

The Engagement of Children with Learning Difficulties within Primary Classroom Interactions

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to further an understanding of the engagement of children with learning difficulties in curricular activities, by focusing on classroom interactions within mainstream primary schools.

In the current educational climate, there is a shift towards increasing the participation of children with special needs, alongside recent governmental guidance supporting the implementation of their right to participate. Consequently, there are a growing number of studies offering recognition of children's participation and their potential contribution. They focus on participation being determined by the teacher whereas this research portrays the view of the child in determining their own participation.

The research was an exploratory, in-depth study of seven children within two contrasting school settings. The research process entailed the building of a knowledge base upon which to interpret classroom interactions. It drew upon multiple sources and methods of data collection, to identify emerging factors and categories pertaining to children's engagement.

The emerging factors fell into three distinct categories; resource engagement, focus of engagement and engagement in the task agenda. Resource engagement is concerned with children's utilisation of social and physical resources whilst focus of engagement considered the subject of children's attention. Lastly, engagement in the task agenda covered the response of the child to the activities set by the teacher.

Relevant theories were used to help further an understanding of the identified categories of children's engagement, and focused in particular on three theoretical tenets pertaining to active, subjective and interactive processes. When these three processes were used constitutively, two conclusive themes emerged. Firstly, that engagement is a demonstration of children's autonomy and self-governance and secondly, that engagement is a process by which children become more knowledgeable about their classroom environment and develop autonomous responses to external requirements.

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ABBREVIATIONS

DES	Department of Education and Science
DFEE	Department of Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
EBD	Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspectorate
ICT	Information Computer Technology
IEP	Individual Education Plan
KS	Key Stage
LD	Learning Difficulties
MLD	Moderate Learning Difficulties
NZ	New Zealand
PE	Physical Education
PHSE	Personal Health and Social Education
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
QUEST	The Total Quality and Special Educational Needs Project
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SN	Special Needs
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The researcher came to the study as a primary school teacher with five years experience of working in mainstream schools with children who have SEN. During that time, it was a concern that the system, put in place to help children who have difficulties in learning, focused on what they were not achieving, rather than on their potential to achieve.

Following on from primary school teaching, the researcher embarked upon a Masters Degree to study the practice and principles of SEN. The critical study presented an opportunity to research the effects of SEN labels on teacher expectations. It sought to establish whether labels, used to categorise children's needs, influenced teachers' perceptions and expectations. During structured interviews therein, teachers were asked to comment on various fictitious scenarios, each providing limited details about a child who had been assigned a label of SEN. It was found that some teachers felt able to comment on the child's academic and social abilities, with the information provided and furthermore, displayed bias by their responses to the nature of the labels in use to describe the child. The findings offered grounds for concern that such labels might affect children's educational experiences.

The Masters degree raised a number of issues and left many questions unanswered. In particular, it led the researcher to question how to access children's capabilities and address their potential within the current system. More specifically, it generated a desire to study the experiences of children with SEN in the classroom environment, giving rise to the current study of children's engagement.

1.2 Underlying Principles and Context

The underlying principles of the research were based on two interrelated assumptions. Firstly, that all children are active directors and participants in their own learning experiences, rather than passive recipients of imparted knowledge and information. Secondly, and as a consequence, it was assumed that by watching and listening to children as they engaged in daily classroom activities and interacted within the mainstream primary school context, there was much that could be learned about their engagement, without the need for interventionist approaches.

1.3 The Relevance of the Study

The study addressed aspects of children's engagement that have not been fully investigated through empirical studies. Rather than focusing on children's participation, as determined and encouraged by the teacher, the research considers the child's standpoint through their engagement in curricular activities.

1.4 Nature of the Research

Guided by the underlying principles, the study was carried out within the context of mainstream primary schools with several children, who had been labelled as having learning difficulties. It used methods that enabled the researcher to attend to events as they occurred within the classroom and to listen in on the children's interactions during their engagement in curricular activities. Whilst the study sought to understand classroom observations and interactions, it also sought to minimise interruptions within the settings, so as not to disturb the events as they unfolded. It was essential that the methods used were flexible enough to enable the researcher to be responsive to the participants and adopt a mercurial approach to the constantly changing circumstances within the field. By allowing the study sufficient time to develop, events reoccurred and therefore patterns were seen to emerge. Many perspectives were sought to elaborate upon the social events unfolding in the classroom.

1.5 The Aim of the Study

The study aims to further an understanding of children's engagement in curricular activities. The aim was addressed using emergent research questions, which defined the focus of the study at sequential (yet iterative) stages of the research process. The questions addressed by the study were as follows:

1. How do children with learning difficulties interact with curricular activities?
2. What factors appear salient in children's interactions?
3. How can emergent factors be categorised?
4. How can the emergent categories contribute to an understanding of how children with learning difficulties engage in curricular activities?

These research questions are elaborated upon within the methodology chapter and answered at various points throughout this thesis.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis was prepared as a report to build a framework into which the elements of the study could be incorporated. Chapter two begins by drawing upon relevant literature in

order to situate the study alongside related policy and within a conceptual, empirical and theoretical context. A dialectical approach was taken to address this policy in order to consider the multiple influential factors on the development of children's participation. Conceptual terms within the related policies were compared and contrasted and therefore the impetus was provided to seek clarity and define the terms of the study. A review of the empirical context identified the themes addressed by previous studies enabling the researcher to situate the study amongst them. Following on, the theoretical context investigated supporting theories for children's engagement.

Chapter three reports on the methodology, reiterating the research aims, strategy, design and questions. Following on an overview is provided and the methods of data collection and analysis critiqued. This chapter ends by summarising the categories of engagement that emerged from the analysis, which are elaborated upon in the subsequent chapter. Chapter five uses the theoretical tenets, outlined in chapter two, as a framework on which to base a discussion of the findings contributing to an overall understanding of children's engagement.

The final chapter of this thesis demonstrates how the current study goes some way to fill gaps in previous research and highlights implications developed from the findings that will be further addressed as part of the subsequent fellowship that the researcher has been awarded.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to situate the current study of children's engagement within a policy, conceptual, research and theoretical context. It thereby contains four sections offering separate consideration of each context.

It *firstly* reviews the policy context, seeking to clarify the current educational climate in which engagement is being investigated. The term participation is used at this stage because it is the most prevalent term used within the field. The section traces the development of children's participation with reference to SEN, thus enabling multiple and transactional influences upon the field to be identified. The *second* section addresses the range of concepts commonly applied within the field of children's participation. The terms are often used interchangeably yet are defined differently. The section seeks to clarify them by considering their semantic similarities and differences, before defining and comparing the concept of engagement. The *third* section reviews research developments within the field of children's participation through which a rationale is being collated. It delineates the themes being addressed in research and considers how the current study can contribute to the field. The *final* section addresses a theoretical context for children's engagement, drawing on relevant theories and developments within educational psychology. It distinguishes the tenets in support of engagement on which a theoretical framework is built.

2.2 The Current Policy Context: A historical perspective

Embedded within the legislative and non-statutory advice of the last three decades are paradigm shifts, relating to two key areas of interest to the current study, children's participation and SEN.

The decision to address policy from a historical perspective is informed and influenced by the work of three developmental theorists. Each take a dialectical approach, focusing on the relationship between separate processes and considering the tensions that result when contradictory phenomenon are unified (Mahn, 1999).

The first theorist Bronfenbrenner (1977) proposes an ecological model of development, centred around three propositions. Firstly that development arises through transactions between an individual and his/her environment, secondly the immediate environment can be differentiated from wider environmental levels and thirdly interrelationships between the different levels are influential. Bronfenbrenner's model supports a wide-scale reflection

on the current situation and recognition of the existence (and interplay) of roles, interrelationships, social structures and ideology.

The second theorist, Kuhn (1975) raises significant philosophical questions about the way knowledge is integrated into communities of practice, proposing that shared professional identity and ‘tacit knowledge’ provides a shared basis for evaluations and judgements of ‘new’ information. He referred to what was shared as a *paradigm*, and argued that *paradigm shifts* occur when epistemic communities accept different ways of thinking. Kuhn’s theory supports reflection on developments in context and recognises shifts to be incremental.

Thirdly Sameroff and Chandler (1975) offer a transactional model of development, rejecting linear models with mechanistic causal links. Their model is dynamic and addresses the mutually influencing effect of both environment and child over time. It encourages thinking about the conditions for the development of children’s participation and their influencing effect upon its progress.

The theorists collectively evoke a need to consider children’s participation as situated within various environmental systems with shared principles, which reciprocally influence one another over time and contribute to a changing status quo. They also warrant consideration of the principles by which different environmental systems have operated through time. The theoretical perspectives are applied to facilitate an understanding of the shifting epistemological context in which governmental doctrine and advice has been implemented, from where the facilitative or inhibitive contribution of previous ideology and practice on the field is addressed.

2.2.1 Children’s Participation

Underlying developments from the early 1980s onwards have seen two sequential trends, firstly towards recognising children’s rights to participation and secondly towards supporting children to exercise those rights.

The earliest parliamentary references to endorse children’s participation were non-statutory. In advice published to schools following the 1981 Act it was commended that:

“The feelings and perceptions of the child concerned should be taken into account, and the concept of partnership should, wherever possible, be extended to older children and young persons” (DES, Circular 1/83: 2)

A HMI publication (1985) also revealed that ‘*schools created few opportunities for children to exercise choice or their initiative*’ (6.3). Both indicate that support was forthcoming from influential sources in accounting for children’s views, partnership and choice. Early acknowledgement of the need for children to contribute is also found in a report following a government commissioned enquiry (The Elton Report, 1989), which recommended that

children's views be taken into account and explicitly endorsed '*[their] active participationin shaping and reviewing the school's behaviour policy*' (p.144).

Both the Children Act (1989) and code arising from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989, ratified in 1991) bestowed the first legislative recognition of children's rights. They are widely publicised to have elevated the child's role in decision-making/planning and to have secured an increasing regard for children's civil rights and entitlement to participation (c.f. Flekkoy & Kaufman, 1997; Russell, 1996; Sherwin, 1996; Wyness, 2000). Both embodied a professional requirement to ascertain children's perceptions (in accordance with their age, understanding or maturity), and give them due consideration when making decisions concerning them. Also cited as being influential to the recognition of rights (c.f. Sherwin, 1996; Ward, 1997), was the renowned Gillick case, having questioned how far parents should have the authority to make decisions on the child's behalf and ruled in favour of children's rights to autonomous decision-making.

Once established in law, children's rights have hardly been altered. Thereafter, the trend shifted towards children utilising their rights. The Education Act (1993) bolstered the right for children to appeal to decisions made about them (Friel, 1995), thus helping to ensure their rights were upheld. It also introduced the Code of Practice (1994) as non-statutory guidance for children with SEN, stating and embodying a need to ascertain/heed children's perspectives in decision-making. The child's right to have their views sought and taken into account was also mentioned in a report, outlining ways proposed to improve the educational achievements of children with SEN (Programme of Action, DfEE, 1998a).

From the year 2000, government support for children's participation has significantly increased, perhaps (in part) due to formal criticism the government received about their implementation of children's rights¹. Government publications continue to raise the importance of encouraging children's participation (e.g. White paper on Education, 2001), yet words of encouragement are also supplemented by suggestions for practice. The Cabinet Committee on Children and Young People's services and the Children and Young People's Unit (CYPU, 2001) outline principles for the involvement of children, contributing proportionately more about action and feasibility issues than rationale. Similarly, the revised Code of Practice (2001a) largely refers to action (required by adults) in

¹ The UN Committee's response to the UN Convention report (HMSO, 1995) concluded that the government had been complacent and recommended a greater priority needed to be given to hearing children's views and promoting children's rights in education (Maclagan, 2002). Whilst reporting on governmental structures for children, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation construed that there had been a failure to promote children's participation in society (Hodgkin and Newell, 1996, cited in Payne, 2002). Further criticism of children's participation came from Ofsted (1999) in an appraisal of the Code of Practice, where pupil involvement in Individual Education Plans was deemed weak, relative to their parents.

respect of children's participation in SEN procedures (including setting targets, IEPs, assessment, annual reviews). Since it contains a new chapter and an associated toolkit (2001b) dedicated to pupil participation, it affords children's engagement (for SEN) rising status. The Code also extends the parameters of children's participation by going beyond implementing children's rights. Although the chapter on pupil participation starts from children's rights, quoting the UN convention (article 12/13) and their right '*to be involved in decision-making and exercising choices*', it also significantly recognises children's unique self-knowledge and individual preferences. Coupled with advice promoting self-advocacy through adults '*responding to the messages the child gives*' (2001a, 3.16: 29), suggestions of children's views being sought, other than during formal procedures, and referrals to children as partners in education, the Code goes beyond safeguarding children's rights via consultation. It strengthens the distinctive nature of children's perspectives and alludes to those perspectives being accessible without the need for deliberate consultative measures.

Recently there has been a move towards supporting children's participation rights in legislation. The latest Education act (2002a) devotes a section to consultation with pupils '*designed to encourage greater participation by children and young people in decision-making within schools*' (176). Also forthcoming statutory guidance on consulting pupils (amongst others) is mentioned in an Action plan for the Involvement of Children (DfES, 2002b), based on principles outlined in the CYPUP publication (2001).

2.2.2 SEN

Whilst this thesis does not support a lengthy discussion of shifting ideology pertinent to the SEN field, general patterns over the last three decades can be detected within legislative developments. The shifts reflect a change of attitude towards children with SEN, which is important in recognising the child's ability to participate.

Historically, the Warnock report (1978) and subsequent Education Act (DES, 1981) were significant for having abolished categories of handicap in favour of a generic term 'SEN' and having introduced the need for a continuum of provision and assessment to cater for the diverse needs of *all* children. Consequently, they are often cited as the inauguration of a paradigm shift away from the predominate influence of the medical profession upon pedagogical expectations and interventions.

With educational practice becoming more informed by the child's 'needs' than medical/psychological criterion, following the 1981 Act, there was a reported shift towards a compensatory philosophy. Since 'needs' were seen as relative to contextual factors, schools sought to offset differences between provision and the child's characteristics, with

extra resources and ‘specialist’ intervention. The Act legitimised the continued involvement of numerous professional ‘experts’ whose status and knowledge was deemed to qualify them to make decisions on the children’s behalf.

The devolved system of financial and management control, brought about by legislative reforms of the late 1980s, were influential to SEN. The corresponding redistribution of responsibilities compelled schools to manage their organisation/development and rendered the government responsible for setting and monitoring school standards. Consequently, discriminatory practice was brought to light and schools became more accepting of, and better able to respond to, children’s diverse needs.

The push towards integrating children with SEN and ‘organising’ schools to make them more capable of responding to the diversity of children (Clark, Dyson, & Millward, 1995), have contributed to a shift towards addressing the school as an equitable social system. This shift has been supported by the practicable endorsement of distinct rights for *all* children (see page 5). The National Curriculum, introduced by the Education Reform Act (1988) gave children the right to participate in a broad, balanced curriculum and the Code of Practice (1994) provided a tool for implementing the participation rights of children with SEN, as part of a cyclical process of assessment, monitoring and review. More recent legislative developments within SEN continue on this trend, reflecting a drive towards inclusion (c.f. Excellence for all children: Meeting SEN, DfEE, 1997) and equal rights (Special Educational Needs And Disability Act, 2001c). While this may be so, there are concerns that the current education system is flawed for delivering equity, with efforts continuing to focus on children’s needs, rather than why they have those needs (Dyson, 2001).

2.2.3 Emergent Tensions

Over the decades, government developments have arguably facilitated the participation of children with SEN, with some deemed to have made a significant contribution to the current climate, such as the Children Act reported to ‘*break new ground*’ (Russell, 1996) or the Code of Practice which argued to put children’s involvement on the educational agenda more than any other development (Davie, 1996). Nevertheless, the inherent ability of those reforms to extend children’s participation rights has arguably been restricted by distinct tensions.

2.2.3.1 Presumptions about Childhood

Paradoxically, while the law has provided rights for children, it also has legitimised adults as experts and adult’s decision-making on children’s behalf. The impact of embedded values

about children and their status in society are believed to be contributory factors. Traditional ways of thinking about children, based on protection of their ‘vulnerable’ status has arguably impeded children’s ability to exercise their rights. Perceiving that children lack the social, moral and emotional development, provides justification for adults in determining children’s interests and welfare (Wyness, 2000). Substantiation of Lansdown and Lancaster’s (2001: 40) claim can be traced through historical developments.

“It has always been presumed not only that adults are better placed than children...to exercise responsibility for decision-making but also that, in so doing, they will act in children’s best interests...This welfare model...constructs the child as a passive recipient of adult protection and good will, lacking the competence to exercise responsibility for his or her own life”.

At the time of the 1981 Education Act, the governing framework appeared structured and was organised around adults as ‘experts’ and decision-makers. It centred on adults’ capability to make decisions on children’s behalf (and conversely children’s incapability to make decisions of their own), which obligated children’s dependence on adults. Importantly, identifying and providing for children’s needs was subject to professional (Roaf & Bines, 1989) rather than personal judgements.

Legislative developments in the late 1980s arguably perpetuated children’s dependence upon adult decisions. Firstly, the devolution of decision-making powers to schools altered the proportion of localised influence on school practice, placing children’s participation dependent on school decisions. Secondly, despite affording children fundamental rights to participate, rights were, as Alderson (2000: 23) specifies, ‘*not absolute but conditional*’. There is therefore evidence to support Sherwin’s (1996: 25) claim that:

“In proceedings under the Children Act 1989, it is the child’s welfare, not wishes and feelings, which is paramount. Responsibility for decisions concerning children has to be taken by adults.”

Adults retained the power to determine whether children could understand and were sufficiently old or mature enough to have their views taken seriously. Although legislation bestowed children the right to voice their opinions and have their perspective considered, the law also rendered children’s wishes revocable, thereby demeaning the strength of those rights. Furthermore, since the UN Convention outlined humanitarian beliefs as a principle (i.e. “*In all actions concerning children...the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration*” Article 3), adults could delineate children’s welfare and substantiate their actions as being in the child’s ‘best interests’, without cause to consider the implications for children. The UN Convention bestowed children three categories of rights: provision, protection and participation; yet acting in the child’s best interest for the first two categories is more justifiable. Ironically, acting in children’s best interests regarding participation rights can potentially restrict their ability to exercise those rights.

Developments of the 1990s arguably retained adults as decision-makers. The Code of Practice (1994) brought about a subtle change of emphasis in placing the onus of responsibility onto schools to “*make every effort to identify the ascertainable views and wishes of the child*” (2.36: 14). However, research evidence by Armstrong and Galloway (1996) indicates that the process of consulting children (on which the Code is based) is founded upon by being ‘acted upon’ by adults and being dependent. They doubt the Code’s ability to work in the child’s interests because it maintains a perception that children are ‘in need’. They likewise argue, as others have (c.f. Christensen, 1996), that the Code retained the deep-rooted assumptions of the medical model, since assessments are made on the presupposition that children have a problem, where children’s views are sought as part of assessing their difficulty and resources are allocated upon identification of their difficulty.

There is evidence to suggest that more current developments reflect the same issues. Whilst recent changes to the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001a) are positive in raising the status of children’s participation, and signalling a requirement to go beyond consultative practice, there is a continuing ‘needs-based’ philosophy. Payne (2002: 128) argues that the problem lies in an imbalance of power:

“...rather than being judged as equal members of the human race, children are perceived as being uniquely vulnerable and dependent”

Such a power imbalance is arguably perpetuated by systems that support a form of hierarchical structure between people. Treating children as a subordinate social group is a form of hegemonic control (Darder, 1991), which can contribute to conflict or passivity. Therefore, there is clear support of Lansdown and Lancaster’s (2001) earlier assertion (see page 9) which can be traced over time.

2.2.3.2 Political Agenda

While the government prides itself on working towards a more open, participatory and democratic society, it is striking that children are inherently reliant upon adults upholding their views and rights. Lansdown (1994) argues that children lack political and economic power, derived from historical attitudes and presumptions about childhood and an over-reliance on their biological and psychological dependency, which adds to their vulnerability. Children have (until recently) scarcely featured on the government’s agenda.

During the 1980s, through legislative reforms, the government implemented a devolved system of management and financial control, whereby decision-making powers were passed from authorities to schools and from professionals to parents. The government’s endorsement of parents as consumers of the education service, coupled with organisation and development responsibilities (and accountability) being passed to schools, effectively

rendered schools and parents regulators of children's participation. Paradoxically, despite emphasising rights, choice and opportunities, the government targeted parents as recipients, and control was passed between adults to make decisions on the child's behalf.

During the 1990s, market forces continued to guide government measures to increase educational standards. The government sought to empower parents as consumers and encourage competitiveness. Schools were put under pressure as service providers, competing on an open market, involving appraisal (and public exposure) of their structural/social systems and performance. Nevertheless, the criteria on which schools are being judged signals a positivist political stance, where summarised assessment scores dominate as measures of performance and children's perspectives are being overlooked. With schools under financial, time and performance pressures, the use of consultation practices with children that rely on time, can serve to confine children's participation. There are those who consider it consequential that children have not been considered consumers of the education service.

“Children have no formal voice within the market-place, yet they are clearly central as recipients of the curriculum and the actions of teachers” (Wyness, 2000:95).

It was recently reported that proposals to incorporate children's views as part of Ofsted arrangements have been unfavourably received (Ennals, 2002), which would suggest there is further to travel before children are perceived as informants and/or consumers of the education service. Nevertheless, the government is under pressure to promote children's rights and incorporate them into their agenda. They were criticised for complacency in implementing children's rights (see footnote 1) and are subject to ongoing review by the UN. They are also under pressure from political lobby groups on children's rights. Growing media interest in children's participation, (e.g. Woodhead, 2002) coupled with the recent appointment of children's rights commissioners, there is optimism that the child's status on the political agenda is changing.

2.2.3.3 Absence in Legislative Developments

It is significant that policy developments in the area of pupil participation have not been legally binding. Evidently, early advice promoted children expressing their opinions/choice, however children were dependent upon schools to seek their views and to take them into account, the topics on which they were to be consulted, as well as the quality/quantity of their participation. When legislation granted children participation rights, non-statutory guidance was issued for their implementation; hence the school's interpretation was still of central importance to rights-based practice. Despite the ratification of children's rights, as Wade and Moore's (1993) research illustrates (post-legislation), rights implementation also depended upon school's value judgements. When

sixty-seven primary and secondary headteachers attending a course were asked whether they took children's views into account, only a third responded affirmatively, and amongst those who did not, there were comments that it was time consuming, it was difficult to cope with diverse views, it had no value, and decisions were taken on a higher level anyway.

When the Code of Practice was introduced for children with SEN, it (partially) fulfilled a need for a practical device to implement children's rights, although its impact also depended upon professional interpretation, because professionals had to 'have regard' for it. As Hart (1996: 116) argues:

“Schools could, with monumental effort, fulfil all the suggestions of the Code of Practice and still not ask the kind of questions which need to be asked.”

Having regard is open to interpretation, yet it remains a feature of the revised code (2001a). Schools could pay credence to it or believe they are implementing the Code without valuing and embracing children's perspectives in an egalitarian way.

Whilst it is difficult to ascertain the effect that greater legal responsibility would have had upon children's rights being upheld in practice, had schools been liable and legal structures been in place for rights' implementation, perhaps less importance would have been placed upon schools' organisation, commitment and value judgements. Only time will tell what affect the recent moves towards legislative support of children's participation rights will have.

2.2.3.4 Implication of Conditions

It was perhaps significant that the participation policy, historically, had been made contingent upon children's age, maturity and understanding. The conditions are reflected in early advice, such as Circular 22 (DES, 1983), which specified older pupils, or the Elton report (DES, 1989), whose research was based in secondary schools. The conditions are also reflected in legislation, from the conditional nature of children's rights to the latest Education Act (DfES, 2002a: section 176) specifying that '*Any guidance issued must provide for pupils' views to be considered in the light of their age and understanding*' and future plans to include children's views in Ofsted inspections stipulate secondary pupils. It is of concern that children at primary level, and particularly those with SEN, are either excluded from policy or later excluded by adults who refute statutory or non-statutory advice on the grounds that it does not apply.

2.2.3.5 Segregated System

Despite a growing trend within policy towards recognising and implementing children's rights, there is increasing concern that reforms fail to provide structures for pupil participation within education. Such concerns are central to evaluation reports, considering

the UK's execution of the UN convention (c.f. Maclagan, 2002; Wyness, 2000). Research at local level, such as children's rights assessment in Oxfordshire (Maclagan, 2002), substantiates these claims, finding a lack of systematic implementation of children's rights and a reliance on professionals' personal awareness.

Whilst the Code of Practice (2001) systematises rights into practice, offering an organisation framework of which participation is a part, it only applies to a select number of children. Furthermore, it centres participative practice on the assessment, monitoring and review cycle, the way by which the needs of children with SEN are identified and evaluated. Paradoxically, despite participative practice resting on democratic and inclusive principles, a principal tool for upholding children's participation within education is part of a segregated system. If, as Croll and Moses (2000) purport, SEN practice continues to be made outside the classroom environment, or in a semi-detached manner within it, participation remains detached from classroom experiences rather than as an integral part of the education system.

2.2.3.6 Educational Strategies/Approaches

This thesis does not support a lengthy consideration of paradigm shifts regarding educational approaches, as there is a wide literary field on which to draw. It is suffice to identify the paradox between structured and didactic approaches reflected within educational reforms and responsive requirements for children's participation. Theoretical assumptions about what children should learn, how they learn and when are manifested both within practice and reform. There is therefore evidence to support Wyness's (2000: 105) claim that:

“Education reform seems to reduce the possibility for pupils to participate in and have some sort of control over their education.”

With power over the curriculum and education policy, centralised by reforms of the late 1980s, any theoretical assumptions that infiltrated policy, not only impact upon teachers' practice and affect children's educational experiences, but also render practice resistant to change.

The National Curriculum (1999), Numeracy Strategy (1998c) and Literacy Strategy (1998b) have been introduced for the purpose of standardising practice at a national level and are therefore inherently structured. Aiming to standardise what is taught in schools, serves to ensure children acquire predetermined knowledge and values. Reforms reflect an emphasis on academic, rather than experiential knowledge, with the (implicit) assumption that knowledge is uni-directional, from the professional ('expert') to the child ('novice'). Professionals rely upon the correct answers and perpetuate the opinion that experts know

whereby, Rudduck (1991) argues, knowledge is not questioned and children do not get chance to explore different perspectives. The curriculum is demarcated by subject and sequenced in a hierarchical order, thus assuming that knowledge and skills are accumulated, and progress results from learning something at the next level. Curriculum reforms also demarcate age-related standards of performance, therefore making assumptions about the level and the pace of children's development.

Historically, prevalent approaches within SEN have been similarly structured and didactic, incorporating assumptions about children's learning. For example, behaviourism was arguably a dominating influence, involving the breaking down of specific skills into small, achievable objectives and teaching, using mechanical-like, repetitive training. Behavioural approaches encourage an assumption that children are passive learners, and fail to acknowledge their internal mental aspects (Mitchell, 1994), operating to maximise the adults' influence over the child's actions (Harris, 1994).

Assumptions about learning can render both the curriculum and assessment procedures inflexible and prescriptive, limiting opportunities both for children's participation and for teachers to take account of what children can bring and contribute to the teaching situation. They can also endorse children's participation rights, being perceived as an additional rather than integral consideration, alongside other curriculum demands.

2.3 Conceptual Context

This section aims to consider the nature and relationships between relevant conceptual terms within the field of children's participation and define the terms on which the study focuses.

Whilst the term participation is prevalent within the policy context, other relevant vocabulary is found with equivalent principles and characteristics. Within a section entitled 'Pupil Participation in School Settings', the Code of Practice (2001a: 28) refers to several terms including consultation, involvement, active involvement, responsibility, participation and partnership. The terms appear to be used interchangeably and without clarification of meaning.

The field of children's participation is complex. There are those who attempt to address its complexities, by applying Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation. Arnstein developed an eight-staged linear model, after research into the public's engagement in planning. It has since been adapted to children's participation by Hart (1992) and subsequently cited in recognition of different levels at which children can participate (c.f. Alderson, 2000; Flekkoy & Kaufman, 1997; Miller, 1997; Russell, 1998). Another ladder is

found in a recent Newsletter of the SEN Network project (Brown, 2001), inviting schools to reflect upon their current and prospective participation work with pupils. Fundamentally, these ladders exemplify the dimensions upon which power can operate between teachers and children, to influence the degree of their interaction. They are therefore useful tools for illustrating that certain participation approaches are tokenistic and promoting higher expectations for children's participation. However, on a cautionary note, the linear nature of the ladders of participation imposes a sequence, suggesting that advancement to higher levels is desired; yet classroom interactions are inherently complex and demand various levels of participation.

Whilst the hierarchical structure of the ladders of participation do not convey the dimensions of the teacher-child interactions, conceptual discrepancies between terms in regular use cannot be overlooked, for which the ladders offer clarification. The terms used in the Code of Practice relate to one another and are usefully depicted on a continuum. The terms are separated by (often subtle) semantic differences, yet are also associated, rendering one comparable with the next, at some level. Although simplified definitions are used to illustrate the point, they provide a means to identify and appraise both underlying meaning and power discrepancies, integral to well-known terms. Their association with issues of power, advances a discussion of inhibiting factors in the field.

Consultation	Involvement	Participation	Responsibility	Partnership
To ascertain information	To include	To take part	To act independently and take decisions	To participate as a partner
Externally driven				
Dependent upon initiator				
Relative to social context				
Intrinsically driven				
Presupposed autonomy				
				Reciprocally driven

Figure 2.1: The perceived semantic similarities and differences between relevant terminologies used in the field

2.3.1 Consultation

The process of consultation can be defined as *'to deliberate, counsel or confer (with someone; about, upon a matter)'*, *'Ask advice, counsel, opinion, permission or approval'* or *'take into consideration (the interest, feelings, good...of a person)'* (Oxford Talking Dictionary, 1998). Whichever definition is used, it entails *'having the right to advise but not to decide on an issue'* (op. cit., 1998). To consult, for the purpose of ascertaining information (whatever the type), is driven by the intention of whoever requires the information.

2.3.2 Involvement

Relevant definitions of the verb ‘to involve’ comprise, ‘*to bring (a person) into a matter*’, or ‘*to include*’ (op. cit., 1998). Therefore, involvement can be distinguished from consultation on account of its relative nature, requiring the invitation to become integrated into a social context, going beyond initiating the collection of information. When executed towards others, involvement can be linked to consultation, since being involved, inherently relies upon external factors in order to occur and is dependent upon an initiator.

2.3.3 Participation

Participation is defined as ‘*to take part*’ or ‘*share in*’ (op. cit., 1998), which can be distinguished from involvement, although as terms, they are often interchanged. Analogous with involvement, participation is relative and occurs within a social context. Subtle differences arise because participation does not depend upon an external initiator. Therefore the responsive role, characteristic of both involvement and consultation, is not intrinsic to participation. Although a person can be invited to take part (analogous with involvement), they determine whether they do so and at what level (thereby motivating the action).

2.3.4 Responsibility

In the context of the continuum, responsibility is defined as ‘*the opportunity or ability to act independently and take decisions without authorisation*’ (*The New Oxford Dictionary of English*, 1998). Like participation, responsibility is relative, it takes place within a social context and its occurrence is intrinsically driven; thus both are, to varying degrees, associated with independence. Nevertheless, responsibility goes beyond participation by presupposing a degree of autonomy and decision-making with a consequential level of accountability. Participation is considered to be a pre-requisite for responsibility.

2.3.5 Partnership

Defined as ‘*association or participation as a partner*’ (*Oxford Talking Dictionary*, 1998), partnership has semantic links with both responsibility and participation. However, partnership transcends previous terms, because it is dyadic and its effectiveness hinges upon reciprocity between partners. Being reciprocal, partnerships essentially require all partners to participate, take responsibility and make decisions. Being a relationship between two (or more) people, as Gascoigne² (1995) argues, partnership is about recognising the need for

² Gascoigne writes in the context of parental partnerships, an area where there is a vast amount of literature. The principles of partnership should remain consistent whoever the partners.

each to contribute and valuing the skills, experience and knowledge of both parties. Successful partnerships command commitment, flexibility and time to develop.

