The Silent Experiences of Young Bilingual Learners
A Sociocultural Study into the Silent Period
Caroline Bligh
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Many teachers are increasingly concerned with how to best support the learning of the rising numbers of bilingual learners in schools – particularly those children who are new to English and therefore cannot yet communicate with the teacher or their peers in their first language – during the silent period.

This book offers an alternative insight to that which is most commonly available to teachers and researchers, as instead of examining language acquisition purely from a linguistic approach; it explores the learning that is occurring through a sociocultural lens and even more significantly, from the young child’s perspective – the worm’s eye view.

Investigated through the experiences of young bilingual learners allows the reader to make sense of the making meaning that occurs when the child cannot make sense of his/her new ‘world’; nor communicate verbally in the language of instruction in the classroom. Remarkably, learning through the silent period is revealed as both complex and ‘messy’ as the bilingual child mediates his or her own learning through a synthesis of alternative learning pathways.

The silent period is presented as a crucial time for learning; distributed through a synthesis of close observation, intense listening and most significantly copying the practices of others. Throughout the silent period the children are not only seen to be learning but also contributing to the classroom practices.

The book not only initiates new understandings of second language learning, but also offers creative ideas on how to raise the achievement of children who are learning English as an additional language.
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Dedicated to my late mother, for her tenacity and devotion – no matter what.
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CHAPTER 1

PRIMING THE CANVAS

At 8.30 a.m. when I first arrived at Suki’s house, I was met at the door by a very different girl from the four-and-a-half-year-old girl (of Japanese heritage) that I had encountered in school. ‘Suki’ appeared at her door as animated and smiling. She immediately greeted me by jumping up and down, saying excitedly, ‘Mrs Bligh, Mrs Bligh!’ She held my hand and guided me quickly through the hall. Suki’s mother welcomed me in, opened the door to the lounge and offered me a seat … I found it hard to believe that Suki (who was now singing happily in her mother tongue) was the same young girl who would remain ‘motionless’ and silent in my reception class. She brought me her school reading book, sat next to me, and attempted to read it to me in English.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE SILENT PERIOD

The purpose in writing this book is to take the reader on a journey which explores how two distinct ‘worlds’ become inextricably interconnected through the lived experiences of young bilingual learners. One world is represented through the experiences of the white monolingual teacher working in an English speaking classroom and the other is that of the young bilingual learner who has yet to negotiate his/her way through the new and unfamiliar ‘world’ of the educational setting. As a former teacher myself I understand well the practices of the English speaking classroom; but (like many other practising teachers) I initially had little understanding of the trials and tribulations encountered on a daily basis by young bilingual learners as they attempt to negotiate their learning trajectory without their spoken language being understood by others in the early years setting – when disengaged from there spoken mother tongue.

In order to unravel the children’s unspoken experiences, I observed the social engagement of young bilingual learners in early years settings, listened to the reflective narratives of bilingual adults and recorded the accounts of monolingual practitioners over a period of three years. Through the interweaving of observational techniques such as ‘gaze following’ with reflective narratives and auto-ethnographic reflections this book retraces the implications of the tentative ‘steps’ taken by the young bilingual learners in their initial attempts at making meaning and reveals the lived experiences of several children including those of ‘Suki’ and ‘Adyta’ in a new and brighter light.

Sociocultural theorising enabled an examination into how these young bilingual learners attempted to make new ways of knowing through their increasing interactions both as agentive social actors with others and through others. Applying
a sociocultural lens to this investigation provided a means through which to interpret the children’s contributions to learning through silent participation.

Sociocultural theorising assists in walking the reader through a distinctive period in a young bilingual learner’s life world – a time of negotiation, discovery and conflicting tensions. It is called the ‘silent period’. Not every young bilingual learner encounters a silent period because not every child invests many of their hours, days, weeks and years in an environment where their mother tongue may be disregarded. The silent period refers to a specific time in a young bilingual learner’s life-world when, on entering an early years setting in England, the language of discourse and instruction (English) is not understood.

Both bilingualism and multilingualism are daily features of many societies, with more bilingual people (here defined as those using two or more languages) in the world than there are monolingual. As defined by Hall (2001) bilingualism refers, ‘to pupils who live in two languages, who have access to, or need to use, two or more languages at home and at school. It does not mean that they have fluency in both languages or that they are competent and literate in both languages’ (p. 5).

The terms ‘silent, young bilingual learner’ and ‘emergent bilingual learner’ refer to a young child between the ages of three and six years of age who is in the first (non-verbal) stage of learning English as a new and additional spoken language within and beyond an early years educational setting in England.

Although there is much conflicting information regarding both the acceptable length of time regarding a young bilingual learner’s ‘silent period’ or ‘silent phase’, many researchers (Clarke, 1996; Tabors, 1997) regard Suki and Adyta’s experiences of passing through the silent period as a normal stage in additional language acquisition. It is suggested by Tabors (1997) that silence is chosen because the bilingual learner prefers to communicate non-verbally. Saville-Troike’s study into private speech described this period as ‘linguistic development that has gone underground’ (1988, p. 568) or, if using private speech (speaking only to themselves), ‘social speech that has turned inward’ (Saville-Troike, 1988, p. 570).

Many factors may or may not have an effect upon the speed at which a child passes through the silent period, including the consequences of psychological withdrawal or an interruption in the child’s expected ‘language acquisition processes’ (Parke & Drury, 2001). Kagan (1989) suggests that children who are temperamentally inhibited will be more cautious, less sociable and perhaps less willing to try; they may be fearful (with no one to share their mother tongue) of making a mistake, therefore prolonging the transition through the silent period.

For instance Mills’ (2004) study, focuses on women and families of Pakistani heritage, the use of ‘silence’ is explored, ‘as a phenomenon [that] has been viewed in the context of the exercise of power between dominant and subordinate groups … and the ways in which the oral contributions of the “muted group” are excluded, constrained or devalued’ (Mills, 2004, abstract).

Whereas Drury (2007) delivers a powerful and agentive perspective on the ‘silent period’, referring to it as a period of self assertion, as can be seen, ‘when analysing the strategies Nazma uses at school, we see her inside her shell. She
clings to the powerful strategy of silence when she is with nursery staff and other children’ (Drury, 2007, p. 73).

A LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE ON THE SILENT PERIOD

I am not a linguist. I approach this study from the position of an educator whose motivation is to unravel the intricacies of bilingual learning through the silent period via a sociocultural exploration. However, to succeed in this quest I willingly hold the linguist’s hand for part of the journey.

Applied linguistics (Cook, 2010) focuses predominantly on the scientific study of how people acquire new language(s) and how best to teach English as second language acquisition [SLA]. To accomplish this task, psychological models of language and language processing are commonly drawn upon. SLA researchers commonly refer to the child’s mother tongue (the preferred spoken language from infancy) as her/his first language (L1) and the new language to be learnt as the second language (L2).

The linguist Stephen Krashen (1985, cited in Spyropoulou, 2008) refers to the silent period as the pre-production stage of SLA when a second language learner [SLL] is ‘unable or unwilling’ to speak in her/his developing second language. Krashen suggests that SLLs need time to listen to others talk, to digest what they hear, to develop receptive vocabulary, and to observe others’ actions (Krashen, 1985, cited in Spyropoulou, 2008). It would appear that Krashen also considers the silent period as a period of ‘reduced output’ when suggesting how to ‘beat it’ – albeit still necessitating ‘first language’ (mother tongue) thinking.

Although Clarke (1997, 2002, 2009) advises that the silent period may be considered as prolonged if it lasts more than one month, from my own experience and observations to date, I have found that it often lasts much longer. Indeed, for a small but significant proportion of young bilingual learners the silent period may last for more than six months and sometimes over a year.

Gibbons’ (2006) study implies that the silent period need not last longer than a month if a child is under no pressure to talk. Gibbons (2006) also suggests that this ‘pre-verbal stage’ is a period of ‘silent incomprehension’ rather than language acquisition processes. As a result, Gibbons (2006) not only infers that initial silence is undesirable, but also suggests that the adoption of early routines and patterns might support transition through the silent stage of second language acquisition.

As a linguistic ethnographer Saville-Troike (1988), raised a concern that language learning in schools is commonly expected to be reified through either visible evidence (such as writing on paper) or auditory (through the spoken word) as proof of its acquisition. Responding to Saville-Troike’s issue, the sociolinguist Snyder Ohta (2001, p. 12) suggested that the ‘seemingly silent learner is neither passive nor disengaged, but is involved in an intrapersonal interactive process’.

Of significance to this study is that a sociocultural perspective articulates the silent period in terms of the child actively participating through her/his inner thoughts – deep in her/his mind due to the spoken mother tongue turning inwards
(Vygotsky, 1986, pp. 249-252) through internalisation of the spoken word. In Vygotsky’s view (Fernyhough & Fradley, 2005, p. 3), ‘private speech represents a stage in the gradual internalisation of interpersonal linguistic exchanges whose final ontogenetic destination is inner speech, or verbal thought’ [my emphasis].

In contrast, the linguist McCafferty (1994) states that private speech serves many functions, classifying them into four categories which are metacognitive and cognitive functions, attentional processes, social functions and affective functions. These categories are similar to the ‘strands’ described by Bialystok (1990) and McDonough (1995).

However, although the linguists Lantolf and Appel agree (Lantolf, 2000; Appel & Lantolf, 1994) that private speech serves as a means to communicate and guide learners’ thinking, it is also assumed that bilingual learners only engage in private speech when a new activity appears either too difficult, or is too demanding.

In contrast the linguistic perspective on the silent period determines this phase as the gaining of language competencies, without recognition of the multitude of shared learning practices that might (or might not) overlap and/or run in parallel to each other. A sociocultural approach to bilingual learning both recognises and embraces these complexities.

Consequently, the linguistic perspective appears to partly obscure the full picture of the silent period due to its framing within demarcated parameters.

SUKI’S SILENCE

Suki’s story guides the reader through this enquiry. Suki (five years of age and of Japanese heritage) is the first of six central characters (the research participants) within the research, including Anyor, Adyta, Tamsin, Kimoto, Nicole and myself who will be introduced as the story progresses.

In 2005, whilst teaching a reception class in Leeds, I first encountered a five-year-old girl of Japanese heritage called Suki. She neither spoke in class, nor in the day nursery¹ which she had been attending for two years previously. My perception of Suki at that time was that of a ‘bewildered’ child, whose facial expression appeared to remain ‘fixed’ and unsmiling at all times. Suki’s prolonged period of silence gave rise to the research question which has driven this exploration into the silent experiences of a young bilingual learner:

What were Suki’s experiences during this prolonged period of silence?

At that time I was initially concerned that Suki’s prolonged period of silence might be restricting her participation in the early years practices and position her as an ‘outsider’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to participation. For this reason I referred her to the Speech and Language therapist in an attempt to articulate her ‘condition’.

