also of developing identities. Harrison et al. (2010) discuss how cultural tools are used to, ‘modify and transform social discourse in ways which produce a kaleidoscope of new identities for new contexts, new circumstances and new purposes...Each identity is always provisional and subject to revision, and each consists of a complex interweaving of multiple discourses’ (Harrison et al., 2010, p.96).

Whilst Lave's (1988) concept 'situated learning' does not articulate understandings of abstract or de-contextualised learning outside of a CoP, Lave and Wenger (1991) have built upon current understandings of meaning making via an exploration into how *abstract learning* takes place between participants within situated learning contexts. What Wenger (1998) claims is that inherent in all CoPs is the co-construction of knowledge and that practice is formulated via a group of individuals with common goals and shared understandings, thus suggesting that abstract and de-contextualised learning is also dependent upon CoPs.

## **2.8 Let's Get More Positive About the Term 'Lurker' - LPP**

The McDonald et al. (2003, p.1) project, 'Let's get more positive about the term "lurker"' explored the meaning of 'legitimate peripheral participants' in a CoP. The participants in the project reflected on the positive connotations of legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) in view of the negative sense captured in the term 'lurker'.

This idea is referred to by Wenger (1998) as a legitimate role for members. The project participants considered the positive perception of LPP in relation to negative connotations implied by the term 'lurking' – where participants are viewed as non-contributors and a source of frustration by visibly active participants. In contrast, lurking is viewed by MacDonald et al. (2003, p.1) as a form of apprenticeship aligned to legitimate peripheral participation in CoPs.

Although the 'lurker' project (2003) was aimed at engagement in online communities, it has relevance for our discussions on the experiences of an outsider (novice member), especially when the novice might be a three-year-old bilingual learner who cannot speak the language of instruction, and whose shared linguistic and cultural practices remain unrecognised within the early years CoP.

Wenger (1998, p.52) describes, 'human engagement in the world' as 'a process of negotiation of meaning', suggesting that it is through engagement with the concepts of participation and reification that negotiation of meaning (learning) takes place. He adopts the term 'participation' when referring to action and connection within a social community. 'It is in this interplay between participation and reification that negotiation

of meaning takes place... Participation in meaning making always implies reifications and vice versa.' (Wenger, 1998, p.39)

What is central in this descriptive account of peripheral participation is the definition of learning. Unlike compartmentalised ideas of learning, Wenger (1998) intentionally keeps an open mind to the nature of learning. It is not a matter of learning a 'something'. It is more the case of learning being *transformative* – recreating the learner.

However, being transformative and recreating the learner may appear as risky propositions for an emergent bilingual learner to 'take on board' – to expose oneself to an unknown. Therefore, Lave and Wenger (1991) provide a notional 'safe haven' where this transformation occurs, which they name 'legitimate peripheral participation'.

Legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) is the term Lave and Wenger (1991) use to articulate:

[T]he relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artefacts, and communities of knowledge and practice. A person's intentions to learn are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a sociocultural practice... (1991, p.29).

Although, 'in cognitive and educational research the use of apprenticeship was largely metaphorical' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.31), learning is, none the less, located in a social context, moving from that of apprenticeship to situated learning and, ultimately, to peripheral participation. As such the individual is moved from the role of, 'learner to learning as participation in the social world' (1991, p.43).

It can be seen that LPP differs from Rogoff's (2003) notion of guided participation. Guided participation creates a picture in one's mind of a child receiving support from an elder (possibly their mother, grandparent or older sibling). The picture painted is of a child learning 'something' with the 'teacher' acting in a supportive modelling role. 'Guided participation' (Rogoff, 2003) aligns more with Bruner's (1986) idea of



scaffolding: ‘something is being learnt, and the more capable other is guiding the learner in mastering the “something”’.

Lave and Wenger (1991) define LPP as, ‘not itself an educational form, much less a pedagogical strategy or a teaching technique... learning through legitimate peripheral participation takes place no matter which educational form provides a context for learning, or whether there is any intentional educational for at all.’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.40.)

LPP does not demand that a ‘something’ is to be learnt. LPP is a means of ‘becoming’ and gaining new ways of knowing. There is no test to mark or picture to be drawn. Within LPP *the taking part* is the learning. A ‘deal’ is made between the emergent bilingual learner and the CoP – when you begin to contribute to the CoP, you can share in our abundant resources.

Thus, Lave and Wenger (1991) consider that legitimate peripheral participants join CoPs as a means through which to gain mastery of the community’s knowledge and participation in its practices. These skills enable newcomers (over time) to move toward fuller participation in the practices of a community (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.29). Through LPP newcomers can observe the ‘what and how’ of masters and old-timers – as they move fractionally forward.

Consequently, the novice does not have to worry that she/he cannot ‘read the rules in the book’ (academic language) or speak the dominant discourse (English) of the early years CoP because she/he gains entrance through non-pressured participation. One means to describe LPP is through imagining a Spanish holiday advertisement, ‘Come to this location, and enjoy the warmth, scenery and the fruits of the locality’. The by-product of the holiday is that whilst relaxing and ‘soaking up’ the sunshine, you may also be learning the local language and contributing to the increased tourist custom and economic growth of the location.

There is also a duality of meaning to LPP. Whilst the young bilingual learner ‘settles’ into the new learning environment without fearing the consequences of errors, she/he can also legitimately risk take, test the water and trial the practices of the CoP. Whilst silently participating from the safe keeping of the ‘look-out post’ (LPP), she/he

contributes to the CoP – contributing to and distributing meaning making through the participating members.

Improvised practice (practising practices) appears to be significant during the movement from peripheral to fuller participation. Lave and Wenger (1991, p.93) suggest that, 'Learning itself is an improvised practice' Indeed the role of participation by Lave and Wenger (1991) is viewed as crucial to learning, which is anchored on, 'situated negotiation and renegotiation of meaning in the world' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.52).

It is this very acceptance of the new and the unknown within LPP that leads to the transformation of practices. No one is concerned whether she/he is or is not performing the correct 'dance steps'. It does not matter if she/he misses a beat, because it is the 'practising of practices' and the 'participating in participation' that leads to transformation. To clarify, if every 'movement' were only to be judged by output (end product) there is mounting pressure placed upon the performance of the participator – to 'get it right'. There is no 'get out clause' for the participant. In contrast, LPP mediates learning without requiring the reification of a 'something'.

Perhaps LPP equates to becoming a member of a circus community, in which a newcomer might be expected to observe others' practices (e.g. walking the tightrope or as a performing clown) without being obliged to do likewise. However, she/he is still contributing – by selling popcorn or entry tickets, or even constructing the 'big top'. However, if and when she/he wishes to participate, she/he can do so when ready – safe in the knowledge that the safety net is securely in place. Selling the programmes is as important as the acrobatics' show in the smooth running of the circus, because these practices all contribute towards the shared endeavour of the circus.

Each member of the CoP is participating, but does every member be actively engage with a newcomer? Because practice is a shared enterprise, the newcomer can decide whether she/he wants to actively engage with 'old timers', but if her/his attempts at active participation fail, then the 'default mechanism' comes into play – LPP acts as a 'safety net' for the newcomer. Social relationships therefore appear as pivotal, not only for continuity of the CoP, but also to LPP. Without social engagement there is no LPP – it just isn't there. A 'CoP' without social engagement is devoid of LPP – leaving a newcomer in isolation.

From a sociocultural perspective, learners in LPP do not need structures or models to understand the world because (within the CoP) they 'participate in frameworks that have structure' (Wenger, 1999, p.4). Learning through LPP involves *fractional* participation that is, 'a more encompassing process of being active participants in the *practices* of social communities and constructing *identities* in relation to these communities' (Wenger 1999, p.4).

Silent participation through LPP appears as more subtle and fluid than participatory activities that rely upon the spoken word. However, without an understanding of emergent bilingual learning and the significance of LPP, it may be impossible for teachers/practitioners to identify the multiplicity of practices of a silent young bilingual learner, who draws upon mother tongue thinking to practice the practices within and through the early years CoP.

## **2.9 What is Happening?**

Lave and Wenger (1991) illustrate their thinking on situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) through observations of different apprenticeships (Yucatec midwives, Vai and Gola tailors, US Navy quartermasters, meat-cutters, and non-drinking alcoholics in Alcoholics Anonymous). Their research reveals how individuals join communities of practice (CoPs) and initially learn peripherally (in LPP) with some 'tasks' (practices) being less or more key to the developing community than others.

As they become more competent members they become more involved in the main processes of the particular community. They move fractionally from LPP to fuller participation (Lave and Wenger 1991, p.37). Learning is, thus, not necessarily seen as the acquisition of a something (knowledge) by individuals as much as that of *social participation*. The nature of the *situation* impacts significantly on learning. Again, your attention is drawn to the 'something'. In LPP there is not necessarily (although there may be) an end product (concrete reification) as evidence to demonstrate that learning has taken place.

As an example, imagine that I am a relatively novice researcher on the periphery of joining a CoP called 'Early Years Bilingual Learning'. To become a member of this



community it is necessary to participate in the practices of the community. So, I begin to attend conferences, whilst continuing with my studies. In doing so, I bring all my prior experiences to the task of a specialist researcher, which is built upon during and before the course of my studies.

In addition I engage in reading, writing and sharing thoughts on bilingualism in the early years with my supervisor(s). Over time I begin to present papers and contribute to a book chapter. Engagement in these practices does not ‘happen overnight’. I move cautiously and fractionally from the periphery of participation, as and when I feel capable and willing. This legitimised peripheral engagement ‘moves me on’ in my thinking – it plays its part in developing my identity – from that of a novice researcher to one who begins to contribute to a shared body of knowledge within the CoP.

If LPP facilitates learning (Wenger 1998) as a transformative action, then it may also be interconnected with identity formation, learning to speak, act and improvise (Lave and Wenger, 1991) in ways that ‘make sense’ within the CoP. LPP as a means to fractionally increase participation, ‘in communities of practice concerns the whole person acting in the world’ (Lave and Wenger 1991, pp.49-50). The focus is therefore on the ways in which LPP is ‘an evolving, continuously renewed set of relations’ (ibid., p.50). The act of social engagement is transformative, bringing rewards through developing agentive identities. Lurking in LPP offers the silent young bilingual learner this, plus much more – it provides a ‘safe haven’ through which to learn.

## **2.10 Reification**

Wenger (1998) uses the term ‘reification’ both to define the ‘concrete’ result of, and the visible by-products of, participatory meaning making (learning). Reification is employed to ‘make real/tangible’ the transformation of an abstract (concept) into something concrete – a visible by-product and/or result. For example, when early years teachers/practitioners are completing their weekly planning sheets, the ‘planning sheet’ is the reification of participatory thinking. Hence, the planning *meeting* is an example of participatory reification. Likewise, a meeting and/or policy (by/end products) may reify issues surrounding a school’s race equality.

A silent young bilingual learner is involved in the process of reification when designing, making and representing within any given participatory activity. However, she/he may be unable initially to produce a reified 'product' due to the spoken language within the early years CoP being either unfamiliar or inaccessible to her/him. The emergent bilingual learner cannot speak the language of instruction, nor understand the writing system. However, despite these apparent barriers to learning, Wenger (1998) emphasises that the constant negotiation of meanings (through mother tongue thought) modifies and reifies participation in practice both within the individual and the early years CoP – learning takes place.

It is apparent that Wenger's interpretation of reification not only acts as a means through which an abstract notion becomes 'real', but also a means through which a young bilingual learner can project her/his silence as she/he learns through LPP. In fact, Wenger states, 'Reification can take a great many forms... a telling glance or a *long silence*...their character as reification is not only in their form but also in the processes by which they are integrated into these practices.' [my emphasis] (1998, pp.60-61.)

However, Wenger also reveals some inherent 'dangers' (1998, p.61) in the misinterpretation of reification. For instance, an early years teacher/practitioner may not understand the significance of reification as a transformative action, and mistakenly view 'end products' (planning sheets) as more important than the thinking and discussions which precede the end result.

There may be a risk that when transferred into the context of a classroom the distinctions between the by/end product (reification) and transformational learning may become too close (Dysthe and Engelsen, 2008, p.107) and indistinct. For example, a teacher/practitioner assessing written work may overlook developing concepts (evolving reification) whilst seeking out the end product – the completed written work.

## **2.11 Linguistic Perspectives on Second Language Acquisition**

In chapter one the value of differing theoretical perspectives on bilingual learning were discussed in an attempt to offer unique insights and understandings into the silent experiences of a young bilingual learner. The application of a sociocultural perspective

was seen to contribute a richer layer to current understandings of ‘second language acquisition’ (SLA) during the silent period.

O’ Malley and Chamot’s (1990) research into the development of SLA suggests that prior to 1981 there was very little SLA theory apart from that of behaviourism (Skinner, 1954) based upon repetition/memory/strategies to guide SLA studies. Chomsky (an authority in SLA) moved SLA thinking forward through emphasising cognitive influences within language acquisition processes. Chomsky’s model of SLA advised that biological and cognitive development were to be considered equally and that SLA was an instinctive ‘process’ aligned (Chomsky, 1977, p.98) to a *critical* age/stage at which learning ‘fits’ with overall development.

Chomsky confirms his position on the unification of cognition with language development in the following (Rieber, 1983) interview extract:

QUESTION... define how you use the term "cognition" as opposed to the term “language.”

CHOMSKY... cognition is an overall term that includes every system of belief, knowledge, understanding, interpretation, perception, and so on. Language is just one of many systems that interact to form our whole complex of cognitive structures... I don’t believe that one can think of ‘cognition’ as a unitary phenomenon.

Chomsky (1955) challenged behaviourism with his (then) fresh SLA perspective, stating that SLA, ‘involves producing further language within the parameters of the social context where the language takes place is being shared, and within the limits of our natural capabilities (Chomsky, 1955, p.114). This new means to theorise SLA and examine an individual’s mental processing of linguistic information partnered well with the cognitive and developmental thinking of Piaget (1972b). Consequently, Chomsky’s (1955, p.113) theory of linguistics is still widely recognised as a transformative movement in SLA.

Consequently, information-processing models of learning served to explain the ‘mechanisms’ by which the mind acquires and stores new information. Linguists would agree that processes act as mediators between teaching and learning in so much as the



quality and quantity of any learning experience will be determined by the degree of cognitive processing the learner engages in and the effective employment of appropriate strategies to enhance and develop these processes (Pérez, 1993, cited in Beltrán, 1997). Learning strategies are therefore perceived by linguists as a means by which bilingual learners can process, store, retrieve and employ information.

Strategies are seen as the tools necessary for developing bilingual communicative ability and commonly segmented (Bialystok, 1990; McDonough, 1995) into three identifiable strands:

- Cognitive – directly involved in SLA.
- Metacognitive – learning necessary skills for the learning activity.
- Social-affective – interacting with another to assist learning a task.

These strands are then broken down into further strategies (O'Malley et al., 1985, 1990) including:

- Imitating other people's speech overtly or silently.
- Responding physically.
- Using the first language as a basis for understanding and/or producing the L2.
- Visualising information for memory storage.
- Auditory representation: keeping a sound or sound sequence in the mind.
- Relating new information to other concepts in memory.

This breaking down of strategies into tasks and skills demonstrates the 'chunking' of SLA, into 'processed', digestible pieces. However, in attempting to 'streamline' SLA, the complexity, messiness and synthesis within emergent bilingual learning may be inadvertently overlooked.

Krashen, a notable linguist, introduced 'the social' to SLA theorising (Krashen, 1987). Krashen developed an SLA theory based on the "Natural Order" hypothesis of SLA (Krashen, 1987, p.12), defining the acquisition of a new language based upon a 'process' in which social and cognitive elements are *acquired* and *learned* independently through individual performance. According to Krashen's thinking, *acquired* language is learned as a 'natural' consequence of exposure to informal

conversations, whereas *learned* language is gained through academic formal teaching. In contrast to sociocultural thinking, both Krashen (1987) and Chomsky (1977) agree that acquired (cognitively-based) language learning is aligned to stages in human development, with SLA occurring ‘naturally’ alongside other developmental processes.

However, the 1990’s were privy to many new thoughts arising within SLA research in relation to highly influential factors impacting upon language acquisition, including those of a ‘social, cultural, race, power and political’ (Cummins, 1996) nature. These factors have also raised understandings, and the status, of the mother tongue within SLA research.

However, during the 1980’s and 1990’s there was little research directed upon the silent period, with Saville-Troike’s (1988) study on the role of silence within private speech being an exception.

## **2.12 Sociocultural Influences on SLA**

Although linguists may acknowledge that social and cultural issues surrounding race, class, power and politics may impact on bilingual learning in the early years, learning an additional language is still commonly perceived as an intrapersonal, cognitive and sequential *process*, as demonstrated in the learning of ‘linguistic codes’ which are represented in telegraphic and formulaic speech production, sometimes referred to as developmental, additive bilingualism (Genesee, 1994).

Linguists such as Duranti (2001, 2004) attempt to uncover, describe and model (theorise) the *systems* behind language through linguistic systems, structures and functions, and in doing so choose to explore the systems within and between sound, meaning and grammar, or/and the evolution of language, children’s SLA, speech and language disorders etc. This perspective continues to fit with the (cognitively and developmentally based) Chomsky (1977) and Krashen (1987) models of *acquiring* language.

In realising the significance of *language* in social and cultural life (Heath, 1983), sociolinguists have also begun to appreciate the rich layering that a sociocultural perspective can add to SLA theorising/bilingual learning, including the significance of

mediation in (shared and distributed) culturally appropriated practices (Conteh et al., 2007), with language being one of the mediated tools for learning.

Coyle and Vancarcel (2002) discuss the important influence of sociocultural factors as highlighted in Wong Fillmore's (1982) study of five young Mexican children, learning English at school in the United States. Having been paired with 'native-speaking' children their interactions were recorded regularly over nine months. Wong Fillmore (1982) highlighted the cognitive and social strategies employed by children who appeared to improve their communicative abilities. Learning the language was their means of establishing friendships in class. The findings revealed that *motivation* to engage with others (who spoke the dominant discourse) resulted in increased learning, rather than the applied SLA strategies.

Following a request in the 'Modern Language Journal' (Long, 1993) for researchers to reduce the expanse of perspectives on SLA, sociocultural approaches gained in number, as linguists reconsidered their theoretical positions (Firth, 2007).

Hence, since the 1990's linguists have not only begun to question how and why language changes over time, but the relationship between language, culture and society. This has resulted in a gradual move away from applied linguistics to a more integrated 'social and cultural' approach to the study of SLA – sociolinguistics. The term has grown in use to refer to the 'interdisciplinary field concerned with the intersection of language, culture, and society' (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005, p.586). However, sociolinguistics speak in terms of how 'linguistic, social and cognitive factors' (Hellermann, 2008) impact upon *language acquisition*, rather than seeking sociocultural understandings *through bilingual learning*.

However, studies based upon acceptance of the 'social-affective' and 'acquired' (Krashen, 1987) strategies for language learning continue to contribute to the evolution of SLA. Gravelle (2005) acknowledges that children learning SLA, 'have social and cognitive competencies that are connected with their use of different languages in different contexts.

Early years pedagogy which formerly discussed language learning through a developmental approach has begun to acknowledge not only that social and cultural



factors influence language learning, but also the sociocultural theorising of bilingual learning. Green and Hill (2005) discuss how young children attempt to make sense of the world and interpret ‘happenings’ around them via the dominant discourses in their culture. Mac Naughton et al. (2001) adds, ‘language is much more than just a window on a world that exists independently of it. Instead, language creates our social world.’

### **2.13 Language Development Through the Mother Tongue**

Cummins’ (1984) SLA thinking theory on language proficiency developed further the concepts of ‘acquired’ and ‘learnt’ language (Krashen, 1987).

Cummins (1981) studied non-English-speaking Canadian bilingual learners aged between four and sixteen years who had been taught in English since arriving in the USA. His findings led Cummins to make a distinction between two kinds of language proficiency – ‘Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills’ (BICS) and ‘Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency’ (CALP).

However, Cummins later used these terms cautiously (Baker, 1993) as he was concerned that BICS and CALP might risk being over-simplified and misused, thus stereotyping the language proficiency of bilingual learners. Consequently, Cummins (1984) addressed this problem through a theoretical framework which embeds BICS and CALP within a larger theory of Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP).

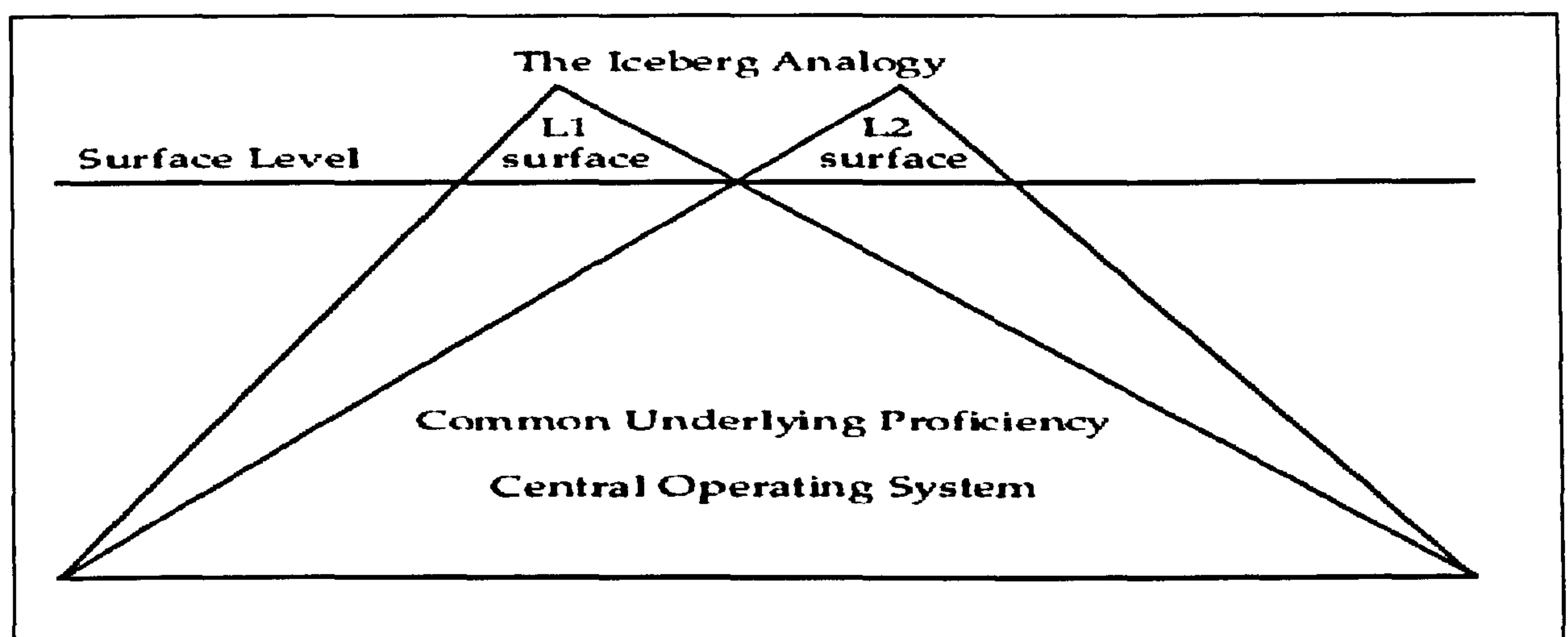
BICS refers to the ‘surface’ skills of listening and speaking which young children learn through ‘playful’ social participation with mother tongue speakers – spoken language required for informal communication. As BICS is context-embedded it is supported through the signs and other non-verbal cues of the listener. Cummins (1984) and Collier (1987) suggest that bilingual learners may take one to three years to develop BICS.

CALP is the necessary knowledge/skills required for a child to work academically in the classroom – the ability to think in and use a language as an academic tool for learning. Whilst many children develop bilingual fluency (BICS) within two years of ‘immersion’ in the dominant language, it may take up to seven years for a child to be working as an *academic* equal. Indeed, bilingual learners who do not have strong mother tongue fluency may take up to ten years to acquire CALP. This may be

exacerbated by a lack of opportunities available for use of non-verbal clues, group interaction, situated academic language and shared cultural/linguistic understanding. Cummins confirms the importance of drawing upon mother tongue understandings in learning an additional language.

CUP is the 'base-line', mother tongue 'anchor' that leads to further learning of and through other language(s). Cummins' CUP 'Dual Iceberg' model of bilingualism (Cummins, 1980, p.36, 1996, p.111) is represented in the form of two icebergs (Figure 1) which are separate above the surface. Two languages are visibly different in outward conversation, enabling the bilingual learner (Baker and Jones, 1998, p.82) to, 'function in two or more languages with relative ease'.

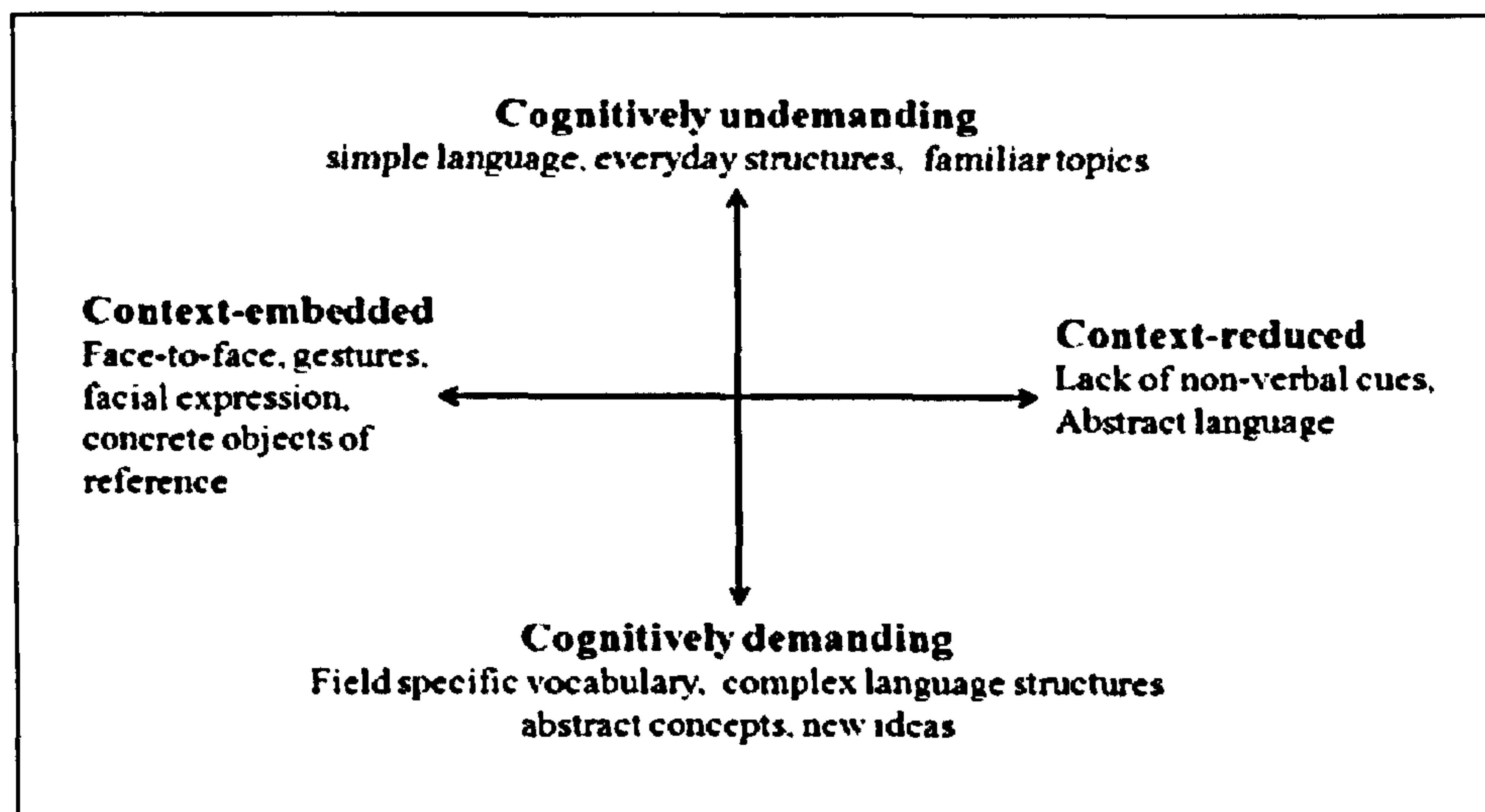
Underneath the surface, the two icebergs are fused so that the two languages do not function separately. Baker (1996, p.147) states, 'When a person owns two or more languages, there is one integrated source of thought.' This is due to both languages operating through the same 'central system' – the mother tongue. Cummins (2000) emphasises that continual development of mother tongue competence is integral to the learning of other languages.



**Figure 1: Cummins' CUP 'Dual Iceberg' Model of Bilingualism**

Figure 2 (Cummins, 1984, p.139) presents a four-part diagram that demonstrates the distinctions between BICS and CALP. A continuum of language ability tasks is determined by the communication context and the amount of support provided along the other continuum from context-embedded to context-reduced. A context-embedded task

is one in which a range of visual and/or oral cues are available to support bilingual learning. A context-reduced task (such as teacher-led assemblies) is one in which the dominant spoken language (English) is the sole resource for bilingual learning, with no context supporting cues available.



**Figure 2: Cummins' Four-Part Distinctions Between BICS and CALP**

Although the EYFS (2007) is based on learning through participative play, there may be situations such as assembly or registration when teaching is context-reduced. EY teachers/practitioners aware of the significance of Cummin's (1984, p.139) model and the importance of supporting mother tongue learning, might choose to modify their teaching and resource CALP through additional context-embedded teaching and learning opportunities.

Cummins' (1994) research supports 'additive bilingualism' in which the mother tongue flourishes simultaneously alongside both shared cultural understandings and the additional learned language(s). In contrast, 'subtractive bilingualism' arises when the unfamiliar, additional language(s) is/are learnt at *the expense of the mother tongue* and known cultural understandings. Cummins (1994) highlights that in additive bilingual environments, children succeed.

## 2.14 Colours of Mother Tongue Thinking

'The speech structures mastered by the child become the basic structures of his thinking' (Vygotsky, 1986, p.94).



Throughout this research I refer to the significance of ‘mother tongue thinking’ throughout the silent period. However, this proves a difficult and ‘hazy’ concept to articulate and demonstrate, because thinking cannot be seen or heard. I therefore draw upon Vygotsky (1986) to support the theorising that underpins my interpretation of this complex and transformative action.

Parents, siblings and other family members across generations (Gregory et al., 2010) introduce language through the medium of the mother tongue, which builds upon and serves as a cultural tool for distributed social participation. Thus, the mother tongue is an instrument of social relations which is transformed within internal cognition (internalised) as thought. To clarify, the spoken word (mother tongue) is transformed into and internalised as mother tongue thought.

Vygotsky (1978) describes the process of internalisation of the spoken word as, ‘a series of transformations: An operation that initially represents an external activity is reconstructed and begins to occur internally... An interpersonal process is transformed into an intrapersonal one.’ (Vygotsky, 1978, p.56.) According to Vygotsky, thought, being one of a human’s ‘higher’ cognitive activities, is dependent on speech. Speech and thought (both social in origin) develop interpersonally, and are involved in facilitating participation through social activities.

