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Teachers' knowledge and practice of empowering young children in four early childhood settings in Australia and the United Kingdom

Lisa Moore
Edith Cowan University

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**TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE OF EMPOWERING
YOUNG CHILDREN IN FOUR EARLY CHILDHOOD SETTINGS IN
AUSTRALIA AND THE UNITED KINGDOM.**

Lisa Moore

BA (Hons), P.G.C.E.

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of

Master of Education

...

at the Faculty of Education, Edith Cowan University

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ABSTRACT

This study explores teacher's knowledge and practice of empowering young children as learners. Empowerment is a complex and multifaceted construct, and a recurring theme in early childhood literature.

This study took place in four early childhood settings in Australia and the United Kingdom. The research was conducted using qualitative methodology, primarily with the use of video-taped observations and stimulated-recall teacher interviews.

Findings indicate that the teachers enacted their knowledge and practice of empowerment. However, empowerment was interpreted differently by each teacher. The current study found links existed between teachers' knowledge and practice and their pedagogic orientation.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
- (iii) contain any defamatory material.

Signature

Date24.02.99.....

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The notion of an empowered child is currently a recurring theme in early childhood literature (MacNaughton and Williams, 1998; Stone, 1995; Tinworth, 1997). Researchers suggest that teachers of young children should be “empowering children to be involved in the direction of their education” (Fleer, 1996, p. 63). Empowerment has thus become part of the rhetoric of early childhood education, along with the assumption that its meaning is universal. This study investigates the knowledge, understanding and practice of four early childhood teachers who say that they aim to empower of children as learners. It is hypothesized that empowerment does not have a universal assumption of meaning, instead empowerment is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon, which is constructed and enacted in a multiplicity of ways.

The literature suggests that teachers’ beliefs, knowledge and values shape their practice (Dockett, 1998; Pajares, 1992; Spidell-Rusher, McGrevin & Lambiotte, 1992). Dockett (1998, p. 1) asserts that “our approach to curriculum is linked to our beliefs about children”. However, teachers’ knowledge, beliefs and values are socially constructed and influenced by the broad socio-cultural context of the education system and socio-institutional context of the school. In addition, the current study suggests that teachers and families construct a unique socio-institutional context within the early childhood setting. Socio-institutional contexts include the organisation of physical amenities, the daily routine and rituals, program organisation, and behaviour policies. Researchers have called for more studies to investigate the dialectical relations between context and the individual (Daniels, 1989: Daniels, Holst, Lunt and Johansen, 1996: Frede and Barnett, 1992).

Daniels (1989, p. 140) asserts that there is “a clear need to develop systems of enquiry that enable clarification of the implications of placing children in particular school environments.” Daniels (1989, p. 140) states that it is important for educators to develop better understandings of the “infinitely subtle mechanisms by which schools send messages to children”. This study will identify and examine the mechanisms within four early childhood socio-institutional contexts that enable children to develop as empowered learners.

Background to the Study

The empowerment of children as learners is advocated by researchers and policy makers alike. Research suggests that empowering children during their early years education can lead to significant long-term benefits (Schweinhart and Weikart, 1993). Curriculum policy documents consider the empowerment of young children desirable (Department of Education and Children’s Services, South Australia, 1996; Ministry of Education of New Zealand, 1993). Despite frequent reference to empowerment, definitions of the concept are rare and often varied (Ashcroft, 1987; Derman-Sparkes, 1993; MacNaughton and Williams, 1998). The absence of a clear, universally articulated definition presents early childhood teachers with two linked problems when they attempt to translate the suggestions and recommendations from research into practice: “What exactly does empowerment mean?” and its corollary “How does one go about empowering children as learners in the socio-institutional context of the classroom?” As a solution teachers appear to construct their own knowledge and understanding about what it means to empower young children as learners and enact their knowledge in

a variety of ways. One teacher's construction of meaning may differ considerably from that of another, or indeed from the one intended in research or documentation.

Empowerment and Educational Reform

In general terms the process of empowerment involves teachers and children in a more equitable re-distribution of power within the learning process. Some teachers may be unwilling to share power with children for reasons linked to recent educational reform. Early childhood education has experienced a period of considerable change in Australia and the United Kingdom over recent years. It is suggested that reforms in both countries have not been driven by research findings but instead by political processes (Corrie, 1998). The implementation of policies grounded in economic rationalism has led to a focus on "the 'three Es' - economy, efficiency and effectiveness" (Reynolds cited in Corrie, 1998, p. 2). According to Corrie (1998, p. 2) "The three Es shape notions about teacher accountability, which is judged by the measurement of students' learning outcomes." For example, in Western Australia, schools are accountable for ensuring children achieve targets dictated by Student Outcome Statements (Education Department of Western Australia, 1998a), and in the United Kingdom schools must use the National Curriculum (Department for Education and Employment, 1995) and the Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning on Entering Compulsory Education (Department for Education and Employment, 1996). In Western Australia the Curriculum Framework (Curriculum Council, 1998) and in the United Kingdom the National Curriculum (Department for Education and Employment, 1995) present teachers with a prescriptive curriculum to which they must adhere. As a result, some teachers may feel that the only way to meet the demands of such documentation is

to forgo child-initiated curricula which inherently foster empowerment, and focus instead on teacher-directed activities that ensure that the prescribed curriculum is 'covered'.

In summary, the empowerment of young children as learners is considered desirable. However, it is a complex concept and for a variety of reasons it is not always enacted as research literature and policy documentation intends.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to develop a greater understanding of the construct of empowerment. The study will seek to discover the constructions of meaning that four early childhood teachers have developed of empowerment. It will provide insights into the teachers' knowledge and understanding and examine how they translate their articulated and tacit knowledge into strategies for empowering children as learners.

Research Questions

The research questions that this study investigates are:

- 1) What do early childhood teachers know and understand by empowering children as learners?
- 2) How do early childhood teachers enact their knowledge and understanding of empowering children as learners in practice?

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used throughout the study. Definitions of the terms are provided here in order to clarify meanings attributed to them throughout the study.

Empowerment - Definitions of empowerment will be discussed in the literature review. The general theme of reviewed definitions is that empowerment involves the sharing of power between individuals or groups in order to create a more equal balance of power.

Early Childhood Teacher - A fully qualified teacher who has specialist knowledge of educating children from 0-8 years in Australia and from 3-7 years in the United Kingdom.

Pre-primary - In Western Australia children may attend State funded pre-primary four days a week, commencing at the start of the academic year (January to December) in which they turn five. Attendance is usually sessional during term 1, increasing to four full days at the start of term two. Attendance at pre-primary is non-compulsory. The staff ratio is one teacher and full-time teacher aide to approximately 26 children

Reception class - In the United Kingdom children attend government funded reception classes five days a week from the start of the academic year (September to the end of July) in which they turn five. Children usually attend mornings only until the beginning of the term in which they turn five after which full-time

attendance becomes compulsory. The staff ratio is one teacher and one full or part-time teacher assistant to approximately 22 to 30 children.

Nursery class - Children attend nursery classes in the United Kingdom from the start of the term in which they turn three. The youngest, summer-born children usually attend from the start of the spring term. All Local Education Authority nurseries offer part-time places consisting of either five mornings or five afternoons a week. Nursery education is non-compulsory in the United Kingdom. The staff ratio is one teacher and full-time nursery nurse to 26 children.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study lies in its investigation of teachers' knowledge and practice of empowering young children as learners. The study aims to provide greater insight into teachers' interpretation of the construct of empowerment. In addition, the study aims to contribute knowledge and understanding of the construct and shape the direction of future research on the empowerment of young children in early childhood settings.

Evidence (Schweinhart and Weikart, 1993) shows that there are considerable long-term effects on children's psycho-social development as a result of attendance in a particular type of pre-school program. Although empowerment has been espoused widely as a positive concept that teachers should encourage, it is beset with a lack of clarity. This study will facilitate a better understanding of teachers' interpretation of the construct of empowerment which will lead to the identification of appropriate strategies.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW.

This study focuses on teachers' knowledge, understanding and practice of empowering young children as learners. Researchers have acknowledged the importance of empowerment for young children (Dalton, 1989; Derman-Sparkes, 1994; Dockett, 1998; Fler, 1996; Hendrick, 1992; Lindstrom, 1995; MacNaughton & Williams, 1998; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1993; Siraj-Blatchford, 1996; Stone, 1995). However, literature does not furnish the reader with a shared or common construction of meaning about empowerment.

Authors and researchers agree that the empowerment of young children is important but literary definitions are few. A starting point for analysis of literary constructions of meaning about empowerment is provided by Ashcroft (1987, p. 142) who consults the Webster and Oxford dictionaries in order to tease out the meaning of the word. Ashcroft (1987, p. 142) maintains that individuals often demonstrate an emotive, defensive response to use of the word empowerment and that by exploring its roots she hopes to "defuse" or decontextualize the construct and enable "the concept to move freely in our vocabularies, beliefs and actions" (1987, p. 142). Ashcroft (1987, p. 143) arrives at a concise definition and states that "To empower...is to bring into a state of ability/capacity to act."

This chapter is in six sections: First, a consideration of the importance of empowerment according to early childhood curriculum policy documents and current research. Second, a summary of previous views and conceptions of different facets of empowerment. Third, an examination of the links between teachers' beliefs, knowledge and practice. Fourth, a synopsis of the current constructivist debate, which provides a rationale for explaining the influence of the

socio-institutional context on the empowerment of young children. Fifth, presentation of the conceptual framework. Sixth, the chapter concludes with a review of methodology.

Early Childhood Curriculum Policy Documents

Early childhood curriculum policy documents support the view that teachers should aim to empower young children. However, documents refer to empowerment in specific terms (Department for Education and Children's Services, South Australia, 1996; Ministry of Education of New Zealand 1993) and in non-specific terms (Education Department of Western Australia, 1998b; Department for Education and Employment, United Kingdom, 1996).

The Department of Education and Children's Services, South Australia (1996, p. 12) considers empowerment to be a "life skill" or "competency", and a component of "the principle foundation area of learning [which] is self-concept". In addition, the Department of Education and Children's Services, South Australia (1996, p. 25) states that "Children have the opportunity to develop a positive self-concept through experiences which foster:...empowerment".

The Ministry of Education of New Zealand (1993, p. 24) believes empowerment to be "one of four broad principles of the early childhood curriculum" and refers to motivating children to become life-long learners. It asserts that the early childhood curriculum will "Foster the development of the knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes that will empower students to take increasing responsibility for their own learning." (Ministry of Education of New Zealand 1993, p. 120). This document is unusual in suggesting how empowerment can shape practice and states that:

Play activities in early childhood education programmes invite rather than compel participation. Adults have an important role in encouraging children to participate in a wide range of activities. Programmes should build on the children's own knowledge, skills, attitudes, and views of the world.

Children will have the opportunity to create and act upon their own ideas, to develop knowledge and skills in areas that interest them, and to make an increasing number of their own decisions and judgements. (p. 26)

The Education Department of Western Australia (1998b, p. 13) maintains that "Young children need....Guided play supported by the teacher to develop knowledge and foster competence, security, identity, belonging and personal power."

In the United Kingdom, the Department for Education and Employment (1996) supports the view that early childhood education should seek to empower young children by suggesting that:

Children are confident, show appropriate self-respect and are able to establish effective relationships with other children and with adults. They work as part of a group and independently, and are able to concentrate and persevere in their learning and to seek help where needed. They are eager to explore new learning, and show the ability to initiate ideas and to solve simple practical problems. They demonstrate independence in selecting an activity or resources and in dressing and personal hygiene. (p. 2)

In summary, it is evident that curriculum policy documents affirm the importance of empowerment for young children. However, there are few suggestions about how teachers enact the spirit of such documents in practice.

Research and Empowerment

The consequences of empowering young children have been acknowledged by researchers in the field of early childhood education. As with curriculum policy documents, references to empowerment in research literature can be direct or oblique. The following section will consider both direct and indirect references to empowerment in order to create a broad understanding of the concept.

Sylva and Wiltshire (1993, p. 37) state that “The most important learning in pre-school concerns aspirations, task commitment, social skills and responsibility and feelings of efficacy”. Studies indicate that empowerment is a key to achieving long term benefits from early childhood education (Schweinhart, Barnes and Weikart, cited in Wortman, 1995, p. 261). Researchers suggest that curriculum content is less important in early childhood education than acquiring positive attitudes towards learning and feelings of self efficacy. Rutter (cited in Sylva and Wiltshire, 1993, p. 32) stated that “The long term educational benefits stem not from what children are specifically taught but from effects on children’s attitudes to learning, on their self-esteem, and on their task orientation”. Schweinhart and Weikart (1993, p. 56) suggest that “active learning empowers children to assume a means of control over their environment and develop the conviction that they have some control over their lives”.

Sylva (1992, p. 146) points out that “Dweck’s work has established that differences in *children’s explanation for success and failure and aspiration for challenge* exert a powerful influence on their performance at school (authors italics)”. Katz (1993) highlights that it is important for children to see themselves as being able to ‘cause’ things to happen. Katz cites Dunn (1988), in stressing that central to a child’s self-esteem is the perception that his/her actions matter and can

have an effect on situations around them. Sheridan (1991) discussed the importance of an internal locus of control, which occurs when children develop personal control as opposed to relying on an external locus of control. Such empowerment may occur when children have opportunities to develop as powerful autonomous individuals who are able to form opinions and make decisions. However the learning environment must be structured in order to facilitate the use and development of such skills.

Dweck and Leggett (cited in Sylva, 1992, p. 145) found that children showed one of two possible types of behaviour when confronted with obstacles in learning, either a 'helpless' or 'mastery' orientation. Children who exhibited a mastery orientation sought challenges, exhibited greater persistency when confronted with obstacles, had a positive view of their competencies and saw learning as incremental. The helpless oriented children avoided challenging tasks, gave up easily and viewed themselves in a negative way, seeing learning as a fixed commodity. The difference in how children saw themselves was not related to intelligence but was critical in their approach to learning. Mastery oriented children were willing to attempt, explore and investigate the learning opportunities around them in a motivated way but helpless oriented children were not and their primary motivation to accomplish goals was to solicit praise from the teacher.

Sylva (1992) believes the language that teachers use in their interactions with children shapes the development of a more mastery or helpless oriented child and sets in motion a 'virtuous cycle' that continues throughout the child's school career leading to lifelong positive repercussions. Schweinhart, Weikart and Lerner (cited in Sylva 1992, p. 143) and Wortman (1995, p. 261) have suggested the long term success of the High/Scope Cognitively Oriented Curriculum is due to a

virtuous cycle of 'expectation-achievement-motivation' initiated by teachers' recognition of children's raised IQ on entry to year one. Sylva (1992) argues that the long term benefits of the High/Scope curriculum were due instead to the very language teachers use when interacting with children. Sylva (1992) suggests that teachers who guide learning and provide specific feedback help children to learn how to accurately assess their efforts. In this way children become empowered; they become autonomous, aspiring individuals, confident in their abilities and eager to set and attempt new goals. It is clear that adults' responses to children's achievements are important; endless gushings of praise do little but ultimately lead to a doubt in the mind of the child as to the sincerity of the adult. A far more appropriate response, according to Katz (1993, p. 26), would be to give '*appreciation* by which is meant positive feedback related explicitly and directly to the *content* of the child's interest and effort (author's italics)' It is evident from the literature cited that the child's perception of self is critical to the concept of children's empowerment as learners because it can determine the way in which the child functions within the learning environment.

Facets of Empowerment

For the purposes of this discussion previous work on empowerment can be perceived in three loose clusters. First, links between empowerment and democracy; second, links between empowerment and anti-bias curricula; and third, literature that refers to empowerment specifically in relation to early childhood pedagogy. The following section will discuss each cluster in turn, highlighting key points and drawing attention to some of the many overlaps that exist.

Empowerment and Democracy

In order to function effectively in a democratic society, children need to learn how to consider choices, make decisions and exhibit perseverance in pursuing their chosen course of action. The influence of John Dewey and the concept of a transference power from adults to children are common themes in literature linking empowerment and democracy.

Dalton (1989, p. 11) comments that skills such as networking and decision-making are increasingly important in democratic society and defines empowerment as “help[ing] children learn responsibility for themselves”. The notion of children assuming responsibility for their learning is noted by Stone (1995, p. 295) who defines empowerment with clarity. Stone (1995, p. 294) states that empowerment “grants an individual the ability to direct his or her own life” and she cites respect, validation and success as the foundations of empowerment along with ownership, choice, autonomy and decision-making as strategies for empowering. Stone (1995, p. 295) asserts that “Once empowered the individual changes. Empowered teachers and children become intrinsically motivated, responsible and independent. They take on the characteristics of risk-takers, collaborators and self-evaluators.”

Greenberg (1992) discusses the importance of preparing children to meet the demands of democracy with particular reference to the work of John Dewey and his view of children as social beings. She argues that authoritarian adults only enable children to develop the lower level thinking skills necessary for following instructions as opposed to the innovative thought necessary for real decision making. Greenberg argues that it is an inappropriate aim to teach children simply to obey the instructions of adults when their society increasingly emphasizes the ability of the individual to make decisions. The aim should really be one of “self-

direction” or the development of each individual, in his or her unique way, to their full potential and therefore enable them to benefit society as a whole. Greenberg (1992) states that:

For Dewey benevolence was not ‘doing good’ to someone, or in his behalf; it was *enabling* him - *empowering* him - to use his own brains and skills. To help someone meant, to Dewey, to help someone to his feet - then he himself would decide which way to walk and to which drummer he would march (author’s italics).(p. 62)

Seefeldt (1993, p. 7) refers to Dewey and Greenberg in her discussion of the skills individuals need to exist in a free world. Seefeldt (1993, p. 4) argues that children need opportunities that “enable” them to be knowledgeable, to learn how make decisions, assume responsibility for the consequences and to be a member of a group. However, Seefeldt (1993, p. 6) cautions that quality early childhood programs recognize that sometimes adults need to make decisions for children, particularly in relation to their health, education and welfare.

Kohn (1993, p. 9) refers to John Dewey and supports the view that it is essential for children living in a democracy to learn how to make decisions. Kohn (1993, p. 9) suggests that the root cause of older students’ disaffection with schooling is a sense of “powerlessness”, and that to remedy the situation teachers need to share power with children and actively involve students in meaningful decision making processes. However, Kohn (1993, p. 18) remarks that “Parting with power is not easy, if only because the results are less predictable than in a situation where we have control. Asking students to decide about even the simplest issue can be scary.” Klubock (1991) agrees with Kohn (1993) that it is important children believe they have a voice in decision making processes, and suggests the

skills of empowered participation should be encouraged in the early childhood classroom. Klubock (1991, p. ix) notes that there are positive effects on “children of discovering self-worth, their ability to make meaningful decisions, and their potential to make things happen in their lives.”

In reference to Dewey, Hendrick (1992, p. 51) views the individual as a participant in a democratic society and maintains that children need to be “empowered to decide”. Hendrick (1992, p. 52) agrees with Kohn (1991) that power should be shared between children and adults, and suggests power be transferred to children through a “trilogy of self-trust, empowerment [and the] ability to become competent”.

In summary, literature supports the link between the empowerment of the individual in the learning environment and the skills necessitated by a democratic society.

Empowerment and Anti-bias Curricula

The empowerment of children is a central tenet in the development of ‘anti-bias’ curricula (MacNaughton & Williams, 1998; Derman-Sparkes, 1993). Anti-bias curricula are those which aim to redress bias in society by actively working against “racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism and ableism” (Derman-Sparkes, 1993, p. 67). As with literature focusing on empowerment and democracy, the transference of power is a core theme but the work of Friere (1972) replaces that of Dewey as the philosophical cornerstone.

MacNaughton & Williams (1998) suggest there are two explanations of empowerment:

In general usage, empowerment as a technique involves giving children the power (or ability) to do things....The more specialist usage of empowerment

as a teaching technique is associated with what are known as 'critical', 'transformative' or 'emancipatory' approaches to education. In early childhood these are also known as anti-discriminatory or anti-bias approaches. (p. 214)

MacNaughton and Williams (1998) and Ashcroft (1987) refer to Friere (1972) who proposes that education has social and political consequences. Ashcroft (1987, p. 154) ultimately makes reference to "*personal power* (authors italics)", a phrase echoed by the Education Department of Western Australia (1998b, p. 13). Ashcroft (1987, p. 154) suggests that an individual who possesses personal power functions "both inner-personally (enabling 'power to...') and inter-personally or socially (the cooperative 'power with...') of Friere or the term 'synergy'". MacNaughton and Williams (1998, p. 215) outline Friere's (1972) philosophy which asserts that there is a social justice dimension to education and state that Friere (1972) "Believes that educators have a moral, social and political responsibility to be involved in education for social transformation which creates a more just and equal social world". They maintain that Friere's (1972) work forms the foundation of anti-bias approaches to education. However, MacNaughton and Williams' (1998) belief that children can be given power challenges Friere's (1972) statement to the contrary:

Not even the best intentioned leadership can bestow independence as a gift.

The liberation of the oppressed is a liberation of men, not of things.

Accordingly, while no one liberates himself by his own efforts alone, neither is he liberated by others. (p. 42)

In agreement with Hendrick (1992), MacNaughton and Williams (1998, p. 213) note that "empowerment always involves such a transfer between the powerful and the powerless". This power transfer can be seen as a reflection of Friere's (1972) discourse on how "libertarian action" can lead to a more equal

distribution of power between the oppressors and the oppressed. A simplistic analysis of Friere's (1972) discourse is summarized as a transfer of power from the oppressor (the powerful) to the oppressed (the powerless) through the process of praxis. Friere (1972, p.73) proposes that praxis is a combination of critical reflection and action which "transform[s] reality". According to MacNaughton and Williams' (1998, p. 215) praxis involves teachers in critical reflection of an unequal and unjust balance of power followed by a "liberating" act aimed at redressing the unequal balance. It is suggested here that empowerment in the socio-institutional context of the classroom involves a re-definement of the traditional roles of the teacher as the powerful oppressor and the child as the powerless oppressed.

Supporters of anti-bias curricula advocate empowering children through a range of strategies. Siraj-Blatchford (1996, p. 66) refers to empowerment and suggests that teachers "need to work from a number of standpoints to fully empower the children in their care. Children need to be educated to deal confidently and fairly with each other and with others in an unjust society". A key issue, according to Siraj-Blatchford (1996, p. 67) is that teachers need to be mindful that children often learn bias from significant adults in their lives, including teachers. MacNaughton & Williams (1998, p. 223) suggest that children have individual needs in terms of empowerment and that teachers need to understand the impact that inequity and injustice have on children's lives and tailor their effort to empowering each child accordingly.

