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ACROSS AUSTRALIA.....

FROM TEACHER TO TEACHER NEGOTIATING CURRICULUM WITH SEVEN YEAR OLDS

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ABSTRACT - This paper is concerned with the notion of negotiating curriculum with an infants class in the environmental studies area. It explains the process the children went through and then discusses child and teacher roles within the program, evaluation of the program and the assumptions underlying the concept of negotiation and collaboration.

This year I am teaching 25 First Class children aged 6.0 years to 8.5 years. Ten of the children are with me for their second year and the other 15 were taken from the bottom of the 1986 ranked kindergarten list. The children vary significantly not only in their age, maturity and ability, but also in their home backgrounds. Two children are Aboriginal, two are Anglo-Australians with English as their only language, and the rest are a mixture of Greek, Portuguese, Arabic, Italian, Indonesian and Maori. Many of them have been speaking English for only a year, and four are new arrivals with six months or less English experience.

My program is individualised and mostly language-based, and it includes much small group work, peer tutoring and the use of teacher-determined contracts.

The idea of negotiating my program with the children was at first very attractive because it was something different and presented a challenge to me and the children. After extensive reading, however, my enthusiasm was somewhat dampened as nearly all the literature discussing this topic is geared to secondary school students and I couldn't see how on earth I was going to scale it down for seven-year-olds.

Two things made me determined to try: 1) in spite of my "attractive and stimulating" classroom combined with the most recently documented teaching strategies I am aware of, some children were still tuning out and I wasn't reaching them; 2) a comment

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Boomer (1982) makes :

...responsible and powerful teachers must win over children, at least at the overt level of what is said and done in the classrooms.

...through their own enthusiasm and interpersonal skills they move off into a new territory with a happy and compliant class. Yet, unwittingly, through the use of powerful motivators teachers may be sapping or turning off the learning power of children.

(Boomer 1982, p.3)

This comment focused my thoughts on how and why the children respond to my particular style of teaching and the methods I use to encourage them to learn. Perhaps my "powerful motivators" were "turning off the learning power" of those tuned-out children and, perhaps, the others were just striving to please me for no better reason than that is what is expected of them.

I realised that I wanted them to learn for their own sakes, not mine, and I wanted them to have the opportunity of showing me what they were capable of without my assuming responsibility and directing the course of their learning. I felt sure many of them were capable of exhibiting hidden abilities given the opportunity. I wanted the children to learn how to be learners, to learn a process of learning that they could apply to other situations. I also realised that the process the children would go through would enable many of them to extend themselves and would provide the impetus to learn more advanced skills to achieve their end result.

To achieve this seemingly ambitious goal I realised I had to relinquish responsibility, stop pre-programming 'teaching/learning' activities and let the children negotiate with me their own contracts. At this stage what I meant by 'negotiation' was that the children would offer their own ideas which would sometimes be supported, sometimes challenged, but all the while the child would be edging towards a shared goal.

This paper will first explain exactly what the children and I did and the processes we went through, and then will reflect on what happened and what the children gained from the experience.

We started with a measurement lesson on arbitrary measure for length. The children were to use streamers to find out and compare the lengths of classroom objects. First, we brainstormed a list of objects which was displayed on the blackboard. I decided that they would work in groups and we discussed that everyone had

to share in the work-load and that they could choose who they wanted to work with, but everyone in the group had to agree on the choice of objects to measure. As I expected, the children formed friendship groups, and after a demonstration of what they were to do they collected their tools of trade and set to work. The stipulation that every member should agree as to what the group measured caused some dissension and shuffling around of groups. No one asked my advice, so I sat back and observed the interesting dynamics.

After about fifteen minutes most groups had decided they had done enough and we had a sharing time, where a previously nominated member of each group spoke about what the group had done, and each member of the group explained how they had helped their group achieve the end result. Only one child in the whole class had sat and not participated, with the result that the rest of the group did not allow her to write her name on their finished piece of work.