When Vygotsky (1981b) describes how internalisation transforms the external into the internal, he is attempting to explain the changing structure and functions of learning (as the spoken word becomes thought. It is at this point that thinking might be perceived as the result of internalisation of the spoken word. The spoken mother tongue appears to resource mother tongue thinking through this transformative cognitive action.

Interestingly, a predecessor of Vygotsky (Mead, 1962) provides a pragmatic focus upon social interaction that enriches Vygotsky’s thinking. Mead suggested that, ‘internalisation in our experience of the external *conversation of gestures*... [in the social process] is the essence of thinking’ [my emphasis] (Mead 1962, p.47). The term ‘conversation of gestures’ implies that internalisation is mediated through a multiplicity of non-verbal practices. Perhaps internalisation of the spoken mother tongue is accompanied by a complexity of practices, such as observation, listening and copying?

This presents the possibility of non-verbal practices emerging in direct relation to internalisation of the mother tongue.

If child development from a sociocultural perspective is seen to occur through social participation with others including family members, then cultural historical messages are conveyed through the mother tongue. Interpersonal learning plays an essential role in providing and demonstrating the use of signs and symbols of the known culture and, from infancy, these signs and symbols assist in interpersonal participation and later, when used as tools, to mediate intrapersonal learning. Does mother tongue thinking serve an important role in the synthesis of known and new practices, in mediating the learner's participation?

Through a linguistic lens, articulation of the transformative capability of speech into thought proves difficult to explore, but from a sociocultural perspective, this emergent stage of bilingual learning no longer needs to be presented as a progression of separate and demarcated processes – but more in terms of thinking through a multiplicity of transformative social practices.

The early years teacher/practitioner has a pivotal role in the early years CoP. Not only is she/he in a position to encourage learning through (as a culture-generated tool) mother tongue speaking (Cummins, 1991), but she/he can mediate the bilingual learner's journey as she/he synthesises known and new culturally appropriated practices. Thus, the early years teacher/practitioner facilitates participation through cross/trans-cultural (Henderson, 2004) understandings.

Rogoff (2003) draws attention to the ways in which learning is supported in different communities and to the forms of guided participation which are central to bilingual learning. Teachers/practitioners may need guidance to establish shared understandings with bilingual learners, and in the introduction of culturally mediated activities.

The use of 'symbolic tools', according to Rogoff (2003), is central to the constantly evolving nature of culture – culture being the result of experiences through which the participants have engaged together in negotiation with their developing identities. As Rogoff states, 'culture is not static, it is formed from the efforts of people working

together, using and adapting material and symbolic tools provided by predecessors and in the process creating new ones.’ (2003, p.51.)

Although children acquire the internal tools of thinking and acting through everyday practices (Lave and Wenger, 1991), Cope and Kalantzis (2008) point out that this is difficult to achieve in an English early years setting where the activities and resources are specifically designed for white monolingual children and stand distinct from their familiar lives. Without cross/trans-cultural understandings of young bilingual learners, will not the early years teacher/practitioner struggle to identify culturally appropriated resources and, despite policy rhetoric (Cable et al., 2006), be unable to appreciate the mother tongue as a tool for learning (in England)?

The ‘mother tongue’ is interconnected to, and universally entwined with, issues of ‘identity, ownership and a sense of belonging to a group, culture, and a country’ and as such, crucial for ‘mothers’ to pass to their children. ‘Identity, aspiration, and notions of gender come together’ through the continuation and development (use of) the mother tongue (Mills, 2004, p.186).

## **2.15 Identity and Agency**

Hall (2003, p.236) argues that cultural identity is a ‘matter of “becoming” as well as “being”... It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories.’

Jacobson (1998) discusses how the family (as the principal source of knowledge and attitudes) nurtures the developing identities of the younger minority ethnic generations, with the support from strong and stable communities, education, religion and recreation having significant effects on the developing identities of young people from South Asian communities in Western Europe.

Jacobson (1998) would suggest that the family and community take ownership of the responsibility of protecting and reinforcing the minority identity of the children and young people.



For example, Adyta (a main participant in the research) is a member of the Sikh community. In the traditional Sikh community (in England) older generations (like Adyta's grandmother) feel a responsibility to maintain certain traditions and boundaries between their own and the dominant culture. As such, Adyta's extended family (reinforced by resources and institutions within the wider Sikh community) simultaneously influences Adyta's developing identities, whilst contributing to his understandings of Punjabi cultural practices – including the preservation of his mother tongue.

Therefore, from a sociocultural perspective, identities develop through interactions between individuals and their sociocultural contexts. The work of identity is always 'going on'. As participants' membership of informal and formal CoP changes, so also the CoPs remodel and determine identities. Identities are therefore forever evolving and modifying through social engagement in participation.

According to Wenger (1998, p.146), identity is created through our social practices, 'even our most private thoughts make use of concepts, images, and perspectives that we understand through our participation in social communities.' Hall (1996, p. 2) also recognises identity as part of the 'binding and marking of symbolic boundaries' and as such, identity 'requires what is left outside' (Hall, 1995, p.3). Identities therefore are not just the product of unity, but also disharmony, difference and exclusion. Identities are never unified and, in late-modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiple; constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions (Hall, 1996, p.4).

Returning to Suki and her silent experiences in reception class, Gee (2004) might ask how Suki developed her identities sufficiently, when constrained between the four walls of the monolingual early years CoP – with its unfamiliar practices and discourses. Wenger (1998) would reply that being part of a joint venture (the early years CoP) would resource the development of Suki's identities.

Not only were Suki's developing identities challenged by the monolingual, dominant and sustaining (Cline and Baldwin, 2004) culture of the early years CoP, but the silent period proved a critical time of learning and negotiation. Lave and Wenger (1991) emphasise that the development of identities is a key factor within the CoP for

movement from peripheral to central participation. To succeed, Suki needed to develop her identities whilst situated on the periphery – not an easy task when the dominant language of discourse is ‘out of reach’.

Wenger (1998) and Hall’s (1996, p.4) articulations of identity demonstrate how identities continually evolve and re-modify, ‘constantly in the process of change and transformation’, rooted in the boundaries and intersections between both unifying and conflicting practices and discourses. Thus, language, identity and culture appear to be acutely complex and intricately interwoven.

Bilingual learning cannot be analysed in isolation from agentive actions. Lave’s (1988) anthropological understandings of participation in everyday practices have moved theoretical thinking on the significance of agency and identity within learning. In the role of ‘social actors’, learners (children) engage in the act of ‘becoming’ through mastering the discourses associated with situated contexts, and develop agency through actions within interrelated life-worlds (Sharrock, 1997). Is it by agentive action that Suki can change her world, and learn?

Lave’s (1988) anthropological understandings of participation in everyday practices have emphasised the significance of agency and identity within learning. This thinking reinforces sociocultural interpretations of bilingual learners as ‘social actors’ taking ownership of their ‘becoming’ through agentive action. When an emergent bilingual learner is mastering the discourses of differing situated contexts, agentive action ‘carves a path’ through interrelated life-worlds (Sharrock, 1997). Consequently, the child is agentive in transforming her/his world – through participation.

Weedon (1987) and Lave and Wenger (1991) presented ‘connectedness’ between identity formation and situated learning within institutional and community contexts. Key concepts identifying the connections between learning, agency and developing identities were examined by Chaiklin and Lave (1996) and Holland et al. (1998) which led to viewing learners as culturally constructed social agents (Holland and Lave, 2001) with identities that were not static, but variable, multi-vocal and interactive – thus implying that emergent bilingual learners are capable and agentive in re-creating new ‘cultural worlds’.

According to Holland and Lave (2001), agency resides in the transformative power of the human imagination, with life-worlds being powerful mediators of activity. To clarify, agentic action (through participation) transforms and re-creates a new world that becomes part of one's own.

## **2.16 Affinity Spaces and Multimodal Thinking**

Gee's (2005) multimodal line of thinking on learning discourses reflects Holland and Lave's (2001) concerns regarding teachers/practitioners perceptions of 'ideal' cultural practices, including expectations in the use of spoken and written English – a *narrowly focused direction*. This apparent 'ideal' may be at 'odds' with the practices of children who diverge from the monolingual 'norm', such as bilingual learners.

Gee (2004, 2005) presents an alternative notion to that of CoPs – 'affinity spaces', which may be capable of 'cutting through' the barriers created by this narrow focus on learning discourses. His concept offers multiple routes to engagement in participation via alternative means, levels and contexts.

Nespor's (1994) undergraduate study argues that people arrive from other experiences that are 'defined... along particular trajectories' (Nespor, 1994, p.9) in which particular discourses shape human experience and the interconnectedness between spaces in order to negotiate their own position and meaning.

So what is special about affinity spaces? Affinity spaces (Gee, 2005) appear as more subtle and fluid than CoPs. In contrast to CoPs where barriers to learning may result from deficit models of race, class, gender and/or ability, the concept, affinity spaces articulates a learning environment in which expertise from both inside and outside the classroom can be drawn upon to support, facilitate and distribute knowledge to others.

A simplistic analogy to explain the differences between CoPs and affinity spaces would be to compare a garden constrained within determined boundaries by fences, gates and walls to that of a CoP, as opposed to affinity spaces in which a location surpasses set physical boundaries and yet is still there. The territory exists within fluid boundaries that may only be evident to the participants located within it. An example of such a location might be the territory set by a domestic cat which passes fluidly over, under



and through boundaries set by gardens, fences, walls and gates. Affinity spaces move beyond the boundaries of the classroom, outside of the school and school hours and into children's homes – where much learning occurs.

Gee's (2004) concept 'affinity spaces' relates to a concern that children from disadvantaged and minority groups may be denied access to learning in 'educational' CoPs, due to them being *language driven*. CoPs are based on groups of people who share similar goals and interests through the employment of common practices, including the tool of language (Wenger, 1999). For instance, the language of a cook's CoP might share such words as 'knead', 'par-boil' and 'flambé' amongst its members; without a valid 'entry ticket' (the language within the CoP) entrance may be barred.

Gee (2005, p.232) believes that, 'affinity spaces can lead us to ask some new questions about classroom learning or ask some old ones in new ways.' Dreier's (1999) study into participation across contexts of social practice engages with similar criticisms of CoPs to those of Gee (2005). Dreier is cautious of applying CoPs as a theoretical lens, warning that CoPs do not necessarily capture the fluidity and complexity of learning. Dreier is reluctant to consider individuals as 'situation-bound' as opposed to fluidly moving in and out of social practices that shift and change over time. The concept of affinity spaces displays similar characteristics to that which Dreier (1999) would term 'trajectories of participation' – participants ongoing social practice.

Gee (2004) offers online video games as an example of an affinity space which acts as a 'level playing field' for all learners – including emergent bilingual learners. During video games, problems are accompanied by instantly accessible 'tools' which enable participants to learn through *guided* experience. Not only does Gee believe that the participants build up their knowledge and expertise in video gaming through successes (as opposed to failure) but that participants mediate their own learning through developing social competencies amongst the 'gaming' community of learners. In doing so, video games may provide the learner with stories, scenarios, visual stimulus and actions that 'tap into' a new 'cross cultural' language – a legitimate means of participatory learning, where new competencies can be built and drawn upon.

Gee (2004) perceives CoPs as too bound within strictly demarcated local settings and argues that learning is not about solely interacting with the members and objects

physically present in the CoP, but defined through the continuity of participation within and through a multiplicity of additional learning spaces.

Interestingly, Merchant et al.'s (2006) study discusses the connection between children's digital learning and identity construction in different contexts. Firstly, 'anchored' identities are identified as, 'profoundly influenced by a long history of sociocultural practice' and secondly, 'transient' identities are identified as, 'more easily made, re-made and unmade' (Merchant et al., 2006, p.25). Anchored identities appear to relate to learning through CoPs, whereas transient identities appears more aligned to notions of affinity spaces.

In contrast to Gees' (2004) articulation of digital learning through affinity spaces, Jackson and Conteh's (2008) study 'tapped' into the resourcefulness of 'art' as a subject which not only provides a 'level playing field' for learning to emergent bilingual learners (unable to access the academic discourse) but also bridges sociocultural understandings, by providing a cross cultural (global) learning platform through which opportunities for contributing to and distributing both known and shared cultural practices. Learning through art is seen to provide a new conceptualisation of the subject, as a significant 'space' and means for negotiating the complexity of teaching and learning practices.

The 'third space' (Gutiérrez, 2008 and Bhabha , 1994) also articulates spaces where differing discourses 'positioned' between home and school lives can be redefined, meanings renegotiated and understandings of everyday practices distributed. Drawing similarities to both LPP and affinity spaces, the 'third space' offers an alternative 'somewhere' for negotiation, construction and re-construction of identity to safely take place.

Building upon this picture of 'other' spaces, Conteh and Brock's (2010, p.12) study into 'sites of bilingualism' also draws upon the concept of a 'third space' in suggesting that a young bilingual learner develops most confidently through 'safe spaces' – which serve to 'empower them' to 'perform their identities' in 'transformative ways'. In Hancock and Gillen's (2007) study of pre-school girls in Peru, America and Italy it is argued that, 'domestic locations can be seen as "safe places"' that, 'enable children's

sense of belonging, foster their “emplaced knowledge” and build on their confidence to explore spaces further afield’ (Hancock and Gillen, 2007, p.1).

Hancock and Gillen (2007) also point out, ‘as a place for children’s development and learning... the rich opportunities that home can provide as a “safe playground”... in which even young children, through their own agency and play, orchestrate personal experiences and learning’ (Hancock and Gillen, 2007, p.20), therefore reminding, ‘us of the way in which we, as adults, may perhaps be out of touch with how children perceive and relate to “learning” spaces’ (Hancock and Gillen, 2007, p.21).

Emergent bilingual learners therefore seek varied and alternative spaces through which to learn. Gee (2004) expresses real concerns that minority groups of learners may be at a distinct disadvantage when unable to access the dominant discourse within a CoP. However, the notion of affinity spaces is not without flaws. Affinity spaces may allow participants to ‘surf’ through racial and social disadvantage, but in doing so may disregard the significance of drawing upon cultural historical knowledge. For a young bilingual learner, negotiating meaning making through the silent period, affinity spaces may provide a temporary fix rather than a successful contribution to theorising bilingual participation. Although a useful concept (it provides a ‘level playing field’ for learning), ‘affinity spaces’ is, none the less, situated in the virtual, rather than the real, world.

## **2.17 Teaching and Learning In, Through and Beyond Early Years Communities of Practice**

Early years teachers/practitioners are not necessarily made aware through current policy and practice that learning takes place *within* culturally-situated activity (Rogoff and Chavajay, 1995) rather than being the *result* of it, and that engagement in participation is mediated through collaborative, culturally relevant practices. Such a lack of understanding may be reflected in the physical resourcing of the early years environment and the practices being distributed within it.

Physical resourcing of the learning environment may be predominantly founded according to middle class, Western-European understandings of what is perceived as ‘relevant’ to white, middleclass, monolingual, English-speaking children. The play based EYFS (2007) ‘curriculum’ does little to drive forward a ‘sea-change’ in such



misunderstandings, thus leading to tokenistic representations of alternative cultures – such as the occasional ethnically represented doll or a Sari in a ‘dressing-up box’. Indeed, the early years environment may appear more representative of the teacher/practitioner’s sociocultural practices than that of a young bilingual learner – devoid of making links with the child’s life-world experiences.

Bilingual learning is not static – it moves, outside of and beyond the formal ‘educational’ environments of school, into and through lived and culturally evolving communities. Familiar and informal CoPs situated outside of the schools provide many learning opportunities for the young bilingual learner over and beyond those experienced within the early years CoP. Primary sources of bilingual learning through home and community school CoPs supplement early years learning – through the sharing of cultural and historical knowledge. Whilst participating in mutually appreciated social practices, primary CoPs resource the child’s agentic actions and developing identities. Is it not a responsibility of early years teachers/practitioners to build upon this culturally situated knowledge – and not to ignore it?

However, somehow silent young bilingual learners manage to successfully bridge and interconnect to and through the differing understandings (Conteh, 2003), in and beyond ‘formal’ CoPs. Gregory (2001) study of synergy between siblings illuminates the gap between children’s experiences at home and what practitioners would consider as learning; thus demonstrating the abundance of learning that emergent bilingual learners participate in within their home environments, and how much more could be achieved if teachers/practitioners recognised and built upon these successes.

The Spitalfields study of literacy in Bangladeshi British children (Gregory and Williams, 2000) demonstrates how older siblings who attend Qur’an classes scaffold their younger siblings, through a ‘fusion’ of learning between what they have already learnt in their English speaking mainstream school and what they are learning within the Qur’an school. Gregory (2008, p.19) uses the term syncretism, ‘to explain how young children blend existing languages, literacies and practices to create new forms’.

In the early stages when reading with a child who was just beginning... the supportive ‘scaffolding’ was almost total, with the older siblings providing

almost every word... As the younger child's proficiency increased however, the scaffolding was gradually removed until the child was able to read alone.

(Kelly et al. 2001, p.200)

Children not only attempt to make sense of the world and interpret 'happenings' around them via the discourses of their own culture (Green and Hill, 2005) but may also attempt to seek out the dominant discourse of the new 'culture'. As Mac Naughton, Rolf and Siraj-Blatchford (2001) articulate, 'language is much more than just a window on a world that exists independently of it. Instead, language creates our social world.'

Kenner (2004) also demonstrated how children syncretize the signs, symbols and tools necessary to participate in differing cultural communities (simultaneous worlds).

Rogoff's (1990) study on 'Apprenticeship in Thinking' emphasised the significance of older siblings and adults in the creation of cultural knowledge – mediating for the younger children.

In contrast to the interconnectedness of learning practices, Kelly et al.'s (2001) study of linguistic minority families demonstrates the complications caused by teachers and researchers in emphasising the 'sameness' of monolingual and bilingual learners. Rather than addressing the difficulties that barriers to participation create in learning communities, this attitude creates and reinforces an additional barrier to participation. Disturbingly, government policy also attempts to create a 'common culture' (Tate, 1995) in order to 'iron out' cultural differences between groups (English National Curriculum, 1995), thus 'failing to acknowledge the learning practices of different minority groups' (Kelly et al., 2001). This, 'sameness' may be misinterpreted as equality of opportunity. Treating all children as 'the same' suggests (at best) indifference and, at worst, benign neglect of minority groups – including bilingual learners.

## **2.18 Socio-Political Issues: Policy and Practice**

Akin to feminism, critical race theory or deconstructive discourse analysis (Agger, 2006), unpacking pedagogical issues arising through the application of a sociocultural lens unavoidably politicizes current policy and practice. Historically embedded within

Marxist ideology, Vygotsky's, (1966) sociocultural model of human development prioritises the significance of socially distributed, collaborative participation through shared cultural practices.

Key elements within sociocultural theorising have been assimilated within current early years policy and practice, including the provision of shared 'areas of learning' resourced with hexagonally constructed tables, which have been constructed to facilitate collaborative participation. In addition to early years theorizing, the norms and expectations within an early years CoP are inevitably driven by whichever political driver is 'fuelling' the early years agenda at any given time. At the time of writing (April, 2011) a Conservative/Liberal coalition government is making substantive educational reforms. The current Department of Education (2010) which has replaced the former Department of Children, Schools and Families (2010), is currently reviewing both the National Curriculum (DFEE, 1999) and the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework (DCSF, 2007)

Whether the removal by the government of the words 'children, schools and families' and the withdrawal of significant sources of funding from 'Sure-Start' scheme (including the development of children's centres) signifies a shift away from prioritising the needs and rights of the youngest children, is not yet known. Also yet to be 'seen' are the outcomes of young bilingual learners, in terms of equity, social justice and inclusion, in relation to any 'down playing' of sociocultural theorising, in favour of upholding a more formal and classically underpinned education ideology.

Discussions related to the needs and rights of emergent bilingual learners inevitably raises contentious issues not only in relation to the socio-political messages (Chapter 6.5, p.148-149) received via current policy and practice, but also in relation to perspectives on social justice (Levinson, 2001). Silence, (like spoken language) is also intertwined with issues of power and justice (Berry, 2004); and yet (remarkably) it has the ability to serve as a culturally shared and politically neutral agentive action in providing a 'level playing field' to participation.

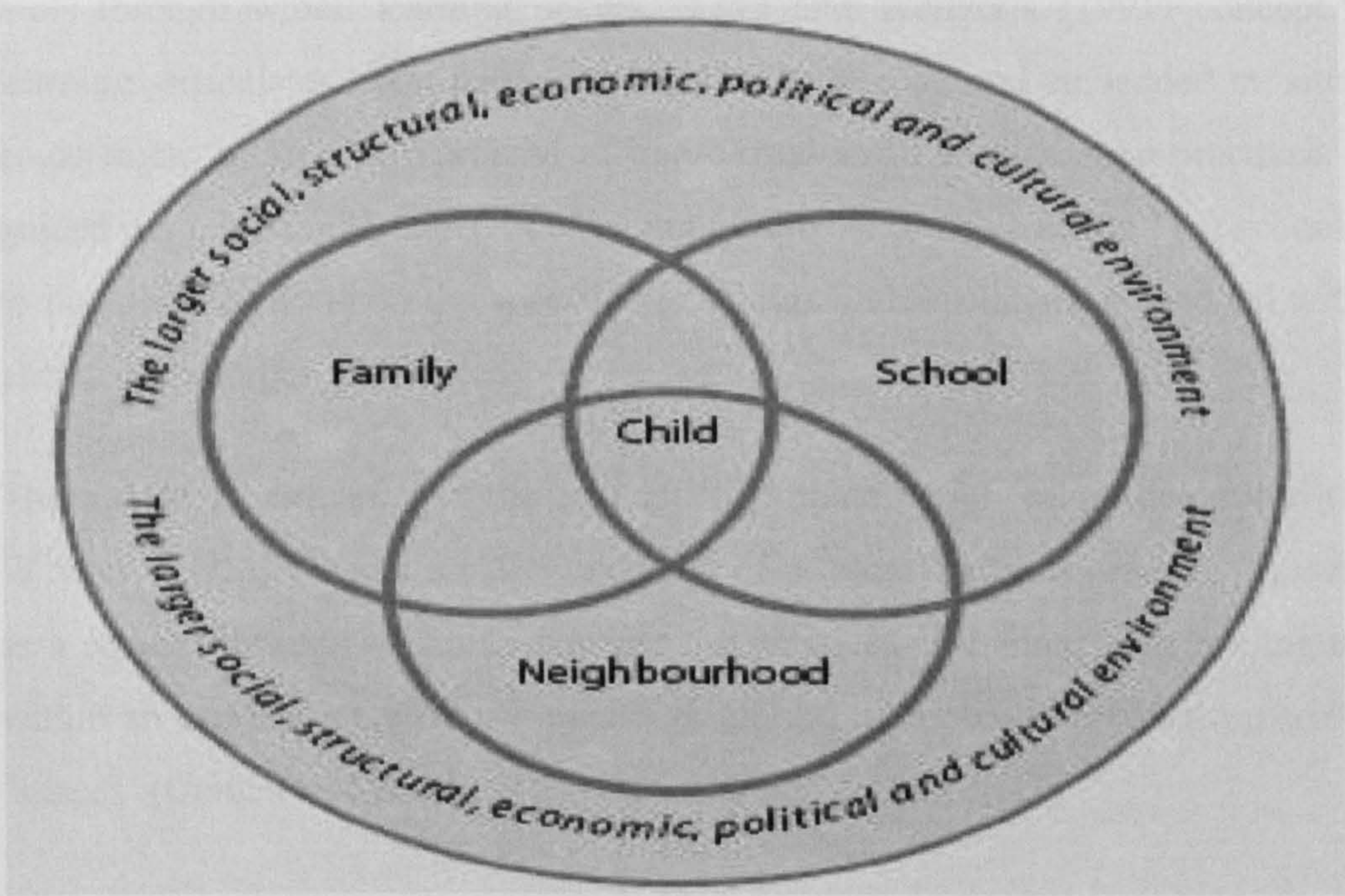
Comparable to ideological values (underpinning socio-political beliefs) being passed on generationally through shared ideas and events of family members; so too early years



CoPs carry their own cultural knowledge which plays its part in partially shaping values and beliefs. These institutionally laden values and beliefs may or may not be shared by the children. Vygotsky’s (1966) sociocultural conception of learning and development inherently acknowledges the significance of these socio-political forces in shaping children’s lives (Cole and Wersch 2003) and development.

It becomes apparent that the beliefs and values held by members of each and every sociocultural context determine the knowledge and skills that are considered worth learning. The influences which shape understandings of experiences within early years environments for young learners (Rogoff 1990) are already evident within the family, and continue to be formed through exposure to external socio-political influences.

Ecological contexts shaping child development (Zubrick and Silburn, 2000) such as Bronfenbrenner’s (1994) ‘ecological systems theory’ (Figure: 3) position the young child at the centre of a multifaceted social network. Most notably identified within the model are the wider political, economic and sociocultural frameworks on which the emergent bilingual learner’s life chances are inevitably dependent.



**Figure 3: Ecological contexts shaping child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994)**



## 2.19 Discussion

The application of sociocultural theory has built upon previously accepted models of ‘second language’ acquisition as a means to ‘clear a pathway’ through which the exploration of Suki’s silent experiences can take place – the extraordinary bilingual learning (Drury, 2007) within the silent period.

The silent period has been explored through the employment of Vygotsky’s (1986, Ch.7) thinking on the transformative internalisation of the spoken word (the mother tongue) into thought (as mother tongue thinking). This theorising attempts to ‘unravel’ the movement of emergent bilingual learning from the social (interpersonal) to that of the individual (intrapersonal) as she/he works (in silence) with, through, and beyond appropriated social participation. Mead’s (1962) ‘conversation of gestures’ may serve to strengthen Vygotsky’s theorising through presenting a synthesis of simultaneous and multiple practices – in the co-construction of new and alternative ways of knowing.

Not only are thought and language situated and distributed in participatory and culturally appropriated practices, but they are also confirmed as the crucial mediating tools through which learning occurs,. Lave and Wenger’s (1991) concept ‘situated learning’ articulates silent participation as a function of, and embedded in, situations of engagement in an active process of improvised and transformative practices. Through guided participation (Rogoff, 2003) communities of practice beyond the school are seen to positively build upon the specific behaviours and discourses embedded within early years communities of practice.

Through an examination of the concept ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991), Wenger’s (1999) concept of a ‘community of practice’ presented LPP as a context through which to examine the practices of a silent young bilingual learner within an early years setting – thus highlighting the potential of ‘legitimised’ learning ‘spaces’ (Conteh and Brock, 2010; Hancock and Gillen, 2007).

Wenger’s (1999) discussions highlight the potential ‘pitfalls’ of reification, which might lead to a young bilingual learner being assessed solely on the visible results of her/his learning, in preference to being assessed through increasing levels of silent participation. In addition, the importance of the teacher/practitioner’s role in mediation

and provision of alternative discourses for learning (Gee, 2004; Jackson and Conteh, 2008) emphasised the need to provide a 'level playing field' for learning on an 'equal footing' to her/his monolingual peers.

What becomes apparent is the complexity and fluidity of emergent bilingual learning in, and beyond, CoPs, as each child contributes to and distributes cross cultural knowledge through learning practices, within families (Kenner et al., 2007), communities (Gregory, 2004) and across a multitude of alternative learning spaces (Conteh and Brock, 2010; Gee, 2005).

The literature review has painted the back drop to Suki's silent experiences. The reader has walked through contrasting and complementary theories of emergent bilingual learning. In doing so, an explanation has been presented of how a sociocultural lens provides a rich layer to this enquiry, bringing together the significance and interconnectedness of the mother tongue (Cummins, 1991) within and through *thought, language and learning* (Vygotsky, 1986).

Although linguists, sociolinguists and sociocultural theorists may attempt to 'hold hands' when unpacking the complexities of bilingual learning, each approach stems from theoretically different 'starting blocks'. However, this divergence in thinking does not inhibit each contributor from adding their unique 'pattern' to a much larger body of knowledge – the 'multicoloured quilt' of bilingualism in education.



## Chapter 3

### Methodology – Oils or Water Colours?

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the philosophical, theoretical, ethical and methodological dilemmas and challenges in developing an appropriate research framework with which to unpack, analyse and interpret the silent experiences of a young bilingual learner.

There is an initial dilemma to be shared, as ‘silent experiences’ appears as an abstract notion which is not easily identifiable, not clearly visible, nor audible - thus it proves difficult to verify. In rejecting Cole’s, (1996) ‘cause-effect, stimulus-response, explanatory science in favor of a science that emphasizes the emergent nature of mind in activity and that acknowledges a central role for interpretation in its explanatory framework’ (p.104) a methodology is sought which proves capable of illuminating a pathway towards data which is rich enough to reveal meaning making through the silent period.

#### 3.2 Developing a Research Design

The research design has provided the *structure* through which all the major parts of the research project interconnect and work together to address the central research question – the design acts like ‘glue’ in holding the elements together.

The research design elements:

- Central research question: What was Suki experiencing during the prolonged periods of silence?
- Primary Focus: Meaning making (learning) throughout the silent period
- Philosophical driver: Interpretivism
- Methodology: Ethnographic
- Chosen theoretical perspective: Sociocultural
- Alternative theoretical perspective: Cognitive (comparison made to sociocultural theory)

- Context: Situated in legitimate peripheral participation – within an early years community of practice
- Location: A city-based pre-school playgroup in West Yorkshire
- Data Collection Methods (three):
  - i. Participant observation (primary method) – via field notes
  - ii. Unstructured interviews – via audio-tape and verbatim notes
  - iii. Auto-ethnographic accounts (reflexive accounts) – via vignettes
- Active Participants (six included in analysis):
  - i. Suki – four-year-old (Japanese-speaking) bilingual learner  
Nicole – monolingual (English-speaking) playgroup leader
  - ii. Kimoto – three-year-old (Japanese/French speaking) bilingual learner
  - iii. Tamsin – bilingual (Punjabi/English-speaking) adult
  - iv. Adyta – three- to six-year-old (Punjabi-speaking) bilingual learner
  - v. The Researcher – monolingual (English-speaking) adult
- Lay Characters (via auto-ethnographic reflective accounts):
  - i. Anyor – eleven-year-old (Polish-speaking) bilingual learner
  - ii. Uzma – four-year-old (Farsi-speaking) bilingual learner
- Evidence: Participation (learning) identifiable through notable changes in behaviours
- Analysis: Thematic (classification, coding and filtering of emergent themes)
- Presentation of analytic data: Vignettes

Following de Vaus's (2001, p.16) guidance, the research design has been structured in such a way as to address the central research question as unambiguously and convincingly as possible. To assist, the ethnographic methodology serves to facilitate the exploration of the silent period through the theoretical lens of sociocultural theory.

Building additional, competing (cognitive) theorising into the design has offered an alternative, rival layer through which to compare explanations of the silent period.

### **3.3 Developing a Philosophical Perspective**

Examining contrasting perspectives on the silent period has assisted in clarifying a philosophical perspective on how I 'see the world', both in general, and specifically within early years bilingual learning. Within current early years pedagogy and childhood studies, a 'bottom up' approach emphasises the importance of gaining understandings on how young children learn (as opposed to what they are taught) and what their rights (as opposed to their needs) are. It is this 'bottom up' perspective that serves as the 'driver' through which the conceptualisation of the methodology and theoretical framework has been born. I draw upon a professional auto-ethnographic account to clarify.