MacNaughton & Williams (1998, p. 217) suggest in detail how teachers can empower children in early childhood settings. For example, building children's critical thinking skills through an emphasis on problem posing questions and the

process of learning rather than the product of learning. They point out how power can also be distributed unequally between children, and that teachers committed to anti-bias approaches to education must work to alter this, for example by enabling all children to have equal opportunities to access resources.

In summary, constructions of meaning about empowerment in anti-bias literature are grounded in the work of Friere (1972), and embody a transference of power from adult to child.

Empowerment and Early Childhood Pedagogy

Schweinhart and Weikart (1997, p. 140) state that “use of a defined curriculum model based on child-initiated learning activities is an essential part of the definition of quality in early childhood education.” The notion of a child-initiated, in contrast to a child-centred, curriculum is a key issue in considerations of empowerment and early childhood pedagogy. Dockett (1997, p. 5) succinctly summarizes the difference between child-centred and child-initiated curricula as “essentially one of control: in a child-centred curriculum, adults make decisions about what is relevant for children; in a child-initiated curriculum, children make some decisions and work with adults to explore and investigate issues that are relevant and meaningful.”

Literature supports the view that a child-initiated curriculum creates greater opportunities for children to be empowered than a child-centred curriculum. For example, Corrie (1996, p. 19) suggests that children are empowered when they have opportunities to make choices and their interests are included in the curriculum. Tinworth (1997, p. 28) states that “When young children and their teachers are passionately collaborating in exciting learning, it is likely that the

questions, the ideas, the strategies and the creativity are being initiated by empowered children". Dockett (1998, p. 5) maintains that "It is empowering for children to have adults take them, and their interests, seriously".

A characteristic of child-initiated curricula is the perception of the adult/child relationship as a collaborative partnership. For example, in the approach to teaching young children in Reggio Emilia, Northern Italy, adults are seen as researchers and equal partners who interact with children in the learning process. Malaguzzi (1993a, p. 9) outlined the image adults have of children in the Reggio Emilia program as "rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent, and, most of all, connected to adults and other children". It is, perhaps, because of the perception of children as able, competent individuals that adults seek to share power with them, confident that children are more than able to successfully assume some of the responsibility for their learning. Firlik (1994, p. 20) agrees and comments that "a belief shift...that needs to be recognized is that we must trust children to learn".

In summary, empowerment is linked to teacher's pedagogic perceptions of children and adult/child relationships in literature.

Teachers' Beliefs, Knowledge and Practice

The following section examines distinctions between teachers' beliefs and knowledge and considers their impact on teachers' practice.

Constructions of Meaning About Knowledge and Belief

Teachers' beliefs are of considerable importance. Kagan (cited in Pajares, 1992, p. 329) asserts that belief "lies at the very heart of teaching". Irrespective of researchers' agreement on the significance of teachers' beliefs and knowledge, the

literature is rich with differing definitions and the effects on practice (Charlesworth, Hart, Burt, Thomasson, Mosely & Fleege, 1993; Fenstermacher, 1997 & 1994; Isenberg, 1990; Pajares, 1992; Spidell-Rusher, McGrevin & Lambiotte, 1992; Stipek & Byler, 1997).

In education, discussions of belief and knowledge focus on the question of a distinction between the two constructs. Opinions on the nature of belief and knowledge form two groups. First, those that consider there to be a distinction between the two constructs and; second, those that consider them to be synonymous. The nature of any distinction is also the subject of considerable discussion. The groups of opinions will be examined with particular reference to Fenstermacher's (1994) detailed review of conceptions of knowledge and Pajares' (1992) summary of research on belief and its associated constructs. Key studies will be referred to as examples.

Fenstermacher (1994) and Pajares (1992) discuss opinions that suggest a distinction between belief and knowledge. Fenstermacher (1994, p. 47) suggests knowledge can be defined in two ways: as a grouping term, along with beliefs, assumptions, opinions, awareness, imaginings; and as a collection of other similar concepts; and significantly, as a separate construct which is distinguished by the attribution of "epistemic merit". In asserting that knowledge is distinguishable from belief, Pajares (1992, p. 310-311) refers to Nisbett & Ross' (1980) identification of an evaluative component present only in belief; Ernst's (1989) proposition that knowledge is a cognitive outcome and belief, although containing a small cognitive component, is largely the affective outcome; and Nespor's (1987) view that beliefs reside in the episodic memory whereas knowledge is semantically stored.

Fenstermacher (1994, p. 25-33) reviewed opinions suggesting that belief and knowledge are synonymous. These include Feiman-Nemser and Floden's (1985) suggestion that if a teacher is willing to act on the basis of a belief then the belief qualifies as knowledge; Kagan's (1990) use of the terms belief and knowledge interchangeably; Alexander, Schallert and Hare's (1991) amalgamation of belief and knowledge; and Feyerabend's (1987) contention that belief is a type of knowledge. Pajares (1992, p. 313) summarizes Lewis' (1990) claim that all knowledge derives from belief and states "That the most simple, empirical, and observable thing one knows will, on reflection, reveal itself as an evaluative judgement, a belief." It is evident that many researchers consider knowledge and belief to be synonymous.

This study supports the view that knowledge and belief are synonymous and 'knowledge' is used to denote a broad grouping term as opposed to a specific construct defined by epistemic merit (Fenstermacher, 1994, p. 47). The words 'knowledge' and 'belief' will be used interchangeably throughout this study.

Links Between Teachers' Beliefs and Practice

Literature supports the view that teachers' personal belief systems have a profound and direct influence on the curriculum in early childhood care and education (Dockett, 1998, p. 1). Malaguzzi (cited in Edwards, Gandini & Edwards, 1993b, p. 81) states that "Whether they know it or not they [teachers] think and act according to personal theories". Consequently, consideration of teachers' practices of empowering children must also examine the beliefs that teachers hold about empowerment.

The analysis and measurement of beliefs is potentially problematic. Rokeach (cited in Pajares, 1992 p. 314) noted that it is difficult to measure individuals' belief systems partly because individuals are often unwilling or unable, for a variety of reasons, to reveal or accurately represent their belief system to others. Pajares (1992, p. 314) concludes that teachers' beliefs must be inferred from what they 'say , intend and do' and cautions that precision is an important consideration in order to ensure the attributed belief is an accurate representation of the individual's belief. Fenstermacher (1997) contests that narrative inquiry is an important method of revealing teachers' beliefs.

Beliefs are remarkably resilient to change, appearing to alter only as a final alternative when accommodation into the existing belief system becomes impossible. Munby (cited in Pajares 1992, p. 317) found that beliefs can outweigh the most convincing information to the contrary. Inconsistency between one belief and another does not prevent inclusion into an individual's belief system. Resilience is particularly evident in what Peterman calls "core" beliefs (cited in Pajares 1992, p. 318). Partially distinguished by a lengthy integration into individuals' belief systems, core beliefs are subsequently subjected to considerable emotional investment which may explain their resistance to change. Spodek along with Hatch and Freeman (cited in Spidell-Rusher, McGrevin & Lambiotte, 1992, p. 279) refer to 'implicit theories' when referring specifically to beliefs teachers have about children that they translate into practice. Fenstermacher (1994, p. 46) refers to "tacit knowledge" which he defines as unconscious, unarticulated knowledge that informs teachers practice. Fenstermacher (1994) stated that:

If the researcher probes in a manner indicative of trust and mutual regard, the teachers' reasons for acting as he or she did, the 'performance

knowledge' heretofore tacit may reach a conscious level of awareness. Once aware of it, the teacher can deliberate or reflect on it and, if it is found meritorious in that teacher's conception of his or her work, advance it as a reason to justify acting as he or she did. (p. 46)

In conclusion, teachers' beliefs and knowledge are elusive and difficult to assess, but are of central importance in any consideration of teachers' empowerment of children.

The Socio-institutional Context and Constructivist Epistemology

As a rationale for explaining the influence of the socio-institutional context on empowerment this section will consider key elements of the current social constructivist debate.

Research supports the view that context affects learning. Light and Perret-Clermont (1991, p. 137) refer to the work of G.H. Mead (1934) and Vygotsky (1934/1962) in stressing cognitive development as a "social-cultural product".

The work of Piaget and Vygotsky is central to the body of literature discussing the interrelation of context and learning. Richardson (1997, p. 3) discusses the constructivist teaching debate and makes the key point that "Constructivism is a descriptive theory of learning (this is the way people learn or develop); it is not a prescriptive theory of learning (this is the way people *should* learn) (author's italics)." The constructivist approach to teaching is open to interpretation and as a result there are a number of different theoretical approaches, each of which is enacted differently in practice. Theoretical approaches are in two general categories: First, Piagetian constructivism; and second neo-Vygotskian social constructivism. A fundamental difference between the two approaches is the

degree of importance attributed to the influence of the sociocultural context on learning, which is perceived as considerably more influential in the Vygotskian based approaches than in those of Piagetian origin.

Furth (cited in Rogoff, 1991, p. 71) asserts that Piaget believed the foundation of cognitive development was a combination of the species-typical genetic background and the species-typical environment. David, Curtis and Siraj-Blatchford (1992, p. 9) state that “Piaget saw children’s intellectual development as a process of change with the children learning through active interaction with the environment”. Piaget emphasized the child as an independent constructor of knowledge. The role of socialization is seen as facilitating or inhibiting the development of children’s knowledge but not as a vital element in its own right (Light and Perret-Clermont, 1991, p. 137).

Piaget’s maturationalist view of development is contrasted by the sociogenic school of thought which advocates a more Vygotskian approach to how we think about the influence of sociocultural effects upon children. Vygotsky considered the sociocultural context to be of fundamental importance in the child’s learning because, he argued, it is through this medium that the cultural ‘history’ of ideas, tools like language and technologies are passed on to children (Rogoff, 1991, p. 68). Vadeboncoeur (1997) explained that:

For Vygotsky (1978), the development of cognitive forms occurs by means of the dialectical relationship between the individual and the social context. The situated individual actively builds knowledge through the process of internalizing social knowledge; knowledge moves from the *intermental* plain to the *intramental* plain, from the social to the psychological (author’s italics). (p. 27)

The essence of Vygotsky's theory lies in his notion of the 'zone of proximal development' which suggests that cognitive development is mediated through social interaction, possibly occurring while the child is independently involved in a task. Interaction can occur either with a more knowledgeable child or with an adult who enables the child to make a forward step in cognitive development that would otherwise have been impossible. Rogoff (1991, p. 70) discusses the idea of the individual "embedded" in the sociocultural context and supports the essentially Vygotskian idea that the social context surrounds the child and facilitates learning. Rogoff, Gauvain and Ellis (1991, p. 300) state that "Context is a complex and structured feature of psychological events, one that is not separate from the activity of the person." Frede and Barnett (1992 , p. 497) support Rogoff, Gauvain and Ellis' (1991) view and maintain that "setting is not as important to the outcome as are teaching practices and children's experiences within the setting".

Vadeboncoeur (1997, p. 15) cautions that perception of the constructivist debate in such bi-polar terms oversimplifies a highly complex issue. Vadeboncoeur (1997, p. 16) argues that in addition to Piagetian and sociocultural constructivism there is a third strand of constructivist epistemology known as emancipatory constructivism. Like sociocultural constructivism this strand is Vygotskian in origin but differs in its interpretation of the role of the sociocultural context. Sociocultural constructivism focuses on the "microlevel analysis of social interaction within the zone of proximal development" (Vadeboncoeur, 1997, p.26). Emancipatory constructivism focuses on the "micro and macrolevel analyses" (Vadeboncoeur, 1997, p.29) and recognises a greater contextualization of meaning. The individual is perceived as immersed in the greater sociohistorical context. According to Vadeboncoeur (1997. p. 22) the three epistemologies are linked. but

proponents' opinions differ on three core issues which are: the subject of the study; the development of cognitive forms; and the liberatory power of the derived pedagogical approach.

The concept of liberatory power is central to the analysis of empowerment in this study because it can be seen as an indicator of the epistemological origins of practices of empowerment. As a definition of liberatory power Vadeboncoeur (1997, p. 22) states that "for a pedagogy to have the capacity to liberate students means that it affords possibility to all students in a way that uncovers and reduces inequality....[Liberatory power] implies a new awareness of the way in which cultural beliefs and assumptions influence both theory and practice, but also thoughtful and transformative action.". According to Vadeboncoeur (1997, p. 29) a critical element of emancipatory constructivism is a "recognition of the effects of social discourses of power and privilege....We produce social discourses and can, therefore, change and transform them to reflect a more just social distribution.". In Vadeboncoeur's (1997, p. 30) view, emancipatory constructivist epistemology underpins the practices of anti-bias curricula. Such a view echoes Friere's (1972, p. 41) discussion of the "liberation" of the oppressed from their oppressors through the process of praxis.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework developed for this study is presented diagrammatically in Figure 1. overleaf. The conceptual framework illustrates the direction of investigation of the study and reflects two key elements of the relationship between socio-institutional context and empowerment:

- 1) The learning environment.

2) Adult-child interactions.

A discussion of these two key components follows the Figure 1.

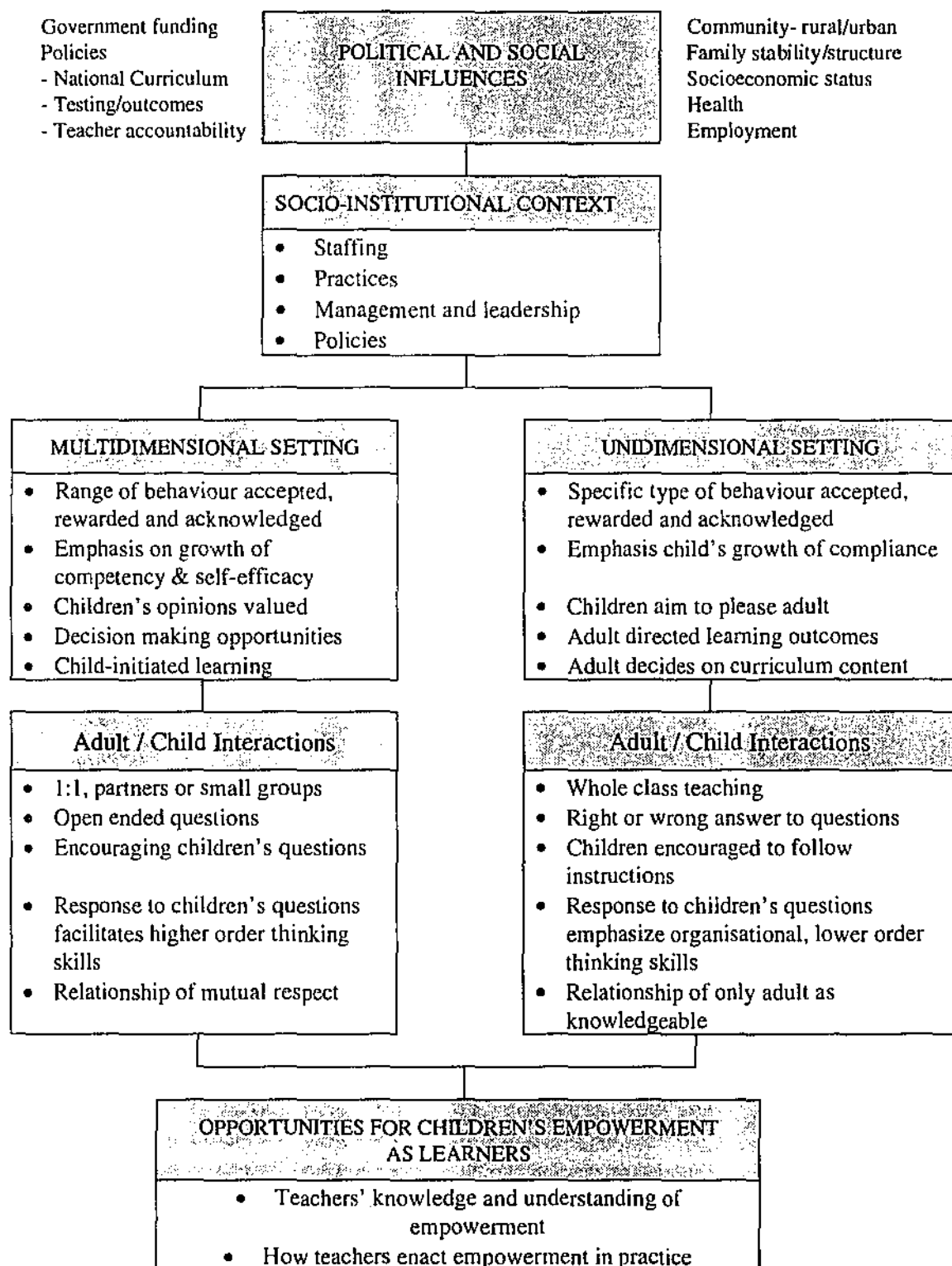


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.

Learning Environment

Learning environments vary greatly, depending on their unique circumstances and on the children and adults who work in them. Teachers' organisation of elements of the learning environment such as timetables, behaviour policies, the use of space, routines and rituals, resources, program organisation and content may be influential in empowering children in early childhood settings. For the purpose of analysis learning environments can be divided into two general types. Rosenholtz & Simpson (cited in Katz, 1993, p.18) define classrooms as either; 'Unidimensional' or 'Multidimensional'.

The 'unidimensional' classroom.

In the 'unidimensional' classroom, children's behaviour must conform to a specific type considered acceptable by the teacher. Rosenholtz and Simpson (cited in Katz, 1993, p. 18) suggest that the unidimensional classroom 'limits opportunity for self-enhancement'

The 'multidimensional' classroom.

In the 'multidimensional' classroom, "teachers provide a wide range of ways for children to contribute to and participate in the classroom life and...a range of behaviour is accepted, rewarded and acknowledged." (Katz,1993 p. 18). Katz argues that, in the multidimensional classroom, children are more likely to be able to develop the desired strong belief in themselves and not the self-indulgent, introspective attitudes typical of our society's obsession with appearances and the superficial.

One of the keys to providing a learning environment that encourages healthy self esteem is to ensure children are given the opportunity to make

decisions, have their opinions valued and considered, and not pay homage to superficial appearances. Such an environment needs to include opportunities for children to feel they have contributed to their fullest potential. The almost instant gratification of some teacher-led activities will do little to build a real appreciation of hard work and determination and of their ultimate and deeply satisfying rewards. Teacher directed and structured activities often require children to follow instructions and be compliant rather than form opinions and become empowered problem-solvers and investigators.

According to Katz (1993) co-operation, in the form of group work in particular, provides rich opportunities for children to affirm themselves and the work and efforts of their peers. However, some programs stress the individual and the individual's work. David, Curtis and Siraj-Blatchford (1992, p. 11) refer to the work of Brunner and Sylva in stressing the value of co-operative learning to children. Katz (1989, p. 133) believes that the ideal approach to working with children is a project-based one, because '...it is a promising means of stimulating dispositions that will endure for a lifetime'. Kohn (cited in Katz, 1993 p. 33) found that when children are given opportunities to make decisions and become involved in a variety of meaningful tasks then there is a corresponding development of self-esteem.

In summary, the 'multidimensional' classroom is considered by Katz (1993) to be the richer of the two learning environments because children are able to learn specific skills and also, critically, they are able to develop a healthy, accurate self-esteem. The model of multidimensional and unidimensional learning environments provides a useful framework that is adapted to suit the purpose of this study.

Adult-child Interactions

Daniels, Holst, Lunt and Johansen (1996) note that the culturally specific nature of schools is shown in the way interactions are structured, because language is bound to socio-institutional practices. Children and teachers develop varied relationships in the course of their school activities.

The role of the adult.

The role of the teacher is pivotal in empowering children. Feinburg and Mindess (1994, p. 139) state that in developmentally based programs 'The teacher empowers the children to expect the best from themselves and to be in charge of their own growth and learning'. In Piagetian constructivist approaches the role of the adult is to facilitate the individual child's internal construction of knowledge. Richardson (1997, p. 5) describes the role of the adult as one that enables the child to continually reconstruct knowledge and thus move through progressively higher levels of understanding. Richardson (1997, p. 5) explains that the teacher achieves this by "facilitating an environment in which students undergo a certain amount of cognitive dissonance, and devising tasks which hopefully lead into instructional practices".

In sociocultural constructivist approaches perception of the role of the adult is to provide "scaffolding" for the child's learning (Elliot, 1995, p. 25). Rogoff (1991, p. 68) referred to "guided participation" whereby the adult gives structure to the child's learning by considering what, when and how to introduce information and ideas, and 'scaffolds' the child's experiences thus encouraging and facilitating cognitive development. Often children are active in seeking such scaffolding and assistance from teachers. Cullen (1992, p. 112) discusses "strategic teaching and learning" which stresses the importance of metacognitive development. The teacher

enables the child to construct knowledge, but there is an added emphasis on 'establishing the learner's current awareness of thinking, and...the potential to clarify dimensions of the teacher's role in assisting the learner to develop independent, self-regulatory approaches to learning'. The aim is to enable the learner to acquire a range of skills that will facilitate learning. Cullen (1992) stresses the importance of teachers talking with children about their work in order to gain insights into the children's perspectives on their learning. Teacher input is then tailored to meet the specific needs of the individual, thus maximizing children's learning opportunities.

Vadeboncoeur (1997) notes that in an emancipatory constructivist approach the teacher stresses the processes of critical analysis and reflection and:

1. foregrounds cognitive development as sociohistorically situated and attends to the merging of everyday and academic concepts;
2. defines knowledge as partial and positional rather than foundationalist; and
3. provides for the awareness and examination of discourses of power and privilege. (p.31)

In summary, adult-child interactions are of critical importance because, despite a range of variables within socio-institutional contexts, the quality and content of adult-child interactions can empower children and have a profound effect on cognitive development.

In conclusion, literature suggests that socio-institutional contexts can have a considerable impact on learning. This study aims to examine what four early childhood teachers know and understand about empowering children as learners

and will investigate how teachers' enact their knowledge in their socio-institutional contexts. The study will focus on the organisation of the learning environment and adult-child relationships.

