**A Sociocultural Analysis of Social interaction, and Collaboration** **within the Cooking Practices of Children**

**ABSTRACT**

This article applies sociocultural theorising as a tool through which to analyse children’s collaborative cooking practices through the key sociocultural concepts of ‘social interaction’, and ‘collaboration’ within a school cooking club.​The ‘every day’ activity of cooking is examined via field-notes gathered through participant observations, diary entries and semi-structured interviews with child and adult participants. The fieldwork sample included 18 participants aged 9-11 years of age and 2 adult participants. The sociocultural nature of the children’s learning during cooking practices was tracked over a 14 week period. Observed incidences of ‘situated learning’, ‘legitimate peripheral participation’, and ‘guided participation’ were tracked throughout the fieldwork period.

The analysis identifies the processes through which participants are able to contribute to and distribute shared knowledge to and through others. Through tracking the

collaborative learning processes and the contrasting pedagogical practices, the research identified the learning trajectory of the ‘newbies’ via legitimate peripheral participation (as observers and silent contributors), and how through fractionally increasing participation the newbies become main members (masters) of this community of practice.

The findings both confirm children’s collaborative cooking practices as a site through which social interaction and collaboration can be examined; whilst also highlighting the complexity of opposing pedagogical practices.

**Key Words:** Learning; Sociocultural; Participation; Social Interaction; Collaboration; Cooking practices

**INTRODUCTION**

This ethnographic study builds upon current understandings of sociocultural theory through an analysis of the collaborative cooking practices of children in a UK primary school. Historically, key concepts within sociocultural learning theory have been applied and interpreted in a wide array of approaches by theoreticians from various schools of thought. Rather than being purely pedagogical, the study is experimental and interconnected to the social world in which it is a part (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The study considers how the key sociocultural concepts of *social interaction* and *collaboration* facilitate children in their learning trajectory from that of being a novice (newbie) to cooking practices, to that of being a main participant (master) within this community of cooking practice. Vygotsky (1978) and Rogoff, (1995) both emphasise the importance of examining individual learning within and through the social world of children.

Taken into consideration is the ‘situativity’ of cooking activity as a context within which learning takes place and where learning and teaching combine as an essentially social process that is situated within, and shaped by, social and cultural contexts (Kirk & Macdonald 1998). The concept of guided participation (Rogoff, 1990) is consistent with Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development, where a child’s success is ensured when more experienced partners facilitate in moving the child’s through their zone of proximal development. In the context of collaborative cooking practices, guided participation provides the means to examine the implicit, distal (peripheral) and face to face social interaction; placing emphasis on the children’s engagement ‘as active participants in their own development’ and in everyday interaction (p.16).

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. How are children learning within the context of a cooking club?

2. In what way is the children’s learning facilitated (or not) within cooking practices?

3. What role does social interaction and collaboration play within cooking practices?

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The paper applies a sociocultural perspective to assist in the understanding of a phenomenon by showcasing the interdependence of social and individual learning; with the individual being inseparable from the social, cultural and historical elements of human activity (Rogoff and Chavajay, 1995). To this effect, emphasis is placed on the relations between people, actions, contexts, meanings, communities and cultural histories (Wertsch et al., 1995) as well as the application of appropriate cultural tools and artefacts (Robbins, 2005). This learning perspective introduced by Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky emphasised on the interrelated roles of the individual within the social world (Rogoff, 1995) by focusing on children’s participation. Vygotsky's (1978) theoretical framework provides an account of learning and development as a mediated process, which includes people (adults and children), as ‘precious’ resources for mediation (Thompson, 2013). Vygotsky’s suggestions has been adopted and transformed by social theorists who attempted to construct ‘accounts of the formation of the mind’ which to varying degrees acknowledge social, cultural and historical influences (Daniels, 2006). Not only does this approach direct attention towards an analysis of the meaning making within the cooking practices on the levels of the individual, interpersonal and community/cultural processes (Rogoff, 1995); but it also illuminates the relationship between the individual in the activity and the sociocultural and historical context (Wertsch et al., 1995) in which the activity occurs.