The children all looked pleased with themselves and had accomplished a great deal more than I had expected them to in such a short time. They had bustled around the room collecting things, shouting instructions, pasting, cutting and measuring in seemingly noisy confusion. However, two important aspects stood out - they were discussing what they were doing and sharing ideas and, retaining ownership of the skill they were learning. I overheard one little boy stating to his group - "If you don't help you don't learn."

With enthusiasm fuelled by the success of the first lesson I, at the next lesson, let the children decide what medium they would use as a measurement instrument and a method of recording their discoveries, and whether they would work in groups or independently. I remember feeling distinctly uncomfortable about being out of control of what every child was doing, and had to stop myself butting in and taking over. Instinctively I knew they were ready for a bigger challenge.

A part of the Year One environmental studies core unit "Why are animals important to me?" is a study of domestic animals. I chose this particular section of the unit because it is something with which the children are familiar. Up to this point I had read them some literature (mostly stories) about pets and farm animals, and we had talked about what animals the children have at home and graphed them. I decided to attack negotiation of social studies activities by getting the children to think first about all the things they already knew about domestic animals.

I chose four children who are confident writers to be group recorders, and let the other children attach themselves to a recorder to make roughly even groups. On a piece of butchers' paper they brainstormed all the things they knew - for example, fish live in water; cats drink milk, etc. They were absorbed with this for three-quarters of an hour! I wandered around the room and helped them with their invented spelling and made suggestions about the organisation of their lists. It was possible, without offering ideas, to guide their thoughts through questions and statements. For example - I wonder what sort of food cats eat; where do you think people keep pet rabbits? One group kept asking me questions such as - "Do budgies eat seed?" And my answer to them was, "If I tell you and you write that down, then you will be recording what I know, not what you know." I asked them to try and remember their questions and we would answer them later.

At the end of this lesson two groups joined together and shared their lists. I particularly wanted them to compare things that both groups knew. The room became full of the sound of "We've got that!" One child suggested that maybe other groups had the same things, and on asking the class how we could find that out there was a unanimous suggestion of, "Let's sit in a circle and tell everyone what we've got." In a second lesson we did just that, and compiled a list of "Things we know about pets" underneath a generalisation of "Pets are animals we can keep at home." This took quite a long time, as the children were finding it difficult to decipher their writing from the previous lesson. The disagreements and resolutions were interesting to watch, and I didn't record any statement on the list unless everyone was happy with it. At a later time I checked through this list and found that much of what had been recorded by the children as things they already knew was information that I would have covered had I followed the prescribed unit for work, hence I would have been giving the children information they already had. I should not have been surprised when they told me what things they wanted to know; things like: What are animals covered with? How do fish breathe and what do they eat? What animals have shells? What are all the different pets you can have? (this child was particularly interested in learning the English words for different animals.) What is the difference between a pet and a farm animal? What do different pets eat?

During the next lesson we discussed how we were going to find all these things out. I introduced the children to a box of books, some charts and packs of photo boards I had collected beforehand, and they spent some time just looking through it all. During this

time a few tentative groups formed as a few children began looking at the same things and sharing information. When it came time to pack up, most had decided what they wanted to do and with whom they wanted to work. Only four children couldn't get their act together and, in desperation, I put them together to work on. Unwittingly they had become my control group.

Over the next two weeks the children worked on their projects and began to publish their findings in some kind of concrete representation of what they had discovered. Some made books, some made posters and charts, and one child, working alone, made a photo board kit from paintings he had done. Interestingly, only the control group had difficulty co-ordinating and organising their work. They constantly demanded my attention, and asked questions like, "Is this right?" and "What shall we do now?" They appeared to be working as four individuals rather than collaboratively.

During this time a student teacher started with me, and the effect of having an extra pair of adult hands in the classroom was startling, both for me and the children. The children became more productive as they used her to answer questions, for conference writing, to read to them, etc., and it meant I wasn't being pulled in every direction at the same time. Larkins (1982) also noted that extra adult help was almost essential for the same reason I have stated, and also because young children's reading skills are not developed enough to handle much of the available literature.