Review of Methodology

The investigation undertaken in this study is typical of research undertaken within the qualitative paradigm. Merriam (cited in Creswell, 1994, p.145) asserts that there are six assumptions of qualitative research, these assumptions can be summarized in the following way: The researcher is primarily concerned with process, as opposed to outcomes, and is particularly interested in how participants make meaning of their lives and experiences. The primary instrument for data collection and analysis is the researcher, who visits the participants in their various socio-institutional contexts for the purpose of naturalistic observation and recording, and finally, that qualitative research is descriptive and its processes are inductive. Merriam's six assumptions cited in Creswell, (1994, p.145) provide the basis for the methodology of this study.

The current study draws on case study methodology as a means of gaining a deep understanding of "a contemporary phenomenon within a real life context." (Burns, 1997, p. 365). The four early childhood settings are perceived as four, separate, bounded systems (Burns, 1997, p.364) and were selected using a purposive, non-probability sampling procedure which is typical of case study methodology (Burns, 1997, p.370). According to Burns (1977, p.370) non-probability sampling involves the identification of a criterion of selection, or a "blue-print" in order to enable the researcher to investigate a specific phenomenon in depth. Selection of participants in different cultures is referred to by Daniels.

Holst, Lunt and Johansen (1996) who state that “The impact of ‘cultural differences’ between schools within countries can be reflected against the impact of cultural differences between countries”.

Grey (1990, p. 207) suggests that there are two principal flaws with case study methodology: The lack of generalisability; and the potential for observer bias. In line with case study methodology, this study aimed to illustrate findings specific to the case(s) under investigation, not to generalise findings to a larger population (Burns, p. 382-383). The researcher was aware of the potential for observer bias as suggested by Field (1991, p.103). However, observer bias is countered by efforts to achieve good construct and internal validity through the triangulation of different data sets, (Burns, 1997, p. 382); the use of non-directive probes during interviewing (Burns, p. 375); and the regular examination of findings with an academic supervisor acting as an “auditor” (Creswell, 1994, p. 168).

Maykut and Morehouse (1994, p. 113) suggest that multiple methods of data collection can be used in qualitative research. The following examines data collection methods pertinent to the current study (Burns, 1997, p. 372; Creswell, 1994, p. 150).

The collection of data through a process of naturalistic observation is common to qualitative methodology. In an analysis of observational research, Grey (1990, p. 206) suggests that the researcher adopts one of two roles, the non-participant or participant observer. However, Burns (1997, p. 318) argues that there is little distinction between the roles of participant and non-participant observer, but defines the role of the non-participant observer is one who strives to “minimize their interactions with participants and to focus attention unobtrusively on the stream of events”.

In outlining the advantages of audio-visual materials including videotape, as a means of qualitative data collection, Creswell (1994, p. 151) refers to Merriam (1988) and Bogdan and Biklen (1992) and states that videos enable a participant to "Share directly his or her "reality." Video-tape accurately captures verbal and non-verbal communication, and important contextual details such as the various activities of individual children during whole group time. Erickson and Mohatt (cited in Maykut and Morehouse, 1994, p. 112) used videotape to record the structure of participation classrooms. However, Creswell (1994, p. 150) and Maykut and Morehouse (1994, p. 72) suggest that the presence of an observer, particularly one with a video camera, may affect the behaviour of participants during the data collection process.

Burns (1997, p. 372) comments that documents are a valuable means of validating data obtained from other sources. However, Burns (1997, p. 372) and Creswell (1994, p. 150-151) suggest that one must be aware that documents may be inaccurate or subject to bias.

Semi-structured interviews are a means of enabling participants, or "respondents" to use their own language (Burns, 1997, p. 372) to share their perspective of their "reality" (Creswell, 1994, p. 151). The use of an informal interview guide reflects Patton's suggestion (cited in Maykut and Morehouse, 1994, p. 88) that participants are asked open-ended questions aimed at encouraging a purposeful discussion. Burns (1997, p. 335) comments on the advantages of audio-taping teacher interviews in order to enable the researcher to participate in the discussion and to ensure that an accurate record of the interview is preserved.

In summary, qualitative research methods were deemed appropriate tools with which to investigate teachers' constructions of meaning about empowerment within their socio-institutional contexts.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Design

The current study is qualitative in design and draws on case study methodology. Primary objectives of the study were to observe and record the knowledge, understanding and practice of four early childhood teachers relating to the empowerment of children as learners within their socio-institutional contexts.

Fieldwork took place within four specific socio-institutional contexts. The principal instrument for data collection was the researcher as a non-participant observer (Grey, 1990). Data collection techniques included video-taped observations and semi-structured, stimulated-recall interviews with the four teachers. In addition field notes and drawings of the classrooms were made as suggested by Maykut and Morehouse (1994, p. 76). Relevant documents such as school policies and teachers' weekly/fortnightly plans were photocopied.

Participants

The participants of this study were the teachers of four early childhood classrooms, all within state education systems. Two of the classrooms were in Norwich, in the United Kingdom and two in the Perth metropolitan area, Australia. The children in all classrooms were 4 and 5 years old. The classrooms in Norwich consisted of two reception classes in different primary schools. The classrooms in Perth were two pre-primary classes in different schools.

The teachers were selected using a non-probability, purposive sampling procedure (Burns, 1997). The "blue print" for selection was that teachers said that they aimed to empower children as learners (Burns, 1997, p. 370). Teachers'

definitions of empowerment were accepted as valid. The two reception class teachers in the United Kingdom were selected because the schools in which they worked were known to the researcher. The two Australian pre-primary teachers were selected on the basis of recommendations from early childhood professionals.

Materials and Equipment

Materials used in the process of data collection were:

- 1) Semi-structured interview guide for teacher interviews.
- 2) Video-camera and blank tapes.
- 3) Audio-tape recorder with an external microphone and blank tapes.
- 4) Television and video-recorder for the purpose of stimulated recall in participant interviews.
- 5) Materials for taking field notes.

Ethical Considerations

All participants agreed to willingly participate in the study. In order to protect the “rights, needs, values, and desires of the informant(s)” (Creswell, 1994, p.164) prior to the commencement of the study, formal, written statements were signed by all headteachers, principals and participating teachers and parental permission was obtained for the study to proceed. The statements detailed the aims of the study, the proposed methods of data collection and assured participants that all information collected would be held in a locked cupboard. In addition, the written permission statements assured participants’ that their confidentiality was guaranteed and that should they wish to withdraw from the study at any time their wishes would be respected. Pseudonyms are used throughout the study in order to

protect the identity of all participants. All video, audio-tape recordings and transcripts are available upon request to those participants to whom they are specific. The final written study will be available to all participants upon request.

It was not anticipated that the study would be in any way detrimental to the teachers or children participating in the study.

Procedure

The study aimed to investigate participant teachers' knowledge, understanding and practice of empowering children as learners. It was therefore essential that the teachers considered the empowerment of children as learners as one of their aims. During a preliminary telephone conversation to inform teachers of the purpose of the study each teacher was asked whether or not they aimed to empower children as learners. All four teachers stated clearly that empowerment was one of their aims.

Data was collected by the researcher in each classroom over a period of two consecutive days. The researcher met with each teacher at the start of the first day to explain the methods of data collection and answer questions. As suggested by Yin (cited in Creswell, 1994, p.159) a protocol was developed to ensure similar data was collected in all four classrooms. However, due to the individual nature of each setting the protocol functioned as a guide rather than a rigidly adhered to timetable. The protocol used for data collection was as follows:

Day One

- 1) 8.30: Introduce self and begin work on maps of indoor areas.
- 2) 8.45: Video the arrival of the children and the following whole group time.

- 3) 9.30 - Recess: Video adult/child interactions during adult led small group learning experiences. Video the classroom environment.
- 4) Recess - Lunch: Observe the learning environment. Take field notes.
- 5) Afternoon: Collect documentary evidence if possible.

Day two

- 1) 8.30: Complete maps of indoor areas.
- 2) 8.45: Collect additional video footage of children's arrival time.
- 3) 9.30 - Lunch: Collect additional video footage of small group learning experiences and supplement field notes.
- 4) Afternoon: Interview teacher.

Data collection techniques

The following details the range of data collection techniques used in the current study.

Video-taping

The aim of video-taping a range of adult-child interactions was to provide the researcher with an accurate record of the adult-child interactions. In addition, video tapes were used as a means of stimulated recall in the teacher interviews. Three key times within the daily routine of each classroom were chosen for video-taping because they were common to all four classrooms and presented opportunities for teachers to translate their knowledge and beliefs about empowerment into practice (Burns, 1997). The key routine times were: the arrival of the children, a whole group time and an adult-led small group learning experience. Every effort was made to minimize the effect an observer with a video recorder may have upon participants (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994).The

researcher endeavored to respect the needs of children, parents and staff for private times. For example the researcher moved away as parents began to discuss personal matters during the children's arrival time.

Field Notes and Classroom Maps

Informal observations of the learning environment were made and recorded as field notes in order to supplement data collected on video-tape and in teacher interviews. Field notes were written up as soon as possible after the event in order to preserve their accuracy (Burns, 1997). Maps were also made of each classroom in order to illustrate the overall organisation of the physical learning environment and amenities (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994).

Documentation

Documentation in the form of school brochures and policies pertinent to the study were obtained and photocopies made of children's work where possible. Teacher's daily and weekly/two-weekly plans were viewed and photocopies made.

Teacher Interviews

The aim of the teacher interviews was to enable the teachers to articulate their knowledge and understanding of empowerment. In order to ensure all participants were asked key questions an interview guide was used as recommended by Patton (cited in Maykut and Morehouse, 1994), (see appendix for interview guide). Probing questions were used to elicit more detailed responses from teachers during interviews (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). Interviews were structured around the material video-taped by the researcher during the preceding two days which acted as stimulated recall when viewed by the teacher and

researcher in the course of the interview. Each teacher saw only tapes of their own classroom for the purpose of stimulated recall. Teacher interviews were audio-taped for two reasons: First, to allow the researcher to participate in the discussion; and second, to ensure an accurate record of the discussion was available for transcription and analysis (Burns, 1997).

The duration of the teacher interviews varied, depending on the availability of individual teacher's time. The shortest took place during lunch time and lasted approximately forty minutes. The longest took place during an afternoon after the departure of the children and lasted approximately one hour and fifteen minutes. All teacher interviews took place at the end of the data collection process.

Analysis of the Findings

In order to analyse the findings, transcript data from the participant teacher interviews were initially scrutinized for recurrent themes or categories (Burns, 1997). The emergent categories were then coded (Creswell, 1994). Fine-grain analysis revealed articulated patterns of meaning in the teachers' discourse and enabled meaning to be made from teachers' tacit knowledge which was articulated through metaphors and descriptive language. Analysis was a reflexive process between the teachers' transcribed articulations and tacit knowledge, and their observed practice captured on video-tape. Links were drawn between what teachers said and what they did, as a result categories emerged related to teachers' articulated and tacit knowledge of empowerment and the translation of knowledge into practice. Interpretations were drawn regarding the teachers' constructions of empowerment and the strategies they used to empower the children within their classrooms. Field notes and documentation obtained in each setting were carefully

examined and the information gleaned was used to triangulate data drawn from interview transcripts and video-taped evidence (Burns, 1997).

Limitations

Limitations of the study are primarily due to the non-probability, purposive sampling procedure and small sample size typical of case study methodology (Burns, 1997, p. 370). Findings remain specific to the socio-institutional contexts examined and generalizations to a larger population are inappropriate. In addition, in order to strengthen reliability the observer's bias must be stated (Burns, 1997, p. 379). The researcher is an early childhood teacher who has taught in Australia and the United Kingdom. The researcher has a professional association with both schools in the United Kingdom as a relief teacher and has worked as a part-time teacher, contracted by the Education Department, in one of the British schools for a period of six months.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

The findings are reported in three sections: first, there is a description of the socio-cultural contexts of the four early childhood settings visited. Second, profiles of the four teachers are constructed. Third, there is an examination of the learning environments visited with specific reference to the organisation of space and routines.

The Socio-cultural Contexts of the Four Schools

The socio-cultural context of the school is likely to influence teachers' construction of pedagogical knowledge and their practices. A brief description is presented of the four schools visited. Two schools were in the United Kingdom and two in Australia. The schools' approaches are described including staffing ratios, parental involvement and admission policies.

In the United Kingdom the academic year begins in September and finishes in July. The Australian academic year begins in January and ends in December. All classes were visited during the second half of the first term in their respective academic years. The reception classes in the United Kingdom were visited during week 12 of term one. The Australian pre-primary classes were visited during week 9 of term one.

Table 1

Socio-cultural Contexts of the Four Settings Visited

Teacher	Location	Setting	Type of school	School age range	Name of class	Age of children
Hannah	United Kingdom	Urban	First and Nursery	3 - 8 years	Reception	4 - 5 years
Ellen	United Kingdom	Urban	First and Nursery	3 - 8 years	Reception	4 - 5 years
Pamela	Australia	Semi-rural	Primary	4 - 12 years	Pre-primary	4 - 5 years
Christine	Australia	Suburban	Primary	4 - 12 years	Pre-primary	4 - 5 years

Table 1 shows the similarities in the four settings. The children in the classes visited were of the same age, although school age ranges varied.

Hannah's First School

Hannah's school was situated on the outskirts of a small city in the United Kingdom. The school was originally built in the 1930s and was bordered on one side by a railway, on another by a busy main road and on the remaining sides by housing. It was adjacent to a large, mostly government owned housing estate for low income families. Children from privately owned homes also attended the school. The majority of the two hundred and twenty-six children on the roll spoke English as a first language.

There were ten qualified teachers in the main school and six classroom assistants; figures varied from year to year depending upon the number of children and the staffing allocation. There was a 52 (part-time) place nursery class attached

to the school with a teacher and an assistant. It was usual for children to be based in large classes with two or more teachers and classroom assistants. The staff thought that this enabled children to benefit from the expertise of more than one adult. The school was committed to celebrating the unique nature of each individual child and family. Parents were encouraged to become involved in their child's education and children with special educational needs were integrated into the mainstream classes. There was particular emphasis on the development of personal and social skills and the staff developed curriculum maps based around the requirements of the 'National Curriculum' (Department for Education and Employment, 1995) The 'School Brochure' stated "We are working on the curriculum in such a way as to provide as many opportunities for the children to make an informed and responsible choice."

Informal observations in the staffroom and classroom indicated that staff interacted with one another in a positive and highly supportive way. The staff generally sat together during the morning break and at lunchtime; they offered help to one another and shared resources. Observations suggested they adhered to a mutually agreed code of behaviour that specified a number of principles, such as not discussing members of staff who were not present.

There were 55 children in the reception class; 20 went home at lunch-time as their birthdays fell in the spring or summer terms. Children who turned five during the autumn term began school five full days a week from the first term. Spring-born children attended for four full days a week until the February half-term and Summer-born children attended five mornings a week, also until the February half-term.

Ellen's First School

Ellen and Hannah's schools were in the same city in the United Kingdom, however Ellen's school was located in the centre of the city. The school was built in 1936, extended in 1972 and a had a nursery constructed in 1996. It was surrounded by government and privately owned housing and small terraced houses. Diversity in family structures was recognised by the school and the 'School Prospectus' stated "Children from many different combinations of families attend our school, and we value the unique contribution which this variety can bring to enrich the life of the school community."

The school was adjacent to a large area of partially wooded heath land. The open space was used by the school for educational purposes and by the general public for recreational activities.

Professional, supportive relationships were evident between staff and children; they spoke to each other with warmth and respect, and this contributed to the welcoming atmosphere of the school. English was spoken as a first language by the majority of children in the seven classes. There were 206 children on the roll, nine class teachers and six classroom assistants including two nursery staff. The nursery had 52 part-time places. Parents were seen as partners in their child's education and encouraged to assist in the school. Children with special educational needs were integrated into mainstream classes, sometimes with additional support. The school aimed to ensure all children received their statutory entitlement to the 'National Curriculum' (Department of Education and Employment, 1995) and the 'School Prospectus' stated that staff "aimed to translate the programmes of study and guidance in the 'National Curriculum' documents into providing a broad, balanced and stimulating curriculum for all pupils in the school.

A combination of the 'National Curriculum' (Department for Education and Employment, 1995) and another Department for Education and Employment (1996) document, 'Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning on entering Compulsory Education' formed a basis for planning in the reception classes.

There were two reception classes in the school and one full-time assistant worked with both classes. Ellen's class contained Spring and Summer-born children who attended part-time until Christmas or Easter respectively. The second reception class was for Autumn born children who attend full-time from September. The admission procedure was in accordance with the Local Education Authority policy recommendations. There were 28 children in Ellen's class, 30 on Tuesdays when two additional children with special educational needs attended.

Pamela's Primary School

Pamela's pre-primary class in Australia was one of two on the site of a primary school. The school was located in a semi-rural, forested area 45 minutes drive from the city centre, surrounded by bush and houses on large blocks of land. The majority of the families were professional, with at least one parent working and often two. Most families owned their homes and could be categorized as having middle socio-economic status.

The two pre-primary teachers at Pamela's school had worked together to produce a 'Program Philosophy' which stated that their approach was in accordance with "Developmentally Appropriate Practice" as articulated by The National Association for the Development of Young Children (Bredekamp, 1987). The 'Program Philosophy' stated that the curriculum was "planned to take into

account individual differences in children, their cultures, prior experiences, and their learning styles.”

Good relationships were observed between Pamela and her teaching colleague, who taught in the adjacent pre-primary classroom. For example, Pamela’s colleague came into the classroom before the children arrived and the teachers exchanged greetings. The teachers ran different programs, however the children from both classes played outside together during ‘morning recess’. The pre-primary staff did not go to the staff room for ‘morning recess’ but usually joined the rest of the school staff there for lunch. The pre-primary children visited the school library on a Monday to exchange library books.

There were 25 children in Pamela’s class who attended on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday mornings. From the start of the second term the children would attend four full days a week. As in all pre-primary classes, there was a full-time teacher’s assistant and often a parent chose to help in the classroom. Parents were encouraged to put their name in on a roster when they wished to assist. The children all spoke English as a first language.

Christine’s Primary School

Christine, like Pamela, taught in one of two pre-primary classes on the site of a primary school in Australia. The school was situated in an outer-city suburb, surrounded by houses and near to a small shopping centre, which was not far from the ocean. Most of the children’s parents worked, and many parents had professional occupations. The majority of families owned their own homes and could be categorised as having lower-middle or middle socio-economic status.

The two pre-primary classes ran separate programs in separate rooms. Christine and the other pre-primary teacher took turns to draw a weekly plan for the

organisation of the large equipment in the shared outdoor area. However the children played outside at different times. Christine and her full-time assistant went to the staff room at lunchtime.

There were 25 children in the class who attended four mornings a week, from Monday to Thursday throughout the first term. This would increase to four full days a week from the start of the second term. There was a roster for parental help and Christine said that it was unusual not to have a parent helping in the classroom.

Profiles of the Teachers

This section will describe some aspects of the teachers' personal philosophies and define their understanding of the concept of empowerment. Prior to the commencement of the study all four teachers said that they aimed to empower the children in their class.

Hannah

Hannah was a highly qualified early years teacher who led the 'Early Years' team in her school. The team included nursery, reception and year one teachers and assistants. She led the reception class staff on a day to day basis which included two part-time teachers who "job-shared" and two full-time assistants. She was also an art specialist and responsible for art and display throughout the school.

Hannah emphasised the role of the adult when she talked about learning. She often used the term "scaffolding" to describe how adults helped children to construct knowledge and maintained that adults were "a kind of facilitator". When explaining "scaffolding" Hannah said:

It's supporting, very much supporting and sort of scaffolding it in a way. Saying "You could try it like this" not saying "Do it like this", "Why don't you try" giving them suggestions, and even at this age they do know the difference between someone saying "Do it like that" or "You could try this or you could try that".

Vygotsky's theory, in particular teachers' knowledge of children's zone of proximal development appeared to be a key strand of Hannah's personal philosophy. Hannah thought that knowing how and when to intervene in children's learning were important teaching skills:

I feel that our skill as a teacher...comes [from] knowing when to intercede, when to ask a particular question, when to look at a particular activity and think "Ahh, if I give them that piece of equipment now that is going to extend just that little bit further.

Hannah's definition of empowerment consisted of two linked notions; one, of the child as the empowered and the other of the teacher as the empowerer. In Hannah's view, an empowered child formed opinions, had a "sense of self worth" and a feeling of ownership over their work. Hannah's perception of an empowered child informed her practice because she considered it part of her role as the teacher to empower the children. Hannah believed that she fulfilled her role through a range of integrated approaches to everyday situations in the classroom and described her practice as :

Celebrating whatever makes that individual an individual....Rather than this trying to anonymise children to a sort of hypothetical norm of...this average child, I mean that's why I am so anti things like school uniform, children lining up in rows and this kind of

thing....Life isn't about lining up in rows and looking the same. [It is about] being different and about making decisions, of looking and thinking "Well where am I going to stand?" It's going in and being able to make a choice where you go shopping and what you want to wear. If you all look exactly the same, little clones of each other, there is no room for expression, freedom, individuality.

In Hannah's view it was necessary to empower children to form opinions and make decisions as a preparation for the challenges of life. Hannah maintained that the organisation of the learning environment empowered children to make decisions because the children were:

given room to think and to articulate their thoughts, to make decisions for themselves and at the simplest level if there is something they need and they know where it is, that they can go and get it without saying "I need a pair of scissors", "I've dropped my pencil".

The children often worked in small groups because Hannah believed small group work enabled children to form and share their opinions with one another. In addition, Hannah thought that adult expectations empowered the children because in her view the children responded positively to such expectations. Hannah said:

An expectation of; well, very much of our expectations of how we expect them to respond, to care for equipment, to help each other, to put things away, to just be, to behave, to negotiate, to share when they are doing activities.

Ellen

Ellen was deputy-head of her school and an experienced early years teacher. Ellen had worked as an advisory teacher for the early years for the County Inspection, Advice and Training Service.

Ellen was interested in the 'High/Scope Cognitively Oriented Preschool Curriculum' (Hohmann, Banet and Weikart, 1979) and this was evident in her practice. The daily routine in Ellen's reception class included a "Plan-Do-Review" sequence and a "Circle Time", which are key elements of the High/Scope program. Ellen summarized her beliefs about teaching and learning when she said:

I think it's a mixture of you know, teaching them something completely new in quite a directed way...very short bursts with this age, and then the sort of supporting and enabling them to develop as self-initiating learners and its that kind of balance between the two.