Lave and Wenger (1991) situate learning in trajectories of participation in the social world in which it takes on meaning as an inseparable aspect of social practice, with the notion of ‘apprenticeship’ synonymous to that of *‘situated learning’.* The concept of situated learning which is commonly understood as ‘learning in situ’ or learning by doing’ is too broad to articulate ‘learning [that] is an integral and [an] inseparable aspect of social practice’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991). ). While viewing learning as situated activity, Lave and Wenger identified a central defining characteristic, a process they call ‘Legitimate Peripheral Participation’ (p.29) a concept and context through which to examine the learning that takes place through ‘fractional’ participation (Bligh, 2014) that is, ‘a more encompassing process of being active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities' (Wenger, 1998, p.4). Legitimate peripheral participation is crucial to this interpretation of situated learning and indicates the kind of engagement the learner is involved in by participating in expert performances, where the term ‘expert’, ‘old timers’ and ‘masters’ (Lave and Wenger 1991) corresponds to mastery of knowledge and skill in a situated activity. The crucial aspect of this concept is that it views ‘participation as a way of learning – of both absorbing and being absorbed in – the culture of practice’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.95). It proposes that an extended period of legitimate peripherality will provide the learners with the opportunity to make the culture of practice their own. This corresponds with Renshaw’s (1992) perception of Vygotsky’s concept of appropriation which involves mastery of methods and activity. Edwards (2005, p.58) argues that in order to understand learning through participation in practices, one must examine the practices and what they ‘represent, allow and constrain’ together with the interactions that occur within them. This will enable an understanding of these interactions as well as how individuals adapt while they engage in practice (Edwards, 2005). Employing the analytical concepts of situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation within cooking practice provides insights into ways in which children learn about the work in the society that they live in (Hutchings, 1996) while they engage in the practices of their communities.

Rogoff (1990) emphasises Vygotsky’s (1978, p.121) thinking in not only questioning the notion that children’s cognitive development is a ‘solitary endeavour’; but in presenting learning (Rogoff, 1995) through the 3 planes of analysis, ‘apprenticeship, guided participation and participatory appropriation’. When referring to the social relations within particular contexts of learning, she presents children’s participation as a transformative cultural activity (Rogoff, 1995).

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

**APPROACH AND METHODS**

**Site and selection of participants**

Since the choice of location was important, a cooking club located within a primary school in Leeds was selected as the preferred site for the fieldwork to be carried out. A number of factors influenced the decision to carry out the study within this school. The duration of the cooking club in the primary school context lasted for six weeks per term and each session lasted between 2.5-3 hours on an evening. The cooking club was situated within the school building with a community room well equipped with workspaces, cooking tools and utensils to carry out the club activities. The club is organised and directed by one trained food educator and one primary school teacher and has been running since 2012 with 4 intakes held per year.

Two informal meetings with the food educators were conducted in order to understand how the club is organised and for the teachers to ask questions and clarification. This opportunity was also used to describe and explain the conceptual basis of the study and to exchange any ideas or issues that they may have. It was advised that the presence of another adult in the club made little difference to the teachers and children in activity as both were accustomed to having ‘an extra pair of hands’ from other teachers or parents at the end of the day. These discussions allowed the teachers to get better acquainted with the purpose of the study also helped build a social relationship amongst the adults prior to the commencement of the club.

Field-notes were collected throughout the first phase of study. Preliminary analysis of the field-notes (comprising in- depth reading and annotating) were aimed at addressing the study’s research questions. It was decided that a second phase of data was necessary in order to build upon the previous phase. The entire study was conducted over a period of 10 weeks, for duration of 2.5-3 hours one day a week.

**The research design including sample size**

Table 1: Elements of the Research design

**Ethical considerations**

The research adhered to the Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2004) which incorporates the moral principles and values of respect, competence, responsibility and integrity, as well as the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998. Ethical Approval for this study was granted by Leeds Metropolitan University Research Ethics Committee in January 2014, outlining participant observations, focus group interviews of children and individual interviews with teachers as a part of the research process. An Enhanced Criminal Record Bureau clearance was obtained prior to the start of the research.