In 2005, I worked alongside 'Karen', a colleague who taught the reception class parallel to my own. Karen's belief in 'transference of knowledge' as the appropriate means to educate four and five-year-old children was demonstrated through her classical pedagogical style based upon cognitive understandings of children's learning. If Karen deemed that children was not developmentally ready for learning in a given teaching session (children in the lower 'ability' sets) they would be directed to 'choose' an alternative activity - 'free choice' of play, whilst those in the higher 'ability' sets would only be permitted to play during the intervals between planned teaching sessions. Karen perceived playful learning as a lesser priority.

Karen's planning was always impeccable with detailed 'learning' objectives and reified outcomes which she assessed, prior to mounting beautifully on two or three layers of different coloured paper.

In contrast to Karen, I viewed play as being integral to learning, with the priority for teaching being to mediate the children's learning (Rogoff, 2003) through being 'at hand' to offer guidance and assistance (Magraw and Dimmock, 2006). Rather than posing fixed learning (realistically teaching) objectives, negotiated and movable *learning intentions* accommodated for unpredicted changes in direction within the children's individual and collaborative learning 'journeys'.



Karen's 'top down' approach to teaching and learning, was based upon her interpretation of early years pedagogy. Although we both acknowledged the significance of learning through play in the early years, we had modified the play based 'curriculum' to suit our underlying philosophies and individual pedagogical styles.

Both Karen and I had the best intentions for the young children's learning and teaching uppermost in our thinking but neither of us could, or necessarily should, have changed our philosophical perspectives on the world. Our educational ideologies were born through differing ways of seeing the world - which positioned us uniquely as who we are.

In seeking ontological 'truths' in relation to this research, my understandings on the nature of reality have been questioned. Believing learning to be both transformative and agentive positioned this research 'somewhere' within the arena of social learning theories. However, before being able to fine tune this 'somewhere' within the domain of sociocultural learning, I sought an epistemological driver to deliver the chosen methodology. As I had no preconceived hypothesis on 'silent experiences' I focused upon framing a methodology best suited to explore, 'the subjective meaning of social action' (Bryman, 2004). I therefore considered epistemological positions in relation to my developing philosophy on the origin, acquisition and theory of knowledge – which is embedded within socially based theoretical perspectives.

According to Merchant and Willis (2001), 'Research across racial lines is important to represent the multiple (and sometimes competing) epistemological and ontological positions in which we, as researchers, find ourselves...Too often, white researchers conduct research "on" or even "with" people of color and continue to reproduce a European American "regime of truth"' (Rogers and Fuller, 2007, p.88).

A possible means to address shared concerns with Rogers and Fuller's (2007) deficit model of researching minority ethnic participants was by actively, 'turning the analytic lens on myself as a researcher, a process called reflexivity' (p.88). Lewis et al. (2007) also stressed how sociocultural theory requires the analytical lens to turn inward as, 'we reflexively examine our positioning as researchers and its effects on learning and the production of knowledge. Viewing research in this way also means that we must

understand the role of our own autobiographies, or histories of participation, as well as the histories of our research participants' (p.xi).

Whereas a positivist researcher might be principally concerned with the creation of laws (objective testing of theories) as an interpretivist researcher I assume that meanings are constructed as people engage with, and make sense of, what they are interpreting. As an interpretivist researcher I seek to understand the context within which the research is taking place, and to interpret what I find through sociocultural understandings which will be shaped by my own experiences. It is this motivation (in part) to make meaning of my own world through gaining greater understandings of the world inhabited by others, that aligns this research closely to that of an 'interpretivist' researcher (Bryan, 2004).

The conceptual framework of the research has been shaped through these philosophical perceptions on the nature of reality and knowledge. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), the framework that guides the research evolves out of a set of philosophical principles founded through the interrelationship between ontology, epistemology and methodology.

### **3.4 Steering the Theoretical Perspective**

Ethnography has its roots in a variety of epistemological and theoretical traditions in the social sciences and education, with most ethnographers sharing the common desire to make sense of a given culture. However, it is the researcher's chosen theoretical position that influences the ways in which they conceptualise their research including the methods chosen and their analytical approach. Positioning the theoretical framework therefore plays a key part in engaging with the generation and construction of meaning. Gordon et al. (2001) identify a number of epistemological persuasions which generate particular theoretical perspectives.

What is unique to ethnography is its ability to assert the theoretical position throughout the whole research process. It was therefore of importance that I drew upon sociocultural theory to influence the nature and purpose of the fieldwork because different theoretical positions would have asserted different understandings of the world – which in turn would have influenced the direction of the research.

In this research, ethnography served as the methodology to facilitate observation of behaviours and to enquire about the *meaning* of those behaviours. Thus, ethnography not only facilitated the unfolding of rich explanations and meaning making (Silverman, 2005) throughout the exploration of the silent period but also aided in conceptualising the theoretical framework. Ethnographers (Wolcott, 1999) draw attention to the importance of sociocultural context and in particular, culture-sharing ones such as communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), thus supporting the adoption of the ‘communities of practice’ analogy (Wolcott, 1999) through which to make meaning of the shared practices within an early years community of practice.

Indeed, using an ethnographic research approach best facilitated Toohey’s (2000) exploration into the connections between the socio-historical, language and identity in young bilingual learners situated in a community of practice – a classroom. Likewise, Morita (2004) used interpretive ethnographic methods in her multiple case study, demonstrating how international students negotiate competence and identity as their position moves from that of an ‘outsider’ to that of participation within the academic community.

A strength of sociocultural theory (as a medium to explore the silent period) is eloquently presented by Lewis et al. (2007) when stating that, ‘few other theories have shed so much light on the education of people whose language, literacy, and very being have traditionally been marginalized or disenfranchised in schools and societies.’ (p.3.)

However, in educational research, ‘culture may mean one thing to bilingual educators... and something else to ethnic scholars or cognitive psychologists’ (e.g. Eisenhart, 2001a). It is only ‘when culture is used as an idea to “think with” that this interpretation may move the research forward’ (Eisenhart, 2001b).

Fleer et al (2004) suggest that, ‘When a sociocultural perspective is taken, it is evident that richer and more immediately useful data on children’s learning is gained.’ (p.184.) Willett’s (1995) study of bilingual children’s participation in classroom events highlights limitations in several second language acquisition studies which (in neglecting to view learning through a sociocultural lens) focus on individual learners rather than the social context and language, both of which have embedded cultural meanings and values.



### 3.5 The Chosen Methodology – Ethnography

‘Ethnography’ refers both to a distinctive methodological research practice, and to the text that is subsequently created from the results of that research...

ethnography is the interpretive account of where you've been, one that can speak both to those who will probably never see the world you describe, and to those who live in and create it every day. (Goodman, 2010, p. 1)

Designing a ‘fitting’ methodology is crucial. Ethnography, as the chosen methodology, has determined the overall research design including the theoretical approach, chosen methods for the data collection, analysis, and ultimately the interpretation. All have been determined by methodological considerations, with the most important being to *justify* the research process (Cohen et al., 2007). Ethnography was chosen in part due to it being interpretive and ‘rooted’ within social anthropology (Blommaert, 2006). As Eisenhart (2001b) articulates, ‘The challenge now is how to grasp, both conceptually and methodologically, the meaningful worlds that are produced in conditions that are... both transformative and participatory’ (p.17).

Walford (2008) pre-warns researchers against any misguided belief that ethnography might provide them with a clear-cut means of researching, stating, ‘What initially appears to be a straightforward process of “hanging around” and writing about what has been seen and heard, with deeper familiarity, becomes a far more complex process.’ (p.vii.) However, Walford (2008) also encourages teachers to embrace the challenges of educational ethnography and, ‘look inside the “black box” of schools and investigate the micro cultures to be found inside’ (p.5).

Educational ethnography not only aims to ‘develop the story as it is experienced by participants’ (Woods, 1994, p.311), but also defines the location within which the field work takes place (often schools) and the nature of that research (often the experiences of children and/or teachers). Nespore (1997) refers to the context of educational ethnography as, ‘an intersection in social space, a knot in a web of practices that stretch into complex systems beginning and ending outside the school... extensive in space and time, fluid in form and content’ (1997, p.xiii).

Taking heed of Deal's (1985) advice on researchers openly asking questions (without pre-judging the situation), ethnography appeared as an appropriate vehicle through which to ask questions which would have silent responses, and with which to seek out the minutia of an emergent bilingual learner's everyday silent experiences within the cultural context of the early years setting.

Critical questions arose regarding the discontinuity between the language(s) spoken and the culture of the researcher to that of the participants. How could I as a white, adult, monolingual researcher undertake a viable ethnographic study of young bilingual children? How could I empathise with the differences in sociocultural histories that have formulated both the participants and my own constructions of 'who we are' and 'how we perceive the world'? It appeared as both inevitable and obligatory that individual constructs of life-worlds would and should influence the course of the research.

In attempting to address the issue of language differences, the research focused primarily upon gaining an understanding of meaning making (learning) during the silent period, rather than the acquisition of an additional language per se. Although the primary participants were initially young bilingual learners, I also included a bilingual adult who could reflect upon her experiences throughout the silent period. It was an attempt (in part) to address the issue of cultural dissonance.

Significant elements within educational ethnography appropriated to researching young bilingual learners, including researching in the child's familiar cultural context (in the field), and secondly, the act of deep engagement with the research processes and practices – keeping close to the data. Other factors, including several ethnographic studies, influenced the decision to conduct this research ethnographically.

Kelly et al. (2001) employed ethnography to study syncretised literacies within linguistic minorities in two East London communities. The research was conducted through contextualised observations of the participants, which were layered through questions until patterns emerged which provided a reliable picture of the social world in which the research was situated. The research demonstrated how children and adults (or older siblings) generate 'cultural knowledge' together in the home or classroom, in contrast to viewing knowledge as pre-constructed by cultural or social class background.

The research followed through Hammersley's (1990) resume of the ethnographic processes involved in studying behaviours in everyday contexts (as opposed to experimental conditions) and gathering data from a range of sources. As proposed by Hammersley (1990), this included observations and informal conversations (unstructured approach) with no detailed prior-plan set up. In addition, Hammersley's (1990) advice to focus on a single setting or group of relatively small scale was adopted, so as to interpret the meanings and functions of human actions through (thick) descriptions and (theoretical) explanations.

Eisenhart (2001b) points out that in much ethnographic research, 'Increasingly, collaborative teams are being used to broaden the scope of work to, for example, include more settings and provide different perspectives. Audio-taping, video-taping, and computer software analysis programs also extend the reach of the researcher-as-instrument.' (p.19)

However, in accordance with Eisenhart (2001b), the research was mainly conducted, 'alone to collect the data, analyze the results, and write up the findings' (2001b, p.18).

### **3.6 Ethnographic Methods**

Ethnographic methods focus upon the most appropriate means (ethnographic techniques/ procedures) with which to gather, analyze and interpret the data. In parallel with Chambers (2001), Tedlock (2001) and Goodley (2000), the multi-method ethnography employed the research tools of:

- Participant observation – emergent bilingual learners
- Unstructured, life story interviews – bilingual adult
- Interviews – monolingual pre-school leader
- Auto-ethnographic accounts – monolingual researcher

The research question was not only approached and critically probed from differing angles, but also layered through sociocultural interpretations (chapters 4 and 5).

Drawing upon a variety of methods permitted access to a variety of voices through which to interpret the silent period. Whilst participant observational field notes captured



many important elements of the silent period (Vidich and Lyman, 2001), the narrative of and by Tamsin (adult bilingual participant) revealed meanings that might otherwise have remained unheard. Walker (1983) adds, ‘The truth about any subject only comes when all the sides of the story are put together and these different meanings make one new one’ (p.49).

Although qualitative tools were chosen for this research, ethnographers commonly include both quantitative and qualitative instruments in their research – particularly when researching larger-scale studies. In such circumstances, in addition to the application of qualitative methods, additional quantitative data might result from (Walford, 2008), ‘structured observation, time-sampling and even surveys’ (p. 4).

However, with the intention of this research to make meaning out of something intangible (understandings of silent experiences), qualitative research tools were chosen with the responsibility of gathering thick and descriptive accounts (Jacobsen, 2008) in the field from a relatively small sample of (six) participants.

The research process ascribed to several of Troman’s (2006) key elements, noted as significant (in educational ethnographic research) when attempting to learn more about the ‘less familiar’ within educational locations, including using multiple methods to generate rich and diverse forms of data, direct involvement and long term engagement of the researcher, recognition that the researcher is a main research instrument and high status given to the accounts of participants’ perspectives and understandings (2006, p.3).

In adopting Troman’s (2006) key elements the data was gathered via the multiple methods of in-depth interviewing (unstructured), participant observation, field notes and auto-ethnographic reflexive accounts.

### **3.7 The Setting**

The pre-school playgroup was chosen as the most appropriate context within which to gather data. I was already familiar to the pre-school playgroup practitioners and its daily activities as I had previously made partnerships with the playgroup. With it being situated locally there was ease of accessibility for conducting weekly participant

observation, and as the majority (twenty-two of twenty-five) of the children were both monolingual and English speaking at the time of the research, the emergent bilingual learners were clearly identifiable. I found the playgroup to be both welcoming and willing to share information and the nature of the research was well supported and accepted by the gate-keeper (Nicole, the graduate pre-school leader). The playgroup was considered (by Ofsted and the early Years Advisory service) as of a good standard in current early years practice.

Twenty-six children currently attend the pre-school (situated in a busy suburb of Leeds) at any one time with both full-time and part-time attendance. A cross section of social backgrounds is represented within the playgroup, with a small number of black and minority ethnic children attending at any given time. The practitioners and the majority of the children are monolingual and English speaking. During the thirty month period of data collection in the playgroup, the spoken languages (made known to me) other than English were: Japanese, Chinese, Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, Farsi, German, French, Portuguese and Welsh. Sometimes a child might attend for only part of the year if one or more of their parents are working on a temporary basis (such as a visiting academic at one of the Universities).

The local community consists of privately owned residential and privately rented housing, with the latter predominantly providing student housing. Although much of the local business is beholden to the student economy, many families choose to live in the area due to the popularity of the local schools, employment at one of the city's universities, ease of access to the rural areas north of Leeds, and/or due to the vibrancy of the suburb created through the eclectic range of local restaurants and entertainment provided. The black and minority ethnic population in the suburb is small, but growing.

I had been liaising with the pre-school since 2006 – the year preceding Adyta's admission in September 2007. The following is an extract from one recorded observation of the pre-school daily practices:

The pre-school, which is light and airy, provides ample physical space within which engagement in activities can take place. There appears to be a reasonably balanced division of 'ownership' between the practitioners and children, with the adults mainly adopting a supportive role in their interactions with the children. One of the practitioners (speaking in English) in the large outside area

is heard encouraging the children's experiential learning (planting seeds) whilst also expressing an interest in the children's well-being (to crouch and not bend over).

Many of the children are engaged in 'playful' and participatory activities of their own choosing – both inside and outside of the 'learning' environment. Three of the practitioners are engaged in, and 'overseeing' the activities, whilst one of the practitioners who is located at an inside table (where a prearranged activity has been set up) positions herself alongside four children. In an assumed 'scaffolding' role she attempted to 'mediate' participation in the pre-chosen activity (making paper flowers) through spoken English. One of the children removes himself from the table and another appears to 'cut' the activity short; the children are able move to and from the activities whenever they wish to do so.

### **3.8 Revisiting the Key Characters**

#### **Active Participants (six):**

- Suki – Four-year-old Japanese-speaking bilingual learner – parents Buddhists. Family moved to England from Northern Japan two years prior to Suki entering the reception class. Father was working on a temporary contract for Toyota in Yorkshire and mother not employed either in Japan or in England.
- Nicole – Monolingual (English-speaking) playgroup leader – of no practising faith – was born in London and lived in Leeds since the age of seven. Employed full-time.
- Kimoto – Three-year-old Japanese- and French-speaking bilingual learner – Mother Shinto and father Catholic. Had moved from Japan (where he was born) two months prior to starting playgroup. Father temporarily employed at the University. Mother's previous employment status unknown, but not employed in Leeds.
- Tamsin – Bilingual (Punjabi/English-speaking) adult – Sikh by faith, but not regularly practising. Moved from the Punjab to England aged four years. Employed full-time.
- Adyta – three- to six-year-old (Punjabi-speaking) bilingual learner – Sikh by faith, but not regularly practising. Mother and father had regularly cut hair and wore western clothing. Attended Temple with Adyta's Grandmother periodically



and wore traditional dress on formal occasions. Adyta's Grandmother moved to England with her husband in 1972. Mother and father employed full-time.

- The Researcher – Monolingual (English-speaking) – was not practising in any faith. Employed as a senior lecturer in a local University.

Lay Characters (via auto-ethnographic reflective accounts):

- Anyor – Eleven-year-old (Polish-speaking) bilingual learner – practising Catholic. Grandparents moved to England from Poland in 1950. Father's occupation unknown. Mother not employed.
- Uzma – Four-year-old (Farsi-speaking) bilingual learner – practising Muslim. Father born in England and mother moved to England from Pakistan following marriage in 1995. Father a builder and mother not employed.

Although the issue of a person's faith has not been specifically focused upon within this research it was (and is) none the less, an important part of 'who we are' and integral to the participants' developing identities.

### **3.9 Code of Ethics**

Within ethnography, 'sympathetic participation should reflect a delicate balance between probing the motivations, intents, investments, and practices of persons, and respecting their boundaries of privacy and vulnerability' (Britzman, 2003, p. 37).

Core to successful outcomes in social science research is a commitment to ethical practice in the development, undertaking, analysis and dissemination of that research (ESRC, 2009).

Current regard to the complexity of human-centred research has formalised ethical review processes and raised awareness about what constitutes ethically sound research and how best to put this into practice. Dealing with situations where a commitment to ethical protocol might prove problematic (when unexpected dilemmas arise in the field) reinforces both the need to follow formalised ethical guidance (BERA, 2004) and the crucial position ethics holds throughout the research process.

### **3.10 Ethical Approval**

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Open University Human Participants and Materials Ethics Committee (HPMEC) – incorporating participant observation of children as part of my research process. Included was an ongoing ethical reflection check-list which was referred to throughout the data collection process.

The research adhered to the revised ethical guidelines for educational research (BERA, 2004) which incorporate the moral principles and values of respect, competence, responsibility and integrity, as well as the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998. In addition, the study was registered with the data protection agency. An enhanced Criminal Records Bureau clearance was obtained prior to the research commencing.

### **3.11 Informed Consent and Issues of Confidentiality**

Both participant, parental and practitioner informed consent were required for this study, along with an assurance of anonymity and confidentiality at all stages of the research. As suggested by Cohen and Manion (1994), researchers should gain permission from the adults responsible for the children, before that of the children. However, a decision was made in accordance with article 12 (UNCRC, 1991) that should any of the potential child participants refuse consent, then this decision would override parental permission. As it was essential that participation rights were comprehensively communicated to children (Alderson and Morrow, 2004) not only was gaining the child's consent considered a priority, but the means of gaining it was adapted accordingly.

Having clearly explained the intentions of the research, informed consent forms (appendix, 3 and 4) and information letters (appendix, 2) were forwarded to the participating adults and parents/carers and the gatekeepers (pre-school leader and/or reception class teacher) of the child participants, clearly indicating that contributing to this research was entirely voluntary.

The informed consent letters included:

- Details of the study

- Information about the researcher
- What participation would involve
- Arrangements for potential participation
- How the data would be used and stored
- Clarification of the participants' right to withdraw at any time
- Issues of anonymity and confidentiality
- Contact details of the researcher and one doctoral supervisor (in case of concern).

Consent forms (for signing) were requested to be returned to the researcher. The participants were given the letters in June 2007, providing four weeks (prior to the summer break) to consider the contents of the letter and consent (or not) to participation in the study.

The contents of the letters and consent forms were discussed with all participants immediately before research activities began. As it was crucial (yet difficult) to ascertain a child's understanding of 'consent' and whether she/he wished to be a participant, the choices available were communicated via the parent/carer at each stage of the data gathering process. The researcher (I) relied jointly upon the child's multimodal means of communication and the parent/carer in confirmation of acceptance.

Researcher acceptance of child consent to participation was in part assessed (in conjunction with the parent/carer) via the interpretation of the child's responses (positive/negative) following a presentation of pictures which visually demonstrated child observations by a researcher. The researcher relied on the parent/carer to interpret the pictures for the potential child participant. In addition (whilst in the field) non-verbal responses were continually observed to confirm a positive reaction to my presence. Had any participant not presented positively, withdrawal from the research process would have been anticipated. This did not occur.

Children's participation rights were discussed with parents/carers prior to being asked to sign the forms. No assumptions were made that initial consent equated to ongoing consent. Continuation of researcher access to data collection was continually (verbally



and non-verbally) renegotiated with the participants and (child and/or adult) gatekeepers (appendix, 4) prior to each stage of data gathering.

Each participant (and parent/carer) was offered free access to a copy of the abstract and (if requested) to view the observational records (field notes) and/or taped interviews during the period of research. However, none of the participants requested to do so.

Having initially presented an outline of the research to the participants, the offer of further discussions was available at any time during the period of research.

### **3.12 Withdrawal**

Child and adult participants were made aware that they could withdraw from participating in the research at any time up to 31st December 2009 (whilst in the field). It was explained that if they refused to participate or withdrew consent, there would be no negative consequences and their data would be immediately destroyed.

### **3.13 Specific Ethical Considerations**

Childhood Studies, as an increasingly influential discipline within the UK, has led to a heightened awareness of the implications of researching children. In recognising that children have specific rights (UNCRC, 1991) as autonomous social actors, educational researchers have developed alternative research techniques involving direct communication with children, to work alongside standard UK ethical codes of conduct (BERA, 2004).

The UK ratified (Frost, 2005) the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1991) that sets out forty-one articles that identify children's fundamental rights and freedoms, including the need for children to have special assistance and protection due to their vulnerability (article 36). It is the first legal instrument to focus solely on the child, regardless of where the child was born and to whom, and regardless of sex, religion and social origin (article 2).

Article 12 (UNCRC) states the right of children to express their views and to be heard in all matters which affect them. Alderson (2000) suggests extending ethical procedures

and fully informed consent (BERA, 2004, p.7) to the right for children to be heard and be informed.

The articles heightened a growing interest in developing opportunities for children's views to be heard (Davies, 2000) and the specifics of research with children, whilst increasing policy demands to include children in collaborative decision-making (ESRC, 2009).

Not only has the issue of how to meaningfully involve children within research design required consideration, but also the importance of integrating ongoing self-reflexive judgements (on the ethical fitness for purpose) from the emergence of research ideas to completion, and beyond (appendix, 1, 'Ethical Reflection').

The crucial ethical consideration for this research has been the protection and respect for the bilingual participants, and in particular, participants aged three to five years of age unable to communicate with the researcher through their spoken mother tongue. For this reason, parent/carer presence was encouraged throughout the research process. Although declined, the offer of an interpreter was made available to the adult bilingual participants.

### **3.14 Data Storage and Anonymity**

Data generation for this study was conducted on alternate Monday/Friday mornings between September 2007 and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2009 (excluding seasonal school closures) in the pre-school community room, the playgroup, reception and year one classes – all of which were situated within the same Primary School.

The procedures followed during this study for gaining access and informed consent addressed the need for privacy, confidentiality, anonymity and secure data storage, and were guided by ethically appropriate principles which applied to both children and adults. To protect the participants' identities, the names of the participants, the settings and any other obviously identifiable information, were either omitted or replaced with chosen pseudonyms.

Where participants gave their consent for interviews, they were recorded using a digital voice recorder and transferred to hard disk prior to transcribing into print and the

preparation of selected vignettes (part of the ongoing thematic analysis). Data generated from participant observation (raw field notes) was also transcribed into print from before selection and preparation of vignettes.

Although the data stored on the computer was password protected, and following transcription into print; the audio hard disk recordings were deleted - following a request to do so from a key participant. The original audiotape recordings, hand written raw data, transcribed data and selected vignettes were stored securely with access only by the researcher for the duration of the research. For additional security and protection of confidentiality, all participants' information, the ethical proposal and informed consent forms were securely filed (in lockable storage) and the information registered with the data protection agency.

The participants were made aware of the selected vignettes entered within the body or appendices of the study; with the added assurance that no additional data would be released/published without their own and/or parental/carer and/or gatekeeper's permission.

### **3.15 Ethical Dilemmas**

Adhering ethically to researching young children has constrained the data gathering. Although having the potential to provide rich data, the research tools of photography and video filming child participants was quickly rejected on the grounds of potentially being a long term intrusion of privacy – of their life-worlds. In addition (as an additional method), I initially considered the inclusion of interpretations of the vignettes via a focus group of mixed-aged (primary school) bilingual learners. However, following several discussions with experienced researchers (Oxford, *Ethnography in Education Conference*, 2008) on the ethical appropriateness of this method of data generation, it was finally rejected on the grounds that the members might be too close to their own silent experiences and therefore unable to detach themselves enough to interpret others' experiences meaningfully through the vignettes. Thus, the focus group might try to disassociate itself from the silent period and/or negate their experiences. It was therefore considered too intrusive for the children aged seven, eight and nine years of age. However, should I engage in further research on the silent period, I would anticipate re-engaging in discussions on the inclusion of primary-aged focus groups.



I had originally wanted to engage in joint thematic analysis during the initial (categorising) stage with the pre-school playgroup leader (Nicole). However, Nicole reported that the data was too close to her own practice to assist effectively with the initial filtering. Following discussions with myself and the other practitioners, she withdrew her engagement in this process. I was extremely concerned at this point that she might have not only withdrawn access to the playgroup, but also the participants.

### **Ethnographic Research Tools**

LeCompte and Schensul (2010) remind the ethnographer that the primary ethnographic research tool is always the researcher – using her or his eyes and ears in data gathering.

#### **3.16 Participant Observation**

There isn't a rigid set of all-purpose instructions for participant observation, since different cultural settings require different approaches... to apprehend the cultural world through the perspectives of those who live, or have lived, it. (Goodman, 2009, p.1.)

Although the observer in ethnographic research has most commonly adopted the classic role of that of *participant-as-observer* (Anderson, 1990) or the *complete participant* role (de Matta, 1994), some analysts prefer to discuss the roles in terms of *membership* (Adler and Adler, 1994). In this research I adopted peripheral membership (Bourgois, 1995) in the role of *participant observer* as the, 'strategy that facilitates data collection in the field' (Bernard, 1998, p.150). Within this role I (the researcher) could, 'observe and interact closely with the people under study, establishing identities as insiders, but not participating in activities constituting the core of group membership' (Angrosino, 2007, p.55). The membership role of participant observer thus facilitated a, 'process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the research setting' (Schensul et al., 1999, p.91).

The strengths and weaknesses of participant observation (adapted from Mack et al., 2005) are:

## Strengths

- Allows for insight into contexts, participation, practices and behaviours
- Can provide information previously unknown to a researcher that is crucial for research design, data collection and interpretation of other data.

## Weaknesses

- Time-consuming
- Documentation relies on memory, personal discipline and diligence of researcher
- Requires conscious effort at impartiality as method is inherently subjective.

Clough and Nutbrown (2007) describe participant observation as, ‘looking – looking critically, looking openly, looking sometimes knowing what we are looking for, looking for evidence, looking to be persuaded, looking for information.’ (p.50.)

‘Radical looking’, introduced by Clough and Nutbrown (2007), presented participant observation as an additional means for exploring beyond the familiar and known. With the need, ‘to develop the capacity to see their topic with *new and different lenses... opening up of familiar things to alternative ways of seeing*’ (Clough and Nutbrown, 2007, p.49), a modified form of radical looking was required to explore a young bilingual learner’s silent experiences.

Data gathering, through participant observation, took place in the pre-school playgroup, reception class and year one class – all of which were contextually familiar to the participants (part of their everyday life-worlds) and situated within the familiar primary school setting. The emergent findings served to guide the direction and formulation (Fetterman, 1998) of successive observations through (Angrosino, 2007, pp.53-54) ‘the regular and repeated observation of people and situations...’.

### 3.17 Alternative Ways of Looking

In seeking out the best means to radically look through participant observation, I focused more closely upon alternative means of communication during the silent period. Tabors (1997) described how silent bilingual learners often engage in differing forms of

non-verbal communication with their peers and practitioners in an early years setting. These non-verbal forms of communication (British Council, 2005) include:

Body language and motions such as shrugs, foot tapping, drumming fingers, eye movements such as winking, facial expressions and gestures

- Use of space to signal privacy or attraction
- Touch
- Eye contact
- Use of time, waiting, pausing
- Smell
- Tone of voice, volume and speed
- Sound symbols including grunting, mmm, er, ah, uh-huh and mumbling
- Silence – pausing, waiting and secrecy
- Posture, such as position of body and stance
- Adornment including clothing, jewellery and hairstyle
- Locomotion, such as walking, running, staggering and limping.

(Adapted from British Council, 2005)

Non-verbal communication, as described above, offers young bilingual learners in the silent period the opportunity to convey meaning, avoid misunderstandings and the ability to ‘fit in’ to the target culture. Furthermore, gesture and expression (British Council, 2008) add an extra dimension to cultural understandings normally carried through mother tongue speech.

My interest was drawn towards comprehending ‘eye movements’, ‘gesture’ and ‘facial expressions’ and also the child as a ‘spectator’ (Saville-Troike, 1988). Tabors (1997) discussed the use of facial expressions by a bilingual learner (Leonardo) who was participating in a ‘spectator’ role – that of quiet observation within LPP.

‘Gaze following’ (Flom, Lee and Muir, 2006) remains predominantly in the domain of the neurological, behavioural sciences and/or psycholinguistics (Doherty, 2006; Leavens, 2006; Hurford, 2003) to date, adopted as a means of assessing children’s cognitive development in relation to medicalised conditions such as autism. However,



recent studies within the arena of early childhood studies have identified the significance of gaze as a multimodal means of communication in pre-school children.

I was fascinated by the linguist Tabors' (1997) description of Leonardo attempting to use his gaze (visual perceptions) to form understandings whilst situated as an 'outsider' situated on the periphery of the CoP. Tabors (1997) also described how a child used facial expressions to demonstrate that help was required by looking to and from the practitioner and researcher. I had previously observed such a situation with an emergent bilingual learner attempting to draw Nicole's attention towards a boy who was splashing water over the floor.

Lancaster's (2001b) study into the functions of gaze in young children's interpretations of symbolic forms, suggests that young children are capable of complex abstract reasoning, rooted in their physical engagement with the world which is mediated through physical and bodily resources – gaze being crucial when devoid of other culturally shared means of representation. The movement between analytic and interpersonal gaze frames is described as an interpretative arena where, 'Anna's gaze now moves from Rob to the cat's face, from interpersonal to analytic mode... coordinating gaze, language, and gesture...' (Lancaster, 2001b, p.148) Flewitt's (2005) comparative sociocultural research also identified that many children in early years settings used new and additional 'voices' (Edwards et al., 1998) as a means to communicate, which might include body movement, facial expression and *gaze direction*. As Flewitt (2007) articulated, 'It took a long time for us to recognise her eye pointing.'

Although Flewitt (2005) and Lancaster's (2001b) studies were not referring solely to bilingual learners, none the less, their research identifies 'gaze following' as an expression of communication, and also as an observational technique that respects the more diverse and multimodal means that children choose to express meaning.

