



## PROMOTING CHILDREN'S AGENCY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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**Abstract:** Using conversation analysis (CA), this study identifies features of teacher-child interactions that enable opportunities for children's active participation in early learning environments, specifically, how teachers promote children's agency in the resolution of their peer disputes. The analysis focuses on two particular episodes of teacher intervention selected from a total of 28 hours of video-recorded observations in two early childhood education settings with three- to five-year-old children. The first demonstrates how a teacher can facilitate the collaborative resolution of a dispute; the second demonstrates how a teacher can respond to a child's report of conflict by positioning herself as a non-participant. While different strategies were utilized in each of these episodes, redirecting responsibility to the children themselves was found to be the key practice in facilitating children's agency in these interventions. Knowledge and insights gained through conversation analysis contribute to our understanding of how teachers and children collaboratively achieve opportunities for agency.

**Keywords:** early childhood education, Conversation Analysis, child agency, teacher intervention

**Özet:** Bu çalışma, Konuşma Çözümlemesi kullanarak, okul öncesi çevrelerde çocukların aktif katılımına imkanlar sağlayan öğretmen-çocuk etkileşim özelliklerini (özellikle öğretmenlerin çocukların etkinliğini ihtilafların çözümünde nasıl teşvik ettiğini) belirlemektedir. Çözümleme, 3-5 yaş arasındaki çocukları içeren iki okul öncesi eğitim ortamındaki 28 saatlik video-kayıtlı gözlemlerden seçilmiş iki bölümlük öğretmen müdahalesine odaklanmaktadır. İlki bir öğretmenin bir anlaşmazlığı işbirlikli olarak nasıl çözümlendiğini; ikincisi, bir öğretmenin, çocuğun anlaşmazlık şikayetine katılımcı olmadan nasıl tepki verebileceğini göstermektedir. Her bir bölümde farklı stratejiler kullanılmasına rağmen, sorumluluğu çocuklara yönlendirmenin her iki durumda da çocuk etkinliğine olanak sağlaması açısından anahtar uygulama olduğu bulunmuştur. Konuşma Çözümlemesi'nden edinilen bilgi ve içgörüler, öğretmen ve öğrencilerin etkinlik için fırsatları işbirlikçi olarak nasıl değerlendirdiğini anlamamıza olanak sağlamaktadır.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Okul öncesi eğitim, Konuşma Çözümlemesi, çocuk etkinliği, öğretmen müdahalesi

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In Australia, a growing awareness of the formative impact of the early years<sup>2</sup> on children's long-term development, has intensified sociopolitical interest and discussion surrounding how to give

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<sup>2</sup> In Australia, and for much of international early childhood education, terms such as 'early childhood' and 'young child' typically refer to the period of a child's life prior to entry into formal schooling (i.e. birth to approximately five years of age). Therefore, early childhood 'settings', 'environments' or 'classrooms' refer to educational and care programs or services that young children attend outside of the home, which are implemented by early childhood trained professionals.

children a good start to life, and what constitutes ‘best practice’ in early childhood settings (Arthur, et al., 2008; Nuttall & Edwards, 2007; Pramling Samuelsson, Sheridan & Williams, 2006; Woodhead, 2006). In recent years, the promotion of young children’s agency has been identified as foundational to learning, development and wellbeing outcomes. It is widely acknowledged that children learn and develop through *active* interaction with others and participation in their environments (e.g. Bandura, 2001; Carpendale & Lewis, 2006; Corsaro, 2005; DeVries & Zan, 1994). Research demonstrating the influential role of agency and interactions in shaping neurological functioning provides particularly strong empirical support for this (e.g. Bandura, 1997; 2001; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004).

In addition to the recognition of the relationships between agency and children’s development, the promotion of children’s *rights* to agency has received a steady increase in attention, both nationally and internationally. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, United Nations, 1989), the first legally-binding document to afford children with the same comprehensive human and citizenship rights as adults, positions children as *entitled* to autonomy, and to fully participate in, and influence matters that concern them (Coady & Page, 2005; Page, 2008; Tobin, 2005; United Nations, 1989). In Australia, the recently released national early childhood curriculum, the Early Years Learning Framework (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations for the Council of Australian Governments, 2009), positions the enactment of agency and autonomy as a key learning outcome for children, from both an educational and human rights perspective.

Research in early childhood education is increasingly paying attention to classroom interaction, demonstrating that the quality of interactions between the teacher and children is a leading indicator of an effective early childhood program (e.g. Mashburn, Pianta, Hamre, Downer, Barbarin, Bryant, Burchinal, Early & Howes, 2008). There is also a substantial body of research which has shown that peer interactions, particularly in conflict situations, provide important opportunities for children’s social, cognitive and moral development (e.g. Maynard, 1986; Goodwin, 1990, 2006; Chen, Fein, Killen, and Tam, 2001; Cobb-Moore, Danby & Farrell, 2008; Green & Cillessen, 2008; Church, 2009). Participation in the resolution of disputes provides opportunities for the development of agency and autonomy (DeVries & Zan, 1994; Mullin, 2007), and the social skills that enable ongoing positive relations with peers. Indeed, ‘no other single phenomenon plays as broad and significant role in human development as conflict is thought to’ (Shantz & Hartup, 1992, p. 11).

In this paper, we are interested in how conflict is managed in early childhood settings, specifically how it is that teachers enable children to autonomously manage peer interactions. We use conversation analysis (CA) to explore teacher interventions in children’s disputes as a site for promoting the development of children’s agency, autonomy and self-efficacy; a locus for enhancing educational outcomes, social inclusion and participation, and psychological wellbeing. The question of *how* teachers promote children’s agency in their day-to-day interactions in early childhood classrooms, is one that has received limited attention. We do not have a clear understanding of what teachers actually say and do within the early childhood environment that is effective in promoting children’s agency. The study therefore aims to document how children’s

agency and autonomy is supported, specifically in disputes where autonomy is necessary to better manage or negotiate interaction with peers.