As not all the groups finished at the same time, I organised other activities for children to go on with and gave the other children extra time in other lessons to finish. I justified this by the observation that they were getting more out of finishing this particular piece of work than participating in an ordinary reading or language lesson.

When everyone had finished to their own satisfaction we had a sharing time during which the groups had to show the other children what they had found out. Most of them found this difficult and couldn't get past the "this is what we did" stage without my prompting them. However, although their explanations were not very clear, it was easy to see that they were proud of what they had accomplished. Their work was displayed on walls and in the book case and became some of the most widely read literature in the class.

"Australian animals" was our next topic and, after a discussion with the children about what we were to do, I decided to be more prescriptive about the type of activities the children were to engage in. As I have already said, some children are new arrivals

in Australia, and others have never been to an animal park, and for these children "Australian animals" would have been an unknown entity. Pets were something they were familiar with and felt confident in asking questions about - Australian animals were more unfamiliar and, hence, more difficult. Not impossible, however. As Davies (1976 p.195) states:

Carefully designed introductory activities can do a great deal to bridge the gap between what is known and what a learner needs to know.

Therefore, before discussing possible things to find out, the children participated in activities designed to introduce the concept of an Australian animal. From these activities and follow-up discussion the children began asking questions about habitats, classification of animals, characteristics of animals and life cycles. From these questions I formulated more specific activities and topics for the children to pursue. These were :

- make up a game to demonstrate where animals live;
- make up a game to demonstrate the differences between mammals, reptiles and birds;
- investigate the life cycles of a mammal, a reptile and a bird;
- what animals lay eggs?
- choose an animal from each different group and list their similarities and differences.

Unexpectedly, my introduction of the activities started a lot of talk amongst the children, none of which was directed to me. The children began to group themselves and choose a topic to pursue. The make-up of the groups had changed significantly and there were no stragglers left over for me to deal with as there had been last time. Most groups were then able to organise a plan of action, collect resources and materials and start. The next afternoon the ESL teacher and resource teacher came to observe some children in the classroom environment and were amazed at the level of activity. It was very exciting. Looking around the room myself, I couldn't see how I could justify returning to curriculum I had not negotiated with the children. The only way was to go deeper into it.

A lot of things in my class had changed, most notably - each child's role as a learner and mine as a teacher. In fact, I had become a learner and the children were teaching me.

My class is one of truly mixed ability. There are two or three bright sparks who tend to dominate discussion and produce 'right' answers quickly in traditional lessons. One child in particular is over confident, even precocious. At the other end of the spectrum are low attainers and two very withdrawn children who try to be totally inconspicuous and never contribute voluntarily to class discussion. In the middle are the few who work laboriously, contributing occasionally. Every child had a view of his or her role in the class. During the first project on pets, these roles were largely maintained within the small groups. However, as the children began to engage with their problems they began to have things to say, things that the rest of the group needed to hear and attend to. For example, Brian, an Aborigine, fairly new to the school and who arrived reading and writing absolutely nothing, was working with a group making a habitat game. The children had made animal cards and were writing the names of the animals underneath the pictures. They were quite happily using invented spelling, until Brian realised that he couldn't read the spelling of other children. The following exchange occurred:

Brian: Wait! I can't read this (he picked up one of Drew's cards).

Drew: It says "Kangaroo." Can't you read?

Brian: Yes, I can. I can read all those. (He pointed to words hanging from the animal pictures suspended above their desk, and promptly reeled them off.)

Ricky: Good, Brian.

Everyone went on with their writing. Brian stood up and looked as if he were about to cry.

Brian: I think we should copy the words so that they are right. We are 'plublishing' so it has to be right.