The Speech and Language therapist who was viewing Suki through a linguistic lens interpreted Suki’s silence as an extremely complex expressive communication disorder – ‘selective mutism’ (SMIRA, 2007). She referred Suki to the educational

¹ English was the language of instruction and medium for learning in her day nursery.
psychologist who (through a psychological lens) focused upon Suki’s individual, developmental and cognitive processes and whether they were, or were not, functioning in the ‘correct’ sequential order.

After ‘interviewing’ Suki (she remained silent throughout) for twenty minutes, the educational psychologist diagnosed Suki with the anxiety-based disorder ‘selective mutism’. I was relieved that a medical diagnosis had been achieved for Suki, because I assumed that a diagnosis would help solve ‘her problem’. However, I feared that the pathologising of Suki as a ‘condition’ disregarded not only social factors affecting her whole person (Engel, 1980) but also labelled her negatively … as a deficit medical model (McConkey & Bhurgri, 2003).

Reflecting upon this episode in Suki’s life-world, I had unwittingly treated her with benign neglect, because I was accepting the ‘medicalisation’ of Suki’s silence. Labelling provided a ‘quick fix’ solution (prescribed ‘programme of treatment’) and more importantly, a ‘just’ reason for accepting Suki’s ‘condition’.

The diagnosis of selective mutism is sometimes confirmed after as little as one month into the silent period. In fact some Education Authority Ethnic Minority Achievement Services advise teachers (Hampshire EMA Service, 2008, p. 2) that, ‘it is crucial children are diagnosed and treated as early as possible’.

A sociocultural perspective not only surpasses the academic disciplines of linguistics and cognitive psychology but also recognises the links between Suki’s cultural understandings and her silent negotiation in meaning making. For Gregory (2002, p. 2) a sociocultural approach, ‘rejects the difference between psychology and anthropology … It’s not just interdisciplinary; it actually transcends disciplines, as it focuses on the inextricable link between culture and cognition through engagement in activities, tasks, or events’.

Following from Suki’s initial diagnosis as a ‘selective mute’, a ‘stimulus fading’ programme of ‘treatment’ (Croghan & Craven, 1982) was prescribed by the educational psychologist.

At this time, the relevance of my position in Suki’s learning was beginning to emerge. How could I, a white, monolingual teacher, ‘bridge-build’ between Suki’s familiar ‘world of home’ and the unknown and possibly distrusted ‘world of the school’. I began visiting Suki in her home twice a week before school to try and re-establish ‘new beginnings’ between the school, Suki and her family.

MOVING FORWARD TWO YEARS

‘Adyta’ who first attended his local pre-school playgroup aged three and a half years, is the second key character to enter the story in September 2007. Adyta’s mother tongue is Punjabi. From birth, Adyta made sense of his world (Conteh, 2007a; Mills, 2004) through Punjabi – the language through which his mother and close family members had communicated with him from birth.

I observed Adyta’s participation in the playgroup, reception class and year one. Adyta, who presented as a confident, fun-loving boy at home (recorded from his home visit), remained almost silent in the pre-school setting. I had initially presumed that he would communicate in spoken English because both he and his
parents were born in England and his parents were articulate Punjabi/English speakers. However, as is customary in many South Asian communities, the paternal Grandmother, ‘Jasmit’, lived with Adyta’s parents. According to Adyta’s mother, her mother-in-law kept the Punjabi alive and active within the family. Although Adyta’s parents could and would speak English in alternative situations, out of respect to Adyta’s Grandmother, family members spoke Punjabi in her presence.

Cummins (2002) expressed the value of mother tongue contributions to bilingual learning when stating, ‘When parents and other caregivers (e.g. grandparents) are able to spend time with their children and tell stories or discuss issues with them in a way that develops their mother tongue vocabulary and concepts, children come to school well-prepared to learn the school language and succeed educationally’. Studies by Cummins (2000), Baker (2000) and Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) demonstrate the value of maintaining the mother tongue for a child’s continued success in learning and development. Speaking Punjabi together inevitably bound Adyta’s family members collectively, as in Jean Mills’ (2004) study of women and families of Pakistani heritage which articulates the inevitable binding between the mother tongue and the maintenance of cultural identity as follows:

‘The associations of the term ‘mother tongue’ were particularly potent of identity through ownership and a sense of belonging to a group, a culture, and a country. It is crucial for them, as mothers, to pass on this language to their children. Identity, aspiration, and notions of gender came together in their perspectives on the vital importance of language maintenance’ (Mills, 2004, p. 186).

As both of Adyta’s parents worked full-time (Adyta’s father worked for a property company and his mother worked in a large department store), Adyta’s Grandmother was his main carer and educator during weekdays between 8.00 a.m. and 5.30 p.m. Adyta’s mother (who collected Adyta from pre-school occasionally) encouraged Adyta to refer to Nicole (the play-school leader) as ‘Auntie’. According to Dasgupta’s (1993) study, many families in the Bay area of India (South Asia) commonly adopt the ‘Western’ term ‘auntie’ as an expression of intimacy towards significant others, and pass this practice on to their children.

**HOW THE AUTHOR FITS INTO THE STUDY**

As an active participant (key character) within this study not only does my life story contribute in developing the study, but the study also contributes to my developing life story.

I moved through six different educational settings throughout the UK as a child, where I encountered difficulties associated with adjusting to unfamiliar contexts, people and practices including differing regional accents and dialects. Reflecting upon these experiences, I would describe this period as devoid of identity, agency or a ‘sense of belonging’.

When first attending an early years setting, a young bilingual learner may feel separated from her/his mother tongue because she/he may not be able to
communicate with those around her/him through speaking. This experience may be comparable to that of my own when separated from my mother between the ages of eight and fourteen years. Situated on the periphery of participation (Chapter 2) I found difficulty in making meaning of my ‘new world’. However, whenever I moved schools I learnt to initially ‘shield myself’ from questions by withdrawing into my private thoughts – forming a ‘safety-net’ of silence until I felt comfortable and confident enough to ‘remove it’.

If my own silent experiences proved noteworthy (as a young, white, monolingual English speaker); then the significance of the silent period must be manifoldly greater for a young bilingual learner negotiating her/his way into an English-speaking early years setting. I can only assume that my negative experiences were a mere ‘microcosm’ of what might be encountered by a young bilingual learner.

Reflecting back on these experiences, the periods of silence became shorter and more transient as I acquired the confidence and ability to converse around reciprocal commonalities (shared practices). Because I made meaning through the same mother tongue (spoken English) of my peers, I was able to share developing understandings of the world.

These learnt capabilities to adapt to unfamiliar cultural nuances (including the ability to learn regional accents with speed) provided the opportunity for negotiation and developing a sense of ‘belonging’. Although initially situated as an outsider, sharing the same mother tongue provided the agency to move forward from a position of peripherality to more central participation.

ANYOR ‘MEETS’ SUKI: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT
Childhood memories of ‘Anyor’ (a Polish-speaking eleven-year-old girl) who I encountered when I attended a Norwich high school contribute to the auto-ethnographic accounts. Anyor’s attempts at conversing in English demonstrated clearly the barriers to participation created when unable to contribute to conversations through a shared mother tongue.

I was privileged to experience occasional ‘golden moments’ with Anyor, who (like myself) had transferred to high school mid-term. On visiting Anyor in her family home, I remember with fascination hearing Anyor and her family members sharing Polish conversations and laughter together. I had no idea that Anyor owned such a rich and flourishing spoken language. I gained great enjoyment from glimpsing briefly into the intricacies and richness of her Polish life-world, because not only did Anyor’s voice ‘come alive’ in her home environment, but so did her physical gestures and facial expressions. It was as if she had been ‘plugged in’ to a new power source – the ‘dimmer switch’ had been turned up to maximum brightness in contrast to her ‘operating’ on a ‘low power setting’ within the school environment.
CHAPTER 1

THE CONNECTION

This is where the connection is made with Suki’s story thus far. When I visited Suki in her home, she too had ‘come alive’ – just like Anyor. Amongst the family’s culturally shared signs, symbols and tools, Suki chatted to me with excitement and showed me her favourite toys. She walked happily with me to school until she reached the school gates, at which point her speech and facial expressions froze – and did not ‘thaw’ again until she left the school gates at the end of the day. This ‘frozen’ appearance bore striking similarities with Zahra’s experiences in an English speaking early years community of practice [CoP].

I can only but imagine the initial frustration felt by Anyor and Suki at being unable to draw upon and present their wealth of social, historical and cultural understandings – their ‘funds of knowledge’ (Moll et al., 2005) – to make meaning of their new worlds. Moll et al. (1992) interpret ‘funds of knowledge’ as, ‘the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being’. Teachers/practitioners may be guilty of neglecting bilingual learners’ rich cultural and cognitive resources nurtured within the home environments, and therefore overlooking valuable opportunities for culturally responsive and meaningful teaching and learning practices.

SELECTIVE MUTISM

I return to Suki in attempting to differentiate between selective mutism and the silent period. What is this condition which was ‘tagged’ on to Suki?

Afasic (2004) defines selective mutism as referring to children who are able to speak freely in some situations but do not speak in others. The ‘problem’ presents in school where there are concerns that a child has not spoken for two terms or more (Afasic, 2004, Glossary 6).

The school speech and language therapist who observed Suki described selective mutism as an expressive language or communication disorder, whilst the educational psychologist referred to selective mutism as a psychiatric, anxiety-based condition. Speech Disorder UK (2010) suggests that selective mutism occurs when a child who has the ability to both speak and understand language fails to use this ability in some settings – the child appears to freeze and be unable to speak.

Afasic UK (2004) provides an introductory ‘picture’ of selective mutism:

- Selective mutism is a relatively rare condition; the best estimate suggests that fewer than one child per thousand is affected.
- Selective mutism is usually reported between the ages of three and five years.
- Girls are affected slightly more frequently than boys.
- Children who come from a bilingual background are slightly more likely to display selective mutism.
- Children with selective mutism are more likely to have other speech and language difficulties than other children.
The majority of children with selective mutism are of average or above average intelligence, but some show moderate to severe learning difficulties.

What is of particular significance to this study is that not only are bilingual children considered more likely to display selective mutism (Cline & Baldwin, 2004), but that the age at which it is usually reported (between the ages of three and five years) also corresponds with the age at which children usually attend an early years setting such as Suki.

Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke (2000) articulate the silent period as a time when some young children who are learning a new and additional language in a strange environment do not talk, describing the features these children present as:

- Refusal to interact in any way or be included in interactions.
- Initially no use of non-verbal behaviours.
- Reluctance to respond with gestures or eye contact.
- Rejection of interaction with other children or staff.
- Reluctance to speak (may also be in first language).
- Difficulties in settling into the nursery or school. (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke 2000, p. 49)

The above features described as normal for a young child passing through the silent period are remarkably similar to those characterising selective mutism. Cline and Baldwin (2004) ascribe the higher incidence of selective mutism in bilingual learners to sociocultural dissonance resulting from the incongruity of belonging to two cultures, and the need to learn a new and unfamiliar language. Perhaps Drury (2007) is nearer the ‘truth’ when suggesting that silence is a chosen agentive strategy. Sage and Sluckin (2004) add that a child may feel isolated if there are no children or adults in the class who speak their mother tongue. Perhaps feelings of isolation extend the period of time that the spoken word turns inward?