**Ethnography – The chosen research methodology**

The rational for choosing ethnography as a research methodology for this study emerged as a result of seeking a way to ‘immerse’ in settings that would give rise to a rich understanding of social action and ‘reality’ as it is experienced by children (Reeves et al., 2008). From an epistemological perspective, the classical ethnographer gains a native’s view of his or her own world by spending considerable time in that world. ‘Ethnographers believe that through systematic observation they may come to identify recurring patterns of human behaviour and social activity’ (Aubrey et al., 2000, p.111). Evidence of these aspects of ethnography is reflected in the subsequent events that unfolded during the fieldwork. In order to become familiar with the sociocultural dynamics within the school’s cooking club, it was necessary to be a part its activities. This included observing; interacting with the children, participating in the cooking activities within the physical environment that they occupied.

Since a sociocultural perspective was adopted throughout this study, the objective was to gain a ‘richer and more immediately useful data’ (Fleer et al., 2004, p.184) on the children’s learning that assumes meaning of reality as experienced by the children in the cooking club. In summary, to provide an explanatory account of the children’s learning experiences.

Prior ethnographic studies with children influenced the decision to conduct this research ethnographically. Christensen (2004) employed ethnography in a study that focussed on children’s influence on family decision-making during food buying. The research in the cooking club followed Hamersley’s (1990) view of the ethnographic processes that involved studying behaviours in everyday contexts (as opposed to experimental conditions) and gathering data from a range of sources. This involved focusing on a single setting or small group (i.e. the cooking club) so as to interpret the meanings and functions of human actions through thick descriptions and explanations in relation to theory. Observations and informal conversations were undertaken spontaneously, with no prior defined plan.

**Ethnographic Methods**

The ethnographic methods provided the children with a more direct voice and a part in field-note collection that is not usually possible in experimental studies or surveys (Prout and James, 1990). Furthermore, with the inclusion of two participant groups, the interpretation of two sociocultural concepts and a multi-layered analysis ensured the triangulation and validation of this study.

* ***Participant Observations***

The decision to employ the research instrument of participant observation formed a major element in this study and enabled access to the ‘reality’ of what was taking place in the cooking club. The aim was to capture as much of the phenomenon as possible within the field and to speculate as little as possible. Observations entailed weekly visits to the school’s cooking club during both phases of the study in April and May 2014 and November and December 2014. Cooking sessions commenced after school and lasted between 2.5-3 hours over a period of 10 weeks. The participants (children and the food educators) practices and the events circling the activities, including interactions between the participants, tools and artefacts were all observed. In addition to developing ongoing ‘working’ relationships with the informants, the role of participant-as-observer facilitated in participation with the children’s cooking activities.

Spradley’s (1980) three step observational method was followed while observing the events in the cooking club: descriptive, focussed and selective. Descriptive observations included detailed notes that were made to describe the setting in which the cooking club was being conducted, the characteristics of children and the adults and included what was seen and heard. The goal was to record as much information as possible without directing attention to one particular participant, situation or event but instead, as Spradley (1980) suggests, with a general question, ‘What is going on here?’. Descriptive observations ‘begin with observing everything in the setting, the process quickly moves to one of organizing observed phenomenon into categories for interpretive purposes, the first phase of analysis’ (Whitehead, 2005, p.15). They provided a background guide to further observations where more focussed observations were made.

During the observations a conscious effort was made to try and relate the research questions to what was being observed. The observations were continuous until a feeling of ‘theoretical saturation’ was achieved, that is when the generic features of new findings consistently replace earlier ones’ (Alder and Alder, 1998, p.87).

* ***Field Notes***

Informed by guidelines (Bernard, 1994), large notebooks were maintained and these served as a logbook, diary and field notes book. Thoughts, reactions and questions were maintained in the diary section of the book and aided in interpreting the field notes. These personal notes made aware personal biases that were held and the extent in which they influenced the decisions she made.

The log book section of the book was a running account of what was observed during field visits. Prior to each visit notes were made on one side indicating what had been planned to do during that visit to the school, while the facing page were notes of what was actually done during that visit. As the fieldwork progressed, this section of the book contained mini analytic notes and questions that needed to be further explored. Key information gathered during subsequent meetings with the headteacher and informal chats with the parents of the children in the cooking club were also documented in the logbook.

The field note section of the book section recorded descriptions of the observations in the settings. These detailed notes were first analysed at the end of the day to identify any issues or themes that were arising from the observational data and were later looked into in detail on the days between each field visit. During this time issues, connections, identified patterns and relationships were reflected upon. The documenting of observations in the form of field notes was important in order to make sense and interpret what was taking place with the children and the adults in the cooking club.