### **Why agency matters in early childhood education**

The concept of human agency is underpinned by various philosophical, psychological and sociological constructs (Bandura, 1997, 2001; Carpendale & Lewis, 2006; Macfarlane & Cartmel, 2008; Paris & Lung, 2008), yet can be generally understood as a quality which enables a person to initiate intentional action in order to achieve goals that are valued. Key elements of agency pertain to intellectual and moral autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1995; Mullin, 2007), and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997, 2001; Paris & Lung, 2008). The role of the individual in constructing his or her experience of the world is active, in that people are ‘agents of experiences rather than simply undergoers of experiences’ (Bandura, 2001, p. 4).

However, a tension exists around the extent to which young children can be considered to possess agency. In particular, there is skepticism in regard to their capacity for self-regulation and self-reflection (Mullin, 2007; Paris & Lung, 2008). This perspective is informed by traditional discourses which hold an ‘image’ of children as incompetent and immature (Ahn, 2011; Arthur et al, 2008; Woodhead, 2006); or as ‘human becomings, not human beings’ (Coady, 2008, p. 4). While a more contemporary, socio-constructivist view of the child as a highly skilled co-creator of their own learning and environment (e.g. Ahn, 2011; Arthur et al, 2008; Macfarlane & Cartmel, 2008; Nyland, 1999; Schuuk, 2008; International Save the Children Alliance, 2003; Woodhead, 2006) has been building momentum in recent years, a minority of traditional views continue to challenge the enactment of children’s agency in early childhood educational settings. Essentially, contemporary research in early childhood education is contesting the argument that “the condition of childhood is one in which the agent is not yet in a position to speak in her own voice because there is no voice which counts as hers” (Schapiro, 1999, p. 729).

There are cultural differences in perceptions of children’s competency and agency (Chen & French, 2008; Goncu & Cannella, 1996; Mosier & Rogoff, 2003; Ochs & Schieffelin, 2008). Rogoff (2003) provides the example of how in ‘Westernized’ societies, we perceive young children as incapable of using sharp knives, whereas in the Democratic Republic of Congo, children are capable of using a machete to cut their own fruit at 12 months of age. In Australian Indigenous communities, young children are seen as holding the same rights and responsibilities as the rest of the community, and, for example may sleep and feed whenever they choose (Townsend-Cross, 2004). While disparity exists in constructions of child agency (see James & James, 2008, for review), early childhood teachers may hold distinct perceptions of children’s competencies. For example, a study by Killen, Ardila-Rey, Barakkatz, and Wang (2000) surveyed preschool teachers in the United States, Columbia, El Salvador and Taiwan, and found that *all* teachers reported positive views about the provision of choice, and believed that one of the main purposes of early childhood education is to develop children’s independence and self-confidence.

Indeed research that documents the positive impacts of agentic behaviour on children’s development (e.g. Bandura, 2001; Carpendale & Lewis, 2006; DeVries & Zan, 1994) contributes to the increasing international trend for facilitating children’s participation, agency and autonomy

(see Hendy & Whitebread, 2000; International Save the Children Alliance, 2003). We know that when children are supported in learning to exhibit agency, they also learn about negotiation, compromise, success and failure, and resilience (Macfarlane & Cartmel, 2008). Similarly, children's participation is encouraged by adult respect for children's agency, and that this in turn supports their sense of self-worth, citizenship and wellbeing (Berthelsen & Brownlee, 2005).

With some consensus that child agency is essential to early learning – and the fact that children are *entitled* to autonomy and freedom, and to fully participate in, and influence matters that concern them (Tobin, 2005; United Nations, 1989; Woodhead, 2006) – the challenge lies in identifying *how* teachers might promote children's agency in practice. In particular, there are difficulties in balancing children's individuality and right to act autonomously, with maintaining group cohesion and a climate of cooperation (Nucci & Weber, 1995; Paris & Lung, 2008). Intentional, teacher-initiated instruction (Oda & Mari, 2006); organizational and curricula constraints (Hendy & Whitebread, 2000), and maintaining order and rules (Killen & Smetana, 1999), are further challenges to the facilitation of child agency. However, we should be wary of creating dichotomies such as independence-interdependence (Bandura, 1997, 2001; Mosier & Rogoff, 2003). Bandura (1997, 2001) refers to studies that show that a high sense of agency and self-efficacy actually *promotes* pro-social, cooperative behaviour, including sharing. Similarly, Rogoff (2003) and Killen (1996) discuss how engagement within a group can simultaneously emphasize individual agency and autonomy.

### **Peer disputes in early childhood classrooms**

In highlighting the role of agency in cooperative behaviour, we turn our attention to peer disputes as a context in which children develop social competence (e.g. Maynard, 1986; Goodwin, 1990; Hutcbly & Moran-Ellis, 1998; Butler, 2008; Church, 2009), and develop 'the ability to meet one's own needs while maintaining positive social relations with others' (Green & Cillessen, 2008: 161). Indeed, a dispute 'is an interactional accomplishment, and one of the most important loci for the development of friendships and peer relationships' (Goodwin, 2006: 33). Active participation and interaction in social situations, including peer disputes, provides opportunities for the assertion of agency and autonomy (DeVries & Zan, 1994; Mullin, 2007). Children express who they are and what is important to them in conflict situations, by what goals they pursue and resist (Mullin, 2007; Shantz, 1987). Whitebread, Anderson, Coltman, Page, Pasternak, and Mehta (2005) discuss how children demonstrate the pro-social or 'moral autonomy' element of agency through developing their ability to resolve social problems with peers (see also Evaldsson, 2007).

For the purpose of our discussion, a 'dispute' is defined as an exchange in which 'one person does something to which a second person objects' (Hay & Ross, 1982: 2); although the definition of these exchanges is not necessarily simple – see Corsaro & Rizzo (1990); Grimshaw (1990) – we are primarily interested in the point at which teachers intervene either of their own accord or in response to a child's appeal (Maynard, 1985; Church, 2009; Theobald, 2009). Children mostly argue about possession and use of objects (Chen et al, 2001; Killen et al, 2000; Roseth, Pellegrini, Dupuis, Bohn, Hickey, Hilk & Peshkam, 2008; Shantz, 1987), and conflict over another's actions or lack of action (Shantz, 1987). By the age of four, however, there is an increase in the incidence of more socially oriented conflicts (e.g. involving claims about opinions) and social order (e.g. rule violations) (e.g. Chen et al, 2001; Cobb-Moore et al, 2008;

Theobald & Danby, 2009). Essentially, conflict is underpinned by claims to control and/or status; importantly, the social rules and values that underwrite this status are constructed by the children themselves (Church, 2009; Cobb-Moore et al, 2008; Corsaro, 2005; Goodwin, 1990; 2006; Green & Cillessen, 2008). It is this *agency* that children demonstrate in negotiating with peers that captures our attention.