Following gaze direction was identified by the researcher as an additional methodological tool – a refined method of radically looking. I had chosen the means to see and 'hear' silent experiences and more importantly how the participant engaged with, and responded to and through, fuller members of the early years CoP.

Through following the child's trail of gaze (radical looking) I was layering participant observation through a personal, interpersonal and contextual lens (Rogoff, 2003).

### **3.18 Field Notes**

The collection and analysis of field notes is fundamental to classic ethnographic research, and particularly so in participant observation (Gibbs, 2005). Stirling's classic monograph (1965) 'The Turkish Village' set standards for future fieldwork in his recording of field notes which still serve as an exemplar for how ethnographic research should be presented, in encouraging transparency and depth.

The recording of field notes appealed as the best means to 'capture' the observations and narrative accounts whilst in and shortly after leaving the field. Although I considered field notes as the primary instrument for gathering data in this research, the notes also acted as an 'insurance policy' for when details and impressions about an interview could not be picked up by the audio recording. In addition, if participants commented after the audio recorder has been switched off, the field notes remained as the primary source of evidence. In addition, field notes lend themselves to thematic analysis through coding, similar to that of analytic memos. Being the sole researcher I did not want to rely on a method that might distract attention (ie: filming) away from engagement with the participants during the observations and conversations. I therefore made the decision to stay close to the data throughout.

Expanding upon Gibbs' (2005) format; the writing of field notes was ongoing, exploratory, analytical, descriptive of events, dated according to significance or interest and written in the first person as a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1975) of narrative.

During some of the in-depth interviews, (with participant permission) I audio-taped so that I could later listen back to the story as a whole, whilst catching the essence of the story in the writing of field notes – as if sketching the outline of a picture. It was an attempt to see and hear the story as a child might listen to a story in a naturalistic setting, passed down through the generations.

### 3.19 Auto-Ethnography and Reflexivity

Included throughout the body of this research are both personal and professional auto-ethnographic recounts which add a colourful layer to the rich mix of methods applied to the exploration of the silent period. The silent period was chosen as the focus of this research in part because it served a purpose in piecing together some of my own unexplained experiences as a young child – through raising the need to develop shared understandings between different life-worlds. In doing so an interest deepened into the complexities of meaning making experienced by young bilingual learners. Ellis and Bochner's (2000) auto-ethnographical study suggested that the starting point for research should be born out of one's own experiences when stating, 'I start with my personal life. I pay attention to my feelings, thoughts, and emotions. I use what I call systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall to try to understand an experience I've lived through. Then I write my experience as a story'.

The thinking behind the writing of auto-ethnographic recounts of my own childhood experiences enabled meaning making of previously untold stories, and in particular the challenges and successes of negotiating my way through unfamiliar and uninviting communities of practice.

Auto-ethnographical writing is inevitably bound to researcher reflection and reflexivity. Rogers and Fuller (2007) explain the importance of applying reflexivity to the researching of bilingual learners when stating, 'Too often white researchers conduct research "on" or even "with" people of color and continue to reproduce a European American "regime of truth". One way that I (Rogers) have actively worked against this is through an active process of turning the analytical lens on myself as a researcher, a process known as reflexivity.' (2007, p.88)

As a reflexive ethnographer it was important to constantly review the evolution of the conceptual framework, and reflect upon why particular decisions were made, review why certain questions were asked and not asked and question why the data were generated through the methods chosen. (Walford and Massey, 1998, p. 8) Just as experiences are intersubjective and transformative (Tedlock, 2001, p.471) so also is research reflective of the ethnographer's own 'view on the world'.



Being in control of directing the research illuminated the significance of applying reflexivity not only upon the whole research process but specifically upon the analysis – before interpretations were finally shaped. However, there were difficulties involved when initially revisiting interpretations of meaning making, such as the complexities involved in unravelling partially formed analytical claims.

### **3.20 Unstructured Interviews**

Goodson and Crick (2009) suggest that, ‘Stories give us a reason for action and enable us to reconstruct identity. Personal change is crucial to deep learning... Both individuals and communities construct stories as a primary means of understanding and negotiating their lives... within particular learning communities...’ (2009, p.232)

The decision to include key events from a bilingual adult’s life-world was supported by Goodson and Crick (2009) study into the pedagogy of disengaged students in New South Wales, which suggests that, ‘Uncovering the stories which shape or explain the place or context under investigation is a crucial step which moves the learner beyond mere description and into higher order thinking and learning capabilities relating to problem formulation, the identification of key (abstract) concepts and knowledge mapping’ (2009, p.234).

White (1992, p.124) adds to the significance of adding extracts from life stories to the rich cultural mix when stating, ‘Our culturally available and appropriate stories... have been historically constructed and negotiated in communities of persons, and within the context of social structures and institutions’.

Through the retelling of culturally rich stories; the shared assumptions, values, and current understandings of experiences within the ‘landscape’ of communities of practice are re-evaluated and modified. Gutierrez-Clellen (2002) regarded interviews as adding the ability to modify the lines of enquiry, by adding interesting responses and investigating underlying motives in a way that questionnaires could not do.

However, the research found a disadvantage of interviews was how time consuming they were. It was difficult to calculate the interview time alongside the writing of field notes, as well as listening to the tape afterwards. It also proved difficult for both the

interviewee and myself to match with the same available interview time. Robson (2002) also suggests that interview responses may reveal discrepancies between what people say that they have done, and what they actually did.

It can be seen that there were both advantages and disadvantages in the adoption of unstructured interviews:

### **Advantages**

- In-depth responses
- An interpretive perspective – connections and relationships between particular events, phenomena and beliefs
- Suitable for sensitive subjects.

### **Disadvantages**

- Interviewee response may be affected by the presence of the researcher
- Time consuming
- Possible discrepancies in what the interviewee says.

Conversations, according to Thomas (2008), act as an ethical means to ‘hear’ the personal experiences of bilingual adults, searching into past experiences. Prior to the interview taking place the participant was asked to talk about her/his experiences and understandings of the silent period as an emergent bilingual learner. The participants had already viewed the abstract and information letter given to all participants, so were aware of what the focus of the research was. The unstructured interviews took place within the adjoining play group community room which was familiar to all the participants. They were audio-taped and scribed verbatim as field notes. Assurances were given to the interviewees that permission would be gained before using the material for any other purpose than the submission of this research.

### **3.21 Vignettes**

Gerber et al (1996, p.962) describe vignettes as; ‘...brief narratives, which contain elements of social situations and actions in which researchers are interested’.

Vignettes were adopted as an analytical research tool, due to their ability to 'home in', and hold the focus upon the contextualised key trends running through the themes. Each vignette was the end result of a huge amount of data which had been assimilated, coded and funnelled through thematic analysis – resulting in vignettes which 'freeze framed' snap-shots of core data.

When compiling the final vignettes they were selected on the basis of representing observations or thoughts on the significant themes – according to the predominance of the selected categories. They were presented as short, readable accounts containing and highlighting the core elements generated and featured throughout the thematic analysis – including significant observations, narratives and ethnographic accounts.

As stated by Hayes (1997, p.223) the researcher needs to be aware that the processing of a relatively small number of significant vignettes requires the, '...assimilation of a large amount of material to lift out the essential ingredients.' In order to pick out the essence of meaning, necessitates the initial 'sifting' through of a large selection.

Unlike vignettes written for instructional purposes, as in medicine, law and business (McAninch, 1993; Merseeth, 1996), in the field of education vignettes often aim to promote reflective thought and discussion of critical incidents and dilemmas. However, Barblett et al (2001) suggest caution in the application of 'too short' vignettes, which may be unable to present a 'true likeness' of complexity, sophistication, and subtlety. Shulman (1992) on the other hand, suggests to sceptical researchers that writing vignettes is a challenging task, thus providing an alternative presentational means within qualitative analytical frameworks - as a credible 'sketch' through which to draw meaning.

Ann Lieberman et al. (1984) introduced vignettes as a qualitative tool for research into the professional practice of teachers. Sixteen vignettes (which were of six to ten pages in length) served as a viable source of data. Lieberman (1987, p.1) described the edited vignettes (in her document resume) as, '...a narrative that was both personal and professional...which produced a rich source of knowledge'. Indeed, she found that, '...the vignettes exceeded our expectations. Their dramatic descriptions, dealing with tough problems in difficult environments...' (1987, p.13)



In providing a frame for each observation and narrative the flexibility of vignettes was found to be uniquely responsive to the specific focus of the research - exploring the story of a silent bilingual learner. Schoenberg and Ravdal (2000) found that vignettes assisted the reader in thinking beyond her or his own world by presenting her/him with new and alternative ways of knowing. Consequently, the primary purpose of the vignettes is to gain a deeper and richer understanding of the silent period.

However, there were draw backs in the employment of vignettes in this research. As the sole researcher the interpretation of the vignettes was dependent upon my understandings, experiences and insight on the selection of data presented in each vignette. When interpreting vignettes the researcher is also (Hayes, 1997, p.208) 'revealing glimpses of her own internal models and personal constructs'. The result is therefore subject to one person's perspective on what is of value. The data (Hayes, 1997, p.223) may have been further enriched (and more varied) if the vignettes had been compared to that of a co-researcher's data set.

### **3.22 Digital and Computer-Aided Technology**

Although used frequently within current ethnographic research (Ethnography and Education Conference, 2009) the use of Information and Computer-aided Technology (ICT) for research gathering and analysing of qualitative data ('CAQDAS' and 'N.VIVO') was not employed. This was in part because I did not want to 'let go' of the data (Fielding and Lee, 1998; Tesch, 1990) and also because I wanted to stay close to the '*roots*' of ethnography ('ethno' = person and 'graphy' = writing).

The use of photographic and video recording methods for the observation of young children's behaviours was considered as an unnecessarily invasive means through which to gather data. However, gaining an understanding of a young bilingual learner's silent experiences without permeating through *personal* spaces remained troublesome.

Kellet (2010) asks the researcher to consider whose interests are best being served through the research process – those of the researcher or the child participant? As children and families are often already subject to constant surveillance by a multitude of 'professionals' (McLaughlin et al, 2008) there was a need to be cautious when

considering more intrusive data collection methods. It was not the intention of the research to further invade the young child (and their family's) life-worlds.

Clark et al. (2003) remark that whilst more imaginative methods have become widely accepted for 'hearing the "voice"' of the child, so also has the risk of invading children's private worlds increases. Lewis (2004) emphasises this point, accusing the government and children's charities of understating or ignoring the child's choice for silence, privacy or non-response. However, as a researcher was I risking legitimising the invasion of a young bilingual child's world in attempting to gain a greater understanding from her/his perspective? It was therefore important to acknowledge the need to be respectful of both emergent bilingual learner and her/his silences (Kellet, 2010; Clark and Moss, 2001).

Garland-Thomson (2002, p.56) described disabled people as being 'visually conspicuous while politically and socially erased' – having always been 'stared at' (p.56) and yet having little actual voice, suggesting that photography offers 'the spectator the pleasure of unaccountable, uninhibited, insistent looking.' (p.57.) As an ethnographic researcher, how could I legitimise such intense staring into young children's life-worlds when the children who were being looked at had no culturally shared means (their mother tongue was not understood) to communicate their rights?

Attempting to 'listen' to the 'voice' of a silent young bilingual learner avoided adopting participant observation merely as an opportunity to legitimise staring. Having considered the advantages and disadvantages of digital data collection methods I decided to align myself to traditional ethnographic methods. Writing and audio-recording emerged as a less intrusive means through which to sketch the experiences of an emergent bilingual learner within an early years CoP.

In choosing to limit the use of audio recordings in the field, no additional 'man made' barriers were created between the researcher, the participants and the data. As stated by Gibbs (2007), 'A common experience of researchers tape recording interviews is that the respondents offer a lot more information, sometimes confidential and revealing, after the recorder has been switched off' (2007, p.27). Data was therefore initially gathered via field notes.

Dufon (2002) encapsulates some of the additional 'fears' which discouraged the employment of video recordings for this research:

First, videotaping whole events requires using a lot of videotape... I was not always able to video record the learners the entire time that I was with them...The biggest difficulty I had was in obtaining wide angle shots... I found its viewing angle too limiting for the field, when I was working in very small spaces. It was not always possible to back up far enough in order to capture all the participants within the range of the camera lens. (Dufon, 2002, p.47.)

Apart from the practicalities of handling and maintaining the equipment (as the sole researcher), the limitations of the camera compared to the human eye (peripheral vision, speed of scanning etc) cannot be underestimated. It would also have been very 'tricky' to have followed the gaze of trail closely without the recording equipment appearing intrusive.

Just as I would not want to have a one-to-one conversation with a friend with a camcorder 'sat' between us, I would not have wanted anything physically situated between the young participants and myself. I ask, how can the researcher be a complete participant observer if the researcher is creating a barrier (by the use of digital equipment) between themselves and the participants?

### **3.23 Framing the Analysis**

The first consideration was choosing an analytic instrument capable of interpreting silent experiences within the social context within which participation was occurring (Kelly et al., 2001). Several tools for analysis (Mercer and Littleton, 2007 and Bloome et al., 2005) were considered before finally settling upon the central instrument of thematic analysis (Thomas and Harden, 2008). Additional tools considered included discourse, narrative and conversational analysis (Jaworski and Coupland, 1999). Although discourse analysis was initially considered, to have employed discourse analysis within the sociocultural framework risked adding an additional theoretical layer to the 'mix', and as such might have 'muddied the waters' of analysis.



As the research was not analysing language structures the focus was upon the best means to interpret Suki's prolonged silent experiences. I therefore sought out an analytical tool that 'freeze framed' the illuminatory threads of the lived experiences (vignettes) in preparation for interpretation through a sociocultural lens. Edwards (2007) viewed sociocultural theory as a sound theoretical source through which to investigate early years issues.

Lave and Wenger (1991) discussed the advantages of employing Community of Practice theory not only as a significant framework of analysis with which to make meaning of situated learning, but also as an analytical viewpoint on learning applicable across many varied situations, including educational settings.

I also examined Fler and Richardson's (2008) study which successfully adopted Rogoff's (2003) three foci of analysis – *personal*, *interpersonal* and *cultural-institutional* – as an analytical lens with which to determine whether early childhood teachers could document how young children participate in sociocultural activity within school Communities of Practice. The adoption of Rogoff's analytical lens would have focused the lens not only on the individual but also on the interpersonal and cultural-institutional aspects of any given activity.

Rogoff (2003, p.58) confirmed that the hand holding the lens, '...construct[s] the focus of analysis and that *'The focus of analysis stems from what we as observers choose to examine'* [Rogoff's emphasis]. However, I chose thematic analysis as an appropriate analytical tool through which to funnel the findings. Sociocultural theorising (Vygotsky, 1978) was employed to explain and account for *the existence* of the patterns and/or regularities and irregularities – the '*why*' of the analytic process (Flick, 2007).

Braun and Clarke (2006) encapsulate the primary reason thematic analysis was chosen when stating, 'Any theoretical framework carries with it a number of assumptions about the nature of the data, what they represent in terms of the "the world", "reality", and so forth. A good thematic analysis will make this transparent.' (2006, p. 80)

### 3.24 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a poorly demarcated, rarely acknowledged, yet widely used qualitative analytic method... that offers an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analysing qualitative data...'. (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.77)

The foundations of thematic analysis are based initially upon *noticing, collecting, and thinking about significant 'things'* (Seideland and Klaus, 1995). Although unaware of exactly when I first started to 'notice' significant 'things', new patterns of thought began to emerge when connections were first made between my own and the participants' silent experiences. Unbeknown to myself at that time, the 'collecting' process was part of incidental data gathering – a preliminary to the formal data gathering process, which involved multiple observations and interviews through the sharing of life stories.

Thematic analysis is a method that can be applied across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches. As stated by Braun and Clarke (2006, p.78) 'Through its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data.'

In contrast to alternative methods of analysis, such as interpretive phenomenological, grounded theory, narrative, discourse (or conversational) thematic analysis adapts to suit the needs of any given theoretical framework (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.81), 'and can be used to do different things within them. Thematic analysis... reports experiences, meanings and the reality of participants, and examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences... are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society'.

#### Advantages

- Flexibility
- Useful method within participatory research paradigm
- Offers 'thick description' of the data set
- Highlights similarities and differences across the data set
- Generates unanticipated insights

- Social as well as psychological interpretations of data.

## **Disadvantages**

- A broad approach
- Belief that its diversity in application may hinder a deeper level of analysis
- Does not ‘zoom in’ upon the minutiae of speech
- Needs to be funnelled through an existing theoretical framework to avoid a purely descriptive interpretation
- Not distinctly demarcated as a ‘stand alone’ analytical method
- Often either overlooked as misinterpreted because historically does not have the ‘kudos-bearing branding’ of discourse analysis.

Thematic analysis offered a justifiable interpretation of the themes, ideas, or implied meanings, through identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. It also facilitated the recognition of how the participants made meaning (Braun and Clarke, 2006) of their experiences through sociocultural theorising, while retaining the focus closely upon the vignettes. Therefore, thematic analysis presented as a method that both reflected and unravelled the surface of contextualised silent experiences.

### **3.25 Classification, Coding and Emergent Themes**

According to Flick et al. (2004), thematic analysis is an approach that involves the creation and application of ‘codes’ to data. There is a link between thematic analysis and grounded theory, which presents a framework for carrying out code-related analysis. Similarly, many CAQDAS (Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis) packages are designed to facilitate thematic coding.

Coding (Flick et al., 2004) refers to the creation of categories in relation to data, the grouping together of different instances of data that enable them to be ‘of the same type’. As to what counts as ‘a category’ draws from all kinds of ‘places’ including theory, literature, research experience and the data itself.



Whilst in the field, I valued highly the ability to align myself closely to the research participants' experiences. Once having completed the formality of gathering the data, I felt overwhelmed by the enormity of the task ahead.

The task of formalising thematic analysis began with hours of re-reading the rather 'messy' (Gibbs, 2007) field notes written in well-worn note books and on endless scraps of paper, plus the studying of both audible and inaudible tape recordings. I was relieved that I had written 'verbatim' field notes throughout all the recordings. However, with the 'evidence' in readiness to 'present my case' (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998), 'An empty feeling comes over you as you ask, "Now what do I do?" (1998, p.170.) I was left with the daunting task of how this thick, rich naturalistic and ethnographic data could be analysed.

Earnestly I organised the data, by categorising and classify the data 'systematically' using a coding system as suggested by Davies (2008) and by adopting the grounded theory 'memoing' tool (Glaser, 1992) to classify the data. However, rather than reducing the data into manageable and comprehensible components (Neuman and Kreuger, 2003) the data increased greatly – due to multiple cross referencing between categories.

Where I had been filled with positive thoughts, I began to question my own judgement and ability to complete the task. I 'backed away' from the data analysis so that I could listen to the experiences of others who, in similar circumstances, had returned from the field and managed to conquer what appeared as an insurmountable stumbling block to the successful completion of the research. Having been reassured by academic colleagues that this 'barrier' was both a 'normal' and expected part of the research process, I realised that I had already begun the analysis, whilst in and out of the field (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998).

Through the writing of field notes and reflective accounts of what was noticed and heard, connections were being made between my thoughts and what I was noticing. This 'incidental' analysis, through which I had already seen themes emerging (Angrosino, 2007) was a welcome revelation that both inspired and lifted my spirits to 'move on' and take ownership once more as the main instrument of *my* data analysis. As Rogoff (2003, p.58) stated, '*the hand holding the lens was of importance*', and, '*The*

*focus of analysis stems from what we as observers choose to examine*’ [Rogoff’s emphasis].

### 3.26 Filtering

Nicole (the pre-school leader) requested to assist with the initial ‘filtering’ of data, but as the categorising progressed it became evident that Nicole was beginning to feel a responsibility for the emerging themes, and was finding it difficult to detach herself from the raw data. As this was a concern which made her feel uncomfortable, Nicole decided to withdraw from the co-analysis. I continued as the sole researcher.

I initially colour-coded the pieces of data as Green-frequency high, Amber-moderate and Red-low; with only those field notes colour-coded Green initially allowed through to the next level of the selection process. Data that appeared to have no thematic relevance (Red) was not included in the next part of the categorisation process. Data coded as Amber was to be reviewed again and then placed in either the Red or Green category. As the sole researcher the decision making was not an easy task. However, although not without its flaws the rudimentary categorisation process began to give the data some ‘shape’.

As suggested by Thomas and Harden (2008), I categorised the data according to recurring themes that had arisen. The intention was therefore to highlight pieces of data that were re-emerging and to funnel them into a particular theme. Unfortunately, this process made it rather difficult for re-modification of the themes as the analysis developed.

I assembled the multitude of selected field notes as dated extracts, and divided them into printed vignettes by cutting each extract into the format of a small ‘story’. Each story was presented as a ‘snapshot’, or ‘freeze frame’, of lived experience.

The data was finally transcribed (as vignettes) with an appropriate level of detail (not too long or short) and each was checked for ‘accuracy’. The coding process was confirmed as thorough, inclusive and comprehensive, with all relevant extracts for each theme collated and themes checked against each other and the original data set. The themes were seen to be coherent, consistent, and distinctive.

The data was initially interpreted on two levels: a) descriptive, and b) theoretical, with the vignettes illustrating examples of the analytic claims. The analysis was considered as presenting a convincing story through sociocultural interpretations of the data, with a balance between analytic narrative and illustrative extracts provided. The assumptions about, and specific approach to, thematic analysis were clearly explained, and the ethnographer (myself) was seen to be actively reflexive in the research process.

### **3.27 Summary**

The Methodology chapter has focused primarily upon justifying the research design, discussing the methodological dilemmas and challenges and the employment of appropriate tools through which to analyse and interpret the findings. Thematic analysis was discussed as an appropriate theory driven analytical instrument with which to identify and report patterns (themes) within the data, and to organise the initial interpretation of the findings (Boyatzis, 1998).

Discussing the ethnographic means of data collection (through direct engagement with the participants) initiated explanations of how sociocultural theory could enrich interpretations of the practices of an emergent bilingual learner. Ethnography presented as a key vehicle through which sociocultural understandings of participation generated new conversations across theoretical paradigms (sociocultural and linguistic) revealing an otherwise concealed dimension in early years bilingual learning. Consequently, the employment of an ethnographic methodology not only centred the exploration upon interpreting the silent period, but also provided the means with which to paint Suki's portrait.

The methodology chapter laid bare the inevitable interrelationship between the researcher and her/his interpretation of the data. As each participant is a product of a unique sociocultural history, likewise, the researcher creates a picture of who she/he is and how she/he interprets the world. Hence, not only am I shaped by my own life-world experiences, but so also is the portrait of Suki - as it is not only an interpretation of what I see, but also on *how* I see the world.



# Chapter 4

## The Research Design – Attention to the Finer Detail

### Introduction

Chapter four provides a detailed account of the research rationale which bridges the divide between the methodological discussions (chapter 3) and sociocultural analysis (chapter 5). Building upon the research framework (Table 1), an ‘audit trail’ of the data collection process chronologically maps out the research process through a timeline (Table 2). In addition, the evolution of the research design and analysis is examined alongside selected data samples which are drawn upon to articulate the scope of the data.

Table 1: Research Framework

Participant	Mother Tongue	Context	Field-Work	Narratives/Vignettes	Chapter
Researcher	English	Primary High School	Auto-ethnographic accounts	1 x vignette	Chapter 5
Anyor (lay)	Polish	High School	Auto-ethnographic accounts	1x narrative	Chapter 1
Uzma (lay)	Farsi	Reception class	Auto-ethnographic accounts	1 x narrative	Chapter 7
Kimoto	Japanese	Preschool	Participant Observations	1 x vignette	Chapter 5
Suki	Japanese	Reception Class	Participant Observations	1 x vignette	Chapter 5
Adyta	Punjabi	Preschool/Reception/Yr1	Participant Observations	5 x vignettes	Chapters 4 and 5
Preschool practitioners (Nicole, Pat and Sarah)	English	Preschool	Unstructured Interviews	2 x vignettes	Chapters 4 and 5
Tamsin (bilingual adult)	Punjabi	Preschool	Unstructured Interviews	6 x vignettes	Chapters 4 and 5

## 4.1 Theoretical Rationale

Walking the reader through the theoretical rationale of the research process not only reinforces the significance of reflexivity in researcher thinking, but also makes explicit the determining factors underpinning both the theoretical rationale and analysis.

**Table 2: Research Timeline**

Date	Research activity	Participant	Method	Location	Comments
<2005	Personal auto-ethnographic accounts  Period of incidental data gathering	Researcher (aged 8 -11)  Anyor (aged 11 years)	Gathered memories  Personal narratives of childhood	Primary school (Scotland) and High school (England)  Anyor's home	Selected auto-ethnographic accounts were drawn upon to provide a researcher perspective
2005-2007	Professional ethnographic accounts	Suki	Multiple incidental observations, 5 x participant observations via hand written field-notes	Researcher's reception class  Suki's home Journey to school	Suki's silence 'sowed the seed' for the research
2005-2007	Email correspondence through SMIRA forum	Collective including Zhara's email (Ch.4, p. 95)	32 x Electronic communications	On-line	Challenged researcher thinking
2007-2009	Data gathering via hand written field-notes	Adyta	Multiple (48) Participant Observations	Preschool playgroup, Reception and Year 1 class	20-30 minute weekly observations of silent participation
2008-2009	Data gathering via hand written field-notes	Preschool practitioners	Unstructured interviews x 2	Preschool	Monolingual Preschool

		Nicole (leader) Pat and Sarah			practitioners perspectives on learning and LPP
2008- 2009	Hand written field- notes	Kimoto	Participant  Observations x 2	Preschool	Importance of LPP noted
2009	Field-notes – hand written and audio recorded childhood memories	Tamsin (bilingual adult)	Unstructured interviews x 2	The reception class that Tamsin attended	Consolidated importance of mediating own learning

Prior to September 2007 (Table 2) preliminary research activity initially set out to critically examine associations between selective mutism and early years bilingual learners. Although not immense, the nominal amount of literature (Cline, 2004; Kervatt, 1999; Johnson, 2001; Cunningham, 2004; Le Couteur, 2006; Longo, 2001) available on selective mutism was mainly written within and for the disciplines of educational psychology and speech and language therapy.

The initial research title, *‘An exploration into the experiences of a silent bilingual child following transition into an early years setting with regards to any association between their sustained silence and selective mutism’*, did not attach the researcher to one theoretical position.

At this time, I shared discussions within the Selective Mutism Information and Research Association Forum (SMIRA, 2007), through which parents shared concerns in relation to their children presenting as ‘symptomatic’ of selective mutism. Regular electronic communications were received from members of the SMIRA Forum who were interested in the researcher’s line of enquiry. The following edited communication was forwarded from ‘Marjan’; whose mother tongue is Arabic.

Hi Caroline,



When we moved from Sudan to Zambia, 'Zahra' was 2.5 years. She had already attended an English speaking nursery in Sudan for 2 months so was a bit familiar with the language [...] In Zambia she found it really hard to separate when I would bring her to the nursery. She would stop talking as soon we entered the gate of the nursery and would hold me firmly. Not allowing me to go. I remember one day when they had gymnastics and parents were allowed to look. She was standing frozen on the trampoline and would not move at all.

In the morning she needed a long time to defrost before she would go and play. In the beginning she would only observe, but later on she was participating non-verbally more and more [...] To one staff member she would later on whisper as well to one of her friends she would talk sometimes.

I had told the school about her situation but they had never dealt with such a child and thought I was an over concerned mother. When I asked after 6 weeks how she was doing and if she was talking the keyworker mentioned that she was shy and would not talk but that it was normal for non-English speaking children to be silent so they can pick up the language and that she would overgrow it when she was older. My reply was that we already had 1 year experience with this in Zambia and that there was more than just shyness.

[...]Whenever I ask her how school was today and what she did she would not reply. One day I asked her if she find it scary to talk to others and she confirmed this. In the beginning Zahra would show the stiffness. It was shocking for me to see as she is really athletic at home. At the moment she is not stiff in school anymore and the key worker told me she loves to climb [...] Unfortunately they don't see how she is at home. People from the Netherlands also suggest to stop the multilingual raising. But it is not a point that she cannot speak the languages as she does speak all languages at home.

'Marjan': SMIRA Discussion Forum (27 May 2007)

Marjan's description of Zahra's changed behaviour bore striking similarities to Suki (Chapter 1.3) when first attending reception class. As Marjan recited of Zahra, 'She would stop talking as soon we entered the gate of the nursery and would hold me firmly ... She was standing frozen on the trampoline and would not move at all'. To the researcher Suki appeared as if, '... "motionless" and silent ...', in the reception class.

Marjan's email communication made it apparent that the presenting characteristics ('silence' and 'stillness') of Zahra and Suki (table 2) were very both similar and contextualised within the early years CoP. Marjan's message was one of several forwarded from parents of emergent bilingual learners who corresponded via the

SMIRA website. Not only did parents such as Marjan express increasing apprehension and frustration at the lack of co-operation (from the teachers and/or practitioners) in addressing their concerns, but they also expressed an urgency for assessment of their children in relation to presenting as symptomatic of selective mutism (Chapter 1.1-1.3).

It was not identified whether the parents' urgency for assessment of their children was based upon a need to share their concerns with others, or whether diagnosis was chosen as a tactical strategy to 'buy in' to additional SENCO support. However, it was none the less apparent that parents like Marjan identified a negative change in their child's behaviour (within the early years CoP) which was not adequately addressed.

A decision had to be made whether or not to explore the possibility of an association between selective mutism and emergent bilingual learners (in early years CoPs). However, to have pursued this line of enquiry might have suggested an implicit acceptance (a justification) of the increasing rates of bilingual learners being diagnosed with selective mutism (Cline, 2004). This measure of doubt and concern in relation to focusing upon an association between bilingual learners and selective mutism halted this line of enquiry.

Following a period of reflection upon the decision not to proceed, an alternative exploratory strategy was contemplated as a means of investigating what was behind the diagnosis of selective mutism. Selective mutism as a diagnosable condition was consciously moved to one side for the duration of the study to enable a thorough examination into what lay behind it.

If 'silence' was the perceived commonality linking selective mutism to emergent bilingual learners and the early years CoP then it was plausible to explore this period of silence. This was not to say that selective mutism was rejected as a diagnosable condition. Indeed it was regularly acknowledged within the SMIRA forum the impact of selective mutism upon both the child and their respective families. Therefore, if the higher incidences of selective mutism presenting in bilingual learners (Cline and Baldwin, 2005) was under scrutiny; then an examination of the bilingual learner's silence was considered as a means to furthering understandings of the child's experiences, regardless of any diagnosis. The research therefore changed track in order to investigate the under-researched phenomenon of the silent period.

As second language acquisition research had primarily adopted a cognitive perspective on bilingual learning, an alternative theoretical lens was sought to both layer and build upon current understandings of the silent period (Chapter 1.2). Indeed navigating the new line of enquiry through the alternative lens of sociocultural theory proved paramount in throughout the study.

## 4.2 The Research Question Evolves

The task of the research questions was to drive the examination forward and through the silent experiences of a small group of young bilingual learners within the context of the early years CoP. The research questions were therefore viewed as part of an ongoing iterative process, to be revised periodically.

Preliminary researcher thoughts focused upon significant factors that might cast light upon the silent period, such as the receiving environment, how emergent bilingual learners gained a sense of belonging and the significance of the affective in mediation of learning.