In addition Ellen saw important links between children's self-initiated learning and the content of direct teaching episodes. Ellen noted that her teaching supported the children in their self-initiated learning, and that some aspects from children's self-initiated learning would become teaching points.

Ellen articulated her beliefs about empowerment with clarity and maintained that empowering children and the organisation of the learning environment were inextricably linked. Choice was an essential component of Ellen's definition of empowerment. Ellen described the range of choice available for children in her classroom and like Hannah, linked her definition of empowerment to enabling children to feel a sense of self worth:

I think they feel very confident if they know that they can make choices, that they've got the opportunity to make choices and not only to choose

what they are going to do but who they are going to do it with, and that they are free to move away you know if something doesn't work out as they want and they can try something else or they can you know put things away and get something else out if they find they don't enjoy it. I mean I think they must, they seem as if they gain a kind of confidence and sort of self-satisfaction and you know, self worth.

Ellen said that a significant part of her role as the teacher was to "support children in the choices they make" and empower them to "access the room in a kind of richer way". Ellen thought that she supported the children in their interactions with the environment through the organisation and maintenance of physical amenities, routines and rituals and in appropriate and meaningful, experiences and conversations.

In addition, Ellen believed that she empowered the children to independently manage their peer relationships by clarifying the choices available to them. She said that the children had "got to feel empowered to talk to each other" and described her strategy in the following way:

Children have a choice and either this happens or they have to move away or...the consequences of their actions are whatever. But it is quite empowering as well; to say to children...."You decide, you can choose, you either need to do this or you need to find somewhere else to work.

Pamela

Pamela was a member of three school committees responsible for shaping school policies, they were: Learning and Teaching for the Curriculum Framework; Special Needs and Health; and Physical Education. She had a great personal

interest in the approach to teaching young children practiced in Reggio Emilia.

Pamela attended conferences and liaised with a network of teachers and early childhood professionals on a monthly basis in order to share ideas and experiences relating to practices in Reggio Emilia. Reference was made to this approach in the pre-primary 'Program Philosophy' which stated that:

Our approach is also influenced by the world famous programs of Reggio Emilia in Italy, where all young children are seen as having potential, curiosity, interest in social interaction, establishing relationships, constructing their learning (and knowledge), and interacting with everything within their environment.

The 'Program Philosophy' explicitly referred to the empowerment of children:

Learning opportunities to help children to develop as empowered learners are planned with an emphasis on active learning through play and discovery, individual choice, using the project approach to explore children's interests and curiosities and through extensive social interactions with peers, teachers and the environment (indoors and outdoors).

Pamela believed that empowering children was a fundamental element of her pedagogy and said "It is the most important thing we can do. I think that it has to be the basis of your philosophy." Pamela's definition of empowerment was influenced by her powerful image of the child as an explorer and her belief that children knew what they needed to learn, she said "I see them as...very self determining. They know what they want to learn about, they know what their needs are themselves."

Pamela structured teaching and learning around child-initiated themes in order to enable the children to follow their own agenda of learning but commented that there was parental pressure for a more formal academic

curriculum. Pamela believed that part of her role as the teacher was to empower children to assume an active role in the construction of knowledge and “take responsibility as a learner.” She explained her understanding of her role:

It's my role to empower them to be that explorer and investigator and to seek answers to their questions and to formulate their own questions and not to be afraid to look for different ways of finding their answers because often there is no 'one' way.

She maintained that appropriate organisation of the learning environment was one way of enabling children to “take the initiative and take charge of their learning” and explained the link between her image of the child and the learning environment:

I think that they are very capable, a lot more capable than a lot of people give them credit for. I think that because they are so curious and have that innate need to know and find out about things. We can structure environments to foster that, and that it is all too easy and I think that it happens in too many schools, that we make decisions for them and we plan for them and organise for them and they are capable of doing all those things themselves.

Pamela thought that by empowering children to form and value their own opinions she enabled them “to believe in themselves” and that such a belief was important for later life. Pamela explained how she wanted her empowerment of the children to support them in later life:

When they are older to be able to make decisions and judgements and say “No” to peers that are trying to encourage them to do something that they know inside themselves...isn't right. Just to have that strength, to be able to

make their own decisions and stand up for those beliefs and decisions that they are making. I guess in a small way, I don't know how much difference we make but, but if you don't start somewhere it may never happen, so I guess empowering them that way is what I am trying to do.

Christine

Christine used two draft documents produced by the Education Department of Western Australia to guide her practice and she was awaiting the release of the final documents. The draft documents Christine used were: 'Guidelines for Best Practice in the Early Years' (Taylor and Werner, 1995) and 'Guidelines for the Identification of Best Practice in the Early Years', (Shortland-Jones, Meney and Taylor, 1996). Christine occasionally attended talks and the annual conference of a professional association.

Christine had produced an 'Information Booklet' for parents which detailed 'Teacher's responsibility' and 'What your child will do'. The booklet outlined the principles of the program that aimed to "cater for all aspects of children's development" and of the importance of play. It stated that:

The play is carefully and thoughtfully planned. First by year, then term, then month, then weekly and finally from day to day - suitable to each child's needs. At all times he is under careful and considered supervision.

Yes, he will play, but this is his way of learning.

Christine wanted to foster a sense of enjoyment in the learning process and believed that the role of the teacher was critical in the learning process. Christine said that she wanted to "make a difference in a child's life while they are at pre-primary."

Christine maintained that encouraging children to choose how to spend their time made it possible for her to assess their learning. By allowing the children “a certain amount of time” in a suitably organised learning environment Christine maintained that she also enabled the children to test themselves at a developmentally appropriate level.

Together with assessment, Christine’s view of “developmental levels” shaped her practice. Christine saw learning as a series of defined strata within a developmental continuum and children were expected to progress from one “level” to another as their skills and knowledge increased. Christine described the levels as becoming progressively “finer” or “higher” and thought that children could be pin-pointed at a particular level. To progress from one level to the next Christine maintained that children needed adult assistance “I’ll step in at that level and hopefully bring them to a higher level.”

Christine said “Oh, the dictionary !” when she was asked to discuss her definition of empowerment. Her response reflected her perception of the abstract nature of the concept which made a precise definition difficult. However, Christine said that she empowered the children in her class and that she wanted the children to have “confidence and self esteem.” In order to foster children’s sense of self esteem Christine told individuals that they were “good” at specific tasks, she said sometimes “I’ll make it up and so, well they’ve got a bit of a boost now.”

Christine believed that by encouraging children to solve problems in collaboration with a peer or independently rather than relying on adult assistance, she was empowering them in their learning. Christine explained why she wanted the children to do this:

Work it out themselves, they don't need me next time because the time is taken to find out themselves. Fiddle around [is] the best way is to find out yourself....I can tell them everything but next time I've got to tell them again and again and again....They are relying on me and I don't want that. I want them, even if there is a problem that they don't know they might have a go and then ask me and if its something new I'll say "Well I can understand why you couldn't work that out, that's a bit tricky" so...reflect on the fact that they have tried it themselves without you know, running to me first.

Christine maintained that it was part of her role as a teacher to empower the children by creating opportunities for them to make choices about what to do and by providing meaningful activities that were frequently based on familiar experiences. Christine said that she wanted the children to express their thoughts and ideas and in practice this sometimes meant allowing them sufficient time to respond to her questions:

[I'll ask] "Have you got it?" and I'll wait maybe a bit longer, just so that it is not...glanced over that their idea is not as good because maybe they can't think of it as fast. I know that they have got one but they just take a bit longer.

Christine explained that once she had established the boundaries of acceptable behaviour the children could assume the responsibility of managing the snack routine. Christine described how the process worked:

I often say to them that they don't need me they could run it by themselves....If I want to do something...they all love [sitting on Christine's chair] because no-one is allowed to sit on my chair, except when

I tell them, then they are the teacher. I get them to be the teacher and that's their role and they can run it quite easily themselves....They don't need to rely on me to organise the fruit...they can do it themselves. I've laid the ground rules or the limits or whatever and they just go with the flow....And the children respond to another person because they want to have a turn so then if that person is watching or if I've said, they know that if they listen and respond then they get a turn. They all listen and respond.

Learning Environment

It is suggested that teachers' ways of organising the learning environment are linked to their pedagogical knowledge. In the present study, the learning environment is examined for the affordances it offers in terms of children's empowerment. The following material reports the nature of the learning environments found within the two reception and two pre-primary classes. The organisation of space in the early childhood settings visited was influenced by the design of the building, the availability of resources and teachers' beliefs. The following presents key similarities and differences between the settings. Specific reference will be made to the organisation of physical amenities and the use of time.

Organisation of Physical Amenities

It is likely that the organisation of physical amenities will influence children's opportunities to develop as empowered learners. This section will consider the organisation of space and equipment within the four classrooms. The floor plans are illustrated in Figure 2.

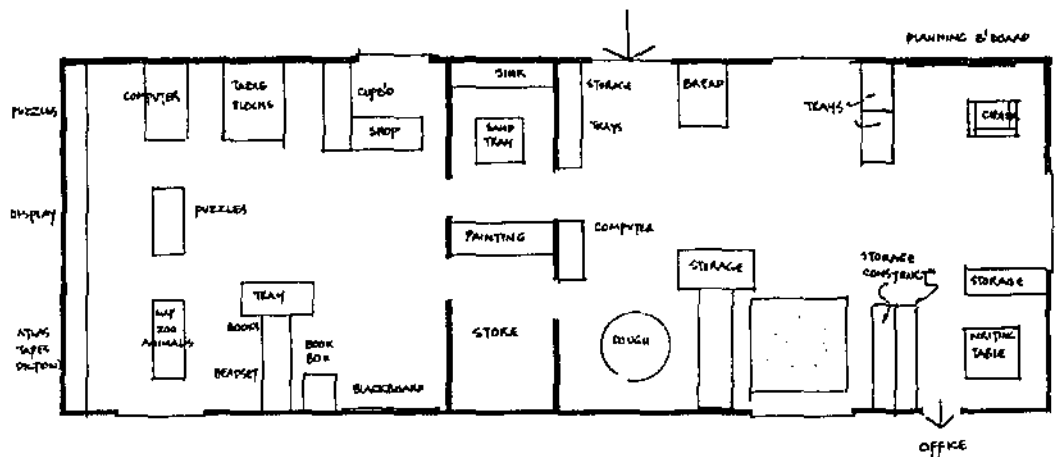


Figure 2.1 Hannah's Classroom

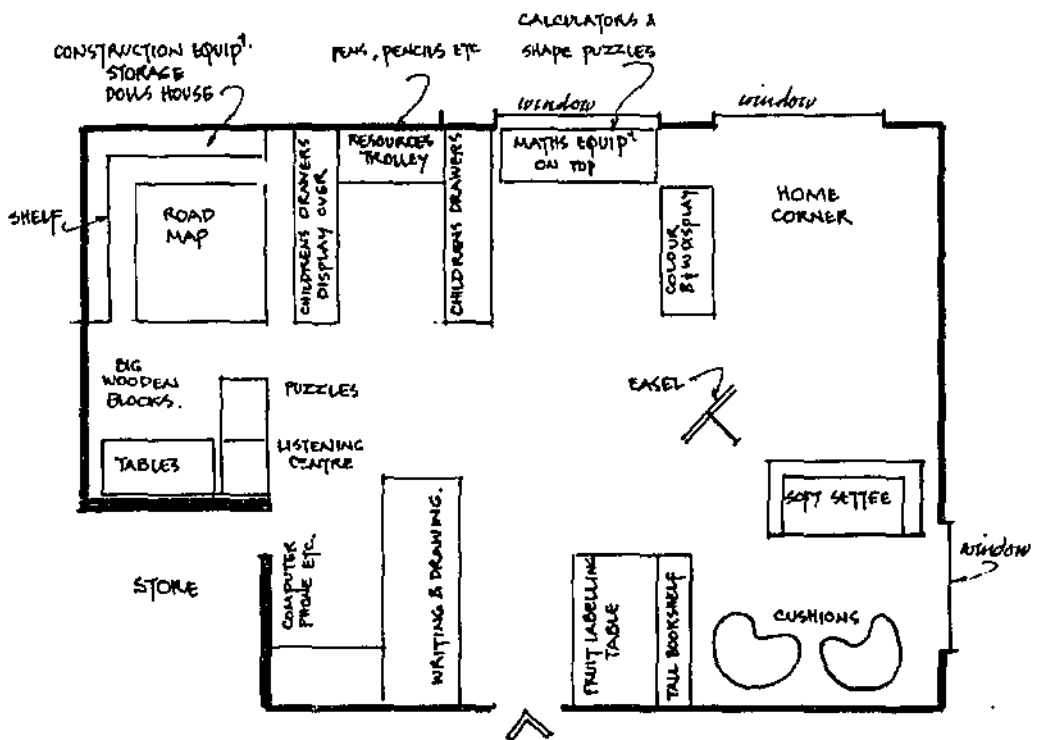


Figure 2.2 Ellen's Classroom

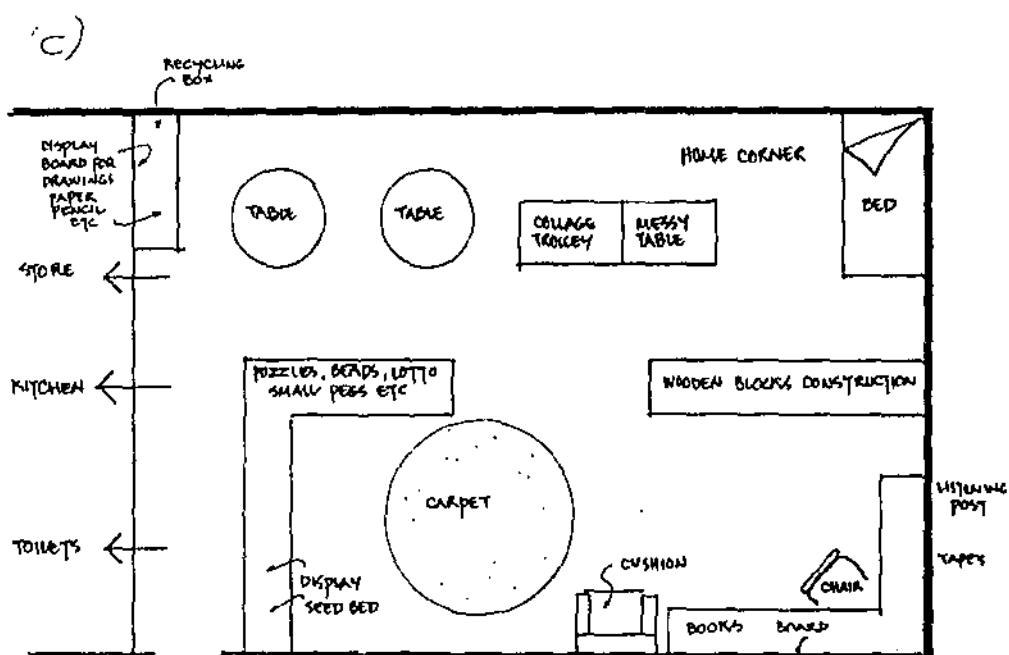


Figure 2.3 Pamela's Classroom

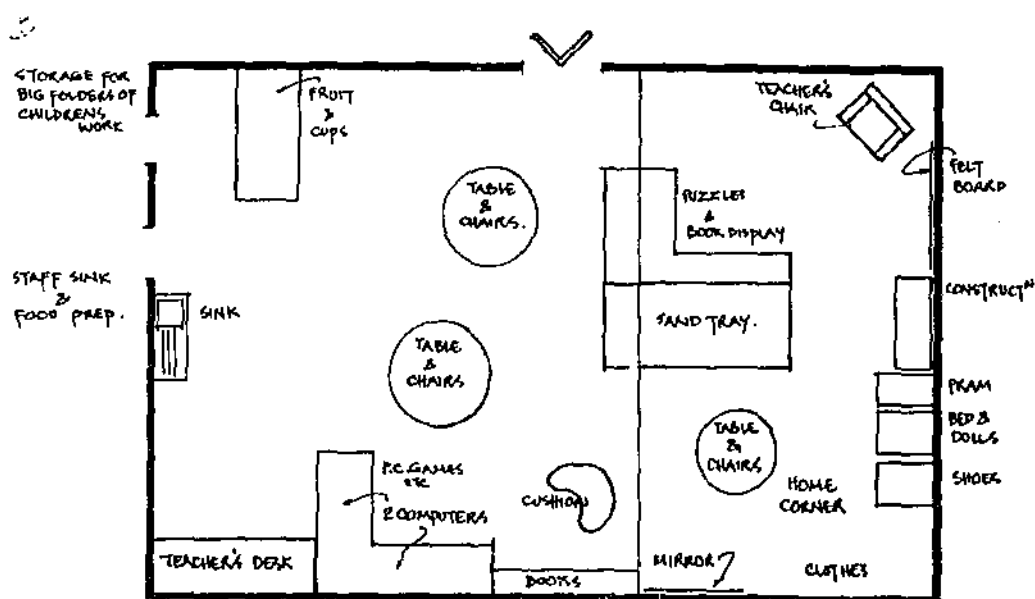


Figure 2.4 Christine's Classroom

The two reception classes were situated in classrooms within old school buildings. Ellen's class shared an adjoining 'wet' area with another reception class. Hannah's setting was unusual because it consisted of two classrooms connected by a small 'wet' area. Children in both reception classes joined the whole school for outdoor play although Hannah's children were welcome to go to the library, or adjacent Headteacher's office instead. Ellen's children had access to the purpose-built nursery outdoor area when it was not in use by the nursery children. Every day, weather permitting, Ellen invited two children to use the nursery outdoor area for part of the morning and recorded their names on a list.

The pre-primaries were in identical, standard demountable units which stood apart from the main school. Outdoor areas were shared only with the other pre-primary class on the school site. Christine's class used the library and computer facilities of the main school once a week. Pamela's class used the library every Monday to borrow books.

The space within the four classrooms was organised in similar ways. Resources were stored in defined areas at child height; there were clear pathways for children to move around the room; and each context had at least one carpeted area for whole class gatherings. Hannah's and Ellen's reception classes were totally carpeted and Pamela's and Christine's pre-primaries were partially carpeted.

Ellen, Pamela and Christine had organised puzzles, mathematical equipment, board-games and construction equipment to be labeled and stored around the room for children to select what they wished. Storage and accessibility of equipment were particularly important considerations for Ellen because she wanted the children to make their own plans about what to do. In order to make an informed choice, Ellen's children either had to already know what was available, or

be able to see equipment with which they wished to work. This meant that equipment was stored in clearly labeled and easily accessible containers.

Hannah's organisation of puzzles, board-games, construction and mathematical equipment was different. Although the materials were labeled and stored in an ordered way in the classroom, it was not necessary for them to be as easily accessible to children as in the other three settings. Hannah placed a range of puzzles or mathematical equipment on tables and although children were able to exchange these pieces of equipment for others, they were not observed doing so. Board games were used infrequently, but children were not encouraged to exchange one board game for another.

Hannah chose which construction equipment was placed on a table for the day. In the other three classrooms children often chose to have a number of different construction resources out simultaneously on the carpeted areas. Hannah maintained that her criteria for selecting equipment were based on her desire to support learning in other areas. She said her choice of equipment was "not quite as random" as it looked, and that she was "Trying to get a balance of activities first of all and also activities that are going to support other things that they [the children] are doing."

Hannah's choice of equipment was partly influenced by her desire to ensure children had opportunities to construct the content knowledge that she and her colleagues had planned. The nature of the content knowledge was defined by Hannah's interpretation of the children's learning needs and guidelines established in the National Curriculum (1988). She said that sometimes she chose equipment because it would be fun and perhaps the children had not experienced it for a while. Hannah thought that unlimited choice would be impossible for practical reasons

because there were 55 children in the group and reasoned that “There is a limited choice; and particularly when you are having this number of children, because you would like to have unlimited choice in some ways it’s not practical; you can’t do it with 55 children.”

However, Hannah maintained that she expected the children to make choices so she made available as many materials as was practical:

We set out as much equipment as possible, the children can access it when they need it. So if they are at a technology type table and they are cutting and sticking and so on I do not get out things like scissors for them, they go and get their own scissors and bring them back and use them and put them away again. Just like things like the pencils and crayons being kept in a separate, in a central place, rather than what you often see is a ready tub of crayons on each table for the children when they come in.

In all four classes the children could choose to paint; share books; listen to taped stories; play in a role play area; and draw or write if they wished. Both reception classes and Christine’s pre-primary had free access to computers, and children in Ellen’s reception class could choose to play in sand or water trays. Hannah’s children had indoor sand and water trays but they had to be available alternately in the winter because of space restrictions. Hannah said that a water tray was always available in the adjacent courtyard, for children to choose in the summer. Children in the pre-primaries had access to large, shaded sand play areas with running water during outside play times. Differences in climate between the United Kingdom and Australia may have influenced the selection of outdoor equipment.

The setting-up of the context was a fundamental element of Ellen and Pamela's pedagogies. Ellen thought that children needed different kinds of space and this conviction influenced the way she organised the classroom. Ellen said;

Space; I wanted to make sure that I had that space in the middle where we could sit in a circle so that they could all see each other. And I wanted to have everything available at the sides of the room with a space for them, a sort of work space for them to take something from the side of the room and work with it and put it back. So either to take something from the shelves or the trays at the side of the room and take it to a table or there are clipboards underneath one of the tables where if they want to put a clipboard on their lap and do something.

It is evident that Ellen wanted children to make decisions about what they worked with, and also where they worked. She wanted the children to feel they had an input into the organisation of the room and said "If they sort of say "Can we have a bigger office?" or you know "We need more space" then I would try really hard to accommodate those sorts of ideas."

In Ellen's view an ordered learning environment enabled children to fulfill their roles as learners. However, children needed some rules to help them maintain the environment "It's got to be well organised and well labeled with some rules about getting things out and putting things away in order to free the children and give them the opportunity."

Ellen saw the organisation of space as an important part of her role as the teacher. She believed that she could improve the quality of children's learning by managing spaces appropriately:

I think where there are areas where you find it's always where nothing really meaningful seems to be happening you have to look really closely and think "Well why isn't, why is that like that? And is it a problem to do with the sort of organisation and management; is it that there isn't enough space? Or is it that it's too big a space?"....I think that that's our role really, it's to look at areas that we feel aren't fruitful for the children and sort of make simple changes that make it easier for them to sort of manage and for the learning to be enriched.

Ellen wanted to achieve a balance in the organisation of the classroom; between children making informed choices and adults knowing when to intervene in order to ensure high quality learning experiences for the children.