In terms of dispute outcomes, what constitutes ‘success’ or ‘effectiveness’ can be difficult to measure or qualify, yet several studies have identified strategies that are consistently linked with conflict resolution, and others with conflict escalation. Successful strategies include: assertiveness, negotiation, compromise and perspective-taking (Boggs, 1987; Eisenberg & Garvey, 1981; Green & Cillessen, 2008). Conversely, the behaviours found to escalate conflict situations include: insistence (e.g. of one’s opinion or demand), passive ignoring, and a lack of perspective-taking (Baumgartner & Strayer, 2008; Eisenberg and Garvey, 1981; Chen, 2003; Chen et al, 2001). However, we argue – as do other CA researchers (see M.H. Goodwin’s exemplary work with children) – that dispute outcomes are best understood from a perspective that recognizes both the authority of participants *and* the multiple and simultaneous resources that participants use to construct the interaction.

### **Teacher Intervention in Children’s Disputes**

The research reported so far focuses on peer behaviours in disputes and has little to say about how teachers intervene in these events. Piaget (1932) claimed that the role of the adult is to help the children to understand one another’s perspective by reducing his or her power and becoming a ‘comrade to the children’ (Piaget, 1932, p. 364). Vygotsky (1978) detailed how teachers or more knowledgeable others ‘scaffold’ children’s learning, whereby the child is assisted to operate at a developmental level above their current competence. Rogoff (1990) builds on this notion of ‘scaffolding’, by proposing that children learn socio-culturally relevant tools and practices through ‘guided participation’. However, there is a lack of clarity as to the form and function of productive guided participation where teachers intervene in children’s disputes.

There is some controversy regarding whether teachers should intervene in children’s disputes or whether this interrupts the conflict resolution cycle (e.g. Goncu & Cannella, 1996; Roseth et al, 2008). Given that children actively construct their own social worlds, adult intervention may not necessarily be appropriate in relation to children’s cultures. For example, Cobb-Moore et al (2008) contextualize this by explaining that classroom rules may not always correspond with rules navigated, negotiated and ratified by children. Yet another layer in this discussion consists of arguments in the literature that children need adult assistance to learn the socio-culturally acceptable ways of resolving their conflicts (Goncu & Cannella, 1996; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Rogoff, 2003; 1990).

Acknowledging these tensions, we can say that more productive types of intervention have been distinguished from those that are less so. It is believed that interventions or strategies that impede on children’s right to agency and autonomy, such as those characterized as ‘cessation’ or ‘coercive’ (e.g. directing, commanding) are most common, yet most unproductive in supporting children’s development (Chen et al, 2001; DeVries & Zan, 1994; Nucci & Weber, 1995). However, interventions or strategies that respect the child’s right to agency and choice, and serve to assist the development of particular skills, dispositions, understandings, or efficacy-beliefs,

such as those characterized as ‘mediation’ or ‘cooperative’ (e.g. questioning, explaining), are considered productive (DeVries & Zan, 1994; Nucci & Weber, 1995).

Approaches that establish a ‘culture of collaborative learning’ (Nicolopoulou & Cole, 1993), where adults act as facilitators and rules are ratified by all, allow children’s active role in their own learning to be centralized (Goodwin, 2007). If we accept that relationships which promote children’s agency and a sense of justice are underpinned by choice, notions of rights and responsibility, and a sense of ‘belongingness’ (Macfarlane & Cartmel, 2008), we are interested in how these relationships might be achieved. We know that learning occurs through high quality emotional and instructional interactions, and that processes and practices are stronger indicators of child outcomes than structural factors such as the level of teacher education (Curby, Rimm-Kaufman & Ponitz, 2009; Mashburn et al, 2008). But to date, there is not sufficient qualitative evidence as to how these interactions can be co-constructed by teachers and children. The data in this study seeks to contribute to this space by detailing *how* teachers can enable children’s agency in early childhood educational settings.

## Method

In seeking to identify ways in which teachers promote children’s agency in their day-to-day interactions, this study uses the methodology of conversation analysis (CA), focusing on the sequential organization of turns in naturally-occurring interaction (Schegloff, 2007; see Sidnell, 2010, for a comprehensive introduction). Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) provided the profound observation that it is the one-turn-after-the-other organization of talk that allows speakers to demonstrate the significant features of the interaction, by what they orient or respond to. In other words, participants display to each other in their turns’ talk, their understandings of each others’ prior turns’ talk (Sacks et al, 1974). CA is a productive method for investigating teacher-child interactions, and, specifically, the ways in which teachers enable opportunities for children to actively participate in the interaction (Erikson, 2004; see Mori & Zuengler, 2008 for review). In other words, CA is concerned with the inherent agentic stances and actions of participants in the talk-in-interaction.

The interactions between teachers and children captured in this study were video-recorded in two early childhood settings; a convenience sample selected from settings that participate in a university teacher-training program. Setting 1 is a four-year-old sessional kindergarten – where children attend sessions with a qualified teacher for up to 12 hours a week in the year prior to school entry – and Setting 2 is a ‘kinder room’, where three- to five-year-old children attend a program with a qualified teacher within a long day care centre (i.e. children can attend up to five days a week). The video recording took place at each setting over a two-week period, for an average of 14 hours per setting (28 hours in total). Video-recordings ran continually for full kindergarten sessions (approximately three hours) at Setting 1, and for approximately two-hour blocks at Setting 2. As the purpose of observation was to obtain naturally-occurring data, participants were not asked to ‘do’ anything outside their everyday practice.