The initial research questions were:

1. Does the receiving *environment* influence the young bilingual learners' experiences during the silent period?
2. Does a young bilingual learner use the silent period to *fit in*?
3. Where is the *affective* in the mediation process?

### Sample analysis

The following vignette sample (1), which was drawn from (tables 1 and 2) Tamsin's experiences (Chapter 5.6) in her reception class, tested out the ability of the initial research questions to facilitate an examination of the silent period.

...The usual teacher was absent that day and a supply teacher came in. I *remember her smiling at us – at me*. She gave out the milk as usual that day, but when I refused the bottle of milk - I must have shaken my head - *she asked me if I wanted the milk in a cup instead* and I nodded and said, 'Yes'. She poured it out for me into a cup and I drank it. [Tamsin laughs] *She engaged with me* so I did what she wanted me to. *She showed me kindness and care – yes, she cared*



about me. I did everything she asked me to do that day...When the usual teacher came back the pattern must have been kind of broken because I started to engage in the activities at school and to speak – a little.

*I didn't develop any friendships* in that reception class – none. It wasn't until towards the end of primary school when I did start to develop some 'in school' friendships, but it couldn't carry on out of school. I remember usually *sitting alone and no one ever choosing me to be their partner*. I remained very *insular and self-contained* throughout primary school because I knew that my life was so very different - at home. Some *kind children did try to reach out to me* but I felt that I couldn't reciprocate because how could I invite them for tea at my house – it was all too different. I mean, I couldn't go to their parties, could I - so what was the point? *It was a coping mechanism* – it made things easier and made less tension ...'

The vignette revealed many factors (including feelings of isolation and the positioning of the affective ( Chapter 6.6) in relation to developing a sense of 'belonging') which were highly significant to Tamsin's memories of silent experiences of her reception class. However, in doing so, the focus had 'shifted' towards an exploration into Tamsin's feelings, rather than examining the nature of her participative experiences (Chapter 2.3) throughout the silent period. To clarify, all of the above factors may be highly significant to *all* children when entering an early years CoP, but were not necessarily specific to this line of enquiry which needed to focus specifically upon raising understandings of young bilingual learners' experiences. Rather than investigating meaning making during the silent period, the research questions had invited the reader into a consolidation of assumptions in relation to the '*receiving environment*', '*fitting in*' and '*the role of the affective*' which were not necessarily directed solely to the experiences of a young bilingual learner.

The research questions were therefore redefined to focus less on understandings of the physical 'receiving environment', and more on participative experiences within the silent period.

The revised research questions were:

1. How is an early years community of practice *experienced* by a young bilingual learner?
2. What part does *mediation* play within the early years community of practice?

3. How does a silent young bilingual learner *negotiate participation* in the early years community of practice?

Vignette sample (2) focuses upon Adyta's trail of gaze as he attempts to sing along with the rest of the children in the preschool.

Adyta is kneeling on the carpet with the other children and he looks at the lead practitioner (Nicole) as she sings 'Old Mac Donald had a farm'. Instead of singing he makes the facial expressions of the animals. He continues looking intently at Nicole and then starts to glance around the room at the other children. He returns his glance towards *Nicole*, *smiles and 'sings' along*. His *mouth is moving*, but no sound is being produced and his mouth movements do not match the words of the song. He manages to *repeat 'had-a-farm'* (as if it were one word) and *sings this very loudly* whilst still looking at Nicole and *following her actions*. The other children turn and look at Adyta. He stops singing. (25 June 2007)

The research questions aided in compartmentalising Adyta's silent experiences into (1) contextualised experiences, (2) mediatory factors and (3) levels of participation (Chapter 2.3-2.4). However these key elements were also seen to be both overlapping and interconnected. For example, all of Adyta's experiences were contextualised within the early years CoP.

In addition, although the mediatory factors were not visible, it was made apparent through Adyta's increasing level of participation that he had mediated his own learning (Chapter 2.3-2.4). To clarify, his increasing participation resulted from partially copying the practices of the children when closely observing and listening intensely to the early years CoP members' singing. Incidental mediation was also evident when the CoP members modelled behaviours such as singing and actions (chapter 6.2-6.5). Adyta's levels of contextualised participation therefore increased fractionally through self-mediation (internalisation of his mother tongue) and the incidental modelling of practices (singing and actions) by others.

Each of the three research questions focused upon significant factors within the silent period, with each of the emerging elements initially 'standing alone'. An increasing awareness was apparent of the synthesis of practices emerging which required all encompassing tools of analysis. Employing both thematic analysis for funnelling and

vignette analysis as an analytical tool was a justified (Chapter 4.6-4.9) as means to merge and interpret participation, mediation as contextualised silent experiences.

Following another period of reflection the three research questions were merged together into:

‘What was Suki experiencing during her prolonged period of silence?’

Vignette sample (3) demonstrates how the synthesis of the three key elements was embedded within the analytical process. The following vignette sample presents a meaningful ‘chunk’ drawn from an unstructured interview with the preschool practitioners, ‘Pat’ and ‘Sarah’, (tables 3 and 4). The research question facilitated the following vignette in ‘capturing a snapshot’ of the practitioners’ understandings of the silent period:

Pat: They stand and watch other children doing things for ages ... sometimes they just stand and stare. I think they can feel overwhelmed at carpet time and need to be allowed some space to sit quietly and watch. It must be like going to another planet really.

Sarah: ... But I don’t think that we should force the children to talk. They need to be allowed to watch what is going on, while we keep a careful eye on them. I’ve noticed that they usually like to play on their own. It’s not easy for them to make friends, even when other children try to involve them. I want to help because I hate to see them so isolated ... Even in reception class it’s harder because they have to follow more instructions.

Pat sets the ‘scene’ within the early years CoP through ‘unpacking’ the emergent bilingual learner’s attempts at participation. Pat’s identification of how emergent bilingual learners, ‘... stand and watch other children doing things for ages ... sometimes they just stand and stare’, provided another ‘angle’ from which to view experiences during the silent period. The vignette reiterated emerging patterns of, ‘silent observation and copying practices from a “safe” distance’ (Chapter, 2.8) which had been noted when interviewing Tamsin and during participant observations of Adyta. (Chapter 5.6-5.7). Hence a more complete picture was beginning to emerge.

Likewise, Sarah reinforced Pat’s thinking on close observation as a key learning pathway, whilst also revealing the need for mediation (despite limited understanding of



her mediatory role) when stating, ‘I want to help because I hate to see them so isolated.’ Of particular interest was Sarah’s understanding and apparent concern that mediation and the language of instruction (English) were interconnected (Chapter 2.6). Sarah realised that instructions in spoken and written English might pose a problem for the emergent bilingual learner in a reception class, when stating, ‘... in reception class it’s harder because they have to follow more instructions.’

Although neither practitioner made an explicit connection between observation and learning (Chapter 6.3) they none the less both recognised that emergent bilingual learners needed to seek out silent spaces through which to observe the practices within the early years CoP. Whilst recognising that the young bilingual learner was not supported during the silent period, Sarah was unsure of her mediatory role. Pat’s comment, ‘It must be like going to another planet really’, demonstrated her understanding that during the silent period the emergent bilingual learner was experiencing an unascertained level of cultural discontinuity (Chapter 7.4) which was reaffirmed when Sarah commented upon ‘difficulties’ understanding the language of instruction. Neither practitioner referred directly to the child’s heritage language, the relevance of culturally shared tools, nor the significance (or not) of culturally responsive (Chapter 7.5) practitioners.

### **4.3 Specifics to the Design of the Research**

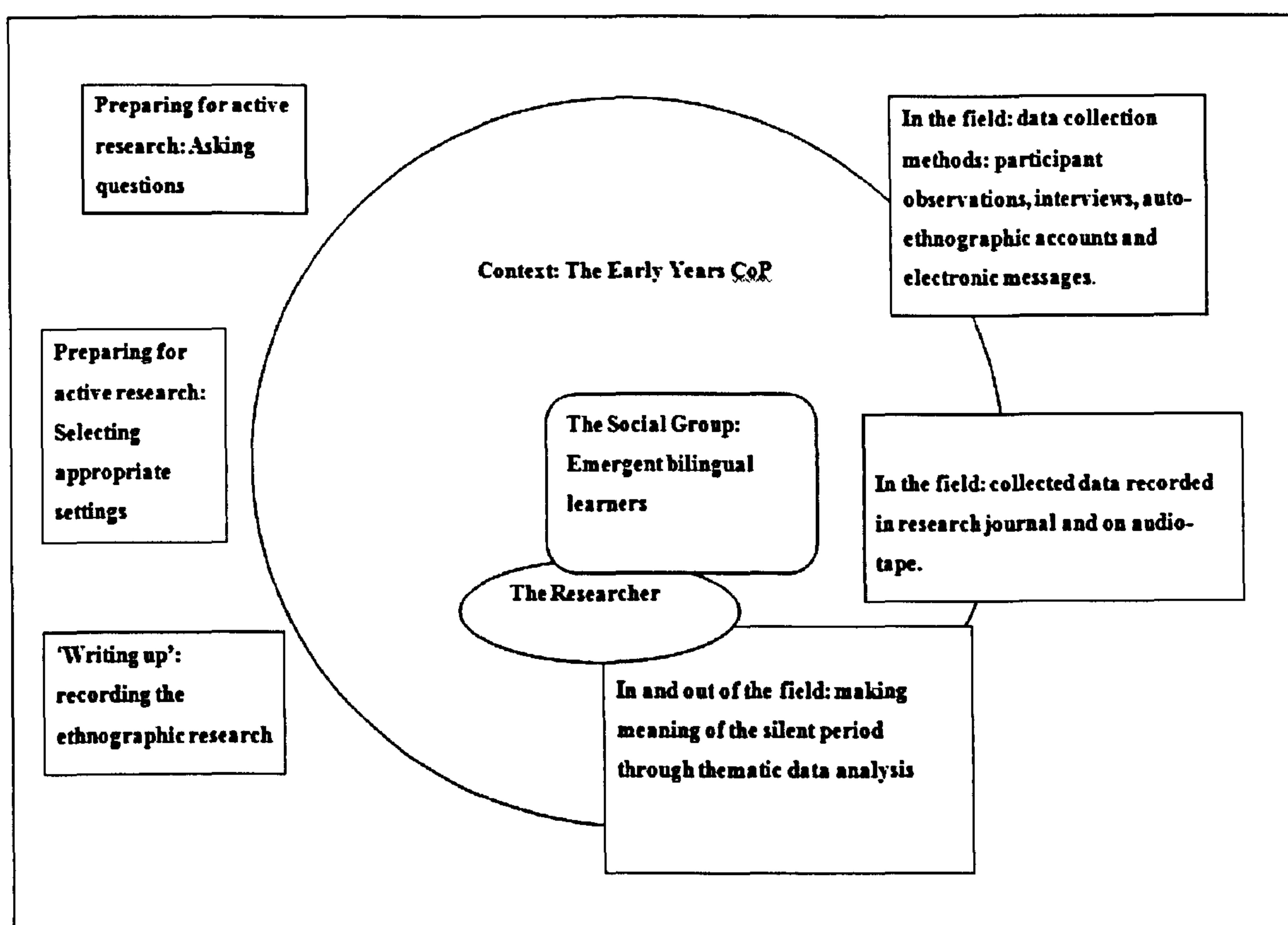
Throughout the evolution of the research, specifics to the design (Chapter 3.2) and ethical appropriateness (appendix 1) required ongoing reconsideration. Adhering to clearly identified key terms of reference within the ethnographic design played a key part in the ongoing reflexive practice. The terms of reference (in chronological order) were:

- Identification of the research focus.
- Identification of the research question(s).
- Identification of a void in existing knowledge.
- Framing the research within an ethnographic methodology.
- Identifying most commonly adopted theoretical perspective (SLA/cognitive).
- Adoption of an alternative perspective (sociocultural).

- Comparisons to contrasting perspectives (SLA/cognitive).
- Choice and appropriateness of analytic tools (thematic/vignette analysis).
- Testing vignettes against sociocultural theory.
- Making meaning through analysis.
- Identification of the relationship between the theoretical findings and practice.
- Identification of the limitations/constraints of the research.
- Review of methodology, results, interpretation and conclusion.
- Articulation of how the research contributes to existing understandings within the field of early years bilingual learning.

#### 4.4 To Proceed

Figure 4 presents a diagrammatic outline of the iterative nature of the research process, with the emergent bilingual learner and the researcher positioned centrally throughout. As is common in ethnographic research, informal data analysis emerged whilst in the field (Figure 4).



**Figure 4: The Ethnographic Research Process**

## **4.5 In the Field**

As qualitative data collection methods (participant observation and unstructured interviews) were intrinsic within the ethnographic study, the perimeters within which data was gathered were clearly identified. The following 'rules' guided the data collection whilst in the field:

- Focus on the here and now.
- Focus on data solely in relation to the research question.
- Write verbatim
- Ignore the audio-tape - when used.
- Not to be distracted.
- Not to interrupt.
- Accept pauses without interruption.
- Maintain (significant) eye contact whilst writing field notes.
- Not to make assumptions out of what is unseen or unsaid/not heard.
- Write reflection post-observation/interview.
- Re-read field notes several times whilst keeping the research question in mind.
- Note recurring elements as relevant to the research question.

## **4.6 Formalising the Analysis**

Although thematic analysis was identified as a fitting method of analysis in accommodating alternative theoretical perspectives (Chapter 3.24) for approximately three months the choice of analysis became a 'sticking point' within the enquiry.

With the intention of the analysis to make meaning of lived experience (the unspoken word) the vignette as a tool of analysis (Chapter 3.21) provided an alternative approach to that of transcription. However, the vignette as an analytical tool (unlike transcription) has yet to be deeply embedded within qualitative research. In addition, as vignettes do not copy the structural presentation of transcription, each vignette is viewed and analysed as a whole unit through sociocultural theorising.

When returning to the raw data the reapplication of levelled coding through highlighting and labelling (Chapter 3.25-3.26) tested the appropriateness of the vignette analysis



throughout the ethnographic process. The overarching aim of the vignette analysis was to facilitate in ‘unpacking’ the unspoken experiences.

However, two questions remained throughout the analytic process:

1. Would the analytic tool serve its purpose and unpack the silent period?
2. Would this ‘creative’ mode of analysis lead to findings that contribute to the current body of knowledge on early years bilingual learning?

Highlighted field notes (at this point over a hundred) were copied by hand on to separate pieces of paper and placed on the floor under their assigned labels. An initial (first wave) of descriptive interpretation was applied to each ‘meaningful’ chunk of data before combining into themed categories, e.g. ‘copying’, observation, listening. This enabled the development of ‘pattern coding’ which presented the key themes within the data. In the second wave of thematic analysis, the number of patterns was reduced through funnelling into larger scale themes (e.g. ‘mother tongue thinking’), in an attempt to capture the meaning through the codes. This final funnelling process reduced the amount of data within key themes and sub-themes.

#### **4.7 The Funnelling Process**

Funnelling of the data (a means of data reduction) was a significant stage in the thematic analysis and was achieved by:

- Reading and re-reading all field notes.
- Removing data which did not relate to the silent period and/or silent experiences.
- Seeking out meaningful whole ‘chunks’ of relevant data.
- Choosing initial broad themes.
- Capturing themes through the emergence of recurrent phrases, concepts and statements.
- Highlighting each theme – four colours.
- Cutting out and labelling data within broad groupings.
- Placing evidence (selected data) for the themes into matched piles.

- Placing aside surplus data which did not ‘fit’ a theme.
- Applying initial descriptive analysis.
- Reducing data again through initial descriptive analysis.
- Reviewing themes.
- Modifying themes.

At this stage the repetition and ‘patterning’ of silence, participation and mediation emerging assisted in reducing the data. The data was finally funnelled into three key themes of ‘mother tongue thinking’, ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ and ‘alternative learning pathways’, and the three sub-themes of ‘close observation’, ‘intense listening’ and ‘copying’.

The repetitive re-emergence of the key themes of ‘mother tongue thinking’, ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ and ‘alternative learning pathways’ is demonstrated through one of the initial data samples (sample vignette 4) through which Adyta’s experiences in the preschool are examined.

Adyta is watching two boys who are playing with cars in the carpeted area. He stands and watches them intently for two minutes and then says, ‘I have’ loudly in the direction of the boys (Adyta is smiling). Adyta’s expression appears ‘alive’ and excited. The boys look up at Adyta and smile back, but do not invite him to play. Adyta kneels down next to the boys and watches them playing. He picks up a blue car and looks at it. The two boys appear aware of Adyta’s presence but they neither encourage nor discourage him from joining their play activity with the cars. Adyta continues to watch and listen to the boys as they are playing, whilst he holds the blue car. (30 September 2007)

Whilst observing participation through the two boys, Adyta initially remained silent on the periphery of practice until he felt ready to move fractionally closer. Adyta drew upon his internalised mother tongue when saying, ‘I have’, loudly in the direction of the boys in attempting to share in the boys’ practices.

Although Adyta’s initial attempt at participation was unsuccessful, by adopting the position of parallel play (Chapter 6.3) he had none the less located an ideal ‘look-out post’ through which to closely observe, listen in upon, and learn the practices involved in playing with the cars. Fractional participation increased as Adyta knelt next to the boys and picked up a culturally shared tool: the car. The two boys incidentally mediated

Adyta's learning whilst Adyta observed and learnt through their modelled practices. Although not confirmed (Adyta was not invited into conversation) he was none the less ideally situated (through parallel play) to 'listen in' (Chapter 6.3) on the boys' conversations. In addition to close observation, Adyta partially employed the alternative learning pathway of copying (the action of holding the car) to increase his fractional participation within the early years CoP.

#### **4.8 Vignette Evaluation**

Prior to and throughout the thematic analysis, each vignette was checked as follows:

1. Is it plausible?
2. Does it address the research question?
3. Has all irrelevant data been removed?
4. Is it matched to the appropriate theme?
5. Is it clearly identified and labelled?
6. Have the findings emerged from within; rather than being researcher driven?
7. Does it raise any new questions?
8. Does it justify (test out) the theoretical framework?
9. Does it merely describe?
10. Is the analysis clear across the range of vignettes?
11. Are the findings transferable to other research areas?
12. Have researcher understandings and perspectives impacted upon the outcome of the vignette analysis?

Both researcher interpretation and reflexivity were inevitably integral to the analysis. Periodic attempts were made to stand back from the data and reflect upon researcher influences on the analysis. Not only did the sociocultural narrative bind the themes together; but this iterative process reaffirmed its meaning and direction.

Sample vignettes 5 and 6 demonstrate how the above 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) were cross references through the key and sub- themes. If one or more ToR were not addressed the vignette was rejected.



### Sample vignette 5:

‘... Although I wore trousers in school, no other girls wore them. I remember one day the head teacher saying in assembly that girls must not wear trousers in school. It made me feel uncomfortable – were they talking about me? No one ever said anything about it to me – maybe they saw me as different to the others... my parents would never have sent me to school without trousers on...’

It is apparent that Tamsin’s silent experiences were not addressed. The vignette did not address the research question (ToR 2 and 8) because there was no direct reference to what was occurring during the silent period. Nor did the vignette reveal findings that could fit into any of the key or sub- themes (ToR 4 and 5). Although the findings emerging through the vignette did not feed into the themes of mother tongue thinking, legitimate peripheral participation nor learning pathways; the vignette did reveal significant connections between Tamsin’s feelings of cultural discontinuity and the school’s enforcement of the dress code (ToR 10 and 15). Tamsin’s experiences, which were positioned outside of the key themes and limitations of the enquiry, none the less invited further research as they clearly impacted negatively upon her memory and recollections of her reception class experiences (ToR 15).

### Sample vignette 6 raised further issues for the researcher:

‘...I remember activities that were set up in the classroom. I knew that I could do them, but I wouldn’t. I wouldn’t engage, speak or drink the milk. She, the teacher, always put the milk out for me but I wouldn’t drink it. I don’t think that she liked that, or me. She tried to be ‘firm’ with me: “You will do ...” But I wouldn’t. She saw it as a “battle of wills”! [Tamsin laughs]. Then she left me; she ignored me totally. She wasn’t kind; she didn’t care about me, or try to engage with me - so I didn’t want to do anything for her’.

Although the imagery was powerfully presented and Tamsin’s silent experiences were illuminated throughout (ToR 8 and 9), the vignette, the findings, did not fit into the key or sub- themes (ToR 5). However, it could not be disputed that Tamsin’s rejecting of the teacher’s ‘forced’ attempts to engage her in participation revealed silence as a powerfully agentive action within the vignette. The research question had been addressed (ToR 2) and yet it revealed more about the absence of the affective in Tamsin’s emergent bilingual learning rather than her attempts at participation (ToR 10). For instance, although Tamsin’s thinking must have drawn upon her mother tongue,

there was no evidence of legitimate participation or the building of alternative learning pathways. The vignette therefore invited further research on (feelings of) isolation (ToR 15) outside of the scope of the current enquiry which remained focused upon examining the participatory elements of silent experiences within the early years CoP (ToR 1).

#### **4.9 Reviewing Analysis**

Following interpretation, the researcher reaffirmed that:

- The vignettes were analysed appropriately.
- The analysis was rooted in the data.
- The main themes were relevant to the research question.
- The themes related to the theoretical rationale.
- Nothing had intentionally been overlooked.
- Any contradictions were explained.
- The analysis was interpreted through sociocultural theorising.

Sample vignette 7 (which originally passed through the funnelling ‘system’) was rejected at the final stage of analysis:

‘...P.E. was the worst. I couldn’t say that I didn’t want to take my clothes off. I wanted to shout, ‘No!’ but I just couldn’t say it. I hated P.E. – it was horrible...standing there in my knickers and vest – I would just stand there and not join in – wanting to get this over with. It was all so wrong – in my own home I would never stand in front of my family in my knickers and vest – showing my legs – it just wasn’t on.

Although Tamsin was silent, and situated on the periphery of practice, the findings did not identify her either drawing upon her mother tongue, nor increasing her participation. For Tamsin, silence was employed as an agentive action as demonstrated when stating, ‘I would just stand there and not join in’. But there was no apparent evidence of Tamsin using this agentive action to build alternative learning pathways. Indeed, akin to vignettes 5 and 6, Tamsin presented as a solitary figure, ‘wanting to get this over with’. The findings within the vignettes which did not identify with the key or sub- themes were none the less recorded within an initial list of findings, so that they were available

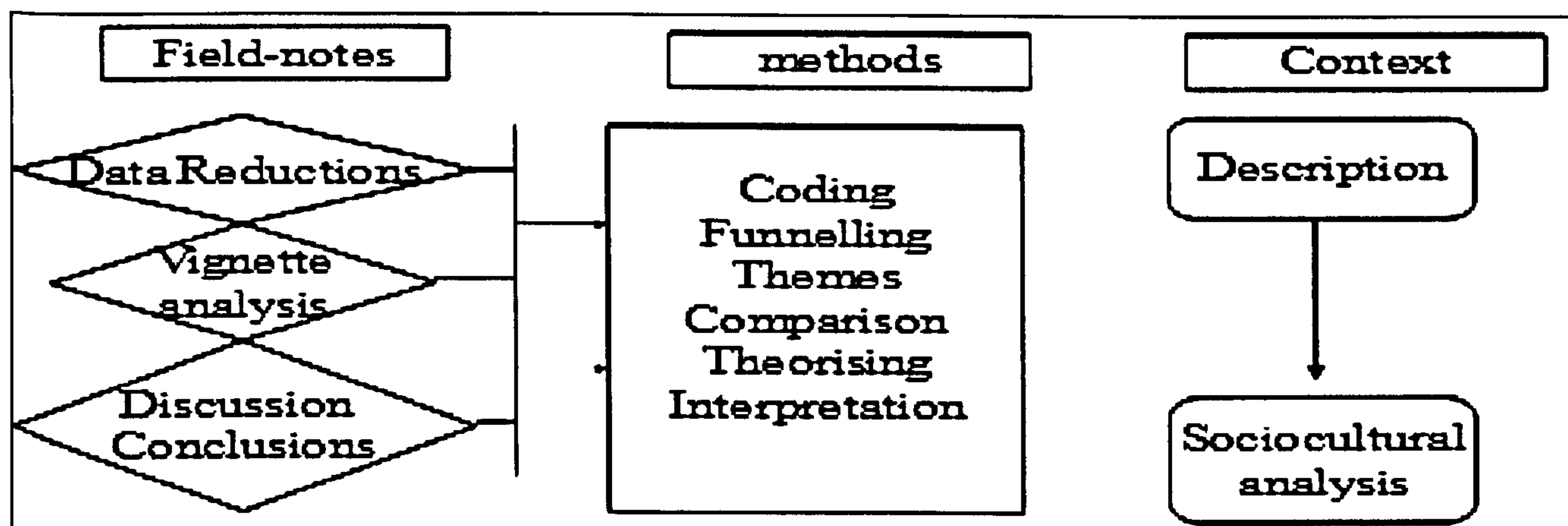
to draw upon through future research into the silent period and/or when disseminating the tentative results of the research.

Prior to testing the findings against sociocultural theory (chapter 5) the initial findings revealed that during the silent period the young bilingual learner:

- Was learning but this was not often recognised.
- Most often chose to be situated on the periphery of practice.
- Was learning through varied levels of participation.
- Was learning through close observations and intense listening and copying.
- Stopped talking when her/his mother tongue could not be understood.
- Often mediated her/his own learning.
- Often sought out quiet spaces.
- Did not like to be forced into the centre of practice.
- Wanted to fit in – when ‘ready’.
- Wanted to make friends – when ‘ready’.
- Was mostly assessed through his/her ability in spoken English.
- Needed to make cultural compromises to ‘fit in’.
- Did not often have her/his prior learning acknowledged or drawn upon.
- Encountered some early years practitioners who disregarded her/him.
- Encountered some early years practitioners who opened their minds to new ways of knowing.
- Encountered early years practitioners who understood the need to observe, listen and copy.
- Encountered some early years practitioners who were unsure of their mediating role.
- Often did not find mutually shared cultural tools, signs and objects.
- Could not easily articulate her/his needs and rights within the early years CoP.
- Often succeeded, but ‘at a cost’.
- might experience cultural discontinuity
- might experience isolation



Figure 5 summarises the complete ethnographic research process from its evolution to conclusion.



**Figure 5: The Analytical framework. Adapted from descriptions by Miles and Huberman (1994)**

#### 4.10 Conclusion

Whilst providing a chronological ‘mapping out’ of the research rationale and design from its evolution to the conclusion, the researcher drew upon selected sample vignettes to further articulate both the analysis and the scope of the data.

The interviewed practitioners revealed a surprising awareness of the alternative learning strategies being employed throughout the silent period and expressed real concerns regarding how the emergent bilingual learners might negotiate the dominant culture and discourse within the early years CoP.

In addition, the researcher revealed ‘snapshots’ of Tamsin and Adyta’s lived silent experiences through analysis of further vignette samples. Although both Tamsin and Adyta were unable to articulate mother tongue thoughts to the early years practitioners, they both attempted to gain control of their learning through the agentive action of silence. Tamsin’s silent experiences painted a picture of cultural clashes through which she communicated her displeasure at being forced to compromise on the use of known cultural tools and values.

The samples revealed the complex struggle that exists for young bilingual learners when attempting to mediate their negotiation on the peripheries of converging communities of practice. As White (1992) states, 'Our culturally available and appropriate stories ... have been historically constructed and negotiated in communities of persons, and within the context of social structures and institutions. (p. 124.)

Despite the demands put upon them, Tamsin and Adyta silently attempted to, 'carve their own paths to success in the face of the dominant monolingual discourse'. Gee et al. (1998) defined this agentic action as, '... changing patterns of participation in specific social practices within communities of practice' (p. 147).

In addressing the finer details of the research process the researcher has revisited important spaces in the participant's lived experiences. Likewise, significant others (p.93-94) such as Zahra (daughter of Marjan) reminded the researcher of why and how confronting selective mutism' drove the enquiry forward. Chapter 5 tests out the findings against sociocultural theory.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Analysis – Revealing the Portrait**

An initial reflection on observing the practices within an early learning CoP:

Whilst seated in legitimate peripheral participation I peer closely within and through the early years community of practice to view the internal micro-structures of silent bilingual learning. I initially set my focus upon meaning making solely in the early learning community, before I cast my net further – beyond the school walls – to refocus attention upon the silent young bilingual learner's new ways of knowin

#### **5.1 Introduction**

In chapter three, an evaluation was conducted into the employment of thematic analysis and vignettes as appropriate analytic and interpretive tools. Chapter four reports the findings – all of which assisted in presenting a richly coloured portrayal of 'silent experiences'.

The silent period's complexity was revealed through an analysis of nine vignettes which highlighted 3 key themes and 3 sub-themes.

##### **The key themes – learning through:**

- Mother tongue thinking – Internalised speech (Vygotsky, 1978, pp.56-57)
- Legitimate peripheral participation – Contextualised silent participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991)
- Alternative learning pathways (Vygotsky, 1997a, p.106; Rogoff et 2003, p.184).

##### **The sub-themes – learning through:**

- Intense listening – Absorbing spoken discourse(s) within the CoP (Rogoff et al., 2003; Bakhtin, 1986, pp.68-69)
- Close observation – Watching practices within the CoP (Rogoff et al., 2003)
- Copying – The practising of participation (Rogoff, 1990, 1998).



5.2 The Vignettes

The findings were analysed through nine vignettes. Table 1 presents the names of each participant, their roles and the title of each vignette.

Table 3: Participants, Roles and Vignettes.

<u>Names</u>	<u>Roles</u>	<u>Vignette</u>
Suki	Five year old girl (of Japanese heritage) who did not speak whilst attending reception class	1. Silent Participation – at home and school.
Nicole	The preschool leader’s narrative account on her understandings of the silent period	2. Understandings of alternative learning pathways.
Kimoto	A three year old boy of dual Japanese and French heritage in preschool	3. Legitimate Peripheral Participation
Tamsin	An adult bilingual Punjabi/English speaker reflecting on her childhood experiences in a reception class in England	4. Mother Tongue Thinking. 5. Alternative learning pathways – at home and school.
Adyta	A boy of Indian heritage (Punjabi speaker) observed between the ages of 3-5 in early years settings	6. Close Observation and Copying. 7. Synthesis of learning Pathways. 8. Intense listening and Close Observation.
The Researcher	Reflecting upon professional childhood experiences across UK school settings.	9. Silent Participation.

5.3 Suki

Suki (chapter one) had not spoken either Japanese (her mother tongue) or English since attending an English-speaking nursery in the North of England two years prior to her admission into the reception class in which I was the teacher. Suki appeared as silent and unresponsive in class. Following on from a referral to the speech and language therapist, Suki was diagnosed as a ‘selective mute’ by the educational psychologist.

I visited Suki's home at 8.15 a.m., three times a week in an attempt to form a connection between home and school. Suki would 'come alive' during these brief visits and, accompanied by her mother, would walk to school between us – until she reached the school gates.

### **Vignette 1: Silent Participation – At Home and School**

'...before we left Suki's house for the ten minute walk to school, Suki showed me her Japanese lunch box with all its beautifully sectioned compartments which contained a selection of her favourite foods. As we passed the front of Suki's house in the direction of school, she proudly pointed out the Japanese radishes which were growing in her garden, whilst both she and her mother attempted to converse with me (in English). Throughout the journey Suki was holding my hand. However, as soon as the school gates came into view, Suki let go of my hand and 'stiffened up'. Her face became almost 'mask-like' and she stopped speaking. Her mother and I both attempted to converse with Suki, but there was no response from her until she left the school building at 3.15 p.m.'