The result of this was a lot of rubbing out and conferring with Brian about where the word for kangaroo, etc., was. Brian's view of himself and the other children's view of him changed, resulting in his increased self-esteem.

As the term progressed, group dynamics changed frequently as each child was discovered to have some special quality or propensity that had not had the chance to come to the fore previously. I evaluated these by doing sociograms. Once, before negotiating the pets unit and once, after the completion of the Australia unit,

I asked the children to write down on a piece of paper the names of two people they would like to work with and give it to me. With this data I constructed a sociogram from which I could determine the acceptance of individual children and the social structure of the class. The picture resulting from the data revealed those children most consistently chosen and also gave me some insight into compatible groupings for future reference. Marsh and Stafford (1986) find that a disadvantage of this method is that teachers can only assume that the children will respond honestly, and that their choices may change. However, my children took the task very seriously, and thought carefully about their choices - as they could choose two - and, in any case, if their choices changed this was precisely what I wanted to monitor.

Interestingly, those children who in formal class work look like natural leaders, were not necessarily the chosen leader by the group. Nor did those who seem bright dominate the groups. As Baker (1986, p.21) says:

...most children get to drive sometime and most get to sit in the back seat occasionally, but they all have a vital part to play within the group and in the overall [result].

Mason (1970), claims that teachers are doing almost nothing to improve human relationships, and that quality human relationships are necessary for quality human life. He says -

...there is nothing to fear from the way we have grown so long as we can understand ourselves and our needs as human creatures. But we have everything to fear if we cannot understand and respect our human nature. Such an understanding does not come to us through scholastic enterprise. It comes from enjoying the right kind of relationships with other human beings and from an open acknowledgement and enjoyment of our own identities.

(Mason 1970, p.31)

I found this quote interesting, as I was discovering a few unexpected pay-offs from negotiating and collaborating with the children. One was the increased quality of social interaction and the growth of the maturity of seeing something from another's point of view.

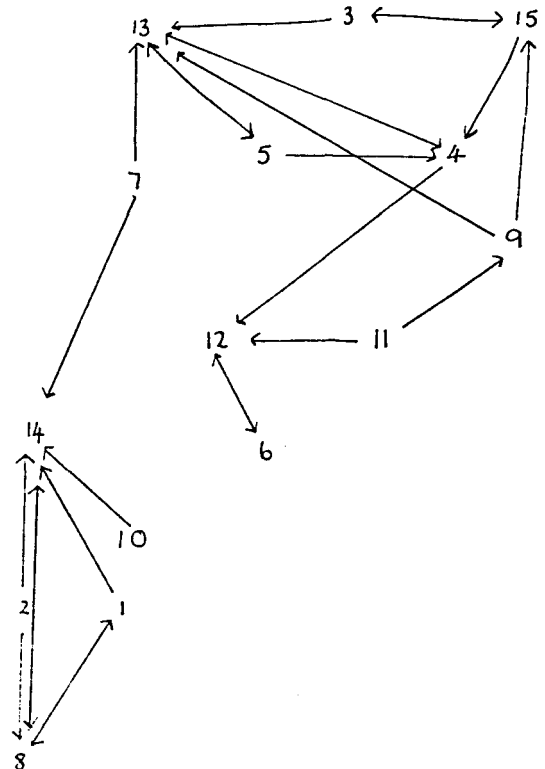
The children didn't talk at each other, or pretend to listen; they actually shared ideas. They were hearing what others had to

say, expanding on each other's ideas, arguing about them and defending them. The first phase ESL children participated, and made contributions when they might usually have been reticent. They were supported in their attempts at English and were gaining confidence, because they had reason and a purpose for communicating. And the second time around they chose interest groups rather than their ethnic groups.

I began negotiating curriculum in a time when some of my children go to community language classes and a few are withdrawn for gross motor classes by the resource teacher. It left me with a more workable number of children for these kinds of activities. The children chose two people for the sociogram from this group that was left with me.