Similarly in Pamela's view, the organisation of the learning environment was of primary importance. Pamela said "The structure of the learning environment is one of the most important things I do". Pamela had reorganised the furniture and equipment in the classroom several times in an attempt to create spaces that the children could use effectively and make the most of the small space available to her:

Basically to try and get them [the children] to use the space effectively, or to give them effective spaces to use....But it's just to see how they use spaces and what they use them for and trying to maximize space because it is such a small room for us as a group.

She maintained space was important because of the interactive nature of learning and that children needed "space to bring their little groups, that's like an interaction with the environment, they need to have that."

Like Ellen, Pamela said that she tried to create different kinds of spaces for children to encourage different kinds of play “They like cosy spaces too. They like to be able to go off into a little corner somewhere.” Pamela maintained that too little space could cause friction among children “They [the children] can’t be all clumped on top of each other, that provides a frustration for them.”

Christine’s reasons for formatting an orderly environment were a little different. Christine believed that by organising space and equipment to facilitate children’s choices she was enabling them to test themselves and to work at a developmentally appropriate level. Assessment and developmental levels of learning were key ideas in Christine’s pedagogy, and were reflected in her organisation of space in the classroom. When talking about the accessible storage of equipment she said “I like them to be able to go and choose and test themselves at their level for a certain amount of the time.”

Christine referred several times to the importance of children accepting their “own responsibility” for their learning, and maintained that it was the teacher’s responsibility to structure the learning environment in such a way that the children could fulfill their responsibility to “test themselves.”

In summary: the teachers organisation of space was indicative of their different knowledge of early childhood pedagogy.

Routines

This section will begin by summarizing Hannah, Ellen, Pamela and Christine’s daily timetables, and then examine three routine times common to the settings visited. The routine times examined are: The arrival of the children; a whole class time; and a small group learning experience. Specific reference will be

made to teachers' empowerment of children. Key elements of each routine time are displayed in tables, followed by discussion and pedagogic examples.

Daily Timetables.

An arrival time, a small group experience and a whole group time were common to all classes. However, they occurred at different times throughout the day. Reasons for this included the teachers' perceptions of their children's learning needs and the demands of the whole school time-tabling requirements. In Hannah's and Ellen's schools the reception classes followed the same basic timetables as the rest of the school, for example; joining children from other classes outside for morning 'play-time'. Pamela and Christine did not follow the whole school timetables, which allowed them greater flexibility in organising daily timetables within their pre-primary classrooms.

Table 2 presents a summary of the daily routines that Hannah, Ellen, Pamela and Christine had devised for their reception or pre-primary classes. Arrival and home times were not flexible. In addition outside play times and lunch times in Hannah and Ellen's classes were governed by the school timetables. However, the timing of routines within all four settings was flexible and appeared to depend on what teachers and children were involved in at a given time

Table 2

Daily Timetable Summary

Hannah	Ellen	Pamela	Christine
8.30-Accompanied children may arrive.			8.30-Children and parents arrive and begin free play.
8.40-Unaccompanied children may arrive.		8.45-Children arrive and self register.	
8.50-Registration and whole class planning time.	8.50-Children and Parents arrive and plan.	8.50-Registration and whole class mat session.	
9.15-Assembly.	9.00-Small group learning experiences and free play.	9.20-Small group learning experiences and free play.	9.15-Pack-away and whole class Mat session
9.30-Small group learning experiences and free play.	9.55 Tidy-up 10.00-Whole class Circle time.		9.40-Outside activities.
10.25 Tidy-up. 10.30-Snack time.		10.15-Pack-away. 10.30-Fruit.	10.30-Inside and wash hands. 10.40-Fruit.
10.45-Outside play.	10.50-Return inside. 10.55-Milk and story time.	10.45-Outside play.	10.55-Small group learning experiences and free play.
11.00-Return inside often for story. 11.15-Small group learning experiences and free play.	11.00-Small group learning experiences and free play.		
	11.45-Tidy-up.	11.30-Story time.	11.30-Pack-away. 11.40-Story time.
11.45-Tidy-up.	11.55-Whole class circle time.	11.45-End of children's day.	
12.00-Lunchtime.			12.00-End of children's day.

12.20-End of
children's day.

12.45-Story.

1.00-Small group
learning
experiences and
free play.

2.30-Tidy-up and
children can be
collected.

2.40-Songs and
rhymes.

3.00-Children's day
ends.

Arrival

The children's arrival into an early childhood setting is an important part of the daily routine because it is the interface between the home and school environments. The children's experiences at arrival time set the scene for the day ahead and mark their entry into the school culture. The following information describes the children's arrival and is linked to some elements that reflect teachers' beliefs about children, and teaching and learning.

Table 3

Routines for the Children's Arrival.

Teacher	Time	Description
Hannah	8.30	• Children accompanied by a parent are free to enter. Parents must remain until 8.40.
	8.40	• Unaccompanied children are free to enter.
Ellen	8.50	• Children and parents enter once the door is opened by the teacher or assistant.
Pamela	8.45	• Children and parents enter once the door is opened by the teacher or assistant.
Christine	8.30	• Children are free to enter with/without parent.

Links between home and school.

As shown in table 3 the initial arrival of children into the classrooms varied in a number of ways. Hannah and Christine welcomed children from 8.30 onwards and children arrived gradually, although in Hannah's class the parents were required to remain with a child until 8.40. Parents often took this opportunity to share a book with their child. Ellen and Pamela welcomed children and parents into the classroom at 8.50 and 8.45 respectively, when either they or the classroom assistant opened the door, signaling the start of the school day.

The arrival and initial activities in which the children became involved were broadly similar in the classrooms studied. In all four classrooms, the children were involved in making preparations for their snack or fruit time later in the morning; beginning some kind of activity; and saying good-bye to the person who had brought them to school, although events did not necessarily take place in that order.

Most children arrived accompanied by a parent or carer (hereafter referred to as parents), many had younger siblings in push-chairs or toddlers who came into the classrooms with them. Some children were brought into the classroom by older siblings who attended the same school. Parents were welcomed by staff in all the settings, although the extent and type of teacher/parent interactions varied.

Hannah and her colleague circulated around the room interacting with the children and some parents during the arrival time. Hannah knew many of the children's parents because she had taught older family members. Hannah was observed to have friendly and professional relationships with most parents; she talked informally with them about their children or events of the previous day. Some parents chose to converse with Hannah's teaching colleague. The majority of parents helped their child to organise a snack for later in the morning, shared a book or said good-bye. The atmosphere in the classroom was informal and welcoming despite the imminent official start to the children's day at 8.50.

Parents of children in Ellen's class had the opportunity to be actively involved in the morning routine by helping their child to plan part of their day. Children's planning was an important routine in Ellen's class and will be discussed later. Ellen had good relationships with parents and an understanding and flexible approach to the amount of time they spent in the classroom during the start of the morning, She said:

Some of them are in a hurry because they are going to work and they don't have time to stay for long. But it is lovely when they have got the time and some of them stay and share a story as well before they go, or they get quite involved in the computer programme. Imogen's mum was there for ages one morning and she said "You know I really don't want to go !".

Many parents helped on a regular basis in the classroom which enabled them to see how their child spent his/her time in school and to increase their understanding of Ellen's pedagogy and the school's approach.

Pamela and Christine's pre-primary classes both had parent rosters and parents helped regularly. Christine had produced an information booklet for her class which referred to the roster and stated "Each family is expected to participate. This is not merely to prepare fruit and clean, but an opportunity for you to see first hand what your child is doing at the centre."

Christine, like Hannah, knew many of the parents from having previously taught older siblings of children who were now in her class. Her relationship with the parents was informal and Christine's conversations with parents created a lively environment as parents and children entered the classroom. Pamela was less able to circulate around the room and interact with parents because she began the morning by welcoming the children onto the carpet in preparation for the whole group time. However there was ample opportunity for discussions at the end of the day or, as with all the teachers, appointments could be made for confidential discussions at a mutually agreed time. Possibly because of the regularity of parent help Pamela and Christine had both put informative notices in key areas around the classroom, such as the home corner and the construction area, informing parents of the potential learning opportunities available to children when they chose to play in these areas.

Home school transition and teachers' knowledge.

Superficial analysis indicated similarities between the four settings. However closer examination revealed important differences between the teachers' knowledge of teaching and learning, their beliefs about children, and their arrival

routines. The teachers' knowledge and belief systems were found to significantly shape their practices, including their efforts to empower children.

The children's arrival was a busy time in all classrooms but particularly so in Hannah's room where 55 children with parents and siblings arrived mostly within the space of twenty minutes. Hannah and her team members had established a routine that facilitated the smooth running of the arrival time, and it reflected the importance Hannah attached to children feeling secure within the learning environment, Hannah maintained that "My biggest aim in this age group...is that they should feel safe and secure."

Hannah thought that children felt secure when they were empowered as independent learners and that children developed security and independence through routines that were consistently maintained by staff and known by children. Therefore the children in Hannah's class had particular routine chores to which they attended. For example, the children were responsible for communicating their lunch time arrangements to the staff. Children selected their name card from amongst those of their peers and placed it in one of three containers labeled 'Packed Lunch', 'School Lunch' or 'Home' depending on how or where they would have their lunch. A classroom assistant used the information from the containers to fill in a 'dinner register', which was used to record the number and types of lunches required by the children.

Independence and security were key strands in Hannah's pedagogy. Hannah said that the feeling of security and the goal of independence were connected, she said:

It almost seems to be a bit at odds with each other, that they are given this feeling of grounding....But within that I've got the independence and the

freedom to have and explore all these other options....And compromise because life is one big compromise of knowing that, you know, sometimes I have got a choice, sometimes I can do just what I want to do; within reason. When Hannah spoke of a "feeling of grounding" she was referring to the feeling of security children experienced as a result of the organisation of the learning environment; including its routines and rituals. However the feeling of security was complemented by opportunities for children to make decisions about what to do when they were not involved in adult-led activities. Hannah maintained that opportunities to make such decisions were indications of independence and freedom. Hannah referred to the balance between security and independence as a "compromise." Hannah empowered children by balancing routines with innovations, and security with independence.

Hannah's belief in the importance of security and independence is evident in her practice during the arrival routine. A feeling of security was fostered because children knew what to expect as they entered the classroom every morning. In addition, the routine emphasized children's independence in real and meaningful ways, as each child was responsible for organising their snack and lunch and gathering on a carpet.

Due to the large number in Hannah's class, children were divided into two groups according to age. Each group had a different carpet to gather on for register, whole group and story times. After organising their snack and lunch time arrangements, children went to their 'register carpet' and chose a book to look at alone or with a parent or shared their reading book with a member of staff or chatted with each other. Hannah and her colleague took the registers at 8.50, often asking the children what kind of register they would like. The children made

suggestions such as a 'Make Mrs. Lewis happy register' or an 'S register'. Chloe's response to a 'Make Mrs Lewis happy register' of "Yes Mrs Princess" was typical:

Hannah: Ok, Chloe?

Chloe: Yes Mrs. Princess.

Hannah: Oh Mrs. Princess. Thank you, Sarah?

Jacob: [interrupts] I've got a dog called Princess !

Hannah: You've got a dog called Princess, yes right. Thanks Jacob !

Children: [Comment and chatter].

For a 'S register' children answered with anything beginning with 'S'.

Hannah frequently made positive comments about the children's responses and drew their attention to interesting or amusing statements. The cohesion of the group was evident in the ritual of a register game, because in order to play the game children needed to have insider knowledge of its rules.

In Ellen's reception class the children and parents entered and began planning when the door was opened at 8.50. Two-thirds of the children were familiar with planning from their experiences in the nursery class in Ellen's school, and Ellen had spoken individually with the remaining third. She said:

I was able to talk with them individually when they came in and say, you know, we had a little notice on it saying 'Fiona's Planning Book' and I just talked to them about making a little sort of note about what they would like to do.

Planning was a key element of the day for Ellen's children and involved them, often with a parent in choosing a writing tool and using their planning book to make a decision about how they would spend their time. The children could select anything within the classroom and adjoining 'wet' area to include in their planning.

Ellen said that she had explored the classroom with the children during the initial weeks of term, showing them the range of equipment and how it could be used. Much of the equipment was consistently available, and new additions were introduced to the children. For example, one morning Hayley and her father arrived with samples of some new lego for the classroom. Ellen asked Hayley if she would like to help label the container, choose where to store the lego and introduce it to the children at circle time once it arrived.

Children were encouraged to plan their first activity of the day by looking around the classroom and either having their parent, Ellen or her assistant scribe their plan for them or write it themselves. For example, Lois planned, with her mum's support, to play with Erica and with Joanne in the office:

Mum: I would.

Lois: Like.

Mum: Like.

Lois: To !

Mum: 'T' a 't' , a curly 't', like the opposite to a 'd'. 'O', that's it. Can you do a 'p'? It's like [drew 'p' on the table with her finger]. It's like that, under here, it's a new word.

Lois: Is that one of those? Is that one of?

Mum: Like this, I'll do the dots.

27.11.97.

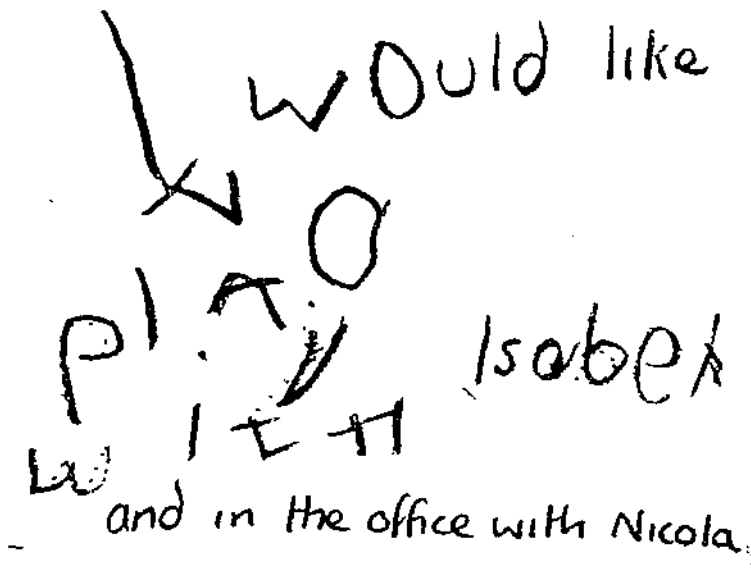


Figure 3. The plan that Lois and her mother made on their arrival in Ellen's classroom.

Ellen maintained that planning enabled children to make a positive start to their morning, and like Hannah, she emphasized the important role that routines play in a child's sense of security:

Well I think that when they first arrive in the morning it's quite a good idea for them to sort of think about the classroom and think about what's available and you know make their own decisions and choices. I think sometimes if they just come in and everybody is kind of milling about it can be quite sort of, not a frightening time for them but a bit overwhelming.

The routine of children planning their day reflected Ellen's fundamental belief in equity of power which shaped her practice in many ways. Ellen said "I think that it's important when you are sort of trying to make a kind of equal in terms of power to all be at the same level."

Ellen's statement about power relationships clarified one of her most important aims, which was to create a learning environment where adults and children shared the power. The organisation of the arrival routine, with opportunities for children to make their own plans, was a clear indication of the value Ellen attached to the children's decisions and opinions. Power was shared when the children were involved in making meaningful decisions; for example, whether or not to join an adult-led activity. Ellen respected the children's plans, and considered adult and child initiated activities to be of equal importance.

To translate her belief in equity of power into practice, Ellen had organised space, time and routines, such as the arrival routine, to create what she described as an "open" learning environment. In an open environment Ellen thought that power was shared between adults and children. However, Ellen thought that it was part of her role as the teacher to sometimes intervene in child initiated learning experiences if the quality of the experience was being compromised in some way, but her aim was to maintain the balance of power. For example, when Ellen thought that the quality of play in the sand tray had diminished because children had put all the different collections of materials into the sand (cars, farm animals, natural objects and containers), she acted to "close" the activity. Ellen explained her actions in the following way:

Then I do sometimes close that area but I try always to give them a reason....I try and, if I do impose something even if it is...closing something for a little while, I try and explain why that has happened, so that they feel that there was a good reason for it....And not just enforcing you know, my power to sort of close something but actually saying "It's closed

because it's going to take us a long time to sort it out, so you know, we'll just close it for the moment and open it again once it's sorted".

Ellen maintained that by intervening she was supporting children in their learning. She said:

There are times when...you have to make that sort of decision in order to keep...a fairly ordered environment. If it becomes disorderly...then it makes it difficult for them to make that informed [choice] you know? You are taking away that opportunity if it becomes muddy.

In Ellen's view children sometimes needed more support in an open environment as opposed to in a more directed learning context. For example, when children had been absent Ellen said that it was important to:

support those children back in...with the other sort of choices, because [if]...they were in a very directed situation then they would just come back in and the teacher would say "Now it's your turn to do that and when you've finished you move on to there" but in this open...environment where it is up to them, it's quite hard to come back in and slot back in, to feeling confident if there has been a time away. So I think you've got to be aware of that side of the sort of environment you've got that it's actually expecting a lot from them.

Ellen thought that when children made a plan they were making an "informed choice" and that she empowered the children to do this through the organisation of a learning environment that encouraged decision making and related action. The learning environment had to be consistently maintained in order to ensure it was predictable and responsive to the children's learning needs:

That is to do with empowerment I think. You know if they are going to feel empowered they have got to know what's available and where it's going to be and they've got to know that they will always find it there. So you know that they won't find the scissors all over the classroom; they'll find them in the scissor-holes.

The routine at the beginning of the day in Pamela's pre-primary class was similar to that in Hannah's reception class in two ways. First, children were not able to make a choice about what to do on arrival because they joined other children on the carpet once they had organised their snack; and second, the use of a self-registration routine.

Pamela had made specific alterations to the arrival time to meet the needs of this particular group of children, which included the routine of 'self-registration'. Every morning, prior to the arrival of the children, the assistant placed the children's name cards face-up on a table near the door. Each child had to find their name card and place it in a box. Pamela thought that this routine was particularly important for a number of reasons. Primarily she believed that children needed to experience a feeling of belonging to the group and this routine meant that children saw their name amongst those of their peers. Pamela said that the children became familiar with the names of other children in the class and made their own judgements about who was present based on the name cards remaining on the table. Pamela said:

They get to know their friend's name and who is here and they will often come and say to me "Kelly is not here today" or somebody else is not here today and it is just that feeling of, of "I'm here and I am part of this group".

Pamela maintained that self-registration heralded the start of the children's time in school, much as planning did for Ellen. Pamela said "It's the beginning. It's like a beginning, a starting off."

As part of the transition from home to school Christine had organised a 'language board' by the door, which contained a question relating to the activities of the previous day, for example 'How do fish breathe?'. Parents and children often paused to consider the question on the board before moving inside. Christine then greeted child and parent and often asked about the answer to the question. This reflected Christine's belief that learning involved the children in a progression through different levels of development and enabled her to let the parents know about the theme, she explained "I can check whether they have understood the question and have a little bit of a talk with the parent about what is going on."

Children had a free choice about what they worked with until 9.30 including an activity with the classroom assistant for example, using clay. Christine encouraged the children to make decisions about what to choose to do during the arrival time through the organisation of the learning environment. Equipment was visible and easily accessible around the room and this facilitated children's choice-making. Christine said that she wanted to "Set up an environment which is conducive to them [the children] testing, challenging, taking a few risks and being successful."

Organising snacks.

In all four classrooms children had responsibility for arranging their snack or morning tea, however organisational routines differed and reflected teachers' beliefs about children and learning. Hannah's children either bought crisps from the school or a snack from home. The children in Ellen's class brought fruit to school

or purchased apples on arrival. They had the responsibility of writing a sticky label for their fruit, sometimes with parental help, to ensure they got the right piece at snack time. Ellen's beliefs about equity and, in particular, her desire to share responsibility with the children are evident in her efforts to "find a way the children can help themselves to their fruit rather than having to wait for it to be given."

In both the Australian pre-primaries Pamela and Christine had a fruit bowl where children placed their fruit to be shared among the class. Fruit was prepared later in the morning by parent helpers. In Pamela's class one incident gave a clear example of how Pamela's beliefs about the interactive and participatory nature of learning shaped her practice within routine times of the day. Anya bought some small biscuits one morning and was undecided about where to put them. Pamela noticed Anya's quandry and involved the children who were sitting with her on the carpet, in an attempt to help find a solution:

Pamela: Anya hasn't bought fruit today. David, Anya has bought little biscuits today and she's not sure where to put biscuits. Can anyone give her an idea of where she might put biscuits?

[A chorus of "I know" from the children assembled on the carpet].

Pamela: Where might she put them Andrew?

Andrew: In the cupboard.

Pamela: That's a good idea but we might forget them in the cupboard.

Claire: [Classroom assistant] We would !

Erica: Table, table, table.

Pamela: Erica has got a good idea, what's your idea Erica? On the table?

Erica: Table.

Pamela: Table. On the table.

Erica: The fruit table.

Pamela: On the fruit table. On the fruit table, that's a good idea, On the fruit table Anya.

The interaction shows that children are encouraged to express their ideas, which are considered and respected. Encouraging the children to express themselves is linked to Pamela's view of empowerment. Pamela said that one of the ways she empowered children was to encourage them to develop their own ideas and opinions:

I guess empowering them is for them to have their ideas and their perceptions and to be able to use those in learning. I guess to always believe in themselves, as a person with an opinion which should be valued.

In the conversation with the children about where to put Anya's biscuits Pamela empowered the children by asking for their ideas, listening and valuing their suggestions and by choosing not to solve the problem for them. In practice Pamela frequently avoided giving the children a solution or answer, preferring to 'wonder' aloud with the children instead. Pamela adopted this approach for two reasons, which were grounded in her perception that "real" learning is interactive and participatory. First, because she did not want to be the "fountain of knowledge" and wanted the children to construct their own knowledge about how to solve a particular problem. Second; because she wanted to model "wondering" for the children:

I often try to, when I am questioning them; "I wonder why?", "I wonder if you have got an answer to that?" so I wonder aloud as a role model and talk about their opinion so you know, "So what's your opinion of this?" so that they know that their opinion is valued.

In summary, detailed analysis of the arrival routine of each teacher revealed some important elements of their individual belief systems, and their rationale for their minute by minute decisions as teachers. For example, Pamela did not tell Anya where to put her biscuits, instead she made a decision to help Anya find her own solution to her problem.