The focus of the analysis of these observations was on the teacher’s language and behaviour when responding to children’s peer disputes (i.e. the intervention), and the children’s subsequent language and behaviour (i.e. the outcome or response to the intervention). Fifty-five episodes of

conflict responded to by the teacher were heard in the 28 hours of videotaped observations. The video-recorded episodes of teachers responding to children's peer disputes were transcribed using CA principles and conventions (see Appendix 1, following Sacks et al, 1974). Microanalysis of turn-taking sequences identified salient features of the interactions that provided possibilities for children's active participation and contribution (see Goodwin & Goodwin, 2004, for their discussion of 'participation frameworks'). In CA, there are any number of ways or systems to detail the non-verbal elements of language, including gaze and gesture (e.g. Gardner 2001; Goodwin, 1979; 1981; 2003; Heath, 1984; Rendle-Short, 2006; Schegloff, 1984). As permission to share images from the data in this project is limited, the transcripts mark the features of interest of the embodied interaction.

### **Analysis and discussion**

The analysis presented in this paper will focus on two particular episodes of conflict that illuminated the practices that afford opportunities for children's agency. Of the whole dataset, these two episodes were chosen as they demonstrate differences in teacher approaches but both proved successful at allowing the children to arrive at the resolution of their dispute through mediation. These two episodes took place in the same setting with the same teacher but occurred on different days, with different children. This kindergarten teacher is identified as 'Teacher' rather than by name in the transcripts for readability, and we recognize that this privileges a particular institutional role (see Hester & Francis, 2001, for discussion). Episode 1 details an approach that involves the teacher facilitating a cooperative process of conflict resolution, through inviting and validating children's contributions, and enabling these contributions to determine the outcome of the dispute. The shorter Episode 2 details an approach that involves the teacher returning authority to the child who reports the conflict, and therefore positioning the child as the primary agent.

### **Episode 1: Facilitating Collaborative Action**

In Episode 1, a group of five children are playing on an open floor area indoors, with a set of marbles and connectable plastic shoots or pipes (for putting the marbles through). As Excerpt 1 shows below, the conflict begins when Joshua approaches Rose who is sitting putting marbles through a long pipe construction. The other children, Rebecca, Ava, and Travis are all in close proximity, and Katie approaches occasionally.

### **Excerpt 1**

1. Joshua: no [ROS:ie that is: my:: (.) mar:bles?;
2. Rose: [*((stands up and turns away while playing with pipe))*]
3. Ava: (I'll get) it [*((standing and reaching over towards Rose))*]
4. Joshua: give the mar:bles back to us Ro:se?; [*((following Rose, as*
5. *Rose walks around spinning pipe in the air))*]
6. RO:::SE: (.) i'm telling on Rose:; [*((briskly walking away*
7. *towards the teacher ))* (2.4) Cel:ine?
8. Teacher: hmm?;
9. Joshua: Rose (.) taked the marbles (.) off us.
10. (0.2)

11. Teacher: ok:ay let's go over and talk about it,=  
 12. =what happened? ((*walking with Joshua over to group*)  
 13. Joshua: Rose (.) snatched the mar:bles off us

In Excerpt 1 above, the teacher's response to Joshua's statement about Rose taking the marbles, contains several significant features that shape each participants' status within the participation framework for subsequent turns (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2004). In line 11, the teacher's turn is prefaced with a pause and she acknowledges the prior talk with the turn-initial 'okay' while 'also prefigur[ing] movements towards next-positioned matters' (Beach, 1995, p. 22). In other words, "I see that there is some sort of problem that requires some sort of next action". The prefatory 'okay' is followed by inclusive language ('let's') – or what Butler (2008) refers to as a 'collective pro-term' which orients participants to a collective group or action – and opens up the possibility for a conversation about his comment ('go over and talk about it'). Importantly, the teacher immediately asks Joshua for his account of what has happened, as they walk over to where the conflict has taken place. The teacher therefore positions herself as 'hearer' by enabling Joshua to have the first turn in this activity of talking about 'what happened' (line 12). Joshua responds to this by asserting his position as 'speaker' and immediately re-stating his account (line 13), upgrading Rose's *taking* of the marbles to *snatching*.

### Excerpt 2 (continuation of Excerpt 1)

14. Teacher: O:kay. (.) what's: what (.) can everybody come over here  
 15. for a minute?  
 16. (0.2)  
 17. Teacher: come and sit down?, ((*sits on carpet with group of*  
 18. *children*))(.) are you going to sit with us? ((*to Katie,*  
 19. *who's walking away*))  
 20. Katie: (I'm going) to get my jumper  
 21. Teacher: O:kay.(0.2) Rose (.) can you come and sit over he:re? (0.2)  
 22. and Rebecca (.) can you come and sit over he:re? (0.2)  
 23. now. (.) hang on? (.) sit next to me (.) make a little  
 24. circle. Joshua? (.) can you see ((*pointing*)) there's a  
 25. marble over there next to the blue one?  
 26. (1.0)  
 27. Teacher: you, get the marble. okay (.) let's move back ((*physically*  
 28. *pulls Rose back next to her*)) now (.) can ev:ery:body tip  
 29. their mar:bles into the middle?,  
 30. (1.0)

In Excerpt 2, the teacher acknowledges the prior sequence of Joshua's accusation by responding with 'okay' (line 14), and then asks everybody in the area to come and sit together. Note that she does not respond by immediately approaching or directing attention to Rose, the other child who



is involved in the conflict. Instead, after asking Katie *if* she's going to sit (because she is standing on the periphery) (line 18), she asks Rose *to* sit down (line 21), and then follows this with a request for Rebecca to sit down also. The fact that the teacher *invites* Katie, who has not been involved in the conflict scenario, but then explicitly *instructs* Rose to sit down, ensures that Rose is a ratified participant in the discussion, but does not position her as 'accused'. Immediately asking Rebecca to sit down also, serves to display that Rose is not necessarily the focus of the discussion about to take place (i.e. she is not 'singled out').

### Excerpt 3 (continuation of Excerpt 2)

31. Teacher: and I want to have a discussion (.) what do you think? (.)  
32. we can do: (.) Joshua  
33. Joshua: mm? ((*off camera, collecting marbles*)  
34. Teacher: to make this fair:?  
35. (2.0)  
36. Teacher: where are the marbles. (.) we want to put them all in the  
37. mid:dle.=((*to Joshua and Ava, who are collecting the*  
38. *marbles and haven't sat down yet*))= what do you think?=  
39. and those ones as well Ava ((*pointing*)) what do you think  
40. we can do to make this fair, (.) with the marbles.(0.2)  
41. wh- what's your sug:ges:tion (.) eve:ry:one?