Sociogram No.1

1. Sanna
 2. Hassan
 3. Concetta
 4. Carla
 5. Susanna
 6. Ahmad
 7. Claudia
 8. Nader
 9. Brian
 10. Kevin
 11. Drew
 12. Ricky
 13. Sandra
 14. Helder
 15. Te Aroha
- Absent: Cristal



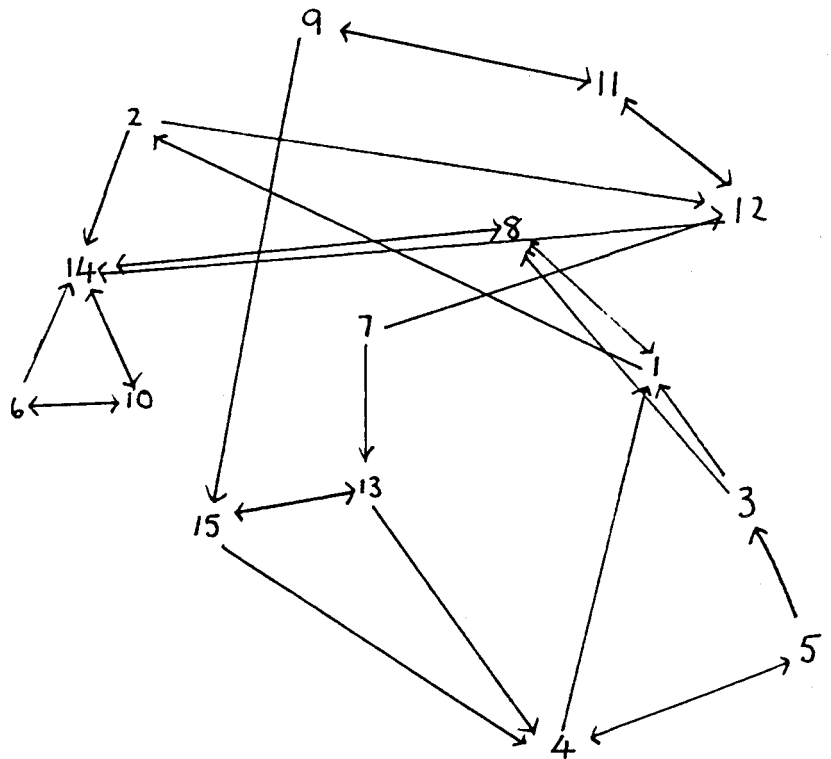
NUMBER OF TIMES CHILDREN CHOSEN

0	1	2	3	4	5
Claudia	Sanna	Te Aroha	Ricky	-	Helder
Drew	Susana		Brian		Nader
Kevin	Ahmad		Carla		Sandra
Hassan	Concetta	(See Sociogram No.1)			

- the children who were chosen five times are the more popular and noticeable members of the class.
- the children who were not chosen by anyone are generally the low attainers and usually have to be pushed to get any work done. These children were precisely the ones who ended up in the 'control' group.

Sociogram No.2

1. Sanna
 2. Hassan
 3. Concetta
 4. Carla
 5. Susanna
 6. Ahmad
 7. Claudia
 8. Nader
 9. Brian
 10. Kevin
 11. Drew
 12. Ricky
 13. Sandra
 14. Helder
 15. Te Aroha
- Absent: Cristal



NUMBER OF TIMES CHILDREN CHOSEN

0	1	2	3	4	5
Claudia	Brian	Drew	Carla	-	Helder
	Hassan	Sandra	Sanna		
	Ahmad	Kevin	Nader		
	Susana	Te Aroha	Ricky		
	Concetta				

(See Sociogram No. 2)

- Claudia was the only one not chosen this time. Claudia does not assist a group but waits to be told what to do.
- Helder is recognised as being an extremely valuable group member whereas other children who were chosen five times before have not been chosen as often this time.
- It is surprising that only one child wanted to work with Ahmad, as I observed that he works well in groups and is generally co-operative.
- It is interesting to note that the first time I did this children chose their friends, but the second time they were more selective about whom they wanted to work with.