2.3.6 Using the Continuum to Evaluate Adult Approaches

The continuum illustrates, as the ladders of participation did previously, that professionals who approach children's participation, only through consultation, perpetuate adult decision-making and do little to empower children. It has already been discussed that the movement towards children's participation fundamentally resulted from the assignment, recognition and implementation of children's participation rights. They bestow children the right to express a view; to be heard during procedures; to conditions ensuring decency and self-reliance; freedom of expression and information; freedom of thought, conscience and association (Alderson, 2000) (amongst others). Nevertheless, most commonly translated into educational practice is their right to express their view and have it taken into consideration. Eliciting children's perspectives has therefore become dominant practice. Whilst the importance of questioning children to ascertain their perspectives should not be underestimated, as Miller (1997: 6) identifies:

“In consultation the people seeking your views will have the ultimate power. They decide what they will ask about, how they will ask it, the means by which views can't be expressed, the time frame and to what extent the views expressed will influence their decision.”

Thus, when teachers consult children, they have the potential to regulate what, when/where, who, how and why; the elements by which action can be approached (after Burke, cited in Wertsch, 1998). Varying the arrangement of what, when, who, how and why alters the cognitive demands placed on children. Donaldson's (1987) embedded/disembedded distinction can be usefully employed to illustrate this point. Donaldson highlights the difference between thinking about a situation that one is in ('embedded'), and being called to think about the same situation when remote from it, in time or space ('disembedded'). Certain approaches (or when used at certain times) are unconnected with children's 'actions, plans and/or spontaneous thoughts' (op. cit, 1987), influencing what is discovered. The Code of Practice (2001a) calls for disembedded reflection by virtue of separate (and often incongruous) procedures in the assessment, monitoring and review of children's SEN.

The involvement of children is being increasingly acknowledged to be problematic in practice. For example, Lee (1999) cites Ofsted as saying that pupils find it difficult to '*make assessments of themselves which are evaluative rather than descriptive*'. Armstrong and Galloway (1996) claim that children perceive attempts to involve them in assessment as unwarranted intervention or punishment. Attempts to implement children's participation rights by focusing on what adults can 'do' for children, relies on children conforming to adult

expectations and interpreting those interventions as intended. Difficulties faced in achieving adult objectives are not necessarily a reflection of children's abilities, so much as they reflect adults' demands.

The continuum provides clarity, through which individual practice can be scrutinised in relation to other approaches. Whilst asking children for their perspectives, or devising ways of involving children, are laudable, opportunities to take decisions, act autonomously, collaborate and share those responsibilities are equally important. Rather than promoting participation at elevated levels, the continuum provides recognition of a place for each level, encouraging flexibility of approach.

2.3.7 Children's Engagement

For the current study, the choice of the term engagement supports the objective; to study children's experiences in the execution of curricular activities. Engagement is defined as the action of involving or committing *oneself in* an undertaking (*Oxford Talking Dictionary*, 1998, the researcher's emphasis). The '*oneself*' element of the definition is significant, since by studying children's engagement, the research focuses on actions directed *from* (not towards) the child. The '*in*' element of the definition is significant in conveying the socially-based, not socially-influenced, nature of engagement. There is a subtle distinction between children interacting as part of the social world (engagement), and taking part in that world (participation).

In so far that engagement refers to an action, it does not warrant separate placement on the continuum. Rather, it is an underlying element of all sections of the continuum, rendering the sections potential descriptors of engagement. Since engagement is a relative concept, defining the initiator of action, the continuum can therefore be considered from either the teacher's or child's standpoint.

The choice of using engagement as the concept under investigation (rather than participation or other terms) is informed by several other factors. Firstly, it has been argued that a deep-rooted power imbalance, between professionals and children, has inhibited the progress of children's participation. Conceptual terms *convey* the paradigmatic context, and whilst the same term may not necessarily have been used in the same way over time (even by the same person), owing to paradigm shifts, the ongoing use of terms associated with ways of thinking about childhood, can feasibly perpetuate inhibitive influences. Secondly, research predominantly focuses on professionals' approaches to children's participation. Conceptual terms are therefore also *interpreted* within a paradigmatic context. If terms in current use become associated with teacher actions,

rather than children's, then using current terms to convey different ways of thinking may affect the interpretation of findings.

2.4 Research Context

The third section of this chapter reviews research developments in the area of children's participation, in order to situate the current study within the field and consider its contribution.

Within a progressively expanding literature, particularly over the last two decades, trends and themes are reflected. In the policy context two trends were discussed; firstly towards recognising children's rights, and secondly towards implementing those rights. Within the participation literature there are comparable developmental trends, through which children's participation and potential contribution have become recognised (prompting children's acceptance as social agents) and then realised (prompting children's recognition as change agents).

The trends are advanced by children's participation, being seen to fulfil a valuable educational *purpose*, on which a rationale is being collated and substantiated. Many participation projects (including Cooper, 1993; Jelly, Fuller, & Byers, 2000; Miller, 1999; Rudduck, 2002), as well as relevant literature (including Alderson, 2000; Fajerman, Jarrett, & Sutton, 2000; Miller, 1997) and policy documentation (e.g. CYPUP, 2001; DfES, 2001a), emphasise the beneficial effects of listening to and heeding children's perspectives. Collectively, they refer to effects permeating both the personal and interpersonal, at multiple levels of the educational system. At the personal level, many refer to staff and children as having:

- A greater level of awareness and knowledge, both of oneself and others, regarding needs, feelings, targets, rights and capabilities.
- A more positive attitude towards participation, reflected in motivation, interest, enthusiasm and commitment.
- Developed skills including communication, listening, negotiation and assertiveness.

Specifically children are mentioned for having developed independence, more affirmative self-perceptions (efficacy, self-esteem, confidence, self-image) and enhanced feelings of membership and ownership (of their targets and their work). Such benefits being attributed to the effect of empowerment, and their ideas/capabilities are being respected. In the process, children are exceeding adults' expectations of what they can do (MacBeath, Myers, & Demetriou, 2001; Webb, 2001). Amongst benefits at the interpersonal level were

improvements in staff-student relationships, attributable to mutual respect and conflict resolution. Participation was recognised as altering staff-student roles, rendering children more active and teachers more responsive. There were benefits at the school level and beyond, with impacts having been reported to extend to the curriculum and school development.

There is a progressively expanding range of *topics and contexts*, where children's participation is being sought and researched. Fielding (2001b) contends that previous approaches to heeding the child's voice involved developing a more democratic, collective voice in the school, or giving children greater responsibility for their learning, through a more flexible pedagogy. He argues that recent developments help bridge the individual (pedagogic) and collective (school) emphasis.

Attention to children's inclusion in decision-making, and reform at *school level*, is backed up by school improvement/effectiveness literature. There is a push for children to be seen as clients of the education service and as a vital source of information (Cooper, 1993). As such, endeavours to improve the service require the incorporation of pupils' perspectives into the agenda for change (Rudduck & Flutter, 2001). Children's inclusion in decision-making and reform is also endorsed within inclusion literature. A recent definition of inclusion centralises participation:

"...a process of increasing the participation of pupils in.....cultures, curricula and communities of their local schools" (Ainscow, 1999: 218)

A survey³ of school attitudes toward pupil involvement (Gersch, 1996) reports that school councils and drawing up behaviour policy were seen as important ways of involving children. Gersch (op cit.) reports that school council meetings were more sophisticated than teachers had expected and instigated improvements in school procedures. However, others report councils as being tokenistic, because those in positions of power do not take children's voices seriously (Fielding, 2001a; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). In the researcher's experience, only a small minority of children can be involved in school councils, and topics discussed are often limited to communal issues and those external to classroom activities. Silva's (2001) evaluative research, into the workings of a school council, found that attempts to achieve equity and diversity broached gender/racial bias and issues of representation, through which power hierarchies and privilege were reinforced amongst students. Silva contends that efforts to structure and cultivate children's participation in reforms should be balanced by consideration of the conflicts, pressures and concerns dominating children's experiences.

³ Small-scale questionnaire survey with low response rate (33/87) for which caution is applied to the findings (conducted by Gersch and Moyse in 1994, cited in Gersch, 1996).

Support for a more flexible *pedagogy* appears to stem from endeavours to make the curriculum, and the teaching/learning process, more child-centred. Influences include social constructivist, cognitive and interactional theories (c.f. Collis & Lacey, 1996), which promote children as active agents/controllers, teachers as facilitators/ interpreters and learning as a two-way process (c.f. Rowland, 1987). However, Wyness (2000) argues that child-centredness is negatively interpreted, prioritising the need to maintain order, and construing children's control in terms of 'busyness'. Furthermore, the development of a competitive environment, the curtailing of play, group and topic work and a subject/teacher-centred focus, render it..

"...difficult to conceive of primary school children being able to structure their own learning and take the initiative in class" (op cit.: 100).

It is not surprising that participation is associated with particular subjects (e.g. PHSE) and linked to particular approaches (e.g. circle time), through which children are provided with contrived opportunities to voice their opinions.

Collis and Lacey (1996) claim that interactive pedagogical approaches encompass two main themes, that of developing children's communication/sociability with others and their thinking/cognitive processes. Their contention reflects a theoretical emphasis, in which both are considered essential to children's development. Regarding communication, research has emphasised the importance of information children have to contribute and an appreciation of children's interpretation (e.g. Davie, 1996). Research has identified that overcoming communication difficulties is an issue (e.g. QUEST project, Rose, McNamara, & O'Neil, 1996), prompting calls for flexible approaches. Therefore, researchers stress the importance of encouraging individually appropriate means of communication (Morris, 1998), deeming the challenge to lie with adults, encouraging children to express themselves (Gersch, 1996; Rushton & Hardwick, 1994; Whittaker, 1996). Regarding cognition, research has emphasised processes by which children think and develop metacognitive awareness. Flexibility comes from recognising differing learning approaches and encouraging the flexible application and transfer of strategies.

Beyond emphasising collective or pedagogic approaches (Fielding, 2001b), children's participation in assessment, decision-making and planning represents another substantial research field. Research projects, summarised on table 2.1, provide worked examples of participation opportunities, associated benefits and emergent tensions. Additional support for children taking responsibility and making decisions, is provided in the form of training resources, generated by children's charities, offering intervention procedures and techniques to facilitate children's communication/decision-making and enhance their participation/empowerment (Fajerman et al., 2000; Kirkbride, 1999; Miller, 1997, 1999). It

is notable that research projects conducted in mainstream schools focus on children's participation in procedures and decisions, associated with identifying, assessing, monitoring and evaluating their SEN, as being detached from their day-to-day classroom experiences. Conversely, those conducted in special schools identify procedures and techniques as integral to classroom practice. Although the number of projects reviewed is small, portraying SEN procedures as being discrete from classroom experience has implications. Within an already overcrowded timetable, participation initiatives can be seen as something extra to add to the increasing number of reforms that teachers have to cope with.

Research	Impetus	Participants	Methods	Outcome
Waltham Forest Pupil Involvement Project Gersch, Holgate, & Sigston (1993) Gersch (1996)	Response to school/LEA requests for consistent procedures	Children with SEN KS3/4	Pupil questionnaires about assessment process Trial materials	Assessment procedure (student report) Aid to implementing Code of Practice
QUEST project Rose et al. (1996)	Consider children's involvement in learning management Setting targets Progress criteria Writing reports	LEAs Schools for children with SEN Mixed ages	Survey of LEAs about support for addressing pupil involvement Questionnaire to schools who provide 'good practice'	Most involve children in annual review Overcoming communication difficulties challenge Participation in criteria setting less advanced
The Child's contribution Armstrong, Galloway, & Tomlinson (1993)	Role of the child in assessments	Children with EBD Mixed ages	Observation of psychologists' assessments Interviews	Assessment perceived as part of their punishment Language used did not make sense Children did not see they were involved
Self-Assessment for Children with LD Lee (1999)	Approaches used for Curriculum/assessment Target setting Records of achievement PHSE programme	Special schools Children with LD KS3/4	Case study (5) Observation Interview with staff & pupils Documentation	Checklist of self-assessment activities Opportunities are provided Younger focus – task, learning, experiences Older more evaluative
Involving Pupils Project Jelly et al (2000)	Increasing pupil autonomy in learning through empowerment Promoting involvement in learning /school decision-making Teaching thinking skills	Special schools Children with SEN Mixed ages	Action research	Emergent themes – pupil empowerment/self-esteem; impact on school ethos/culture; promoting inclusion Audit checklist

Table 2.1: Summary of several research projects considering pupil participation in assessment, decision-making and planning

Returning to the point made by Fielding (2001b), there is evidence to support his assertion that participation research has traditionally focused on pedagogy and school reform. Children's participation in assessment, planning, and decision-making is found to represent another focus, largely pertaining to SEN.

Fielding (op. cit.) argues that new developments bridge the gap between pedagogy and schools. These developments appear to fall into two categories - children's participation as researchers and research into children's classroom experiences. Fielding (2001b: 49) contends that recent developments stem from recognition (amongst others) that:

"...the previously forbidden area of teaching and learning is becoming a legitimate focus of enquiry from the standpoint of the students as well as teachers"

The current study addresses the second of those categories, studying classroom experiences from the child's standpoint.

The two themes identified are central to a large ESRC funded national network project, currently running, namely 'Consulting Pupils about Teaching and Learning'. Several projects are considering the effect of involving *children as researchers* and thus, addressing children as change agents. The topics, under consideration for research by children, include school policy issues/procedures and their experiences of learning (Rudduck & Flutter, 2001). Children's involvement as researchers features on the ladder of participation (Brown, 2001), describing '*pupils as fully active participants and co-researchers*' as the '*highest*' level of participation. Brown distinguishes between children being consulted, taking part and being a part of projects, designed to promote their participation.

There are an increasing number of research projects considering the child's experiences. Several are summarised on table 2.2. Notably, of the studies found in the literature, each seeks to elicit the child's experience using consultative methods of enquiry, thereby setting the current study apart. This point will be addressed further in the methodology, chapter 3.

Research	Impetus	Participants	Methods	Outcome
Experiencing special education Wade & Moore (1993)	Interests of children not being ascertained	Children in UK and NZ Aged 5-19	Questionnaire Sentence completion	Children require full role in school Need to re-evaluate expectations of /relationships with children who have SEN
Pupils reflecting on their own thinking Powell and Makin (1994)	Explore ways of improving professional practice Implementation of teaching/learning programme	Children with MLD Aged 12-13	Diary Ongoing evaluation of effectiveness Analysis of pupil descriptions	Ways can be identified to encourage reflection Teaching/learning transactional

Continued over

Research	Impetus	Participants	Methods	Outcome
Pupil perspectives Cooper (1993)	Effect of residential schooling School organisation Characterisation of relationships Pupil adaptation Resolution of difficulties	Boys with EBD in residential schools Aged 14-16	Interviews Observation Questionnaire Document analysis	Effective schools offer respite, relationships & opportunities giving children confidence/motivation to engage in their own learning
Rules, routines & regimentation Sherman, (1996)	Exploring children's perspectives on what makes a good school and things they learn at school	Children Aged 5	Interviews with children in 5 schools	Children aware of authoritarian nature of school, imposed rules & routines
Listening to children Bearne (2002)	Investigate perceived dip in performance between KS 1 and 2	Children with LD Year 3	Progressively focused interviews with staff /children	To realise principles in revised Code of Practice, need to listen to children

Table 2.2: Summary of several research projects considering children's experiences of learning

Research developments in the field suggest that children are being included for multiple reasons, they are being recognised for what they have to offer and should be afforded the right to be listened to. The findings suggest participation is beneficial and such benefits extend beyond the child. Amongst the studies reviewed within this section, several dominant trends have emerged, including:

- *Research methods eliciting the voice of the child* - It is portrayed that student outcomes can be improved by going to the source and asking students (Mitra, 2001).
- *Interventionist approaches to participation* – specific initiatives are being introduced and evaluated, or consultative methods are being used to elicit the child's perspectives.
- *Focus on older pupils* – several projects, particularly involving children as researchers, are conducted in secondary schools.

Considering the participation literature for children with SEN, prevailing trends have also been revealed. It is argued that more research is required, embedded in mainstream classrooms, to make SEN more equitable and move the field away from the dominant individualisation of current approaches towards systematic embedded interventions (Dyson, 2001). Notably the trends include:

- Many participation projects are conducted in special schools.
- Many projects focus on the assessment, monitoring and review cycle for children with SEN.

Collectively the predominant trends within participation literature leave a shortfall in the research conducted in mainstream primary school classrooms, also with children who have

SEN, and furthermore, a shortfall in research using minimal interventionist methods and those studying classroom experiences from the child's standpoint.

2.5 Theoretical Context

The fourth section of this chapter aims to review a theoretical context for children's engagement, on which a rationale can be substantiated. Theoretical endorsement can be sourced from a wide body of literature, spanning the academic disciplines of psychology and sociology, with several influential themes being subject to paradigm shifts and ongoing research. This thesis cannot include developmental discussions of the various theoretical perspectives, or discussions of each topic in the detail covered in the literature. Instead, it will focus on theories deemed by the researcher to be pertinent to children's engagement, as initiators of action, and as part of the social world. In particular, it will draw on the relevance of theoretical perspectives from social constructivism and social cognitive psychology.

2.5.1 Social Constructivism

Social constructivist theories directly correlate with children's engagement, encompassing both the importance of child action, and the social world, by way of theorising about the acquisition of knowledge. Their impact upon educational research and practice has been increasingly evident in recent years, although the theories on which they are based have a long history.

Regarding the *child*, social constructivism is based on interrelated assumptions that knowledge is constructed in the minds of individuals and is subject to their interpretation. Theories therefore, emphasise both active and subjective processes involved in understanding (Watson, 2000). Social constructivism is theoretically distinct from behaviourist theories, which assume the straightforward transmission of knowledge from teacher to learner (op cit: 136), thereby portraying children as passive recipients.

Social constructivist notions of the *active* nature of the child are derived from long-standing theories about intellectual development. Particularly influential is Piaget (1958; 1970), whose theories centre on a regard for living organisms as both self-regulating and active. Piaget argues that knowledge originates in action and is constructed over time. He emphasises the importance of self-directed problem-solving, and what children could discover for themselves without help from others. Another significant theorist, Vygotsky, considers the active construction of knowledge by emphasising practices such as thinking and speaking (Cole & Wertsch, 1996). Bruner (1966; 1973) also places construction and action as central principles, regarding the acquisition of knowledge to be an active process,

involving selecting, transforming, constructing and altering information from the environment. He depicts children as actively searching for meaning through explorations in their world.

Social constructivist theories emphasise *subjective* processes, by theorising that knowledge is subject to interpretation. Piaget (1958) theorises that organisms use existing cognitive structures to make sense of new experiences (assimilation), and these cognitive structures are modified by environmental factors (accommodation). Both assimilation and accommodation work simultaneously, generating a subjective process in which existing knowledge influences what a child experiences, and new experiences shape ongoing knowledge acquisition. They augment Piaget's emphasis on knowledge construction by depicting children taking in, processing and actively modifying information, rather than passively receiving it. Bruner also alludes to the subjective, and similarly argues that experience and knowledge are cognitively structured and are used, not only to provide meaning in novel situations, but also to organise new experiences in ways that make sense to the individual. Constructivist notions acknowledge a person's current state of mind, and previous experiences will affect their perceptions and understanding (Watson, 2000). Insofar as different people have differing capabilities and experiences, they may construct very different interpretations of the same scenario (Tomlinson, 1998).

As regards the *social world*, social constructivism is based on an assumption that knowledge develops in social contexts. Whilst the significance of child action is substantiated by theories emphasising active and subjective processes, social impact and importance are supported by theories emphasising *interactive* (and language) processes. Particularly influential is Vygotsky, whose theories centre on the function of social interaction in intellectual development (Mahn, 1999). Wertsch (1985) argues that Vygotsky went beyond social interaction in emphasising exchange at societal level, which generate socio-economic forces operating independent of individual influence (c.f. Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Vygotsky (1978) theorises that others play a crucial role in learning. Vygotsky offers a theoretical model, founded on the co-construction of meaning through social interaction, which scrutinises the extent to which children can go further with their learning alongside others, rather than on their own. For Bruner, the social/cultural context is a central theme, based on the tenet that information is taken from the cultural context, before being individually modified, as well as his focus on language and instruction. Piaget also alludes to social interactions, in theorising about stages of development being influenced by the social and cultural environment.

Whilst Piaget and Vygotsky both make significant contributions vis-à-vis active and interactive processes, there are discernible differences in their respective emphasis on the individual versus social as the locus of development. They have sometimes been portrayed as diametrically opposed⁴ (e.g. internal/individualistic versus public/intersubjective, Meadows, 1993), prompting debate, contending that their theories are complementary (Cole & Wertsch, 1996; Kitchener, 1996). Combined, their theories provoke an appreciation of both an active child and an active environment (Valsiner, 1993 cited in Cole & Wertsch, 1996).

Interactive development models, conveying progression and dynamism within the child and the environment, are not limited to cognitive psychology. Sameroff and Chandler (1975: 189) (see section 2.2) promote a transactional perspective, whereby both the child and the environment are perceived as undergoing regular restructuring, owing to ongoing transactions between them over time. The child and environment are dynamic and are recognised as having a mutually influencing effect upon the other over time.

2.5.1.1 Application of Social Constructivist Theory within Education

The social constructivist propositions, particularly of Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner, have impacted significantly on educational psychology. The basic tenets of active, subjective and interactive processes have guided methodological approaches and subsequent research developments, directly influencing socio-cultural and neo-Vygotskian domains. Embracing the constitutive nature of the child, social, linguistic and cultural world, justifies naturalistic research within the classroom. Significantly, the propositions have changed how many features of classroom life are being researched. For example, research on classroom interactions has witnessed a shift away from attempts to classify interactions using pre-arranged categories as measures (e.g. Flanders interaction analysis categories, Flanders, 1970), because what they capture neglects to account for idiosyncratic/routines of classroom life, and relies too heavily on the researchers' frame of reference (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). Equivalent socio-cultural systems exist, such as MASS (material, activity, socio-cultural and semiotic aspects of discourse, Gee, 1999), although are seemingly used to frame what (rather than how) interaction is analysed. Research into classroom interaction has developed to encompass the identification of factors influencing interaction, and the social construction of individual and collective action and identities.

Social constructivist ideas have likewise changed how many features of classroom life are conceptualised (e.g. learning). Salomon and Perkins (1998) argue that embedding the study

⁴ The dichotomous depiction of Piagetian/Vygotskian theory is reductionist and fails to embrace the dialectical principles of Vygotsky's methods (c.f. Mahn, 1999).

of learning within social/cultural contexts and interactions, has given rise to two complementary conceptions of learning. The first conception is of the individual learner, emphasising the acquisition of knowledge and skills as transferable commodities, whilst the second conceives of the collective participatory process of active knowledge construction, emphasising context, interaction and situation. Although Salomon and Perkins use 'acquisition' versus 'participation' to consider ways in which individual and social aspects of learning interrelate, the categorisation serves another purpose for this thesis. Notably, they also represent two separate bodies of literature, through which social constructivist/socio-cultural tenets (active/subjective/interactive processes) have been applied to children's learning. The categorisation provides a way of condensing the field, helping to locate the study within a body of literature, and offering grounds for determining the relevance of that literature to the study.

As Salomon and Perkins (op cit.) argue, acquisition and participation symbolise two sides of the same coin, both concerned with learning, yet part of an interrelated whole. On one side, there are those that apply social constructivist/socio-cultural tenets to learning through acquisition, tending to focus on teacher-mediated approaches or learning strategies. This approach is arguably predominant within the literature, perhaps partly reflecting a move towards socio-cultural perspectives from an information-processing paradigm, which concentrates on individuals acquiring skills and knowledge; and partly because historically children have been perceived in individual (not situated) terms (e.g. SEN individual-deficit perspective). On the other side, the tenets are applied through participation, generally focusing on participation-mediated approaches.

For a study of children's engagement, literature pertaining to the second approach will be reviewed. Research considering teacher/learner approaches to skill/knowledge acquisition, whilst pertinent, because it upholds socio-cultural tenets (e.g. assuming children to be active), is beyond the scope of the study. It is nevertheless recognised that socio-cultural ideas have contributed to a shift, away from traditional teaching methods, towards conceiving the teacher as a facilitator (Cotton, 1995). Teaching approaches have been particularly influenced by Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD), which considers the way adults assist children to go beyond what they could achieve alone. The theory of ZPD is reflected in learning models, such as one by Tharp and Gallimore (1988), who modelled the sequence of learning through a more-able person. The principles of ZPD are also applied to 'scaffolding' approaches (e.g. Bruner, 1966), for which the teacher acts as a responder, to support and guide the child through the unknown territory between one concept and other (Arnold et al., 1992). As regards learning approaches, socio-cultural

tenets have been subsumed in research into metacognition and learning strategies, considering how children could become more able to regulate their own learning. These are beginning to be reflected within educational practice, such as in appreciating the different learning strategies that can be applied (c.f. Numeracy strategy, 1998c), or featuring thinking skills in the National Curriculum (1999).

In concentrating on research developments pertaining to children's participation, it is equally beyond the scope of this thesis to consider both sides of the coin, as to the extent to which children acquire knowledge through participation. Insofar that learning is perceived to require knowledge and skills acquisition, a study of engagement does not claim to be one of learning. Instead, the learning environment (classroom, curricular activities) describes the social context in which engagement is studied.

Lave and Wenger's (1991) work is particularly relevant to a review of theoretical developments concerning participation, since they similarly subscribe to a dichotomous conception of learning (i.e. 'internalisation' versus 'increasing participation in communities of practice'). Unlike Salomon and Perkins (1998), who propose integrating the two categories, Lave and Wenger argue for shifting the analytical focus from the individual as a learner, to learning as participation in the social world. Their contention is founded on perceiving the individual (their understanding/experience), the activities and the social world as mutually constitutive and negotiated:

"Conceiving of learning in terms of participation focuses attention on ways in which it is an evolving, continuously renewed set of relations" (op. cit., p49-50).

They claim that taking a related view dissolves dichotomies, including cerebral/embodied activity, contemplation/involvement and abstraction/experience, since it is not appropriate to consider participation in terms of being internalised or externalised. It follows that, perceiving of an individual as an integral, constitutive member of the social community, depicts the internal/external as mutually dependent rather than independent.

Rogoff (1995; 1996) appears to hold a similar dichotomous perception. Rogoff proposes 'participatory appropriation', to contrast with Vygotsky's theory of 'internalisation'⁵, in an attempt to move beyond its association with information processing perspectives and severance of the internal/external world. Rogoff takes appropriation to mean the resultant change and preparedness, for subsequent engagement arising from participation. Rogoff argues that perceiving the social world as being external to the individual is misleading and

⁵ Vygotsky describes internalisation as the transformation of social activity (interpersonal) into higher psychological processes (intrapersonal).

therefore describes appropriation as:

“...the change resulting from a person’s **own participation**⁶ in an activity, not to his or her internalisation of some external event or technique” (Rogoff, 1995: 153).

In explaining the difference between ‘appropriation’ and ‘internalisation’, regarding internal/external extinction, the phrase ‘what comes first the chicken or the egg?’ can be usefully employed. Vygotsky (1997: 106) is explicit in delineating a sequence:

“Every function in the cultural development of the child appears on the stage twice, in two planes, first, the social, then the psychological, first between people as an intermental (interpsychological) category, then within the child as an intramental (intrapsychological) category.”

Rogoff appears to question the validity of this claim, and disputes the boundary between the social/internal planes, on the basis that the social plane exists *because of* the child. Perceiving the social world inextricably linked to the child's action, there are no grounds for separating the internal/external world.

Rogoff (1995) further delineates ‘appropriation’ and ‘internalisation’, due to assumptions about time. Rogoff argues that separating past, present and future leads to perceptions that development involves knowledge accumulation or transformation of existing items, rather than change throughout. Vygotsky conveys the process of internalisation as uni-directional. Yet, conceiving of both an active child and an active environment, the process becomes multi-directional, thus discernibly non-linear in time. Adams (1995; 2001) encourages social scientists to recognise the constitutive character of time, as created not merely used, with each moment impacted by the past and future. Considering time as constitutive, renders the child and social environment inherently active.

However, notably others use the term ‘appropriation’ differently. Mercer (1993) discusses appropriation, as introduced by Leont’ev, to be an alternative to Piaget’s theory of ‘assimilation’. Mercer defines appropriation as meanings that are taken from interacting with objects (or concepts/ideas) in cultural contexts. He supports its use to consider reciprocity between teachers and children, embracing what one another says or does. Wertsch (1998) discusses appropriation, albeit derived from Bakhtin, to mean ‘*the process...of taking something that belongs to others and making it one’s own*’ (p53). Insofar that Mercer and Wertsch associate ‘appropriation’ with language and exchange between people, they differ from Rogoff’s application. Thus, they offer grounds for separation of an internal/external world on a subjective level, since each person has (and exchanges) different ideas or interpretations.

⁶ The problems Rogoff alludes to could be allied with the term ‘participation’. Rogoff argues that a person participating in an activity is *part of* that activity, rather than separate from it, yet at the semantic level the term participation conveys the existence of a separate social world in which the child takes part.

As another author considering the participatory construction of knowledge, Wertsch (1998; 1985) appears, like Solomon and Perkins, (1998), to look for a middle ground, believing learning concerns the inter-relationship between ‘acquisition’ and ‘participation’. Wertsch (1998: 23-4) argues that:

*“...action is not tied solely to individual or social processes....The task of a socio-cultural approach is to explicate the relationship between human **action**, on the one hand, and the cultural, institutional, and historical contexts in which this action occurs, on the other”*

Whilst acknowledging that each may exist separate from the other, Wertsch argues the importance of giving prevalence to both individual and social processes, when trying to understand what shapes action.

On the one hand, Rogoff and Lave and Wenger dichotomise ‘internalisation’ versus ‘participation’. They consider learning to be integral to, and inseparable from, social practice and convey participation as a crucial process. They argue that learning should be approached through participation. On the other hand, Solomon and Perkins dichotomise ‘acquisition’ versus ‘participation’, as grounds for proposing the inter-relationship of social and individual processes (c.f. Wertsch, 1998). They appear to argue that learning stems from combining participation (as a subjective, yet collective social process) with acquisition (as an individual process). The two perspectives cannot be compared on one level, since there are subtle differences as to how they regard the social world, with consequences as to how participation is perceived. On the one hand, collective members define the social world; hence participation involves *being a part of* that world (as a constitutive member); yet on the other, the social world consists of collective members, hence participation involves *taking part within* the social world, exchanging meanings and ideas. Nevertheless, both perspectives construe the individual, activities and social world as mutually constitutive; one, through mutual dependence within the social world, the other, through integrating social and individual processes. Both perspectives consider knowledge to be constructed not received, children being active participants in their own development and more significantly, both substantiate participation, giving it eminence and status in the learning process.

2.5.2 Social Cognitive Psychology

Social cognitive theories can be applied to children's engagement, because they further an understanding of the influence of subjective processes on action in the social world. The theories consider how individuals make sense of situations in ways that are personal to them (Williams & Burden, 1997). The different theories, on which social cognitive psychology draws, consider perception and influence, yet they differ as table 2.3 illustrates overleaf.

Social Learning Theory	Attribution Theory	Intrinsic Motivation Theory	Social Cognitive Theory
Sense of personal control	Cause of success/failure and controllability	Motive of personal actions	Outcome expectancy & efficacy expectation
Perceived personal control over the outcome of events		Perceived personal control over the process of action	Perceived personal control over the process and outcome
Behaviour-outcome contingency *	Causal attribution *	Personal causation *	Self-perception of ability and competence *
Retrospective judgement		▶	Predictive judgement

Table 2.3: Summary table of Social Cognitive Perspectives

* after Elliott (1997)

Social learning theory is derived from Rotter's (1966) notion that a child's actions in achievement pertain to their perceived 'locus of control' (LOC). LOC is categorised as being either external or internal, depending upon whether children regard the cause of their achievements to be a product of personal responsibility, or beyond their individual control to influence.

Attribution theory originates from the work of Heider (1958), yet is often associated with Weiner (1979). Weiner proposed a three-dimensional model of perceived control, taking attribution theory beyond being a retrospective judgement about the cause of success/failure - dispositional factors (ability, effort) or situational factors (luck, difficulty of task). Weiner introduced a controllability dimension, thereby linking causal attributions with affective responses. Cognitive and affective causal attributions were deemed to determine actions, affecting both self-perceptions and perceptions of others (Poulou & Norwich, 2002). The theory refers to control as the child's perceived ability to alter the factors affecting the outcome (Stipek & Weisz, 1981).

Intrinsic motivation theory is derived from a cognitive philosophy that people are motivated by what they think. Two theorists in particular are widely cited. Harter (1978) argues that internal perceptions of control act as mediators, maintaining and increasing the child's motivation. Significantly, Harter believes that children facing failure perceive the cause of the failure, whereas following success, perceptions of responsibility for the outcome, is more important. Therefore, a perception of control is argued to be necessary for competency to result. DeCharms (1968) argues that people perceive themselves to be either an 'origin', or a 'pawn' depending upon the source of their motives. Whilst pawns are regarded as those who are prompted by external influence and motivation, origins initiate action, take responsibility and consider that their actions result from their own free choice. Both emphasise children's personal perceptions of their ability to control their

actions, in an achievement context, rather than as perceptions of the cause of the outcome itself.