Through the ‘lens’ of a psychologist, Suki appeared to be presenting with a set of ‘symptoms’ that required ‘fixing’. What concerned me at that time (and still does) is why Suki was perceived as a ‘problem’. 
CHAPTER 2

PAINTING THE BACKDROP

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a ‘landscape’ through which a sociocultural perspective on learning through the silent period can be painted. Having compared learning during the silent period through two lenses, sociocultural and linguistic, it is apparent that a sociocultural lens contributes additional understandings on how a bilingual learner creates meaning through her/his silent experiences.

The reader explores beneath the layers of a young bilingual learner’s journey as she/he mediates participation from and through culturally appropriated communities to that of the less familiar community of learners in school.


Sociocultural theorising not only provides the platform through which the evolution of emergent bilingual learning can be presented, but also the thinking that underpins and contextualises ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ [LPP] as a concept through which to explore silent experiences. ‘Communities of practice’ [CoPs] is theoretically critiqued alongside mother tongue thinking, in an attempt to contextualise the initial learning trajectory of an emergent bilingual learner as she/he negotiates participation through an early years CoP.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY

Out of a critique of cognitive and empirically based constructivist understandings, the roots of sociocultural learning theory were born. The Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) analysed the pre-existing belief of his contemporary, Jean Piaget (1896-1980), that depicted learning as something that could not precede the universal stages of development. Vygotsky (1978) disagreed and maintained that every function in the child’s cultural development (learning) appeared on two planes – firstly (and most importantly) on the social level, and secondly, on the individual level. That is, learning between people (interpersonal) precedes learning inside the individual (intrapersonal). It was Vygotsky’s reinterpretation of learning as social, rather than purely psychological, that set him apart from the constructivist theory of learning.

Piaget’s constructivist theory was considered the norm until Vygotsky’s works (published in Russia in the 1960s) were published in the western world in the 1980s. Until then, Piaget’s constructivist perspective continued (and continues) to present children’s learning as a process acquired through transferable skills and knowledge, which are learnt/taught at age appropriate stages of development.
However, one of Piaget’s flaws was that he overlooked examining the significance of social and cultural development within learning. Indeed, his results were based mainly upon researching middle-class, white, monolingual children. Consequently, Robbins (2002) argues that, ‘the use of a Piagetian framework ignores or dismisses the multitude of influences on their thinking, and treats knowledge as though it is only important when it “belongs” to individuals … From this perspective children will always be viewed as “deficient” in their thinking – particularly if they do not happen to live within the western-world context in which this framework was developed’ (Robbins, 2002, p. 20). Rogoff (2003, pp. 3-4) adds, ‘people develop as participants in cultural communities. Their development can be understood only in light of the cultural practices and circumstances of their communities – which also change’. This ‘oversight’ in Piaget’s research may have borne the seeds from which sociocultural learning theory has evolved.

Fleer et al. (2004, p. 175) describe research framed from a sociocultural perspective as, ‘less about revealing the external child and more about uncovering the historical child’. Consequently, a sociocultural perspective (Fleer et al., 2004) seeks to see the whole picture through understanding the social, historical and cultural aspects of children’s daily practices. Rogoff (2003, p. 178) explains how sociocultural research accomplishes painting the whole child, when stating, ‘the lenses continually move back and forth from the interpersonal to the cultural/institutional’. Rogoff (2003) also interprets this dynamic and evolving cultural context as, ‘a glimpse of a moving picture involving the history of the activities and the transformations towards the future in which people and their communities engage’ (Rogoff, 2003, p. 60).

Successors of Vygotsky have further refined concepts within sociocultural learning theory, and/or applied these concepts as analytical tools. Lave and Wenger (1991) employed ‘Legitimate, Peripheral Participation’, Rogoff adopted the ‘Three Planes of Analysis’ (2003), and Gee (1999) applied his sociocultural understandings of ‘Discourse Analysis’ to do so. Therefore, Vygotsky’s theoretical understandings of learning have not only been actively explored and built upon, but have also provided alternative and multimodal discourses through which to interpret the complexity of early years pedagogy. Rogoff and Lave (1984) explored sociocultural theories of learning in their research on ‘everyday cognition’ as a means of understanding differing patterns of ‘everyday’ learning through practice. This research not only analysed a variety of learning contexts across educational and everyday practices, but also revealed the significance and versatility of thinking processes in adapting to the demands of any given situated activity.

As a result of Lave’s (1988) study on ‘cognition in practice’, Lave defined situated learning less in terms of individual ownership, and more in terms of shared ownership, distributed through and across people and practices. Lave and Wenger’s (1991) study of ‘Legitimate Peripheral Participation’ employed ‘situated learning’ to demonstrate how learning occurs as ‘part and parcel’ of social relationships embedded in situations of co-participation. Situated learning implies
that understandings of the world are developed through participation in a ‘community of practice’.

However, from my own professional experience, individualistic ‘formal’ tasks (such as writing) are often prioritised over collaborative interpersonal practices (such as play) in many reception and year one classes in England.

In place of solely focusing on how the *external culture* impacts on the child (Rogoff, 2003) sociocultural thinking attempts to reveal the child’s learning through the dynamics of an ever evolving cultural context. The knowing of the individual becomes apparent through their relationship(s) within and through the cultural and institutional context (Siraj-Blatchford, 2003), thus revealing greater insight, meaning and understanding. Hedegaard and Fleer (2008) emphasise that to, ‘understand children we must be cognisant of the social, cultural and historical practices in which they live and learn. That is, we need to be aware of the *social situation of children’s development*’ [their emphasis] (2008, p. 1).

Sociocultural understandings from Moll (1992) into community literacy practices present and connect the significance of sociocultural understandings to effective learning and teaching of bilingual learners:

[I]n studying human beings dynamically, within their social circumstances, in their full complexity, we gain a much more complete and a much more valid understanding of them. We also gain, particularly in the case of minority children, a more positive view of their capabilities and how our pedagogy often constrains, and just as often distorts, what they do and what they are capable of doing. (Moll 1992, p. 239)

If the importance and strengths embedded in the everyday practices of language and action are disregarded in early years settings, opportunities for significant others (such as teachers) to draw upon and harness bilingual learners’ valuable resources, their ‘funds of knowledge’ (Moll et al., 2005), may be ignored.

**LEARNING**

It is not easy to articulate precisely how Vygotsky was thinking regarding how a young bilingual learner makes meaning, and yet it is apparent that he considered it a normal part of a child’s cultural development for the spoken word to turn inward (external speech to internal speech). Vygotsky did not discuss the silent period, nor make explicit that internalisation of the spoken word is a language driven cognitive transformation for the purposes of bilingual learning, and yet there are several pieces of evidence in his writing (1978, 1986) that suggest the creation of thought (mother tongue thinking) may result from this transformative act of internalisation.

Sociocultural theory suggests that learning begins as a ‘transformative’, ‘social’ and ‘interpersonal’ action. Vygotsky (1978) states that, ‘First it [the child’s cultural development] appears between people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category … It goes without saying that internalization transforms the process itself and changes its structure and functions’.
(Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57). It appears that practices (such as speech) are transformed into thought under internalisation (Vygotsky & Luria, 1994).

This notion of internalisation not only serves to confirm the importance of ‘inner speech’ in a mediatory role, but also in articulating how we, ‘project our meanings into the world and then we perceive them as existing in the world, as having a reality of their own’ (Wenger, 1998, p. 58). Internalisation (of the spoken word into thought) appears to be a transformational cognitive action – through its action, learning occurs. Lave and Wenger (1991) emphasised social interaction and collaboration as the essential components of situated learning, defining people who share in the same situated learning as participating in a shared endeavour within a CoP. Wenger (1998) asserts that interactive, mutual and reciprocal participation (improvised practice) is facilitated by the sharing of a common language (‘language driven’) and that working towards a common goal not only moves the CoP forwards, but also enables further development of the members’ identities.

If learning is perceived as ‘improvised practice’ (Wenger, 1998, p. 93) then when a young bilingual learner is observing, listening and copying behaviours of other members of an early years CoP, she/he is building upon her/his expertise as a fractional participant.

Bruner (1996) (a socio-constructivist) suggested that learning might consist of two separate elements – first, the mind as a computational device (gaining understanding of abstract concepts), and second, (the sociocultural position) formed by and in the use of human culture. However, Wertsch (1991) argued that learning was far more wide-ranging and encompassing than could be implied by the concept ‘cognition’, thus preferring to re-focus upon understanding the ‘mind’. Interestingly, Lave and Wenger (1991) demonstrate that a culturally situated approach to learning has no need for a dichotomy in understandings of mind, because it is from and through participative and collaborative learning that individual meaning and learning is located and created. Rogoff (1998) and Wenger (1998) emphasise that because meaning and understanding are enacted in social contexts, a young child’s ‘understanding must be viewed as transient and fluid’ (Fler & Richardson, 2008, p. 140).

Rogoff (1990, 2003) has influenced sociocultural thinking on ‘what learning is’ by addressing the ‘workings of cognition’ and reinforcing the significance of the cultural tool of thought. Rogoff’s (2003) research revised individualistic understandings of young children’s learning to that of collaboratively distributed practices through people in shared endeavours. Rogoff (1998, p. 690) presents cognition as something, ‘that people move through to gain understanding, rather than to understanding’. Learning is thus defined as a rich mix of collaborative contributions within, across and through cultural practices – inventing, borrowing, and modifying practices through the cultural tools of thought and language.

MEDIATION AND CULTURAL TOOLS

Martin (2005, p. 143) states that, ‘Sociocultural theory places mediation at the centre of the learning relationship’. Mediation articulates the relationship between
individuals and social environments as they act upon objects in the world. As such, Keating (2005, p. 112) suggests that relationships are mediated by the tools, signs or artefacts which themselves are ‘shaped by the social and cultural environments within which these actions are taking place’. Enciso (2007, p. 52) refers to the cultural tools such as signs, symbols and objects as the meditational means with which transformations of ‘ways of being and thinking’ are generated.

As sociocultural learning theory views language as a crucial cultural and psychological tool for mediating learning (Vygotsky, 1986), it is therefore central to both thinking and the construction of concepts. According to Kozulin (2003), sociocultural learning theory challenges the individualistic identification of agency and in doing so highlights two key concepts in redefining the position of agency within learning – mediation and psychological tools. Therefore, within sociocultural theory the use of cultural tools (both material and psychological) is viewed as crucial in the development of understandings. Vygotsky (1986) explained psychological tools as those that direct the mind and behaviour, while technical (material) tools bring about changes in other objects (Daniels, 2001).

Examples of cultural tools might include thought and language, numbering and counting symbols and systems, writing methods, art representations (including drawings), diagrams, maps, and other signs. Not only are they believed to shape and transform the development of mental processes (Cole & Wertsch, 1996) but also to, ‘mediate social and individual functioning and connect the external and the internal, the social and the individual’ (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 236).