The need to communicate and work together begins with the negotiation in which a group of children engage to agree on their group goals. Discussing what the problem is and what is involved in solving it forces the children to work together towards a common goal. They need to communicate, share ideas, make group decisions and keep each other informed. In this sharing of ideas and information, children begin naturally and spontaneously to discuss the appropriateness, efficiency and effectiveness of their methods and solutions. Consider the following observation from my journal.

Ahmad, working on an animal classification game, was randomly cutting out animal pictures from paper sheets to make cards. Seeing Kevin cutting out a giraffe he suddenly realised they were wasting time by not checking whether the animal was Australian before cutting it out. After a discussion they asked me for assistance, i.e. "Is this an Australian animal?" I referred them to a poster. "Can you find it on there? If not, then it's not Australian." Surveying the pictures they had already cut out they realised they had both cut out some the same - more wasted time. Ahmad suggested they lay out the pictures, not stack them, and check before they cut them out. The group applied the same procedure when it came to writing the animals names on the card and they realised that they had made a few duplications.

The children can see how successful they are being and they know they are satisfied with their work without constantly asking "Is this right, Miss? What shall I do now?" The importance of co-operative talk, of creative thinking and of active involvement becomes well established when children are working on something that belongs to them and is therefore meaningful. Dalton (1985) rightly argues that these are the skills of the future.

Another striking observation I made was that the children were capable of generating real problems in which the interests, experiences and preferences of *all* children were represented. I didn't have to make intricate plans to program multicultural, non-sexist and Aboriginal perspectives. The activities the children engaged in utilised and valued each child's background and culture. Ideas brought forward naturally differed between girls and boys and between cultural backgrounds, and were not imposed.

I also observed a natural rhythm in the children's work. There were times when the concentration was intense, frequently followed by some frivolity and light relief. I realised that if the children had taken on their task, engaged with it and negotiated their goals there would be long periods of task-directedness and that these would be followed by brief spells of disengaging from the problem. My observations of groups going through this process showed that the commitment they had made earlier was not lost and that, if I stayed out of it, someone usually made a comment after a few minutes of distraction that drew attention to the task at hand. The children would get themselves back to work without teacher interference. Having been given the opportunity, seven-year-old children were demonstrating a level of maturity and an ability to get on, take initiatives, make decisions with confidence, and discipline themselves by dealing with disruptions to their flow of work at a level normally not expected in the infant school.

This point brings me to a consideration of my role as a teacher in a classroom where a teacher is not essential to every move or decision that children make.

In much of what goes on in the traditional classroom it is the teacher who plays the leading role. It is the teacher who tells the children what they will do, decrees how it will be done, and decides when it is finished. The teacher does most of the talking and thinking and asks questions to which there is already an expected right answer. This kind of classroom separates the brighter children from the less able, and perpetuates in them the feeling of failure.

When learner participation is sought in the planning and implementation of a program, the teacher's role as "programmer of classroom life" (Cook, 1982) changes significantly. In my experience I found that I was still in charge and my goals and responsibilities had not changed, but my methods of achieving them had. I was still the 'expert', a source of ideas (although not the only source), a provider of information, a guide and a leader, but in a different context.

My tasks were to start things and oversee the process, link up the people and gather the resources children needed, make the arrangements necessary as the learning was planned and implemented and generally co-ordinate the process the children were going through. In other words, the children got on with learning while I facilitated its progress.

Prior to this, however, I had to set up an environment where negotiation was possible - that is, create an appropriate emotional environment. For optimum learning children have to feel able to take risks in moving towards new understandings and skills; they must be challenged and encouraged; they must strive to get things right but not feel fear or shame about getting things wrong; and they must know that they can make mistakes and the teacher will help them. Even prior to beginning this project I would hope that my classroom gave the children this kind of security.