Whole Group Time

Whole group times involved all the children and the teacher gathered together on a carpet for a routine, specific purpose other than story time. The organisation and management of whole group times created opportunities to observe how Hannah, Ellen, Pamela and Christine translated beliefs about empowering children into practice.

All four settings had carpeted areas either in the middle of the room or in a corner where teachers and children met during the course of the program. Teacher purpose and timing of whole group times differed, as a result each will be considered separately and significant elements highlighted. The names that teachers' allocated to whole group times were descriptive of their purpose.

As shown in Table 4, Hannah and Pamela's whole group times took place immediately after the children's arrival. Hannah referred to the whole group time as "planning time" and Pamela used the phrase "mat time". In Christine's room children were asked to finish their activities and gather together for a "mat session" at approximately 9.20. The same happened in Ellen's room at approximately 10.00 when Ellen and the children met for "circle time."

Table 4

Whole Group Times

Teacher	Time	Purpose
Hannah	8.50 - 9.15	• Planning time - Communication of the adult decided agenda of the day ahead.
Ellen	10.00 - 10.30	• Circle time - Children recall and share their experiences of the first part of the morning.
	11.50 - 12.00	• Circle time - Children gather together prior to departure at 12.00, recall experiences of second part of morning if sufficient time
Pamela	9.00 - 9.20	• Mat time - Discussion of child-initiated topics involving the whole class.
Christine	9.20 - 9.40	• Mat session - Adult led activities including music and a story, enabling construction of knowledge by the children and assessment by the teacher.

Planning time in Hannah's reception class.

Planning time was the pivotal routine of the day, and involved communication of the adult planned structure of the day to the children. During planning time the children sat on the carpet while Hannah stood up and used coloured chalk to draw on the adjacent blackboard. She began by drawing each member of staff and an object to represent the activity they would work with during the day. Hannah involved the children in discussion about who she was drawing and why:

Hannah: We are still working on our big picture for the hall and its nearly, nearly finished. We've made all the bits for it and we have made our angels haven't we?

Children: Yes.

Hannah: And Mary and Joseph but is there someone we have left out?

[Draws her colleague Mrs. Edwards.]

Children: We haven't done a baby !

Hannah: You are right, we haven't done a baby. So Mrs. Edwards is going to start work on the baby. [Draws a baby next to Mrs. Edwards and circles them.]

Once the adults and their respective activities were drawn Hannah drew the "choosing things" which were the permanent classroom equipment and adult chosen activities that children could select to work with, usually unaccompanied by an adult. "Choosing things" included the computer, the shop role play area and a collection of nativity figures with a stable. Hannah reminded the children of specific things to remember, for example "Remember to use those scales for your weighing in the shop." She asked the children to think about the initial sounds of the "choosing things" and wrote the appropriate letter next to the illustration.

To conclude, Hannah reminded the children of a strategy for organising their own time if they did not know what to do next:

Hannah: If you are not working with one of us and you are not sure what to do next, what could you do?

Edward: Look at the planning board.

Hannah: Brilliant, good boy. You could come and look at the planning board and think "Ooh yes ! I haven't done that yet" and that helps you to remember all the things you could do.

Hannah's emphasis on the importance of knowledge was seen in practice during the planning time. She told the children about the activities she had planned

for them; who they would work with; why they needed to participate in the activities; and how to do them. Hannah believed the children had to assume the responsibility for constructing knowledge. Hannah described the process of encouraging the children to accept the responsibility for learning as “push[ing]” or “bat[ing].” By involving the children in the planning discussion Hannah thought that she was encouraging them to assume the responsibility for the construction of knowledge. Hannah said that the combination of discussion and visual representation on the board enabled the children to “hook into” the knowledge she was sharing about the day; she said “They are getting a little bit of a forte for a mental image of what is going to happen during the day and why, and the links between them.”

Hannah and her team had carefully planned the content knowledge of the day, and felt it was important the children understood the learning objectives underpinning activities. Hannah thought that there was an increased likelihood of children constructing the desired content knowledge when they understood *why* they needed to do certain tasks. Telling children why was a way of reducing the element of chance in the learning process “They should know why they are doing it because how can they really learn, unless its by accident, what we really want them to learn unless they know?” It is evident that Hannah’s beliefs about knowledge profoundly affected the format of whole group time.

Hannah thought planning time was important for two additional reasons that related to the importance of children’s construction of knowledge about the day ahead. First, knowledge fostered a sense of security, and it gave the children:

More of a feeling of knowing what’s happening, this security of “I know what’s happening, I know who is doing what, I know that I’ll probably be

involved in that during the day" so that during the day if Zoe [team teacher] calls them and says "Come on look, I need you to work with me". They are not thinking "What?", "Why?", "What's happening?"

Second, knowing what was going to happen prepared children for "the crunch." "The crunch" involved the realization that one no longer had a choice about which activity to do. "The crunch" occurred when an adult decided that a child needed to participate in a particular learning experience. For example when Zoe said to Elliot "I need you now " Elliot experienced "the crunch" or the realization that he could no longer play with the nativity figures but had to work with Zoe. Hannah believed "crunches" were inevitable, because life was "one big compromise of knowing, you know, sometimes I have got a choice."

Hannah believed that by telling the children about the day's activities at "planning time" she was reminding them that sometimes they would have to compromise on how they spent their time. "The crunch" was the realization that one had to compromise and stop doing what one had chosen to do and do what an adult had decided one should do. Hannah maintained that having to compromise between doing what one wants and what someone else wants was a part of life.

Thus important aspects of Hannah's pedagogy were reflected in the way she structured the routine "planning time." In Hannah's view, the teacher had an active role in enabling the children to learn, as she "push[ed]" and "bat[ted]" the responsibility of learning back to them. Hannah believed that children were able, competent individuals and that it was her responsibility to create opportunities that enabled them to develop and use their skills. Hannah said "I just think that if a child is capable of doing it then they should do something. We've got enough to do without running around spoonfeeding them."

Through the routine of “planning time” Hannah informed the children of the options available to them in the day ahead and of the reasons underpinning activities. By informing the children in this way Hannah empowered them to act as competent individuals and make their own choices for some of the time. Hannah said “If we expect people, and they are people, to make choices then they have to have the freedom to make those choices.”

Circle time in Ellen's reception class

Ellen had two circle times; the first at 10.00, and a second; if there was sufficient time, at 11.55 before the children departed at 12.20. The following discusses the first circle time which took place at approximately 10.00 every morning. The primary aim of this circle time was to encourage the children to recall how they spent the first hour of the morning, share their experiences with one another; and value individual achievements and discoveries with the whole group.

Ellen and the children sat at the same level on the carpet in a large circle. Ellen was the only teacher to sit on the carpet during the whole group time and, like her use of planning, it is indicative of her belief in equity of power relationships which was discussed earlier. Ellen said that she always tried to be at the same physical level as the children when she was talking with them, because this enabled her to have quality interactions with the children. Ellen said:

One of the things I am quite aware of is the height at which we sit, and I think that's so important, so when I want them to sit on the floor for a circle time I try and always sit on the floor as well....I sit on the low chair if I'm reading a story or if there is something to be shown and I ask the children to come, you know, stand or sit next to me....Generally if you want to engage

in a kind of worthwhile conversation and talk to them about something, then

I think that it is important to be at the same physical level.

By sitting at the same physical level as the children during circle time, Ellen emphasised the equality of the individuals sitting on the carpet. Children and adults had equal rights to speak and be listened to. Ellen said that she did not want to appear to be “cross questioning” the children, instead wanted the talk at circle time to “be more like a discussion, you know, going backwards and forwards.”

Ellen empowered the children because she shared the power to speak and ask questions amongst all members of the group. Ellen fostered questioning skills by inviting the children to ask each other questions and asking them to put their hand up if they wish to be asked:

Ellen: Can you ask him?

Leo: What did you do?

Marcus: I made a model.

Leo: What else did you do?

Marcus: I played with Joe sometimes.

Leo: What else?

Marcus: I played in the building area.

Ellen: Do you think he’s got something he might like to show us?

Marcus: Shall I show you what my model is?

[Leo nods and Marcus goes to fetch his model.]

It was of particular concern that children did not feel pressured to speak. Ellen’s belief in individually appropriate times for the construction of knowledge was evident in her approach to circle time. Ellen enabled the children to choose if and when they contributed to the group discussion. Ellen explained her opinion:

There are still some children who never volunteer, but you know the very fact that they are not made to volunteer; I think there will come a time when they suddenly, like Seth yesterday, that was the first time yesterday when he had volunteered. He had actually put up his hand because he wanted to be asked and somebody actually asked him. I think it will come up for all of them.

Ellen used a quiet voice, and was careful not to dominate the discussion; at one point she left the group to fetch two children from the adjoining area. In her absence the discussion continued as Marcus returned with his model:

Ben: Wow.

Ellen: Show the children [departs.]

Children: Wow, wow [begin chanting.]

Louise: Points to the centre of the circle and tells Marcus where to put his model [inaudible.]

Marcus: No. Well, well this shoots [points his model at the chanting children.] Well when somebody's being naughty this shoots fire at them [waves model at remaining chanters who stop.]

Fiona: Do it?

Louise: No, you can't do that.

Marcus: Puk. Puk. [pointing the model at Louise.] It shoots fire out. It shoots fire out. It shoots fire out when they're being naughty. [Ellen returns.] When they are being good we leave it in the middle.

Ellen: Have you told the children about your model?

Marcus: Yes but the fire come out this. Fire come out there, up the top there.

Ellen: Right at the top does it?

Marcus: Yes, fire come out down in these bricks and it go right up there and pschew, pschew.

Ellen: Shall we leave it in the middle of the circle for the children to look at it and would you like to ask somebody else about what they did today?

Ellen was particularly interested in ensuring quality learning experiences and interactions for the children. For example at circle time she drew children's attention to their behaviour, reminding them to be aware of the needs of others;

Sophie and Harriet you are leaving Ben out of the circle, could you just move back so that you are not, because you have got your back to Ben haven't you Harriet? So that he doesn't feel left out.

Circle time finished as outside play began and the children joined the rest of the school in the playground.

Mat time in Pamela's pre-primary class

Pamela had four primary aims for the mat time: First, to welcome the children into the setting; second, encourage discussion of child-initiated topics of interest; third, facilitate the children setting and pursuing "their own agenda" for the day ahead; and fourth, enable negotiation about which children participated in adult-initiated activities.

Pamela's whole group time took place immediately after the children arrived. The children self registered and made their way to the carpet where Pamela

was waiting seated on a chair. Pamela valued the routine and took the register formally then group time began with a whole class discussion.

Pamela's strong image of the children as competent explorers who have their own agendas for learning was evident throughout the group time. Pamela's view of children as competent was apparent in the choice of a discussion topic. Pamela encouraged the children to share items and experiences from home. There was so much to discuss: Anna's seed collection, Helen's chestnuts, Verity's guinea pigs and a stunning moth found outside the pre-primary earlier in the morning which intrigued the children by fluttering in its box.

During the discussion Pamela acted as a facilitator in the following ways; she wondered aloud "I wonder why?" and "I wonder if you have got an answer to that?"; she modeled questions; encouraged children to listen to one another; provided opportunities for children to share their experiences; and valued their opinions and contributions:

Pamela: You can't touch it Sarah, perhaps when we have finished at mat time and people have chosen where they would like to go to do their activities, perhaps if you want to have a good look at them you can sit with Helen, and Helen can talk about it. Thank you.
It is a very hard nut isn't it Helen? Where did you find it Helen?

Helen: On the bush.

Pamela: Has anybody got any questions?

Helen: On the prickly bush.

Pamela: On the prickly bush. Has anybody got any questions they would like to ask Helen to find out something about this seed?

George: I've got some at home.

Verity: Last night mummy called out "There's baby guinea pigs!" and I ran to her and we saw both the guinea pigs sucking.

Pamela: What do you think they're sucking from, the nipples? What do you think they are getting from her? They do suck on the nipple part of the mother's body. What do you think they are getting out of her?

Tara: Milk.

Pamela: Milk.

[A chorus of "Milk !" from all the children]

Pamela: Milk, special milk, just like human mummies give to their babies. Yes, Chloe, have you got a question you would like to ask Verity?

In Pamela's view part of her role was to respond to the children as they progressed towards goals dictated by their own, child initiated agendas for learning.

Pamela's beliefs about the interactive and participatory nature of "real learning" were evident throughout group time. For example she encouraged the children to peep into the box containing the moth and think about what it might be "I'm going to give you a peep, I don't want you to say what it is, keep the thought inside your head."

The children had many ideas:

"A cockroach."

"I think its a clown inside that."

"A snake."

"A flying grasshopper."

"A moth."

Pamela: You've got some at home. What about you Ben? What did you want to know Ben?

Ben: Where did she get it from?

Pamela: Where did she say she got it from? Who can help Ben?

Jack: From the prickly bush

Pamela: Jack was being a good listener, good boy. Was it on your bush at home Helen?

Helen: No.

Pamela: Somewhere else was it? Well done. Helen also bought some other seeds to show us but we will have a look at those later or Helen you might like to share them with a little group of your friends or other people who want to have a look at them later.

The children responded by asking questions, listening and offering suggestions. For example, Verity shared the story of the birth of her baby guinea pigs:

Max: How can the babies eat?

Verity: They can't eat yet, um they can't eat food yet.

Tara: Because they haven't got teeth.

Verity: No.

Pamela: They haven't got teeth so what do they do?

Verity: Um.

Tara: Suck it

Verity: They just, well we saw them sucking their nipples so she's definitely a girl.

Pamela: She's definitely a girl, and what do you think they're sucking?

“A flying cockroach.”

“A mosquito.”

“A preying mantis.”

“A lobster.”

Pamela said she wanted the children to be actively involved in their learning rather than assume that she would provide them with knowledge “They have to participate in learning it can’t just be coming from me, I don’t want to be the fountain of knowledge.” This was seen in practice when she asked the children for their opinions but did not tell them that the creature was a moth “I think I know what it is but so do you think you know what it is.” Pamela believed children instinctively knew what they needed to learn next and she said “I feel quite sure that they know what they need to learn.” This belief was evident in her practice as she encouraged conversation around topics suggested by the children and responded to their interest in the creature in the box by suggesting “If anybody’s really, really interested about this little creature in here Mrs. Edwards has some books and we can look in the books and we can see if we can find one like it and see what it is.”

Pamela concluded group time by telling the children briefly about the adult-led activities she had planned. Children who did not volunteer or were not specifically asked to join in an adult-led group chose what to do within the room or to paint outside.

Mat session in Christine’s pre-primary class

There were three phases to Christine’s mat session: First, singing and the introduction of the triangle; second, the introduction and use of the ‘Bananas in pyjamas’ puppets; and third, a story time. The following will report on the first two

as story times occurred separately in the other three settings. Each phase of the mat session had a different aim however, Christine blended familiarity with fun to meet the children's learning needs.

Christine adopted a flexible attitude to time, preferring children to finish an activity if she thought they were involved in learning. When Christine talked about her pedagogy she frequently referred to time as a commodity that she controlled and noted: "I'll give them [the children] time." At the start of the mat session Christine's belief was translated into practice. The children were given five minutes warning prior to "pack-away" time and they were encouraged to finish their activity or to organise their work so they could return to it later using signs, some of which said "Please don't touch my building." Christine said:

I'll often tell them it is nearly time, so that if they are doing something they know that we are going to sit down, but if they are involved I can't rush them. If there is learning and skills being used I'll let them finish off.

This meant that not all children began routine times at the same time, for example on one occasion after all the children had arrived, a small group led by Ben became involved in exploring the rolling properties of the wooden blocks. Christine became involved in Ben's learning experience and did not ask the children to tidy-up ready for the mat session until 9.30, fifteen minutes later than on the timetable. In addition, she allowed Alexa to continue work on her clay creature for approximately another ten minutes, until it was finished and allowed three boys placing signs on their duplo models a similar amount of time. Christine said:

I'll let them finish and then I'll start something and they'll come, they'll come. I don't have to continually tell them to come. We will start and then

others will follow on; start with rhymes and songs so it gives them time to finish off.

During the first phase of the mat session Christine's initial aims were to encourage the children to complete their work and gather on the carpet which she did by beginning a lively sing-along to taped music once a small group of children were seated on the carpet. Christine said that the singing "just brings them" and she maintained that the children came to the carpet because "They know this is going to be good fun, they'll come. I don't have to tell them "Come and we are going to sing a song". No, I just [start and] away we go." Christine believed that entertainment and learning were linked and commented "Well they enjoy it [the first phase of the mat session], and it's learning because they love to listen to the different songs and the different music." Christine's statement reflected her view that enjoyment facilitated learning.

Christine believed that, although the children needed to take responsibility for their learning, it was her role to extend learning. In addition to ensuring learning experiences were fun Christine extended the children's learning in a number of ways: First, by ensuring that they had a variety of experiences to keep them interested and therefore motivated, Christine said "We don't start it [the mat session] the same every day it's something different but we love it and it's whatever skill, they really don't know they are practicing these different ways all the time." Second, Christine extended learning by responding to information from the children. For example, while singing Christine noted the children's interest in long and short sounds as they copied her arm actions; stretching them out wide as a sound continued, then closing them together as it stopped. Once the song finished Christine showed the children a triangle, told them how it was played, and

demonstrated making long and short sounds, encouraging the children to listen carefully. Christine thought it was an ideal time to introduce the triangle because of the interest the children had shown in the sounds and commented "It is relating back to what they are interested in, which is long and short sounds; perfect follow on. Put it [the triangle] back, go on to what you planned." Christine's attitude towards her planning was sufficiently flexible to allow deviations in order to focus on the children's interests in this way.

Christine's desire to make learning fun was evident in the second phase of the mat session with the use of two large 'Bananas in Pyjamas' puppets kept in a cupboard adjacent to the carpet. On Tuesdays Christine knocked on the cupboard to create the illusion that the puppets were knocking to come out and explained "I love the dramatic bang on the cupboard, well they [children] didn't really think it was them."

Christine chose two children to stand up in-front of the whole group and hold the puppets, then she encouraged conversation about what might happen next by asking questions:

Christine: What do you think?

Alice: Let's do it together.[Holding puppet B1.]

Christine: Let's do it together, what a good idea. What do you think B2?

Shane: Good.[Holding puppet B2.]

Christine: Good. Do you have some ideas B1 about what we could do together? [Waits.] What could we do together?

Alice: Marching.

Christine: We could march. What do you think B2? [Waits.] What are you thinking about B2?

Shane: We could all stop together.

Christine: We could all stop together. Good idea? [Scans children on the carpet.]

Children: Yes !

Christine: Any other good ideas? What do you think B1?

Christine explained her reasons for using the puppets in this way:

I am trying to get the conversation for those shy ones through 'Bananas in Pyjamas' the talking, the language, the conversation. Giving them ideas "What could we do?", "Lets go marching" they said so yes it's come from them, the talking and the marching.

Christine's management of this part of the mat session is similar to her management of the snack time routine (referred to in Christine's profile). On both occasions Christine empowered the children to offer their suggestions for managing a routine time. However, the children's responses are shaped by their knowledge of previously acceptable suggestions.

The 'Bananas in Pyjamas' were incorporated into the mat session every Tuesday because Christine maintained that such a routine helped the children learn the days of the week "Every day of the week we relate to something so that they know which day is library, which day is computer. Bananas in Pyjamas is Tuesday." Christine related how during the previous day, the children had suggested using the puppets "Yesterday they said to me 'I think they want to come out' and I said 'Oh well, Thursday, no'" Christine's adherence to the weekly routine reflects how important she feels the routine is in helping the children construct knowledge about the days of the week. Christine maintained that the specific Tuesday routine "Just starts because they [the children] are familiar with

Bananas in Pyjamas." Christine said that her use of the familiar helped the children cope with the transition from home to pre-primary. Christine's perception of the children's needs on their arrival in the pre-primary class shaped her planning:

At the start because the children have to come in with something that I think is familiar to them, so I base [the work around] something familiar. I don't always start with that, I might decide that teddies [sic], something familiar that they come with from home. I might start with 'The Three Bears' but I think something familiar.

In summary, Christine believed that the children needed consistently maintained routines and familiar experiences in order to help them adjust to the learning environment.

Following the puppeteers suggestions Christine and the children marched around the room to 'Bananas in Pyjamas' music and stopped together when Christine turned the music off. Christine then asked for more suggestions from the children:

Christine: This time what are we going to do?

Children: [Chorus of] I know.

Christine: Phillip.

Phillip: Go on top of something.

Christine: Alright, this time when the music stops, just be careful alright, be careful is the word. On top of anything, anything on top of. Ok.

Children: [Chorus from a small group of children] yes, yes.

Christine turned on the 'Bananas in Pyjamas' music and everyone moved around the room. When the music stopped the children hurried to find an appropriate place

to hide “on top of something” as Phillip had suggested. Christine asked the children to tell her where they were:

Christine: George what are you on top of?

George: A cushion.

Christine: Carefully is the word. Jason, what are you on top of? [Pauses.] What are you on top of Jason?

Jason: Don't know.

Christine: Look.

Jane: Look at them. Look at them.

Christine: Ssh. What are you on top of? Look at what you are on. [Pauses.] What are you standing on?

Jason: Table.

Christine: No, you are not standing on a table.

Jason: A chair.

Christine: A chair.

The game continued in this way for approximately five more minutes.

The game had two main aims: First to enable the children to become familiar with spatial concepts; and second, to enable Christine to assess the children's knowledge of spatial concepts. Christine explained the aims:

It's the maths concepts [of] beside, under, on, partner, two, bridge, back-to-back, whatever. Ask them “What else can we do?” someone else said “Make a number one.” We all make a number one. They are clever they are thinking....They are all squashed up and I call out “Where are you?” so they have to articulate where they are and then I know if there is someone and they've got no idea, I need to work with them.

Assessment was a key strand of Christine's pedagogy because she believed that learning involved a progression from one developmental level to another and that it was important to be aware of each child's knowledge and understanding. Christine maintained that the 'Bananas in Pyjamas' activity enabled her to assess the children's developmental levels because within the context of the game she was able to observe their responses to a series of commands related to spatial concepts. Christine thought that children who were slow, or unable to find a place to hide, had not yet constructed the appropriate knowledge and said "I can see who is the last one always worried because they haven't got the concept."

The mat session ended with a story time using the felt board before outside play.