As Excerpt 3 shows above, the teacher explicitly names and therefore establishes the forum for subsequent interaction; that is, a 'discussion' (line 31). This is the first turn in which the teacher communicates to the children a reason as to why she has asked everybody to sit on the floor with her. In these few words, she opens up the possibility for a multiple participation framework, in which she is not to be the only speaker, and which is not to concentrate on her explaining what 'wrong' has gone before. This neutral emotional stance (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2000) is further embodied by intonation that is even-paced, consistently low volume and 'matter of fact'.

By posing the question 'what do you think we can do' (lines 31-32), and selecting Joshua as the next speaker, the teacher affords Joshua rights to the floor as 'instigator' of the discussion. When Joshua doesn't 'take up' this opportunity by responding with an answer or idea, the teacher repeats the question – "what do you think" (line 38); "what do you think we can do to make this fair" (lines 39-40); "what's your suggestion" (line 41) – but this time opens the second pair part to "everyone". Interestingly, the teacher emphasizes the word 'you' (line 39), and lengthens the words 'suggestion' and 'everyone' (line 41). She is inviting *everyone* to participate by making a *suggestion* that will be open for *discussion*, thereby extending authority to the children.

Notably, the teacher does not refer here (nor at any later stage) to the fact that someone (or everyone) isn't sharing the marbles, but rather orients the conversation directly to the task of resolving the issue through a discussion of possible solutions. She does not 'lecture' the children about rules regarding sharing, for example. The teacher also does not enter into details of what happened during the conflict. In this way, each turn opens up the opportunity for a possible next

response which focuses on determining the next step forward – and indeed with a preference for progressivity (Stivers, 2006), for one of the children to accomplish the activity of providing a solution in favour of simply selecting a particular child to respond – rather than a response that focuses on the provision of an account of what has gone before.

**Excerpt 4** (continuation of Excerpt 3)

42. Rebecca: my: sug:gestion?, is (.) like (.) we can each have a go?,  
 43. (.) and we can have all of them instead (.) and then (.)  
 44. there can be:: (0.2) we: can do (.) eeny miney mo (.)  
 45. and then: (.) and then: (.) it- it- it chooses them. (.)  
 46. then (.) they: get to take all the marbles?, (.)  
 47. and then another one?, (.) and another one?,  
 48. Teacher: so? (.) [how many people are here?  
 49. Rebecca: [you can have-  
 50. (1.0)  
 51. Rebecca: ahh?=  
 52. Teacher: don't count me, ((to all children)) how many children  
 53. here?=  
 54. Ava: five five (.) five five (.) five five  
 55. Teacher: ok:ay: (.) so Rose (.) er (.) Rebecca's saying (.)  
 56. ev::ery:body: could have a tu:rn of having all: the marbles  
 57. Rebecca: yes.=  
 58. Teacher: =((to all children)) is there another way you could do it?=  
 59. =does anyone else have a su:ggestion:?  
 60. ((holding all marbles in her enclosed hands and gesturing  
 61. handing all of them to each child one by one around the  
 62. circle))  
 63. (1.5)  
 64. Rebecca: we can do (.) eeny miney mo[ (.) and then it can choose one  
 65. (.) and then (.) if it chooses one (.) then they: (.)  
 66. have all the marbles?, (.) [and then?,  
 67. Teacher : [ye:ah?,  
 68. Teacher: o:kay, (.) let's count how many marbles we've got?,  
 69. ((pushes one marble away from pile on the carpet))  
 70. (???): one (0.2) two (.) three (.) four (.) five (.) six (.) seven  
 71. (.) eight (.) nine (.) ten?, ((children chanting, as  
 72. teacher pushes a marble aside with each number))

In Excerpt 4, Rebecca aligns with the project of the teacher's prior turn (see Stivers, 2008), by beginning her turn with 'my suggestion is' (line 42). Our interest is in the turn-initial possessive pronoun 'my' as an enactment of agency. Rebecca explains her suggestion, including the details of how it would play out (i.e. they would use the method of '*eeny miney mo*' – a children's counting rhyme to select an individual – to determine who would have the first turn of having all the marbles). Despite the frequent pauses throughout Rebecca's utterance, providing multiple turn transition relevant places, the teacher does not self-select as next speaker until Rebecca has reached a point where her suggestion has taken a relatively comprehensive form, and is starting to involve repetition ("and another one (.) and another one"). This attentive listening ratifies Rebecca's authority not only to make a suggestion, but for this suggestion to be properly considered by the group, as evidenced in the teacher's subsequent talk (lines 51-52). By summarizing Rose's suggestion for the group, and emphasizing the key aspects of the suggestion (i.e. 'everybody', 'turn' and 'all') (line 56), the teacher achieves two things. Firstly, in clarifying the suggestion of '*eeny meeny miney mo*', Rebecca's contribution to the ongoing talk is legitimised, and secondly, the teacher summarizes and simplifies the suggestion for the rest of the children, thus supporting a collective understanding of the proposed solution.

By asking how many children are in the group (lines 48 and 52-53) and how many marbles there are (line 68), the teacher establishes an opportunity for (a) all of the children to actively involve themselves in counting aloud the number of people and then the number of marbles, and (b) to realise that there are enough marbles for each child to have the same amount (i.e. two marbles each). She does not count the children herself (lines 48-54), nor does she count the marbles aloud with the children, but instead scaffolds this counting by physically demonstrating each count with a marble (lines 70-72). This approach to facilitating child agency is similar to M.H. Goodwin's observations of parents shifting epistemic authority to children. In Goodwin's (2007) analysis of the conversational practices of one family in Los Angeles, she shows how a father presents himself as uncertain of an answer, and puts questions to his children, therefore opening up the possibility for one of them to resolve the inquiry, instead of delivering a lecture on the correct answer.