A safe, trusting and supportive environment is a conducive one in which children can develop an awareness of their own role - that is, that they are responsible for setting their own goals and criteria. Every child needs to feel able to contribute ideas, however loosely formulated they may be, and they need to feel that being creative or divergent is valued. Within this it should be possible for children to work at a level of complexity with which they feel confident and satisfied.

As the children became more used to the new rhythm in the classroom I became more of a resource than a "central processor". I was available to share their experiences and talk with them about their work, and be on hand to assist them when and as they needed help. In fact, one of my most difficult tasks was precisely this - deciding the most appropriate time to intervene.

Intervention can have both positive and negative effects on the learning process and can change the entire course of the investigation. The worst kind of intervention is to take the problem away from the children by telling them what to do next or

by giving too specific a hint. The best kind is the ability to redirect the children's thinking with careful questions (of the process order rather than content order) that opens up new avenues and courses of action which will enable children to retain ownership of their ideas and solutions.

Collaboration with children does not make the teacher redundant. Although children are working together and have purposes in common, the teacher is still needed to open up the range of options and modes for learning (Cook, 1982). The style, amount, kind, timing and order of things is as varied as the children in the class. The beauty of this is that it is possible to help children on a needs basis, as and where required. Confusions and disruptions within groups can be sorted out and groups and individuals can be linked up, as the teacher is in a position to be aware of all the activities in the room and where each child is at. I found that during this part of the process I could really teach and communicate with the children, and this was the most rewarding and satisfying time.

An important aim of primary education is to help children become independent learners. This cannot happen if the teacher's role is always one of prescribing exactly what the children will do, how they will do it and when they will do it. For children to learn to think for themselves and to take some responsibility for their learning, they must be given opportunities to make some decisions themselves. In this situation both teacher and child are important partners in promoting learning and the role of the teacher changes accordingly.

When children are working collaboratively it is not possible to give each child a score and a page of ticks and crosses. Yet the teacher is still accountable and must know what each child is contributing to a group, learning in a group, and what strategies and skills are being developed and used.

It was this aspect of the program that I agonised over the most - that is, until I realised that I was trying to deal with it as a separate issue. Given certain beliefs about developmental learning and about how children learn, evaluation of individual children ought to be a natural phenomenon occurring every day. It should not be seen as a separate issue, as it is an important and integral part of the teaching/learning program.

Because of the nature of the program and the amount of time children spent in group work I could withdraw occasionally and observe what the children were doing. I spent this time writing

anecdotes and jotting down verbal exchanges between children, and also listing specific skills and language that particular children were using and developing. In retrospect, these observations were useful for future planning decisions because they focused on what the children knew, and were learning and doing.

Of course, observations alone did not provide me with all the information to form a more complete picture. Discussions with individual children and groups revealed a lot of interesting data, particularly once the children were used to the idea of their doing the talking and not me. In talking with children about their work I found that allowing periods of silence for the children to formulate their thinking and ideas was important (and extremely frustrating!).

In looking at evaluation as a continuous factor in the program I found Boomer's (1982, pp.158-163) questions and strategies for evaluating all stages of the process the most helpful. The list helped me to focus on particular aspects of the children's (and my!) development, and note things that might have passed me by. Evaluating what was happening was the most powerful learning experience for me during the whole program.

When evaluation is divorced from the rest of the program, as it so often is, it becomes "evaluation for evaluation's" sake, and hence is meaningless. In an effort to show some kind of results at the end of a unit of work, information is often collected by testing. Numbers appear to have statistical validity. However, evaluation is much broader than the mere measurement of a few outcomes of a program. The outcomes able to be measured this way often do not reflect the guts of the program instituted, especially one that involves the type of knowledge used in a negotiated unit of work. Indeed, many of the most important aspects of learning cannot be tested or measured:

In any 'subject', if the emphasis is on process rather than content, on understanding rather than mindstocking, on application of knowledge to new situations rather than parroting snippets of information, then evaluation is difficult...Content is reasonably easy to teach and learn - recall reasonably easy to test. Understanding is much more difficult to teach, learn and test... evaluation is more concerned with what children can do than with what they know. Evaluation concentrates on seeking out and developing pupil potential rather than on grading, selecting and predicting. It also examines our contribution as teachers and the material of the course of study we present. (Vaughn, 1980, PP.192-3).