Social cognitive theory originates from the work of Bandura (1977), whose early work pertains to (prospective) expectations of success. Bandura distinguishes between ‘outcome expectancy’ – as a person’s estimation that a given action will lead to certain outcomes and ‘efficacy expectation’ – believing that one can successfully execute the action required to produce the outcome. Each expectation is assumed to be independent and hold predictive power (Elliott, 1997). Bandura (1997) argues that personal efficacy is represented as propositional beliefs, which in turn influences how people think, feel, motivate themselves and act. As such, self-efficacy is considered an important determinant for action. Bandura also conceptualises beliefs as being embedded within a network of relationships⁷ and thus, as part of the social world, people are contributors, not sole determinants of what will happen to them.

2.5.2.1 Application to the Current Study

Social cognitive propositions are founded on the tenet that people can exercise *influence* over what they do (Bandura, 1997). An individual’s ability to influence is not only dependent upon the perceptions that they form of themselves/others, but also upon the influence of others and the perceptions that they form. These underlying principles mirror the active, subjective, and interactive tenets of social constructivist/socio-cultural theories, thereby complementing the premise for children’s engagement on the following grounds:

Active	Children influence their actions.
Subjective	Children form perceptions of themselves/others affecting their actions.
Interactive	Children are contributors to what happens to them. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are affected by the influence/perceptions of others. • Others are affected by the influence/perceptions of the child.

Table 2.4: The Complementary Tenets of Social Constructivist/Socio-cultural & Social Cognitive Theory

Whilst social constructivist/socio-cultural theories appear to apply the dimensions to knowledge acquisition, social cognitive theories apply the dimensions to cognitive/affective determinants of action (e.g. motivation, attitudes, beliefs) and associated processes (e.g. self-regulation, problem-solving). Combined, they illustrate multi-dimensional learning, going beyond it being a study of either action or knowledge acquisition.

The social cognitive emphasis on determinants and processes provides a substantial literary base upon which to draw, the scope and detail of which goes beyond the limits of this

⁷ Bandura contends that, acknowledging beliefs to be embedded within a social network, goes beyond the dualist perception of agent versus object. This dualism is comparable with one of individual/social pervading socio-cultural/constructivist theory.

thesis. In summary, the cognitive/affective determinants of action can be applied to engagement on the following grounds:

- Children make retrospective judgements about their experiences, which either facilitate or inhibit their engagement in subsequent activities.
- Children make prospective judgements on the basis of what they anticipate will happen, or their ability to carry out what is required, which influences their subsequent engagement.

The theories substantiate claims of a distinction between participation that is initiated/driven by adult motives, and participation that is determined by the child's motives (c.f. Hart, 1992). Social cognitive theories can be applied to explain both the engaging of and the sustaining of their engagement. Retrospective theories suggest that children may be more motivated to engage in an activity, if they realise they can gain from participating. If the gains are perceived to stem from their own actions, it is theorised that children will sustain their engagement leading, not only to successful learning (Howe, 1999), but also to self-perpetuating success.

Prospective theories suggest that children who feel happy about participating may be more motivated to engage and sustain their engagement. Notably, Bandura's (1977) attention to learner expectations can be complemented by those pertaining to teacher expectancy. Rogers (1998) distinguishes between 'probabilistic expectations' (what is thought most likely to happen) and 'prescriptive expectations' (what is thought ought to happen). Prescriptive expectations (as an expression of what ought to happen, what is wanted and potentially could happen) are argued to drive action. Whilst self-efficacy expectations focus on self-belief as a motivator for action, prescriptive expectations focus on aspirations; both are equally applicable to children and offer the potential for explaining self-perceptions.

It is deemed by the researcher that much of the literature on the application of cognitive/affective processes on engagement goes beyond the scope of this thesis, on the grounds that it focuses on processes directed towards the child. Certain developments, such as self-regulation, appear directly relevant to children's engagement since they are defined as a 'self-directive process' requiring self-initiated motivation, behavioural and metacognitive processes (Zimmerman, 1998). Nevertheless, it corresponds to a structured learning technique implemented by the teacher, used to encourage the development (and independent use) of study strategies, and a sense of self-efficacy, with the intention of making learning self-sustaining (Zimmerman, Bonner, & Kovach, 1996). Research in this

area has focused on applicable instructive approaches (e.g. reciprocal teaching, Palincsar & Brown, 1984) and strategy/skills acquisition, rather than considering how children engage, initiate and direct. Although some researchers, such as Biemiller et al (1998), sought to obtain children's spontaneous verbal interactions, when discussing those interactions they considered and phrased them from a teaching perspective. The emphasis on instruction/acquisition may reflect, as with social constructivist theory, a historical focus on individual cognitive processes, or a different conception of the social world than was implicated through participative approaches.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The main aim of this study is to further an understanding of the engagement of children with learning difficulties in curricular activities. The research seeks to address the perceived gap in the literature (identified in chapter two), whereby children's participatory practice in day-to-day curricular activities, embedded within primary mainstream classrooms, is overlooked.

As discussed in chapter 2, the concept of engagement encompasses two elements, the actions *of* the child *in* the social world, on which a theoretical framework has been built. The research methodology seeks to uphold the theoretical principles outlined, conceptualising individual's processes as being active, subjective and interactive within a social/cultural context. The study intends to give both individual and social constituents due consideration by examining them as they interact (Rogoff, 1996; Wertsch, 1998).

This chapter delineates the chosen research strategy as a primary consideration because its principles impact upon the whole research process. The chapter then outlines the research questions, as informed by the chosen strategy, and indicates where those questions will be addressed. The research design is subsequently defined to summarise decisions made about the research in advance of data collection and outlines a rationale for those decisions. In subsequent sections of the chapter, the conduct of the research is addressed, from the issues of practicality to reviewing the main methods of data collection and analysis.

3.2 Research Strategy

A *collective case-study* (Stake, 1998) was chosen to further an understanding of children's engagement. The choice of methods is recognised to be 'a matter of appropriateness' (Oppenheim, 1992: 12). A case-study is considered appropriate because of its inherent flexibility (Robson, 1993) and its ability to recognise the complexity and 'embeddedness' of social truths (Adelman et al., 1980 cited in Bassegy, 1999). The study depends upon ensuring that emergent factors and dimensions are not detached from the conditions in which they arise (Shipman, 1997). Case studies are also appropriate for seeking to understand a research issue. Whilst studying the individual case provides a depth of understanding, the study was deemed by the researcher to benefit from a breadth of understanding afforded by gaining access to different perspectives across several cases.

As the research focuses on the interaction of children within the social world, the chosen approach needed to be unstructured and flexible enough to respond to whatever emerged, and to account for insights that could not be predetermined, both during and after the

fieldwork. An *exploratory* approach was therefore chosen, as one that was eclectic, iterative, inductive and dialectical. It sought to be *eclectic* to account for the dynamic and interactive nature of the social setting, on which both a proactive and reactive balance was required. Recognised to be a reciprocal process, the research becomes dictated and directed by both the researcher and participants. It was planned to be *iterative* by allowing sufficient time in the field for repeated patterns and processes to emerge. It was chosen to be *inductive*, giving rise to explanations; thus social life is examined to further an understanding rather than to confirm existing insights (May, 1997). A cyclical and transactional process was chosen; one in which new findings shed more light on previous findings in order to discover new insights. Lastly, it was intended to be *dialectical*, by utilising multiple sources of evidence, to gain an understanding from the actions, words and interactions of different participants.

3.3 Research Questions

The research process has entailed an evolving focus. In part, this stems from restrictions imposed by Ed.D regulations, necessitating a progressive focusing and refocusing of the study. It also arises from a need to tailor research questions to account for changes in the researcher's understanding, through the process of collecting and analysing the data. An eclectic methodology was somewhat inevitable, since it was not possible to pre-determine which path the research would follow.

Therefore, the research questions listed below are intended to assimilate and reflect an emergent approach, employed from the start of the study. They are intended to guide the reader through the research process and are presented sequentially, since insights generated in addressing one question informs and directs subsequent questions.

1. How do children with learning difficulties interact with curricular activities?
2. What factors appear salient in children's interactions?
3. How can emergent factors be categorised?
4. How can the emergent categories contribute to an understanding of how children with learning difficulties engage in curricular activities?

The *first* question refers to the investigative focus of the research, stipulating the study of children's interactions in the context of daily curricular activities. This question is therefore addressed as an element of this chapter, in considering the methods used for data collection and analysis.

The *second* question stems from the first, owing to the emergent nature of the issues. The research sought to identify factors arising from the data collected, rather than to look for

particular issues, thereby allowing the opportunity to consider all aspects of children's engagement in curricular activities. The question is addressed in this chapter where it is shown how emergent factors arose in addressing the subsequent question and were defined over time. The factors are presented as episodic events within the findings chapter, comprising examples of children's words and interactions.

Addressing the *third* question depends upon factors having been identified, thus is sequential. The research seeks to arrange and consolidate emergent factors in ways that do not detract from the complexity and variety of what emerges. The question is considered in this chapter where it is shown how episodic events form a categorical framework (see table 3.5), which is used to structure the presentation of the findings.

The *fourth* question refers to the use of emergent categories to address understanding. This question will be addressed in the discussion chapter, where the theoretical tenets outlined in chapter two, will be used to consider the research findings and structure a developing understanding of children's engagement.

3.4 Research Design

Prior to entering the school settings, a research framework was generated to reflect the theoretical approach (outlined in chapter two) and an emergent research strategy. It was designed as a tri-staged⁸ process, initially descriptive of the classroom/school context, subsequently focused on the interactions of child participants during curricular activities and lastly reflective as salient aspects of the data are identified and categorised. It was envisaged that findings emerging at any one stage would inform and direct successive stages.

3.4.1 Stage One

The first stage was planned as a period of familiarisation, designed to address the following objectives:

- Establish relationships
- Describe the setting
- Identify and enlist child participants
- Determine the subject focus

⁸ Adapted from Carspecken (1996), who proposed five stages for conducting critical qualitative research. Carspecken uses the stages to reflect the process by which data is first collected and later analysed in monological then dialogical terms. Rather than implement Carspecken's approach, the current design only reflects a process of adaptation within the setting so as to address several research considerations (see section 3.7).

The decision to spend time in the field before recording interaction data was to serve multiple purposes as a two-way process. It gave the school time to become accustomed to the ongoing presence of the researcher, whilst affording the researcher time to become habituated within the setting.

Entering into a 'shared social world' depended upon both 'interaction' and 'reciprocity of perspectives between social actors' (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998). Access was recognised to be an ongoing process, as important within the research settings as gaining access to the sites. Whether the aim was to gain access to confidential records, ideas/thoughts or to observe within the social setting, some degree of acceptance was required, which takes *time* to acquire. Whilst multiple perspectives were to strengthen the study, getting access to them necessitated building a rapport and securing the trust and co-operation of the school community (see section 3.7.1.3). Taking time to negotiate an entry to the setting was planned to dispel concerns about the researcher's 'critical presence' (Lareau, 1996) and reduce the 'Hawthorne Effect' (see section 3.6.1.3), before transactional data was collected.

Child participants were to be identified and approached during stage one, to provide them with access to information (and time) to make an informed choice to participate. It was considered particularly crucial that child participants did not feel segregated or targeted for special attention. Stage one was intended to help participants become familiar with the researcher's presence as an observer and with research techniques (e.g. questioning, tape-recorder) to maximise the validity of the interactional data collected. Time was allocated to build a rapport with all class members and secure a non-authoritarian/non-teacher role. It was intended that the researcher be known on first-name terms. The researcher's role was proposed to evolve by making/reacting to appropriate judgements, in recognition that there is a fine line between confining and facilitating data acquisition, a balance susceptible to small modifications of the role. In time an acceptable equilibrium could be ascertained.

For the researcher, becoming habituated within the setting was considered important for reasons summarised by Hammersley (1998: 9):

"It is necessary to learn the culture of the group one is studying before one can produce valid explanations for the behaviour of its members."

Fetterman (1998) refers to this phase as a survey period, collating cultural knowledge (language, kinship, historical data, structure, function) to generate an interpretive framework by which data is analysed. Since the research took part within a familiar setting to the researcher (as a former primary school teacher), a descriptive approach was chosen whereby all events would be recorded. Involving participants in the process and

collecting/evaluating predominantly monological data was intended to help keep an open-mind and enhance the validity of the data.

A further objective during stage one concerned defining a subject focus, recognising that feasibility was a determining factor. This stage was envisaged to take several weeks, subject to achieving the objectives outlined above.

3.4.2 Stage Two

The second stage was planned to focus on interactional data, designed to address the following objectives:

- Collate interactional classroom data
- Gain insights into participants' perspectives
- Build relationships

A decision was made to focus on children's interactions to emulate a theoretical stance (see chapter two), concerned with describing, interpreting and explaining action as the unit of analysis (Wertsch, 1998). Moreover, accounting for the constitutive nature of time, action, activities and the social world obliges the study of contextual interactions. This point is summarised by Wertsch (op cit.: 25) in relation to mediated action:

“The essence of examining agent and cultural tools...is to examine them as they interact. Any attempt to reduce the account...to one or other of these elements runs the risk of destroying the phenomenon under observation.”

Applied to the current study, interactions were intended to form the basis of the data collected. Methods were chosen to access both verbal and non-verbal actions of the child within the context of executing curricular activities.

The decision to access participants' perspectives as part of the study was based on considering emic perspectives to be instrumental in understanding and describing situations/behaviour (Fetterman, 1998). Thus, the study sought to understand the delivery/execution of curricular activities and contexts under investigation through the participants' perspectives.

Defining relationships as an ongoing concern reflected the dependence of the research upon participants' co-operation and their willingness to participate over time (see section 3.7.1.3). Unless people are happy that the research information being collected about them is put to good use, their confidences observed and their interests and identities and confidentiality safeguarded, they will block access to it (Woods, 1986). The researcher deemed it crucial that the school(s) in general and participants in particular, trusted the researcher's intentions and assurances of anonymity/confidentiality, trusted that non-

deceptive techniques were being applied and that they were represented fairly and accurately. Fetterman (1998) maintains that trust is acquired through honesty. Nevertheless, trust is acquired over time, therefore it was acknowledged to be an ongoing concern.

It was envisaged that stage two would take several weeks and would be subject to negotiated access in the field and the collection of interaction data for each participant was done within a comparable number of lessons.

3.4.3 Stage Three

The third stage as foreseen would occur out of the field, designed to address the following objectives:

- Analyse the interaction data
- Crosscheck insights with teacher participants

The stage was intended to be reflective and focused on an in-depth analysis of the interaction data. Deciding on the appropriateness of analytical methods was intended to depend on the data collected and to reflect an exploratory and emergent design. The researcher deemed that the study would benefit from the teacher's interpretation of events, so it was planned that transcripts would be given to teacher participants to analyse as part of the process (see section 3.7.2.2).

3.5 Practicalities of the Research

3.5.1 Pilot Study

A three-week pilot study was held in a small school and based in one classroom setting during which time several decisions were made about the research. In particular, the pilot study helped determine the feasibility and appropriateness of certain methods and help formulate a decision about the number of child participants. The setting provided the opportunity to trial different ways of recording children's interactions, including clip-on microphones/dictaphones and tape-recorders. The use of clip-on microphones was abandoned because it singled children out and had a greater impact on the setting than the use of a tape-recorder. From the pilot study, a decision was also made to base 'priority observations' (Carspecken, 1996) on one child throughout a lesson rather than between participants. Carspecken recommends changing priority individuals every 5 minutes, however doing so made it impossible to track the development of the child's engagement or fully understand the contexts of their actions (in terms of previous/subsequent action).

A decision was made to limit the number of participants from twelve to eight, to optimise the balance between depth/breadth.

3.5.2 Establishing Participants: Access and Sampling Issues

After permission was granted by Leeds Education Authority to conduct the research, letters were sent to all mainstream primary schools with more than 200 pupils, within a 10-mile radius of the researcher's home (i.e. 9) informing them about the project and inviting their participation. The schools were contacted by telephone and meetings were held with headteachers who showed interest (i.e. 3). Two schools were then selected on the basis of the opportunity presented to the researcher (Shipman, 1997), initially dependent upon the headteachers' willingness to participate and subsequently the availability/consent of two⁹ teacher-participants in each setting. Headteachers then approached the teachers (based on the availability of child-participants with LD/headteacher judgements of suitability) to request initial approval. Meetings were then held with those teachers to summarise the project (outlining aims, strategy and methods), answer any enquiries and to gain consent. The researcher entered the field at a convenient time for all concerned, two weeks into the start of the autumn term.

It was decided that two¹⁰ children would be selected in each class, amongst those identified as having LD and on the school SN register between stages 2 to 5, forming a sample of 8 cases in total. Headteachers/teachers were asked to select child-participants and their decisions were used to define what constituted LD for the context of the study (see table 3.2). The criteria on which children were identified varied across teachers/schools. Children were chosen because of availability, personality (e.g. teachers thought 'shy' children could benefit from attention/discussions), teacher concerns (i.e. where it was hoped the research process would enlighten matters of concern) and/or child behaviour (i.e. the teacher deemed the researcher's presence to be too disruptive for some).

Child participants and their parents were contacted during stage one using methods deemed appropriate by the school. In one school, the children were called to a meeting with the headteacher to discuss the project and gain their consent before their parents were contacted by letter¹¹ and the researcher confirmed their desire to participate. In the other

⁹ Using two teacher-participants in each school served a dual purpose of giving access to different perspectives whilst limiting the schools involved, given the nature of the research methods employed and time constraints associated with conducting/completing a doctoral thesis.

¹⁰ Using two child-participants in each class allowed flexibility (e.g. absenteeism), access to different perspectives, avoided participants feeling singled out and limited the number of classes involved.

¹¹ The letter sent to parents was written by the researcher and summarised the study's aims and methods. The letter offered parents the chance to meet the researcher or discuss the study and was taken up by two of the seven parents.

school, parents were initially contacted by the headteacher and then by letter, whilst the researcher sought the children's consent. Gaining access to the child participants was a lengthy process, reliant on schools approaching and obtaining parental consent. After six weeks, consent had not been obtained for one child, and was withdrawn for another, owing to family matters. Whilst a decision was taken to enlist another child participant (1.2.2¹²) in one class, in the other an alternative was not available, rendering the final study sample seven in total.

3.5.3 Participants

3.5.3.1 Schools

School one is a county primary school catering for 295 pupils, aged 3-11, organised into 11 classes. There are 12 teaching staff and 8 SNA's. It describes itself as seeking to encourage a *'family atmosphere'* and work with children as part of a team. It defines an expectation that children take responsibility for their own actions. Pupils with SEN receive support mainly in withdrawal groups.

School two is a large county primary school catering for 440 pupils aged 4-11. There are 16.5 teaching staff and 5 SNA's. It describes itself as a *'family school'*, aiming to *'..provide every child with a high quality...and challenging education...where the child experiences a sense of enjoyment and achievement'*. It aims to encourage children's self-motivation and independence. There are between 30-40 children on the SEN register, receiving in-class support (2.2.) or additional literacy support in withdrawal groups (2.1).

3.5.3.2 Teachers

Brief details about the teachers in the study are represented on the following table:

Teacher/ Code		Years Teaching	Class size	Year Group/ Responsibilities		Brief Organisational Details
1	1.1	3	29	3/4	RE	Groups of 6-8, taught in ability groups for english/science/maths
2	1.2	20	26	5	Geography	Groups of 2-4, desks facing blackboard, whole-class teaching, tasks executed individually
3	2.1	12	31	5	RE	3 sets of 10, organised by ability, whole-class teaching, some group tasks
4	2.2	15	31	6	Deputy head KS 2, discipline, staff dev.	3 sets of 10, organised by ability, whole-class teaching, some pair work

Table 3.1: Summary of Teacher Participants

¹² Chris was the only participant who was on the SN register for behavioural as well as learning difficulties. He was expelled from the school for a short period of time during the research period.

3.5.3.3 Children

Brief details about children in the study are outlined on the table 3.2 below:

Child ¹³	Code used	Age	Stage	Nature of Learning Difficulty ¹⁴	Availability of SNA
Joanne	1.1.1	8	3	Reading - sight vocabulary, inconsistent use of reading strategies, retaining words from day-to-day Spelling high frequency/common words use of spelling strategies in free-writing	Not available for in-class work Withdrawn for literacy support
Jenny	1.2.1	9	5	Reading - retention of sight words, use of phonic knowledge, comprehension Confidence - writing/spelling Listening - heeding/following/understanding instructions Writing – sentences	Intermittent availability Some continual in-class contact Withdrawn for literacy support
Chris	1.2.2	9	2	Maths - confidence, number skills, problem solving, understanding English - reading, spelling, written work Behaviour - outside the classroom	Intermittent availability Limited in-class contact
Charlotte	2.1.1	9	2	Literacy - reading, spelling Pace - across subjects ' <i>[Charlotte's] greatest problem is her speed.....her thought processes are very slow....</i> ' Attention - ' <i>daydreaming</i> '/' <i>switching off</i> '	Intermittent availability No 1:1 contact Withdrawn for literacy support
Bridget	2.1.2	9	2	Spelling – key words Motivation – attitude to school	No contact
Kevin	2.2.1	10	5	Verbal understanding - organisation, sequencing of abstract/complex language Expressive language - explaining complex ideas, verbal reasoning, sentence structure, word recall, maintaining same topic of conversation	In-class support for all classroom-based lessons (i.e. except ICT)
David	2.2.2	10	4	Literacy – reading fluency, phonological processing, phoneme recall, irregular high-frequency spelling vocabulary, visual/auditory discrimination, punctuation, sentence construction Maths -number manipulation >100, time Sequencing/memory Confidence, self-esteem, motivation	In-class support for all classroom-based lessons (i.e. except ICT)

Table 3.2: Summary of Child Participants

3.6 Data Collection

Methods were chosen on the basis of 'appropriateness' in seeking to uphold the chosen research strategy in a study of children's engagement and the actions of the child in the social world (both spoken and non-verbal). Furthermore, the choice of the research methods was also motivated by a desire to be informed rather than have things affirmed (Fisher, 1996), ensuring that findings were not rooted in prior assumptions.

¹³ Pseudonyms have been used for anonymity.

¹⁴ Notes compiled from the child's IEP, formal assessment reports (i.e. support service, social services) or teachers' remarks

There were three main methods of data collection utilised: observation, dialogue and documentation, each serving a different purpose for the research process. The following table provides an overview of the methods used and their differing purposes. These will be discussed in more detail in the sections that follow.

Overview of Methods

Method	Stage	Procedure	Description
Observation	1	Participant-as-observer	Descriptive, narrative account Of all subjects/days/school events
		Diary/reflections	Log of thoughts/conflicts/ ideas/ emergent issues using dictation machine
	2	Observer-as-participant Priority observations	Focused on child participants Classroom-based, core subjects/ICT
		Diary/reflections	As above
Dialogue	1	Impromptu discussions [A]	Log of comments to researcher
		Planned discussions [T]	Record of teachers' comments or answers to researcher queries
		Transcript feedback [T]	Transcribed fieldnotes given to teachers weekly for comment
		Objectives sheet [T/H]	Inform T/H of weekly aims, requests for documentation/time
		Focused interview [T] 30mins	Discussion of T/C participants, classroom routines/organisation
		Meeting [H]	Access, research issues
	2	Taped interactions	Table-top recorder used in core subjects/ICT
		Contextual discussions [C]	Researcher interaction during lessons (as appropriate)
		Question proforma [T]	Addressing questions arising in each lesson (verbal/written)
		Unstructured interview 40 mins [T]	Discussion about teaching/learning
		Impromptu discussions [A]	As above
		SENCO interview 30 mins	Policy context, school procedures, participation
		Objectives sheet [T/H]	As above
	3	Follow-up interview [T]	Further an understanding of the teachers' approach using issues emerging during the research
Teacher analysis [T]		Teacher interpretation	
Documentation	1	School (action plan, aims, rules, prospectus, handbook, Ofsted report)	Contextual background
		Curriculum (timetable)	
	2	Lesson (child's work, worksheets, textbook)	Contextual information Cross-check
		Curriculum (policy, planning, lesson objectives)	
		SEN (policy, child's file, IEP, ALS)	Participant information

Table 3.3: Summary of Research Methods at Stages of the Research Process

[T] = Teacher, [C] = Child, [H] = Headteacher, [A] = All (staff, children and parents)

3.6.1 Observation

3.6.1.1 Stage One

Observation was chosen to research matters of understanding. It was a key method, particularly during stage one of the data collection, where the researcher adopted a *participant-as-observer* role. This involved being part of the participants' social world whilst recording what happened for research purposes (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). A desire to preserve a natural setting and acknowledge the researcher's presence as a participant within it, required a non-invasive, unstructured and inherently flexible approach. The method was chosen to enable naturalistic¹⁵ (unprompted) and contextual classroom events to be recorded. In his infamous account, Whyte (1955: 305) reported:

“As I sat and listened, I learned the answers to questions that I would not have had the sense to ask if I had been getting my information solely on an interviewing basis.”

It was also chosen to uphold an overt role whilst being drawn into the complexity of the classroom/school, where connections, causes and correlations could be observed (Adler & Adler, 1998).

During stage one, observation was key to achieving the objectives of describing the setting and determining the subject focus (see section 3.4.1). A deliberate attempt was made to observe all school events, curricular subjects and everyday of the week, across four classrooms. In a participant capacity, the researcher 'joined in' certain¹⁶ classroom (e.g. reading games, group debates, role-play) and playtime activities (e.g. tig, hopscotch, ball games, skipping, colouring), rather than observe from a distance. A conscious effort was made to mix with all members of the class without disrupting classroom activities. Social discussions were largely held over lunch or at playtime. As an observer, the researcher was based in each classroom for a full day on at least one (different) day per week, observing school proceedings (e.g. plays, assemblies), withdrawal/reading groups and curricular activities. Descriptive and detailed field notes were made as an ongoing log of events within a time frame during most classroom activities or recorded afterwards, following participation in activities. The field notes were unstructured so as not to limit or influence the observations¹⁷. They were written up into a narrative account (daily), to minimise the impact of memory shortcomings (Robson, 1993) and passed to the teachers for verification. Alongside field notes, a research journal was kept which was separate to

¹⁵ Naturalistic is used to mean representational of classroom life rather than involving researcher interventions.

¹⁶ The researcher took part in non-curricular activities or those deemed appropriate by the teacher /child participants (by invite).

¹⁷ Observational schedules were rejected on the basis that predefined categories may have limited the findings and would involve defining actions without consideration of the meaning/significance behind their occurrence.

distinguish between personal comments (opinions, issues, perceptions of how events related to one another, concerns, memory sparkers) and what was observed (or heard).

3.6.1.2 Stage Two

During stage two, the researcher adopted an *observer-as-participant* role, involving less extensive contact with the group (Cohen et al., 2000). An observer-as-participant depicts the researcher as a contributor within the social setting, yet in a more detached and objective capacity. A role change was required as the focus shifted towards individual child participants. A technique termed 'priority observations' (Carspecken, 1996) was adopted, involving taking one child within the setting and recording everything they say/do, in as detailed a way as possible as the first priority, everything other people say/do in the interaction as the second priority and any other details as the third priority. The technique was chosen to preserve the context and account for events as they occurred, yet focus the observations on individuals. Since every action was deemed pertinent by the researcher, observations were not reliant upon the researcher's judgements of events, in the interest of the research, as would have been required for other focused observational methods (e.g. critical incidents, Cohen et al., 2000).

During stage two, observation was used to help achieve the objectives outlined in section 3.4.2. Observations were classroom-based and focused upon the engagement of one child participant at a time, during an entire curricular activity for one of the core subjects or ICT (as available)¹⁸. Records were made of the child's approach and endeavours in the execution of curricular activities, as well as the support and regulation of those activities-in-action. Field notes were collated as a running record of events, structured into segments - time, child actions/utterances, contextual information (regarding teacher/peer/SNA as appropriate) and emergent issues. An attempt was made to alternate between the two child participants in one class over the course of a day. A seating position was chosen to maintain a level of detachment during observation sessions and avoid children with SEN feeling uncomfortable about the researcher's continual presence. The research journal was maintained during stage two, as a form of reflection on the impact of methods and emergent issues that required researcher decisions.

3.6.1.3 Critique of Observational Methods

The use of participant observation across different settings raised several issues. Observation was chosen as a means of accessing first-hand accounts of participants'

¹⁸ Subjects were chosen for reasons of continuity (geography/history were taught in 6 week periods), availability (varying flexibility of teacher availability), classroom-based (difficulty of collecting data outside) and relevance to research (limited interactions during art/PE).

actions and representing their complexity/embedded nature but as a time-consuming method, the scope and representation of the study was limited. Choosing to observe across multiple settings to address an element of breadth/depth of understanding had its implications. One trade-off was continuity, owing to the number of events that could not be observed and the observations being intermittent. This became problematic when lessons were an extension of those started previously, and the researcher had not been party to former explanations, discussions and verbal instructions. It was also problematic when time constraints meant activities had to be continued when the researcher was scheduled to be elsewhere, rendering lesson observations incomplete.

An observational method was chosen to reflect the researcher being a part of the social milieu. As Schwandt (1998) reiterates, it is not possible to disentangle the observer from the observed. To the extent that the researcher's presence within the classroom alters the context and potentially the actions of those within the setting, validity issues are broached. The effects of the researcher are often referred to as the 'Hawthorne Effect'¹⁹, to refer to the possible effects of participants wishing to avoid, impress, direct, deny or influence the researcher (Cohen et al., 2000). Ultimately it remains difficult to ascertain the extent to which participants acted differently in the researcher's presence or as a reaction to the research process. Whilst teacher/child participants reacted to the researcher/research tools (e.g. smiling, talking, looking at/moving the tape-recorder), participants' actions may have reflected acceptance of (or having become accustomed to) the researcher or tools being present within the setting, as much as their actions were a consequence of being researched. It was particularly noticeable that for child participants with an SNA, the researcher added to the number of adults in their vicinity. A more detached seating position was chosen, as a result of this observation.

Recording observations raises other issues, since it was only possible to record a proportion of *what* was observed, which correspondingly represents a proportion of the social event. The difficulties of recording contextual complexities using hand-written notes rendered both observation and notes incomplete. The dynamics of the setting, the speed of the hand and the time-lapse between observation/writing had consequences for what was observed and recorded. Whilst pictorial methods (video/photographs) could have helped circumvent such issues, they were discounted because they still would not have accounted for all of the occurrences, yet they would have had an additional impact on the 'naturalness' of the setting and could have enhanced the participants' potential discomfort

¹⁹ During research conducted in the Hawthorne works, employees increased their productivity, rendering the effect of the researchers' presence.

by being targeted for attention. Observations were also dependent upon being able to distinguish the participants' actions, which were affected by the researcher's position and proximity to the child. Too close may have influenced the setting, yet too far away (or at certain angles), would have adversely affected observations. The exact nature of children's actions could not always be established (e.g. seeing what Bridget was writing when she continued to work, having been asked to stop). Furthermore, observations could not account for the complexity of participants' actions (e.g. intentions, motives) or determine participants' listening/concentration (simultaneous action/thought). For example, attending to stationary items during the teacher's dialogue could distract or facilitate a child's listening/concentration. Recordings were also affected by *how* actions were recorded. It was deemed necessary by the researcher to be vigilant whilst recording children's actions so that interpretive labels were not being imposed on the data collected. While efforts were made to describe actions, there were consequences for how much could be recorded.

3.6.2 Dialogue

A variety of methods were used (see table 3.3), for the purpose of obtaining interaction data, gaining access to participants' perspectives and accounting for things that could not be observed (Whyte, 1994). Methods differed slightly between stages (and participants), since judgements of appropriateness guided their use, dependent upon the degree of interaction with those involved (Woods, 1986).

3.6.2.1 Stage One

During stage one, informal and *impromptu discussions* were held with all members of the school community, as 'on the wing' conversations (Robson, 1993) were distinct from planned or targeted questioning. *Informal, planned discussions* were held with teachers before or after lessons, as were feasible. Targeted questioning comprised *focused* interviews held with teacher participants. A focused interview describes one scheduled with an aim in mind (May, 1997), seeking to ascertain particular information about the teacher (experience, background), child participants (social/academic interests, targets, strengths, limitations) and emergent issues (e.g. generation of classroom-rules, routines). Formal *meetings* were arranged with headteachers to arrange procedures for gaining parental and child consent. Written dialogue was also used. Teachers were asked to give *written feedback* on field notes to serve the dual purpose of verifying observations and maintaining an open/honest research process.