#### **Excerpt 5** (continuation of Excerpt 4)

73. Teacher: °o:kay?, now, (0.2) I won:der if there's a different way we  
74. could do it?(.) what do you think?=*((to all children))*  
75. Ava: = two each?  
76. (0.2)  
77. Teacher: do you think?, *((to all children))*(.) what do you think  
78. about that (.) Rebec:ca?  
79. Rebecca: *((shakes her head))*  
80. Teacher: well (.) what do you think?, (.) Ava's say:ing: you could  
81. have two: each: (.) which is really good maths (.) Av:a?,  
82. (.) Ava's say:ing (.) cos there's ten?, (0.2) marbles (.)  
83. and there's fi:ve children (.) we could do this?,  
84. *((pushes two marbles towards each child))*

85. we could: di:vide them up?, (.) (inaudible) and we could  
 86. have two: each:?, (.) O:R (0.2) we can: (.) let one person  
 87. have ten mar:bles: first: (.) and then another person has  
 88. ten marbles (.) and another (.) and another (.) and  
 89. another?, (.) ((*gesturing to each of the children as she*  
 90. *says 'another'*))(.) what do you think i[:s:?, (.)] what do  
 91. you want to do:? =

After the children have counted the marbles, the teacher asks if there's a different way to share the marbles ('okay, now, I wonder if there's a different way we could do it?') (lines 73-74). In these lines, several features of talk significantly shape the participation framework. Firstly, the teacher acknowledges Rebecca's attempt to continue to voice her perspective ('okay, now') and then pauses before launching into a question. The question is preceded by the words 'I wonder', which present the status of her question as inquisitive or hypothetical, rather than authoritative. Note also that the teacher then asks if there is a 'different way', not if there is a 'better' way. This opens up possibilities for other children to contribute to a solution, without *evaluating* Rebecca's prior contribution to the discussion. The teacher's use of the collective pro-term 'we' ('we can do it') in this line (and as previously noted, e.g. line 11), serves to establish a cohort of members orienting to the collective action of resolving the conflict (Butler, 2008). In doing so, she positions herself as a member – not necessarily instructor – of the problem-solving team.

After putting this question to the group of children, the teacher then asks them, 'what do you think?' (line 74). When Ava puts forward her suggestion of 'two each' (line 75), the teacher immediately asks the group again, 'what do you think?' (line 77). Note that she does not communicate her own judgment or thoughts about it, ensuring that the authority of evaluation resides with the children themselves. By repeating the question to Rebecca, selecting her as next speaker by name (line 78), the teacher ratifies Rebecca's position as the person who contributed the first suggestion. She also invites Rebecca to consider Ava's suggestion. The teacher thus positions herself as the facilitator of the 'unfolding embodied action' (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2004, p. 240).

The teacher physically demonstrates what each child's suggestion would entail (lines 84, and 89-90), thus assisting the children to understand the suggestions. The fact that she does this for each suggestion, and repeats the first one again at the end, presents each solution on its own merit and positions them as equally valid options. The teacher supports the children to understand each suggestion, and to consider each as plausible, before asking 'what do you think is... what do you want to do?' (lines 90-91). Such is the teacher's effort to present alternative solutions as having equal value, the repair within this turn avoids any description or qualification of the solution (e.g. 'what do you think is [better]'), and returns agency to the children: 'what do you want to do?').

As Excerpt 6 below shows, the teacher includes everyone in the discussion and as agents of the conflict resolution, by asking the children to participate in a vote. In doing so, she opens up the participation framework so that each child has the agency and authority to influence the outcome. That is, she makes it possible for all voices to be heard, and not just those children who contributed a suggestion. This is argued to be the 'crutch' of the facilitation of collaborative

action in this episode. It is the point at which *all* of the children are enabled to participate in determining how the conflict will be resolved, through democratic means; ‘so that it’s fair’ (Excerpt 3, line 34). Excerpt 7 demonstrates the children asserting their agency, and thus orienting to the teacher’s request for them to participate in the vote.

### Excerpt 6 (continuation of Excerpt 5)

92.                                    what do you think i[:s:?, (.)] what do you want to do:? =  
93.    Rose:                                    [two  
94.    Rose:                                    =I want two: each?,  
95.    Teacher:                                if you want to have two each (0.2) sit with E:va?, =  
96.    Rebecca:                                = I want all: of them?, =  
97.    Teacher:                                = if- listen (.) we will vote (0.2) if you want two each  
98.    (.) sit with Ava (.) (0.8) (*children start moving*)  
99.    and if you want (.) all: of them: (.) at a ti:me (.)  
100.    sit with Rebecca.  
101.    (0.8)  
102.    what about you Travis (.) do you want two-  
103.    Ava you’ve gotta stay (.) you wan[t two: ((to Ava))  
104.    Travis:                                    (*standing up*) [I want. I want two.  
105.    (0.5)  
106.    Teacher:                                °ok:ay?, (0.2) so let’s count (.) how many peo::ple? (.)  
107.    want to have all: of them?, (.) Av:a?=  
108.    Ava:                                        =three.=  
109.    Teacher:                                =and how many want two?  
110.    (1.0)  
111.    Rose:                                        two.  
112.    Teacher:                                sorry? (*looking up at Katie who has rejoined and is*  
113.    *standing next to the group*)  
114.    Katie:                                        (inaudible)  
115.    Teacher:                                (*to Katie*) yeah (inaudible). (*returning attention to the*  
116.    *group*) so how: does that: vote wo:rk:?  
117.    Ava:                                        ten each:,  
118.    Rose:                                        ten each:?,

The teacher then briefly shifts her attention away to another task. Excerpt 7 resumes when the teacher re-joins the activity of re-allocating marbles, which Ava is coordinating.

**Excerpt 7**

119. Ava: ((to Rebecca))°(do you want) to do (.)eeny meney miney mo?°  
 120. Teacher: ok:ay?, ((to all children))  
 121. Rebecca: ((to Ava)) YEAH  
 122. Rebecca ((to Celine)) [eeny miney mo?,=  
 123. Ava: [(inaudible) ((while lifting finger to point))  
 124. Teacher: =but hang on, (.) to see who's: (.) who gets: to do it:?  
 125. Ava: °it's those three?,  
 126. Teacher: okay:, (.) so those three (.) so you do (.) eeny meney  
 127. miney mo: (.) to see who has them first? =(moving finger  
 128. around group)) =is that what you're say:ing:?  
 129. Ava: ((nods head))  
 130. Teacher: okay?, (.) you've gotta include every:bod:y: though?,  
 131. ((points around group))  
 132. (0.2)  
 133. Ava: °even katie?,  
 134. Teacher: even katie.  
 135. (0.1)  
 136. Teacher: you read:y:?  
 137. Ava: ((nods))

In Excerpt 7 above, Ava suggests to Rebecca that they do 'eeny meney miney mo' to determine who is going to have the first turn of having use of all of the marbles first. Rebecca agrees and reports this back to the teacher (lines 121-122). This demonstrates two important achievements of agency. Firstly, that in the absence of the teacher's facilitation, one child initiates and communicates an idea to another child, who accepts the proposal, which is then reported to the teacher. The children therefore arrived at the next step in the resolution process, through building action together (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2004). This is the point in the episode where cooperative play commences and the teacher begins to gradually step outside of the participation framework, enabling the children to independently monitor the sharing of the marbles through allocation by 'eeny meney miney mo' method.