* ***Interviews***

In this study individual interviews were conducted with the adult participants and focus group interviews were held with the children. All the interviews were undertaken within the school and ranged between 30-45mins in length. Before the interviews with the adults and the children, informed consent was reconfirmed and confidentiality and anonymity were explained. Prior to beginning the group interview, permission to record the interview was once again sought and explained to the children why it was necessary to do so. The children who were particularly shy or who raised concerns earlier about having a voice recorder during the interviews were once again reassured that they could write down their responses if that felt more comfortable in doing so. Recording the interviews was invaluable as it allowed full attention to be given to the conversation. It also improved the accuracy of the data collected and ensured that no important part of the interview was missed out.

All aspects of the research questions were addressed through the interview techniques. For example, it was not possible to observe participants’ past actions, feelings, thoughts or intentions. Likewise, it was not possible to observe the participant’s previous experiences that related to how they learned to cook as children or what meaning was attached to that experience. Furthermore observations of the children and adults in the club did not cast light on why they acted or made certain decisions and hence in addition to conducting observations, it was necessary to conduct interviews with the purpose of entering into the participants ‘perspective’ (Patton, 1990, p.278) and in this way to try and learn about their experiences, why and in what ways they do what they do, and how they achieve their goals.

* ***Focus Group Interviews with children***

The study used focus group interviews as opposed to individual interviews with the children.

While conducting a study on children’s interpretations on food, Elliot (2009) explains how focus group interviews have been found to help understand what children think and why, and is recommended as an ideal research method for exploratory work on children’s perspectives on food and its meaning. The focus group interview with the children from the cooking club lasted for approximately 30-45mins and was conducted in the presence of the food educator. Taking the role of facilitator encouraged discussion rather than leading it. In order to make the children feel comfortable and at ease, she seated herself with the children and proceeded to ask for volunteers to test whether the voice recorder was working as it should. This involved recording small bits of conversations and allowing the children to listen to themselves speaking on the appliance. Ice-breakers as such, that were used during these warm up sessions set the stage for later involvement (Hennessy and Heary, 2005). The food educator who was present occasionally asked supplementary questions to elicit views and prompt discussions within the group. This was a useful exercise as it facilitated in the observation of the interview process from an alternative perspective which would not be possible as the sole interviewer. There were instances when the children made jokes and told of experiences and events that were not linked to the topic or questions; however these conversations were carefully brought back to the focused topic - sometimes by the children.

Although the group interviews with the children had a number of advantages it revealed certain disadvantages in this study. One such example was when the children were asked if learning to cook in school was different from learning to cook at home, the discussion was led by two children who made a number of valid points however their persuasive dialogue lead to a few other children following what the two children had said instead of revealing their own perceptions. ‘…hmm yes I was going to say the same as Sofie Miss. …it’s different because *we* have recipes and people who teach *us* and stand at *our* table but at home *we* all are used to *our* kitchen’s’. Another limitation faced was that the data produced from the focus group interviews was not an orderly arrangement. The children were at intervals exchanging their views concurrently and while replaying the recording it was at times difficult to ascertain the name of the child who was speaking in the group. This made the data analysis more time consuming. To overcome this, a conscious effort was made to use the child’s name during probing or to thank the child using his/her name for their comment.

**Data Analysis**

The study uses a theoretical thematic analysis that draws upon its key concepts. The main objective of using thematic analysis in this study was to systematically categorise the interpersonal learning that takes place between children while they observe and participate with their peers and more skilled members of their society within this specific context; cooking practices. One of the main advantages of using thematic analysis within this study is that it is theoretically-flexible, which means that it can be used within different frameworks and to answer different types of research questions especially when one is investigating an under-researched area (such as cooking practice) (Braun and Clark, 2006).

The analysis of the data was performed in 4 stages.

1. Inductive Thematic Analysis - Data Reduction into Codes

2. Conceptual Summary of Main Participants

3. Generation of Themes

4. Interpretation and Testing against Sociocultural Theory

The first stage of analysis was inductive, involving a close reading and detailed coding of data in order to capture the content. However, this coding is thematic in that it goes beyond marking and counting the explicit use of words or phrases (Guest, et al., 2012) to focus on identifying and describing ideas that are both implicit and explicit within the data.. All data (interview, transcripts, observations and field notes) were coded in this way, resulting in initial codes. Each code was then reviewed, defined and considered in relation to the literature. This involved associating them to aspects of the key concepts and then linking them to the raw data as summary markers for later analysis. This process is considered a very effective approach to capture the complexities of meaning within a textual data set (Guest et al., 2012).