Planning collaboratively with children changes the notion of curriculum from simply a plan of content, activities, methodology and outcomes, to a process beginning with the teacher's (although not always) conception and proceeding through planning and evaluation. It also operates on a different set of assumptions about knowledge and 'knowing' than teacher planned curriculum written to an "objectives = outcomes" formula. Curriculum pre-planned this way tends to assume that knowledge is black and white, right or wrong. Activities are set up to prove that "x" is or isn't. This knowledge is unproblematic, meaning that it is standardised and external to the learner and doesn't have the nature of a problem, is unquestionable, and not open to negotiation.

However, negotiating with children assumes that knowledge is within the learner and understandings and attitudes are arrived at as a result of subjectivity and unique perceptions. Learners use language to make meaning of their experiences and the knowledge gained by individuals is individual.

Different hues of meaning will be attributed to what could be thought to be the same information.

(Holliday, 1982 p.9)

Different people ascribe different intentions to the manner in which the information is communicated. When children have had a say in planning their work they can respond to knowledge that is meaningful to them at that time. The child's experience of a particular activity becomes the meaning (or outcome) which could not have been pre-planned. As Zahorik (1970, cited in Clark and Yinger, 1977 p.28) noted, teachers who planned exhibited less honest or authentic use of pupils ideas during their lessons. He concluded from this that the typical planning model - goals, activities and their organisation, and evaluation - results in insensitivity to pupils on the part of the teacher.

This, of course, does not mean that teachers cease planning for their children and allow "free undirected learning". The task of planning and programming is completed with the children and written up once it has been worked out - maybe on wall charts so that everyone can see it.

It was this particular aspect of my project that caused my supervisor the most worry. I could not assure her that the outcomes for the children of my class for this particular unit would be the same as the outcomes for children in the other first classes - that is, I should be seen to be teaching the same content as everybody else. Also, there was the worry of the time factor - while

children in other classes were working away on set up activities, my children were still working out what they already knew. To a certain extent I was relinquishing control of how the children went about acquiring knowledge that they had decided was meaningful to them. However, once having done this and trusted the children to control their own outcomes, it was interesting to note that a lot (not all) of the material they came up with was precisely the content of the previously planned units. And by going through the process of planning with the children I had effectively engaged their interest, involvement and personal commitment and, hence, increased the quality of their learning.

This does not mean that the collaboration between us ended there. Negotiation in itself is an element of the total program. The work that children do as a consequence to the planning is not separate from that initial process. I found that even as the children and I were planning together some learning was already going on, and throughout the small group work children still negotiated meanings, information and understanding together through talking, listening, reading, writing, experimenting with new skills and reflecting. The negotiation process is finished when the unit is finished, unless the children raise more questions or problems.

I believe that an overriding goal of education for young children is to develop process-oriented curriculum. Children need to acquire the ways and processes of finding things out and of working alone and together to solve their problems. The way is being paved with the introduction of conference writing, conference reading, spelling by writing, and maths by investigation, and negotiated curriculum is a step on from this. The approach focuses on inculcating a principle that enhances the acquisition of information -

It involves students in the constant exercise of choice and tries to give them confidence in the fruits of their own learning...the emphasis is on [informal] learning rather than teaching. Ideally, the ways of learning are as informal as they are when we learn to speak: learning language is associated with participation, experience and models. It is acquired in a participatory, active manner which depends on the co-operation of others.

(Hill, 1977 p.146).

If we believe this then there is no escape from trusting children with the major responsibility for their own learning (Holdaway, 1979).

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