Mediation acts as a means to appropriate future learning, thus creating a ‘chain reaction’ between language, communication and learning. Thought and language therefore resource the necessary communication, build further cultural resources (learning), and facilitate future learning. There are implications for a young bilingual learner who is unable to call upon her/his spoken mother tongue as a cultural tool with which to mediate understandings of the world. Does mother tongue thinking serve this important role, and does the act of silence mediate mother tongue thinking?

In Hall’s (2008) study of the transition from middle childhood to ‘teenhood’, the position and importance of mediation in relation to developing identity and agency are examined. Drawing upon the works of Wertch (1991, p. 88) to define ‘mediated action’, Hall (2008) refers to mediated activity as:

[A] term designed to bridge the gap between the person and the social world or socio-historical context in which the person lives … interactions are accomplished by the use of meditational means or cultural tools … they are acquired in participation and interaction with others and therefore they are always distributed.

It becomes apparent that there is a complementary duality to mediation. On the one hand there is the role played by others in learning, and on the other that played by psychological, culturally appropriated and internalised tools. Mediation provides the agency for a child to master activities which would be far too challenging to accomplish alone. It can be seen that sociocultural approaches to learning theory
(inspired by Vygotsky) not only lay emphasis upon interpersonal relationships between people, culturally situated contexts and actions, and the importance of the cultural historical in meaning making (Wertsch et al., 1995) but also the significance of cultural tools and artefacts. Vygotsky and his contemporaries appear to have redefined learning as a reciprocal process, contextually situated, guided in participation by others and mediated through shared cultural tools and artefacts. Fundamental to this research is an articulation of how silence mediates a young bilingual learner’s access to participation.

Geertz (1973, p. 5) described culture as, ‘located in the minds and hearts of people who are at the same time actors and creators of social interactions’ (cited in Gregory, 2002, p. 7). Does Nicole (the pre-school leader) play the crucial role of creator of social interactions (Sylva et al., 2004)? Mediating the movement of one culture through another draws upon sociocultural understandings, which may not be apparent to all practitioners/teachers. Cole (1998) refers to the need to document the crucial role of mediators like Nicole in different contexts, such as the early years environment, so that new and existing practices (sharing of commonalities) come together. But is this crucial role in mediation understood by practitioners? According to Crawford (1996), Vygotsky focused upon thought and the connections between people and the sociocultural context in which they interacted in shared experiences, most commonly termed the ‘Zone of Proximal Development’.

ZPD, GUIDED PARTICIPATION AND SYNERGY

Vygotsky presented the Zone of Proximal Development [ZPD] as a connecting concept which articulates the ‘space’ within which a child is currently learning, and her/his potential learning capability when ‘bridged’ through active support (Wood et al., 1976) in collaboration with a knowledgeable other(s) and/or capable peers. Within the ZPD the cultural tools of thought and language act as ‘key players’ as a means of connecting through the use of culturally mediated tools. Bruner et al. (1976) applied the term ‘scaffolding’ to the ‘supportive’ role of a ‘knowledgeable’ other in mediating learning across and through the ZPD. As with many sociocultural concepts, over a relatively short period of time they have been adopted, redefined and reapplied through the development in the thinking of many contemporary researchers.

Rogoff’s (1990) research into situated learning through engagement in ‘peripheral participation’ resulted from the reworking of Vygotsky’s ZPD, in relation to the pivotal role of ‘guided participation’ (apprenticeship and mastery) between children and adults (apprentice and master) in children’s learning. Rogoff (1995) attempted to reinterpret scaffolding by looking beyond purely educational settings, and established three mutually responsive aspects to mediation – apprenticeship, guided participation and appropriation. Rogoff (2003) drew the conclusion that guided participation (rather than mediation of learning) both in schools and any given community was essential for human learning and development. Concerned that ‘guided participation’ might suggest an unequal
partnership, Gregory’s (2001) ethnographic study (of siblings playing and working together) speaks of a reciprocal experience – ‘synergy’. Gregory (2010, pp. 165-166), in her cross-generational study, applies the terms ‘synergy’ and ‘syncretic learning’ to describe bilingual learners creating new ways of meaning making through blending known and new cultural repertoires together – a transformative process, which creates new cross-cultural understandings. Fleer’s (2002) study on assessment in the early years adopts the term, ‘assessing beyond the actual and into the potential’ to articulate the crucial role of mediation in the learning process of young children.

SITUATED LEARNING

Learning traditionally gets measured on the assumption that it is a possession of individuals that can be found inside their heads … learning is in the relationships between people … in the conditions that bring people together and organize a point of contact that allows for particular pieces of information to take on relevance; without the points of contact, without the system of relevancies, there is no learning, and there is little memory. Learning does not belong to individual persons, but to the various conversations of which they are a part. (McDermott, 1999, quoted in Murphy, 1999, p. 17)

Returning briefly to the constructivist theory of learning, which focuses predominantly on (McCormick & Murphy, 2008, p. 5) ‘individual internalisation of knowledge’, there is still need for change if learning is to be perceived, ‘…as a process of participation in cultural activity’. In the re-examination of meaning making through participatory culturally appropriated activity, ‘situated learning’ is fundamental. Thus, rather than learning being considered as, ‘…a process of transfer of knowledge from the knowledgeable to the less knowledgeable’ (McCormick & Murphy, 2008, p. 5); meaning making is redefined as a distributed, rather than individualistic, concept. Barton and Trusting (2005) emphasised the importance of context in thinking when presenting a range of learning practices both in and outside formal learning environments – these included the work place, skiing and shopping. Lave (1988) developed these ideas further by demonstrating that the position of practice within learning is not only central and fundamental, but also distributed between people (Barton & Trusting, 2005, p. 4).

The concept ‘distributed knowledge’ may need to be considered in relation to a silent young bilingual learner’s meaning making, because the opportunities for engagement in culturally authentic activity may be severely limited in early years settings when the practices operate through white, middle-class, monolingual, mono-cultural and mono-faith discourses. In these situations (which are not uncommon), negotiating participation in the early years CoP will take longer for the emergent bilingual learner, as she/he may not feel able to contribute to, and/or access, distributed knowledge.

Gee (2005) suggests that learning, which is considered as essential to any cultural group’s survival, should be learnt as a situated, cultural process taught
through copying modelled practices by a more knowledgeable other (Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990). Gee (2005) employs ‘everyday cooking’ as an example of a culturally situated learning activity where the learner not only learns through seeing, but also through taking an active part in problem solving – because the learning is culturally situated. Gee (2005) adds that if a cultural group was only taught cooking via the academic language of instruction in schools, then survival of the community would be placed at risk. For example, a community of biologists or chemists utilise the benefits of culturally situated learning to gain an understanding of the ‘facts’ of their particular community of learners. The facts in the text book are used as tools to support their situated learning activities: experiments, using microscopes, dissecting etc. The learner who is copying the situated activity (for example, by participating in dissection or an experiment) needs active participation. One would assume that the academic language of instruction (English) is to be comprehensible to all the participants of the learning community for learning to occur. A silent young bilingual learner (to whom the academic language may be incomprehensible) is reliant on situated and culturally embedded practice (including her/his mother tongue) to mediate her/his learning.

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

A belief that learning is social and comes largely from experience of participating in daily life formed the basis of a significant rethinking of learning theory in the late 1980s and early 1990s by two researchers from very different disciplines – Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger. In their study of situated learning (1991), Lave (anthropologist) and Wenger (social theorist) presented a move in emphasis to that of practice being situated within communities, based on the premise (Dysthe & Engelson, 2008, p. 107) that situated learning is, ‘a process of enculturalisation into a community of practice’. Their model of situated learning proposed that learning involved a process of engagement in a ‘community of practice’ (Wenger, 1998, p. 3) with the belief that learning occurred ‘in the context of our lived experience of participation in the world’. The basic argument made by Lave and Wenger (1998) is that CoPs are everywhere and that we are generally involved in a number of them – whether that is at work, school, home, or in our civic and leisure interests. In some groups we might be core members, whilst in others we are marginal – on the periphery of the community.


Fleer and Richardson (2008, p. 141) discuss how learning is ‘more than an individual construction…Ideas are socially constructed and reside not in
individuals but are constituted in collectives, such as a particular community of practice'. Smith (2009) articulated that CoPs are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. CoPs are formed by people who engage in learning collectively as a shared endeavour, such as a tribe learning to hunt, a band making music together, or a group of school children defining their identity together. Although the characteristics of CoPs may appear to vary, none the less, members are brought together by joining in common activities and by, ‘what they have learned through mutual engagement in these activities’ (Wenger, 1998). In this respect, a CoP is different from a community of interest or a geographical community in that it involves a *shared practice*.

Lave and Wenger (1991) re-examined perspectives on cultural development through researching how meaning, communities and identity, are emphasised as social interaction and collaboration – essential components of situated learning. Using examples from observations of ‘apprenticeships’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to illustrate his theory, Wenger (1998) defined people who are sharing in the same situated learning as participating in a CoP. The model describes how ‘newcomers’ who are initially on the periphery of the CoP gradually move to the centre, as they become more competent masters and ‘inherit’ the same knowledge as the central members of the CoP – ‘old timers’. The reader must ‘hold on’ to the notion of ‘newcomers situated on the periphery of a Community of Practice’. Wenger (1998) confirms the importance of participating in a CoP through interactive, mutual and reciprocal practices which are facilitated by the sharing of a *common language* – participation is therefore ‘language driven’. The significance of learning being language driven will become clearer as the study progresses. Wenger (1998) also asserts that the interactive process of working towards a common goal changes the dynamics of the CoP and moves it on – enabling it, and the participants, to evolve. This suggests that the CoP (through the sharing of a common language) is a transformational learning environment.

CoP may initially present as a possible theorizing concept for interpreting bilingual learning during the silent period – bilingual meaning making may be achieved through participating members distributing shared knowledge. However, two questions surface in relation to adoption of CoPs as an exploratory lens. Firstly, if a CoP is essentially language driven (members share a common language), how can a young bilingual learner gain membership of an early years CoP when the language of instruction is not the mother tongue? This suggests that participation is mediated through thought (internalisation of the spoken word) and other culturally shared communication practices?

Wenger (1998, p. 7) affirms that CoPs are not only an integral part of our daily lives, ‘so informal and persuasive that they rarely come into specific focus, but also quite familiar’, defined by groupings of people who are drawn together for a common purpose.

CoPs are characterised as having three fundamental elements:

- Mutual engagement – they interact with each other.
Joint enterprise – they have a common endeavour.

Sharing repertoires – they have common resources of language, styles and routines with which to express their identities as members of that group (e.g. actions, stories and artefacts).

Implicit in these characteristics (though not explicit) is the assumption that CoPs also encompass, ‘an ideologically laden set of beliefs, actions, and assumptions’ (Lewis et al., 2007, p. xv). If shared beliefs, actions and cultural tools are essential mediators of learning, what happens when an emergent bilingual learner attempts participation in a CoP where the cultural tools are not shared? How is participation accessed? Is there an expectation that participants share common histories of participation and common anticipated experiences? Does silence play a part in gaining participation?