During stage one, dialogue played a key role in establishing relationships and negotiating access to child participants within the school setting. Likewise, it served the purpose of

collating and verifying contextual information. Nevertheless, achieving these objectives was subject to a balance between research demands (e.g. openness, verifying, collating information) and being respectful of participants' responsibilities/demands (e.g. time/work pressures). Dialogue for research purposes depended heavily on participants' time (which was at a premium), yet relationships hinged on minimal interference/pressure. Written dialogue helped address the balance. Headteachers/teachers were provided with a weekly objectives sheet outlining research priorities, changes and requirements. Therefore, research objectives could be conveyed without utilising time or jeopardising relationships. Minimising dialogical exchange served other purposes in initial stages. Refraining from questioning others about matters relevant to the research, meant answers could emerge through data collection and time in the field. Participant-initiations and spontaneous responses were particularly important in generating insights that could not be predetermined. Early discussions were often about the research itself, for which a direct, open and honest approach was taken (see section 3.7.1.3). Records of informal conversations were made post hoc, to facilitate the development of a rapport with participants. Focused interviews were conducted towards the end of stage one at the teachers' convenience and were used to confirm, elaborate, correct, clarify and/or modify (May, 1997) issues and responses arising from analysis of the data collected. Interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim and later passed to teachers to be crosschecked.

3.6.2.2 Stage Two

During stage two, the research focused on dialogue within the classroom. The primary focus of the data collection was participants' *interactions* during curricular activities. Consistent with the 'priority observation' technique applied (see section 3.6.1.2), verbal exchanges were tape-recorded throughout the lessons observed. The recordings were to serve the purpose of obtaining a verbatim script of the participants' dialogue and those with whom they interacted. A secondary focus was to understand what was happening during the execution of curricular activities, through the participants' perspectives. Their perspectives were obtained through *discussions in context*²⁰. This method was chosen because calling upon participants to think about their latest actions, plans or spontaneous thoughts in the situation, placed fewer cognitive demands upon them, than questioning them retrospectively (Donaldson, 1987). It was planned that questioning would be kept to a minimum to allow answers to emerge and lessen an impact on the setting however, questioning served to further an understanding of participants' actions and confirm

²⁰ Interviews were not used with participants as the focus was on their actions and interactions in the classroom. Some parents specifically said they did not want children being interviewed outside of the classroom context.

observational notes (and therefore maintain validity). The researcher felt that a rapport was important to the nature and flow of discussions. *Teachers' perspectives* about lessons observed and the nature of the child's execution of curricular activities were obtained during discussions before/during/after lessons, where feasible. They served to access the meanings teachers attributed to events, and encouraged them to reflect upon their experiences. Teacher perspectives were further explored using *unstructured interviews*, seeking to derive an understanding of their approach to teaching and learning in the light of observations. Unstructured interviews were used because, by nature, they are non-directive and aimed at accessing the interviewee's perceptions (Powney & Watts, 1987). Informal *impromptu conversations* served an important role during stage two, in accessing different perspectives. However, there was more dialogue, initiated both by the researcher and the school community, for the purpose of addressing gaps in the researcher's understanding. Arising from the analysis of SEN documentation, interviews were held with SENCOs to further an understanding of the school's approach to SEN and the background/implementation of the SEN policy. Of particular interest was the school's approach to the participation of children with SEN. A schedule was used, generated from analysis of the SEN policy and based on the researcher's questions.

During stage two, dialogical methods were chosen to complement the observational methods (Burgess, 1984) in addressing the objectives (see section 3.4.2). Interactions were *taped* using a tabletop recording device, comprising a pop-up unidirectional microphone, positioned in front of the child throughout a lesson. The device was chosen because of its size and flexibility; it was battery operated so could be easily moved and the pop-up facility helped to achieve clear recordings of both the teachers' delivery and the child participants' execution of curricular activities in a busy classroom. To minimise researcher intervention and give child participants control, they were taught to operate the microphone and were permitted to switch the recorder off, as necessary. *Discussions with child participants* were held when the opportunity arose during task-execution, using open-questions (e.g. tell me about...?) to obtain information about their thoughts, intentions and actions. Questions were avoided during participants' interactions with others, to observe and record how those interactions developed, and were occasionally asked of others (peers, SNA) to avoid participants feeling singled out and build contextual information. *Discussions with teachers* were held more regularly yet the need to access teacher perspectives about lessons observed (particularly regarding child participants/activities used), analogous with stage one, depended on participants' time. A question proforma was created and its use negotiated. In the closing stages of each lesson, several questions were recorded; these

were either discussed with teachers after the lesson if time allowed, or were left for teachers to complete in their own time. *Interviews* were conducted with teachers (and SENCOs) in school at their convenience (at week 8/9). *Unstructured interviews* were held with teachers lasting approximately 40 minutes and were taped to free the researcher to listen and respond carefully and to provide a verbatim script. Scripts were later crosschecked with teachers to enable quotes to be used when corroborating observations.

3.6.2.3 Stage Three

At stage three, the research focused on obtaining information from teachers about data collated in the field and involving them in the analysis of the data. *Follow-up interviews* were held to further an understanding of the teachers' perspectives, by raising several topics²¹ previously mentioned by the teachers during interviews/discussions and asking the teachers to consider the topics in terms of perceived locus of control and teaching priorities. Thus a framework was developed to sort the topics as to whether they were regulated by the child, teacher, both, or neither party. Teachers were later involved in data analysis (see section 3.7.2.2). They were given a disc containing all classroom interaction transcripts from stage one and two and interview transcripts and were asked to *analyse* one lesson transcript and make any changes to the interviews, as required.

The methods were chosen to help address the objectives of data analysis and crosschecking data sources. The schools were visited twice after leaving the field. Shortly after leaving, interviews were held with teachers at their convenience. The second visit occurred after the data had been transcribed (5 months later). Meetings were held with teachers to discuss analysis requirements. They were given broad areas as prompts for consideration of the data including interactions, strategies, questions, decision-making, actions (see section 3.7.2.2). Teachers were informed that the purpose was to:

"... enable me to crosscheck my recordings and observation notes with your experiences, understandings and recollections".

3.6.2.4 Critique of Dialogue Methods

Dialogue was crucial for collecting and understanding interaction data. The implementation of flexible, unstructured methods sought a balance between minimising the impact of the researcher's presence on participants' engagement in curricular activities, and obtaining information that could not be established through observation alone (e.g. participants' intentions or the reason for their actions). The collection of dialogue data in

²¹ Topics involved in the follow-up interview included routines, ethos, class-timetable, listening, concentration, choices, communication, discipline, motivation, pace, subject matter (amongst others).

dynamic classroom environments posed several challenges involving moment-to-moment decisions within the setting.

- *Taping* - Participants moved around the classroom, affecting recordings and posed the question of whether to follow. The device was used as a bookstand, affecting the quality of the recording yet, posed the question of whether to intervene. One participant turned off the tape-recorder, symbolising its impact and affecting the data, whilst another swore into the device and checked the researcher's reaction, leaving a question as to how the researcher should react. Although costly, a battery-operated device proved more flexible. Participants reported the battery warning light being on, thereby emphasising its impact. Also, the inevitable battery changes during lessons were distracting. Taking advantage of the pop-up unidirectional microphone depended upon participants remembering to use it or on the researcher intervening, which was distracting. Furthermore, not all interactions could be distinguished (e.g. whispers, multiple voices). Therefore, for several reasons taping could not capture a full dialogue of each lesson, highlighting the importance of observation notes.
- *Discussions with child participants* – the decision of 'when to initiate' posed one of the greatest challenges, for what may have appeared an appropriate opportunity for the researcher may have felt inappropriate for the child. When child participants worked alone, the researcher tried to consider the effect of questioning on their concentration and task achievement. When working alongside others (i.e. peers, SNA), the researcher was conscious of adding to the overall number of interactions or interrupting the natural free-flow of dialogue between parties. Further challenges were broached in deciding what/how to ask, which was often subject to spontaneous thought-in-action, yet had the potential to impinge upon the participants' response.

Participants initiated many interactions with the researcher (see section 4.2), posing further questions in the field as how to respond. Participants raised many issues (e.g. spellings, peer's behaviour, ideas) for different purposes (e.g. help, eliciting information) and at times that did not always fit in with the teachers' agenda (e.g. after calls for silence). On the one hand, participants appeared to engage the researcher, as they would a peer/SNA; to stop them or suggest that such questions/comments were inappropriate, could feasibly have had a greater impact than responding to their request. On the other hand, topics were not always pertinent to the task and reacting may have influenced further initiations or affected the participants' work, research findings and/or the researcher's relationship with the teacher. The researcher aimed to maintain a professional distance whilst building a rapport. It was of concern that

interactions with the researcher may have precluded others from interacting with participants, including those initiated by the child and teacher. Nevertheless, since participants broached spontaneous and non-elicited topics, comments and questions, they provided insight into their thoughts and ideas without the need for questioning. Taking Cooper's (1993: 129) argument, such accounts are more authentic (i.e. '*a spontaneous and honest account of the respondents thinking*') than questioning, which are influenced by participants' perceptions about intention, purpose, audience and anonymity.

- *Discussions with teachers* – time constraints rendered discussions with teachers to be brief and limited to after lessons. This restricted the scope of topics discussed since it was difficult to question them about specific thoughts, intentions or actions. Asking teachers to discuss the lesson retrospectively raised an issue of memory fallibility. Moreover a link cannot be assumed between the teachers' account of action and what was observed of the action itself. Such discussions could also have been affected by teachers rendering their account of actions in the classroom, representing something beyond the dialogical situation (May, 1997). Where discussions were not feasible, leaving the question proforma with teachers to complete later, it raised issues about the teachers' interpretation of questions asked and the time delay before completion.
- The *unstructured interviews* themselves pose further considerations. They adopt a different form to conversations, due to the embedded nature of some of the questions (Fetterman, 1998). An unstructured design also meant a variable course and outcome amongst teachers, although the use of the interview for triangulation purposes rendered this matter inconsequential. The format placed greater significance on moment-to-moment decisions about the appropriateness of questions used in response to participants' remarks. Whilst structured interviews were discounted for their potential influence on teachers' perspectives, there was still scope for influencing the interviews and much depended upon how questions were phrased. Teachers could potentially respond differently to the same question if asked another way.

3.6.3 Documentation

A variety of documents were used as part of the research (see table 3.3), gathered throughout the process. During stage one, school and curricular documentation was collated and used for two purposes. Firstly, to provide the procedural/organisational information needed for arranging and managing the operational research details, whilst minimising the utilisation of participants' time when relationships were in their infancy. Secondly, they were used to obtain detailed information to acquire a better understanding

of the school context and therefore put the findings into context (see section 3.4.1). During stage two, once a subject focus was defined, policy documents were sought for information purposes. Also with parental/child consent, SEN documents were collated to obtain relevant details about participants' LD and the schools' approach. With participants' permission, several lesson documents were photocopied (see table 3.3) to verify observational/taped data as required.

Documents were to serve multiple purposes in providing information about the setting, which were used in the field to examine the data collected and later, to substantiate observations and clarify dialogue. Schools were amenable to requests for documentation. The weekly objectives sheets communicated requests ahead of time, avoiding the need to pressurise participants or utilise their time. Documents were collated, subject to the research focus, participants' trust and consent. The researcher sought to gain trust by communicating their intentions and providing assurances of confidentiality.

3.6.3.1 Critique of Document Use

Documents have the potential to inform and structure decisions that people make on a daily and long-term basis, hence they provide insight into people's aspirations, intentions and social relationships (May, 1997). However, an important consideration in using documented evidence concerns the difference between the frame of reference used to interpret the text and that used to create the document. Documents are fixed at a particular point in time and are contextual. As secondary sources of evidence, documents are created for a different purpose than for the research (Denscombe, 1998). As far as possible written sources were referred to, where they had been backed up by discussion or observation.

3.7 Research Considerations

3.7.1 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations underpin the research design and were applied throughout the process. Cohen et al (2000: 56) argue that '*there can be no rigid rules in this context*'; whilst principles are defined in advance, they also are responsive to participants and circumstances presented in the field.

3.7.1.1 Informed Consent

According to Cohen et al (2000), the principle of informed consent arises from the subject's right to freedom and self-determination. The participants' right to choose remained an ongoing consideration of the research. A basic premise was applied to any decision participants were asked to make about their participation in the research, such that

it was considered, enlightened and made freely, without coercion. Consent thereby involved the provision of information, opportunities for discussion, time to make decisions and being respectful of participants' right to choose.

At the outset, headteachers/teachers were given written information, outlining broad aims, nature (strategy/design), duration and methods as a summary of information known about the research, before entering the field. Meetings provided the opportunity to answer queries and negotiate on issues of accessibility, feasibility and appropriateness. Parental and child consent was obtained in the field, conducted with school involvement and in response to individual circumstances. Child-participants were given information about the research over time to address concerns, convey and demonstrate specific methods and incorporate individual circumstances into the process. Participants were told that their participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any stage, without being judged negatively.

In the process, participants were asked for consent before methods were applied (e.g. before observing/taping, photocopying material) and as changes became necessary (e.g. use of question proforma).

3.7.1.2 Anonymity and Confidentiality

It was ensured that information provided was given proper regard and would not reveal participants' identity (Cohen et al., 2000). The schools and participants involved were to remain anonymous. The identity of the other school was never referred to (despite requests) and pseudonyms or code labels were used for participants in written text, both during and after the process. Assurances of anonymity were also given regarding disseminating research findings to others. Inevitably data collected in the field, especially written records/documentation, reveals participants' identity and therefore has been treated confidentially under the Data Protection Act (Robson, 1993). In the process of data collection, the researcher was party to complaints, concerns and comments that were to remain confidential. For this reason, a verbal research diary was kept separate and other parties did not have access to this information.

3.7.1.3 Trust and Honesty

The participants' *trust* was an ongoing priority since the research depended upon their co-operation and willingness to divulge information. Fetterman (1998) regards trust to be built through honesty, communicated verbally through assurances of confidentiality and non-verbally through self-presentation. Honesty was applied as the 'best policy' from acknowledging the researcher's role in school to answering queries about the research, other than where anonymity or confidentiality was jeopardised or where actions may have

caused participants' harm (e.g. get a child in trouble). The supply of a weekly objectives sheet ensured intentions were regularly communicated, therefore ensuring that actions would mirror the information conveyed. By working with participants and being open to their suggestions, unforeseen ramifications were taken into account (Robson, 1993), ensuring trust and honesty were maintained.

3.7.1.4 Respect

During the data collection period, the researcher sought to be *respectful* of participants' time, culture and information provided. This involved minimising the demands upon their time and maximising the researcher's flexibility to fit in with existing schedules. In practice, some teachers were more flexible than others, and negotiation was required to account for more than one setting. Flexibility involved being available when a crisis arose (e.g. helping a child taken ill). It was an ongoing concern that the research was reciprocal, therefore ensuring participants felt that they were receiving something, in return for all their effort (Fetterman, 1998). In line with the ethical principles of the British Psychological Society, (cited in Robson, 1993) the research sought to be of no threat to participants' well-being, health, values or dignity. All views were listened to and respected by being treated as relevant. Since a deliberate attempt was made to treat all information in a non-judgemental way (Fetterman, 1998), a degree of *detachment* was maintained throughout the research process, so that personal concerns and expectations did not pervade the research or affect its course.

3.7.2 Other Research Considerations

3.7.2.1 Rigor

Rigor was a consideration throughout the research process, to ensure information was collected and represented as accurately as possible. In the field, rigor was addressed at two levels, minimising the researcher's impact upon the setting (and therefore what was observed), and minimising the researcher's influence on the data recorded. Personal reflections and interpretations were therefore kept separate, to ensure that events were recorded as descriptions and as factually accurate as possible. The representation of the data was ensured by using thick description of both the context and of participant accounts, which Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested maximises its dependability. The research process was also rigorous in aiming for consistency throughout. Consistency was a consideration across participants and settings in the field; ensuring equal time was given to data collection and analysis, giving each case study equal status and priority.

3.7.2.2 Bias

Bias is a consideration in using an eclectic, exploratory approach, whatever method is used to collect data. Robson (1993) warns that bias can pervade research in four main ways, including *selective attention* (interests, experiences, expectations affect what is attended to), *selective encoding* (expectations affect what is seen/interpreted), *selective memory* and *interpersonal factors* (the need to feel a part of the setting, warms us towards interacting with those who are more welcoming).

During fieldwork, the research design and approaches used were crucial to addressing issues of bias. At stage one, the focus was collating descriptive accounts and devoting time to building a rapport with all parties, before interaction data was collected. An equivalent amount of time was spent observing each setting, before moving onto stage two. Field notes were written up into thick description on a daily basis during stage one, to minimise memory issues and were returned to teachers weekly to crosscheck recordings with their experiences, understandings and recollections (whilst preserving openness). At stage two, observations were focused on limiting potential effects of bias on participants and recordings were as detailed an account of participants' words and actions as possible. Teachers were also asked to read through stage two data and comment as required. Being aware of a distinction between observing and understanding (Shipman, 1997), the two remained separate considerations – observational notes sought to be descriptive factual accounts, whilst understanding of the setting developed over time, through an iterative process.

During analysis, teacher involvement was important as a way of addressing bias. Teachers were given two lesson transcripts to enable teacher interpretations to be crosschecked with those of the researcher. A decision was taken to provide non-annotated scripts, so as not to influence what teachers may have to say, yet provide prompts to enable teachers to make informed annotations, based on the research focus. Their comments were sought as a form of triangulation, rather than to comment on researcher interpretations/findings (referred to as 'member checking' Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Whilst both are cited as procedures to address validity/credibility (c.f. Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Robson, 1993), they raise several issues provoking scepticism vis-à-vis their appropriateness (c.f. Silverman, 1993).

A decision to triangulate observations rather than validate interpretations, was based on recognition of several issues. Both teacher and researcher interpretations are subjective, rendering it questionable whether they can be substantiated or need to be corroborated as

Dey (1993: 235) queries in stating:

“The validity of our account does not depend on acceptance by those who are the subject of it”.

Respondent self-image was felt to be more significant to the validation of interpretations (Abrams, 1984, cited in Silverman, 1993), than to the validation of data. Although the researcher was not impartial, neither was the teacher since bias, misinterpretation and selectivity can work both ways. The emphasis was placed on seeking to corroborate and generate new insights about the data on which the research focused.

3.8 Analysis

3.8.1 Analysis in the Field

Analysis was started in the field. It was used to help achieve the research objectives at both stages and was key to safeguarding the values of the chosen research strategy. It was part of a cyclical and transactional process in which the data collected was used to generate questions that, in turn, guided further insights. It was used to generate topics for discussion in the focused interviews at stage one, and generate questions at stage two. Also, the analysis was part of an iterative process, systematically seeking to have observations and interpretations confirmed by participants and/or by further observations in the field. Participant confirmation was sought through feedback (see page 58) and questions (see section 3.6.2.2), yet was also obtained through observation. Child participants' spontaneous interactions with others or comments made in the course of their work were particularly insightful and minimised the number of questions that needed asking. By listening to the interactions amongst various parties, many queries could be answered. In certain circumstances, ongoing observation served to confirm or disprove previous observations. Also, the questioning presence of others (e.g. SNA) provided insight into some of the participants' thought processes, which otherwise could not have been accessed.

3.8.2 Data Accumulated

Stage	Timing	Methods	Data Accumulated
1	6-8 weeks	Field notes	1 ½ A4 Note Books
		Thick description	4 @ 6-7 days
		Teacher feedback	4 @ 6-7 days
		Journal	2 hours taped
		Interview	4 @ 30 mins
		Documents	Timetable, class plan/equipment list /photographs, school prospectus, aims, inspection report, mission statement, rules, staff handbook

Continued over

Stage	Timing	Methods	Data Accumulated
2	8 weeks	Field Notes	2 ½ A4 Note books
		Taped interactions	60 lessons @ 45 mins. – 1hr 20 mins.
		Journal	2 hours taped
		Teacher Interview	4 @ 40 mins.
		SENCO interview	2 @ 30 mins.
		Question proforma	For ¾ of lessons observed
		Documents	7 SEN files, school policy for subjects targeted & SEN, copies of work/worksheets/textbook for each lesson observed
3	2 visits	Interview	4 @ 30 mins.
		Teacher analysis	4 @ 1 lesson

Table 3.4: Summary of Data Accumulated in the Field

3.8.3 Preparation of the Data

The preparation of the data involved transcribing, ordering, filing and joining together different data sources. Verbatim transcripts were made of the interviews, research journals, taped interactions and field notes. A total of 45²² tape-recorded lessons were transcribed verbatim onto templates, mirroring the one used for the field notes. Between four and eight lessons were transcribed for each child. Transcripts recorded child-participants' interactions and those of others with whom the child interacted. The tape-recorded data was amalgamated with observational notes to combine talk and action, therefore accounting for simultaneous actions/interactions of the teacher, child, peer and SNA during the recordings. Synthesising the data also served to triangulate sources of information. Lesson transcripts were colour-coded to facilitate the retrieval of different information sources. Whilst the process was lengthy, taking five months to complete, during transcription the researcher became fully immersed in, and familiar with, the data.

3.8.4 Choice of Analysis Methods

It is frequently cited that there is no 'right way' or standard approach to analyse non-numeric data (Bryman & Burgess, 1994a; Burgess, 1984; Robson, 1993). Tesch (1990) is widely cited (e.g. Miles & Huberman, 1994; Robson, 1993) for distinguishing at least twenty-six approaches to 'qualitative' data analysis. As for the methods of data collection, the choice of methods for analysis was guided by 'a matter of appropriateness' (Oppenheim, 1992). Such a matter was defined by the research strategy and approach, reflecting an emergent, eclectic and iterative process. Over the course of analysis, various approaches were considered and rejected as being unsuitable, whilst others were tested and later rejected on the same grounds.

²² Not all lessons were transcribed and therefore variations between participants could be explained. A similar number of lessons were observed for each child, yet lessons were not transcribed where the class-teacher was absent, lessons were incomplete, involved assessment tests or non-target subjects were observed (owing to timetable changes). All other data was transcribed, so as not to introduce bias.

Amongst those approaches considered and rejected, were methods that could be categorised as analytic strategies - branded systems or models of analysis (e.g. analytic induction, grounded theory, pattern modelling). The researcher deemed it inappropriate to use approaches where an aim (e.g. generate theory) and procedure are pre-defined. Such approaches are subject to interpretation and can be associated with ways of thinking that may affect how others perceive the study. Also, the researcher felt such approaches could inhibit an iterative and eclectic approach. It was likewise considered inappropriate to separately analyse different types of data (c.f. Silverman, 1993, 2000), since it was intended that, over the course of the analysis, data sources would be synthesised.

Methods were tested in response to issues arising in the course of analysis. Tally charts were employed in an attempt to manage the unwieldy burden of verbatim data transcription, and depended upon being able to generate and sort data into categories at an early stage. Moreover, they affected the ability to crosscheck data sources, use verbatim quotes and took data out of context, therefore contradicting the research objectives. Another method involved interrogating the data by seeking to answer questions generated during the analysis using thick description. It became apparent that the approach was over-reliant on the researcher's judgements because questions were difficult to answer, illustrating that issues generated through analysis were not necessarily pertinent to all data.

Similarities are apparent between discarded approaches. Unwittingly, yet systematically, approaches that pre-defined or imposed considerations on data analysis were deemed by the researcher as inappropriate. The figure overleaf illustrates the variations and dichotomous relationship between principles held in balance when analysing non-numeric data²³.

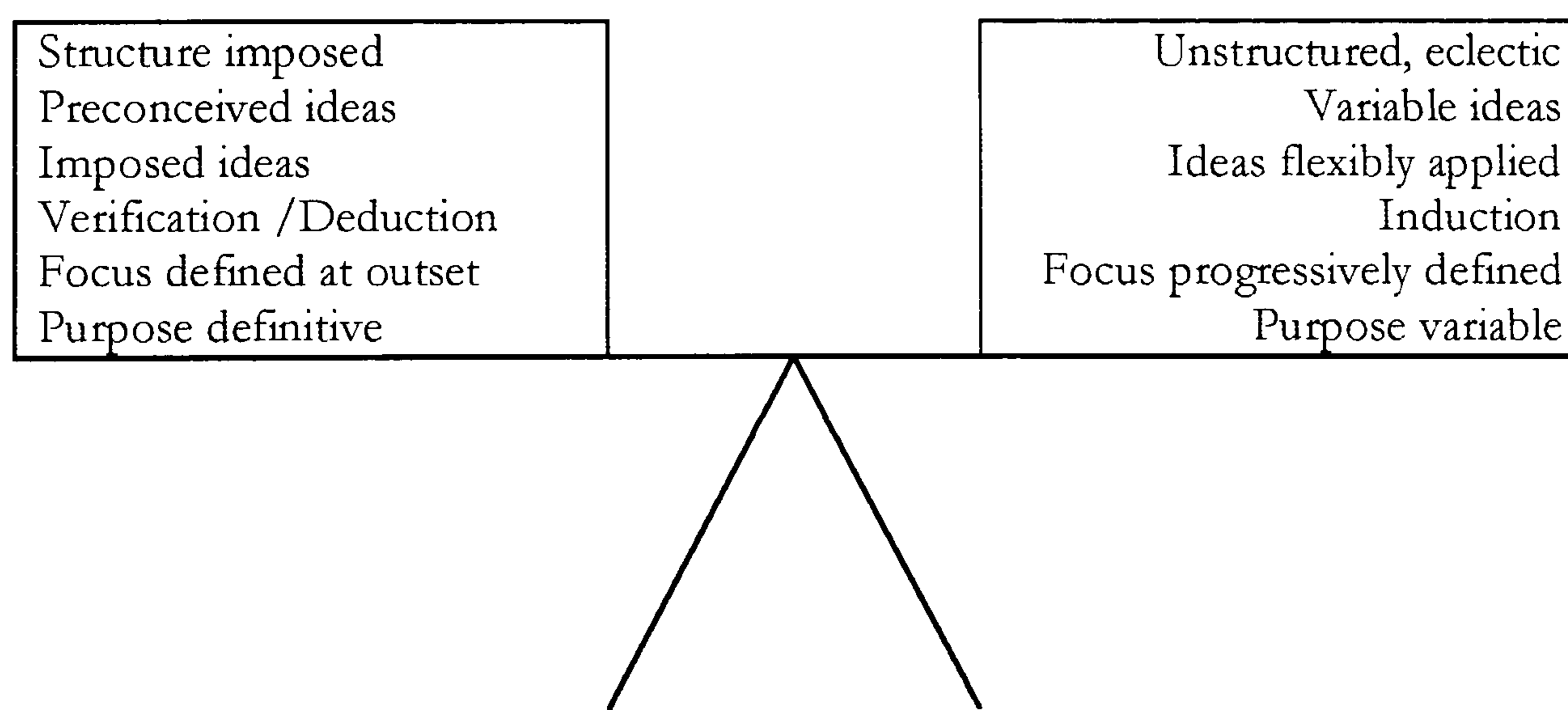


Figure 3.1: Diversification across approaches to the analysis of non-numeric data

²³ The principles mentioned are not intended to be representative of all approaches. The variables are recognised to extend beyond those considered at either end.

The approaches discussed in the sections that follow were chosen for their ability to generate creative and meaningful insights. The principles represented on the right of the continuum were applied in favour of those on the left.

3.8.5 Salient Factors

Addressing the second research question involved identifying factors appearing to be salient during children's interactions. The question was addressed over time (14 months) as a staged process, alongside the categorisation of the data.

Transcripts were annotated using descriptive comments in a column to the right of the data, therefore keeping the notes in context, whilst preserving the original data. The data on each child was analysed separately in order that the researcher became fully conversant with each case so that insights were crosschecked between lessons. The research emphasis rendered the child a pivotal focus of the analysis and therefore the access point into social scenarios. The words and actions of others were compared as they interacted with the child in question. The data was considered from all angles, using a process of 'free association' where all things that 'spring to mind' were recorded (Dey, 1993). 'Free association' became one way that contextual knowledge (accumulated through time spent in the field) became integrated. Knowledge was used as an 'interpretive framework' (Fetterman, 1998), used to explain participants' actions. For example, familiarity with class routines enabled children's actions to be described as procedural. The researcher's influence/impact was another subject addressed in the annotations, used to inform a critique of methods.

Authors often describe this stage as 'coding' of the data. However, caution is required in applying the term, since it is defined and used differently between researchers, as noted by Bryman and Burgess (1994b). Insofar as Robson (1993: 385) defines a code as '*a symbol applied to a group of words to classify or categorise them*', coding does not describe the process used in the analysis of the data; as descriptive and interpretative annotations were used, not single terms/labels. The researcher deemed that labelling the events contradicted the 'discovery, emergent' premise of the research. However, insofar that coding is defined as '*marking the units...so that similar themes...can be put in the same categories*' (Knight, 2002: 182), or '*breaking the data down into units for analysis*' and '*adding comments/reflections in the margin*' (Denscombe, 1998: 210), coding can be used to describe the process of analysis.

Further differences were evident between the approach used and the coding/annotation process described by others. Discordant with some authors (e.g. Burgess, 1984; Robson, 1993; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) the data on which the research focused was not annotated

(coded) until after data collection. Checklists or predefined questions from the literature (c.f. Dey, 1993; Robson, 1993; Strauss, 1987) were not used, as it was felt at the time that they would impose a structure on the analysis, thereby restricting creative insights and the scope of the findings. Nevertheless, questions generated in the course of analysis were used to examine the data (e.g. who initiated/terminated the interaction, plausible reasons). Since authors distinguish between the processes of ‘memoing’ (i.e. theorising about codes and relationships, Robson, 1993: 386) and ‘coding’, the annotations represented a merger of the two.

The second stage by which salient factors were determined involved thick description, defined by Brewer (2000: 111) as needing to:

“...take in the context of the phenomenon described, the intentions and meanings that organize it and its subsequent evolution or processing”.

Once broadly defined by categories (see section 3.8.6), annotations provided the starting point to elaborate upon the social event involving describing, explaining and interpreting the child's actions (Wertsch, 1998). Therefore, annotations were used to develop meaningful categories rather than as ‘retrieval and organising devices’ (Robson, 1993). This stage also involved extracting and analysing child-teacher interactions separately, through which various issues emerged to supplement and support previous themes (represented as figures in the findings chapter). It was decided that approximately half of the lessons transcribed and annotated would be used at this stage owing to what was realistic to cover. Lessons were chosen where interesting issues had emerged in the process of annotation. This stage was iterative, systematic and rigorous, involving moving between data sources to expand upon the child's interactions (with regard to previous/subsequent interactions and the words/actions of their peers, the SNA or teacher). Extracts of text were added verbatim to illustrate points, attempting to balance different interpretations of particular events. Interpretations were checked against the child's reflections, teacher comments (analysis data) and perspectives (interview data), as well as school expectations (documented data). This stage thereby encompassed further triangulation of the data. Coffey and Atkinson (1996:191) offer justification of this decision in stating:

“It is never good enough to illustrate good ideas with supportive examples.... comprehensive searching and systematic scrutiny are required”.

Extracting emergent issues across cases enabled further salient factors to be identified. This represented a distinct stage whereby data was regarded in the context of the descriptive accounts, rather than in the context of lesson transcripts. Post-itTM²⁴ notes

²⁴ Post-It is a trademark of 3M.

helped highlight issues relevant to the teacher/child and facilitated the generation of matrices, both within and across themes.

A decision was taken at this stage that it was more feasible to focus on descriptive events (i.e. episodes) pertaining to the child and were analysed by looking for similarities and differences. Differences between episodes were somewhat explained by the range of themes already identified. Differences were further perceived by considering dimensions (or characteristics of action) and interrelationships within themes. Episodes were found to be similar where participant interactions did not correspond to the actions/words of others. In categorising these factors, the findings emerged (see table 3.5).

3.8.6 Categorisation of the Data

Addressing the third research question regarding the categorisation of emergent factors, ran concurrent, yet sequential, with the identification of emergent factors.