**Episode 2: Returning the authority to dispute participants**

In Episode 2, a small group of children are playing outdoors around an obstacle course. The teacher is sitting with another small group of children at an outdoor art table. The conflict itself occurs off camera, and Excerpt 1 below shows Angus, who has been playing by the obstacle course, approaching the teacher to tell her that another child has called him a name.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For readers unfamiliar with Australian English slang, a 'wedgie' is a state where underpants are stuck uncomfortably between the buttocks, or is the *act* of another person sharply pulling underpants to this position.

### Excerpt 1

1. Angus: chris:toph:er:: said (0.2) hi an:gus: we::dg:ie::  
2. (0.2)  
3. Teacher: sorry (.) can you say that a:gain? ((*leaning forward*))  
4. (0.2)  
5. Angus: (x x x) and Chris said hi angus wedg:ie=  
6. Teacher: =0:kay. and what's the problem. here (hang on to [that]),  
7. Angus: [we::ll  
8. (.) because (that's not) ni:ce.=

In Excerpt 1, the teacher responds to Angus' initiating turn by leaning forward and asking him to repeat what he has said. Angus responds to the teacher's repair (Schegloff, 1992) by repeating his statement, but this time in greater detail (some of which was inaudible on camera) (line 5). The teacher's turn immediately follows or 'latches' to Angus' revised repeat, with 'okay' then asking the question 'and what's the problem?', promptly orienting to Angus' turn as a complaint or "telling" (Theobald & Danby, 2009) (line 6). (Note, the teachers subsequent comment "here, hang on to that" is addressed to another child at the table).

The teacher's question ends with a falling contour (line 6) rather than a rising or a falling-rising contour, which implies that she is asking somewhat of a leading question; that is, a question that directs the hearer to attend to a point or challenge being put forward in the 'question' (Drew & Heritage, 1992). In this first pair part, she establishes an expectation that Angus will put forward in his next turn, an argument or statement about how Chris calling him a name is a 'problem'. In doing so, she invites Angus to clarify what it is about Chris' statement that he doesn't like or finds objectionable.

Angus' response aligns with the accountability raised by the teacher. He begins his answer with the preface 'well' and a pause (line 7). This serves to display a moment of consideration of the teacher's prior turn, and a precursor to a dispreferred turn (Pomerantz, 1984). Preface markers, such as 'well' or 'I don't know', can indicate that the speaker is about to say something that is less than agreement, or is not the most 'acceptable' or anticipated response (Heritage, 1984; Sacks, 1984). Angus' turn, 'well, because that's not nice' (lines 7-8), therefore displays how he has a) oriented to the nature of the teacher's prior question, and b) is unsure of the merit of his account, given that the tellability (Schegloff, 1992) of the problem has been called into question by the teacher (line 6).

### Excerpt 2

8. Angus: (.) because (that's not) ni:ce.=  
9. Teacher: =and did you tell him that?  
10. (0.8)  
11. Teacher: did you tell him that? (.) or are you just telling me::.  
12. (0.2)

13. Teacher:     cos I didn't say it (0.2) you need to say to him (.)  
 14.             I don't like it when you call me that.  
 15.             (0.5)  
 16. Angus:       *((turns and walks away towards Chris))*  
 17. Teacher:     an' then you need to give him a chance to stop calling you  
 18.             that.  
 19.             (5.4) *((Angus walking towards Chris))*  
 20. Angus:       ° (x x x) (I don't) like: it ((to Chris))  
 21. Chris:       *((looks back at camera))* S::ORRY

As Except 2 shows above, the teacher then co-constructs the solicited intervention with Angus through a series of turns, incorporating questions and statements. A number of significant features display how the teacher positions herself as a non-participant in the conflict, and thus centralizes Angus' position to resolve the dispute himself. Immediately following Angus' explanation of how Chris' comment is a problem (i.e. because it wasn't 'nice'), the teacher responds with 'and did you tell him that?' (line 9). Note that she does not comment on his explanation. She does not display approval or disapproval or any particular stance to the object of the complaint (Du Bois, 2007). Through positioning herself as outside the conflict episode, and thus its resolution, she returns the authority to Angus, as one of the dispute participants. Another way in which this is done is through the teacher's use and emphasis of particular pronouns throughout the sequence (e.g. 'I', 'you', 'him' and 'me' in lines 13-14). The teacher draws attention to the respective roles that particular people hold in the situation. She does not align with his complaint, but rather demonstrates that since she was not a participant in the event – and Angus was – then *he* has the authority and agency to communicate his complaint to the other child directly. He is the primary agent.

Following the teacher's advice (lines 13-14), Angus responds by turning away and walking towards Chris (i.e. returning to the activity where the affront took place) (line 16). While at this point, he has not verbalized a response to the teacher's direction, his body language and the very act of walking away towards the other child, displays that he has accepted the return of authority. Evidence of this is hard in his approach and reprimand delivered to Chris. Angus is aligning with the teacher's prior turns through his actions. The teacher adds an instruction to give Chris a chance to 'stop calling you that' (lines 17-18). In this turn, she is providing additional guidance regarding what Angus needs to do in order to resume cooperative play after he has communicated his perspective or feelings to Chris. In this way, she is enabling Angus with an additional tool for resuming play with Chris, while ensuring that the responsibility of actively utilizing this tool resides with him.