Because participation in a CoP is based on mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire, early years CoPs may at times be potential sources of ‘conflict and disjunction between participants’ (Rogers & Fuller, 2007, p. 80). Gee (2004) suggests that the term ‘community’ may lead to participation being contended in relation to decision making on membership and boundaries which may appear to newcomers as immovable. Adopting Gee’s (2004, p. 78) position, it remains questionable whether children in an early years CoP should be considered as belonging to a given CoP on the sole premise that they are contained within the same four walls.

Whilst there is much discussion to be had over who is in, who is out, how far in and out of any given CoP, it is worth considering whether such action of ‘disharmony’ might actually open up spaces to peripheral members – newcomers with differing histories of participation. This opens up the possibility of silence acting as a meditational tool through which the practices of an early years CoP are reinforced. Indeed, Wenger (1998) utilises the concept of participation to articulate aspects of action and connection that encompass all forms of activity and relationships, such as ‘doing’, ‘talking’, ‘thinking’, ‘feeling’ and ‘belonging’. Dysthe and Engelsen (2008, p. 107) not only describe participation as collaborative and social, but also as a personal activity, including both conflictual and competitive elements. Without the ability to communicate verbally within the early years CoP, is it possible that the emergent bilingual learner adopts an alternative means to gain a sense of belonging?

Engagement in participatory practice, not only mediates new understandings of the world, but also of developing identities. Harrison et al. (2010) discuss how cultural tools are used to, ‘modify and transform social discourse in ways which produce a kaleidoscope of new identities for new contexts, new circumstances and new purposes …’. Each identity is always provisional and subject to revision, and each consists of a complex interweaving of multiple discourses’ (Harrison et al., 2010, p. 96). Whilst Lave’s (1988) concept ‘situated learning’ does not articulate understandings of abstract or de-contextualised learning outside of a CoP, Lave and Wenger (1991) have built upon current understandings of meaning making via an exploration into how abstract learning takes place between
participants within situated learning contexts. What Wenger (1998) claims is that inherent in all CoPs is the co-construction of knowledge and that practice is formulated via a group of individuals with common goals and shared understandings, thus suggesting that abstract and de-contextualised learning is also dependent upon CoPs.

LET’S GET MORE POSITIVE ABOUT THE TERM ‘LURKER’ – LEGITIMATE PERIPHERAL PARTICIPATION

The McDonald et al. (2003, p. 1) project, ‘Let’s get more positive about the term ‘lurker’’ explored the meaning of ‘legitimate peripheral participants’ in a CoP. The participants in the project reflected on the positive connotations of LPP in view of the negative sense captured in the term ‘lurker’. This idea is referred to by Wenger (1998) as a legitimate role for members. The project participants considered the positive perception of LPP in relation to negative connotations implied by the term ‘lurking’ – where participants are viewed as non-contributors and a source of frustration by visibly active participants. In contrast, lurking is viewed by MacDonald et al. (2003, p. 1) as a form of apprenticeship aligned to LPP in CoPs.

Although the ‘lurker’ project (2003) was aimed at engagement in online communities, it has relevance for our discussions on the experiences of an outsider (novice member), especially when the novice might be a three-year-old bilingual learner who cannot speak the language of instruction, and whose shared linguistic and cultural practices remain unrecognised within the early years CoP. Wenger (1998, p. 52) describes, ‘human engagement in the world’ as ‘a process of negotiation of meaning’, suggesting that it is through engagement with the concepts of participation and reification that negotiation of meaning (learning) takes place. He adopts the term ‘participation’ when referring to action and connection within a social community. ‘It is in this interplay between participation and reification that negotiation of meaning takes place …. Participation in meaning making always implies reifications and vice versa’ (Wenger, 1998, p. 39).

What is central in this descriptive account of peripheral participation is the definition of learning. Unlike compartmentalised ideas of learning, Wenger (1998) intentionally keeps an open mind to the nature of learning. It is not a matter of learning a ‘something’. It is more the case of learning being transformative – recreating the learner. However, being transformative and recreating the learner may appear as risky propositions for an emergent bilingual learner to ‘take on board’ – to expose oneself to an unknown. Therefore, Lave and Wenger (1991) provide a notional ‘safe haven’ where this transformation occurs, which they name ‘Legitimate Peripheral Participation’. Legitimate Peripheral Participation is the term Lave and Wenger (1991) use to articulate:

[T]he relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artefacts, and communities of knowledge and practice. A person’s intentions to learn are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured
through the process of becoming a full participant in a sociocultural practice …. (1991, p. 29)

Although, ‘in cognitive and educational research the use of apprenticeship was largely metaphorical’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 31), learning is, none the less, located in a social context, moving from that of apprenticeship to situated learning and, ultimately, to peripheral participation. As such the individual is moved from the role of, ‘learner to learning as participation in the social world’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 43).

It can be seen that LPP differs from Rogoff’s (2003) notion of guided participation. Guided participation creates a picture in one’s mind of a child receiving support from an elder (possibly their mother, grandparent or older sibling). The picture painted is of a child learning ‘something’ with the ‘teacher’ acting in a supportive modelling role. ‘Guided participation’ (Rogoff, 2003) aligns more with Bruner’s (1986) idea of scaffolding: ‘something is being learnt, and the more capable other is guiding the learner in mastering the “something”’. Lave and Wenger (1991) define LPP as, ‘not itself an educational form, much less a pedagogical strategy or a teaching technique … learning through Legitimate Peripheral Participation takes place no matter which educational form provides a context for learning, or whether there is any intentional educational for at all’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 40).

LPP does not demand that a ‘something’ is to be learnt. LPP is a means of ‘becoming’ and gaining new ways of knowing. There is no test to mark or picture to be drawn. Within LPP the taking part is the learning. A ‘deal’ is made between the emergent bilingual learner and the CoP – when you begin to contribute to the CoP, you can share in our abundant resources. Thus, Lave and Wenger (1991) consider that legitimate peripheral participants join CoPs as a means through which to gain mastery of the community’s knowledge and participation in its practices. These skills enable newcomers (over time) to move toward fuller participation in the practices of a community (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29). Through LPP newcomers can observe the ‘what and how’ of masters and old-timers – as they move fractionally forward.

Consequently, the novice does not have to worry that she/he cannot ‘read the rules in the book’ (academic language) or speak the dominant discourse (English) of the early years CoP because she/he gains entrance through non-pressured participation. One means to describe LPP is through imagining a Spanish holiday advertisement, ‘Come to this location, and enjoy the warmth, scenery and the fruits of the locality’. The by-product of the holiday is that whilst relaxing and ‘soaking up’ the sunshine, you may also be learning the local language and contributing to the increased tourist custom and economic growth of the location. There is also a duality of meaning to LPP. Whilst the young bilingual learner ‘settles’ into the new learning environment without fearing the consequences of errors, she/he can also legitimately risk take, test the water and trial the practices of the CoP. Whilst silently participating from the safe keeping of the ‘look-out post’ (as if in LPP), she/he contributes to the CoP – contributing to and distributing meaning making through the participating members. Improvised practice (practising practices)
appears to be significant during the movement from peripheral to fuller participation. Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 93) suggest that, ‘Learning itself is an improvised practice’ Indeed the role of participation by Lave and Wenger (1991) is viewed as crucial to learning, which is anchored on, ‘situated negotiation and renegotiation of meaning in the world’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 52).

It is this very acceptance of the new and the unknown within LPP that leads to the transformation of practices. No one is concerned whether she/he is or is not performing the correct ‘dance steps’. It does not matter if she/he misses a beat, because it is the ‘practising of practices’ and the ‘participating in participation’ that leads to transformation. To clarify, if every ‘movement’ were only to be judged by output (end product) there is mounting pressure placed upon the performance of the participator – to ‘get it right’. There is no ‘get out clause’ for the participant. In contrast, LPP mediates learning without requiring the reification of a ‘something’.

Perhaps LPP equates to becoming a member of a circus community, in which a newcomer might be expected to observe others’ practices (e.g. walking the tightrope or as a performing clown) without being obliged to do likewise. However, she/he is still contributing – by selling popcorn or entry tickets, or even constructing the ‘big top’. However, if and when she/he wishes to participate, she/he can do so when ready – safe in the knowledge that the safety net is securely in place. Selling the programmes is as important as the acrobatics’ show in the smooth running of the circus, because these practices all contribute towards the shared endeavour of the circus.

Each member of the CoP is participating, but does every member be actively engage with a newcomer? Because practice is a shared enterprise, the newcomer can decide whether she/he wants to actively engage with ‘old timers’, but if her/his attempts at active participation fail, then the ‘default mechanism’ comes into play – LPP acts as a ‘safety net’ for the newcomer. Social relationships therefore appear as pivotal, not only for continuity of the CoP, but also to LPP. Without social engagement there is no LPP – it just isn’t there. A ‘community of practice’ without social engagement is devoid of LPP – leaving a newcomer in isolation. From a sociocultural perspective, learners in LPP do not need structures or models to understand the world because (within the CoP) they ‘participate in frameworks that have structure’ (Wenger, 1999, p. 4). Learning through LPP involves fractional participation 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 1999, p. 4).

Silent participation through LPP appears as more subtle and fluid than participatory activities that rely upon the spoken word. However, without an understanding of emergent bilingual learning and the significance of LPP, it may be impossible for teachers/practitioners to identify the multiplicity of practices of a silent young bilingual learner, who draws upon mother tongue thinking to practice the practices within and through the early years CoP.
WHAT IS HAPPENING?

Lave and Wenger (1991) illustrate their thinking on situated learning and LPP through observations of different apprenticeships (Yucatec midwives, Vai and Gola tailors, US Navy quartermasters, meat-cutters, and non-drinking alcoholics in Alcoholics Anonymous). Their research reveals how individuals join CoPs and initially learn peripherally (in LPP) with some ‘tasks’ (practices) being less or more key to the developing community than others. As they become more competent members they become more involved in the main processes of the particular community. They move fractionally from LPP to fuller participation (Lave & Wenger 1991, p. 37). Learning is, thus, not necessarily seen as the acquisition of a something (knowledge) by individuals as much as that of social participation. The nature of the situation impacts significantly on learning. Again, your attention is drawn to the ‘something’. In LPP there is not necessarily (although there may be) an end product (concrete reification) as evidence to demonstrate that learning has taken place.

As an example, imagine that I am a relatively novice researcher on the periphery of joining a CoP called ‘Early Years Bilingual Learning’. To become a member of this community it is necessary to participate in the practices of the community. So, I begin to attend conferences, whilst continuing with my studies. In doing so, I bring all my prior experiences to the task of a specialist researcher, which is built upon during and before the course of my studies. In addition I engage in reading, writing and sharing thoughts on bilingualism in the early years with my supervisor(s). Over time I begin to present papers and contribute to a book chapter. Engagement in these practices does not ‘happen overnight’. I move cautiously and fractionally from the periphery of participation, as and when I feel capable and willing. This legitimised peripheral engagement ‘moves me on’ in my thinking – it plays its part in developing my identity – from that of a novice researcher to one who begins to contribute to a shared body of knowledge within the CoP.