The first stage of categorisation involved sorting annotations, based on salient factors. They were broadly grouped into those pertaining to the child and the teacher, and then were further sorted by themes. Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe this as a staged process of ‘coding’, where initial thoughts are used to develop categories and as a means by which the dimensions and properties of the category are defined. Definitive and specific categories were not appropriate, as themes were not necessarily mutually exclusive. A flexible framework was imperative at this stage of categorisation. Equally pertinent were the teachers’ themes arising from their analysis of the data. It is recognised that:

“Although qualitative research can make use of observer-generated codes and categories these must, at some point in the process, be related to the participant’s codes and categories...”(Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995: 301)

The second stage of categorisation was rigorous and iterative within and across case studies, taking many months. The differences emerging as themes, and dimensions of the data, involved the researcher in a process of merging and remerging salient factors. Merging of the themes served to give a more succinct overview of children’s engagement, whilst merging the dimensions of action, served to give a more detailed understanding of children’s engagement. To some extent, the process involved further analytical endeavour, returning to the original data to verify and establish the dimensions in greater depth. For instance, where it had emerged as noticeable that participants engaged others, the data was further analysed for all participant initiations to establish their frequency and nature.

There were a number of factors kept in mind during the generation of these categories. These factors can be summarised by Miles and Huberman (1994) to be concerned with constructs being well grounded in the data, the descriptive/contextual account being

complete/thorough and interpretations relate to the participants' lived experience. It was ensured that the categories emerged from the data and remained true to the data collected. It was ensured that interpretations were not based on value-judgements (Fetterman, 1998), were not made too early and were backed up with sufficient data. Secondly, the account uses descriptive episodes and child-teacher interactions in the findings, to illustrate how data has been interpreted and categorised, thereby equipping the reader with sufficient information (within the confines of an Ed.D thesis) to allow them to judge for themselves. Finally, it was further ensured that categories were somewhat determined by teachers and that interpretations used were substantiated, using a variety of data sources, based on the participants' perspectives.

The emergent categories were multi-dimensional – those used to outline children's engagement and those to describe children's engagement. It is the relationship between these two sets of categories where the findings of the research emerge, summarised on the table 3.5.

	WHAT	WHEN	HOW
	Action	Timing	Approach
RESOURCE ENGAGEMENT (Participants' utilisation of social and physical resources)	The type of resources engaged The purpose for which those resources are engaged	The time access to resources was instigated relative to classroom activities Utilisation of opportunities	The ways used to gain access to resources & direct their use
FOCUS OF ENGAGEMENT (The subject of participants' attention)	The nature of discrepancy between the subject of attention & the subject called for by external sources at points in time	The link between focus & task requirements &/or the focus of others Characteristics of engagement focus during phases of the lesson	The topics through which participants prioritised & directed the focus of their attention Consequences of discrepant focus upon task approach & engagement in classroom activities
ENGAGEMENT IN TASK AGENDA (Participants' response to activities set by the teacher)	The nature of difference between response to task requirements (in nature or extent) & the instruction given &/or peers' response	The nature of association between the timing of responses & the timing of instructions &/or peer response	Participant-initiated techniques The application & modification of those techniques in response to the task agenda, within & across particular contexts

Table 3.5: Summary table of the interrelationship between emergent categories

It is worth acknowledging that there are recognisable interconnections between the categories, hence episodes can be used to illustrate more than one category. A

contributory factor was the characteristics they shared. Each descriptor concerned the child's utilisation of time (i.e. *what* was done in the time available, *when* participants interacted, and *how* participants approached the time available). Thus, crossovers occurred where the significance of the participants' interactions related to the timing of those interactions or their relation to classroom events. Another contributory factor was the conceptual link between categories. The approach used by participants (how) embodies undertakings and interactions (what) within their social and physical environment. These issues have rendered some sections larger than others and addressed using links between the categories.

The findings chapter addresses each of these dimensions in turn.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the key findings of the research, which are laid out according to the emergent categories arising from the data analysis, as presented in table 3.5. A decision was made to present the data as themes rather than cases to convey the findings of the second and third research questions, which sought to identify and categorise salient factors from the interactional data collected in the field. The decision was also driven by the primary aim of the research, which was to seek an understanding of engagement rather than seek enlightenment of each case.

Each of the three categories of engagement that emerged from the analysis is addressed in turn. Within each category, the child's engagement is described in three dimensions; what, when and how, thereby providing a detailed account of each of the categories.

Extracts of classroom interactions have been added verbatim to exemplify how the data has been interpreted and categorised and to take into account the various interpretations of particular events that were observed within the classroom.

At the end of this chapter, each category of engagement is summarised, based on the researcher's interpretation of the findings.

4.2 Resource Engagement

4.2.1 What

Participants initiated the use of a variety of resources during their engagement in classroom tasks by interacting with their physical and social environment. Where participants instigated interactions, instructions had not been given, nor could visible or verbal prompts be detected.

4.2.1.1 Physical Environment

Participants:

- *Referred to physical resources without discernible prompts/instructions*

Written resources (including textbooks, worksheets, wall displays, alphabet, reading/exercise book) were accessed in response to particular task demands - after questions were asked (1.2.1/1.2.2/2.1.1/2.2.2), as text was read aloud (1.2.2/2.1.1), to ascertain words pertinent to the task (1.1.1/1.2.1), or when brainstorming ideas (1.2.1).

- *Sourced alternative resources when others had been provided*

For example, Jenny used her textbook and previous answers in her exercise book when she experienced difficulties rather than written accounts provided ‘*to help them in their work*’.

- *Utilised resources for a different purpose than anticipated*

For example, Kevin was provided with an exemplar spreadsheet as something to base his design on. The teacher initiated ‘*Where are you? I think you could do with that straight so you can see it. You're here look*’. Kevin replied ‘*I am not going to copy it*’. It was confirmed that Kevin used it to aid his spellings:

Researcher ‘*When you are looking at it [the sheet], what do you use on it?*’

Kevin ‘*The words. I can't really spell that much*’

Researcher ‘*Do you find the spelling helpful?*’

Kevin ‘*And I forget 'em because it's a typing thing. I forgot words while I am looking for typing stuff*’

4.2.1.2 Social Environment

Participants initiated verbal interactions when addressing task-relevant issues. Through their initiations, they sought to find out *from* others (typically questioning) and convey *to* others (typically declarations).

4.2.1.2.1 Seeking from Others

a) Confirmation

Participants instigated interactions with others to resolve uncertainty, request approval, appraisal and recognition of their ideas.

- Participants sought *verification or reinforcement* of their task-related thoughts or ideas through the teacher, SNA, peers and/or researcher. Typically they posed questions generating a yes/no response. They questioned a range of issues from teacher instructions (e.g. 1.2.1 ‘*Miss, do you copy it in your book?*’), word identification (e.g. 2.2.1 ‘*Does that say Ireland?*’) to method application (e.g. 2.2.2 ‘*That would work wouldn't it?*’ [alluding to a computer function]). Only David addressed the same issue through different people, asking the teacher, SNA and researcher²⁵ to confirm his spelling attempts. All seven participants sought to confirm teacher instructions with peers, yet only two sought confirmation from their teacher. One teacher commented on a lesson transcript ‘*prefers to ask peer than me*’, in response to Charlotte asking her peer (i.e. ‘*Do I need to write this down?*’). Participants varied in their tendency to initiate questions, seeking to verify or reinforce ideas. Those with access to an SNA asked the greatest number of confirmatory questions overall with all parties. The greatest diversity of

²⁵ This action may be explained by the availability of an SNA. Others were only asked in her absence (see section b).

issues was directed at the SNA, to whom additional issues were raised including accuracy of work (e.g. 2.2.2 ‘*could you just tell me, is it vehicles?*’), task sequence (e.g. 1.2.2 ‘*do you have to do that first?*’) and teacher remarks (e.g. 2.2.1 ‘*did they really?*’).

- Certain participants called upon their teacher, SNA, peer(s) and researcher to *approve* their ideas, before applying them to their work. Ideas were expressed as questions, beginning with the auxiliary verbs ‘shall’, ‘should’ ‘can’ or ‘could’. Only participants who worked alongside an SNA sought this form of confirmation, others’ approval only being sought in her absence. SNA approval was sought regularly during writing tasks. The following working example is selected because during the task execution, both interactions initiated by Kevin asked the SNA to sanction his ideas.

	Kevin	SNA
1	<i>Could I say I want you to be my bodyguard?</i>	
2		<i>Yeah but that would be you being Marcus [a centurion]</i>
3	<i>He said to me....</i>	
4		<i>You either have to write it I have just been saved in the amphitheatre by....or a slave was once saved in the amphitheatre by centurion Marcus. You will have to do it one way or the other. You have to decide though.</i>
5	Kevin begins to write in his draft book	
6		<i>No its just about ideas, we're not writing it out in sentences here</i>
7	<i>Slave was once saved</i>	
8		<i>Right, just write slave saved</i>
9	Kevin writes in his book	
10	<i>Is that right?</i>	
11		<i>Yeah</i>

Figure 4.1: Exemplar SNA-participant interaction

Kevin elected a different standpoint [1] than the choices offered by the teacher. He may have questioned if he could take a different stance or requested the SNA's judgement of its suitability. Either way Kevin invited the SNA to decide what was included. He also asked the SNA to make further decisions by offering his proposal for review [7] and later by questioning its accuracy after writing [10] (i.e. seeking appraisal).

Kevin and David readily sought teacher approval (in SNA's absence) during tasks emphasising their decision-making. For example, throughout a task requiring the use of pictorial evidence to answer open questions, David repeatedly questioned the teacher (when in attendance) before committing his ideas to paper (e.g. ‘*should I put I think it is made out of silk?*’, ‘*Could I put I think they look very stressed?*’), despite teacher

encouragement of David's decision-making ('*You write what you think [David]....*', '*You decide what you are putting; put it all down*').

- Several participants (i.e. 1.2.1/1.2.2/2.1.1/2.2.1/2.2.2) sought *appraisal* of the outcome of their endeavours, by inviting feedback after recording ideas. SNA, peer and researcher appraisal was sought infrequently in one-off instances. Conversely, Chris, who otherwise rarely initiated teacher-interactions, sought teacher appraisal repeatedly, both within and across lesson contexts. Chris made four non-verbal initiations, approaching the teacher and presenting his work, prompting feedback. He either acted upon and sought further feedback or made no further task-related effort. Each time he received specific instructions (e.g. '*This looks like nothing. Can you go and see how you spell algae. It's on the sheet*'), he acted upon those instructions, whereas upon receiving non-instructional feedback (e.g. '*that doesn't tell me anything about playing the game. You haven't given me any instructions to play the game at all*'), he did not apply further task-related effort.

b) Help

The majority of participants (6/7) initiated interactions to request *assistance*. Six participants approached their peer(s) for help; five sought researcher assistance and three initiated teacher/SNA assistance. Nevertheless, participants varied in their propensity to request help. Charlotte and Chris rarely initiated teacher support. Charlotte was observed/described as quiet. The teacher noted that she '*rarely asks me for help*'. Bridget did not request help (as verified '*she doesn't ask for help*'). The teacher mentioned trying to remember to initiate interactions with Bridget to check her understanding. Chris did not request help even after articulating his lack of understanding (e.g. '*I don't get what she means*'). In contrast, Joanne readily initiated interactions following expressions of doubt.

Participants requested help with several issues including:

- *Accessing task instructions* – during the delivery of task instructions, participants sought sporadic help in understanding the teachers' terminology (e.g. 1.2.1 '*What's an OAP?*'). Instructions were further communicated through written worksheets/overheads/ textbooks, and four participants (1.1.1/1.2.1/2.2.1/2.2.2) regularly sought help with reading or understanding word meanings (e.g. 1.1.1 '*so what does it mean, discovery?*').
- *Understanding the mechanics of a task* – participants requested help to understand procedures required in the process of implementing task instructions. Significantly the methods they sought were common to all tasks of a given type (e.g. 2.2.2 '*How do we centre it?*').

- *Task* – Help was requested to address task issues (e.g. spellings) or specific ideas (e.g. 1.2.1 ‘*Miss can you think of a feeling?*’).

c) Clarification

Some participants appealed for an *explanation* or *elaboration*, after instructions. Distinct from questions seeking information or help with understanding, four participants (i.e. 1.2.1/1.2.2/2.2.1/2.2.2) sought clarification by conveying their own understanding as a question. Episodes were observed in several lessons, mainly directed towards the teacher or SNA. Questions fell into categories concerning task approach (e.g. 1.2.1 ‘*Miss do you just add a nought?*’), meaning of words and phrases (e.g. 2.2.2 ‘*so that means there's more...?*’ [concerning the term ‘decrease’]) and instructions (e.g. 1.2.2 ‘*When we were born?...I can't remember mine*’ [after a request for his date-of-birth]).

d) Information

All participants requested task-related information on a variety of topics including:

- *Administration details* - A request for task-related details was the largest category and included organisation or procedure (e.g. date, question/page number, title). The majority of information requested from the teacher or SNA, sought administration information. Peers were asked the majority of questions, by five participants (i.e. 1.1.1/1.2.1/1.2.2/ 2.1.2/2.2.2).
- *Factual information* - A request for specific task-related/topic details was the smallest category. Details included programme operation (e.g. 1.2.2 ‘*how do you get onto the next level?*’), character role, or historical/scientific facts (e.g. 1.1.1 ‘*what kind of paper is that?*’).
- *Others' opinions* - Requests for task-related viewpoint, sought by three participants, predominantly directed at peers during collaborative tasks. Participants sought their peer's choice (e.g. 1.2.2. ‘*Shall we go onto the third one?*’), ideas (e.g. 2.2.2 ‘*Do you think it could be distance from the earth?*’) or judgement (e.g. 1.1.1 ‘*does that one feel weak to you?*’).
- *Others' actions* - Requests for task-related actions were made by five participants (i.e. 1.1.1/1.2.1/1.2.2/2.1.1/2.2.2), directed primarily at peers. Information was sought about current action (e.g. 1.1.1 ‘*what are you doing?*’) and/or preceding action (e.g. 2.1.1 ‘*what did you do for....?*’) in seeking to determine their peer's progress, findings, solutions and/or conduct. Across and within lessons, Jenny made multiple requests for particular types of information including her peer's findings or answers (e.g. ‘62, *what goes next?*’) whereas Joanne repeatedly sought her peer's progress (e.g. ‘*where are you up to?*’).

e) Equipment

All participants called upon others (especially peers) to supply items of stationery equipment. Primarily an eraser was requested despite being banned in one school and discouraged in the other.

4.2.1.2.2 Conveying to Others

a) Their Progress

All participants reported their progress to others during task execution, yet at different stages - during (e.g. 2.2.2 *'I am half way there'*), upon completion (e.g. 1.2.1 *'Miss I've finished'*) and retrospectively (e.g. 1.2.2 *'I got 18 right'*). Variations among participants were noted. Joanne and Jenny made regular reports, at all stages and to all parties. Conversely, reports by Chris, Bridget and Charlotte were infrequent, made upon completion of their work, chiefly to the teacher whilst Kevin and David occasionally reported progress to the SNA whilst working.

b) Having Difficulty

Six participants declared having difficulty with particular tasks, by either reporting their lack of understanding (e.g. 1.2.1 *'I am not sure what to do'*) or by specifying their difficulty (e.g. 1.1.1 *'Heh I can't find it'*), except David who reminded the SNA of a problem reported previously (i.e. *'You said I got it wrong'*). Difficulties fell into broad categories including concerns about the task (e.g. 1.2.2 *'I don't know the month date'*), individual limitations (e.g. 2.1.1 *'I never remember'*), their peers' behaviour (e.g. *'Miss [peer's name] is picking on [peer's name] because she wears glasses'*). Typically mentioning a difficulty prompted others to offer/instigate support.

c) Ideas/Opinions

All participants conveyed their ideas and opinions mainly to the SNA/peers, largely (although not exclusively) in response to a particular question or task. To the **SNA**, participants predominantly conveyed question or task responses. All three participants who worked alongside an SNA for writing expressed task responses. Kevin and David consistently communicated ideas to the SNA *before* attempting to answer teacher questions. The teacher interpreted such action as *'looking for confirmation his guess is right before he commits himself'*. The SNA confirmed their ideas as suitable, made corrections and/or offered explanations accordingly, thus ensuring their responses were generally accurate. The teacher reported utilising the SNA's reaction in choosing whether to accept David's response:

"...if you asked him a question.... I have to be very careful do I think he will know that or is he going to say something that is totally off the wall erm and make him look silly and sometimes [SNA's name] will know that he knows the answerAnd I look at her if I think there is a good chance because then I can boost him"

Also Kevin and David communicated their ideas to the SNA *rather than* the teacher during discussions, conveyed their ideas but not attempting to offer them to class-discussions.

All participants conveyed ideas to *peers*, largely concerned with their approach or work-related feelings. Notably to peers, participants predominantly offered their support or imparted their viewpoint, not appearing to seek a supportive response whereas ideas conveyed to the SNA had been chiefly consultative in nature (seemingly to entice feedback). All participants conveyed their ideas about *task approach*, particularly in collaborative contexts, by instructing their peers to perform particular interactions (e.g. 2.2.2 '[Kevin] *press up*'), by specifying a particular sequence (e.g. 1.2.2 '*Right I will go first*'), by attempting to alter their peer's action (e.g. 1.1.1 '*Don't, you are breaking it, no don't do it rough*') or by proposing combined action (e.g. 1.1.1 '*Let's stand them up this time*'). Additionally several participants conveyed *work-related feelings*, raising a variety of issues including perceived task-difficulty (1.2.1), task predictions (1.1.1), concerns about work-standards (2.1.1), and/or affirmative or dissenting views about their peer's work (1.1.1/1.2.2/2.1.1/2.2.2).

d) Intentions

Certain participants (1.2.1/1.2.2/2.1.1/2.1.2) informed their peer or researcher of their intentions before carrying out an interaction. Several topics were raised, broadly categorised as decisions to act (e.g. 1.2.2. '*Heh, I am going to try that bit*'), or not to act (e.g. 1.2.1 '*Miss, I am not reading all of mine out*').

e) Findings

Five participants declared what they had discovered/noticed to others during their work, where requests had not been made. Several reported issues previously introduced by adults (particularly the researcher). Joanne, Jenny and Chris conveyed their observations or strategies used in their work after prior researcher-initiated questioning on their ideas or approach. For example, after being asked to describe his actions earlier, Chris reported '*for question 12 I added 50 add 50 which equals 100 then added 90 and 20*'. To the SNA, David reported finding number bonds and number patterns following SNA intervention to encourage their use or discovery (see section 4.4), whilst Jenny accounted the formula for calculating sums, subsequent to the SNA's interaction on the topic. To the teacher, Joanne recounted findings after a teacher-initiated demonstration of what to look for.

Findings were conveyed that challenged proposals made by the SNA (1.2.1) or teacher (2.1.2). For example, during a 1:1 interaction, Bridget interrupted the teacher to report '*Yeah but then there is a nought there*' after the teacher proposed '*We can't put the 5 and the 5 together but we could put those two ...*'

The five participants reported findings to peers, particularly within group-tasks whereby participants detailed what they had noticed (e.g. 2.2.2 ‘...it’s suddenly changed the date of birth’) or established (e.g. 2.1.2 ‘I’ve tried that one and it doesn’t work’).

f) Needs

Four participants (1.1.1/1.2.1/2.1.1/2.2.2) informed others (peers/researcher) of their needs, albeit infrequently, largely prompting counteraction. The topics conveyed included stationery (e.g. 2.1.1 ‘I need a thin guide line, I can’t do it with thick’), writing conventions (e.g. 1.2.1 ‘I have to write joined up’) and health concerns (e.g. 1.1.1 ‘...look eczema, I need my cream’).

g) Task-Related Information

All participants informed others of facts or occurrences relevant to the topic under discussion. The nature and frequency of information passed to others differed. Two reported to the teacher infrequently yet both broached participation issues, Chris to ensure his own (e.g. ‘Miss, I haven’t got a person’) and Charlotte to ensure her peer’s participation in given tasks. The researcher received the widest range of task-related information, most frequently, by three participants who reported upon current events (e.g. 1.1.1 ‘...I have to write like that when I’m at top of page’), past events (e.g. 1.2.1 ‘Miss, I wasn’t going to read all of them... she [the teacher] told me which ones to do.’) and related experiences from home (e.g. 2.2.1 ‘I don’t have pocket money...its just on birthdays I get it’).

4.2.2 When

Participants accessed resources at particular points during the lesson. Episodes are derived from situations where the timing of participant interaction was deemed significant.

4.2.2.1 Relation to Classroom Proceedings

The time at which participants utilised resources did not always correspond with the timing of classroom events. Accordingly participants interacted before, during or after several proceedings where their attention was called for or required elsewhere.

4.2.2.1.1 Before

- *Question responses* - Kevin and David repeatedly conveyed ideas to the SNA before offering question responses (see 4.2.1.2.2.c).
- *Recording ideas* – participants with access to an SNA verbalised their ideas before they were recorded (see section 4.2.1.2.1a).

4.2.2.1.2 During

- *Instructions* - Kevin and David frequently addressed matters of concern with the SNA during the teacher’s delivery of instructions (see section 4.2.12.1a).

- *Class discussion* - Participants utilised their peers/SNA/researcher during class discussions albeit infrequently to convey and seek information.
- *Interactions* - During interactions with others, several participants (1.2.1/2.1.2/2.2.1/2.2.2) relayed and requested information on matters of their own interest or concern at times when other speakers addressed separate issues. For example, Kevin interrupted the ICT teacher (when checking Kevin's use of the calculator function) referring to his own idea, thereby signifying separate concerns.

4.2.2.1.3 After

- *Instructions* - Participants sought and conveyed information after teacher instructions to the contrary. Jenny and Chris regularly sought peer/SNA/researcher interaction after commands for silence. Kevin repeatedly sought peer assistance despite the ICT teacher disallowing peer collaboration (e.g. '*don't help your partner just let them work it out*').
- *Question responses* - Jenny conveyed (a limited number of) question responses after attempting to answer a question having not being chosen.

4.2.2.2 Relation to Opportunities

The timing of participants' initiations of social/physical resources could be associated with the proximity of resources. Participants appeared to utilise resource opportunities when the opportunity arose.

- *Teacher proximity* – Joanne, Jenny and David instigated teacher support whenever the teacher was in their proximity throughout a restricted number of lessons (e.g. 4.2.1.2.1a).
- *SNA proximity* – where access to the SNA was intermittent, Jenny and Chris frequently utilised her to convey or request information when she was in their vicinity or where she was continually present, her approval was sought regularly (see section 4.2.1.2.1a).
- *SNA's presence/absence* – the SNA's presence had a bearing upon interactions initiated by three participants. The teacher initiated all the teacher-child interactions when the SNA was present. Kevin and David involved others when the SNA was preoccupied or absent.
- *Proximity of physical resources* – three participants used available physical resources without instructions or cues from others in response to teacher/SNA interaction. For example, Chris and Charlotte appeared to follow text as the teacher read from written material to which they had access, and did so without instructions. David looked at either his book or times-table wall display upon being given an undertaking to work without guidance (and before responding) yet likewise each time no prompt or instruction had been given.

4.2.3 How

This section considers how participants accessed social and physical resources and directed the way resources were used when deriving task-responses, exemplifying these points through several dichotomies.

4.2.3.1 Verbal/Non-Verbal Approaches

Participants accessed social resources verbally and/or non-verbally. Initiations were primarily non-verbal, conventional, physical reactions (i.e. raising hand, leaving place to see others), yet resources were utilised mainly verbally (i.e. by asking/telling others).

4.2.3.2 Conveying/Requesting Approaches

Significantly participants did not access and utilise resources solely for instructional purposes but also for passing information on (see section 4.2.1.2.2).

4.2.3.3 Direct /Indirect Approaches

Since conveying information yielded access to resources, resources appeared to be accessed in several ways, using either explicit or implicit approaches. Most commonly direct approaches were used, seeking help, information or enlightenment by enquiring openly about an issue requiring resource assistance. Indirect verbal approaches to resource utilisation were less frequent. Participants posed inquiring statements or expressions of their own understanding yet more commonly they made reports alluding to/expressing an unresolved issue, appearing to provoke support. For example, expressed uncertainty (e.g. 1.2.1 '*...I think I have gone wrong somewhere*').

An implicit/explicit dimension was apparent during resource utilisation. During certain interactions (i.e. Joanne/teacher, Jenny/SNA, Kevin/SNA, peer, teacher, David/SNA) actions were executed in response to the other party yet devoid of verbal commands or explanations of what was required. Common to the majority of those interactions was evidence of a long-term relationship between the parties involved²⁶. Routinely participants indirect initiations, errors, hesitations and/or non-verbal interactions were understood by others to be a cue to entice support and visa versa regarded as cues to respond. Certain parties appeared aware of how the other may interpret their interactions. Thus, reading out a question (2.2.1/2.2.2) or passing an item on (2.2.2) was understood without explanation. Several of these features are exemplified in the exemplar interaction in the figure 4.2.

²⁶ Joanne had worked with the same teacher for more than a year, whilst Kevin and David had worked alongside the same SNA/peers throughout the junior years.

	Joanne	Teacher
1		Present helping Joanne's peer
2	Joanne interrupts the teacher to ask 'Miss what does number 2 say?'	
3		She places her finger on Joanne's text, waits and reads 'what...'
4	Hesitates and says 'the dragon...'	
5		Words
6	Was...	
7		Words..
8	Words did ...	
9		Mother
10	Say...about...the dragon. Mother said...	
11	Joanne finds the part on her sheet and reads 'mother says... there...is...no... such...things as a dragon.'	What did mother say?

Figure 4.2: Exemplar teacher-participant interaction

Joanne initiated by requesting teacher support (2). The teacher responded non-verbally, pointing at the text (3). Without a response she provided the first word only. Without an instruction, Joanne articulated part of the question (4), appearing to read recognisable parts of the text. The teacher offered the second word of the question (5), without providing further directions. As the interaction continued Joanne's errors (6) or hesitations (8, 10) appeared to be taken as cues for support, provided in the form of repetition (7), word identification (9) and rephrasing of the question (11). Similarly Joanne responded following the teacher's hesitations (3, 7, 9).

4.2.3.4 General/Specific Approaches

Verbal requests for support could be further delineated by participants' referral to the general or the specific nature of difficulty. General questions openly sought assistance (e.g. 2.2.2 'can you help me?') or sought to determine the processes required to complete tasks (e.g. 2.1.1 'what do you do with that one?'). Specific questions named the particular operation with which they encountered difficulty.

4.3 Focus of Engagement

4.3.1 What

There were numerous occasions where participants held a separate focus of engagement to the one called for by the teacher/task or attended to by peers. There was a distinction between separate issues that were *discrepant* in comparison with external requirements and those that were *additional*. At given moments, participants attended to:

- Separate issues *rather than* those demanded by the task (discrepant focus).

- Separate issues yet feasibly *at the same time* as attending to those demanded by the task/teacher (additional focus)

The two categories are discrete because in addressing additional issues (habitually non-verbally) participants may well have continued to attend to the speakers' message, whilst focusing on discrepant issues (whether verbal or non-verbal) had consequences for listening or subsequent interaction (see section 4.3.3.2.1). Exemplar episodes could be subcategorised according to whether the focus was associated with or disassociated from the task in hand. Some discrepant issues were repeatedly attended to whilst others were infrequently observed.

4.3.1.1 Discrepant Task-Related Focus

4.3.1.1.1 One-off, Unconnected Episodes

Six participants engaged in alternative task-related matters. The focus of participants' engagement either:

- *Did not correspond to teacher instructions* - Non-compliance occurred, with limited frequency, across four cases (1.1.1/1.2.2/2.1.2/2.2.1) either after individual task commands or behavioural intervention. For example: Joanne was given a worksheet with specific instructions (i.e. '[Joanne] I have done you a sheet to help you record. Can you put your name and the date on the sheet'), yet subsequently she followed customary task procedure (opening her exercise book, drawing a margin) and class instructions (copying text from the board), despite repeated references to the exemption of those with worksheets (e.g. 'can you underline please and copy, except for the people I have given the sheet to. You don't need to do it').
- *Did not correspond to the teachers' delivery of information* (as instructed/assumed) - More frequently, participants (1.1.1/1.2.1/2.1.1/2.1.2) worked on task during teacher dialogue (differing from peer action). Joanne, Charlotte and Bridget²⁷ continued with previous parts of the task during the introduction to subsequent tasks. Charlotte continued recording while the teacher discussed decisions required for the task. Her action prompted teacher comment '[Charlotte was] focusing on first task but not listening to next part of lesson', corroborating the researcher's observation. Episodes also occurred during teachers' involvement in task execution, for Joanne and Charlotte. For example, during a demonstration of testing materials for a collaborative task, Joanne initiated a peer-interaction referring to her record sheet (i.e. '[peer's name] what does that say?'). Her

²⁷ Kevin also completed previous sections of the task during subsequent introductions albeit repeatedly. Joanne's actions during introductions concur with actions during plenary sessions where she also continued with previous elements of the task (see section 4.2.2.1.2).

interaction prompted teacher intervention (i.e. '[Joanne] *just listen a minute*'), indicative that she expected a different focus.

4.3.1.1.2 Recurring and Related Episodes

Certain participants engaged in task-associated interaction, repeatedly and without instruction, in addressing matters of apparent importance to them as individuals at times when the teacher was prioritising other issues. Recurring and related examples emerged, sub-categorised into those addressing concerns about task accuracy, completion, conventions and pace.

- *Accuracy* (2.1.1/2.2.2) – e.g. David made repeated endeavours across and within lessons observed to ensure the accuracy of his spellings. He audibly spelt out words, asked adults for spellings and wrote words in a wordbook, asking others to check his attempts (see section 4.2.1). The teacher commented on David's use of the spelling wordbook '*Again no flow so progress is hampered and slowed down*'. Nevertheless, the teacher broached spelling accuracy in her initiations (i.e. '*what are you writing? Now think, think, stop [David]. You are nearly right, you have just missed out some letters*').
- *Completion* (1.1.1/2.2.1) – e.g. Kevin repeatedly returned to previously uncompleted sections of task during the teacher's guided demonstration of several computer functions (e.g. replicate, Autosum) (see section 4.4.2.2)
- *Conventions* (2.1.2) - Bridget repeatedly recorded routine details (e.g. date, title) before commencing her work (see section 4.4.2.1).
- *Pace* (1.2.1) - Jenny continued to copy during teacher explanation/questions to maintain the teacher's pace across six lessons.

4.3.1.2 Additional Task-Related Focus

Four participants (1.2.2/2.1.1/2.1.2/2.2.1) turned their attention to additional task issues, which did not necessarily relate to contextual events. Each episode involved the nonverbal organisation of materials prior to task commencement e.g. collecting stationery/books, opening exercise book, writing name on worksheets.

4.3.1.3 Discrepant Off-Task Focus

4.3.1.3.1 One-off, Unconnected Episodes

On occasions, participants were engaged in off-task interaction, involving a focus of engagement that was unconnected to the task and non-compliant with teacher instructions. An off-task focus was evident through:

- *Verbal interactions* - All participants verbalised extraneous topics at different stages of the lesson. During the task introduction and plenary, Joanne and Jenny in particular made

several (though unrelated) verbal comments to convey/request information not pertinent to the task. Certain participants (1.1.1/1.2.1/2.1.1) made intermittent off-task verbal comments/non-verbal actions during introductions, indicative that listening was (at least) interrupted. During task execution all participants initiated off-task discussions on varying topics (from out-of-school activities to items of equipment), indicative of a differential focus (especially Joanne/Jenny).

- *Physical removal from context* - Two participants (1.1.1/2.2.2) left the context during the teachers' introduction e.g. David moved to look in his tray during the teacher's explanation of a question, prompting '*David what are you doing? How on earth can you concentrate when I am asking questions if you are up and looking in your tray*'.
- *Actions during task execution* - Joanne, Jenny and Charlotte attended to superfluous issues rather than the task, focusing on items of equipment in their vicinity (i.e. stationery, dictionary, tape-recorder).

4.3.1.3.2 Recurring and Related Episodes

Four participants repeatedly discussed off-task topics over a sustained period of time. Broadly two categories were discerned:

- *Health concerns* – Joanne and Jenny raised concerns about their physical condition (i.e. eczema/site of injection respectively).
- *Stationery* – three participants (1.2.1/2.1.1/2.1.2) broached the subject of stationery in their initiations with others.

4.3.1.4 Additional Off-Task Focus

Five participants attended to issues unrelated to the task, at all stages of the lesson, yet only during the task introduction/plenary could nonverbal episodes of participants' attention be categorised as additional²⁸. There, participants feasibly could simultaneously attend to the introduction/plenary. The off-task topics attended to included social, physical and personal matters (see section 4.3.3.1). Participants (1.1.1/1.2.1/1.2.2/2.1.1) appeared to focus on peer/SNA's interactions during introductions. For example, Charlotte watched the SNA, prompting teacher comment '*off-task*', '*easily distracted*'. Several participants (1.1.1/1.2.1/1.2.2/2.1.1 /2.1.2) attended to (by watching, writing, reading, touching) wall displays, window or objects in the vicinity (items of apparel/educational equipment/cards).