(The first visit to Suki's home, September 2005.)

At home, Suki was an adept and a confident speaker in her mother tongue. However, Suki was a novice and newcomer to the (English) language awaiting her within the boundaries of the school environment. From the moment the school was in sight, Suki stopped speaking and appeared as if concentrating hard – to gain mastery of the school's unfamiliar practices and make meaning of her new world.

At this time I made no effort to contextualise newcomers' participation through legitimate peripheral participation (LPP). Unwittingly in class, I attempted to 'include' Suki as a central character within reception class practices, to 'tease' her out of her silence. I would talk directly to Suki, focusing attention by inviting her completed pictures and models to be shown to the rest of the class. However, Suki did not want to be a central character, and preferred to seek out (Lave and Wenger, 1998) spaces which provided legitimate peripheral participation. As confirmed by Lave and Wenger (1998), Suki required, 'lessened intensity, lessened risk, special assistance, lessened cost of error, close supervision, or lessened production pressures' (1998, p.100).



Suki was not withdrawing from participation when she released my hand near the school gates. On the contrary, she was drawing upon the unspoken words (her internalised mother tongue) (Vygotsky, 1978, pp.56-57) to observe closely and listen intensely to the practices of the CoP. Suki watched and listened to the reception class practices, but her participation remained limited – as observed within the confines of the school.

However, during one of my visits to Suki's home, in March 2006, I observed her playing 'schools'. She appeared happy as I watched her at play, practising the practices that she had observed and listened to in class. This practising of practices included role play as the 'teacher' reading a story to and asking questions of the 'children'. Suki's home provided her with the known cultural knowledge and the agency to participate in LPP. Suki's concentration on learning the practices of the early years CoP reflected learning through the active role of apprenticeship (Rogoff, 1990, p.90).

Suki's home was surrounded with known and shared cultural signs, symbols and tools which not only empowered her to practice spoken English, but also to 'rehearse' increasing levels of participation – without feeling pressured to do so. Suki's home provided her with safe domestic spaces (Hancock and Gillen, 2007) through which to rehearse the unfamiliar practices of the early years CoP – through which to learn.

Akin to Lave and Wenger's (1991, p.95) description of how newcomers gradually build sketches of the practices within a learning community, Suki's experiences of building alternative learning pathways at home and school were a means to 'sketch' participation – as a sociocultural practice.

#### **5.4 Nicole**

The following vignette was extracted from field notes gathered immediately following a 'regular' pre-school session. I asked 'Nicole' (the pre-school leader) to discuss her understandings of the silent period.



## Vignette 2: Understandings of Alternative Learning Pathways

‘...It’s just their way of observing the other children and listening to their language, learning the codes of behaviour, allowing them to absorb different atmospheres....I don’t know why they do it really; it’s bizarre, no one knows... It’s just their way of observing and listening; the next stage is how they start using language, the beginnings of key words. They use actions and things, but that’s not what you asked me, is it? They cannot speak the language, that’s all really.’

Although Nicole suggested that she knew very little about the silent period the vignette revealed the contrary. In contrast to being passive, through the silent period the emergent bilingual learner is presented as active, employing the, ‘use [of] actions and things’. The employment of both *observation* and *listening* was reported as a means of the ‘newcomer’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991), ‘both absorbing and being absorbed in – the “culture of practice”’ (1991, p.95). Also noted was the employment of ‘actions and things’ as a means to ‘progress’ on to spoken English with the practices of observation and listening being interpreted as a preliminary stage to additional English language acquisition. Although the silent period was perceived as a ‘stepping stone’ on to a ‘higher’ level of communicative competence, ‘the next stage is how they start using language’; observation and listening were considered as highly significant in learning the practices of the early years CoP – ‘learning the codes of behaviour’.

The silent period was contextualised as a ‘somewhere’ through which ‘to *absorb* different atmospheres’. The phrase, ‘absorbing different atmospheres’ paints a picture of an emergent bilingual learner as learning silently within legitimate peripheral participation through close observation, intense listening and the copying of others’ practices. As one of Nicole’s colleagues (appendix 6.4) suggests, ‘They [emergent bilingual learners] stand and watch other children doing things for ages. Sometimes they just stand and stare.’

### 5.5 Kimoto

I first met Kimoto (a three-year-old French- and Japanese-speaking boy) shortly after he had started attending the pre-school playgroup, where I had been conducting fieldwork.

Kimoto would sometimes attempt to speak Japanese (the language spoken by his mother) in the playgroup. He also appeared to enjoy watching others at 'play'.

Kimoto's mother was Japanese and his father, French. He did not speak inside the pre-school from April until the week before he returned to France (in November). This vignette presents Nicole's reflection on Kimoto's learning through LPP. In contrast to Lave and Wenger's (1991) abstract and notional interpretation of LPP, within the context of the pre-school, LPP appeared to be reified by Kimoto. To Kimoto, LPP was a real, concrete and literal location – LPP was the *furthest position on the carpet area*.

### **Vignette 3: Legitimate Peripheral Participation**

He always looked so serious. He would sit with the train track all day if I let him. He would be watching everything that was going on but not speaking at all. If another child came over to play with the train track he would let them, but not speak... I have noticed that the children who can't speak English usually sit at 'the back' during 'carpet time'. 'They' don't like to sit at the front and won't move forward if you ask them to. I brought Kimoto next to me at the front of the carpet one morning, but he started crying, so I won't do that again. 'They' seem to feel happier just sitting at the back. I've also noticed that he likes to engage in parallel play, rather than co-operative play.

Nicole's reflections on Kimoto, December, 2009.

Nicole had noticed that Kimoto chose to sit in the most appropriate acoustic position from which to listen intensely and to survey the practices of the early years CoP from a 'safe' distance. The furthest point on the carpet served as a 'lookout post' from where Kimoto could observe participation. LPP for Kimoto presented as an unpressurised *somewhere* from which to learn the rules of engagement without being 'centre stage' and without the fear of visibly making 'errors'.

In addition, it was noted that Kimoto employed parallel play with the children who were playing with the train set. This positioning facilitated Kimoto in fractionally increasing his levels of participation. Kimoto could watch more closely, listen more intently and copy participation in brighter colours. For Kimoto, parallel play was not a necessary stage in his development prior to developing the ability to play collaboratively with other children. On the contrary, parallel play was autonomously chosen as a less distant lookout post ('half way house') which facilitated in his increasing levels of



participation. Appendix, 6.6 ('Adyta is watching') presents an additional example of learning through the legitimised position of parallel play.

It is evident that Kimoto was unhappy when he was removed from LPP. Moving him away from his 'safe' location (from where he silently participated) was a strategy that failed because Kimoto could not (was not ready to) participate centrally in the practices. He was already making meaning through the agentive action of fractional participation. Removing him from LPP into central participation hindered Kimoto's ability to learn through observation, listening and copying. Kimoto lost ownership of his learning because his means to participate was impaired. He relied upon LPP to build alternative learning pathways.

Reflecting upon Kimoto's silent experiences, I recall (from my professional experience as a reception class teacher) bilingual newcomers sitting quietly on the periphery of the carpet area, rejecting attempts at being drawn into the centre of practice. I now realise how LPP secured Kimoto with a non-threatening opportunity to learn the 'everyday' practices through autonomously chosen levels of silent participation.

## **5.6. Tamsin**

Tamsin is an articulate Punjabi (her mother tongue) and English speaker. At the time of the data collection Tamsin was (and still is) holding a senior managerial position. Tamsin's story was drawn from her memories of starting school in a reception class in 1969. Tamsin did not speak in school until her third term in reception class.

The following data was extracted from a transcript of an unstructured interview with Tamsin in the pre-school community room – with which she is familiar.

### **Vignette 4: Mother Tongue Thinking**

Tamsin's silent learning on the periphery of practice was (and still is) highly significant to her, as she clearly remembered and recalled experiences of her learning over thirty years ago.

...I hadn't attended a nursery or play group. It was an inner-city primary school in Newcastle. I remember my first day very clearly... My mother wanted me



look smart, so she dressed me in a bright yellow Punjabi suit [Tamsin laughs]. I remember walking to school and seeing this building. I didn't know what school was; I had no idea what to expect. She left me there [pause]; I was totally bewildered, all these English children around me, just staring at me.

It was all very strange... I was always on the periphery, because I didn't fit in. You learn to survive. You learn what you need to know to fit in. It must have had an impact on me for me to remember it all so clearly.  
(Unstructured interview, May 2009.)

Tamsin's learning in reception class was neither a positive experience (appendix 6.3) nor legitimated (they were 'staring' at her), as she remained 'always on the periphery', refraining from gaining fuller participation. In the absence of familiar signs, symbols and cultural tools, Tamsin relied upon mother tongue thought to learn 'how to survive' and 'to fit in'. As Vygotsky (1978) states, 'Direct manipulation is replaced by a complex psychological process through which inner motivations and intentions, postponed in time, stimulate their own development and realisation' (1978, p.26). Tamsin's internalised spoken words acted as a problem-solving tool through which she attempted to acquire meaning making within the early years CoP.

Tamsin encountered a situation where there were no familiar cultural tools and no knowledgeable other willingly mediating her learning. As Tasmin was unfamiliar with the spoken language (English) of the teacher and children in the classroom, mother tongue thought served as the cultural tool through which to learn the everyday practices within the early years CoP.

Tamsin states, 'I was always on the periphery'. Just like in MacDonald et al. (2003, p.10), Tamsin was a lurking peripheral member, who *chose* to, 'stay on the periphery, watching the interaction of... active members'. In attempting to fit into and modify her new world, Tamsin moved into LPP – where she could begin to build alternative pathways to learning.

Perhaps, if Tamsin had had an older sibling to 'induct' her into the expected practices within the early years CoP (appendix 6.1) her experiences might have been more positive – laying the foundation for silent participation.

The following vignette provides examples of how Tamsin built her alternative learning pathways during her early experiences in the ‘English-speaking’ reception class.

### **Vignette 5: Alternative Learning Pathways – At Home and School**

‘...I felt like a “fish out of water”... I remember withdrawing, thinking that this was... not part of my experience. What I was watching was not part of my world. *I didn’t speak; I just watched, looked and listened...* I wanted to go home. I didn’t feel comfortable. I felt alone and isolated. Gestures helped me to understand a little, *I started to figure things out*, but I didn’t understand what it was all about... I knew that this woman was in charge, the teacher, and I *remember watching the children playing...* I didn’t want to speak because this had nothing to do with me. It was too scary for me. *I didn’t want to draw attention to myself. You want to blend in’.*

‘After I hadn’t spoken for several months the school...called my Dad into the “Head’s” office. They asked him if I could speak! [Tasmin laughs.] When I went back home Dad [puzzled] asked me why I wouldn’t speak to him [in the Head Teacher’s office or in class] but I couldn’t explain... being silent helped me to cope with it all, to get through it. She [the teacher] tried to be “firm” with me, [saying] “*You will do...*”, *but I wouldn’t*. She saw it as a “battle of wills” [Tamsin laughs]. Then she left me – *she ignored me totally. She didn’t ...try to engage with me*. She was probably a good teacher; I mean, *I learnt lots...*’

Even though Tamsin’s silent experiences (in the reception class) were negative she, none the less, ‘started to figure things out’. Even devoid of the teacher mediating her participation (appendix, 6.5) she still ‘learnt lots’. In the absence of culturally shared signs, symbols or tools, Tamsin made meaning in her ‘new world’. She relied upon mother tongue thought (the known cultural tool of language) to assist her in learning how to ‘fit it’ – learning the practices of the early years CoP. Vygotsky (1981a) explains how the tool of language could be adapted to serve this new function (mother tongue thinking) as, ‘The inclusion of a tool in the process of behaviour introduces several new functions connected with the use of the given tool... and alters the course and individual features... of all the mental processes... replacing some functions with others (i.e. it re-creates and reorganizes the whole structure of behavior ...’ (1981, pp.139-140).



Mother tongue thinking also enabled Tamsin to develop alternative learning pathways, as she ‘watched, looked and listened’. Tamsin’s silent experiences reflected the intensity of the really ‘hard work’ that was part of her language driven, cognitive transformation – as she ‘worked things out’. From Vygotsky’s (1978) thinking, the internalisation of the mother tongue resulted in the transformation of Tamsin’s interpersonal learning into that of intrapersonal practices – looking, listening and copying through silent participation.

However, Tamsin demonstrated her need to have her learning contextualised through LPP, when asserting, ‘I didn’t want to speak... She [the teacher] tried to be “firm” with me [saying] “You will do...”, but I wouldn’t. She saw it as a “battle of wills” at a time when she needed ‘to blend in’. She required the silent spaces (LPP) through which to build alternative learning pathways – looking, listening and imitating the practices. Tamsin, ‘didn’t want to draw attention to [her]self...’.

Unwittingly, the class teacher eventually provided her with just the sought after silent participation that Tamsin required. Although the teacher withdrew her attention (and her mediatory obligations) from Tamsin, in doing so she empowered Tamsin to learn peripherally and to mediate her own learning – where she ‘learnt lots’.

Tamsin’s father could not understand why Tamsin did not speak in school because the school’s picture was not representative of the Tamsin within the family CoP. Or perhaps Tamsin was not yet able to accommodate the school’s cultural norms without compromising her known sociocultural understandings (appendix 6.2). The school’s portrait of Tamsin was partially eclipsed – constrained within the parameters of the school.

The rich colours had not been added that would have revealed Tamsin’s ability to build alternative learning pathways both inside and outside of the early years CoP – her silent participation was invisible to the school. Tamsin did not have recognition by the school of all her learning, and in particular from within the home, where she was able to mediate participation through culturally appropriated signs, symbols and tools. Tamsin’s learning (although unseen by the school) continued through and beyond the early years CoP, as a synthesis of complex, interconnected and non-linear learning pathways.



## 5.7 Adyta

Adyta presented as a silent bilingual learner in the pre-school playgroup. Having gathered field notes over a three-and-a-half-year period (between three and six years of age) I observed the ‘trials and tribulations’ of Adyta as he developed his participation in practice within the early years CoP.

As a participant observer, observations of Adyta were focused upon ‘radical looking’ through following his gaze of trail. Three vignettes were selected to demonstrate how Adyta (whilst located in LPP) silently participated whilst building and synthesising alternative learning pathways. ‘Tyrone’ is an indigenous ‘English-speaking’ boy who also attends the pre-school.

### Vignette 6: Close Observation and Copying

...Adyta points to Tyrone’s painting. He looks intently at it whilst Tyrone is painting in purple with large thick brush strokes. Adyta watches Tyrone’s brush movements as he colours in the white paper. Adyta looks at the painting cupboard and moves over to it. His expression appears serious as he fills a paint pot himself. He is concentrating very hard on this activity, not letting his eyes leave the paint container until it is full. He carefully replaces the lid on the container and moves towards an empty easel, casting his eyes across at Tyrone’s painting. Tyrone smiles as Adyta watches his own brush enter the pot and spread the thick red paint on his picture...

Adyta spent ten minutes watching Tyrone painting, observing closely and copying Tyrone’s application of the tools for painting which included collecting paint in a pot and the application of the paint brushes. Through Adyta’s close observation he absorbed the ‘rules’ of engagement in participation and practice – how to prepare for and perform a painting activity in the early years CoP. Copying the observed practices of others (appendix 6) empowered Adyta with new ways of knowing through which to make meaning of the painting – demonstrated through his increasing participation. Having observed Tyrone, Adyta carried an empty paint pot to the paint cupboard, opened the cupboard and chose red paint to fill the pot. Having filled the pot, he closed the cupboard, looked for an unused easel and looked at, ‘his own brush enter the pot and spread the thick red paint on his picture...’

Throughout the silent period, observation proved an enabling learning pathway through which to fractionally increase his levels of participation. Although Tyrone's mediation of Adyta's learning appeared as incidental, he, none the less, provided the interpersonal learning through which Adyta could practice the practices of the early years CoP. Not only did Tyrone legitimise Adyta's presence when observing him painting, but the practice of painting was contextualised and mediated through the availability of culturally shared tools – paints, paper and brushes. Mother tongue thinking facilitated the agentic action of close observation, which resulted in silent participation.

The following vignette presents an example of Adyta synthesising observation, listening and copying as an agentic, cognitive action – silent participation.

### **Vignette 7: Synthesising Learning Pathways**

...Thunder, lightning and torrential rain has started, and the children run inside. Nicole decides to suspend the outside activities and tells the children that she is going to put the television on. When the children have 'settled down' in the carpet area, Nicole and her two assistants move away from the carpet area as they start to tidy the morning's activities away.

Adyta is sat on the carpet with all the other children watching a humorous children's DVD. Some of the other children have started to move into smaller groupings on the carpet and are chatting informally....Adyta's eyes circle the television monitor....

There is loud laughter from the other children as a humorous incident occurs on the screen... Adyta opens his eyes wide and stares in surprise at the rest of the children, turning his head around in both directions. There is a pause and then Adyta copies the other children laughing and he laughs really loudly... Adyta doesn't realise at first when the rest of the children have stopped laughing.

Adyta suddenly turns his head and looks in all directions; he lowers his head a little, looks at his fingers and stops laughing. This same pattern of attempting to 'join in' with the other children's behaviour patterns continues throughout the fifteen minute episode shown on the television... (Adyta observed in pre-school, 19 February 2008.)

Intense listening was an important element in Adyta's learning as he endeavoured to follow the story-line on the television whilst also observing and copying the practices of the other children on the carpet area. As Adyta endeavoured to, 'observe and listen with



intent concentration and initiative...' (Rogoff, 2003, p.176) he was also synthesising alternative learning pathways to learning through intent (and silent) participation. The pause (before Adyta laughs) represented Adyta's realisation (through hearing laughter) that something had happened. Adyta did not join in with the laughter until he could see and hear that all the children laughing. He then copied the laughter and contributed to this shared endeavour by laughing really loudly, until he heard and observed that the laughing had ceased. Adyta then stopped laughing. Although he wanted to participate he did so peripherally and fractionally (appendix 6.6).

Akin to the Kaluli children when party to the adult's conversations (Schieffelin, 1990), Adyta was neither being drawn into the conversations, nor referred to directly, thus allowing him the perfect opportunity to 'eavesdrop' on the practices of the community whist situated in LPP.

Unlike the Inuit boys in Crago's (1992) Arctic study and the African Americans in Ward's (1971) Louisiana study, Adyta did not listen unobtrusively in on adult conversations – Adyta listened with intent. As in Ward's (1971) study, Adyta found that despite the lack of engagement in conversation with other children and adults (in the early years CoP), his learning progressed. LPP provided the ideal conditions for Adyta to listen intently to the conversations of children and adults alike through silent participation.

In contrast to Crago (1992), Ward (1971) and Schieffelin's (1991) passive descriptions of listening as 'eaves dropping', Adyta's intense listening (referred to as 'listening in' by Rogoff et al., 2003) presented as agentive (Garvie, 1990). Adyta's listening (albeit part of 'everyday' practice for most children) was a non-passive learning pathway through which Adyta made meaning of the sociocultural practices within the early learning CoP. An SLA perspective would also observe Adyta's intense listening to be important (Krashen, 1981) but as a comprehension strategy to develop receptive vocabulary, demarcated into 'micro skills' (Richards, 1983). Hence, sociocultural interpretations are seen to layer the SLA model through the application of a non-linear synthesis of alternative learning pathways.

Revisiting Vygotsky's (1962) understandings of children's learning, Adyta was attempting to connect on an interpersonal level with the other children through the



practice of laughing. Gregory's (2008, p.19) notion of connecting as, 'learning between individuals within or between social or cultural contexts... provides the foundation for intercultural learning as children learn to learn in a new language in school.'

Adyta's learning was dependent on making connections between what he already knew (the children were laughing) and what he was capable of understanding (something amusing on the television had caused this reaction). Adyta's ability to close the gap between the partially known and that which was fully understood demonstrates his learning through Vygotsky's ZPD (1978). Knowledgeable others (in this case, other children) incidentally modelled the practices and mediated Adyta's learning through the ZPD.

Interestingly, there was no intentional mediation (visibly) apparent from observing the practices within the early years CoP; mediation occurred almost as a 'by-product' of interpersonal social practices. To clarify, there was no intent in the facilitation of Adyta's learning. Although Adyta was assisted in and through his learning via incidental mediation, he drew upon his mother tongue thinking in the development and synthesis of building alternative learning pathways.

The linguist Lantolf (2000) acknowledged that interaction is a form of mediation through which learners collaboratively construct new forms and functions. Adding a sociocultural perspective to Lantolf's thinking suggests that 'incidental' mediation resulted from interaction constructed whilst participating in cross cultural, shared practices.

Vygotsky's (1978) thinking on ZPD assists in explaining Adyta's incidental mediation of his learning through cross-cultural participation. Adyta built upon his repertoire of known and unfamiliar cultural tools (English), signs (laughing) and symbols (the television) to transform his learning to a new level of participation (laughing), resulting in engagement in shared practices (enjoying the amusing incident).

In order to negotiate his participation more centrally within the CoP Adyta transformed his language and narrative style, relationships and learning styles appropriate to the observed practice. However, there was no active mediation apparent from the practitioners in either guiding his transformation as he moved through one language and

cultural experience to the next, nor in assisting negotiation through his levels of participation.

Adyta mediated his learning through observation of others, listening to the indigenous language and copying the practices – simultaneously. Like Samia (Drury, 2007), Adyta absorbed, ‘the everyday language... [and the] routines and expectations’ of the early years CoP. The synthesising of practices (Kenner, 2004) was presented as fluid, overlapping and intersecting pathways which mediated Adyta’s increasing participation.

### **Vignette 8: Intense Listening and Close Observation Through LPP**

... Adyta looks at Nicole who is telling a story to children in the story corner. Adyta continues to eat his fruit whilst watching Nicole. He appears to be concentrating hard... He continues sitting at the table for ten minutes whilst eating fruit. His eyes are scanning the room... Tyrone passes and Adyta ‘catches’ him with his eyes. He smiles at Tyrone and points to some fruit on the floor and giggles. Tyrone looks back at Adyta and then walks straight ahead to sit with the other children. Adyta turns his head around to look at Nicole. He watches the actions of the other children who are copying Nicole’s demonstration of how to make a phone call...

Adopting Rogoff’s (2003) sociocultural interpretations, Adyta was an apprentice to participation within the story-telling session. However, he also chose to be situated legitimately on the periphery of the CoP (the snack table) where he looked out and listened in on the practices of more central members. Adyta attempted to progress to fractionally increased participation by drawing Tyrone (unsuccessfully) into engagement in practice. This attempt towards a shared endeavour demonstrated how LPP served as a location through which Adyta could negotiate participation (with Tyrone) whilst continuing to observe closely and listen intensely. Silent participation continued throughout.

Adyta attempts to connect with Tyrone, by smiling at him, and giggling as he points to some fruit on the floor. Tyrone did not actively mediate Adyta’s understandings of the cultural practices within the early years CoP. Nor did he engage Adyta in fuller participation. However, more importantly, when Tyrone, ‘looks back at Adyta and then walks straight ahead to sit with the other children,’ Tyrone unintentionally legitimised



Adyta's peripheral participation. Appendices 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3 offer further evidence of Adyta's silent participation.

## 5.8 The Researcher

The researcher's personal childhood memories add a further layer to the analysis. The following reflections are based upon my silent experiences (chapter one) as I moved through six different schools throughout the UK. Although a monolingual English speaker, the following vignette presents a 'snapshot' of how I internalised my 'mother tongue' and built alternative learning pathways as a means to resolve the struggle to 'fit in' with the new and changing practices that I encountered – particularly so as my known cultural knowledge (through historical family practices) was 'fractured' at this time.

### Vignette 9: Reflections on Silent Participation

... I realised quickly that I needed to 'fit in' and gain a sense of belonging, but I also wanted to 'hang on' to 'the known me' with my own ways of speaking and 'doing', so I initially resisted unfamiliar practices by not speaking in the receiving environment...

I remember during one music lesson (in Scotland, aged eight) when the class was singing 'Old Mac Donald Had a Farm', I was *thinking* as 'loudly' as possible, the full round 'o' sound for the word 'old' rather than the Scottish 'oo' sound. It seems strange to think about this situation now – how I really wanted to preserve the old me, despite the inevitability of change. Perhaps the 'old me' was connected to a wish to hold on to my 'mother tongue' – or in a more literal sense, to my mother.

I also remember privately rehearsing the dominant dialect, and likewise doing so in the accent that I already 'owned'. As time went by, and the urge to make connections with people (make friends) increased in importance, I became less resistant to adopting the new dialect/accents. I would imitate the new accent when conversing with peers, because this commonality would assist me to fit in and belong.

During these silent experiences I, like Tamsin, was also 'weighing things up' and 'working things out' as a means to learn. Through silent participation, not only was prior learning being built upon (through the building of alternative learning pathways)



but also interconnected with the learning both inside and outside of the unfamiliar school CoP.

Akin to a silent, young bilingual learner, drawing upon the tool of mother tongue thinking (internalisation of the spoken word) was a crucial agentive action through which to make meaning and gain a sense of belonging. Through closely observing (lurking), listening intensely (listening in) and absorbing the everyday practices (copying), I also built upon and synthesised alternative learning pathways within and through these unfamiliar ‘worlds’.

Throughout the course of this research and exploration into my own monolingual childhood memories, the (commonly) unrecognisable abilities of my fellow bilingual participants have been held in high regard. Negotiating participation through the complexities of the silent period when working out, working into and working through the dominant monolingual discourses in new and unfamiliar communities of practice cannot be an easy task. For young bilingual learners such as Suki, Tamsin, Adyta, Kimoto and many others, mother tongue thinking was the sole culturally mediatory means with which to make meaning in their ‘new worlds’ – the early years CoP.

### **5.9 Silent Participation**

The analysis of the silent period revealed *silent participation* as the central finding.

Silent participation within the research defines a young bilingual learner who:

- Internalises mother tongue speech (thinking) as a mediatory means to learning.
- Participates when situated in a non-threatening peripheral location (LPP).
- Builds alternative learning pathways as an agentive action.
- Synthesises the learning pathways of close observation, intense listening and copying.

For silent participation to occur, mutually defining elements synthesise (Figure 6).

The findings present the loose, fluid and overlapping concept of silent participation within the early years CoP, in which legitimate peripheral participation acts as a



location through which mother tongue thinking mediates the young bilingual learner’s learning – synthesises alternative learning pathways to make meaning.

5.10 Summary

The findings reveal that silent young bilingual learners:

- Apply ‘mother tongue thinking’ to practice participation whilst situated in LPP.
- Mediate learning both inside and outside of the early years CoP.
- Build alternative learning pathways simultaneously through close observation, intense listening and copying – they synthesise together.
- Negotiate levels of participation in the early years CoP through silent participation.

Drawing upon the sociocultural understandings of Lave and Wenger (1991) and Vygotsky (1978), it is evident that learning takes place within and through participation with others who model the practices to be learnt (Figure 6).

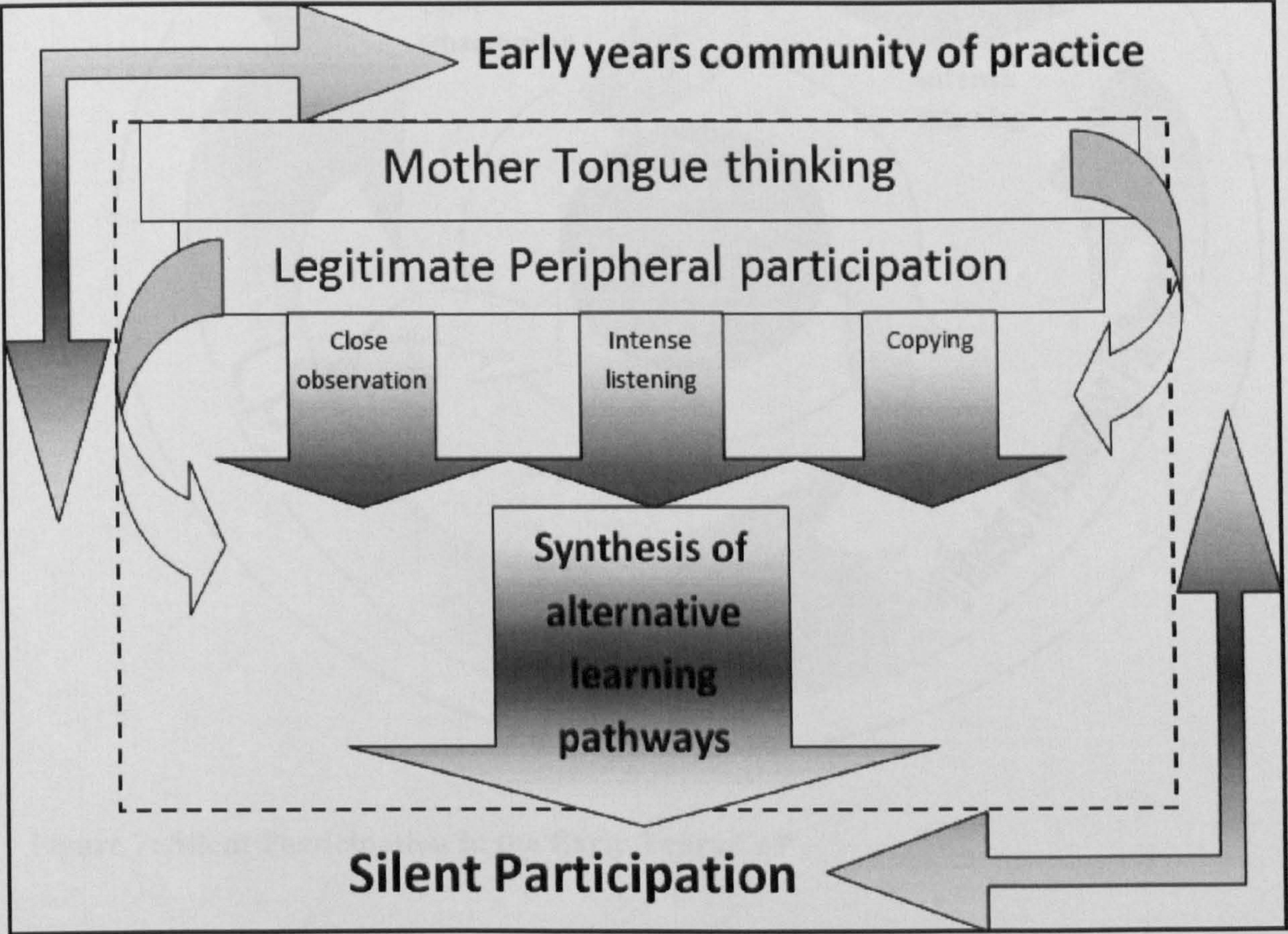
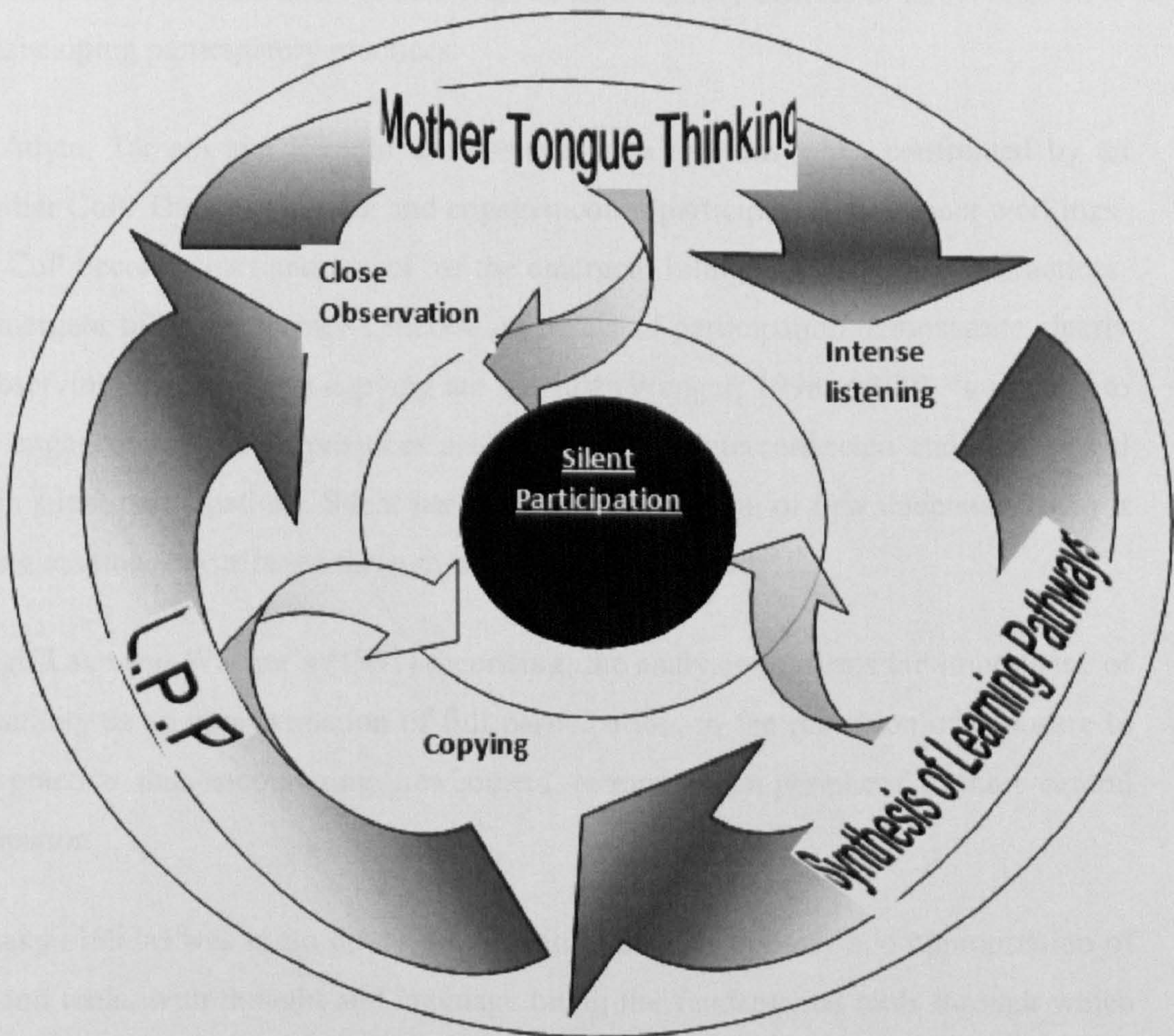


Figure 6: The Development of Silent Participation Within an Early Years CoP



Through increasing participating in the social practices of the CoP (silent participation) the emergent bilingual learner makes these practices her/his own. She/he modifies the practices through shared ownership, contribution and distribution of what is learnt. However, learning through copying differs from learning through guided participation (Rogoff, 2003) in that the modelling of practices within the CoP appears to be mainly incidental. Members of the early years CoP are not necessarily modelling practices with the intent to mediate the newcomer's learning. However, the newcomer *is* actively and intentionally copying the practices of the other members.