If LPP facilitates learning (Wenger 1998) as a transformative action, then it may also be interconnected with identity formation, learning to speak, act and improvise (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in ways that ‘make sense’ within the CoP. LPP as a means to fractionally increase participation, ‘in communities of practice concerns the whole person acting in the world’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991, pp. 49-50). The focus is therefore on the ways in which LPP is ‘an evolving, continuously renewed set of relations’ (ibid., p. 50). The act of social engagement is transformative, bringing rewards through developing agentive identities. Lurking in LPP offers the silent young bilingual learner this, plus much more – it provides a ‘safe haven’ through which to learn.

REIFICATION

Wenger (1998) uses the term ‘reification’ both to define the ‘concrete’ result of, and the visible by-products of, participatory meaning making (learning). Reification is employed to ‘make real/tangible’ the transformation of an abstract
(concept) into something concrete – a visible by-product and/or result. For example, when early years teachers/practitioners are completing their weekly planning sheets, the ‘planning sheet’ is the reification of participatory thinking. Hence, the planning meeting is an example of participatory reification. Likewise, a meeting and/or policy (by/end products) may reify issues surrounding a school’s race equality.

A silent young bilingual learner is involved in the process of reification when designing, making and representing within any given participatory activity. However, she/he may be unable initially to produce a reified ‘product’ due to the spoken language within the early years CoP being either unfamiliar or inaccessible to her/him. The emergent bilingual learner cannot speak the language of instruction, nor understand the writing system. However, despite these apparent barriers to learning, Wenger (1998) emphasises that the constant negotiation of meanings (through mother tongue thought) modifies and reifies participation in practice both within the individual and the early years CoP – learning takes place. It is apparent that Wenger’s interpretation of reification not only acts as a means through which an abstract notion becomes ‘real’, but also a means through which a young bilingual learner can project her/his silence as she/he learns through LPP. In fact, Wenger states, ‘Reification can take a great many forms … a telling glance or a long silence … their character as reification is not only in their form but also in the processes by which they are integrated into these practices’ [my emphasis] (1998, pp. 60-61).

However, Wenger also reveals some inherent ‘dangers’ (1998, p. 61) in the misinterpretation of reification. For instance, an early years teacher/practitioner may not understand the significance of reification as a transformative action, and mistakenly view ‘end products’ (planning sheets) as more important than the thinking and discussions which precede the end result.

There may be a risk that when transferred into the context of a classroom the distinctions between the by/end product (reification) and transformational learning may become too close (Dysthe & Engelsen, 2008, p. 107) and indistinct. For example, a teacher/practitioner assessing written work may overlook developing concepts (evolving reification) whilst seeking out the end product – the completed written work.

LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVES ON SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

In Chapter 1 the value of differing theoretical perspectives on bilingual learning were discussed in an attempt to offer unique insights and understandings into the silent experiences of a young bilingual learner. The application of a sociocultural perspective was seen to contribute a richer layer to current understandings of ‘second language acquisition’ [SLA] during the silent period.

O’Malley and Chamot’s (1990) research into the development of SLA suggests that prior to 1981 there was very little SLA theory apart from that of behaviourism (Skinner, 1954) based upon repetition/memory/strategies to guide SLA studies. Chomsky (an authority in SLA) moved SLA thinking forward through emphasising
cognitive influences within language acquisition processes. Chomsky’s model of SLA advised that biological and cognitive development were to be considered equally and that SLA was an instinctive ‘process’ aligned (Chomsky, 1977, p. 98) to a critical age/stage at which learning ‘fits’ with overall development.

Chomsky confirms his position on the unification of cognition with language development in the following (Rieber, 1983) interview extract:

QUESTION … define how you use the term “cognition” as opposed to the term “language”.

CHOMSKY … cognition is an overall term that includes every system of belief, knowledge, understanding, interpretation, perception, and so on. Language is just one of many systems that interact to form our whole complex of cognitive structures … I don’t believe that one can think of ‘cognition’ as a unitary phenomenon.

Chomsky (1955) challenged behaviourism with his (then) fresh SLA perspective, stating that SLA, ‘involves producing further language within the parameters of the social context where the language takes place is being shared, and within the limits of our natural capabilities’ (Chomsky, 1955, p. 114). This new means to theorise SLA and examine an individual’s mental processing of linguistic information partnered well with the cognitive and developmental thinking of Piaget (1972b). Consequently, Chomsky’s (1955, p. 113) theory of linguistics is still widely recognised as a transformative movement in SLA.

Consequently, information-processing models of learning served to explain the ‘mechanisms’ by which the mind acquires and stores new information. Linguists would agree that processes act as mediators between teaching and learning in so much as the quality and quantity of any learning experience will be determined by the degree of cognitive processing the learner engages in and the effective employment of appropriate strategies to enhance and develop these processes (Pérez, 1993, cited in Beltrán, 1997). Learning strategies are therefore perceived by linguists as a means by which bilingual learners can process, store, retrieve and employ information.

Strategies are seen as the tools necessary for developing bilingual communicative ability and commonly segmented (Bialystok, 1990; McDonough, 1995) into three identifiable strands:

– Cognitive – directly involved in SLA.
– Metacognitive – learning necessary skills for the learning activity.
– Social-affective – interacting with another to assist learning a task.

These strands are then broken down into further strategies (O’Malley et al., 1985, 1990) including:

– Imitating other people’s speech overtly or silently.
– Responding physically.
– Using the first language as a basis for understanding and/or producing the L2.
– Visualising information for memory storage.
– Auditory representation: keeping a sound or sound sequence in the mind.
– Relating new information to other concepts in memory.

This breaking down of strategies into tasks and skills demonstrates the ‘chunking’ of SLA, into ‘processed’, digestible pieces. However, in attempting to ‘streamline’ SLA, the complexity, messiness and synthesis within emergent bilingual learning may be inadvertently overlooked.

Krashen, a notable linguist, introduced ‘the social’ to SLA theorising (Krashen, 1987). Krashen developed an SLA theory based on the “Natural Order” hypothesis of SLA (Krashen, 1987, p. 12), defining the acquisition of a new language based upon a ‘process’ in which social and cognitive elements are acquired and learned independently through individual performance. According to Krashen’s thinking, acquired language is learned as a ‘natural’ consequence of exposure to informal conversations, whereas learned language is gained through academic formal teaching. In contrast to sociocultural thinking, both Krashen (1987) and Chomsky (1977) agree that acquired (cognitively-based) language learning is aligned to stages in human development, with SLA occuring ‘naturally’ alongside other developmental processes. However, the 1990s were privy to many new thoughts arising within SLA research in relation to highly influential factors impacting upon language acquisition, including those of a ‘social, cultural, race, power and political’ (Cummins, 1996) nature. These factors have also raised understandings, and the status, of the mother tongue within SLA research. During the 1980s and 1990s there was little research directed upon the silent period, with Saville-Troike’s (1988) study on the role of silence within private speech being an exception.

**SOCIOCULTURAL INFLUENCES ON SLA**

Although linguists may acknowledge that social and cultural issues surrounding race, class, power and politics may impact on bilingual learning in the early years, learning an additional language is still commonly perceived as an intrapersonal, cognitive and sequential process, as demonstrated in the learning of ‘linguistic codes’ which are represented in telegraphic and formulaic speech production, sometimes referred to as developmental, additive bilingualism (Genesse, 1994).

Linguists such as Duranti (2001, 2004) attempt to uncover, describe and model (theorise) the systems behind language through linguistic systems, structures and functions, and in doing so choose to explore the systems within and between sound, meaning and grammar, or/and the evolution of language, children’s SLA, speech and language disorders etc. This perspective continues to fit with the (cognitively and developmentally based) Chomsky (1977) and Krashen (1987) models of acquiring language. In realising the significance of language in social and cultural life (Heath, 1983), sociolinguists have also begun to appreciate the rich layering that a sociocultural perspective can add to SLA theorising/bilingual learning, including the significance of mediation in (shared and distributed)
culturally appropriated practices (Conteh et al., 2007), with language being one of the mediated tools for learning.

Coyle and Vancarcel (2002) discuss the important influence of sociocultural factors as highlighted in Wong Fillmore’s (1982) study of five young Mexican children, learning English at school in the United States. Having been paired with ‘native-speaking’ children their interactions were recorded regularly over nine months. Wong Fillmore (1982) highlighted the cognitive and social strategies employed by children who appeared to improve their communicative abilities. Learning the language was their means of establishing friendships in class. The findings revealed that motivation to engage with others (who spoke the dominant discourse) resulted in increased learning, rather than the applied SLA strategies.

Following a request in the ‘Modern Language Journal’ (Long, 1993) for researchers to reduce the expanse of perspectives on SLA, sociocultural approaches gained in number, as linguists reconsidered their theoretical positions (Firth, 2007). Hence, since the 1990s linguists have not only begun to question how and why language changes over time, but the relationship between language, culture and society. This has resulted in a gradual move away from applied linguistics to a more integrated ‘social and cultural’ approach to the study of SLA – sociolinguistics. The term has grown in use to refer to the ‘interdisciplinary field concerned with the intersection of language, culture, and society’ (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 586). However, sociolinguistics speak in terms of how ‘linguistic, social and cognitive factors’ (Hellermann, 2008) impact upon language acquisition, rather than seeking sociocultural understandings through bilingual learning.

However, studies based upon acceptance of the ‘social-affective’ and ‘acquired’ (Krashen, 1987) strategies for language learning continue to contribute to the evolution of SLA. Gravelle (2005) acknowledges that children learning SLA, ‘have social and cognitive competencies that are connected with their use of different languages in different contexts.

Early years pedagogy which formerly discussed language learning through a developmental approach has begun to acknowledge not only that social and cultural factors influence language learning, but also the sociocultural theorising of bilingual learning. Green and Hill (2005) discuss how young children attempt to make sense of the world and interpret ‘happenings’ around them via the dominant discourses in their culture. Mac Naughton et al. (2001) adds, ‘language is much more than just a window on a world that exists independently of it. Instead, language creates our social world’.

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE MOTHER TONGUE

Cummins’ (1984) SLA thinking theory on language proficiency developed further the concepts of ‘acquired’ and ‘learnt’ language (Krashen, 1987). Cummins (1981) studied non-English-speaking Canadian bilingual learners aged between four and sixteen years who had been taught in English since arriving in the USA. His
findings led Cummins to make a distinction between two kinds of language proficiency – ‘Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills’ (BICS) and ‘Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency’ (CALP). However, Cummins later used these terms cautiously (Baker, 1993) as he was concerned that BICS and CALP might risk being over-simplified and misused, thus stereotyping the language proficiency of bilingual learners. Consequently, Cummins (1984) addressed this problem through a theoretical framework which embeds BICS and CALP within a larger theory of Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP). BICS refers to the ‘surface’ skills of listening and speaking which young children learn through ‘playful’ social participation with mother tongue speakers – spoken language required for informal communication. As BICS is context-embedded it is supported through the signs and other non-verbal cues of the listener. Cummins (1984) and Collier (1987) suggest that bilingual learners may take one to three years to develop BICS. CALP is the necessary knowledge/skills required for a child to work academically in the classroom – the ability to think in and use a language as an academic tool for learning. Whilst many children develop bilingual fluency (BICS) within two years of ‘immersion’ in the dominant language, it may take up to seven years for a child to be working as an academic equal. Indeed, bilingual learners who do not have strong mother tongue fluency may take up to ten years to acquire CALP. This may be exacerbated by a lack of opportunities available for use of non-verbal clues, group interaction, situated academic language and shared cultural/linguistic understanding. Cummins confirms the importance of drawing upon mother tongue understandings in learning an additional language.