²⁸ During task execution attending to other issues had consequences for the time spent on-task, though participants may have had task-related thoughts during this time.

4.3.2 When

The timing of participants' focus emerged as salient where it did not correspond with task requirements and/or the teachers/peers' focus. Given that the prominence of participants' timing hinged on occurrences in the classroom, episodes were grouped according to phases of the lesson. Additionally, several characteristic features were evident during lesson stages.

4.3.2.1 Task Introduction

On several occasions, the focus of participants' attention did not correlate with events occurring during the introduction.

- Common to all instances across participants was their *concurrent* attention to other matters during teacher dialogue (i.e. instructing/questioning/demonstrating/informing/summarising). The issues they attended to were also concurrent, as suggested in 'what' (see section 4.3.1), since participants either focused on discrete issues or simultaneously attended to more than one issue during teacher talk.
- Over time participants *alternated* their focus from one (or more) thing(s) to another.
- The *proportion* of time engaged in discrepant, additional and/or a fluctuating focus varied from lesson to lesson. Three participants (1.1.1/1.2.2/2.1.2) appeared to focus on other issues as tasks were summarised (e.g. Chris attended to cards and a glue pot for the last five minutes of a twenty-minute introduction), whilst four (1.1.1/1.2.1/1.2.2/2.1.2) addressed extraneous issues throughout the introduction period.
- Common to certain scenarios was the *regularity* with which discrepant issues were attended to. Participants (1.2.1/2.2.1) repeatedly addressed a discrepant yet *task-related* focus during introductions (e.g. continuing with a preceding task). Issues *unrelated* to the task were also regularly addressed (e.g. health).
- The *timing* of participants' attention did not always appear appropriate, as evident from teacher/SNA intervention. For example, Bridget wrote on her sheet prompting the teacher to question '[Bridget] is there something you've got to write about? What are you doing? Are you colouring?', to which she responded 'I am writing my name on it'.

4.3.2.2 Task Execution

On occasions, across all cases, the focus of participants' attention did not relate to teacher instructions. Such occasions were considered discrepant (not additional) since time spent focusing on extraneous issues was deemed time away from the task.

- The *concurrent* characteristic of participants' focus was evident, predominantly alongside priorities instructed previously. They attended to discrepant issues in the time set aside for other matters and less often during teacher dialogue.
- Participants *alternated* their focus (as during the introduction), commonly switching between a task-related/off-task focus. Chris's disengagement from the task for a continuous period of twenty minutes was atypical; he made no further attempt to work after teacher feedback (see section 4.4.2.2.2).
- Participants spent a *proportion* of time attending to discrepant issues rather than addressing the teachers' agenda. All spent time engaged in matters *unrelated* to the task, yet disengagement was relatively less than work-related attention across the majority of instances. *Task-related* discrepant engagement was most noticeable in relation to teacher priorities (either explicitly/implicitly). For example, Charlotte spent more time on presentation than calculating sums and did not meet the teacher's set target. Actions were also salient in relation to peers. For example, during a note-taking practice task, Bridget used all the time available (writing throughout each break given) in contrast to her peers. Proportions were also relative to the teachers' timing (e.g. Jenny spent a proportion of time on corrections during the teacher's reading of further questions).
- Participants attended to certain issues *regularly*. Charlotte, Bridget and David regularly attended to task detail (i.e. presentation/conventions/accuracy respectively) across various tasks (see section 4.3.1.1.2), whilst Jenny, Charlotte and Bridget regularly focused on *off-task* issues.
- The *timing* of participants' focus was striking relative to peers/teacher focus. This was particularly evident where participants conducted verbal interactions during teacher dialogue or where their actions prompted teacher intervention. Relative to peers, they attended to instructions before/after their peers (e.g. Kevin watched his peer type before attempting the work himself).

4.3.2.3 Task Plenary

Participants' focus of attention was extraneous across six cases during the plenary.

- Universal to salient scenarios was a *concurrent* characteristic. Attention to other issues occurred simultaneously with other events (in time & space) and included class discussions/feedback, marking work, teacher demonstrations and group presentations.
- Participants *alternated* their focus between teacher-directed events and other task-related matters (as well as between alternative issues). For example, twice David stopped to correct sums during marking thereby missing answers given in the meantime. He

reassumed the teacher's schedule after correcting them and utilised SNA support to address missing answers.

- Participants' focused on discrepant/additional matters for a *proportion* of time allocated to the plenary. Few participants attended to variant issues for the entire stage²⁹.
- Some emergent scenarios were *regularly* observed both within and across lessons. Charlotte continued to write during *each* feedback session having watched group performances of collective work, whilst Joanne worked to complete tasks during all science/English lessons. Some participants consistently focused/refocused on the same issue (e.g. items of stationery – 1.2.1/2.1.1/2.1.2)
- The *timing* of participants' focus of attention revealed some scenarios as salient, where their focus was deemed inappropriate at that time (whereas at other times it may have been acceptable). Participant action prompted teacher intervention (e.g. Joanne looking through her textbook prompted '[Joanne], close your book and join in') or retrospective comments on the lesson (e.g. where Bridget had attended to her unfinished work folder, the teacher surmised she was 'off-task').

4.3.3 How

This section addresses two emergent details; firstly it reflects on how participants prioritised and/or directed the focus of their attention, in ways that were either supportive or superfluous to the task, through the issues they attended to. Secondly it addresses how discrepancies in their focus affected their task approach and their subsequent engagement in classroom activities.

4.3.3.1 Issues Addressed

The issues attended to by participants included:

- *Physical items* (i.e. displays, written text or items of apparel, equipment & stationery) - These were addressed predominantly non-verbally, thus could be addressed alongside contextual demands. Objects in participants' vicinity were the primary focus of attention (rather than those sourced externally), rendering it salient when David left his place during the introduction. Where the timing of participants' focus was salient, they attended to objects in ways that either related or did not relate to the task. Participants supported their task response by preparing/organising materials prior to instructions/prompts to start. Other items of equipment provided for the task (i.e. stationery, dictionary) were attended to in superfluous ways. Those objects were the

²⁹ Teacher intervention influenced the proportion of time spent focusing on extraneous issues.

subject of off-task discussions or were used for time unrelated purposes. Participants determined the point at which they engaged items in time assigned for other matters.

- *Personal matters* (i.e. health or body) – Some participants attended to personal matters during time allocated for the task-agenda. Where a focus was verbally executed, it was intermittently yet repeatedly expressed as a concern, having a distracting influence upon task-related interaction. Time spent by Jenny and Joanne expressing their feelings about health was time away from the task and an interruption to their task attention. Conversely, non-verbal actions (e.g. fiddling with hair) were sporadic, usually during the teachers' dialogue, and appeared inconsequential to participants' task attentiveness.
- *Social environment* - Participants particularly attended to people in their immediate vicinity (see section 4.2), rendering it salient when they left their place to interact with others after calls for a different focus of attention. They directed their interactions, using verbal/non-verbal means of communication and governed the purpose of verbal interactions by conveying or requesting information, either task-related/unrelated. Participants appeared to respond to others' actions (e.g. SNA entered room). Attending to others either impinged upon or enhanced task-related attention, through the issues raised. They appeared to direct the timing of their actions by not always conforming to contextual events, acting before (e.g. requesting information subsequently issued in an instruction), during (e.g. asking for an explanation of an instruction) or after (e.g. broaching an off-task topic with peer after not being chosen to answer a question).
- *Task concerns* (i.e. task conventions, accuracy, pace, completion) - Participants designated certain task undertakings as requiring attention prior to (or rather than) tackling issues identified by the teacher. During time allocated for explanations and discussions, all participants attend to other aspects of the task (at some point) with consequences for subsequent interaction. During task execution, some instructions were omitted whilst issues were attended to that the teacher had not raised (e.g. Kevin investigated the computer's calculator function by executing alternative sums but did not use it to check spreadsheet calculations as directed. See section 4.3.3.2.1). Also time was spent attending to or prioritising issues that (later) contradicted teacher priorities. Charlotte's presentation concerns or David's spelling focus prompted their teacher to comment that their actions impeded progress or the flow of work respectively (see section 4.3.1.1.2). Participants also influenced the order (i.e. priority) given to certain issues (e.g. Bridget attended to task conventions before calculations, hence started after her peers).

4.3.3.2 Effect on Engagement and Task Approach

Focusing on discrepant issues had an effect upon participants' task approach and subsequent engagement in classroom activities, at given points in time. There were two categories discerned:

4.3.3.2.1 Effect on Subsequent Action

Participants' actions had consequences for their engagement in other matters (seemingly without their awareness).

- *Participation* - typically a discrepant focus affected participation in communal activities (e.g. question/answer sessions, sharing of work, chants, discussions).
- *Missing out instructions* – participants did not always follow instructions issued whilst their attention was diverted. Instructions were missed whilst participants worked on previous elements of the task e.g. Joanne continued testing materials whilst being instructed to write a concluding sentence, which she did not write even after finishing testing. Others were omitted whilst participants worked on extraneous activities e.g. Kevin centre-aligned his numbers during an instruction, which he overlooked. Participants did not always appear aware that an instruction had been omitted.
- *Time* - less time was devoted to task requirements as a result of addressing discrepant issues, particularly during task execution, with consequences for how much could be achieved. Chris was an exception in securing extra time, relative to his peer, by investigating other parts of a computer programme.
- *Productivity* - a differential focus had implications for the quantity of work produced with teachers commenting on progress, pace and flow being disrupted.
- *Late responding to instructions* – attending to separate and incongruent issues affected the punctuality of task engagement.
- *Overlooking the purpose of the task* – a discrepant focus caused the task purpose to be overlooked. For example, in investigating the calculator function, Kevin made up sums that did not relate to a spreadsheet he had been working on; hence the calculator was not used as a verification tool as specified (see section 4.3.3.1).

4.3.3.2.2 Effect upon Task Approach

Participants initiated purposeful action retrospectively to counteract their discrepant focus.

- *Reliance on others* - Participants requested assistance to address difficulties as they emerged yet the issues they raised had been previously explained whilst their focus was diverted. On other occasions, the subject of the participant's focus obliged them to request help from others (e.g. David stopping to correct sums meant he needed support in order to catch up).

- *Copying* - having been preoccupied during explanations, participants used alternative strategies, such as copying from peers, rather than request help to address emergent task difficulties (see section 4.4.3.2.2). For example, Kevin finished an aspect of the task during an explanation of Autosum, and later copied his peer's total rather than attempt Autosum with his own statistics, rendering his work inaccurate.

4.4 Engagement in Task Agenda

4.4.1 What

Participants' responses to certain task requirements did not always conform or relate to original instructions and/or their peers' response. Difference was common to emergent scenarios, such that the interactions participants undertook in response to the assigned tasks (at particular points in time) fell into one of two categories:

- Deviation from task agenda in extent
- Change to the process/outcome of the task

4.4.1.1 Extent of Engagement in Task Agenda

During the *introduction*, where the agenda frequently called for participants' verbal engagement (e.g. answers, information, discussions), extent of engagement was deemed significant relative to the opportunities provided by the teacher. Participants *responded to* certain opportunities (but not others). They intermittently attempted to respond, yet only ever reacted to a proportion of the opportunities offered. Responding to certain opportunities was further distinguished through regularities, across three participants (1.2.1/1.2.2/2.1.1) in the *type of question* they responded to. In one lesson introduction, of four questions Charlotte attempted to respond to, three were open-ended (i.e. '*tell me something about....*').

Participants' responses did not always conform to specific class/group instructions. Two participants (1.2.1/1.2.2) verbalised their intention not to respond and their comments were corroborated subsequently through several off-task remarks and interactions. For example, despite one teacher emphasising inclusion in her instructions (e.g. '*Everybody in this class should know that 1 m is the same as 100 cm. I would like to see everybody's face looking at the blackboard*'), Jenny remarked repeatedly about the irrelevance of her engagement (e.g. '*I don't need to because we haven't done it*') and made repeated off-task comments/non-verbal interactions (e.g. drawing, looking out of the window, reading book).

Conversely, participants *instigated* opportunities for verbal engagement in their response to contextual stimuli, thus broadening the extent of their engagement. They made contributions that did not coincide with teacher-provided opportunities or conform to

conventional ways of responding. Certain participants (1.1.1/1.2.1/1.2.2) regularly influenced the frequency of their contributions by calling out question responses.

During the *implementation* of the agenda, the extent of the engagement was judged relative to the instructions given, the time allocated, and their peer responses and scenarios were salient on several grounds:

- *Degree of engagement* – where participants did less than instructed. All participants engaged in discrepant off-task interactions during the time allocated to the task (see section 4.3.1.3). Jenny and Chris were selective in the instructions attempted during daily mental-maths tests. Jenny did not attempt any questions involving multiple stages of calculation (e.g. ‘multiply 9 by 6 and then add 5’) or fractions (e.g. ‘How many 10s are equal to 40 halves?’). Charlotte’s engagement was relative to her peers during group tasks, with instructions for collective composition, across two lessons. She attended to items of stationery and contributed limited ideas. When asked to comment on Charlotte’s quietness, the teacher described it as ‘normal...[Charlotte] needs much encouragement to join in. Takes long time to understand objective’.

Some participants (1.1.1/2.1.2/2.2.1) extended tasks by exceeding (yet not necessarily complying with) instructions. Two completed additional exercises after being asked to stop and listen. For example, Joanne continued writing during the plenary discussion, reporting having written four sentences (not three as asked). The teacher commented that ‘she will continue to work if she knows what she’s doing’ and ‘her peers’ answers might have prompted further ideas’. Kevin performed additional procedures whilst the teacher delivered instructions e.g. centre-aligning numbers after replicating them.

- *Degree of task completion* – where participants worked beyond set time boundaries (see section 4.4.2.2). For example, Joanne endeavoured to complete tasks in science and English lessons (but not maths), by working after being asked to stop. In response to the researcher’s comment following one English lesson ‘I noticed that you were rushing to finish this’, Joanne stated ‘yeah, well I like writing’.
- *Quantity of work produced* - Two participants (1.1.1/1.2.1) repeatedly determined the extent of certain tasks without (perceptible) external influence. For example, during daily phonological awareness training exercises, Jenny was asked to write as many words as possible, incorporating the same phoneme for each of four units of sound, yet in each section, she counted the words she had written and stopped at seven/eight, despite having received no instructions regarding the quantity (as confirmed by the teacher).

4.4.1.2 Process or Outcome of Task Agenda

Participants' actions did not always relate to contextual proceedings, actions used by neighbouring peers and/or suggestions made for addressing the task.

- In the *process* of following the task agenda, three participants (1.2.1/2.1.2/2.2.1) digressed, on limited/unrelated occasions by carrying out their own investigations within the boundaries of the task. Bridget and Kevin conducted explorations during the teachers' instructions, thereby neither conforming to those instructions nor expectations that they were listening to the next stage of the task. For example, Bridget repeated sums to investigate the proposed theory that a 3-digit number reversed and added to itself generates a palindrome number eventually, albeit through a series of stages. Chris's explorations were different from those of his peers. He utilised an exploratory approach when working alongside another to practice place-value on a computer programme containing multiple topics/levels. Chris utilised his turns to complete exercises and also to seek alternative exercises on the given topic, moving between different levels and trying various tasks, whilst in contrast his peer completed one exercise each turn.

Some participants used distinct actions whilst addressing the task. Joanne and Kevin progressed through their tasks in a structured and organised manner, devising ways to keep track of their progress. For example, Kevin drew crosses on a census datasheet as he was following clues on a sheet in naming a person. Asked why, Kevin stated '*because I want to keep track of the line.... so I can write the name down*'.

- The *outcome* did not always correspond to what was expected. Participants offered discrepant themes/ideas, especially in *response to questions* that did not embody the teachers' target leading to responses being deemed inaccurate. Scenarios were common to responses offered by Chris e.g. to the question '*Which bit of the plant grows first?*', he answered '*seed*', to which the teacher answered '*no*'. The question was repeated until a child answered '*root*'. The teacher explained '*When a seed starts to grow, the very first thing it does is put down a root*', and identified roots having originated from seeds, thus portraying (yet not acknowledging) Chris's response as technically correct.

Discrepant themes/ideas also emerged in written work. Several unrelated/ context-specific instances were observed with Chris and Kevin. Chris's actions did not correspond to what he had been asked to do, giving rise to discernible differences between his task-responses and those of his peers. For example, having been asked to write instructions for a simple game, Chris wrote an equipment list and then wrote a sentence for each piece of equipment outlining its function in the game. Kevin's

interactions differed with respect to his peers (and teacher expectations. See section 4.2.1.1). For example following instructions to decide on the amount of money received/spent weekly, Kevin chose to save some weeks in order to spend more in others in contrast with his peers who never spent more per week than the amount coming in.

Discrepant outcomes were also evident in participants' finished products. The form or design of Joanne, Jenny and Kevin's work contained elements that did not conform to instructions. For example, Joanne drew lines, ticks, crosses and numbers on her record sheet despite no instruction to this effect (see section 4.4.3.1.3). To the researcher, Joanne repeatedly referred to drawing lines on her sheet (e.g. *'I have done lines so I can write them down'*), effectively partitioning the materials being recorded. She had numbered the materials tested and put ticks or crosses to indicate a positive/negative outcome of the scratch test (i.e. *'They are all stuff what we have been doing what scratch'* [pointing at the ticks]). Through organising her recordings, Joanne had altered the form and appearance of her record sheet. She articulated having made some changes because of her perceptions of teacher requirements (i.e. *'Right the thing is they are wrong because I wasn't supposed to do that'* [i.e. write in sentences]), yet such a requirement had not been specified.

4.4.2 When

The timing of responses did not always conform or relate to original instructions and/or the response of their peer(s). Differences fell into four categories, differentiated by the association between the timing of participant actions and the timing of instructions and/or peer action.

- Task-related actions were undertaken ahead of instructions (*predictive action*)
- Task-related activities were started or stopped at different times (*task junctures*)
- The speed/rate of progress through the task differed (*pace of work*)
- The *sequence* of activities undertaken by participants differed.

4.4.2.1 Predictive Action

Episodes were considered salient where participants' actions did not relate to teacher instructions (or their peers' action) at the point of occurrence, yet instructions to perform that action came later. Thus they demonstrated foresight that such action would be required. Foresight appeared to be sometimes prompted by teacher comments e.g. Joanne got herself (and peer) a dictionary after the teacher stated *'I have noticed some people are having trouble finding words in the dictionary so we are going to look at how we can make it easier'*. However,

predictive action sometimes contradicted teacher remarks e.g. after the teacher stated ‘*we are going to listen to the tape. I want you to tell me what we should write down so you are not going to write anything down yet*’, Bridget wrote ‘note-taking’ at the top of her page, thereby not only predicting a title would be required but also choosing an appropriate title regardless of teacher commands (see sections 4.3.1.1.2).

The nature of participants’ actions included:

- Recording routine particulars - date, title, name, page/question number (1.2.1/1.2.2/2.1.1/2.1.2)
- Assembling equipment – items of stationery, maths/English equipment or software (1.1.1/1.2.2/2.2.1/2.2.2) (see section 4.3.1.2)

In the majority of cases, these actions were occasional events whereas Bridget repeatedly recorded routine details (e.g. date, title) before instructions were given. In one incident, she stated ‘*we haven’t put the titles. What is the title?*’ and attempted to write ‘palindrome’ uttering the initial letters, whilst her peer began the sum.

Such action appeared to occur without teacher awareness. For example, after Bridget’s attempt, the teacher wrote the word on the board and later corrected Bridget stating ‘*It’s a palindrome not a palendrome*’, seemingly unaware that she had attempted to spell the word for herself, prior to instructions. The teacher also said that such action indicated she was ‘*organised and following instructions*’, neglecting to observe the action having occurred prior to instructions being given.

4.4.2.2 Task Junctures

Several emergent scenarios occurred at the transition between one task or phase of the lesson and another, when participants’ (tangible) engagement in particular tasks began or finished at discrepant times, particularly relative to teacher instructions.

4.4.2.2.1 Starting Task-Activities

During the *introduction*, four participants (1.1.1/1.2.1/1.2.2/2.2.1) regularly commenced task-related activities before the teacher had finished instructions or specified they could start. They did so where multiple instructions were given, responding to initial commands during further directions, prompting teacher intervention in some cases.

Five participants (1.1.1/1.2.1/2.1.1/2.1.2/2.2.2) determined when they commenced *task execution*. Charlotte and Bridget frequently started exercises after their peers owing to their respective focus on presentation and procedural recordings. David and Jenny interrupted interactions to begin work (e.g. David resumed recording his ideas thereby terminating verbal interactions with his teacher/peer).

4.4.2.2 Finishing Task-Activities

The time at which participants chose to finish the task did not always correspond with teachers' instructions. During *introductions*, most commonly participants (i.e. 1.1.1/1.2.1/2.1.2/2.2.1/2.2.2) completed previous tasks after being asked to stop to listen to other instructions.

During *task execution* and *plenary* sessions, participants:

- Chose when work was finished (1.2.1/2.2.1), taken to the teacher for approval (1.2.2) or handed in (2.1.1).
- Chose to complete tasks before the time allocated for the activity had lapsed (1.2.1/1.2.2) e.g. Chris did not work any further on the task after receiving feedback (see sections 4.3.2.2).
- Delayed the end of the task by stopping after instructions to do so (1.1.1/2.1.2/2.2.1/2.2.2). Whilst Joanne continued tasks until finished, David finished the question he was working on.
- Chose not to stop as instructed, working throughout discussions (1.1.1) and further instructions (2.1.2/2.2.1/2.2.2). For example, after the teacher stopped the class and stated '*look at me even if you haven't finished*', Bridget went on to finish one sum and start another, during the teacher's explanation of the next task (see section 4.3.1.1).

4.4.2.3 Pace of Work

Several episodes emerged concerning pace where the speed of participant responses/rate of their progress was at variance with their peers/teacher. Others provided a benchmark against which the pace of participants' interaction was deemed significant.

Three participants' pace was different from their *peers*. Joanne's pace varied according to whom she sat with, whereas Bridget and Charlotte frequently worked slower than their peers. For example, when asked to generate a science investigation as a group and record collective ideas individually, repeatedly Charlotte was left recording whilst her peers designed/discussed subsequent stages of the investigation. Consequently she did not contribute to the group's discussion. When commenting on the lesson transcript, the teacher stated Charlotte is '*very slow at recording, often gets behind because she will re-write if work is not neat or spellings incorrect*'. Her recordings reflected her peer's decisions, which may or may not have conveyed her own.

In three cases (1.2.1/2.1.1/2.2.1), pace was slower relative to the *teacher*. Jenny, in particular, recorded more slowly across six maths and science lessons, when copying a series of passages from the blackboard (see sections 4.3.1.1.2). She continued to write during explanations/questioning on each paragraph to help keep up. Others responded

differently to rapid task demands. Kevin became reliant on teacher/peer support through interactions, instigated ‘coping strategies’ and omitted to follow some instructions, whilst Charlotte failed to react to each instruction when delivered in multiple.

In four cases, pace was relatively *faster* than the teacher. Chris completed one activity before the teacher had finished handing out the equipment. For the other participants (1.2.1/2.1.2/2.2.2), speed was evident during teacher-directed interactions in maths, whereupon they progressed through the sum faster than the teacher appeared to anticipate through her questions. For example:

	Teacher	David
1	<i>3 and 9, 12</i>	
2	She points to numbers as he is adding	
3	<i>And then you've got to add 10</i>	
4		22
5	<i>Good</i>	
6		33....33
7	<i>Oh, well done you leapt right ahead of me there...good. Oh this is an easy one now. Look for the easy patterns. You know, what do 3 and 7 make?</i>	
8		12
9	<i>Well that's 12 with that but what do 3 and 7 make?</i>	
10		10
11	<i>Good, 12 and that 3</i>	
12		13 no...15

Figure 4.3: Exemplar teacher-participant interaction

The teacher determined the order that numbers were added, placed emphasis on specific strategies (7) and framed stages of the sum (e.g. 3). David twice progressed faster than the teacher appeared to anticipate (6/8). Whilst she acknowledged him having done so on the first occasion (7), on the second she asked David to retrace his steps thus highlighting number bonds; yet these may have been applied unprompted since David added the numbers 3, 7 and 2 together promptly.

4.4.2.4 Sequence of Response

Three participants (1.1.1/1.2.2/2.1.2) differed in the sequence of task-responses undertaken relative to others. Joanne and Chris contravened instructions by carrying out actions before they ought. For example, during a science investigation, Joanne began testing materials before predicting the strongest, despite explicit instructions to the contrary. Bridget routinely gave precedence to recording task conventions and consequently started the task after her peer-group (see sections 4.3.1.1.2, 4.4.2.1).

4.4.3 How

Participants used different approaches in executing the task relative to instructions and/or the response of their peer(s). Unlike previous 'how' sections, this section focuses on the nuances of their approach. Participants instigated techniques/methods in the process of addressing task requirements and deriving an outcome. Scenarios fell into four categories, defined below, classified by type of approach applied and the number of times/contexts in which approaches occurred.

4.4.3.1 Techniques Instigated Throughout Tasks

Procedures occurred *throughout* the execution of a task that differed from those instructed/encouraged or used by peers, yet were not observed across contexts³⁰. Such procedures were largely subject-specific, task-associated and could often be verified through verbal interactions between participants and others. Several of them were systematic and methodical.

4.4.3.1.1 Maths

Of six participants observed to complete addition work, five instigated discrepant *computation* procedures, relative to instructions/peers.

- Relative to *peers*, there were those whose methods directly contrasted (1.1.1/2.1.2). For example, Joanne utilised previously generated patterns to derive an answer to the questions (e.g. used $36 + 4$ to work out $360 + 40$), in contrast with her peer who added on. Others worked without peer influence, sitting alone (1.2.2) or working on different material (2.1.1) at the time.
- Relative to *instructions*, certain participants used contrasting procedures (1.2.2/2.1.1/2.2.1/2.2.2). Bridget used an approach that had not been mentioned previously, writing a sum to the side of her worksheet (when deducing an answer from a series of alternatives); an observation verified by the teacher:

'Don't worry about showing me your workings. If you want to put them to the side do it'

Another participant used discrepant *recording* procedures. Chris wrote a list of numbers vertically on his desk in contrast to a horizontal layout, introduced by the teacher and presented in the textbook. Having calculated an answer, using the desk for his workings, Chris wrote in the middle of a page and subsequently entered the question alongside, horizontally as required.

³⁰ Such approaches were possibly were transferred across contexts without researcher awareness.

4.4.3.1.2 English

Five participants used discrepant procedures in English tasks to record ideas, address spellings or evaluate their progress. In recording, Bridget used bullet points, sketches, words and numbers during note-taking. She did not use word abbreviations as demonstrated, but used number abbreviations that had not been mentioned. Three participants (1.1.1/1.2.1/2.2.2) used unprompted techniques to ensure spelling accuracy. For example, Joanne appeared to use word association to locate her target answer, repeatedly muttering ‘downstairs’ whilst looking for ‘pancakes’, when both words were located within the same corpus of text. Her interaction was confirmed by the statement *‘how do you spell pancakes....I can't find where it says he came down for breakfast and...’*. Unprompted Joanne and David used evaluative procedures including reading through finished sentences or work. Joanne's teacher stated that doing so was compliant with school expectations.

4.4.3.1.3 Science

During science investigations, techniques were salient during collective tasks for two participants (1.1.1/2.1.1). For example, Joanne applied different testing and recording procedures relative to peers or instructions. Her testing procedures were systematic e.g. testing each of four materials against each of four objects one at a time in contrast with her peers who appeared to randomly test any material with an object not tested already. Joanne dictated how the group should proceed despite instructions to collectively design/perform an investigation (e.g. *‘Right, start off with cardboard’*). She made alterations to both record charts provided (see section 4.4.1.2).

4.4.3.1.4 ICT

Two participants (1.2.2/2.2.1) used approaches that were both additional and different. Chris's differences were particularly salient relative to peers. He completed exercises, alongside his peer, which required placing a series of numbers in order (from highest to lowest), revealed one by one with the press of a lever. Chris brought numbers up a few at a time ordering them as he went along (i.e. *‘I am just changing them as I go along’*), whilst his peer set out all the numbers before sequencing them. Chris discovered that numbers did not need moving around manually since previously sited numbers automatically shifted when new numbers were placed on top. Subsequently Chris attempted to encourage his peer to apply his time-saving procedure (e.g. *‘You don't need to change places. That one goes into right place, just go to that one and the next thing is that one jumps to that one’*). Kevin's differences were particularly salient relative to instructions. An example was revealed in a 1:1 interaction (i.e. Teacher *‘...press enter [Kevin] there’*; Kevin *‘Enter? I did click again. I don't really*

need that). Kevin had discovered that ‘double click’ performed the same function as ‘enter’, applying the procedure himself.

4.4.3.2 Techniques Applied Across Contexts

Participants utilised particular ways of doing/achieving something in managing analogous situations (e.g. in addition tasks). Techniques traversed subject boundaries, were not necessarily encouraged or prompted by others and some proved resistant to change by others. Diverse techniques were distinguished during task execution. Characteristically these were either verbally or non-verbally applied.

Six participants applied *verbal techniques* when working without support. Five participants (i.e. 1.1.1/1.2.1/2.1.2/2.2.1/2.2.2) customarily read aloud questions (where applicable) unprompted before attempting to answer them. Although when present the teacher/SNA asked participants (particularly 1.1.1/1.2.1/2.2.1/2.2.2) to verbalise questions, prior to support being instigated, they continued to use this technique in the absence of external influence. Reading aloud occasionally prompted others’ involvement especially where mistakes were articulated or difficulties evident (e.g. Kevin ‘*Dennis can jump 2 metres and a half*’; SNA ‘*It’s not a half*’; Kevin ‘*isn’t it, oh. 30 cm*’).

Other verbal techniques were noted. Joanne, Jenny and Kevin repeated teacher instructions aloud as they worked (e.g. after the teacher asked ‘*what number is 10 times more than 100*’, Jenny whispered ‘*10 times more than 100....100, 100 and 10*’ and wrote 1010). Joanne and Jenny repeated instructions intermittently during maths lessons, whilst Kevin did so regularly throughout two lessons. Whilst searching for information in a book, Jenny similarly repeated the instruction.

Regularities were observed across certain writing/maths tasks. Joanne, Kevin and David articulated full or part-sentences before (or as they were) writing. Participants verbalised individual words (1.1.1/1.2.1/2.1.2), decoded words in chunks (1.1.1/2.2.1) or spelt out words using letter sounds or names (1.1.1/1.2.1/2.2.2). Joanne’s persistence in verbalising words whilst writing was raised in discussion. The teacher deemed it to be a phase that her peers had gone through two years earlier. She also reported that children were taught to think of a sentence before writing. In addition tasks, Joanne, Chris and David verbalised numbers as they were calculating and recording the question/answer. It was apparent through their utterances (and also non-verbal techniques – see below) that they habitually added numbers by counting forward in ones.

Certain verbal techniques were routinely employed over recurrent activities. For example, in completing PAT exercises (involving blending phonemes with individual letter sounds),

Jenny voiced each phoneme/word blend before recording new words. Her verbalisations exemplified her errors - words sounding accurate yet spelt erroneously (e.g. cill for kill) or words that sounded incorrect to her (e.g. tent).

Several *non-verbal* techniques were applied recurrently across similar lessons. In addition activities, five participants (1.1.1/1.2.1/1.2.2/ 2.1.1/2.2.2) routinely used their fingers when counting. When computing sums, Jenny and Chris regularly wrote their workings on the desk before recording the answer. Additionally Joanne and Jenny completing phonological exercises systematically followed their finger along an alphabet written at the top of their worksheets for each of the four phonemes without prompting. Joanne applied the same strategy when the teacher wrote the alphabet on a worksheet requiring her to write words in alphabetical order.

4.4.3.2.1 Resistance to Change

Irrespective of whether verbal or nonverbal techniques were used, some techniques applied between contexts proved resistant to change. Teachers (and/or SNA) demonstrated, introduced or encouraged certain techniques whilst participants applied others when achieving task results. For example, Charlotte used her fingers when counting in contrast with a demonstration of doubling; Chris added in tens for double-digit whole numbers rather than add the single digits, then the zero as introduced by the teacher. Although examples were evident in all cases, resistance to change was particularly apparent over time, as the following example illustrates.

During the delivery of an addition task and throughout its execution, David was encouraged to apply strategies to speed up mathematical calculations. The teacher started the lesson by recapping strategies taught previously and reminding children to apply them:

“Now you’ve been doing a lot of work....about....little strategies and methods to help you. Doubling, halving them, pairs, patterns, thinking about different ways...to make this easier..... I want you...to be very conscious while you are doing it to look for the patterns. What you’ve learned this week I want you to use it.”