The second stage involved generating a Conceptual Summary of Main Participants focusing on six core participants and 4 individual reports that give a narrative account of each child’s learning journey and two accounts provided by the adults who facilitated the cooking club. These analytic summaries were derived by drawing upon observations and interviews of the participants in the cooking club and conversations with the parent/carer’s at the end of the sessions. The accounts of the four children were chosen as the core samples because these participants had attended all sessions of the cooking club, including two who took part in both phase one and phase two of the fieldwork. The objective was to provide a ‘real time’ situated context that illuminated the interpersonal learning process between the children within the school’s cooking club and the narrative accounts presented a conceptual summary of the learning journeys of the core participants within this study.

The third stage involved refining the conceptual summaries and linking them to the initial codes in order to prioritise the concepts and identify those that will be looked considered in more detail. Essentially as Braun and Clark (2006) propose, the codes were analysed in order to determine how they may combine and form and overarching themes. Once arranged into potential themes, coded data segments were assembled within these identified themes. Codes derived from the conceptual accounts the data were then reviewed and compared in order to establish which themes are recurring, how they fit together and the overall story they tell about the data (Braun and Clark, 2006)

In the fourth phase, sociocultural theorising (Vygotsky, 1978) was used to interpret the themes that were derived in order to understand learning within the social context of cooking practice that took place within a participatory framework. A written interpretation of each theme was conducted along with taking into account how the theme fits in the overall study in relation to the research questions. Theoretical concepts of situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and guided participation (Rogoff, 1990) were used and to ‘test out’ and understand the learning that constituted the participants experiences while engaging in cooking practice.

Figure 2: The process of Data Analysis

* **Social Interaction**

An important theme identified in this study was the significant social interaction between the children and the adults in the cooking club and its effect on learning. At the outset, there were a number of reasons why the children decided to join the cooking club. Essentially what attracted them was that they were provided with the opportunity to learn a range of mature activities and do ‘real cooking’ which was typical of what they would do in a ‘real kitchen’. The chance to work alongside their teachers by using the equipment that adults use in the kitchen was also appealing. An important part of their participation was their opportunity to meet, interact and work alongside other children while they are engaged in the activity. Yasmin explains it this way

The best thing about learning in the cooking club is you are with all your friends and you are also cooking with them. You can’t do this at home, you just can’t say come to my house I’m going to cook something. Yes you could invite them over but it’s a lot of hassle. Here you have your friends and you are learning to cook different things that you haven’t made with them. That’s fun!

Children also derive motivation as they interact and engage with one another. Lave and Wenger (1991) explain how membership in a community of practice arouses newcomers’ desires to achieve higher levels of knowledge and participation. In this sense, acceptance by and interaction with other members of the community, makes learning legitimate and of value from the point of view of the learner. (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.110)

Some children who had never cooked before expressed the importance of working alongside more experienced children in order to make it easier for them. Cara describes how interacting with her partner nurtured her independent skills, ‘When I was draining the tuna, I couldn’t do it until I saw how Meera was doing it and, when she showed me how I tried the same, it worked’. This interaction between learners and more experienced members is a major element of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Being involved with others in making choices and decisions and by feeling in control made children confident enough to explore and take risks thereby directing their own learning. Communicating with their partners or other members of the group, engaging in activities like ‘doing the washing and drying up’ or ‘lining up the tables and chairs’ provided the children with rich social interaction and participation in the practices of the cooking club. On occasions when there was a longer wait while food is baked, adults and the children spent time talking to each other outside the community room and in the open spaces of the school. Conversations that took place here did not focus on instructing the children about the ongoing activity but rather comprised of narratives that recounted everyday events or events of past experiences that the children or the adults were personally involved in or that consisted of stories of family or tradition. Evidence of meaningful and transformative learning has shown to emerge from social interaction and participation in social practice in physical and social environment as such (Vygotsky, 1978; Lave and Wenger, 1991).