Figure 7 demonstrates that silent participation is also agentic and non-linear, occurring through interconnecting practices.



**Figure 7: Silent Participation in the Early Years CoP**



The analysis reinforces Vygotsky's (1997a) thinking on copying as both a normal, necessary and essential component of children's learning processes, through which understandings of the social world are gained. It would appear that children do not copy in isolation, but act upon and adopt the ideas of others through appropriation (Rogoff, 1990) within their own participatory capacity. In line with the thinking of Vygotsky (1997a), Mehrotra et al. (2009) describe copying as agentive and non-passive, 'in which the practices and tool use got transferred and embodied in other students' thoughts and practices' (2009, p.91). Although Bruner (1996, p.93) described an agentive mind as, 'proactive, problem-orientated, attentionally focused, selective, constructional and directed to ends', the emergent bilingual learner experiences conflict through their everyday 'practice at practice' and may feel (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.116), 'overwhelmed, overawed, and overworked', as their identity evolves in direct relation to their developing participatory practices.

Suki, Adyta, Tamsin and Kimoto demonstrate such tensions when confronted by an unfamiliar CoP. Through practice and engagement in participation, the 'inner workings' of the CoP become 'part and parcel' of the emergent bilingual learner's own practices. The emergent bilingual learner's increasing levels of participation demonstrate clearly that observing, listening and copying are not just (Wenger, 1998, p.100), 'a prelude to actual engagement'. These practices are proven to be interconnected and synthesised through silent participation. Silent participation (the gaining of new understandings) *is* meaning making – distributed through transformative learning.

Through Lave and Wenger's (1991) theorising, the analysis confirms the importance of peripherality as an approximation of full participation, in the provision of exposure to actual practice, thus encouraging 'newcomers' to move from peripheral to more central participation.

Vygotsky (1997a) was in no doubt that learning requires mastery and appropriation of signs and tools, with thought and language being the fundamental tools through which learning transforms the practices of the child. These findings not only confirm the importance of thought as a fundamental tool through which learning occurs, but also that a silent young bilingual learner is capable of mediating her/his bilingual learning

(Drury, 2007, p.101). As stated by Vygotsky (1986; 1987), internalisation of the spoken word results in a cognitive transformation (1978, p.86) – that of mother tongue thinking.

Interestingly, although the spoken word turned inward (became silent) it was not accompanied by the simultaneous unfolding of speech (Vygotsky, 1987). In fact, the development from thought to word was able to stop at any point, as was the case with Suki at the school gates.

The findings also demonstrate that learning is not a linear process, but moves across and through both the familiar and less familiar CoPs as was the case with Tamsin and Suki. Building ‘alternative learning pathways’ (the most notable and recurring theme revealed through the analysis) serves as the means through which a young bilingual learner gains new understandings of, and participation in, unfamiliar worlds such as the early years CoP.

Rather than solely expanding the repertoire of theory in relation to SLA theory, providing a sociocultural perspective upon the silent period has revealed much more about *how* emergent bilingual learners learn *per se*, in contrast to being purely language focused. The findings are less about SLA during this initial stage of bilingual learning, and more about *the practice* of learning throughout the silent period – whether it be learning how to paint, to be like the teacher, to be able to share in an amusing incident with others, or simply to ‘fit in’.

A tentatively unique contribution to the ‘where, what and why’ of bilingual learning has been presented through these findings, with the role of silent participation revealed as pivotal throughout the silent period (Vygotsky, 1987, p.57). Sociocultural understandings thus provide a deeper meaning to what might mistakenly be perceived (through a purely SLA perspective) as ‘lower level’ cognitive actions – the synthesis of alternative learning pathways through which silent participation occurs.



## Chapter 6

### Discussion – The Public Viewing

‘The word was not the beginning – action was there first; it is the end of development, crowning the deed.’ (Vygotsky, 1986, p.225.)

#### 6.1 Silent Participation Through Legitimate Peripheral Participation

The findings of this small scale study confirm the complexity of the relationship between thought, language and spoken words as demonstrated through the building and synthesis of alternative learning pathways. The complex development of thought passes through, ‘an infinite variety of movements; to and fro, in ways still unknown to us...’ (Vygotsky, 1986, p.254).

If in agreement with Vygotsky (1986) that the spoken word is internalised (through private speech) into thought, it may also be assumed that if the mother tongue is Punjabi then internalised speech is also in Punjabi – *mother tongue thought*. Through mother tongue thought the synthesis of each alternative learning pathway, ‘creates a connection, moves, grows and develops, fulfils a function, solves a problem...’ (Vygotsky, 1986, p.218). Mother tongue thought is ‘consumed’ through the mediation of silent participation.

However, the findings also reveal that the flow of thought is not necessarily accompanied by the simultaneous unfolding of speech, and the development from thought to word may stop at any time. None the less, learning continues throughout the silent period – through legitimate, peripheral participation (LPP).

LPP is seen to be a significant ‘workable’ concept through which a young bilingual learner gains a ‘sense of belonging’ through increasing participation within the early years CoP. Although the Government guidance, ‘Every Child a Talker’ (ECAT) (DCSF, 2008, 2010, p.9) states, ‘Modelling language and using descriptive commentary should make up about 80% of your interactions...’, Nicole (chapter four, p.5) revealed negative repercussions when she attempted to move a silent young bilingual learner (Kimoto) out of LPP and into the centrality of spoken practice – he was visibly distressed.



If a young bilingual learner gains participation through her/his silent experiences, then focusing predominantly on the spoken word draws the child out of the ‘security’ of LPP – thus hindering (or at worst blocking) the child’s attempts to build new learning pathways. She/he loses the ‘observation post’ from which to silently participate.

Indeed, Hancock’s (2007, p.1) study articulates how two-year-old children ‘use and invest meaning’ in ‘safe’ domestic spaces, through utilising their familiar signs, symbols and tools. Unfortunately, such spaces within which an emergent bilingual learner can silently make meaning (Bligh, 2011) are noticeable by their absence within the English early years CoP.

The results would suggest that in terms of current early years practice, including the current Early Years Foundation stage (DCSF, 2007), the provision of adequate spaces (‘look out posts’) through which a young bilingual learner can synthesise the practices within the early years CoP might be considered as crucial.

## **6.2 Close Observation**

Adyta (LPP) silently observed the practices within the early years community – silently, but actively watching from a ‘safe’ distance using, ‘observation and imitation as a legitimate means to gain peripheral membership of a community’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.95).

Rogoff (2003) moves pedagogical thinking forward in considering observation as central in a young child’s learning but also arguing for a cross fertilisation and building upon alternative cultural ideas of teaching and learning. Rogoff (2003, p.299) states, ‘children’s play builds on what they observe, but what they have the opportunity to observe differs greatly depending on whether they are included in the full range of their community’s activities or are segregated from many settings that are restricted to adults.’

The above quote justifies criticism of current early years pedagogy which is based on ‘differentiation’. In many English-speaking UK classrooms, children’s activities and tasks are divided into ‘ability’ groupings, with emergent bilingual learners commonly being situated in the ‘lower ability’ groups. The National Strategies (DfE, 2010)

defends its support of differentiation in its explanation of the Early Years Foundation Stage (DCSF, 2007) planning process for two-year-olds when stating that, 'A balance of planned adult-initiated activities and self-selected child-initiated activities ensures developmentally appropriate differentiation and challenge'.

The result of endorsing 'developmentally appropriate' differentiation is that emergent bilingual learners cannot observe more advanced practices and therefore cannot *practice* the more advanced practices of the learning community. This disables the child from contributing to the community's shared endeavour, and in gaining fuller participation.

Whether the strategy of differentiation results in teachers focusing more on the 'higher ability' groups, and less on the 'lower ability' groups (in which emergent bilingual learners are too commonly situated) may need consideration, due to the risk of neglecting the crucial mediating role of the teacher/practitioner within bilingual learning.

The importance of close observation in meaning making for bilingual learners cannot be underestimated as can be identified by Lancaster (2001b) and Flewitt (2005) following from their research into non-verbal forms of communication in pre-school children. Although not solely focusing on bilingual learning, the importance of observation in learning and reasoning is apparent.

In Lancaster's (2001b) multimodal analysis of a two-year-old child representing and interpreting graphic signs whilst engaging, with her father, in drawing and marking, the term 'gaze' is used in preference to 'observation'. Three functions of gaze were identified throughout the single activity – 'analytic', 'interpersonal' and 'expressive'. The research presents a young child's complex abstract reasoning as rooted in physical and emotional engagement with the world and interpretative activity, mediated through physical and bodily resources.

Like Lancaster (2001b), Flewitt's (2005) pre-school study re-examining language-biased approaches to classroom interaction, revealed the range of 'voices' employed by three-year-old children during their first year in pre-school. Flewitt (2005) presented the multimodality of meaning making through the interconnectivity of talk, body movement, facial expression and gaze.



The girls' interaction was negotiated chiefly through imitative movements, timely glances and gaze, with only occasional talk from Jemima, who attributed intention and meaning to Tallulah's silent expressions of meaning. In every 'action' line, the meaning intentions appeared clear to both producer and observer of the signs (Flewitt, 2005, p.216).

Rogoff (2003), Lancaster (2001b) and Flewitt's (2005) research emphasises the importance of observation within children's learning, and yet this important contribution to learning is not apparent in much current early years pedagogy. Observation is recognised as a key tool through which the *teachers/practitioners* may assess children's learning, but not vice-versa. Knowing how crucial observation is within the repertoire of early years bilingual learning, where is the recognition?

With the greater emphasis on monolingual speaking skills in early years CoPs (including assessment of speaking, answering teacher directed questions and expectations of reading aloud), the significant contributions through multimodal means of meaning making (including close observation) are at risk of being over-looked or misunderstood. Gaskins and Paradise (2010, p.95) suggest that, 'Observational learning is sometimes dismissed as insignificant because of a commonsense understanding that it is basically a passive activity - 'just looking'.

Does this suggest that the behaviour of a young bilingual learner – to observe, to 'stand and stare', to 'gaze' – is perceived as 'inactivity' (in a reified curriculum/guidance), and observation is therefore not recognised as one of several alternative learning pathways?

### **6.3 Intense Listening**

'It is our birthright to listen, quietly and undisturbed... and take whatever meanings we may' (Hampton and Grossmann, 2009).

The findings have revealed that emergent bilingual learners need to listen intensely to gain in participation within an early years CoP. Learning through *intense listening* (an alternative learning pathway) has significant pedagogical implications.

Early years learning environments may appear as 'noisy' due to many young children participating in multiple practices at any given time. However, for an emergent



bilingual learner such a learning environment may impede the ability to ‘eaves drop’, ‘listen in’ and/or *listen intensely*. Perhaps the movement of Kimoto into parallel play (in close proximity to the practices) was his way of addressing this pedagogical issue.

There are several questions that the findings raise in relation to listening opportunities for emergent bilingual learners:

- Are emergent bilingual learners missing out on enriching learning opportunities, because they have no silent spaces through which they can intensely listen, ‘lurk’ (MacDonald et al., 2003) or ‘eavesdrop’ (Ward, 1971)?
- Does current early years pedagogy address the issue of facilitating listening opportunities for emergent bilingual learners?
- What is the requirement for provision of silent spaces in current early years settings?

Although it is beyond the scope of this research to address each of these questions (which invite further enquiry), it can be seen that there is room for further development before early years CoPs can claim to be ‘conducive to listening’ environments. Indeed, with the increasing emphasis on teachers/practitioners to provide more assessable, recordable and visible evidence of children’s learning, what motivation is there for teachers/practitioners to address issues focusing upon the provision and facilitation of learning through such an abstract notion as intense listening?

In contrast to learning within an early years CoP, multilingual learning which takes place in the home and community schools (Robertson, 2004) and within children’s own homes, may present with many more opportunities for silent participation – through both familiar and domestic spaces (Hancock and Gillen, 2007) where children have the autonomy and agency to ‘seek out spaces’ to ‘listen in’ on the practices of their immediate community (Rogoff et al., 2003).

#### **6.4 Not ‘*just*’ Copying**

It has been identified that an important part of bilingual learning both in and out of an early years CoP involves copying the shared playful practices of others as a means to engage in participation. Copying modelled activities through guided participation

(Rogoff, 2003) enabled Adyta, as apprentice to silently copy from others – which was through close observation of the pre-school teacher modelling pre-school practices (i.e. singing), and also (predominantly) through his peers’ ‘everyday’ practices. This brings into question the crucial role of the teacher/practitioner in mediating participation through the modelling practices throughout the silent period. It is also possible that some teachers/practitioners believe that mediation is unnecessary as learning will occur only when the child is ‘developmentally ready’. Despite the copying of modelled practices being part of Adyta’s meaning making, there was little evidence in the findings of the teachers/practitioners in the research directly guiding an emergent bilingual learner (being situated close to her/him) so that the child can ‘work’ alongside ‘strong’ role models – the contrary appeared more often the case within the informal learning environment of the pre-school playgroup.

Although *copying* from others is part of distributed practice, bilingual learners may be discouraged (frowned upon) if seen to be copying others’ writing. In Japan (Sedgwick, 2010) copying is traditionally recognised as a respected mode of learning in schools. However, this is not the case in England, where copying is perceived more negatively – as a form of ‘cheating’. In many reception classes, teachers may actively discourage children from copying their peers writing. An individualistic and developmentally-based pedagogy may therefore limit emergent bilingual learners’ opportunities to copy, through inhibiting more diverse opportunities for participation. Could a change in attitude towards the status of copying within early years pedagogy increase its visibility as an alternative learning pathway?

## **6.5 Limitations of the Study**

Although the findings of this research have revealed several pedagogical implications in relation to current and future early years practice, there remain several issues which have not been resolved. These ‘satellite’ issues and limitations require further explanation.

Narratives presented from older, primary aged children:

There are no narratives presented from older, primary aged children, recalling their silent experiences. This ethical decision resulted from extensive discussions (Bligh,



2009, 2010) around the age at which a child's memories of her/his silent experiences would no longer impact negatively. Future research may wish to reconsider this dilemma.

#### Additional non verbal learning pathways:

There has been a focus upon specific learning pathways – observation, listening and copying. However, other non-verbal learning pathways have not been extensively explored in relation to the silent period. For instance, the significance of incidental 'signing' and the significance of touch during the silent period have not been developed. Flewitt (2005) and Lancaster's research (2001b) demonstrates the complexity and multimodal means through which young children communicate and make meaning both at home and in pre-school settings.

Akin to children who have profound hearing loss, Adyta struggled to articulate his speech accurately because he was not party to hearing the intricacies of all the sounds made through the dominant discourse – English. Children with profound hearing loss also build an additional and more appropriate learning pathway – sign language. These factors are open to further exploration.

#### The Affective:

The significance of the affective during the silent period has not been addressed in relation to the 'caring' role of the early years teacher/practitioner and the level of empathy required in supporting bilingual learning. The importance of the affective in relation to mediation of learning was referred to by Vygotsky (1986) and in contemporary research by Cooper (2011). The affective (table 4) may benefit from closer examination in relation to an emergent bilingual learner's levels of participation, developing identities and in promoting a sense of belonging.

#### Assessment:

Emergent bilingual learners may be grouped together in low 'ability' sets within the English primary school system from reception class onwards. These sets are often solely assessed on the child's ability to communicate through speaking, reading and/or writing in English – not in their mother tongue. How can a silent young bilingual learner make



meaning when he or she is grouped with the children who find difficulty in communicating and participating through the language of instruction themselves?

At present most children in both early years and primary classrooms are taught, assessed and expected to learn through the language of instruction – English. How can young bilingual learners be reliably assessed when the dominant discourse is not the child's language of thought and learning, their mother tongue?

Gee (2004) argues that when the dominant discourse in the classroom is academic English, this marginalises children who cannot access academic English. In contrast, if teaching and learning are offered through multi-media sources, a 'level playing field' (Gee, 2004) emerges that is particularly supportive to those who cannot make meaning or communicate through the dominant discourse. Teachers and practitioners may need to 'dig deep' to employ alternative means of assessing a young bilingual learner's capabilities. Gee's (2005) contribution of computer gaming and Jackson and Conteh's (2008) global learning opportunities afforded through the medium of Art, may offer alternative opportunities through which a young bilingual learner can mediate their own levels of participation through mother tongue thinking.

Socio-political factors in relation to bilingual learning:

The political aspects of bilingual learning have also been under-represented in this research (Chapter 2.18). It is neither easy nor appropriate to separate politics from theoretical understandings, policy and practice – particularly so in relation to the study of early years bilingual learning within the English-speaking educational system.

In Conteh et al. (2005) her writing on self reflection movingly discusses the contradictions and compromises faced on a daily basis by bilingual learners, their families and their teachers in confronting difference and diversity in the English-speaking educational system: 'I am largely immune [through the colour of my skin] from the struggles which these encounters represent in the contexts I researched. I knew this dimly at the start, but I know it far more deeply and powerfully now.' (2005, p.145)

Underwriting this research methodology is a central belief in equality of opportunity for all children, which 'cuts' across racial and cultural 'divides'. Although issues of politics

and power have not been addressed explicitly through the course of this enquiry (Cummins, 2000, 2001), these issues are, none the less, implicitly embedded within the qualitative nature of the ethnographic and sociocultural lens through which understandings have been gained on an emergent bilingual learner's initial encounters on entry into an English-speaking early years community of practice.

Spoken language does not stand alone. Not only does it connect to and 'carry' sociocultural understandings, but also issues of status, power and future life chances – in every word that is spoken. The language of instruction within an early years CoP is the dominant white, monolingual, middle class and academic discourse – accessible to some, but not to all.

Conteh et al. (2007) encourages the reader to, 'engage with the details of interaction in order to understand the bigger picture' (2007) because, 'As Gee (2005, cited in Conteh, et al. 2007, p.12) argues, language can never be considered a politically neutral phenomenon – power is 'part and parcel of using language'.

## **6.6 Summary: Respecting the Power of the Unspoken Bilingual Word**

'Children [like Nazma and Naseem] present a challenge to schools because their language use and their socialisation and cultural experience in and beyond the home, do not match the norm which teachers expect to be able to build on' (Drury, 1997).

Each of the participants in the research entered an early years CoP without the ability to readily mediate his/her learning through familiar and mutually shared cultural tools. He/she could not speak the dominant discourse because her/his mother tongue was not English. Adyta and Tamsin both spoke Punjabi and 'Suki' and Kimoto spoke Japanese. Without being able to mediate learning through spoken English, a barrier to learning appeared between the learner and participation.

However, something happened which transformed meaning making without any explicit or apparent assistance. Each of the children sought out LPP as a location for learning the practices of the early years CoP. Without explicit guidance, Adyta, 'Suki' and Tamsin initially 'distanced' themselves from the core practices of the CoP, and whilst



situated on the periphery of practice (legitimised by their monolingual peers) they began to learn.

Through the internalisation of their mother tongue (thought) they engaged in a rich mix of inter-connected practices – through close observation, intense listening and copying. These alternative learning pathways were not part of a linear process, nor were they strategies for learning. Peering through a sociocultural lens, the layers of this non-linear and synergetic complexity could be seen – as silent participation.

Early years teachers/practitioners may currently be presented with limited colours (cognitive models) with which to articulate bilingual learning. Identifying that there are additional ‘colours’ available on the palette (applying a sociocultural perspective) may assist in developing further understandings of and how best to support a silent, young, bilingual learner within and through a ‘monolingual’ CoP.

Although the research makes apparent that the silent period is a critical time for learning whilst negotiating into and through the early years CoP; there still remain unanswered questions. Yet to be identified is whether sociocultural dissonance on transition into the school environment ‘elongates’ the silent period; or whether the young child is making an asserted choice of loyalty to the mother tongue when actively rejecting the majority language within the early years setting.

Through a SLA lens, each young bilingual learner was seen to employ several non-verbal strategies (observation, imitation, gestures, listening and memory) to support her learning. However, when viewed through a sociocultural lens these same ‘strategies’ were identified as culturally appropriated learning practices. Rather than being a pre-requisite for language learning, alternative learning pathways are seen to build upon the existing tool of language – culturally-generated learning that is accessed through the mother tongue.

Apparent throughout these discussions is a sociocultural perspective on bilingual learning, but how does this perspective build upon the cognitively based SLA model?



Table 4 presents the sociocultural ‘layer’ (‘gloss coat’) which builds upon (as opposed to challenging) SLA cognitive theory in relation to defining the silent period in the early years CoP.

**Table 4: Learning Through the Silent Period**

Second Language Acquisition	Sociocultural layer
Observation, listening and copying are important strategies which precede the learning process (O’Malley et al., 1985, 1990).	Close observation, intense listening and copying are important interconnected learning pathways (Rogoff et al., 2003).
Second language learners can be taught these individual strategies (Oxford et al., 1990)	The child mediates learning through synthesising multiple interconnected learning pathways (this research).
SLA is passive during the silent period (Krashen, 1985).	Although some learning may appear as passive (e.g. eaves dropping) (Rogoff et al., 2003), silence is a powerful and agentive means through which learning occurs (Drury, 2007).
Teaching of comprehension activities, receptive vocabulary and memorising during the ‘pre productive’ stage (Ellis, 2009) – ‘top down’ approach.	Silently participates through LPP (Lave and Wenger, 1999) – ‘bottom up’ approach.
Historically, there has been (Krashen, 1982) less emphasis on the role of the mother tongue within SLA (Noor, 1994).	Learning occurs through the mother tongue (Cummins, 2002).
Appropriately structured and objective-led SLA teaching in class will assist in ‘breaking through’ the silent period (Krashen, 1985).	Everyday family and community practices extend learning through silent participation (Rogoff, 2003; Gregory, 2004; Kenner et al., 2007; Conteh et al., 2007).
A language rich environment (Baker, 2001) facilitates progression in non-verbal stage of SLA.	The sharing of culturally appropriated signs, symbols and tools mediates increasing participation (Rogoff, 1998, 2003) both in and outside of the early years CoP.
Affective factors facilitate (or do not facilitate) comprehensible input during the pre-production stage (Krashen, 1985).	These factors may be of significance (Cooper, 2011) but require further exploration.

<p>Motivation, Age, Exposure, Personality (Wong-Fillmore, 1979).</p> <p>Motivation, High self-esteem/self-confidence, Low anxiety, Risk-taking, Empathy (Krashen, 1981, 1982)</p>	<p>LPP (Lave and Wenger, 1999) facilitates the emergent bilingual learner in taking ownership of her/his fractionally increasing levels of silent participation through parallel play (this research) – play being a primary means to develop the affective (Vygotsky, 1966).</p>
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Sociocultural theorising is seen to enhance cognitively-focused models of SLA, through revealing ‘new ways of knowing’ through the silent period.

These findings do not present an interpretation of the silent period from the teacher’s perspective; nor do they offer ‘top down’ *solutions* to the teaching of emergent bilingual learners. The findings do, however, emphasise the complexity of learning throughout the silent period and reveal silent participation as a means through which an emergent bilingual learner practices the practices, and makes meaning within, through and beyond an early years CoP.

The silent experiences of a young bilingual learner are revealed through silent participation – across early years and multiple communities of practice.



## **Chapter 7**

### **Conclusion – Closing the Exhibition**

Wenger (1990, p.142) stated, ‘learning is above all an integral part of social practice, taken as a generative process in which persons ...interact with each other and with the world and we tune our relations ... with the world accordingly. In other words we learn.’ (Wenger, 1998, p.45.)

In concluding this small scale sociocultural study into the silent period, the threads that underpin the sociocultural implications of the findings are drawn together within the explanatory framework; thus presenting the implications of these important insights into emergent bilingual learners’ silent participation.

An evaluation is presented of the methodology, the findings in relation to sociocultural theorising, early years pedagogy and the potential for future research. Finally, tentative links are established between the findings from this small sample of emergent bilingual learners and those experienced within the wider population..

#### **7.1 Synthesis of the Research Findings**

The findings of this small-scale sociocultural exploration into the initial stage in English additional language acquisition tentatively reveal that for emergent young bilingual learners, the silent period presents as a phase of intense learning, through fractionally increasing participation in the practices within the Early Years CoP.

The findings make apparent that during the silent period; internalisation of the mother tongue (as thought) acts as an agentive and self mediating tool through which young bilingual learners build a synthesis of alternative learning pathways. It became apparent that alternative learning pathways (close observation, intense listening and copying) were built as the result of thought passing through, ‘an infinite variety of movements; to and fro, in ways still unknown to us...’ (Vygotsky, 1986, p.254). Through mother tongue thought, the synthesis of alternative learning pathways, ‘creates a connection, moves, grows and develops, fulfils a function, solves a problem...’ (Vygotsky, 1986, p.218).



The findings also reveal that for this small number of children, there is a preferred location for the emergent bilingual learner within the early years CoP. The location which best facilitates the building and synthesis of alternative learning pathways and fractionally increasing participation is referred to as legitimate, peripheral participation (LPP). LPP offers the emergent bilingual learner an ideal location (on the periphery of practice) through which to observe, listen and copy the practices within the CoP. Legitimate peripheral participation is seen to offer an explanatory framework through which alternative learning pathways are actively constructed.

The early years teachers/practitioners were found to be less culturally responsive (Deldado-Gaitan, 2006) than might be appropriate to their mediatory role during the silent period. Due to the uncertainty of this mediatory role, and with much mediation being incidental, the young bilingual learners were seen to predominantly mediate their own learning.

Understandings of my mediatory role were initially challenged whilst a former reception teacher – in particular, my understandings of mediating emergent bilingual learners who appeared to be marginalised, on the fringes of participation and whose life experiences may have been very different from my own.

Sometimes attempts to engage as an ‘outsider’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) led to making a serious error of judgement – such as when I referred ‘Suki’ to the Educational Psychologist due to her prolonged period of silence, which resulted in Suki being perceived as the problem.

Small breakthroughs in understandings sometimes occurred when I attempted to ‘reach out’ and ‘go out of my way’ to connect with a child, such as when I visited Suki’s home before school started in the mornings. However, being an outsider sometimes impacted negatively on my attempts to mediate emergent bilingual learners. To clarify, I turn to one final silent character, ‘Uzma’, a five-year-old Farsi-speaking bilingual learner (of Pakistani heritage) who started her schooling in my reception class in September 2006.

One morning, after Uzma’s mother had left the classroom, Uzma began to cry, and moved apart from the other children. I walked towards her, wiped her tears with a tissue and held her hand whilst I led her to sit close by me on the carpet area. At that point, I

was satisfied that I had fulfilled all that Uzma required from me – her tears stopped, and she appeared as ‘settled’.

However, when I observed Uzma later that morning (whilst playground supervising), not only was she disengaged from play with other children, but she spent the entire fifteen minutes walking alone around the perimeter of the playground.

The assumed act of mediation had not facilitated Uzma’s participation. Uzma could not speak English and her mother tongue, Farsi, was not understood by the other children. Although Uzma appeared to be ‘settled’ in class, during informal learning spaces such as ‘tidy up’ and ‘play time’, she often stood alone and in silence. To explain this inconsistency between what I thought had hoped had occurred (participation) and what had actually happened (isolated from the early years CoP), Greene and Hill (2005) suggest that, ‘the nature of any child’s experience is always in part inaccessible to an outsider: this must be a fundamental premise for the researcher. This inaccessibility is even more problematic when children are as yet unable to report on their conscious encounters with the world...’ (2005, p.5).

It becomes apparent that the process of exploring the silent period through sociocultural theorising may raise new questions – not only in relation to mediation and participation, but also surrounding the nature of our understanding of ourselves and others.