In summary, it is evident that the structure and content of each whole group time was unique, and reflected the teacher's beliefs and their learning objectives. All teachers involved the children in a discussion but the nature of the discussions varied greatly. Pamela wanted to involve the children in pursuing their "own agendas" and Ellen wanted the children to recall and share their most immediate experiences with one another. Hannah was concerned with communicating knowledge that she believed the children needed to know about the day ahead and Christine had precise learning objectives such as increasing awareness of spatial relations, which she assessed. The teachers can be divided into two groups, Pamela and Ellen who encouraged child-initiated topics of discussion and Hannah and Christine who used adult-initiated topics as a basis for their whole group times.

Small Group Learning Experiences and Organisational Strategies

In all four settings teachers involved the children in small group work. Small group learning experiences are defined as adult-led groups of between three and six

children, who work on an adult planned and initiated activity. Similar to whole group times; small group learning experiences (hereafter also referred to as small groups) took place at different times and for different purposes in the programs examined. The following will report teachers' strategies for organising their small groups and then consider the aims and content of one small group learning experience in each setting. As shown in table 5, Hannah, Ellen, Pamela and Christine used different strategies to organise children for small group learning experiences and all the teachers used a combination of strategies.

Table 5

Organisational Strategies for Small Group Learning Experiences

Teacher	Time	Organisational Strategy
Hannah	9.30 - 10.25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children directed to specific small group learning experiences by the teacher or children volunteered.
	11.15 - 11.45	
	1.00 - 2.30	
Ellen	9.00 - 10.15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tried to negotiate timing of children's participation or children volunteered.
	11.00 - 11.45	
Pamela	9.20 - 10.15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tried to negotiate timing of children's participation or children volunteered
Christine	10.55 - 11.30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All children participated in the same small group learning experiences in turn or children volunteered.

Note. Times shown indicate approximate amount of time teachers were involved in small group learning experiences. Amount of time one group of children were involved in a specific small group time learning experience differed and appeared dependent on the nature of the small group activity and on the individual children involved.

Hannah.

Hannah planned a different range of activities for the children every day. Some small group learning experiences were only available for one day, for children who wished to participate in them. However, if Hannah thought that all the children needed to participate in a particular activity then it was available for a number of days. For example, Hannah and her team planned that one of the classroom assistants would share a big book with small groups of children and because Hannah wanted every child to participate in this activity it was available for two days. As shown in Table 5, small group learning experiences occurred throughout the day in Hannah's reception class. Children who were not involved in an activity with an adult made their own choices about what to do; some referred to the planning board as a reminder of what was available.

The children in Hannah's class became involved in small group learning experiences in one of two ways; either they were directed to a specific small group by an adult or they volunteered. Hannah explained her strategy in the following way:

I do direct that first lot in the morning. People who volunteer go off or otherwise it would be a bit of a scramble. But even saying that, I have gone into reception classes where children have their own seat. Their own place and that's where they sit !

Hannah was unlike Ellen, Pamela and Christine because although she prepared the majority of materials that the children would need in a small group time, she also encouraged the children to think about equipment they may need. Hannah's

view of children was as competent individuals who needed to take responsibility for their learning and she refused to “spoonfeed” them. Hannah said:

We set out as much equipment as possible, the children can access it when they need it. So if they are at a technology type table and they are cutting and sticking and so on, I do not get out things like scissors for them, they go and get their own scissors and bring them back and use them and put them away again. Just things like the pencils and crayons being kept in a separate [container], in a central place rather than what you often see is a ready tub of crayons on each table for the children when they come in.

Hannah said she empowered children by expecting them to assume some of the responsibility for organising equipment because she expected them to think about what they needed, know where to find equipment and be responsible for replacing it after use.

Ellen.

Ellen’s strategy for organising small group learning experiences was, as with much of her practice, shaped by her belief in equity. During the first part of the morning and again after outside play Ellen invited small groups of four children to work with her. She thought that insisting children came against their will meant they may not necessarily have the same quality of experience that resulted when they chose to participate. Ellen related part of a conversation with Nicholas “Nicholas refused two days, he said ‘No, I’ll come tomorrow, I’ll come next year’ and I left him but today he actually agreed to come, so that was the third time I’d asked him.”

Unless a child accepted an invitation to join an adult in a small group learning experience, they would continue to work on self-initiated activities throughout the

morning. Ellen said "They will make their own choices throughout the whole morning, if they don't happen to be invited to join in one of the set tasks."

However, Ellen explained that if it was an activity in which she wanted everyone to participate then children ultimately had to come "By the time I am getting to the end [of a class list,] they don't get quite so much choice."

Ellen's belief in individually appropriate times for the construction of knowledge was evident because through the combination of inviting children to join a small group and the planning routine she empowered the children to make decisions about how to use their time.

Pamela.

Pamela's notion that children had their own agendas of learning, was evident in her approach to organising small group learning experiences. Pamela sometimes negotiated with children about when they joined a small group for example, "Craig, did you want to do some clay work today?" and she tried to avoid asking children who were deeply involved in an activity of their own choice. At the end of mat time some children were asked to join an adult for a small group learning experience and other children volunteered. The remaining children were expected to choose what they would like to do. For example once the assistant had announced the names of children who needed to participate in a particular small group had left the carpet Pamela said "I've got five trays [sorting trays to accompany a bucket of small natural objects] so five people can work with me today. You people can stand up and choose what you need to do." The children decided whether they wished to work with Pamela, if there was space, or elsewhere in the classroom.

Pamela said that her organisational strategies for small group learning experiences empowered the children, primarily because she respected the children's choices about what to do. Pamela tried to sensitively balance her need to ensure that sometimes all children participated in a particular small group, and her perception of the children's need to follow their "own agenda" for learning.

Christine.

Christine's small group learning experiences took place towards the end of the session. All the children became involved in the activity in turn; as one child finished they were often asked to fetch another to come to the table and complete the activity. Christine called some children and others volunteered to join the group. Children who were not involved in the small group with Christine worked on an activity of their own choice or participated in another small group with the classroom assistant.

Christine, like Ellen, referred to the importance of time, however Christine's construction of the concept was different from Ellen's. Christine maintained that the children in her class knew "we will give them time" to complete activities. This belief was reflected in her organisation of the small group learning experience. Christine intended that all the children would participate in her small group in the period between 10.55 and 11.30. Children initially worked in a group of six and then individually with Christine as she scribed for them. During the scribing process the children had to complete a sentence as they stood next to or in front of Christine, who was seated on a small chair.

Aims of Small Group Learning Experiences.

The following examines the aims and content of one small group learning experience in each setting. Particular reference is made to the roles of children and teachers.

Table 6

Aims of Small Group Learning Experiences

Teacher	Number in small group	Teachers' aims
Hannah	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finish the angels.• Work collaboratively.• Return to a piece of work and ask "What else can we do to improve it?"
Ellen	4 Increasing to 5.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Familiarize the children with geographical language from "Red Fox story.• Support the children in choosing equipment.• Draw a route.
Pamela	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduce the small natural object collection.• Raise awareness of small natural objects.• Encourage the development of observation and classification skills.• Encourage appropriate language.
Christine	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finish making a class book.• Focus on a theme familiar to the children.• Assess children's skills.

Note. Aims are defined as the main aims of the activity as stated by the teacher.

Hannah and the angels.

Hannah needed to complete two large angels as part of the reception children's contribution to a 'whole school' hall display. The display was entered in a competition and time was critical. Hannah explained the aims of the activity:

So my very, very first aim was to finish it ! but also I do like children to come back to activities. So that we have done something, they've painted it, they've used the...textured paint on it in a particular type of technique that they were making swirls of colour in different shades of blue. Then they came back to it again the next day and they used glitter paint on it to highlight them. Because I like the idea that you can just, that something is not finished done, gone, we do something else. But you are actually looking, ...particularly at things like artwork its a good way of coming back and saying "What else can we do to improve it?".

Thus Hannah's primary aim was to complete the angels. However, she also wanted to involve the children in a collaborative act that would result in a display over which many children had a sense of ownership. Hannah explained the importance of collaboration:

It's a group thing, that it isn't "I did that that's mine". And sometimes you do have to make things as an individual but we are all helping together to make it something really special and we are all adding our own bits to it and everybody has got something that they can offer that they can do that's making it that little bit special. So it is very much a co-operative thing but so doing something together; a group task. And it's not necessarily that a shared, taking turns one but we are all helping to do this.

Hannah's statement "everybody has got something that they can offer" is significant because it reveals one of Hannah's key beliefs. Namely that it was an important part of her role as a teacher to create opportunities for each child to form and share their opinions. Hannah explained that this was one of the reasons why she planned a large number of small group learning experiences:

I mean that's why we do so much small group work; as far as possible so that they all feel that there is a chance to negotiate and have some input....With small groups even if it's a small discussion group or they are handling some object or passing around pictures, photographs or whatever, they have each got the opportunity to have their say and there is no question of right or wrong...getting it right, the question that the teacher wants answered.

Decision making and the ability to form and share opinions, were key elements of Hannah's perception of empowerment and in her planning and organisation of small group times Hannah believed that she fostered both. Hannah maintained that "Having an opinion is what counts, of adding some little comment of our own."

Hannah thought that this particular small group learning experience was unusual because due to the demands of the art competition she could not allow the children as much input as normal in decorating the adult and child drawn angels. Hannah knew how she wanted the end result to look, but attempted to balance this by encouraging the children to choose which colour feathers they thought looked most beautiful:

Hannah: And what colour feathers do you think we should have on this one?

We've got blues and purples over there. What shall we have?

Ben: Yellow.

Hannah: Yellow, do you think yellow would look nice? Ooh yes what else shall we have then? What else do you think with the yellow?

Ben: Green and red.

Hannah: Kaitlin, what colour feathers shall we have for this one?

Kaitlin: Er, just yellow. [Looks in the bag of feathers.]

Hannah: Just yellow?

Kaitlin: No, pink.

Hannah: Yellow and pink. Ooh yes, that will look rather nice.

Ben: I need orange and red.

Hannah: And orange and red. Right are you going to sort them out then?

Hannah's belief that the role of the adult was to scaffold children's learning is evident in her conversation with Melanie. Melanie was using a small plastic bottle to put glue onto the paper wing and then placing a feather on top. She was busy squeezing the bottle but found little glue came out, Hannah took the bottle squeezed it and found it almost empty:

Hannah: Just a little bit more, squeezey, squeezey. What happens when I do that? Makes them all flap around doesn't it? Why do you think they do that?

Melanie: Because you're squeezing it.

Hannah: What's coming out of it?

[Melanie bends down and looks up the nozzle of the bottle, Hannah continues squeezing.]

Hannah: Why do you think it does that?

Melanie: Glue.

Hannah: Is glue coming out? [Pauses.] No it's making air look like the wind, making it flap. Can you see?

[Melanie bends down again, looks closely at the nozzle of the bottle and nods.]

Hannah: Can you feel it? Put your hand down. [squeezes the bottle over Melanie's hand.] Woop ! [as glue splutters out.]

Hannah's practice of using spontaneous moments to scaffold children's learning was evident in her interaction with Melanie. Hannah challenged Melanie to make inferences and attempt to construct knowledge about what else was coming out of the bottle.

Ellen and the story of "Red Fox".

Ellen's objectives for this small group learning experience focused on the story 'Red Fox' by Hannah Gifford. The primary objective was to familiarize the children with the geographical language used in the story, such as 'The hare on the hill'. Ellen also wanted the children to think about their choice of tools, so she had put a selection of pens, pencils and crayons on the table in preparation for the children. Ellen defined her objectives as "fitting in the sort of learning that we [Ellen and the other reception class teacher] had identified when we planned so; the language and supporting them in making a choice of tools." In addition to these objectives Ellen had stated in her written plans "To draw a route: Can you draw where Red Fox went - his pathway? What did he pass? Where did he go? (Free Drawing)."

The small group was in two parts. First, Ellen and a group of four children sat together on the carpet and sequenced laminated photocopies of the 'Red Fox' illustrations. The children used the book to help them sequence the photocopies and

there was considerable discussion using the geographical language. Second; Ellen invited the children to move to the drawing table by saying "If you would like to come and draw your picture of Red Fox's journey you can come to the drawing table now." All of the children in the group chose to join Ellen at the drawing table. In addition Lois had chosen to repeat the activity and joined the group part of the way through the sequencing. However, Ellen suggested that she use a nearby table or the office to work in because there was not space at the drawing table for five children.

Once seated at the drawing table Ellen drew the children's attention to the range of drawing materials available. When their drawing was complete the children worked individually with Ellen and told her their story while she scribed for them. Ellen explained one of the reasons why she scribed for the children:

It is very powerful when you read it back to them and they can hear exactly what they've said again....That's what's so lovely about when something's written down, that it's there....You can go back to their very words can't you? And remind them of what they've said.

Again Ellen's desire to promote a sense of equity with the children was overwhelmingly evident; she sat next to the children at the same level, asked where to write, if she may put the title and date on the bottom of the page, the children were not hurried and everything they said was accepted and written down. Ellen's opinion that her role was to support the children in their learning was emphasised in the language she used. In conversation with Sarah about her story Ellen asked "Do you want to tell me about your story?", "Tell me what to write", "Anything else? Do you want to look at your picture again?". She sought clarification by asking:

Sarah: That's animal things

Ellen: What sort of animal things?

Sarah: Spider animal things.

Despite having planned learning outcomes for the activity Ellen focused on the learning needs of individual children as opposed to adhering to her pre-determined learning objectives. For example Sarah called her story "Things That Stuff Wash In" and it deviated considerably from the original 'Red Fox' theme as shown in Figure 4.



Where the babies sleep
 in their bed
 That's fireworks
 That's the fox's bed.
 That is windy
 The fox is asleep upstairs
 the baby is frightened downstairs
 the baby goes upstairs.
 The washing machine with
 the baby's clothes and the
 mummy's clothes
 That is a squirrel.
 That's the animal things -
 a spider animal

Things that stuff
 wash in plates and things

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Figure 4. Sarah's illustration and story.

Ellen believed that there were optimum times in a child's learning when certain cognitive developments could be made and that this was just such a time for Sarah. As the small group learning experience progressed it had become increasingly important to Ellen that the story was meaningful to Sarah. Ellen maintained that it would have been "totally inappropriate" to try and remain focused on the story of "Red Fox" when Sarah's story had "moved away" from it. Ellen said "As far as geographical language is concerned, that can come later you know, there is always another time but there may not be another time for this, this is just right for Sarah."

Ellen empowered the children because by listening carefully and accurately scribing their stories she enabled the children to realize considerable power: Ellen wrote what the children told her to write, when and where they chose. Ellen maintained that she fostered in the children a sense of ownership of their work because "they are not doing it for the teacher, they are doing it for themselves."

Pamela and the collection of natural objects.

Pamela's small group learning experience was planned as a response to the children's interest in seeds and seed pods and reflected her powerful belief in a child-initiated curriculum. Pamela explained how the interest began:

They started finding seeds in the playground and in their fruit and wondering where they came from. They didn't realize they'd come from the tree because all the seed pods had come off the wattle tree so they just didn't know, they had no idea how they came to be there. And they really didn't know what they were until somebody found one with a little shoot coming out of it. And there was a lot of excitement, like the moth today, there was a lot of excitement and

lots of children and others were coming to look for them but they couldn't see them for the sand. So we talked about ways that we could find them and in the end they found sand sieves and the magnifying glasses and they came to those discoveries because they knew those things were in the centre and they were finding them and that has been going on all week. Finding things.

Pamela's learning objectives were to raise the children's awareness of small natural objects by introducing a new collection and fostering observation and classification skills. In addition to these objectives Pamela maintained that she wanted the children to:

Take responsibility for their own way of doing something, there is no right or wrong way of sorting things and classifying them and...to get that language going and just exposing them to those things, because often they walk around and they don't notice the little things in nature, they see other things, and people don't point those patterns and beautiful things out to them.

The collection included many tiny natural objects like polished stones, nuts, shells, beans, seeds and seed pods. Pamela and her assistant had given considerable thought as to how to present the collection to the children. Pamela explained their reasoning:

On Friday we got them out and were playing with them, and we tossed and turned about whether to separate them before we presented them to the children. How we were going to present them was a dilemma. We thought should we split them up into seed pods and beans and shells and stones or should we mix them all up and see what they would do? And in the end, because it was their first time with them, we decided that the most fun way was to put them all into a big pile and see what they did with them.

Their ultimate decision was shaped by a perception of children as explorers and in the participatory and investigatory nature of 'real learning'. The bucket was placed on a table with small trays that Pamela thought may encourage the children to classify objects.

Five children chose to join Pamela at the table and began by enthusiastically examining the contents of the bucket. They made mini-collections based on favourites, types and families, for example "the shell family". Pamela observed that the children classified the objects in many ways:

They all did them in different ways and some of them even changed them, I think Justine sorted them into groups of things that were the same and then she changed it to groups of things she liked but she was very involved in observing things and examining them.

Pamela collaborated with the children in their exploration of the collection by sitting with them at the table sharing in the experience and sometimes wondering aloud with the children "If we planted it do you think that it would grow?" Pamela empowered the children because she listened to their descriptions, valued their opinions, examined detail they thought significant and wondered aloud with them.

Christine and the book about the beach.

The small group learning experience began when Christine chose six children to join her at a table, and handed each a sheet of blue bubble printing which were to become the pages of a book. The children had completed the bubble printing on a previous day and Christine had written "At the beach I like..." on the top of each sheet. Christine explained her objectives to the children: First, she wanted them to draw what they liked doing at the beach using the pens and crayons she had placed

on the table. Second, decide how they would like to complete the sentence “At the beach I like...” and she would write down what they said on the top of their picture.

As the children finished their drawings they joined a small queue and handed their work to Christine who scribed their ending to the sentence and added the finished work to the pile on her lap. Christine encouraged children to think about their sentence by saying “ You’ve got to tell me a sentence” and her conversation with Jason was typical of her approach:

[Jasons stands next to Christine as she holds his work on her lap.]

Christine: Jason beautiful. At the beach I like?

Jason: Um. I went, I went to swim in the sea.

Christine: No, listen to me [points at each word.] At the beach I like. What do you like doing at the beach? [Pauses] What do you like doing at the beach?

Jason: I like to swim.

Christine: Good one that finishes it off. I like to [Looks at Jason.]

Jason: Swim.

Christine: Swim. Good boy . Because you know how to swim because you’ve been to swimming lessons. We just have to finish it off.

Jason: Under the water.

Christine: Well done. [Reads] I like to swim. Do you want me to put under the water?

Jason: [Nods.]

Christine: Ok. I like to swim. Good one. Under the water. That’s good; under. You can get under the water.

Jason: [Smiling, nods.]

Christine: You read with me. [Points at the words.] At the beach I like to swim.

[Pauses and looks at Jason].

Jason: Under the water.

Christine: Well done. I can see you under the water. Good one.

Christine had a number of objectives for this small group learning experience which focused on the completion of the 'group book'. She explained the reasons for involving all the children in making a book:

Something familiar, I wanted them to give me, give me a sentence for a group book so that we could do a shared reading with their familiar experience. So that they can see that what they can tell me can be written down as a sentence or a story that is related to them, to see if they have developed and learnt any skills or knowledge that we have been talking about....And I can see different levels here drawing....So it's a good model to see what stage they are at; their language etc. Their fine muscle and their drawing skills.

Christine wanted the children to take the book home and to look at it with their parents during arrival time. In addition, she explained how the book would be shared with the whole class "They share their story with us and I point to the word and they re-tell what they have done to everyone."

Christine emphasized that she wanted the sentence that she had asked the children to complete to be:

easy for them to remember, for a first time book, easy for them to remember, even looking back at their picture, I mean they don't know what the writing [says] but looking back at the picture they have got a grip on what the words

might say. I mean they don't have to tell me word perfect, it's just a re-tell of their picture.

Key elements of Christine's role as the teacher were to provide children with familiar themes to work on and assess their developmental levels; both were reflected in the small group learning experience. Christine's image of children as needing familiar experiences during this first term was evident in her choice of theme. The theme of the beach and ocean had been specifically chosen because, like 'Bananas in Pyjamas', Christine thought that it was familiar to the children. Christine explained that one of the reasons for choosing this particular activity was to "Just draw...from their experiences...often you get if you've got a few [children], they'll say the same things because...they are having trouble but this lot had wonderful ideas of what they'd like to do. Because it is very familiar." In practice Christine facilitated empowerment by providing familiar topics such as "At the beach I like...".

Christine's belief in the importance of assessing children's developmental levels was evident in her discussion with Jason. Jason we remember, had found it hard to find an appropriate place to stand or sit in the 'Bananas in Pyjamas' mat session earlier in the morning. When talking to Jason Christine emphasized the concept of being under the water in order to clarify the concept of under for him and to assess the extent of his knowledge. Christine maintained that this small group learning experience enabled her to "see if they have developed and learnt any skills or knowledge that we have been talking about to see if they can, and I can see different levels here."

Throughout the small group learning experience Christine remained focused on her planned learning outcomes, for example she said to Jason "We just have to

finish it off.” In contrast to Ellen who maintained that “there is always another time” for planned learning outcomes and put her belief into practice when she scribed Sarah’s story about “Things That Stuff Wash In”. Ellen maintained that it was more important to meet Sarah’s needs “as they arise” than adhere to her planned learning outcomes. Christine’s identified learning outcomes defined not only the content but also the length of the children’s responses. Christine said:

I point to words and tell them I want a sentence not a story, a story can go on so there is a difference between a word, a sentence and a story. A story has parts; a sentence is one idea.

In conclusion it is evident that small group learning experiences, like whole group times, differed as teachers’ beliefs shaped their practice.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Curriculum documents assert that teachers in early childhood settings should empower children (Department of Education and Children's Services, South Australia, 1996; Ministry of Education of New Zealand, 1993). However, the literature lacks clarity and does not recommend how teachers should translate statements about empowerment into practice. What are teachers expected to do? What does empowerment look like when teachers claim to do it? And does empowerment make a difference? The aim of this study was to investigate early childhood teachers' knowledge, understanding and practice of empowering young children as learners. Findings suggest that empowerment is a complex and multifaceted concept, and that teachers constructed and enacted personal meanings through a diverse range of strategies.

Discussion of the findings is in three sections: First, there is an examination of empowerment as a complex and multifaceted concept. Second, there is a reflection of the link between teachers' knowledge and practice; and third, there is a consideration of the limitations and recommendations of the study, followed by a concluding statement.