CUP is the ‘base-line’, mother tongue ‘anchor’ that leads to further learning of and through other language(s). Cummins’ CUP ‘Dual Iceberg’ model of bilingualism (Cummins, 1980, p. 36, 1996, p. 111) is represented in the form of two icebergs (Figure 1) which are separate above the surface. Two languages are visibly different in outward conversation, enabling the bilingual learner (Baker & Jones, 1998, p. 82) to ‘function in two or more languages with relative ease’.

Underneath the surface, the two icebergs are fused so that the two languages do not function separately. Baker (1996, p. 147) states, ‘When a person owns two or more languages, there is one integrated source of thought’. This is due to both languages operating through the same ‘central system’ – the mother tongue. Cummins (2000) emphasises that continual development of mother tongue competence is integral to the learning of other languages.
Figure 1. Cummins’ CUP ‘Dual Iceberg’ Model of Bilingualism

Figure 2 (Cummins, 1984, p. 139) presents a four-part diagram that demonstrates the distinctions between BICS and CALP. A continuum of language ability tasks is determined by the communication context and the amount of support provided along the other continuum from context-embedded to context-reduced. A context-embedded task is one in which a range of visual and/or oral cues are available to support bilingual learning. A context-reduced task (such as teacher-led assemblies) is one in which the dominant spoken language (English) is the sole resource for bilingual learning, with no context supporting cues available.

Although the EYFS (2007) is based on learning through participative play, there may be situations such as assembly or registration when teaching is context-
Cummins’ (1984, p. 139) model and the importance of supporting mother tongue learning, might choose to modify their teaching and resource CALP through additional context-embedded teaching and learning opportunities.

Cummins’ (1994) research supports ‘additive bilingualism’ in which the mother tongue flourishes simultaneously alongside both shared cultural understandings and the additional learned language(s). In contrast, ‘subtractive bilingualism’ arises when the unfamiliar, additional language(s) is/are learnt at the expense of the mother tongue and known cultural understandings. Cummins (1994) highlights that in additive bilingual environments, children succeed.

COLOURS OF MOTHER TONGUE THINKING

The speech structures mastered by the child become the basic structures of his thinking. (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 94)

Throughout this study I refer to the significance of ‘mother tongue thinking’ throughout the silent period. However, this proves a difficult and ‘hazy’ concept to articulate and demonstrate, because thinking cannot be seen or heard. I therefore draw upon Vygotsky (1986) to support the theorising that underpins my interpretation of this complex and transformative action.

Parents, siblings and other family members across generations (Gregory et al., 2010) introduce language through the medium of the mother tongue, which builds upon and serves as a cultural tool for distributed social participation. Thus, the mother tongue is an instrument of social relations which is transformed within internal cognition (internalised) as thought. To clarify, the spoken word (mother tongue) is transformed into and internalised as mother tongue thought.

Vygotsky (1978) describes the process of internalisation of the spoken word as, ‘a series of transformations: An operation that initially represents an external activity is reconstructed and begins to occur internally ... An interpersonal process is transformed into an intrapersonal one’ (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 56). According to Vygotsky, thought, being one of a human’s ‘higher’ cognitive activities, is dependent on speech. Speech and thought (both social in origin) develop interpersonally, and are involved in facilitating participation through social activities. When Vygotsky (1981b) describes how internalisation transforms the external into the internal, he is attempting to explain the changing structure and functions of learning (as the spoken word becomes thought). It is at this point that thinking might be perceived as the result of internalisation of the spoken word. The spoken mother tongue appears to resource mother tongue thinking through this transformative cognitive action.

Interestingly, a predecessor of Vygotsky (Mead, 1962) provides a pragmatic focus upon social interaction that enriches Vygotsky’s thinking. Mead suggested that, ‘internalisation in our experience of the external conversation of gestures ... [in the social process] is the essence of thinking’ [my emphasis] (Mead, 1962, p. 47). The term ‘conversation of gestures’ implies that internalisation is mediated through a multiplicity of non-verbal practices. Perhaps internalisation of the spoken
mother tongue is accompanied by a complexity of practices, such as observation, listening and copying? This presents the possibility of non-verbal practices emerging in direct relation to internalisation of the mother tongue.

If child development from a sociocultural perspective is seen to occur through social participation with others including family members, then cultural historical messages are conveyed through the mother tongue. Interpersonal learning plays an essential role in providing and demonstrating the use of signs and symbols of the known culture and, from infancy, these signs and symbols assist in interpersonal participation and later, when used as tools, to mediate intrapersonal learning. Does mother tongue thinking serve an important role in the synthesis of known and new practices, in mediating the learner’s participation?

Through a linguistic lens, articulation of the transformative capability of speech into thought proves difficult to explore, but from a sociocultural perspective, this emergent stage of bilingual learning no longer needs to be presented as a progression of separate and demarcated processes – but more in terms of thinking through a multiplicity of transformative social practices.

The early years teacher/practitioner has a pivotal role in the early years CoP. Not only is she/he in a position to encourage learning through (as a culture-generated tool) mother tongue speaking (Cummins, 1991), but she/he can mediate the bilingual learner’s journey as she/he synthesises known and new culturally appropriated practices. Thus, the early years teacher/practitioner facilitates participation through cross/trans-cultural (Henderson, 2004) understandings. Rogoff (2003) draws attention to the ways in which learning is supported in different communities and to the forms of guided participation which are central to bilingual learning. Teachers/practitioners may need guidance to establish shared understandings with bilingual learners, and in the introduction of culturally mediated activities.

The use of ‘symbolic tools’, according to Rogoff (2003), is central to the constantly evolving nature of culture – culture being the result of experiences through which the participants have engaged together in negotiation with their developing identities. As Rogoff states, ‘culture is not static, it is formed from the efforts of people working together, using and adapting material and symbolic tools provided by predecessors and in the process creating new ones’ (2003, p. 51).

Although children acquire the internal tools of thinking and acting through everyday practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991), Cope and Kalantzis (2008) point out that this is difficult to achieve in an English early years setting where the activities and resources are specifically designed for white monolingual children and stand distinct from their familiar lives. Without cross/trans-cultural understandings of young bilingual learners, will not the early years teacher/practitioner struggle to identify culturally appropriated resources and, despite policy rhetoric (Cable et al., 2006), be unable to appreciate the mother tongue as a tool for learning (in England)?

The ‘mother tongue’ is interconnected to, and universally entwined with, issues of ‘identity, ownership and a sense of belonging to a group, culture, and a country’ and as such, crucial for ‘mothers’ to pass to their children. ‘Identity, aspiration, and
notions of gender come together’ through the continuation and development (use of) the mother tongue (Mills, 2004, p. 186).

IDENTITY AND AGENCY

Hall (2003, p. 236) argues that cultural identity is a ‘matter of “becoming” as well as “being”. … It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories’. Jacobson (1998) discusses how the family (as the principal source of knowledge and attitudes) nurtures the developing identities of the younger minority ethnic generations, with the support from strong and stable communities, education, religion and recreation having significant effects on the developing identities of young people from South Asian communities in Western Europe. Jacobson (1998) would suggest that the family and community take ownership of the responsibility of protecting and reinforcing the minority identity of the children and young people.

For example, Adyta (a main character in this study) is a member of the Sikh community. In the traditional Sikh community (in England) older generations (like Adyta’s grandmother) feel a responsibility to maintain certain traditions and boundaries between their own and the dominant culture. As such, Adyta’s extended family (reinforced by resources and institutions within the wider Sikh community) simultaneously influences Adyta’s developing identities, whilst contributing to his understandings of Punjabi cultural practices – including the preservation of his mother tongue. Therefore, from a sociocultural perspective, identities develop through interactions between individuals and their sociocultural contexts. The work of identity is always ‘going on’. As participants’ membership of informal and formal CoP changes, so also the CoPs remodel and determine identities. Identities are therefore forever evolving and modifying through social engagement in participation.

According to Wenger (1998, p. 146), identity is created through our social practices, ‘even our most private thoughts make use of concepts, images, and perspectives that we understand through our participation in social communities’. Hall (1996, p. 2) also recognises identity as part of the ‘binding and marking of symbolic boundaries’ and as such, identity ‘requires what is left outside’ (Hall, 1995, p. 3). Identities therefore are not just the product of unity, but also disharmony, difference and exclusion. Identities are never unified and, in late-modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiple; constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions (Hall, 1996, p. 4).

Returning to Suki and her silent experiences in reception class, Gee (2004) might ask how Suki developed her identities sufficiently, when constrained between the four walls of the monolingual early years CoP – with its unfamiliar practices and discourses. Wenger (1998) would reply that being part of a joint venture (the early years CoP) would resource the development of Suki’s identities. Not only were Suki’s developing identities challenged by the monolingual,
dominant and sustaining (Cline & Baldwin, 2004) culture of the early years CoP, but the silent period proved a critical time of learning and negotiation. Lave and Wenger (1991) emphasise that the development of identities is a key factor within the CoP for movement from peripheral to central participation. To succeed, Suki needed to develop her identities whilst situated on the periphery – not an easy task when the dominant language of discourse is ‘out of reach’. Wenger (1998) and Hall’s (1996, p. 4) articulations of identity demonstrate how identities continually evolve and re-modify, ‘constantly in the process of change and transformation’, rooted in the boundaries and intersections between both unifying and conflicting practices and discourses. Thus, language, identity and culture appear to be acutely complex and intricately interwoven.

Bilingual learning cannot be analysed in isolation from agentive actions. Lave’s (1988) anthropological understandings of participation in everyday practices have moved theoretical thinking on the significance of agency and identity within learning. In the role of ‘social actors’, learners (children) engage in the act of ‘becoming’ through mastering the discourses associated with situated contexts, and develop agency through actions within interrelated life-worlds (Sharrock, 1997). Is it by agentive action that Suki can change her world, and learn? Lave’s (1988) anthropological understandings of participation in everyday practices have emphasised the significance of agency and identity within learning. This thinking reinforces sociocultural interpretations of bilingual learners as ‘social actors’ taking ownership of their ‘becoming’ through agentive action. When an emergent bilingual learner is mastering the discourses of differing situated contexts, agentive action ‘carves a path’ through interrelated life-worlds (Sharrock, 1997). Consequently, the child is agentive in transforming her/his world – through participation. Weedon (1987) and Lave and Wenger (1991) presented ‘connectedness’ between identity formation and situated learning within institutional and community contexts. Key concepts identifying the connections between learning, agency and developing identities were examined by Chaiklin and Lave (1996) and Holland et al. (1998) which led to viewing learners as culturally constructed social agents (Holland & Lave, 2001) with identities that were not static, but variable, multi-vocal and interactive – thus implying that emergent bilingual learners are capable and agentive in re-creating new ‘cultural worlds’. According to Holland and Lave (2001), agency resides in the transformative power of the human imagination, with life-worlds being powerful mediators of activity. To clarify, agentive action (through participation) transforms and re-creates a new world that becomes part of one’s own.