## **7.2 Reflection on the Limitations of the Methodology**

Ethnography was the chosen methodology through which to make meaning out of a small group of young bilingual learner’s lived experiences. As an ethnographer, I was well placed to slide into the most accommodating position. Within the emergent bilingual learners’ ‘everyday’ learning environment, the young children’s silent experiences could be observed and recorded verbatim. Ethnography therefore, made possible a means through which to ‘listen in’ on the ‘unheard voices’ within the silent period.

However, as the sole monolingual researcher attempting to make qualitative meanings out of the unspoken experiences of early years bilingual learners I was presented with



many challenges which were both practical and ethical. Indeed, quantitative research methods may have made the analytic stage less problematic. In particular, the enormous task of comparing, contrasting and gross categorising of the minutiae, in attempting to identify themed behaviours proved particularly troublesome.

Rather than having to categorise a mass of undifferentiated ideas and behaviours through the gathered field-notes, which then required division into key narrative 'slices'; quantifiable techniques might have provided precise timings of responses and participation as observed within the silent period. In addition, closed questions within distributed questionnaires to parents and practitioners might have led to less speculative quantifiable understandings of the silent period. I am suggesting that quantifiable layering might have further fortified the findings.

### **7.3 Further Insights Enabled by Socio-cultural Theory**

Within this small group of children; rather than the silent period being deemed solely as the pre-verbal stage within SLA, sociocultural theorising of the silent period has supplemented cognitively determined explanations; presenting learning through the silent period as agentive, non-linear, complex and transformational.

Whereas 'observation, listening and copying' might have been considered as independent learning strategies (Purdie et al., 1999); through sociocultural theorising, this study speculatively reveals observation, listening and copying as a complex synthesis of alternative learning pathways. Whilst learning through the silent period is distributed through fractionally increasing participation; so too is fractionally increasing participation distributed through the synthesis of alternative learning pathways.

Through internalisation of the spoken word (Vygotsky, 1986) mother tongue thought is presented as an essential tool through which understandings of the early years CoP are mediated. Indeed, the sociocultural lens reveals the significance of legitimate peripheral participation as a chosen location from which the emergent bilingual learner can more readily observe, listen and copy and practice the practices through fractionally increasing levels of participation.



Silence may not be highly valued in the Western world as a medium for learning, and yet this research clearly demonstrates that this perception is misconceived – not only demonstrating the crucial role of mediation within emergent bilingual learning, but also, ‘the inextricable link between mind and culture.’ (Gregory, 2008, p.19.)

### 7.31 Implications for Early Years Pedagogy

Sociocultural theorising raises several interesting issues in relation to current early years pedagogy. Notably absent in the findings is evidence of the early years teachers/practitioners *knowingly* mediating learning during the silent period, and yet this mediatory role is considered as crucial (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 2003) for learning. Although not specifically designed to focus upon the silent period, Magraw and Dimmock’s (2006) ‘Merridale’ nursery project revealed the important role of teachers in mediating children’s peripheral participation through silence spaces.

We became aware of the length of silences during a session, when we listened to the audio recordings. On reflection we realised the inevitability of silences... and that good relationships are based on the acceptance of them. We came to realise that presence is the other side of silence, and allows for the child to continue comfortably doing their self-allotted task, knowing that support and assistance is available if wanted, but it is not forced. (Magraw and Dimmock, 2006, p.4.)

The teachers on the Merridale project guided the children’s participation whilst allowing them to negotiate their own levels of participation through their silence. Each child’s peripheral participation was legitimised by the teacher who modelled practices which could be observed and copied without an expectation of dialogue.

However, how can teachers/practitioners mediate effectively in circumstances where they have no understanding of the child’s cultural tools? Is it possible to listen to the voices of emergent bilingual learners without sharing their mother tongue? There must be another means of listening throughout the silent period.

Clark and Moss (2001) introduced the ‘Mosaic approach’ as an appropriate methodological tool with which to hear the unspoken voices of children. The mosaic approach employs a range of observational tools to enable children to build up a

‘mosaic’ picture of their ‘early years’ experiences. For instance, a child might take a ‘tour’ of the early years environment (employing a camera as a research tool) to point out areas of interest, or by drawing a ‘map’ and/or pictures of ‘things’ they might dislike.

This contemporary mode of thinking has not only raised questions regarding current UK attitudes towards the status of young children in terms of *empowerment* within early years learning environments, but also the resourcefulness of children as *researchers* (Kellet, 2010). As a result of these incredibly enlightening studies, teachers/practitioners are encouraged not only to listen to the spoken, but also the *unspoken* words through, ‘the hundred languages of children’ (Rinaldi, 2005).

Early years teachers/practitioners are inevitably bound to government policy and practice through nationally introduced ‘curriculums’ such as the Early Years Foundation Stage (DCSF, 2007). The nature of such frameworks is predominantly based upon developmental and cognitively based models of learning.

Smith (2002) notes that within the evolving paradigm of ‘childhood studies’, psychological models of individual growth and development (independent of context) are currently being challenged (Woodhead, 2004) with a re-emphasis on the diversity of childhoods coming to the fore. According to Mayall (2004), instead of children being considered as ‘mute’, vulnerable objects of concern (Hardman, 1973) children are now repositioned as powerful and competent social actors with *voice* and *agency* – through agency children express their ‘hidden’ voice.

Worthy initiatives such as the Coram Family project ‘Listening to Young Children’ (Lancaster and Broadbent, 2003) have aided in redefining the portrait of a child from that of passive to autonomous (Clark and Moss, 2001). However, such initiatives have been quickly superseded by government supported ‘top down’ attempts to raise the status of ‘speaking and listening’ (‘Every Child a Talker’ [ECAT] DCSF, 2008). Unfortunately, in the process of attempting to raise the status of the spoken word, the significance of the *unspoken* word may have been overlooked, both as a crucial cultural tool for bilingual learning (through silent participation) and also as a thinking space (through LPP) for practising the practices of an early years CoP.



It can be seen that in attempting to raise the status of speaking and listening, the initial noble intentions of empowering 'harder to reach' children may have been misinterpreted in re-packaging for classroom 'consumption' into purely strategic policies. In doing so, the position of power risks being shifted away from the young bilingual learner, and back to the policy makers.

Although the Government guidance, 'Every Child a Talker' (ECAT) (DCSF, 2008, 2010, p.9) states, 'Modelling language and using descriptive commentary should make up about 80% of your interactions...', Nicole (chapter four, p.5) revealed negative repercussions when she attempted to move a silent young bilingual learner (Kimoto) out of LPP and into the centrality of spoken practice – he was visibly distressed. LPP is therefore disregarded within early years pedagogy as a 'workable' concept through which young bilingual learners might gain in participation or a 'sense of belonging' within the early years CoP.

If a young bilingual learner gains participation through her/his silent experiences, then focusing predominantly on the spoken word may draw the child out of the 'security' of LPP – thus hindering (or at worst blocking) the child's attempts to build new learning pathways. She/he loses the 'observation post' from which to silently participate.

Indeed, Hancock's (2007, p.1) study articulates how two-year-old children 'use and invest meaning' in 'safe' domestic spaces, through utilising their familiar signs, symbols and tools. Unfortunately, such spaces within which an emergent bilingual learner can silently make meaning (Bligh, 2011) are noticeable by their absence within the English early years CoP.

The results would suggest that in terms of current early years practice, including the current Early Years Foundation stage (DCSF, 2007), the provision of adequate spaces ('look out posts') through which a young bilingual learner can synthesise the practices within the early years CoP might be considered as crucial. Rogoff et al. (2001) envisaged spaces where, 'learning activities are planned by children as well as adults, and where parents and teachers not only foster children's learning but also learn from their own involvement with children' (2001, p.3) thus developing understandings of how learning moves fluidly through and beyond the early years CoP, into the wider community.



Without a culturally responsive pedagogy, not only does the cultural and linguistic diversity of the young children remain unacknowledged, but teacher-child interactions continue to be formulated solely through white, middle-class, monolingual and curriculum- formulated dictates with the language of instruction projecting solely white, UK middleclass cultural expectations; transferred (both verbally and non-verbally) through teacher/practitioner's attitudes, values and expectations.

If bilingual learners are already disadvantaged due to experiencing cultural discontinuity between home and school, then the knowledge base of the early years setting remains disconnected from the child's prior learning. There is little evidence that early years practitioners act as cultural brokers during the silent period; even though they are in the 'powerful' position of being able to 'make a difference' by (Moll, 2005) actively drawing upon their funds of knowledge.

### **7.32 Opportunities for Further Research**

This small scale sociocultural study highlights potential avenues for further research. Firstly, the significance of the silent period (as a medium through which learning occurs) invites collaborative investigation. A comparative study of the silent period through complementary theoretical lenses (such as cognitive and sociocultural) drawing from a larger cohort of participants might offer more substantive links between the current findings and those of the wider population of emergent bilingual learners.

Although this research did not attempt to address factors relating to 'feelings of isolation' the 'affective' and 'cultural discontinuity' within the silent period; further investigations into practitioner/teacher's professional capabilities in addressing these significant issues might 'throw light' on the impact of positive and negative factors throughout the silent period.

The significance of silent spaces (Bligh, 2011) within the early years CoP is another focus of attention which invites both sole (small scale) and collaborative (larger scale) research in relation to both the status of silence within current early years pedagogy and the value placed upon silence as a medium through which learning occurs.

All three alternative learning pathways and in particular, ‘copying’ provoke further pedagogical enquiry. Questions concerning why ‘copying’ within the UK school learning environment is commonly perceived as a low status learning strategy; and whether/why it appears to be ‘hidden’ behind more acceptable terminology such as ‘imitation’ or ‘modelling’, might be worth pursuing. Sociocultural research would inevitably make known the links between copying, apprenticeship and learning as articulated by Rogoff (1990).

#### **7.4 Final Thoughts**

Silence may still remain a misunderstood and undervalued phenomenon within UK culture, and yet through agentive and resourceful ‘everyday’ practices, the multi-complexity of the silent period is illuminated. Cultural variations in the use of silence can be as vast as the differences between languages. The meaning of each silence depends not only on the situation, but upon the value assigned by cultural convention to silence in each situation (Ingalls and Hammond, 2007).

The value of silence and the spoken word appears unequally culturally distributed, with speaking in UK early years settings being closely aligned to higher order assessments of cognitive development. Contributions offered through silent participation may therefore go unrecognised in the UK; whereas In countries such as Japan and India, silence and thoughtfulness (mother tongue thinking) appear as more highly valued. Trawick (1990) states that, ‘silence in relationships in India does not mean absence but is more of a tool that invites dialogue, probing and further understanding’ (1990, p.33). UK researchers such as Drury (2007) and Bligh (2011) also reveal silence to be a powerful, assertive and agentive action.

Viruru’s (2001) nursery school study questioned the high status bestowed solely upon the spoken word as the main vehicle of human expression and communication. According to Viruru (2001), this is yet another example of the Western world imposing its cultural norms upon less dominant cultures and communities – and in particular children. Viruru asks whose interests are best served when spoken, ‘language is privileged over other modes of communication’ (Viruru, 2001, p.31). Set in India, the ethnographic study, suggests that children, ‘engage in complex forms of communication that do not involve language’ (Viruru, 2001, p.31) and questions the common



assumption in dominant Western discourses that the spoken word should be monolingual when, ‘most of the world’s children use and live in multilingual environments’ (Viruru, 2001, p.31).

Parents in the Western world may expect their children’s lives to be full, active and stimulating, with the spoken word considered as pivotal. However, emergent bilingual learners participate through alternative and culturally appropriated means..

The process of exploring the silent period through a sociocultural lens raises several important questions – not only in relation to the generation of knowledge, but also surrounding the nature of our and others’ understandings of ourselves. Indeed, Greene and Hill (2005) suggest that we should accept that silence is our problem rather than the child’s when suggesting, ‘the nature of any child’s experience is always in part inaccessible to an outsider... This inaccessibility is even more problematic when children are as yet unable to report on their conscious encounters with the world...’ (2005, p.5).

Young children like Adyta, ‘Suki’, Kimoto and Tamsin’s need their alternative contributions to learning to be recognised and valued. In adding a sociocultural perspective to current SLA perspectives of bilingual learning, this ethnographic research has succeeded in painting a renewed and *brightly coloured portrait* of a small number of silent, young bilingual learners. Silence is seen to provide the agency a young child requires when actively learning through their mother tongue thinking, close observation, intense listening and copying – multiple levels of learning occurring simultaneously, whilst legitimately situated on the periphery of participation in an early years community of practice.

I have often been asked why I chose to complete this research – why I considered it to be of importance. At the outset this question was difficult to answer, but as the research has progressed the reasons have become clearer.

The conclusion of my writing has completed a circle both personally and professionally. This sociocultural exploration into early years bilingual learning has not only revealed how silent, young bilingual learners are capable of negotiating learning pathways during periods of intense uncertainty, but how I did likewise.



Struggling to fit in and belong is difficult at any time in a person's life, but for a young child who cannot understand the nuances of the spoken discourses in her/his early learning environment, it is even more so. However, even during this difficult period in the young child's life-world she/he is capable of taking ownership of her/his own learning both in and outside of the early years communities of practice. This resourcefulness in 'getting through' and in ultimately succeeding (Conteh, 2003) 'out there' in the multiplicity of the 'real world' is truly remarkable.

The restoration of the painting is complete, revealing the portrait of a silent, young bilingual learner in bolder, richer and more vibrant colours.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1**

**Ethical Reflection** – made available to all participants and gatekeepers.

- All children and parents/carers who attend the pre-school playgroup, reception and year one class have been made aware (through the gatekeeper) of the planned research.
- I have made it clear to participants of all ages that they are under no obligation to participate in (nor continue with participation in) the research.
- All participants have been reassured that there will be no negative outcomes if they choose not to participate in, or to discontinue participating in the research.
- Participants have been provided with ongoing informal and formal opportunities to accept or decline participation in the research through informal discussions and an ‘opt out’ in the consent form.
- Participants have the opportunity to ask the researcher and/or research supervisor questions about the research at any time during the data gathering period.
- The participants will have had the opportunity to view/handle any data recording equipment before the onset of the data collection.
- Parents/carers have been encouraged to discuss (privately) the research with their child and to report back any concerns.
- All participants have been given the researcher’s and supervisor’s contact details including phone number, email and address.
- All of the above negotiation has been conducted via interpretation if needed.
- The researcher is currently registered with the Criminal Records Bureau as having passed the enhanced CRB check.
- The research has been accepted by the OU ethical committee and registered with the OU data protection data base.

## **Negotiation of Ongoing Consent**

- The research is being conducted within a negotiated, broadly outlined framework.
- The research will continue to develop within the participants' expectations.
- Gatekeepers, practitioners, parents and carers and all participants will be encouraged to report any concerns regarding any adverse effects of the research on themselves or individual children.
- I will respond appropriately to any negative indications being observed or raised regarding child participants – they would be invited to withdraw participation.
- The researcher/researched relationships are to be built upon through sensitivity, reciprocal trust and collaboration.

## **Participant Consultation and Research Outcomes**

- The participants of all ages will have the opportunity to view and comment on the research abstract and data extracts to gain an understanding on what is occurring throughout the research process.
- Participants of all ages will be informed about the possible outcomes and dissemination of the study (with parents/carers communicating this information to child participants).
- The participants will be given copies of the recorded data of themselves and a short report on the final research findings.
- The care and respect of the child participants is central throughout.
- The researcher will continually refer to, and reflect upon, this ethical review throughout the whole research process.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Sample Letter of Explanation – as sent to participants:**

#### **Participation in educational research**

FAO: The Preschool Playgroup Leader

Date

Dear .....

I am a postgraduate student with the Open University undertaking research for a Doctorate in Education.

The focus of this research is: **The Silent Experiences of a Young Bilingual Learner**

The abstract for this exploration (describing the research) is freely available on request.

It is the aim of this research to build upon current knowledge regarding the emergent stage of bilingual learning (the silent period) within early years settings.

#### **The Research Activities**

To complete the research activities it is an ethical requirement to ask permission of the intended gatekeepers, the participants and carer(s) and/or parent(s) of any intended child participants.

I am asking for access to and participation with a maximum of three research activities within the pre-school playgroup and primary school buildings:

- Weekly observations of a young bilingual learner following his/her transition from pre-school into reception class and year 1.
- Interview with a maximum of five bilingual adults.
- Interviews with the preschool playgroup practitioners.



## **The Child Observations**

The observations will take place in the pre-school, reception and/or year 1 class on a weekly basis (term-time) for a maximum of twenty minutes, alternate Monday and Friday mornings. The observations will be recorded on paper in written narrative format and can be viewed by the carer(s) or parent(s) of the child participant if requested until 31<sup>th</sup> December 2009 when data collection ceases.

Should a negative response be received (prior to 31<sup>th</sup> December, 2009) from an intended child participant, parent or carer, then this feedback will translate as it not being appropriate for the participant to continue participation in the research. The observations will either not commence or discontinue with immediate effect and any observational accounts (data) will be destroyed immediately.

## **The Child's Consent**

The research will be described in clear and straightforward vocabulary to the intended child participant (translated through the bilingual parent or carer) prior to the observations taking place, which will be supported with visual clues – pictures of myself observing a child that is engaged in preschool activities.

In the event of permission being withdrawn prior to 31/12/2009 the observations would cease to take place or would be terminated, and any data collected would immediately be destroyed.

## **The Adult Interview**

The interview would be unstructured with minimal (if any) prompting.

A maximum of five bilingual adults will be asked to participate in an interview.

Permission will be requested to tape record the interview so that it can be transcribed, for the purposes of this research. A copy of the transcription will be offered to the participant and parent or carer.

If granted permission (following a clear explanation of the research activity) the interview will take place in the community room with the option of another family

member or friend present. The interview would normally last a maximum of twenty minutes – unless permission is granted for an extension on the timing, with a transcription of the interview offered to the participant.

In the event of permission being withdrawn prior to 31/12/2009 the interview would cease to take place or would be terminated, and any data collected would immediately be destroyed.

### **Further Information**

All of the research data will be treated as confidential and stored securely. It is registered on the OU data protection base. As described above, if at any time (prior to the 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2009) a participant wishes to withdraw from the research, any collected data will be destroyed immediately.

I am registered with the Criminal Records bureau as having a current enhanced police check (CRB) and am a registered member of the General Teaching Council and of BERA (British Educational Research Association) (revised 2004) whose ethical guidelines will be adhered to for this educational research.

Please read the above consent explanation and the enclosed informed consent form very carefully. If you wish to participate in, and are in agreement with the proposed research activities, please sign the informed consent form and return it either directly to myself (in the enclosed envelope) to the above address, or in person via the pre-school playgroup. Do not hesitate to telephone with any further queries.

Yours sincerely,

Caroline Bligh

For further clarification of any of the above, or to discuss participation in the research, please contact me on:

Telephone: 01132759347

Email: [blighadele@aol.com](mailto:blighadele@aol.com)

Should there be any further issues for which you need explanation, please contact:

Dr Rose Drury (Doctoral Supervisor)

Open University  
Faculty of Education and Languages  
Walton Hall

Tel: 01908 653212

Email: [r.a.drury@open.ac.uk](mailto:r.a.drury@open.ac.uk)



## **Appendix 3**

### **Informed Consent for Research Participants**

Researcher: Caroline Bligh

Project Title: The Silent Experiences of a Young Bilingual Learner.

Date:

I agree to take part as a participant (or consent for participation on behalf of ..... ) in the above research study undertaken by Caroline Bligh in her capacity as a Doctorate in Education student with the Open University.

The project has been fully explained to me and I have read the explanatory covering letter, which I can keep for my records.

I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to allow the researcher to (delete as appropriate):

- Observe my child in preschool and/or reception class for a maximum of twenty minutes each week up to 31/12/2009.

and/or

- Conduct one semi-structured interview with the preschool playgroup practitioners in the community room.

and/or

- Conduct a maximum of three unstructured interviews with a maximum of five adults for twenty minutes (unless extension on timing agreed) in the community room with the option of a family member or friend present.

### **Data Protection**

This information will be processed for the following purpose:

To collate data for research purposes only (as described in the consent explanation form) which may or may not be used in part or full as required for the completion of my Doctorate in Education, and for no other purpose without the participants’ prior permission being granted.

I understand that any information provided is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party. No identifiable personal data will be published. The identifiable data will not be shared with any other organisation.

And

I understand that I will be able to gain access to a transcript of the data prior to it being included in the write up of this research.

I also understand that participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw participation in part or in full at any stage of the research project 31/12/2009 when data collection ceases) without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

Signature ..... Date .....

Participant’s name(s) .....

Age of child (if under sixteen years of age) .....

Parent or carer’s name and signature (as appropriate)

.....

For your information, my Doctorate in Education Supervisor is:

Dr Rose Drury FELS Walton Hall.

Tel: 01908 653212 Email: r.a.drury@open.ac.uk

## **Appendix 4**

### **Informed Consent Form for Gatekeeper of Research Participants**

**Research title: The Silent Experiences of a Young Bilingual Learner**

**Researcher: Caroline Bligh**

#### **Informed consent**

**Dear**

I wish to ask for your permission to conduct a case study observation of .....  
..... in your setting in order to gather qualitative data as part of my Open  
University Doctoral in Education degree program.

In order to gather the information I require, I will need to observe ..... as  
s/he goes about his/her normal daily activities. I will need to take notes about the events  
that I see occurring during twenty minute sessions each Friday morning.

To do this I will be 'following the gaze of the child' which will require me to follow  
what ..... is looking at, watching his/her responses and recording this  
on paper.

I will not be asking ..... any questions without your presence

I am doing this research to gain further knowledge about the silent experiences of young  
bilingual learners, including the quality of their communication and responses to  
differing situations both in their pre-school setting and on transition into a reception  
class.

When I have completed my observations and gathered all the information I need, I will  
write a description and analysis of what I have learned from this study. I will submit this  
written report as my doctoral thesis.

My intention is to provide valuable insight and knowledge that may be enlightening to  
educators and other researchers interested in early years bilingual education.



In my writing I will not disclose the name of ..... , your names, the settings or the location. Instead I will use fictitious names to protect and preserve privacy and anonymity.

As..... is under your care within your current work setting you will be interacting with the child on occasions. I need to ask your permission to record on paper my written narrative of my observations regarding ..... , visual responses to such interactions, should they occur during my regular observational time in your setting. It is possible that this written narrative may be included in my final thesis.

Also, should you wish for the research to stop at any time, you may request this. In doing so all the collected data would be destroyed.

If you have any questions or require further clarification about my study, I will be glad to answer them.

If you agree to allow me to include..... in this study, please sign the statement below and date it. I am required to keep permission statements on file.

Thank you for your willingness to allow participation in the study.

Yours sincerely,

Caroline Bligh (Researcher)

.....

As the child’s practitioner in their Early Years setting, I agree that ..... can participate in the study as explained above by the researcher.

The project has been fully explained to me and I have read the Explanatory Statement, which I will keep for my records.

I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to allow

Caroline Bligh to:

Observe ..... in playgroup and/or reception class for twenty minutes each Monday/Friday morning and write narrative accounts on these observations

**Data Protection**

This information will be held and processed for the following purpose:

To collate data for my Open University Doctorate in Education research, which will be analysed and (on completion) recorded in part or in full in my Doctorate in Education thesis.

I understand that any information ..... provides is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party. No identifiable personal data will be published. The identifiable data will not be shared with any other organisation.

and

I understand that I can ask for a transcript of the data concerning ..... given to me for my approval before it is included in the write up of the research.

I also understand that participation is voluntary and that I can choose not to allow participation in part or all of the research study, or I can ask to withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

Signature ..... Date .....

Participant’s Name: ..... (please print)

Participant’s Age: .....

Practitioner’s Name .....

Your relationship to participant: .....

If appropriate, reason(s) why s/he cannot give written consent

.....  
.....

Signature of Practitioner: ..... Date .....



## **Appendix 5**

### **Interview with a Bilingual Adult**

#### **Doctorate in Education Research**

#### **The Silent Experiences of a Young Bilingual Learner**

**Researcher: Caroline Bligh**

**Introduction:**

**I am researching around the silent period in young bilingual learners.**

**To be more specific, I am talking about bilingual learners' experiences of silence in an early years setting.**

**Please describe to me your own experiences of commencing school and/or an early years setting in the U.K.**

**I will only prompt you during the course of the interview if deemed necessary to encourage continuation of the dialogue.**

## Appendix 6

### Additional Narratives

#### 6.1. Sunita

‘Sunita’ is of Sikh heritage and has a brother (Ramjeet) who is five years older than her and a sister who is three and a half years older. I asked Sunita to share her experiences on learning at home and school in the North of England:

My parents believed that education was the key to success in England. Although they had not achieved well at school themselves they expected me. They spoke very little English so we spoke mostly Punjabi at home. I learnt to speak English from my older brother and sister. They had learnt it from school.

Before I went to school my older sister was already there. She’s three and a half years older than me. She really had a hard time of it at school – but for me, having her already there made me feel confident. She was somebody to share break times with and, well... I just knew she was around. It did help – I’m sure of that, because I could ask her anything that I was unsure about in Punjabi. I was much more confident than her at school – in fact I could be quite naughty! I settled in quickly – my Mum was really surprised because that wasn’t the case with my sister. My sister is still the quiet one – well, compared to me she is. She’s always been quite shy really. Mum says she didn’t speak at school for ages, whereas the language, speaking English wasn’t an issue for me.

I was quiet to begin with I guess. I mean you would be quiet to begin with wouldn’t you? There’s a lot to think about, to learn really, when you start school. Everything is so different from home isn’t it – well it was for me anyway.

Both my older brother and sister taught me some phrases that I needed to know in English before I started school – you know, like how to ask for the toilet, and others. They had told me so much about everything really I suppose I was prepared. I knew it would be different from home – I expected that.

When I was at home I talked about school a lot, and I would sit on the floor in my sister's room and she would practice maths with me and test me on it. She also made me copy out some of her stories from school, word for word and then I had to read them aloud to her. I've still got them somewhere!

My sister never wanted to go to Birthday parties or bring friends home from school, but I did. I think that if you are confident at school the teachers like you. I think that the teachers kind of ignored my sister – with her being so quiet.

When I started at school my sister and I would have competitions about things, but when I started to win them she didn't really like that.

## **6.2. Sam and Naz**

I recently drew upon an interesting conversation with two, bilingual third year undergraduate Initial Teacher Education students ('Sam' and 'Naz'). I asked Sam and Naz whether they were able to draw upon their cultural resources when they started in a UK primary school:

**Sam:** No, because you want to fit in. You need to compromise, so you follow what everybody else does because you don't want to be different.

**Naz:** You pay for it, though in your family relationships, because when you seek out the majority language and culture to fit in, you begin to forget your own.

**Sam:** It is much more difficult to converse with my grandparents now...and that's not good.

**Naz:** Sometimes I feel that I am stuck between two cultures, but not fully part of either. It's not easy always having to compromise so that you can fit in with different sets of people... I had to 'hide' my own language and Islamic traditions from my English-speaking friends because they would not have understood or accepted them. Also, I couldn't share all of my school experiences with my parents because I didn't think that they would approve.

## **6.3. Fatima**



The following was recorded on paper immediately following an incidental breakfast conversation with ‘Fatima’ and her son (‘Simon’) and daughter (‘Eileen’) whilst on a family holiday in Majorca:

Fatima (Portuguese heritage) and her Turkish heritage husband live in Newcastle with Eileen (sixteen years of age) and Simon (aged five) – both children were given English names. When Eileen started school in the UK at six years of age in year two, Eileen could speak no English. Fatima said that ‘this wasn’t a problem for Eileen’ and that she had ‘settled into school really quickly’. However, Eileen (who speaks Farsi, Turkish and English) disputed this, and said that it was a ‘horrible’ time for her. She said that she had ‘hated it’ because she couldn’t make herself understood and, ‘felt *hollow* inside’ and ‘didn’t speak for ages’. Eileen said that she had ‘never enjoyed school and couldn’t wait to leave’. Eileen is now employed in a department store in Newcastle. Fatima was visibly shocked at Eileen’s account of her entry in a UK school.

Simon had a complete understanding of Farsi, Turkish and English, but would only converse in English. Although Fatima and Eileen conversed in Farsi, when either of them spoke to Simon in Farsi he responded in English. I asked Eileen why she only conversed with Simon in English and she said that she didn’t want it to be the same for him’ as it had been for her.

#### **6.4. Preschool practitioners**

The following is a short excerpt which was recorded on paper following an informal lunch break with the monolingual preschool playgroup practitioners, ‘Pat’ and ‘Sarah’:

**Pat:** The parents want to know if, and how well, they are speaking in English. They stand and watch other children doing things for ages. Sometimes they just stand and stare. I think they can feel overwhelmed at carpet time and need to be allowed some space to sit quietly and watch. It must be like going to another planet really.

**Sarah:** But I don’t think that we should force the children to talk. They need to be allowed to watch what is going on, while we keep a careful eye on them. I’ve noticed that they usually like to play on their own. It’s not easy for them to make friends, even when other children try to involve them. I want to help because I hate to see them so

isolated. It must be much worse for them if they start further up the school. Even in reception class it's harder because they have to follow more instructions. I do feel for them.

### **6.5. Aneena**

[...] Aneena sits and observes quietly in the carpet area. She concentrates hard. She looks out of the window and makes a 'shivering' expression. Aneena does not smile. The children around her engage with the teacher, Aneena remains silent...Aneena stands up with the wrong work group. She does not respond to the teacher's requests to sit down. The teacher sits her down. ..She pushes a child away that is encouraging her to stand up for her correct work group. Aneena looks concerned [...]

(Aneena in reception class, 31st October 2007)

### **6.6. Adyta**

- **Adyta is kneeling**

Adyta is kneeling on the carpet with the other children and he looks at the lead practitioner (Nicole) as she sings 'Old Mac Donald has a farm'. Instead of singing he makes the facial expressions of the animals. He continues looking intently at Nicole and then starts to glance around the room at the other children. He returns his glance towards Nicole, smiles and 'sings' along. His mouth is moving, but no sound is being produced and his mouth movements do not match the words of the song. He manages to repeat 'had-a-farm' (as if it were one word) and sings this very loudly whilst still looking at Nicole and following her actions. The other children turn and look at Adyta. He stops singing.

(25th June 2007)

- **Adyta is watching**

Adyta is watching two boys who are playing with cars in a carpeted area. He stands and watches them intently for two minutes and then says, 'I have' loudly in the direction of the boys (Adyta is smiling).Adyta's expression appears 'alive' and excited. The boys

look up at Adyta and smile back, but do not invite him to play. Adyta kneels down next to the boys and watches them playing. He picks up a blue car and looks at it. The two boys appear aware of Adyta's presence but they neither encourage nor discourage him from joining their play activity with the cars. Adyta continues to watch and listen to the boys as they are playing; whilst he holds the blue car.

(30th September 2007)

- **It is 'tidy up' time**

It is 'tidy up' time and Adyta watches 'Archie' emptying objects from the water tank. Adyta joins Archie in this activity. Archie splashes water up at Adyta's face. Adyta looks up at Archie 'crossly' but when he sees that Archie is smiling he smiles back and flicks water up at Archie. Adyta watches Archie move away from the tank with his hands over his head. Adyta stays to finish emptying the tank and then walks to the carpet area with his hands over his head.

(10th February 2008)