Angus' complaint to Chris (line 20) is treated as a request for an apology. (We doubt the sincerity of the apology given the exaggerated intonation and glance towards the camera before orienting to Angus and saying 'sorry'). Angus treats this response as sufficient and he joins the ongoing play.



## Conclusion

The analysis of each episode has illustrated how early childhood teachers promote children's agency in the context of peer disputes, and more specifically, how conversational sequences and participants' reflexive orientation to one another enables agency. Episode 1 demonstrated how a teacher facilitated the collaborative resolution of the conflict through a group problem-solving discussion. The teacher achieved this by acknowledging and respecting children's prior turns and contributions; focusing on the task of resolving the conflict (rather than on the conflict itself); summarizing individual children's suggestions to the whole group, and using physical gestures and props to support understanding; presenting each child's suggestion as valid; setting up opportunities for children to discover other possible solutions themselves; framing teacher suggestions as hypothetical; prompting children to respond to each other's contributions or suggestions; and opening up multiple possibilities for all children to participate in the discussion. Episode 2 demonstrated how the teacher responded to a child's report of conflict with another child, by positioning herself outside of the conflict and the child as the primary agent. The teacher promoted the child's efficacy and agentic status by: asking leading questions that called the tellability of the child's reported problem into question; the use and emphasis of particular pronouns (e.g. 'I', 'you') to draw attention to the participants' roles in the dispute; providing guidance or direction for the child regarding how to communicate his perspective, and also how to create the opportunity to resume cooperative play.

The earlier review of the literature around teacher interventions and strategies underscored the facilitative role that teachers play in children's learning and development, especially in understanding one another's perspective in peer disputes. For example, Episode 1 illustrates how Piaget's (1932) concept of comradery manifests in an approach to conflict resolution that is collaborative, through techniques such as the use of collective pro-terms (e.g. 'what can *we* do to make this fair?') (Episode 1, Excerpt 3, line 36) to organize collective action (Butler, 2008).

Importantly, CA has enabled us to understand the very resources children and teachers use to achieve this collaborative action. Focusing on the sequential organization of the talk and showing how speakers orient to the force of the prior turn(s) has demonstrated a range of situated practices used by the teacher and children to co-construct the efficacy of the intervention, for example: using body language to display attention; emphasizing pronouns (e.g. 'we', 'you') to position participants' roles in the conflict resolution process; and emphasizing participants' names (e.g. 'Rebecca') to direct questions or turns to a particular child or to display acknowledgement of a child's prior turn.

The analysis draws on Goodwin and Goodwin's (2004) notion of participation frameworks, in which multiple parties reflexively construct actions that contribute to the unfolding of events, and Goodwin's (2007) exploration into the consequences of embodied participation for 'how participants shape each other as moral, social and cognitive actors' (p. 53). Existing research in CA in early childhood has focused primarily – and productively – on children's peer interactions (e.g. Butler, 2008; Evaldsson, 2007; Goodwin & Kyratzis, 2007); parent-child interactions (e.g. Filipi, 2009; Wootton, 1997) or in clinical contexts (e.g. Hutchby, 2007; Gardner & Forrester, 2010). The interactional space of early childhood classrooms (see for example Burdelski, 2009) deserves further attention to document and illustrate *how* teachers can build the very practices requisite for learning. Building on existing research in children's peer disputes (eg. Maynard,

1985, 1986; Goodwin, 1990, 2006; Church, 2009) this study illustrates how teachers can effectively facilitate children's agency in disputes by participating in a collaborative sequence of resolution.

The findings add to the work of DeVries and Zan (1994), Nucci and Weber (1995), and Macfarlane and Cartmel (2008), who argue that productive forms of intervention involve: respect for the children's rights to agency and choice; recognition that the conflict belongs to the children; encouragement for the children to take ownership; and a sense of belonging. Promisingly, our findings respond to tensions identified by other researchers between difficulties in balancing children's individuality and autonomy with other factors such as maintaining group cohesion and a climate of cooperation (Nucci & Weber, 1995; Paris & Lung, 2008) and intentional, teacher-initiated instruction (Oda & Mari, 2006). We have provided detailed examples of how teachers can facilitate children's agency and autonomy *through* the facilitation of group and pair cooperation.

This study provides support for arguments against the creation of dichotomies such as independence-interdependence (Bandura, 1997, 2001; Mosier & Rogoff, 2003; Rogoff, 2003; Killen, 1996). CA allows us to see how agency is facilitated by the teacher, or rather co-constructed by the teacher and children, as the children are able to align with the affordance of agency by taking up and enacting authority in these disputes. The idea that teachers *enable* children to enact agency, implies that teachers are positioned as having greater agentic status or power than children. This can be seen as problematic when our research is underpinned by the assumption that children are competent citizens, possessing the requisite skills to develop and assert their own agency and autonomy. However, the analysis of the turn-by-turn, sequential structure of talk has demonstrated that children actively 'take up' or accept opportunities presented to them. The teacher *and* the child, therefore, co-determine the effectiveness of teacher interventions or approaches to resolving disputes.

The present study has therefore demonstrated what can be achieved when teachers and children establish a 'culture of collaborative learning' (Nicolopoulou & Cole, 1993), in which teachers position themselves as facilitators, enabling children to align with their position as agents of their own learning and social worlds. Contrary to Schapiro's (1999) claim that "the condition of childhood is one in which the agent is not yet in a position to speak in her own voice because there is no voice which counts as hers" (p. 729), this study demonstrates that children do in fact have voices that count as their own, and that teachers, through their contributions to the organization of interactions, enable children's voices to be heard.

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**Appendix: CA transcription conventions** (see Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974)

.	Falling terminal contour
,	Falling-rising contour
?	Strongly rising contour
?,	Rising contour, stronger than a falling-rising and weaker than strongly rising contour
!	Empathic/animated utterance terminator
-	Abrupt halt
[ ]	Overlapping speech
=	Latching (contiguous stretches of talk)
(0.7)	Pause measured in tenths of a second
(.)	Pause timed less than 0.2 seconds
—	Stress on the word/syllable/sound
:	Lengthening of previous sound
CAPS	Increase in volume
◦◦	Decrease in volume
.hhh	Audible inhalation
( )	Uncertain words (best guess)
(( ))	Non-talk material e.g. quality of speech, or non-verbal actions of conversation participants