When beginning to compute the sums, David used his fingers whilst counting aloud in ones, prompting SNA intervention i.e.:

‘Look hang on.....Now we can use our number bonds here look, 3 and 7 is 10 isn't it’

Throughout the task, seemingly provoked by David's interactions (i.e. adding on his fingers or counting aloud in ones), the SNA systematically intervened promoting the use of doubling and/or number bonds through her interactions, direct assertions and indirectly through questioning (e.g. ‘Just remember 1 and 9, 2 and 8, 3 and 7’; ‘I know that 8 and 8 is 16 and 9 add 9 is 18 so 8 and 9 will be?’). She also wrote number bonds to ten on scrap paper for him. Yet David continued to use his fingers and count forward in ones before writing his

answer. During a 1:1 teacher-initiated interaction, number patterns were further reinforced (e.g. *'think of your number bonds, 11 and 9'*). David counted on his fingers after she had left.

Later the SNA referred to the shortcomings in David's approach through its enduring use e.g. a peer prompted David to state *'be quiet I am going to lose mine'* after interrupting his counting, the SNA responded *'You are running out of fingers....Come on lets try and do it an easier way'*. David attempted to follow the SNA/teacher's suggestions. He announced to the SNA *'we've got a 3 and a 7'* and raised this approach in an interaction with the researcher:

	Researcher	David
1	<i>You have gone on to do these sums have you changed the way you are doing it at all?</i>	
2		<i>Yeah</i>
3	<i>Can you tell me about the way you've changed?</i>	
4		<i>Well if I've got a 3 there I'd make that 10, and I'd make that into 18 so that's 2 I've done and then, and then I just like, and then I just added these (2 more numbers)</i>

Figure 4.4: An exemplar researcher-initiated interaction

It also emerged through attempts to use number bonds and SNA questioning (e.g. *Does it muddle you if we take something like the 7 and the 3?*) that David experienced difficulties retaining figures he was adding in his head (e.g. *'oh I've lost it. I had it...I had it all in my head'*). The SNA appeared to modify her approach stating *'Well, lets count the big numbers...'* seemingly embracing one David had articulated earlier (i.e. *'..I add the big numbers first...'*) when asked whether number bonds were confusing.

Subsequently the teacher stated *'I am going to give you one or two minutes to just finish the sum that you are doing...'*. David counted in ones aloud from 11, appearing to revert back to his previous technique.

4.4.3.2.2 Unconventional Techniques

Some participants used techniques in dealing with or managing specific situations often unbeknown to the teacher that contrasted with instructions/peers' approach but also did not conform to accepted task-practice. All participants occasionally used their peers' responses as their own, copying the same answer (see section 4.3.3.2.2). Joanne and Jenny were regularly observed to do so. Joanne disclosed having done so (i.e. when asked *'How do you know it's 220?' she replied 'Because she's [her peer] just copying off there putting a nought at the end of it'*) and her actions prompted teacher intervention (e.g. when asked to think about a question, Joanne glanced at her peer's work, prompting *'don't look at [peer's name], which way will you work it out?'*).

Chris utilised various other unconventional techniques in achieving a task outcome, especially during maths activities. For example, Chris systematically copied answers from the previous day's exercises to his current work of completing daily worksheets focusing on one times-table each week. When the teacher demonstrated previous maths work on the board (for which he had been absent), Chris wrote the answers down, as each sum was completed. Whilst his approach prompted teacher intervention (i.e. '*Chris, put your pencil down and listen*'), Chris continued to copy answers when her back was turned and put his pencil down as she turned around.

4.4.3.2.3 Techniques Modified to Context

Over the course of task execution, some participants changed the techniques they used in conjunction with perceptible changes in the classroom context. Charlotte applied different techniques in the teacher's presence (i.e. counting in her head) during teacher interactions and when in proximity but used her fingers to count at other times.

Others applied different techniques when the teacher altered her approach. Joanne technique changed following lengthy (vs. shorter) instructions. She looked at her peer's work before writing an answer in her book following two lengthy instructions yet all questions of noticeably shorter duration were attempted without looking at her peer's work. Charlotte and Kevin used different approaches for multiple instructions (contrary to other instructions), routinely responding before the teacher had finished (not always following all those given subsequent to the first instruction).

Differences were particularly striking during a lesson with two distinct phases, where techniques applied by Kevin appeared to relate to the nature of those stages. Phase 1 involved generating an exemplar computer spreadsheet by following a series of instructions (teacher-directed); yet during phase 2 children were instructed to input their own data and then design a spreadsheet of their own (child-directed). Many techniques used in phase one appeared to help Kevin to maintain the teacher's pace, whilst those used in phase two appeared to support him to realise his goal. The variations are summarised on table 4.1.

	Phase One	Phase Two
Interactions with the Teacher(s)	Utilised teacher support to maintain the pace/catch up (e.g. repeat instructions, typed field heading for him, talked through instructions individually)	Initiated to clarify own decision-making (e.g. Kevin ' <i>so can you put anything down?</i> ' Teacher ' <i>you can put in what you like...okay but its got to be under 50p</i> ' Kevin ' <i>I know</i> ') Maintained chosen position when challenged (e.g. Teacher - ' <i>Oh, you spent it all that week Kevin. Aren't you putting any away in your piggy bank?</i> ' Kevin ' <i>No</i> ')

Continued over

	Phase One	Phase Two
Interactions with the Teacher(s) (continued)		Initiated support to address concerns pertinent to his design (e.g. [1] 'How do you get it to total?' [2] 'Could you actual save it so that you'd spent nothing and then have more change to spend?')
Following Teacher Instructions	Some instructions omitted (e.g. did not use Autosum, copied peer) Returned to complete earlier parts of task whilst teacher delivered further instructions	Rejected teacher instruction (e.g. Teacher – 'You're here look' Kevin – 'I am not going to copy it' Teacher – 'What are you doing?' Kevin – 'My own design')
Interactions with Peer(s)	Instigated numerous interactions for help with spellings (e.g. [1] 'how do you spell pocket money?') Called out to clarify an instruction (e.g. 'Numbers?') Looked at peers' work & typed in what they had written Accepted peer-instigated instruction (e.g. 'you move the column by....') Checked peers' work against his own Watched his peer work before following instructions to attempt functions for himself (e.g. to replicate)	Instigated peer support before asking the teacher (i.e. 'how do you get it to follow the answers...') Rejected peer-initiated instruction (e.g. [1] Peer 'You don't have to type your name though' Kevin 'You can if you want....' Peer 'no one else has' [2] Peer 'You have to highlight..' Kevin 'It's your design.') Held discussions on theme of task (e.g. 'I don't have pocket money')
Verbal Techniques	Verbalised lack of understanding (e.g. 'What's he doing now?... Minimise it?') Repeats instructions to himself as he follows them (e.g. 'times six equals')	Articulate words & numbers as he types (e.g. '0.56')

Table 4.1: Different techniques applied during two phases of an ICT lesson

4.5 Interpretive Summary of Emergent Findings

4.5.1 Resource Engagement

Participants' utilisation of extrinsic sources of information during task-based endeavours.

It was notable that participants **initiated** the use of a variety of resources during their work. Initiated action was evident on several grounds, yet each arose from a non-correspondence between participants' actions and those of others. They lacked correspondence with:

- *Instructions* - resources were sourced/utilised unprompted, without or contrary to commands.
- *Peers* – participants initiated and used different resources to their peers.
- *Expectations* - participants' resource interactions were questioned/reproached.
- *The timing of events* - participants interrupted the speaker to address different concerns or utilised resources during events requiring a different focus.

- *Ideas* – issues were raised that contrasted/challenged those of others.
- *Function* - alternative resources were sourced and resources were used for different purposes.

Through participants' initiations, a number of factors emerged concerning the **self-governance** of resources. Participants appeared to autonomously determine:

- *The nature of resources accessed*
Participants accessed resources of their own accord yet rejected the use of others. They did not always use physical resources as anticipated or intended, altering their use whilst addressing teacher requirements.
- *The purpose for which resources were employed*
Social resources were drawn on for a variety of reasons. There were correlations between purpose and person approached e.g. the SNA was used to gather information, where peers were used to impart information.
- *When resources were used*
Participants individually determined the timing of resource employment where access was initiated to resources verbally (e.g. questioning peer/SNA) during teacher dialogue or following instructions to the contrary.
- *The manner in which resources were approached/utilised*
Participants varied the amount and type of data communicated to others (raising general/specific or unrelated issues) and the form of address used (questioning or declaring). They also broached discrepant issues, challenged others' ideas or mentioned issues that others did not consider relevant.

Individual differences were apparent across participants in:

- *Their tendency to utilise resources*
Quieter participants (2.1.1/2.1.2) were less prominent across all forms of resource engagement whereas more vocal participants (1.1.1/1.2.1) or those in verbal contexts (2.2.1/2.2.2) initiated social resources more regularly.
- *The type of resource engaged by participants*
There were variations in *resource availability*, with not all participants having SNA access (see table 3.2). In the SNA's presence, resource engagement occurred more frequently, yet other resources were less utilised (i.e. teacher). Another reason for individual differences was *preference*, particularly where several resources were available. Charlotte was reported to prefer to ask her peers, whilst Joanne demonstrated her preference for teacher support by physically approaching her despite peers being available.

- *The purpose for which resources were engaged*

Chris used teacher support to obtain feedback but not to address matters of understanding whilst Kevin and David sought approval regularly.

4.5.2 Focus of Engagement

The subject of participants' engagement

It was notable that participants attended to **different** issues during curricular activities. Differences were engendered within permutations of various emergent dichotomies, including occurring simultaneous to/in lieu of curricular activities, association/disassociation with curricular activities, within/physically removed from the context, verbal/non-verbal, one-off/recurrent. Whilst the dichotomies led to differences on several grounds, universally the issues participants addressed at such times did not correspond to contextual events. Differences were evident relative to:

- *Instructions* - participants did not always engage in task instructions despite direct (and sometimes named) commands being given, yet other occasions were salient because no instruction/prompts had been given prior to action.
- *Peers* – participants engaged with issues of an individual nature.
- *Expectations* - participants were questioned/reproached for the issues they addressed. There was a mismatch of participant and teacher concerns in some cases (e.g. quantity versus quality, accuracy versus flow).
- *Timing of interactions* – participants took action during teacher dialogue or time allocated for specific curricular tasks when others were addressing/expecting a different focus.
- *Consequences* - subsequent engagement was affected by participants' actions.

By interacting with discrepant issues, participants **governed** the use of their time. They appeared to autonomously determine:

- *The nature of issue addressed* –
 - Participants addressed individual task-related concerns, thereby influencing both the quality (e.g. accuracy, presentation) and quantity of their work (e.g. proportion completed, rate of progress, pace).
 - Participants interacted with issues that neither related nor conformed to instructions/expectations – turning their attention to unrelated topics of their own accord, largely focused on items in their vicinity. Support materials became the focus of participants' off-task attention, not always being used as intended.

- *When issues were addressed*
Participants engaged in task-related issues (in line with expectations³¹) yet before and after junctures set by the teacher (i.e. in time allocated for other activities).
- *Time allocated to issues*
Time was utilised to address other issues. Participants prioritised issues by time, influencing the order issues were addressed, the proportion of time spent on one issue compared with another or the frequency with which issues were engaged.

The focus of participants' engagement reflected individual differences:

- *The time spent on/ off task*
Participants varied in their tendency to address other issues. Quieter participants were more salient in non-verbal (additional) categories, whilst vocal participants were salient across discrepant categories. It was striking that there was a lack of salient off-task episodes occurring in the SNA's presence, where participants were constantly monitored, asked to maintain listening/concentration and maximise effort, unlike their peers. The SNA directed participants' engagement, with verbal commands or preventative/corrective interactions (e.g. explaining/reinforcing instructions, concepts and strategies or providing immediate feedback). The SNA also appeared to direct participants' engagement away from the teachers' focus, by interacting with them during teacher dialogue or interjecting comments, both of which require participants to alternate their focus of engagement.
- *Topics that captured/ held their attention*
Certain participants repeatedly addressed particular issues. Charlotte, Bridget and David recurrently attended to *task* detail (i.e. presentation/conventions/ accuracy respectively) across varying tasks (see section 4.3.1.1.2), whilst Jenny, Charlotte and Bridget regularly focused on *off-task* issues.

4.5.3 Engagement in Task Agenda

Participants' task response to activities assigned by the teacher.

It was notable where participants responded to task instructions in ways that were **different** and/or **original**. Emergent scenarios were identified by non-correspondence with either:

- *Instructions* - participants responded differently to instructions with consequences for the nature, timing or task approach.
- *Ideas* - ideas were conveyed that were not observed to originate from others.

³¹ Expectations were either specified or inherent within teacher interactions.

- *Peers' response* – the process/outcome of peers' work provided a measure by which participants' task-response was deemed to be of significance.
- *Expectations* – participants' techniques/approach were questioned/reproached.
- *Timing* - actions did not always relate to the task boundaries, sequence and/or rate of progress instigated by teachers.

Participants appeared to autonomously determine:

- *What was responded to*
The agenda executed did not always relate to the one set by the teacher. Participants influenced the task agenda by altering its extent (doing more/less, selectivity, non-engagement), its process (exploring/monitoring procedures) and outcome (ideas/design) relative to requirements.
- *When to respond to the agenda*
Participants influenced the timing of agenda execution by starting/stopping tasks outside set time boundaries.
- *How to approach the agenda*
The techniques used to execute activities.

Individual differences amongst participants were noted in terms of:

- *Approach* – participants utilised techniques repeatedly that over time could be deemed both characteristic and idiosyncratic to them as individuals.
- *Disposition* - Joanne's attempts to take the lead/assert her ideas in collective science tasks could feasibly reflect her temperament as Charlotte's non-participation in group-tasks may denote her quiet/shy disposition.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter aims to address the primary aim of the research, that of furthering an understanding of children's engagement. Data collected in addressing the first research question, investigating how children with learning difficulties interact with curricular activities, have shown that children used complex and multiple means of interacting with such activities. Through their interactions children demonstrated their ability to initiate in a variety of ways, offering insight into their individual self-governance as well as indicating differences amongst children. By addressing the second and third research questions, seeking to identify and then categorise salient factors within children's interactions, initially sequentially and later concurrently over time, three categories of engagement emerged. Each category was identified to exist on three dimensions, presented as part of the findings, leading to a complex picture of children's engagement. This chapter addresses the fourth research question and overall aim of the study, considering how the emergent categories contribute to an overall understanding of children's engagement. The theoretical framework and in particular the three theoretical tenets (underpinning both social constructivist/social cognitive theories), presented in chapter two and summarised on the table below, offer a structure by which the findings can be interpreted and a developing understanding of engagement addressed.

	Social Constructivist/ Socio-cultural	Social Cognitive
Active	Children initiate action They select/transform/construct/ alter environmental information*	Children influence their actions†
Subjective	Children interpret information Their previous experiences/state of mind/capabilities affect their perceptions/understanding	Children form perceptions of themselves/others affecting their actions
Interactive	Children acquire knowledge within a social/cultural context Meaning is co-constructed between individuals◇	Children are contributors to what happens to them: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are affected by others' influence/perceptions • Others are affected by the child's influence/perceptions

* After Bruner (1966) ◇ After Vygotsky (1981) † after Bandura (1997)

Table 5.1: The Tenets of Social Constructivist/Socio-cultural & Social cognitive Theory

Applying the three tenets as dimensions on which the findings can be interpreted, a multi-dimensional understanding of engagement emerges (see table 5.2 overleaf). Rather than address each section of table 5.2 in turn, the three theoretical tenets listed across the top of the table are examined separately, to consider their potential contribution to an

understanding of engagement. The categories of engagement are used to discuss the tenets in relation to the findings.

	Active	Subjective	Interactive
RESOURCE ENGAGEMENT (Children's utilisation of social and physical resources)	Resources initiated to address their own purposes Children governed what, when & how resources were used	Children addressed what they considered important Children formed perceptions of their needs & those of others	Children's initiations were influenced by the teachers' approach Resource use was dependent on others' reaction
FOCUS OF ENGAGEMENT (The subject of children's attention)	Children attended to matters of their own concern during time allocated for other issues Children governed what, when & how issues were addressed	Children's interests/concerns/feelings affected their engagement Children formed perceptions of importance/relevance & expectations	Children's actions prompted interventions affecting subsequent engagement
ENGAGEMENT IN TASK AGENDA (Children's response to activities set by the teacher)	Children's responses were different/original Children governed the nature/extent/timing of their task response & task approach	Children's interpretations, knowledge/understanding & previous experiences affected their task response Children formed perceptions of teacher expectations /requirements & of task approaches	Children's task-responses were influenced by the teachers' approach

Table 5.2: A Multi-Dimensional Understanding of Engagement

5.1 Resource Engagement

5.1.1 An Active Dimension of Engagement

The theories offer consideration of children as initiators and influencers of action. This section delineates an active dimension of engagement, by considering the findings in these terms. The two theoretical perspectives differ in their respective emphasis since 'to initiate' encompasses a discernible factor whereby children are seen to act of their own accord, whereas 'to influence' embodies an indiscernible factor, whereby children bring about change through action. However, the two perspectives are complementary to an understanding of engagement.

Initially the data alluded to children as initiators of action. With the study focusing on actions of the child, and aiming to identify salient factors within the curricular interactions collected, observable action was imperative. It was the children's initiations (rather than influence) that emerged as salient. Irrespective of the category in which children's actions

were later placed, a common theme was a non-correspondence between children's actions and those of others/context (see section 4.5), rendering the children's actions unique and individual at certain levels. Thereby, children were deemed 'active' because their actions were different.

As the data were analysed, children as 'influencers of action' emerged. The analysis revealed children's influence to be three-dimensional: what (nature of action), when (timing) and how (approach). Children were thereby deemed 'active' on account that they governed their actions (see section 4.5). The children governed their resources, use of time and their task response, revealing a multi-dimensional ability to engage, as described in the findings (see table 3.5).

With evidence of both difference and self-governance, children demonstrated their ability to think for themselves, make decisions and thereafter, take responsibility for the consequences as determiners of action. The findings thus back Wyness's (2000) claim that research shows children to be competent social beings with an ability to control and govern their own work, its direction and progress. Children exemplified lateral thinking, for example by creating resource opportunities - accessing and utilising resources that had not been provided. They demonstrated independent and predictive thinking, for example by organising equipment during the introduction in preparation for the task. Coupled with their attention to routine details of the task, ahead of instructions, it is feasible that the children started thinking about the task or making decisions about how to proceed, before the teacher finished her instructions. They signified self-assertiveness and self-management, for example, by choosing the timing of their actions, applying their own strategies to task execution, despite teacher/SNA instructions or by utilising certain resources but not others.

Children's initiations were particularly evident within the category of resource engagement, where children used verbal means to enlist the help of others. Children summoned others in their endeavours, calling into question children's approaches towards others. Such approaches can be considered alongside adult approaches, where models encourage reflection upon children's participation (see section 2.3.6). In addressing child/professionals' interactions, the continuum (see section 2.3) thereby provides a means to consider the child's standpoint and type of approach used. Thus it has been applied to exemplify the teacher/child's role relative to the other, and is depicted on table 5.3 overleaf.

Consultation	Involvement	Participation	Responsibility	Partnership
To ascertain information	To include others	To take part	To act independently/ take decisions	To participate as a partner
Role initiated & guided by party seeking information	Role initiated by one seeking to include other, guided by both parties	Role initiated & guided by one party	Role recognition in social context	Dual role, shared decision-making in social context

Table 5.3: Role differences at various levels of participation

Children initiated to seek information at the consultative level. Their initiations (as requests) were apparent, as was their influence in determining reasons for what, when and how others were engaged. They also sought to include others at the involvement level, where others played a more influential role in determining the course of the interaction. Different levels of the continuum could be applied to other categories of engagement, where verbal action was less common (see section 5.1.3).

Consideration of the findings as being an active dimension of engagement, is consistent with theories that address the different facets of action. In particular, the findings link to the work of Burke (1969, cited in Wertsch, 1998), who advocates a pentad approach to studying action (i.e. act [what], scene [when/where], agent [who], agency [how] and purpose [why]). Burke's work differs from the current study where facets have emerged as dimensions of influence through the analysis, since he argues for approaching investigations of human action through these principles. Nevertheless, he argues for multi-dimensionality in understanding action, as the findings have shown. Wertsch (1998) argues for a need to consider how to blend the pentad principles together to explain action without getting too complex. He uses Burke to further an argument for going beyond the individual when studying action. Whilst, the active tenet helps identify autonomy or differences in action, it does not provide an explanation for them. Furthermore, it does not explain differences that were seen to exist between the child participants (see section 4.5).

5.1.2 A Subjective Dimension of Engagement

Two interrelated considerations are embodied by the subjective theoretical tenet; what children bring to a context affects what they perceive and what they perceive influences how they act. This section considers the findings in these terms and outlines a subjective contribution to an understanding of engagement.

Individual and subjective processes offer a means to help clarify variations amongst the episodes reported in the findings chapter. Considering resource initiations or the subject of engagement in terms of what children bring, raises a matter of individual *interests and*

concerns. Others were enlisted to address issues of apparent importance to children as individuals when engaging them for task purposes. Likewise, the subject of children's attention and timing of their focus appeared to represent what captured and/or held their attention as individuals. Interests and concerns could particularly account for different issues being addressed frequently and/or repeatedly (e.g. health), despite others prioritising alternative matters or not mentioning those issues. Interest could account for the proportion of time spent engaged in an issue or choice to engage in one topic rather than another. Interest could also account for discrepancies within cases (e.g. expressing an interest in written work could clarify why a child sought to complete activities in English/science but not maths).

Attending to certain issues before/instead of others also raises the issue of *motivation*. Whilst this thesis cannot support a consideration of what motivated children to respond as they did, on account of it being difficult for the researcher to question/define or detect motivation, it appeared salient that children sought to finish tasks without perceptibly receiving or seeking external influence/reward. DeCharms (1968) may regard such action as indicative that those children perceive themselves to be an 'origin', for having initiated action and taken responsibility, without external influence or motivation. Additionally children appeared to set goals for themselves (such as finishing tasks) and manage the execution of those goals by attending to different task issues during time allocated for other matters. Children thereby demonstrated taking responsibility (see section 2.3) without such responsibilities being allocated or defined externally. The literature appears to take differential views on the motivational source of responsibility. There are those who focus on children's responses to being *given* responsibility (e.g. Gersch, 1996), whilst others perceive children *develop* a sense of responsibility for learning (e.g. Collis & Lacey, 1996). Wang and Stiles (1976) take a middle ground. They hypothesise that if children decide when they complete work, their perception of responsibility and learning performance will be affected. They argue that their research supports this hypothesis and conclude that, given the *opportunity*, children can develop the ability to take responsibility and also *perceive* of having this ability. Whilst the findings indicate self-directed action, the act of responsibility cannot be separated from the social context, such that the teachers' reaction affected opportunities for children to perform tasks outside set time boundaries (see section 5.1.3). From another perspective, taking responsibility for managing activities reflects a change in participation from being relatively peripheral to becoming situated (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Actions may also be explained by children's *feelings* about themselves or the task. Vocalising their interest in the task or affirming their ability to execute the task (confidence) was often coupled with instances of sustained concentration. Conversely, having expressed negating personal feelings (e.g. health) or task worries (e.g. lack of understanding) children were visibly distracted.

Considering *task responses* in terms of what children bring, raises an additional set of issues, such as whether the child's subjective understandings of the task-agenda reflects in the nature of their response. Children's *interpretation* of curricular activities could account for differences and originality in their task responses. *Instructions* were not always interpreted as intended, with the consequence that children developed different tasks (see section 4.4.1.2). Similarly misinterpreted *comments* were evident. For instance, declamatory statements were taken as cues to respond or often taken literally. *Questions* were also interpreted in ways that did not respond to the issue under scrutiny. Hence whilst some responses were labelled 'incorrect', they did not necessarily reflect the child's conceptual understanding, as much as they did their interpretation of the question. Consequently, children's interpretation of what was required or happening was significant in determining the nature of agenda executed, irrespective of the teachers' intentions. In presenting a transactional model of teaching and learning, Rowland (1987: 131) centralises the importance of interpretation, by stating:

"It is vital that the child's interpretation of the stimulus motivates the activity."

More fundamental to the findings however was the effect of children's interpretation on the nature of the task rather than motivation.

Though interpretation evidently accounted for some actions, others appeared to reflect children's *knowledge and understanding*. When conforming to task instructions, skills and conceptual understanding were demonstrated. Equally though task-responses were achieved by employing 'non-conventional'³² strategies, appearing to compensate for their lack of understanding (see section 4.4.3.2.2). Action appeared to be taken to avoid ambiguity such as observing others before responding. However, task instructions were also executed and an outcome derived, without understanding the relevance and purpose of the task. Consequently, engagement is brought under scrutiny, as to whether it corresponds to the mechanics of executing the task or an understanding of the processes involved.

The regularity of certain responses indicates that children were influenced by prior *experiences*. Several maths strategies, applied of the child's own accord, contravened

³² Teacher interventions were used to determine what constituted 'conventional' practice.

teacher/SNA requirements and were rudimentary in approach (e.g. counting in ones, use of fingers to count). Those strategies may reflect early school experiences, appearing ingrained since they were resistant to change. Children may also have drawn upon previous home or school experiences when responding to tasks. Children's choices could emulate what occurs at home (e.g. saving up pocket money in some weeks in order to spend more in others).

There were aspects of children's engagement that could be explained by considering action in terms of perceptions, across each of the three categories of engagement. Concerning *resource initiations*, perceptions were particularly notable as others were engaged. Children appeared to initiate the use of resources based on perceptions about themselves or their work. Basing their perceptions on *feelings* about their capability to achieve could account for some actions. Children sought help from others (e.g. to check spellings), when help proved unwarranted. Repeatedly calling upon others to make and approve task-based decisions may reflect a poor self-identity, such that they lack confidence in their own ability, are self-conscious or have low self-esteem. In seeking information, reassurance or confirmation, children could boost their confidence before publicising or writing their ideas. Amongst social cognitive theorists, the affective state of the child is considered significant. Howe (1999) claims children's achievements are influenced by the extent to which they feel in control, whilst Bandura (1977; 1997) argues that self-efficacy beliefs are an important determinant for action. If having a low self-efficacy leads to dependent action, could it follow that a high self-efficacy prompts autonomous action? Zimmerman et al (1996) claim that students are more apt to take responsibility for their learning when they realise that they are capable of achieving on their own. Similarly Fisher (1996) regards developing positive self-esteem involves showing children they are capable of decisions.

Resources may also have been engaged based on a perception of others' needs rather than their own (see section 5.1.4.2). Several children addressed issues raised by others in previous initiations (see section 4.2.1.2.2). Such a correlation may signify that children kept the needs of others in mind and attempted to satisfy those needs, thus reporting the information requested when it became available.

Concerning the focus of engagement, perceptions appeared to influence both task-related and task-unrelated engagement. Perceptions could account for children's task-concerns, which feasibly could have been based on either their own perceptions of importance (expectations) and/or their perceptions of what the teacher considers important. Perceiving accuracy or neatness (for instance) to be a matter of priority may prompt children to repeatedly direct their endeavours towards achieving those standards (see

section 4.3.1.1.2). Perceptions could also account for task-unrelated engagement. For instance, perceiving the teachers' remarks to be irrelevant may account for the child who attended to discrepant issues after expressing that she did not need to be involved.

Children's task responses likewise appeared to be engendered and explained by their perceptions. Children's prior experiences were reflected in their subsequent actions, suggesting that they were influenced by previous experiences. Perceptions based on experience could explain how techniques were instigated repeatedly. Perceiving that a technique enables them achieve the desired result could prompt its ongoing use. Experiences could also influence perceptions of what is required/expected. The social cognitive ideology reviewed in chapter two, was argued to be applicable to engagement on the grounds that children make retrospective judgements about their experiences having a facilitative or inhibitive effect. Forming perceptions based on experiences could explain children's predictive organisational or procedural routine actions (at a facilitative level). Anticipatory action could also indicate, from Lave and Wenger's perspective, that children were becoming situated into the community of practice (1991, c.f. Chapter 2). They propose the term 'legitimate peripheral participation', to describe '*engagement in social practice that entails learning as an integral constituent*' (p35). It would follow that in learning the routines of the classroom children would not necessarily require instructions for procedural action. Lave and Wenger help to support the view that as children become more active and engaged within a culture, they assume more responsibility (autonomously) in association with an increasing sense of identity.

In embracing a wider perspective, as offered by Lave and Wenger, it becomes apparent that subjective processes do not address the whole picture. Whilst children's subjective understandings and perceptions may account for some actions, it is necessary to consider the influence of the social/cultural context in order to take an understanding of engagement further.

5.1.3 An Interactive Dimension of Engagement

At the interactive level, the theoretical tenets mutually embrace a reciprocal influence of the social/cultural context on children's actions. This section delineates reciprocal factors on children's engagement, using interactive terms to consider the findings and further an understanding of engagement.

There were discernibly three levels on which interactive elements appeared to influence children's engagement:

- *Children's actions were influenced by the actions (initiations) of others*³³

In focusing on children's interactions during curricular activities, the delivery of those tasks was particularly pertinent to the study. Significant therefore is the emergent effect of the teachers' approach upon engagement. Teachers recognised the reciprocal effect of their approach, epitomised in the statement '*if I make it boring, they don't want to listen*' (2.1).

In the category 'focus of engagement', several influential factors emerged including the degree of the child's involvement (see section 5.1.4.1), multiplicity of instructions and pace. Different approaches placed correspondingly different demands upon children in terms of listening/concentration, varying in the degree of teacher dialogue and nature of delivery. Lessons typically followed a pattern involving whole-class introductions/plenary with time allocated for task execution, yet others involved a series of teacher (whole-class) inputs commanding a fluctuating focus of engagement/task-agenda. The latter appeared to generate listening, concentration and management implications given that a discrepant focus reverberated upon subsequent stages of the process. To an extent the delivery/dialogue content are a reflection of curriculum requirements as much as they are teachers' decisions. The majority of lessons observed during the study were based on the Literacy and Numeracy strategies for which whole-class interactive teaching is a key feature. Authors have emphasised the importance/nature of the 'interactive' approaches to teaching rather than the 'whole-class' grouping (c.f. Alexander, 2000). The findings concur with Denvir and Askew's (2001) interpretation of interactive teaching being concerned with attempts to uphold the participation of the whole-class. As such, teachers appeared to focus on the transient engagement of as many children as possible, whilst children influenced whether their engagement was maintained (subject to their listening/concentration).

Consideration of the teachers' approach, with respect to the other two categories of engagement, an issue was revealed requiring further explanation. Children appeared to become dependent upon external resources in undertaking certain task demands set by the teacher. This issue is discussed further in section 5.1.4.2.

- *Children's actions were influenced by the reaction of others*

Children's actions provoke reciprocal verbal reactions from others. On the one hand, children sought a reaction from others, as with resource engagement. Nevertheless,

³³ A full consideration of the effect of others' actions upon children's engagement is beyond the scope of this thesis yet nevertheless relevant to the findings. It is the researcher's intention to address this aspect during an ESRC postdoctoral fellowship next year.

from children's initiations it was not always apparent what their *intentions* were. Also it could not be perceived whether their motives were to prompt counteraction/convey information to others or whether their interactions were deliberate attempts to engage support. Using statements to engage resource provision, more so than questioning, meant relying on others *interpreting* their interactions, as they were intended, concluding that other's interpretations of initiated interactions were significant to the utilisation of resources. Their *feedback* was also significant. Issues were raised and addressed by the other party that children had not broached in their initiations. The extent to which they were able to address their needs by engaging social resources appeared to vary. Some interactions enabled children to express their ideas/address uncertainty or allowed them to go beyond their requirements, thus exploring or extending their understanding through mutual opportunities to declare, question and listen. However, in other interactions children's questions were not addressed.