Empowerment: A Complex and Multifaceted Concept

The findings of this study suggest that teachers' articulate and enact complex, multifaceted personal definitions of empowerment rather than a commonly-shared construct. This finding is discussed and a range of key issues are highlighted.

Teachers' Constructions of Meaning About Empowerment

Hannah, Ellen, Pamela and Christine held diverse knowledge and had formed unique understandings of empowerment. Each teacher fused together elements such as children's self-worth; children's ability to form opinions; and the skills necessary for collaboration, in order to create a personal definition of empowerment that they translated into practice. Although similar elements were evident in each teachers' discourse they did not attach identical meanings to elements and therefore superficial comparisons between the teachers' constructions of empowerment are misleading.

Similarly, diverse constructions of empowerment are evident in early childhood literature (MacNaughton & Williams, 1998; Stone, 1995) but often this diversity is unacknowledged by researchers. Discussions of empowerment appear to be predicated on a basic assumption that the concept means one thing, and that it means the same thing to everyone. Although reference is made to empowerment, authors rarely furnish the reader with an explicit definition, preferring instead to use 'empowerment' in a global way that lacks detail. (Derman-Sparkes, 1993; Dockett, 1997; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1993). Possibly, explanations of the concept are rare because early childhood professionals assume that definitions of

empowerment have a shared meaning. However, the findings of the current study suggest this is not the case and that definitions of empowerment are constructed by the teachers and reflect their knowledge, beliefs, experience and context.

'Unidimensional' and 'Multidimensional' Learning Environments

At the beginning of the study, Rosenholtz and Simpsons' model of 'unidimensional' and 'multidimensional' classrooms (cited in Katz, 1993, p. 18), was considered a useful research tool to analyse the four learning environments. Rosenholtz and Simpsons' model was developed to reflect the range of children's behaviour that teachers' considered important within the classroom (Katz, 1993, p. 18) and not specifically tailored to analyse empowerment. Findings show that it is possible to deduce from the teachers' discourse that they considered their classrooms to be of the multidimensional type. However, although the model developed by Rosenholtz and Simpson provided a superficial view of the learning environments, it did not adequately reflect the complexity of the teachers' knowledge. In addition, the model could not capture the inherent diversity of individual constructions of empowerment. In summary, although useful as a tool for superficial analysis, this study did not find that Rosenholtz and Simpsons' unidimensional and multidimensional model was an appropriate research tool to analyse the teachers' knowledge and practice of empowerment.

Teachers' Knowledge and Understanding of Empowerment and Constructivist Theory

In order to gain a deeper understanding of how teachers' knowledge shapes their practice, it is suggested that constructivist theories of learning can illuminate the teachers' discourse of empowerment. This section will align Hannah, Ellen, Pamela and Christine's knowledge of empowering children as learners with three constructivist theories. The following analysis will use Richardson's (1997, p. 3-12) and Vadeboncoeur's (1997, p. 22-35) definitions of Piagetian, sociocultural and emancipatory constructivism.

Christine: Piagetian Constructivism

Christine's knowledge of empowerment appears to be influenced by Piagetian constructivist epistemology. This claim is supported by a number of similarities between Christine's pedagogical approach and the defining characteristics of Piagetian constructivism. First, the goal of Piagetian constructivism is individual cognitive development, the child is commonly perceived as a solitary scientist using logical tools to construct knowledge. The role of the teacher is to facilitate the child's progression through hierarchical levels of development towards the construction of decontextualized knowledge. Richardson (1997, p. 5) maintains that teachers' may facilitate children's progression through developmental levels through the structuring of the learning environment to facilitate children's reorganisation of their cognitive maps. In part this involves the use of "certain forms of questioning that dig deeply into students' beliefs, turn the

beliefs into hypotheses, and provide a non-threatening atmosphere in which those beliefs can be examined.” (Richardson, 1997, p. 5).

Christine’s practice reflects the Piagetian goals as she refers explicitly to trying to lead the children to a “finer” or “higher level”. Her questioning of Ben as he experimented with the rolling properties of the wooden blocks, is one example of Christine’s use of questioning aimed at enabling Ben to construct knowledge that he could apply and generalize.

Richardson (1997, p. 7) refers to teaching practice that is based on a Piagetian constructivist epistemology as one where the “student takes the teacher’s word that the student should construct and own knowledge while the teacher is still really in control”. In practice Christine created this illusion of shared power with children. For example, during the “At the beach I like...” small group learning experience Christine remained firmly in control by insisting that the children draw then construct a sentence about what they liked to do at the beach. Christine’s conversation with Jason and her refusal to scribe his initial statement of “I went to swim in the sea” reflected her control over Jason’s construction of knowledge in relation to this episode. Jason assumed that he could adapt the activity to pursue his own interests but Christine remained focused on her desired learning outcomes. The result was that Jason was not empowered to initiate learning but needed to comply with Christine’s wishes.

Vadeboncoeur (1997, p. 26) states that “By using the view of development as a process that occurs according to the ‘nature’ of the ‘individual’ child, the liberatory power of pedagogical approaches derived from Piagetian constructivism is weak; and may even be considered exclusionary”. Vadeboncoeur (1997, p. 26) referred to the emphasis on the individual in Piagetian constructivism that may

reinforce inequalities within the classroom. In Christine's classroom the goal of individual cognition excluded a redress of the balance of power between children, or between children and the teacher, because little importance was attached to the role of the sociocultural context in learning. Christine aimed to meet the needs of each child by leading them to progressively higher developmental levels. Her translation of Piaget's epistemology focused on individual cognition, not on the effect of sociocultural context on the child or the child's potential to affect the broader socio-historical context of a democratic society.

Hannah and Pamela: Sociocultural Constructivism.

The practices of Hannah and Pamela appear to be linked to Vygotskian based sociocultural epistemology. However, their practices are informed by additional factors and experiences. For example, Hannah's school stresses the importance of the development of children's personal and social skills, and Pamela has a deep interest in the approach to early childhood education in Reggio Emilia. These are just two of many influences that may shape Hannah and Pamelas' practice.

A common link between Hannah and Pamela's practice and sociocultural constructivist epistemology is their perception of children embedded in a context that influences the acquisition of knowledge. Hannah and Pamela used language as a tool to enable children to move knowledge from the intermental plain to the intramental plain and thus internalize it. For example, Hannah stated that during whole group planning time she was "push[ing]" and "bat[ing]" the responsibility for the construction of knowledge back to the children. She made specific reference to "scaffolding" children's learning and used semiotic tools such as language,

written initial sounds and drawings to help the children “hook into” knowledge about the day ahead. Elliot (1995, p. 25) paraphrased Day, French and Hall to define scaffolding as “Aim[ing] to minimise the cognitive demands imposed by new tasks by guiding, modeling and cueing higher order processes involved in thinking and problem solving.” These strategies are evident in Pamela’s practice. For example, Pamela believed that real learning was interactive and participatory and said “They [the children] have to participate in learning.” During the whole group discussion Pamela modeled questions and responses for the children to help them internalize knowledge from a social setting. Evidence shows that Hannah and Pamela focused on assisting the children to move knowledge from the intermental plain to the intramental plain, which is a practice grounded in sociocultural constructivist epistemology.

Vadeboncoeur (1997, p. 28) points out that sociocultural constructivism assumes that the context of the classroom is beneficial, and therefore children are not at liberty to question any inequalities that may exist. Consequently, inequalities are unlikely to be revealed or redressed if they are revealed. Thus inequalities may be perpetuated and the liberatory power of pedagogic practice derived from this epistemology is not realised. Hannah and Pamela empower the children in their classrooms by “Encouraging children to make decisions-**the power to choose**; by building children’s autonomy-**the power to try**; and by fostering their competence-**the power to do** (author’s emphasis)” (Hendrick, 1992, p. 51) all within the established culture of the classroom. In Hannah’s classroom in particular, opportunities for children to question the equity of the systems and structures that form the cultural framework were not so evident. A key element of Hannah’s understanding of empowerment was the individuality of children. Her aim of

“Celebrating whatever makes an individual an individual” is reminiscent of Piagetian constructivist epistemology, where the theoretical focus on the individual can sometimes conceal gendered perspectives. As Vadeboncoeur (1997) explained:

While Piagetian constructivists may desire to develop liberatory pedagogical approaches, the cultural assumptions that provide the foundation for developmental and child-centred pedagogy, in particular naturalism and individualism, serve to reproduce inequity and maintain the status quo by concealing the influence of classroom culture and the broader social context in the production of stereotypical differences. (p. 25-26)

Thus the potential for liberatory power inherent in Hannah’s essentially sociocultural constructivist based practice may not be realised.

Pamela made specific reference to empowering children in her program philosophy. She stated that she wanted children “to believe in themselves” and her definition of empowerment appeared to have a transformative element, common to liberatory power, whereby children have some influence on their environment. The children in Pamela’s class influenced their learning environment in two ways; indirectly through the child-initiated topics of learning, and directly, during the day as they worked in the classroom. Pamela made specific reference to children needing to have “an interaction” with their learning environment, suggesting that she considered the learning environment to be a zone of proximal development for children. Consequently she organised an environment that responded to the children in a variety of ways. For example, equipment was stored to facilitate easy access and exploration; the curriculum emerged from their ideas, or was negotiated with them; and their meaningful experiences were respected, valued and integrated into the fabric of classroom life through opportunities to share them with others.

Ellen: Emancipatory Constructivism.

The theoretical or epistemological base from which Ellen's practice appears to be derived is that of emancipatory constructivism where the individual is perceived as situated within the broad sociohistorical context and the notion of liberatory power is a central tenet (Vadeboncoeur 1997, p. 29). Literature (Derman-Sparkes, 1994; MacNaughton & Williams, 1998; Vadeboncoeur, 1997) is remarkably consistent in describing an emancipatory approach to education.

Ellen's efforts "to be equal in terms of power" reflect the social justice component of emancipatory constructivist epistemology which commits individuals to work towards equality. In practice, Ellen strives to redistribute power within the classroom in order to achieve an equitable balance between adults and children. For example, Ellen sits at the same physical level as the children; invites them to join her for small group learning experiences, and respects their choice to refuse; and readily supports children's learning, irrespective of whether it corresponds with planned learning outcomes. Ellen aimed to ensure all children had equal opportunities to participate in quality learning experiences. For example, during whole group time she reminded children about how to sit so that everyone could share in the experience.

Vadeboncoeur (1997, p. 30) stated that teachers whose practice is derived from an emancipatory constructivist epistemology acknowledge and critically reflect on their own biases, and they work with children to develop an inclusive pedagogy. Findings show that Ellen had developed particularly sophisticated skills of critical reflection. For example, when Ellen reflected on her desire to include the children in sharing responsibility at fruit time by helping themselves, she examined

her present practice from the perspective of her aim for a more equal distribution of power and found her practice wanting. Ellen was considering how to refine her practice in order to enact “emancipatory constructions of knowledge”(Vadeboncoeur, 1997, p. 30).

In summary, the knowledge and understanding that Hannah, Ellen, Pamela and Christine possessed about empowering young children as learners can be framed within current constructivist research literature (Vadeboncoeur, 1997). The aim of this analysis was to illuminate the teachers' knowledge and practices in broad terms and not to impose a literary definition on their unique and personal constructions of meaning.

Teachers' Articulation of Meaning

It is suggested that a relationship exists between the teachers' critical reflection and the strategies they used to empower children as learners. The complexity of empowerment was evident when the teachers were asked how they would define the phenomenon. Hannah, Ellen, Pamela and Christine gave different definitions and spoke with varying degrees of ease or difficulty. For example, Christine found it hard to articulate her meaning of the term empowerment. When Pamela was asked to share her meaning of the term, she talked about its value and stated that “It is the most important thing we can do. I think that it has to be the basis of your philosophy”. It is suggested here that two key factors affected the teachers' articulation of their knowledge and understanding: First, empowerment is a complex concept; and second, teachers may not previously have needed to articulate their knowledge of it to others. Rokeach (cited in Pajares 1992, p. 314)

pointed out that individuals were often reluctant, or found it difficult, to share their beliefs with others. Asking the teachers to share their definition of empowerment meant that they may have needed to articulate strands of tacit knowledge. Fenstermacher (1994, p. 46) referred to the process of asking teachers to speak about unconscious knowledge and understandings as “‘surfacing’ tacit understandings to a level of awareness that permits reflective or deliberate consideration.”. At the end of the study Pamela commented that the research process “made me feel very aware of what I am doing” which suggested her tacit knowledge of empowerment had become knowledge that could be reflected upon and analysed.

Talking with peers enables teachers to critically reflect on their knowledge, understandings and practice. The teachers’ experiences of verbalising their pedagogic knowledge varied. Hannah talked informally with colleagues and on a daily basis with members of the early years team in her capacity as ‘team leader’. She had created opportunities to reflect on her practice and its theoretical underpinnings through study for a higher degree. Ellen was articulate and spoke with clarity and confidence about “When you are trying to be equal in terms of power”. It is likely that Ellen’s experiences of listening to other teachers and speaking about her knowledge and understandings as deputy-head of her school and as an Early Years Advisor, had helped her to develop and refine her skills of critical reflection. Pamela had created opportunities to talk and reflect through monthly meetings with early childhood professionals who shared her interest in the approach to teaching young children in Reggio Emilia, and through attendance at conferences. By contrast, Christine had little contact with other early childhood professionals.

Power as a fluid concept

Fine grain analysis of the teacher interviews and video tapes indicate that power relationships are dynamic and changing. Power shifts between the teacher and children in response to changing contexts. As a context changes the meaning that a teacher has attached to a particular element of empowerment alters to correspond with the new context. For example, the children in Hannah's class were encouraged to assume the power to make decisions about what to do, as children made their decisions and acted on them, a balance of power emerged. However, at certain times the balance of power between the child and the teacher shifted because the child was expected to comply with the teacher. Hannah acknowledged the shift in power from children to adults when she talked about "the crunch".

In Christine's classroom power appears to shift from the children to the teacher when Christine "gives" an individual time to complete an activity. However, closer analysis indicates that although the children make decisions about what to do, Christine retains control of the agenda. The apparent decision-making of the children remains controlled by the teacher and could be seen as pseudoempowerment.

In summary, it is suggested that several factors shape the complex and multifaceted constructions of meaning about empowerment. Teachers constructed personal knowledge and understandings about empowerment. Some knowledge appeared to be tacit knowledge which teachers sometimes found difficult to articulate. In early childhood literature the concept of empowerment is clouded as writers and theorists articulate differing views. Rosenholtz and Simpsons' model of unidimensional and multidimensional classrooms (cited in Katz, 1993, p. 18) was

an inappropriate research tool because it was not designed to reflect the complexities of empowerment. In addition, it is hard to categorize the power relationships between teachers and children because they are dynamic and shifting.

Links between knowledge and practice.

The teachers' constructions of meaning about empowerment and their practice are closely entwined and as a consequence, they are hard to separate for the purpose of discussion. Vadeboncoeur (1997, p. 15) stated "An unfortunate consequence of multiple interpretations and variable approaches is that the connections between the theory and the knowledge and the way it is put into practice become blurred." The following section will consider the connection between knowledge and practice

Spodek, along with Hatch and Freeman (cited in Spidell-Rusher, McGrevin & Lambiotte, 1992, p. 279) referred to "implicit theories" when referring specifically to the beliefs teachers have about children that they translate into practice. Hannah, Ellen, Pamela and Christine translated their known and tacit constructions of meaning about empowerment into practice. For example, Hannah often involved the children in small group learning experiences because she believed they needed to learn how to form and share opinions. Ellen said that she wanted the children "to develop as self-initiating learners" and structured daily routines to include a planning time to ensure children had ample opportunity to develop the skills necessary to make and act on decisions. Pamela believed that it was important for children to feel part of a group and included a 'self-registration' routine during arrival time. Christine maintained that children needed familiar experiences to help them manage the home-school transition and consequently

planned topic work around a theme she considered familiar to the children. Fine grain analysis revealed that each teacher used an eclectic mix of strategies to enact their unique, multifaceted meaning of empowerment.

Teachers' strategies for empowering children were consistent with their construction of meaning about empowerment. It is suggested that one reason for this may be the peculiar, composite nature of empowerment. In the absence of a shared definition, teachers constructed meanings of empowerment within their sociocultural contexts which were easily integrated into their existing pedagogic knowledge. As a result, their constructions of meaning could be enacted with minimal disruption to existing practices. This supposition is supported by literature discussing the nature of teachers' beliefs. Beliefs are remarkably resilient to change. Munby (cited in Pajares, 1992, p. 317) found that beliefs can outweigh the most convincing information to the contrary particularly if they are what Peterman calls "core beliefs" and therefore subject to considerable emotional investment (cited in Pajares, 1992, p. 318). It is unlikely that Hannah, Ellen, Pamela and Christine would independently construct meanings of empowerment that radically challenged their existing knowledge and necessitated fundamental changes in their practice.

In the United States research has highlighted factors that may inhibit teachers enactment of their knowledge. These include state and parental pressure to emphasise a more academic approach to teaching young children (Spidell-Rusher, McGrevin & Lambiotte, 1992; Stipek & Byler, 1997) and standardized testing (Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, Thomasson, Mosley & Fleege, 1993). Hannah, Ellen and Christine did not refer to these factors. However, Pamela maintained that she experienced parental pressure to teach a more formal academic curriculum as

opposed to the child-initiated approach that characterizes her current practice. In summary, the teachers enacted their various constructions of meaning about empowerment through a range of strategies consistent with their knowledge and understanding which was influenced by the sociocultural context.

Limitations, recommendations and conclusion

The discussion has addressed the relationship between the findings and the research questions. The following will consider the limitations of the study and make recommendations for future research and practice.

Limitations

The study was limited in three key ways: Size, selection of participants and the absence of consultation with children. The small sample size makes it impossible to generalise the findings of the study. In addition, it is suggested that had the sample size been greater Rosenholtz and Simpsons' model of 'unidimensional and 'multidimensional classrooms (cited in Katz, 1993, p. 18), may have been more appropriate as a research tool for defining broad categories. Participant teacher selection followed a non-purposive sampling procedure. The researcher had worked in Hannah and Ellen's schools for a limited amount of time and was familiar with the broader sociocultural context of the schools. In contrast Pamela and Christine's schools were selected on the basis of recommendations from two early childhood professionals. Future studies of a similar nature could be improved by employing a random sampling procedure whilst continuing to ensure all participants claimed to have children's empowerment as one of their aims. Finally, the study did not consider the views and opinions of children in any of the classrooms visited. The comments, opinions and explanations of young children

about their learning environments would add a rich dimension to any future study on the empowerment of children as learners.

Recommendations

Recommendations focus on refining constructions of meaning about empowerment whilst maintaining the richness and inherent diversity of the construct. The four teachers who participated in this study had unique constructions of meaning about empowerment, which had evolved within their specific sociocultural contexts. They possessed considerable stores of tacit knowledge which had profound and direct influences on their practice and unless articulated would remain unacknowledged and unavailable to others. The recommendations of this study focus on creating opportunities for teachers to become involved in three linked processes, these are: First, to have opportunities to articulate their knowledge; second, to critically reflect on their knowledge; third, to collaborate with other early childhood professionals during the processes of articulation and critical reflection.

Teachers need opportunities to articulate their knowledge and understandings of what it means to empower young children as learners. Talking is one means of becoming consciously aware of tacit knowledge. Critical reflection may enlighten teachers about the depth of their own knowledge of empowerment, and enable them to reassess their constructions of meaning in the light of others' views. In addition to regular staff meetings and whole school professional development days, the opportunities available to Hannah, Ellen, Pamela and Christine for critical reflection varied and depended in the most part on individual teacher initiative.

As perceptions of the construction of knowledge shift to accommodate the notion of the child situated within the greater sociohistorical as well as socio-institutional context, the concept of empowerment becomes increasingly important. Teachers' input into developing a shared construction of empowerment is valuable for two reasons: First, because their knowledge is contextual and therefore highly relevant; and second, because along with parents they are at the forefront of fostering a sense of empowerment in young children. Rodd (1994, p. 131) stated that "Practitioners have a vital role to play in initiating and implementing change in any society where informed action is based on critical enquiry and reflective judgement."

The complex nature of empowerment makes critical reflection by early childhood professionals important as a means of clarification. Empowerment is a multifaceted phenomenon and should be acknowledged as such, attempts to oversimplify it will confound meanings and inhibit the search for a meaningful, shared understanding of what it means to empower children as learners. Richardson (1997) supports this suggestion and comments that researchers need to share discussions relating to the construction of knowledge with teachers:

We have a tendency to attempt to work out the complexities of our theories in the hallowed halls of academia and academic conferences. And then, quite cavalierly, we turn it over to the practitioners to work out the practices. 'Here's a neat idea' we say. (p. 12)

It is suggested that teachers' constructions of meaning about empowerment need to be integrated with those of researchers, otherwise rich contextual information will be lost and a literary understanding of empowerment will evolve that has little meaning for early childhood teachers. Opportunities need to be created to enable all

those involved in the field of early childhood education: Teachers, parents, teacher assistants, policy makers and researchers to meet and share their knowledge and experiences. Specifically this will mean involvement in workshops and seminars designed to share and forge understandings of empowerment in a climate of mutual regard. The dissemination of information may raise all early childhood professionals' awareness of empowerment and enrich pedagogic knowledge. It is suggested that greater awareness and knowledge of empowerment will aid teachers in their efforts to empower young children in their learning environments.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study examined four early childhood teachers' knowledge and understandings about empowering children as learners. It analysed how the teachers enacted their constructions of meaning about empowerment in their unique sociocultural settings. This study does not support claims that suggest empowerment is a straightforward concept, and instead proposes that it is a complex and multifaceted construct which is influenced by a range of factors. Further research is necessary in order to establish shared meanings about empowerment which may enable teachers to reflect on their practices in diverse socio-institutional contexts.

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APPENDIX 1

Interview Guide for Teacher Interviews.

- 1) Why do you organise the arrival time in this way?
- 2) Can you tell me what the children are doing?
- 3) I noticed that you asked the children.... Can you explain why you did this?
- 4) What were your objectives for the activity?
- 5) I noticed that you....Why did you choose to introduce these concepts in this way?
- 6) How do you decide which topic to use?
- 7) Can you tell me why you have organised the room the way you have?
- 8) How would you describe your approach to teaching young children?
- 9) I understand that you consider it important for teachers to empower young children. Could you explain to me what you understand by this? PP

Probing questions to elicit more detailed information:

Can you explain that to me?

Can you tell me a little more about this?