In addition to learning how to perform new activities in the club the children valued their ongoing relationship with other children in the club. Yasmin’s account of how working alongside her peers within the club made her membership in the club meaningful and relevant.

I’m used to cooking alone at our house but I love coming to the cooking club. When we come here its more fun, it feels like ‘real cooking’. We can actually make it more fun than home instead of baking and cooking by yourself. Here too you are learning how to cook but you don’t want to just keep measuring, pouring and mixing, it’s nice to do other stuff with your friends while cooking and then you can go back and practice the same when you are alone in your kitchen.

Learning from a sociocultural perspective is essentially social rather than individual in nature, where interaction constitutes learning (Lantolf and Pavlenko, 1995). Similarly as advocated by sociocultural theories, learning in the cooking club is not just an acquision of skills and knowledge (Lave and Wenger, 1991) but demonstrates how learning occurs through social interaction. The food educators intentionally structure children’s participation with opportunities for them to learn and interact within the club. By promoting talk and interaction among the children, the food educators make mutual engagement possible and this is considered an essential component to any practice (Wenger 1998). As the children interact with others who are engaged in the activities of the cooking club they make connections and try to work out what they see taking place in those activities. Likewise, Wenger (1998) affirms that mutual engagement draws on what we do and what we know, as well as the ability to connect with what we don’t do and what we don’t know and results in relations that reflect the full complexity of doing things together through interaction. Vygotsky (1978) proposed that teachers use cooperative learning exercises to help less competent children develop with the help of more skilful peers within the zone of proximal development. In a sociocultural context, social interaction through peers evidences the zone of proximal development and serves as an effective tool through which children can develop skills and learning strategies (Crawford, 1996). The children in the cooking club are ‘buddied’ with other partners so that they can interact with and support each other. They co construct learning as they negotiate meaning through social interaction. Saara explains this by saying

In our school we encourage parents to be involved in the child’s education and learning in the cooking club is no exception as it is a hands - on fun environment where parents/carers can come and work alongside and support their children. This is not just fun for children but it develops collaboration, communication, concentration, independence and imagination.

Although social interaction is evident throughout the children’s learning within the club, some children appear as less confident as the others. This is illustrated in the following example taken from observational notes of Kevin and Andrew’s close interpersonal involvement in the task they have been given. ‘While trying to cut and shape their pastries Kevin and Andrew laugh through the whole process. They continue to follow the steps in their recipe sheets but the shape doesn’t seem to be turning out quite like the others. Unlike some of the other children Kevin and Andrew don’t seem to want to compete with any of the children in the group and are not looking out for any tips or ideas to fix they dish. They are clumsy in their methods with Andrew dropping his fork a number of times on the floor. Their workspace is probably the least tidy with flour all over the table, and bits of filling on their clothes; however, they seem to be the very involved in their task. Kevin and Andrew’s conversation while handling the pastry is focussed on the task they have been given; to roll out the pastry to the desired size, put the chicken stuffing to one side, then fold over, seal and brush it with egg wash’.

Kevin: ‘I don’t think this going to work. It’s breaking off’ laughs ‘hold it on this side’ laughs

Andrew: ‘Did she say thick or thin?’ giggles ‘No no don’t do that just press it lightly or your finger will go through’. Giggles.

Kevin: ‘I didn’t hear, thick I think. Just press it down and put two spoons of it inside’ laughs ‘I’m not eating this’ ‘Do it to the side’ giggles

Andrew: ‘When do we put in the egg? Kevin you ask Miss’. Giggles

Kevin: ‘Look in the recipe’

Andrew: You read it out. You do it now and I’ll read it. There I think we have finished. Look at Sofie’s table’ giggles ‘look at how big she has made it, it’s going to explode in the oven’ laughs. ‘Miss, do you want our trays?’

Lave and Wenger (2003) argue that learning is not about acquiring a structure; it is not about something that individuals do or has a beginning and an end. They suggest that it is best separated from the rest of our activities; and that it is the result of looking closely at everyday activity. It is clear that ‘learning is ubiquitous in ongoing activity, though often unrecognized as such’ (Lave 1993: 5). Kirschner (2006) points out that social relationships change the way knowledge is created and perceived. Although Kevin and Andrew possessed the same skill level when it came to food preparation (bake with their mothers once in a while and don’t have real inclination or keen interest in cooking) their engagement and interactions while being partnered together although unconventional, enabled the construction of knowledge through problem solving and shared meaning.