On the other hand, children's actions achieved a response without one being sought. The lack of correspondence between children's actions and contextual events prompted others to question and reproach actions based on apparent differences. Interventions were particularly related to focus of engagement. Teachers repeatedly referred to listening in their interventions, thereby alluding to its perceived importance³⁴. They also frequently commented on listening post hoc, interpreting attention to different issues (whether verbal/non-verbal, task-related/unrelated) as evidence of 'not listening' or 'off-task' and attending to the teacher/question/task/attempting to contribute as 'on-task' and 'listening'. Nevertheless, the nature and timing of teacher interventions/comments raised some paradoxical issues. On occasions, children were questioned for attending to task-related matters without instructions, thereby sending negative messages about independent decision-making. For instance, children were questioned for predictive action and thus were not acknowledged for their decisions, their foresight or their constructive utilisation of time. Children were questioned for not listening or paying attention, when their gaze appeared diverted or they attended to items in their vicinity (non-verbally), despite the potential for simultaneous interaction. Through subsequent interaction, it could be deduced where children had listened and acted concurrently,

³⁴ Teacher perceptions about the importance of listening were confirmed during interviews, where it was mentioned as an expectation (i.e. 'I would expect the children to listen' 1.1), and its significance emphasised (e.g. 'I keep telling my class that unless they are listening, they will learn nothing so I think I will put that at the very top' 1.2). Also not listening was referred to as 'a constant problem' (1.1) because of subsequent effects on pace, time, understanding, behaviour, resource utilisation and learning progress (1.1/2.1/2.2).

thus focusing on more than one issue at the same time. For instance, they attended to different matters (e.g. writing, items) during teacher dialogue, yet then answered or commented appropriately indicating that they had been listening to the teachers' line of questioning simultaneously. Where the focus was simultaneous and task-related, children demonstrated their ability to multi-task.

It was probable that teachers contributed towards children's task concerns through their interactions, prompting children to act based on their perceptions of what the teacher considered important, rather than on their own perceived standards (whether of quality or quantity). For instance, repeated references to neatness of presentation may have encouraged children to form (and subsequently conform to) expectations of task requirements or attempt to please the teacher, regardless of the effect on pace. Equally, intervening to point out spelling errors may have perpetuated a concern to address spelling accuracy or attempts to maintain the teachers' pace may stem from knowing the consequences if the work was not finished (i.e. complete during playtime).

Whilst intervention/comments may have prompted certain perceptions, it was also feasible that children formed perceptions on account of prior experience of non-intervention. Although children visibly attended to different matters, teachers did not always comment, perhaps indicating they found it acceptable, perpetuating repeated interaction. Working during introductory/plenary sessions may have persisted because children's actions were not (and would not be) interrupted/questioned. In this way children secured additional time on-task. The probability that interactions would prompt particular teacher reactions may have directed other interactions. For instance, expecting not to be chosen to answer may have prompted off-task interactions.

- *Children/others mutually influenced one another's actions*

The co-construction of meaning between children and others emerged as a feature of certain verbal interactions. Certain initiations repeatedly prompted others to react, raising the question of whether the regularity of interactions may have contributed to a *mutual understanding* between children and others. In engaging resources, children's utterances were interpreted as initiations, with others appearing to know what was expected, without requests being explicitly made. Perhaps children repeatedly used such interactions as initiations because they knew that support would be forthcoming. Hence, for instance the impromptu reading out of questions regularly initiated support. Assuming non-direct attempts were intended to elicit a response, an awareness of the consequences of their interaction may have induced their consistent use of this procedure to entice support.

An issue of mutual understanding was discernible during the execution of resource-based interactions (see section 4.2.3.3). Some interactions exemplify a mutually influencing effect in which one another's interactions appeared to be understood by the other without the need for verbal explanations. Both parties appeared to have an understanding of one another's needs and/or intentions and applied this insight to interpret the non-verbal interactions of the other party. Thus a distinguishable yet implicit procedure between the parties could be inferred, based on a mutual understanding, which was consistent and routinely implemented over the course of the interaction. These findings suggest that some interactions operated at a partnership level on the continuum (see section 2.3). Both parties appeared to have a shared understanding of one another's expertise and abilities, share a common language (verbal/non-verbal) and have a joint agenda with a mutual goal, focus and purpose. The power to exercise control or influence the interaction was shared reflecting the claims of Edwards and Mercer (1987), that teachers should be concerned with establishing such mutual understandings and shared meanings.

5.1.4 Furthering an Understanding of Engagement

The current study of engagement has focused on the actions of the child in undertaking curricular activities in the social world. Combining social constructivist and social cognitive theories has helped to envisage, as Williams and Burden (1997) claim, that the way children view the world and perceive themselves within the world, plays a major part in learning and their construction of knowledge. The active dimension addresses how children were initiators and influencers whilst undertaking those activities, how they acted autonomously. The subjective dimension shows how children's subjective understandings and perceptions influenced the actions they undertook, whilst the interactive dimension illuminates how others' active/subjective processes also served to control actions after/as/before they are undertaken.

Separately considering an active, subjective and interactive dimension arguably furthers an understanding of engagement yet doing so fails to explicate many aspects of the findings. The linearity with which these dimensions have been explored may be part of the problem and thus part of the solution. This is because the findings can be explained by:

- Reversing the dimensions
- Perceiving the dimensions as cyclical and transactional
- Considering the dimensions as constitutive

5.1.4.1 Reversing the Dimensions

Although children initiate and influence at the active level, they do so in response to the curricular activities set at the interactive level, thus necessitating a consideration of what occurs before and reversing the process in terms of the child's response. Briefly, teachers can be considered as active in initiating/influencing the agenda, applying their subjective processes to the planning of that agenda, and when implementing that agenda becoming influenced by the child's reaction/perception. This is summarised on the table 5.4 overleaf.

Active	Teachers initiate & influence the nature of curricular activity set
Subjective	Teachers interpret & form perceptions of themselves/children affecting the nature of activity set
Interactive	Teachers' actions occur within a social/cultural context where they contribute to what happens to them Delivery of activity is affected by children's influence/perceptions
Subjective	Children interpret information and form perceptions of themselves/others with respect to the task
Active	Children initiate & influence the nature of task-agenda executed

Table 5.4: An illustration of the reversal of the active, subjective and interactive dimensions

From delivery (interactive level) through to execution, children thus contribute to the nature of activities undertaken in the first place. Whilst the child's influence has been shown with regard to task-execution at the active and subjective level (see sections 5.1.1/5.1.2), little mention has been made of their influence during task delivery. In being active whilst activities were delivered and delineated there was a transactional effect upon engagement, whereby what children engaged in affected what they heard and what they heard affected subsequent engagement. Notably the frequent mode of curriculum delivery relied heavily on teacher dialogue, with a corresponding dependence upon listening for the formation of a task-agenda and dependence upon the teacher for opportunities to participate verbally.

Evidently children either simultaneously engaged in an extraneous issue whilst a task-agenda was being conveyed or engaged in issues successively, of which the task-agenda was one. Successive engagement was distinct because children either did not engage in, or were unable to heed, the teachers' message/task simultaneously. Thus making incongruous verbal remarks or being physically removed provided evidence of interrupted listening (and concentration); as did their non-participation in proceedings that occurred at the point they were otherwise engaged.

During task introductions, teacher (or SNA) judgements about appropriateness affected opportunities to engage verbally. Whilst children directed questions/declarations at others during teacher dialogue (either calling out or raising their hand), attempts to engage those resources were not always productive. A research study by Tobin (1988) argued of the

possibility that a child's willingness to participate declines without opportunities to do so. This was substantiated by one case, where the child reportedly 'lost interest' and 'switched off' after not being chosen to answer.

Where listening had been interrupted, there were evident repercussions upon engagement. Children missed out instructions through attending to incomplete messages. Also children purposefully engaged resources to obtain assistance with the very issues that had been addressed when they were engaged in discrepant issues. They appeared to miss instructions without realising and engage resources without awareness that such issues had already been explained. Commonly teachers referred to a cause/effect analogy between listening and understanding, evident within their discussions (e.g. *'its always the children that do listen...that do task right'* [1.1]; *'if they don't concentrate, they are not listening and they are not going to understand and that all comes together'* [2.2]) and classroom interactions (e.g. *'we did this yesterday, it's a pity you didn't listen'* [1.2]). Also teachers indirectly linked the two by instructing children to listen following inaccurate responses and using such responses to illustrate the importance of listening. Nevertheless, children also effectively executed task-agendas following evidence of intermittent listening. Just as it is not always necessary to read every word to understand a written message, it may not be always necessary to hear every word to comprehend a spoken one. Notably also children could have listened but still not understood what was required. Consequential effects upon engagement were therefore apparent on account of awareness yet not always understanding. It may be more appropriate to question what proportion needs to be heard (relative to the whole) to prevent misunderstanding. Also there may be a need to attend to issues of awareness rather than focus on listening and understanding. Teachers may provide suggestions, tips, strategies, things to decide, things to look for, explanations and summaries, and concentrate on whether children are listening. More important might be to question whether children realise them to be aids to learning and have interpreted them as the teacher intended.

5.1.4.2 Dimensions as Cyclical

The findings depict children acting autonomously, yet also reveal where children appeared dependent and avoided making decisions. Embracing the tenets as cyclical and transactional, rather than linear, conceives of an active child and an active social world, which renders influences at the active, subjective and interactive levels having a continually mutually influencing effect upon one another over time. Thus rather than consider that children's perceptions and those of others are static entities influencing action, cyclical and

transactional forces depict that perceptions are ever changing. The potential effect of previous experience on subsequent engagement is thus acknowledged.

The issue raised in consideration of the teachers' approach (see section 5.1.3) is particularly well illustrated with regard to resource engagement. Once outlined, the findings will be discussed in terms of the impact of previous experience.

Dependency - Children perpetually engaged certain resources when accessible (see section 4.2.2.2.), raising the question of whether those resources were accessed because of availability or necessity. For reasons of availability, dependency is hypothesised since children may not have thought for themselves on account of having somebody to ask instead. By initiating the involvement of another, it was debatable whether children became less self-reliant and avoided autonomous decision-making. It seems plausible that another person's presence rendered children prone to inaction or less likely to take responsibility for their own actions. It was striking that children instigated more interactions (and more frequently) when the SNA was present either to convey ideas/seek approval. Also children frequently moved off-task when the SNA's attention was diverted, their inaction plausibly resulting from a reliance on SNA support. There was also the child who called upon the teacher, when present, to make decisions about his work, seeking her approval or appraisal before recording ideas, yet in her absence recorded ideas unreservedly.

Being obliged to work alongside another, raises the question of whether through the presence and interactions of another, children were hindered from thinking for themselves. Plausibly children became accustomed to another person's influence such that they developed perceptions of their inability to take responsibility for decisions or the consequences of those decisions.

Another dependency issue was raised with respect to the teachers' approach. Children required external resources to execute the specific task demands of the teacher. Several children depended upon external support to decipher written text or explain meaning. The value and relevance of certain tasks was under jeopardy where written instructions, support material or task outcomes could not be recognised or understood. In such cases children could not access or verify their own work, reinforcing dependency upon external resources.

Extrinsic Decision-Making - The frequency with which certain children engaged others to convey or seek approval/appraisal of task-based ideas exemplifies how routinely responsibility was passed to external parties. Also children asked questions seeking to know others' decisions, such as whether they were 'allowed' or what 'should' be done,

signifying that they perceived others to be responsible for those decisions. Nevertheless, whilst these interactions were frequent, a distinction needs to be drawn between requesting/conveying to others *before* making a decision or before an idea was recorded/relayed to the teacher and doing so *after* a decision has been made, after not being chosen to answer or once an idea was recorded. It is recognised that either one (before/after) may achieve the purpose of gaining recognition, checking the procedure or receiving feedback-in-action (such that children sought information, to have ideas verified, reinforced or suggestions made for change to benefit their work), yet 'before' raises doubt about whether children perceive themselves to be responsible for making decisions in the presence of certain people.

There appear to be two emergent tensions, firstly regarding the effect on autonomy of the child's perceptions of themselves/others in the others' presence and secondly regarding the influence of others upon autonomy. These tensions are considered separately in the sections that follow.

The Child's Influence on Autonomy

Children contribute to their lack of autonomy as well as being autonomous in their actions, based on their perceptions of others (as well as themselves). It was discussed earlier in the chapter (see section 5.1.2), that children's retrospective judgements based on their experiences can have a facilitative or inhibitive effect on engagement. Perceptions could work to inhibit autonomy, thus explaining their dependent actions.

In contexts where children were being called upon to make decisions about their work, they asked others to verify their creative and original ideas, decide what is right, appropriate and/or recorded. This could indicate that children perceive others to be either responsible or apt to make such decisions. If they consider others to be more responsible or suitable to make task-based decisions, they are perhaps more likely to pass over decision-making in their presence. It was striking that one child engaged the teacher to ask 'can I..?' or 'should I ...?' yet only when she was present. His feelings of capability may have been influenced by the teacher's presence, such that he had doubts about his abilities in her company. Applying Bandura's (1997) theory, the child may have perceived that in the teacher's presence he did not hold the power to originate actions, suggestive of the child having a low self-efficacy³⁵. It could likewise indicate he has come to accept that learning lies outside of his control in the teacher's presence (Watson, 2000). On the other hand, he may have been seeking 'recognition' of ideas.

³⁵ Such an interpretation would be consistent with reports about one child lacking self-esteem.

Children may hold perceptions of another's role, with associated judgements about responsibility, and furthermore base their interactions on those perceptions. In analysing Piaget's methods of testing children, Donaldson (1978) argues that children try to interpret adult expectations of them in constructing their responses in real life situations. Such an argument could be applied to explain children's task responses. Their actions could reflect expectations based on what they thought others wanted to happen. Thus they would strive to look good or please others through their actions. Their actions could equally reflect expectations based on what they anticipated would happen (see page 34) or most likely to happen (Rogers, 1998) with subsequent effects upon engagement. Thus since the teacher previously judged a piece of work based on spelling inaccuracies, the child may address spellings in future endeavours (see section 5.1.3). Alternatively following previous comments about the unsuitability of an idea, a child may check subsequent ideas with that person. Expectations are believed to contribute to a self-fulfilling prophecy (Rogers, 1998; Tauber, 1997). Whilst the term is defined differently, the definitions are alike, in terms of how a person changes their behaviour to conform to an expectation. Just as Brophy (1985) argues teachers can have a self-fulfilling prophecy effect on student achievement (albeit in 5% of cases), whether children also change their behaviour to conform to their expectations is under question. From a transactional perspective, Sameroff and Chandler (1975) embrace two principles which are usefully applied in considering this question. Firstly, that humans have self-righting mechanisms such that only prolonged negative experiences have long-term consequences. Secondly, some elements of a person's past experience may no longer be influential. Thus in forming expectations of others, people refer to and select from their past experience. In the context of teacher expectations, Brophy (1983) regards that the potential for expectation effects is limited because they must be mediated by consistent communication of inaccurate expectations. The likelihood of children acting on their expectations may depend therefore upon the consistency with which they receive particular messages about their work and the prominence given to those messages.

Children could also seek to satisfy the perceived needs/requirements of others, and in doing so hinder autonomy. Their perceptions of others' needs may be formed in response to their prior experiences of other people's initiations or responses. Children could seek confirmation or help with decision-making by acting on perceptions of what others need/want. One teacher had stated a desire to gauge the SNA's reaction to the children's responses before choosing them, hence the child's actions could be a response to their teacher's intention, thereby conforming to her tacit 'routine' where the SNA was the

'gatekeeper' to their verbal engagement. Aside from that routing contributions through her may give them more chance of getting their contributions recognised. During task execution, calling upon others to verify ideas and make decisions, could reflect children perceiving them to be 'gatekeepers' to the application of ideas. Such perceptions may encourage children to route decisions about appropriateness or accuracy via the parties who adjudicate their ideas before committing themselves to a decision. In that way they can pre-empt what reaction their work will receive when reviewed later.

The Influence of Others on Autonomy

Classroom support systems counteract children's autonomy as well as operating to promote their self-governance, as a result of decisions made on children's behalf. Measures put in place to support children in their work, because of their difficulties in learning, had mitigating influences upon autonomy.

The SNA made numerous decisions on children's behalf, determining their pace, approach, recordings, focus of attention and/or support requirements. She also took responsibility for aspects of work such as the retrieval and organisation of materials and/or identifying errors. The timing of her interventions, commanded a fluctuating focus of engagement, which rendered the teachers' message incomplete. Paradoxically, whilst her interventions may have helped children to utilise time more effectively, avoid deferment, extend their understanding, avoid errors and take an objective stance, children were precluded from collating all the information available, making decisions and addressing such issues autonomously. As Westwood (1993) states in relationships where pupils are dependent on others, the child's attributional belief that they only learn by relying on the support from others is reinforced. If over time children get accustomed to another person making decisions on their behalf (or utilising others' support), they are less likely to make decisions for themselves (or without support). Seligman (1975) refers to this as 'learned helplessness'. He developed the theory following experiments on humans/animals, where they were not given any control over what happens to them. Seligman concluded that organisms learn that they have no control and become responsive and passive. Seligman's work is thus associated with the self-fulfilling prophecy, as encapsulated by Wilkinson(1994: 62):

"If people are treated as though they will never take control of their environments, that judgement is likely to fulfil itself."

However, for children in the study, it may be more appropriate to consider their subjective understandings of control, since whilst SNA's made decisions on children's behalf they also encouraged children's decision-making.

Teachers' decisions were also to have an effect on children in terms of autonomy (see section 5.1.3). Teacher-imposed structures, whether through questioning (see section 4.4.2.3) or lesson design (see table 4.1), had implications for autonomous action. This was particularly noticeably during a lesson of two phases. The two phases are comparable as a reflection of the child's abilities. During the teacher-directed stage, the child depended on others' support and employed coping strategies (e.g. copying peer), whilst during the self-directed phase he governed the use/purpose of resources (rejecting/requesting), strategies used and the design of his work. He was autonomous in his actions where structure was not imposed. The child-initiated task afforded the child opportunities to take responsibility, make choices and decisions (Fisher, 1996). It also provided an opportunity for him to structure his own learning and take initiative, despite Wyness's (2000) argument that such chances were 'difficult to conceive of' in the primary classroom (see page 21). Strikingly the child appeared to perceive himself responsible by claiming to be the decision-maker and rejecting unwarranted support. Flekkoy and Kaufman (1997) consider having control over what is happening fosters a feeling of ownership and sense of empowerment in the child. The teacher described the child as needing considerable support, yet he did so, partly as a consequence of the teacher's approach. It could be wrongly assumed that teacher-directed structure was the support he required. Rowland (1987) argues that whilst successful teachers are believed to be able to control and predetermine situations/understandings, the emphasis should be on the child in control of their own activity.

Questioning structures used by the teacher (or SNA) were not always necessary and moreover appeared to suppress children's independent decision-making. Children executed the task at a faster rate than anticipated (see section 4.4.2.3), or offered contradictory explanations (see section 4.4.1.2). It could be that teachers conformed to, as Jones et al (1996) argue, a 'natural' inclination to 'do things for them' when the child experiences difficulty rather than help them confront problem for themselves. A child's dependency on others can thus be perpetuated by the teachers' desire to protect children from failing (Coupe O'Kane, Porter, & Taylor, 1994). Research has addressed structure in considering approaches to teaching. The incorporation of socio-cultural ideas has contributed to a shift away from traditional teaching methods towards conceiving of the teacher as a facilitator (Cotton, 1995). There are calls for flexibility of method to account for the child's spontaneous thoughts/ideas during teaching interactions. In particular the principles of Vygotsky's ZPD have been applied to 'scaffolding' approaches (Bruner, 1966), for which the teacher acts as responder to support and guide the child through the

unknown territory between one concept and other (Arnold et al., 1992). In supporting the child through a question/problem, the teacher uses structure, which can only be constructed spontaneously in the moment involving unplanned on the spot decisions. Consideration of the teachers' subjective understanding is required. Teachers may have based their decisions on the child's perceived need or their own agenda (e.g. to reinforce particular strategies) rather than the child's thoughts and agenda, thus the structures they imposed overlooked the child's independence of thought and capabilities.

Considering adult-directed structures were always appropriate, children nevertheless utilised structures in their autonomous actions. The findings support Rogoff's (1996: 16) contention that:

“Children seek structure and even demand the assistance of those around them in learning how to solve problems of all kinds”

Children's autonomous predictive actions focused on procedural matters, suggestive that they embraced and utilised classroom routines in their actions. Also structures were inherent to routine procedures within interactions between teachers/SNA and children in the execution of particular tasks, where a mutual understanding was apparent. This indicates that an element of structure is conducive to learning. For structure to work to support autonomy, an element of mutuality appears to be required, such that equal regard needs to be given to the perspectives of both parties. Embracing the child's perspective could be illustrated by the example given in the category ‘resistance to change’ (see section 4.4.3.2.1). Adult attempts to structure and change the child's approach took effect when his subjective understandings (i.e. difficulty in holding figures in his head) were taken into account.

5.1.4.3 Dimensions as Constitutive Elements

The findings indicate that on one hand, there were occasions when children acted autonomously whilst interacting with curricular activities, yet on the other they demonstrated dependency in their actions. Autonomous action can be explained in terms of the active initiations/influence of the child and idiosyncrasies accounted for by considering the subjective dimension. Moving into the interactive level, the influence of the social cultural context becomes apparent, through which Davie (1996) and Robertson's (2001) argument is substantiated, that autonomy and independence cannot be separated from the influence of a cultural context. Wherein, children's actions were seen to depend on teachers' (and others) reactions and approaches as active/subjective/interactive beings, leaving an unclear understanding of engagement.

From another standpoint, particularly considering children's dependent action, it is found to be unhelpful to understand engagement in terms of active, subjective and interactive dimensions as separate processes. Engagement can be better understood in terms of those dimensions being constitutively linked and inseparable. This is because the findings indicate children form subjective perceptions of others based on previous experience. Actions are seen to be as much a product of the child's past as they are of children's decisions about their present context. The findings also signify the inter-related nature of children's actions and context, indicating that one cannot be considered without the other.

Therefore, when talking of constitutive elements two approaches emerge, mirroring the two stances defined in the literature (see chapter 2):

- a. Considering social and individual processes to be part of an integral whole (Salomon & Perkins, 1998; Wertsch, 1998)
- b. Considering individuals, activities and the social world as being mutually dependent on one another (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1995, 1996)

Approaching an understanding of engagement through the consideration of autonomous action, indicates a need to integrate social and individual processes. Engagement is understood in relation to taking part with, and alongside of others in the social world, involving continual interactions therein. Of central importance to this perspective is dialogue and exchange of ideas between teachers and children; thus engagement is deemed to benefit from mutual understandings and shared meanings between individuals (partnership).

Approaching an understanding of engagement through dependent action indicates a need to embrace constitutive parts as being mutually dependent. Children's engagement is understood in terms of them being part of a social world, involving an appreciation that children contribute to that world as much as they are altered by it. Of central importance to this perspective are the evolving relationships between the child, the activity and the social world. An understanding of engagement would appear to benefit from recognising and embracing the child's subjective understandings about others or the task upon which their action is based and consideration of the influence of the teachers' actions upon the child's autonomy.

Nevertheless both approaches contribute to an understanding of engagement and either one helps us to conceive of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts. On one hand, engagement is understood to be an entity through which children demonstrate they are autonomous and competent social individuals who govern their actions and interpret curricular activities, thereby influencing the nature and execution of the task-agenda, whilst

from the other perspective, engagement is understood to be a process by which children become more knowledgeable about the context over time and in doing so develop autonomy.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The study contributes to the field of children's participation by addressing some of the perceived gaps in the research literature. There appears to be a perceptible readiness, amongst authors, that research into children's participation within primary classrooms is required. Whereas research in the area has previously focused on pedagogy or school reform, there is a recognisable shift towards the classroom and addressing participation from the child's standpoint (Fielding, 2001b). Dyson (2001) calls for practices embedded in mainstream classrooms in moving towards equity for children with SEN. Rogoff (1996) regards that researching the child's active role in their development (through observation, interaction and their participation with others) has been overlooked, which she attributes to be due partly to cultural expectations of the child's interactive role and partly to researchers' conceptualisations of the social context. This research is embedded within classrooms and addresses participation from the child's standpoint, therefore it potentially has much to offer the field at this time.

Regarding cultural expectations of the child's role, Rogoff's argument is substantiated by considering the inhibitive effect of presumptions about childhood at societal and policy level upon children's participation and exercise of autonomy. Alderson (2000: 64) argues that a belief that '*children cannot contribute*' is not only common but is also entrenched in society. Presumptions are compounded when considering children with SEN. Conceptualising children with SEN in terms of their difficulties has been traditional practice and still remains an ongoing feature of the current system. Children are labelled and considered on the basis of what they cannot do, as the system stresses and focuses on their individual difficulties. Concerns are evident that children are subject to stereotypical treatment on the basis of such labels, and exposed to methods that reinforce their passivity, which as Harris (1994) contends, maximises the adult's influence over their actions. Coupled with the prominence and justification of humanitarian principles within policy, it is of concern that there is a tendency to protect and often over-protect children through the practices used (Hinchcliffe, 1994; John & Speake, 1994). Added to which assumptions are also age-related. The younger the child, the greater the number of presumptions about what they can/cannot do and the greater the tendency to act in (and determine) the child's 'best interests'. Nevertheless, the research findings provide significant evidence to suggest that young children with SEN *can* and *do* contribute. Addressing participation from the child's standpoint through everyday curricular activities has enabled such contributions to be brought to light. Children demonstrated their ability to influence and self-govern the execution of curricular activities in unique and complex ways. The study thereby prompts

a different way of thinking and talking about children with SEN and their learning achievements. Rather than conceptualise children in terms of their difficulties, the study calls for children to be considered in terms of their participatory contributions so that endeavours to support children in their learning may be based and build upon what children are currently achieving. The findings of the study suggest a need to re-examine approaches being used with children by questioning implicit assumptions that underpin those approaches and a need to consider more carefully children's capabilities and potential through their words and actions.

With the child's participation rights legalised, the interpretation of them into research provides justification for Rogoff's second argument that researchers' conceptualisations of the social context have contributed to the child's active role being overlooked. There is a growing trend towards accessing children's perspectives, encouraging their decision-making and promoting their involvement in planning and assessment. Recognition is rising of the benefits to children's learning on which a rationale for participation is being collated. Much work is being done to encourage adults to listen to children and moreover, heed the messages they convey in response. Children are being recognised as having a lot to offer and deserving of being listened to. Nevertheless, researchers appear to focus their efforts on eliciting the voice of the child in determining their perspectives or prompting interventions to increase children's participatory role. Considering that 'children know more than they know they know' and most of what they know they know implicitly, the question is poised of whether researchers can realise the realities of children's experience or what they know by asking (Burnard, 2002). Elicited methods are consultative and are based on adult decisions; hence they can serve to disempower the child. Added to which elicited methods are often conducted outside of the classroom context, demanding that children reflect on their experiences whilst distanced in time and space. Interventions are also based on adult decisions as to what is required/helpful. Such issues have led researchers to seek ways to empower the child with the hope of eliciting more spontaneous responses, thus aiming to give children a more active role within the approaches and interventions of research. Nevertheless, the active role Rogoff appears to allude to concerns the child's day-to-day role, rather than a contrived one set up for research or educational purposes. This research approaches the child's active role from a non-interventionist perspective. In recognising and embracing this stance, it is the researchers' role that changes rather than the participative role of the child. Considering the child's active role requires a shift from 'listening to' children as a researcher towards 'listening in' on children's perspectives and aiming to understand what is said in the context of its

occurrence. Thereby the focus of research should be on integral (and natural) classroom procedure rather than supplementary (and contrived) practice. As a result, attempts to increase participation can be based on (and build on) the child's existing participatory actions and achievements.

The legalised rights of the child require interpretation into practice, rendering the child's participative role also being dependent on the school. Research into children's rights implementation has raised concerns about too much emphasis being placed on teachers' personal awareness and the lack of systematic practice or reference to children's rights in schools (Maclagan, 2002). Along with concerns raised by the UN committee, in response to the UN convention report about government complacency, it has been argued that a tool is needed to regulate practice, raise awareness and embed children's rights in routine school procedures. For children with SEN, the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001a) represents a means by which to address such requirements and thus, ironically SEN has been described as a 'Trojan horse' carrying messages about participation to wider groups of children (Ennals, 2002). Yet as a system focusing on the identification, monitoring and review of children's difficulties, the Code segregates children's rights from daily classroom practice, thereby failing to offer a satisfactory solution. A decision was taken in this research to avoid specific and separate consideration of SEN procedures and concentrate on daily practice through which requirements can be addressed in a holistic way.

Promoting inclusion represents another way to address children's participation rights in schools, embedding those rights within routine principles and practices whilst doing so to the benefit of *all* children. Conceptualisations of the term inclusion are arguably shifting. They are moving beyond considering the physical location of children with SEN towards embracing a process involving pupil participation as a central element alongside one of constantly fine-tuning structures, policy, approaches and perceptions to provide for all children's diverse learning requirements. There was a recent call by Ainscow (1999, see page 20) to address inclusion by increasing children's participation. In order to take account of inclusion as a process (taking place over time), involving the increase of children's participation, participation also needs to be conceptualised and operationalised as such. Although the interactive whole-class teaching approaches of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies promote participation as an inherent part, in practice it was observed that participation tended to be promoted (and thereby increased) by seeking (more) verbal contributions from as many members of the class as possible. In this way, whilst children's participation was encouraged, it was done so on a transitory basis. Perhaps part of the problem concerns the use of the term participation, defined literally as

‘taking part’ (see section 2.3). In essence seeking to increase children's participation can be conceived of (and thereby operationalised) in terms of increasing the number of momentary opportunities for children to participate. The findings suggest that aiming to engage as many children as possible is more appropriate, fitting more closely with the essence of inclusion as a process, since engagement is defined and thereby operationalised differently. Engagement entails being an ongoing part of the social setting (see section 2.3.7), thereby aiming to increase children's engagement involves widening the focus of the teachers’ efforts from obtaining children's verbal interactions to one of maintaining their focus and concentration *over time*. In this way the ethos of inclusion as a process can be embraced through its implementation as well as in the way it is conceptualised.

The active role of the child may have been overlooked in research, yet it underpins the predominant aim of education, regarded as that of fostering the independence of the individual learner (Robertson, 2001). To address such an aim, there is a need to respond to the messages that children are conveying as an autonomous response to curricular activities, as the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001a: 3.16, p. 29) suggests. The study provides an insight into these ‘messages’ being conveyed by children as they support themselves through curricular activities. The study concludes that children's engagement can be understood as both an *entity* and a *process*. Children demonstrate their competence as social beings through their engagement as an entity, whilst demonstrating that they are learning through their engagement as a process, enhancing their own participation over time.

In stepping outside of this thesis, the findings have several implications for classroom interactions. Since the child's subjective understanding of themselves/others can impact upon their engagement, determining whether they act autonomously or dependently, there is a need to access and take on board the child's understanding when interacting with them during the delivery/execution of curricular activities. On the basis that children's autonomy can be influenced by decisions, implemented to support them in addressing curricular demands, teachers need to react to the child's needs/agendas identified in the context of their occurrence. The research findings concur with calls for children to be involved in determining their own support requirements (Jones, Bill, & Quah, 1996), yet suggest that such requirements are often demonstrated on a moment-to-moment basis. The findings also indicate a need to consider the impact of fixed or pre-planned support structures upon children's engagement. Whilst it is recognised that ‘*some young people may need additional support and encouragement in order to participate fully*’ (DfES, 2001a: 29), this additional support is often addressed through the provision of an SNA. The findings suggest that support can have an inhibitive (as well as facilitative) effect upon children's

engagement, suggesting of the need to consider the consequences of provision. As one SENCO conveyed during an interview:

“...they have got SNA's around them all the time...you know, other children have time just to sit and chat a bit don't they? ...They just can't sort of relax for a minute can they?”

Continual monitoring affords children little chance to think for themselves, make mistakes and learn from their errors. Similar issues emerged in structured lessons, indicative that children benefit from flexible schedules with opportunities to structure tasks and take responsibility for themselves.

6.1 Where Next?

The researcher has been awarded an ESRC postdoctoral fellowship and thus has been given a privileged opportunity to address this work as an ongoing concern.

It has only been possible to convey part of the story about children's engagement in this thesis because of the need to balance rich/complex data with the requirements/regulations of an Ed.D degree. It is the researcher's intention to address the reciprocal influence of the teacher (and SNA) as part of the work undertaken during the fellowship year, thus embracing the salient factors emerging from the initiated interactions of others to supplement those initiated by the child. An understanding of children's engagement would appear to benefit from considering the mutually constitutive dimension of others' engagement. Particularly beneficial would be to consider the inhibitive and facilitative effect of others' actions upon children's engagement. It would provide depth to the emerging tension between autonomy and dependency as described in this thesis.

It is also the researcher's intention to use the fellowship year to disseminate both the findings and approach of this study taking a multifaceted approach using several written publications (journal articles), on-line dissemination (databases, website and discussion groups) and verbal presentations (seminars, national/international conferences). Various end-users of the research will be targeted including policymakers, academic staff, researchers, postgraduate students, head-teachers, SENCOs, teachers, and support staff.

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