* **Collaboration**

This theme focusses on the deliberate pairing of children by the teachers within the cooking club in order for them to have an opportunity to learn from each other through collaboration. Saara considered the interaction of the children with the partners they are buddied with, an essential way in which children learn a number of different things and not just how to cook. ‘Together children try to make sense of the actions of their partners and this helps them in their own knowledge and understanding. Such an arrangement is particularly useful when they are paired up in our school’s cooking club’. This approach is largely grounded in Vygotsky’s (1978) theoretical perspective that affirms working with a more capable person appropriates personal development. While focussing on a child partnered with another, Vygotsky (1978) made two important claims. He argued that learning is first mediated on a social level between the child and other people within his/her environment, and is then internalised by the child on an individual level. Secondly, learning on a social level with less experienced persons will involve mentoring provided by more knowledgeable persons (adults or peers) who are engaged in the activity through a process of guidance or collaboration (Lin, 2015). From this perspective, learning through collaboration within the cooking club aims at social interaction among the children, their partners and teachers and helps the learner advance through the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD according to Vygotsky, (1978, p.86) is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance of more capable peers.).

Below is an illustration of a child learning through collaboration within the cooking club and as a result advancing through the ZPD

**19th May 2014 Observation Note 1:**

Today the children were asked to follow the recipe sheets that are given to them. The aim is to offer minimum instructions and to allow children to create the dish on their own by using the recipe sheets provided, talking to their peers and the partners who they are paired up with. They are encouraged to use their own ideas and experiences too and if needed to ask for support from the staff. Yasmin and Kelly are working together today. Yasmin reads the instructions from the sheet and then passes it to Kelly. The sheet say’s ‘mix the flour and butter until they resemble breadcrumbs’.

Kelly reads the sheet and looks around other tables to make sense of what it means to ‘resemble breadcrumbs’

Yasmin: ‘Rub it till it makes breadcrumbs’

Kelly: ‘Do you want to do this or should I?’

Yasmin: ‘You do it’.

Kelly: ‘So we mix the butter with the flour?’

She continues to mix it using a wooden spatula. After a few mins Kelly is not so sure if the flour has turned out the way it was meant to be so looks at Yasmin uncertainly.

Yasmin: ‘Can I show you? You need to mix it and keep rubbing it till it makes breadcrumbs’

Yasmin empties half of the mixture from the bowl into smaller bowl and continues to mix small quantities with her fingertips. She talks out loud to explain what she is doing and what result she is hoping to get while Kelly watches.

Yasmin: ‘You have to mix until there are no lumps of butter left and the flour gets rough. I need some more lumps of butter from your bowl because this is still like a smooth powder, can you put in 2 spoonful’s please’

Pointing to the mixture and showing gestures while she continues to mix, Yasmin glances at Kelly to see if she has understood. Kelly then takes her bowl and tries to copy what Yasmin is doing. During the process Yasmin corrects Kelly by showing her the correct way to do it.

Yasmin: ‘Take small amounts not so big then you will be able to mix the butter into it and try to use all your fingers like this. Yes that’s the way’

From the above it can be seen that when Kelly tried to work independently without Yasmin’s help she was unable to execute the task. i.e. create a breadcrumb consistency with the flour and the butter. In contrast with Yasmin’s help Kelly’s potential increased as she was able to do more things. She tried to figure out what she is supposed to do using a combination of things: Watching by paying silent attention, listening to Yasmin while she spoke by either giving instructions or plainly commenting while she worked and coordinating with Yasmin by sharing work. The concept of ZPD highlighted the interdependence between both children and the social process in co-constructing knowledge in the cooking club. Working in collaboration created the opportunity for Kelly to achieve her learning goals by actively communicating with Yasmin thereby expanding her own understanding of the task.

Learning through collaboration within the cooking club illuminated the relationship between social interaction among the children, their partners and teachers within the cooking club and their subsequent achievement of their task.

The collaborative nature of the cooking club sessions did not apply just to the children and adults within the club but extended to the parents and teachers that occasionally partake in the activities of the club. The intention was to promote learning, support the group and build on each other’s efforts. It allowed the children to examine various points of view, new ideas and information, different approaches while they talk, question and arrange their work that in turn helped them make meaning and execute the activity at hand.

While learning through collaboration maximised the opportunity for the participants to interact and collaborate with one another as they all worked towards a common learning goal, a few possible barriers to collaborative learning were identified during the analysis of the data within the club. In order to keep the children on the task the teachers in the club used a number of verbal instructions while they communicated with the children. The manner in which their method of instruction affected collaborated learning has identified and documented below.

**09th June 2014 Observational Note 1:**

Mehnaz calls out, ‘Talk less and work more. No talking while cooking and keep referring to your recipe sheet’ She then walks around the room looking for children who need help and then comes to Cara and Sarah’s table to see if they are doing fine. Mehnaz silently stands beside them to see how they are getting on with making the kebab mix. Both girls stop talking to each other and follow the recipe sheet with Cara mixing the ingredients and while Sarah drops the ingredients on my one into the mixing bowl. Once the mixture is ready Sarah and Cara take small quantities and try to shape them into kebabs as seen during the demonstration. ‘Let me show you how to do it’ says Mehnaz and starts to shape one. Both girls watch quietly and once she is done they try a second time to shape it the way Mehnaz showed them.

**09th June 2014 Observational Note 2:**

On another table Anna and Kelly talk to each other about the shape and negotiate among them about what is a good size.

Anna: ‘I think we can make more instead of just four. It’s breaking up and not staying round’.

Kelly ‘I've got 10 people in my house I'm going to make some for my family’

Anna: ‘Then they need to be smaller’

Kelly: ‘Squeeze it harder, it won’t break’

As observed in the above examples, both pairs of children were given the same task to complete which resulted in the children successfully accomplishing the task however, since the study is placed within a sociocultural framework it is important to examine both examples within a Vygotskian framework. In the first note, it can be seen how the manner in which the More Knowledgeable Other, MKO (Vygotsky, 1978) facilitated or directed the process of learning impacted the final outcome. When the Mehnaz was didactic, Sarah and Cara found it difficult to work in collaboration. Both of them had to rely on her directives and found it difficult to mediate their own learning in the way in which Anna and Kelly did. The method of teaching impacted their method of learning resulting in Sarah and Cara copying the exact shape of Mehnaz’s kebab. When the interpersonal learning element had diminished both Sarah and Cara were unable to express their ideas and thoughts, listen to each other in order to look for answers to the problems they faced or even create new ideas. All these elements are crucial in constructing knowledge through social interaction and collaboration (Vygotsky, 1978 and Wang 2008). Mehnaz expected both the girls to perform under her directions and any suggestions that were made were evaluated as a test of their knowledge as opposed to their contribution to the task.

Whereas in the second note, Anna being the more capable peer treated Kelly as a responsible contributor to the work they were doing together. Her suggestion of ‘squeeze it harder’ was a crucial input in order for the kebab’s to keep its shape and by taking on that suggestion Kelly was able to lead the task as the activity proceeded. This facilitative approach helped them ‘make sense’ of experiences in relation to real world events (Gregory, 2002) and confirmed that the greater the extent to which partners are involved in the task, treat it as a joint endeavour, and come to a shared understanding, the more likely will children learn (Hogan and Tudge, 1999).

**Conclusion**

This ethnographic study examined the learning that occurs through a participatory framework (Hanks, 1991) in an ‘every day familiar’ activity within a UK primary school cooking club. Employing ethnographic methods not only facilitated the unfolding of children’s meaning making within and through cooking practices but also aided in conceptualising the learning within the sociocultural framework. Analysing the practices through a sociocultural lens revealed how children contributed and distributed new ways of knowing as a shared activity. The significance of social interaction and collaboration was revealed as they move from participating at the periphery as new members of the cooking club to main participants and through their ‘growing involvement’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.36) when gaining new understanding within and through the cooking club. Although most of the children learnt to mediate their own and others learning; key samples of field-notes reveal that some children who are taught didactically (as opposed to facilitative teaching) may appear as unwilling or unable to learn collaboratively. Instead they appear as compelled to follow the prescriptive instructions of the didactic teacher. The findings provide a unique opportunity to build upon current understandings of sociocultural learning theory that may have pedagogical implications across participative engagement settings.

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