**AFFINITY SPACES AND MULTIMODAL THINKING**

Gee’s (2005) multimodal line of thinking on learning discourses reflects Holland and Lave’s (2001) concerns regarding teachers/practitioners perceptions of ‘ideal’ cultural practices, including expectations in the use of spoken and written English – a *narrowly focused direction*. This apparent ‘ideal’ may be at ‘odds’ with the practices of children who diverge from the monolingual ‘norm’, such as bilingual
learners. Gee (2004, 2005) presents an alternative notion to that of CoPs – ‘affinity spaces’, which may be capable of ‘cutting through’ the barriers created by this narrow focus on learning discourses. His concept offers multiple routes to engagement in participation via alternative means, levels and contexts. Nespor’s (1994) undergraduate study argues that people arrive from other experiences that are ‘defined … along particular trajectories’ (Nespor, 1994, p. 9) in which particular discourses shape human experience and the interconnectedness between spaces in order to negotiate their own position and meaning.

So what is special about affinity spaces? Affinity spaces (Gee, 2005) appear as more subtle and fluid than CoPs. In contrast to CoPs where barriers to learning may result from deficit models of race, class, gender and/or ability, the concept, affinity spaces articulates a learning environment in which expertise from both inside and outside the classroom can be drawn upon to support, facilitate and distribute knowledge to others. A simplistic analogy to explain the differences between CoPs and affinity spaces would be to compare a garden constrained within determined boundaries by fences, gates and walls to that of a CoP, as opposed to affinity spaces in which a location surpasses set physical boundaries and yet is still there. The territory exists within fluid boundaries that may only be evident to the participants located within it. An example of such a location might be the territory set by a domestic cat which passes fluidly over, under and through boundaries set by gardens, fences, walls and gates. Affinity spaces move beyond the boundaries of the classroom, outside of the school and school hours and into children’s homes – where much learning occurs.

Gee’s (2004) concept ‘affinity spaces’ relates to a concern that children from disadvantaged and minority groups may be denied access to learning in ‘educational’ CoPs, due to them being language driven. CoPs are based on groups of people who share similar goals and interests through the employment of common practices, including the tool of language (Wenger, 1999). For instance, the language of a cook’s CoP might share such words as ‘knead’, ‘par-boil’ and ‘flambé’ amongst its members; without a valid ‘entry ticket’ (the language within the CoP) entrance may be barred. Gee (2005, p. 232) believes that, ‘affinity spaces can lead us to ask some new questions about classroom learning or ask some old ones in new ways’. Dreier’s (1999) study into participation across contexts of social practice engages with similar criticisms of CoPs to those of Gee (2005). Dreier is cautious of applying CoPs as a theoretical lens, warning that CoPs do not necessarily capture the fluidity and complexity of learning. Dreier is reluctant to consider individuals as ‘situation-bound’ as opposed to fluidly moving in and out of social practices that shift and change over time. The concept of affinity spaces displays similar characteristics to that which Dreier (1999) would term ‘trajectories of participation’ – participants ongoing social practice.

Gee (2004) offers online video games as an example of an affinity space which acts as a ‘level playing field’ for all learners – including emergent bilingual learners. During video games, problems are accompanied by instantly accessible ‘tools’ which enable participants to learn through guided experience. Not only does Gee believe that the participants build up their knowledge and expertise in video
gaming through successes (as opposed to failure) but that participants mediate their own learning through developing social competencies amongst the ‘gaming’ community of learners. In doing so, video games may provide the learner with stories, scenarios, visual stimulus and actions that ‘tap into’ a new ‘cross cultural’ language – a legitimate means of participatory learning, where new competencies can be built and drawn upon. Gee (2004) perceives CoPs as too bound within strictly demarcated local settings and argues that learning is not about solely interacting with the members and objects physically present in the CoP, but defined through the continuity of participation within and through a multiplicity of additional learning spaces.

Interestingly, Merchant et al.’s (2006) study discusses the connection between children’s digital learning and identity construction in different contexts. Firstly, ‘anchored’ identities are identified as, ‘profoundly influenced by a long history of sociocultural practice’ and secondly, ‘transient’ identities are identified as, ‘more easily made, re-made and unmade’ (Merchant et al., 2006, p. 25). Anchored identities appear to relate to learning through CoPs, whereas transient identities appears more aligned to notions of affinity spaces.

In contrast to Gees’ (2004) articulation of digital learning through affinity spaces, Jackson and Conteh’s (2008) study ‘tapped’ into the resourcefulness of ‘art’ as a subject which not only provides a ‘level playing field’ for learning to emergent bilingual learners (unable to access the academic discourse) but also bridges sociocultural understandings, by providing a cross cultural (global) learning platform through which opportunities for contributing to and distributing both known and shared cultural practices. Learning through art is seen to provide a new conceptualisation of the subject, as a significant ‘space’ and means for negotiating the complexity of teaching and learning practices. The ‘third space’ (Gutiérrez, 2008; Bhabha, 1994) also articulates spaces where differing discourses ‘positioned’ between home and school lives can be redefined, meanings renegotiated and understandings of everyday practices distributed. Drawing similarities to both LPP and affinity spaces, the ‘third space’ offers an alternative ‘somewhere’ for negotiation, construction and re-construction of identity to safely take place.

Building upon this picture of ‘other’ spaces, Conteh and Brock’s (2010, p. 12) study into ‘sites of bilingualism’ also draws upon the concept of a ‘third space’ in suggesting that a young bilingual learner develops most confidently through ‘safe spaces’ – which serve to ‘empower them’ to ‘perform their identities’ in ‘transformative ways’. In Hancock and Gillen’s (2007) study of pre-school girls in Peru, America and Italy it is argued that, ‘domestic locations can be seen as “safe places”’ that, ‘enable children’s sense of belonging, foster their “emplaced knowledge” and build on their confidence to explore spaces further afield’ (Hancock & Gillen, 2007, p. 1). Hancock and Gillen (2007) also point out, ‘as a place for children’s development and learning … the rich opportunities that home can provide as a “safe playground” … in which even young children, through their own agency and play, orchestrate personal experiences and learning’ (Hancock & Gillen, 2007, p. 20), therefore reminding, ‘us of the way in which we, as adults,
may perhaps be out of touch with how children perceive and relate to “learning” spaces’ (Hancock & Gillen, 2007, p. 21).

Emergent bilingual learners therefore seek varied and alternative spaces through which to learn. Gee (2004) expresses real concerns that minority groups of learners may be at a distinct disadvantage when unable to access the dominant discourse within a CoP. However, the notion of affinity spaces is not without flaws. Affinity spaces may allow participants to ‘surf’ through racial and social disadvantage, but in doing so may disregard the significance of drawing upon cultural historical knowledge. For a young bilingual learner, negotiating meaning making through the silent period, affinity spaces may provide a temporary fix rather than a successful contribution to theorising bilingual participation. Although a useful concept (it provides a ‘level playing field’ for learning), ‘affinity spaces’ is, none the less, situated in the virtual, rather than the real, world.

TEACHING AND LEARNING IN, THROUGH AND BEYOND EARLY YEARS COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Early years teachers/practitioners are not necessarily made aware through current policy and practice that learning takes place within culturally-situated activity (Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995) rather than being the result of it, and that engagement in participation is mediated through collaborative, culturally relevant practices. Such a lack of understanding may be reflected in the physical resourcing of the early years environment and the practices being distributed within it.

Physical resourcing of the learning environment may be predominantly founded according to middle class, Western-European understandings of what is perceived as ‘relevant’ to white, middleclass, monolingual, English-speaking children. The play based EYFS (2007) ‘curriculum’ does little to drive forward a ‘sea-change’ in such misunderstandings, thus leading to tokenistic representations of alternative cultures – such as the occasional ethnically represented doll or a sari in a ‘dressing-up box’. Indeed, the early years environment may appear more representative of the teacher/practitioner’s sociocultural practices than that of a young bilingual learner – devoid of making links with the child’s life-world experiences.

Bilingual learning is not static – it moves, outside of and beyond the formal ‘educational’ environments of school, into and through lived and culturally evolving communities. Familiar and informal CoPs situated outside of the schools provide many learning opportunities for the young bilingual learner over and beyond those experienced within the early years CoP. Primary sources of bilingual learning through home and community school CoPs supplement early years learning – through the sharing of cultural and historical knowledge. Whilst participating in mutually appreciated social practices, primary CoPs resource the child’s agentive actions and developing identities. Is it not a responsibility of early years teachers/practitioners to build upon this culturally situated knowledge – and not to ignore it?
However, somehow silent young bilingual learners manage to successfully bridge and interconnect to and through the differing understandings (Conteh, 2003), in and beyond ‘formal’ CoPs. Gregory (2001) study of synergy between siblings illuminates the gap between children’s experiences at home and what practitioners would consider as learning; thus demonstrating the abundance of learning that emergent bilingual learners participate in within their home environments, and how much more could be achieved if teachers/practitioners recognised and built upon these successes.

The Spitalfields study of literacy in Bangladeshi British children (Gregory & Williams, 2000) demonstrates how older siblings who attend Qur’an classes scaffold their younger siblings, through a ‘fusion’ of learning between what they have already learnt in their English speaking mainstream school and what they are learning within the Qur’an school. Gregory (2008, p. 19) uses the term syncretism, ‘to explain how young children blend existing languages, literacies and practices to create new forms’.

In the early stages when reading with a child who was just beginning … the supportive ‘scaffolding’ was almost total, with the older siblings providing almost every word … As the younger child’s proficiency increased however, the scaffolding was gradually removed until the child was able to read alone. (Kelly et al., 2001, p. 200)

Children not only attempt to make sense of the world and interpret ‘happenings’ around them via the discourses of their own culture (Green & Hill, 2005) but may also attempt to seek out the dominant discourse of the new ‘culture’. As Mac Naughton, Rolf and Siraj-Blatchford (2001) articulate, ‘language is much more than just a window on a world that exists independently of it. Instead, language creates our social world’. Kenner (2004) also demonstrated how children syncretize the signs, symbols and tools necessary to participate in differing cultural communities (simultaneous worlds). Rogoff’s (1990) study on ‘Apprenticeship in Thinking’ emphasised the significance of older siblings and adults in the creation of cultural knowledge – mediating for the younger children.

In contrast to the interconnectedness of learning practices, Kelly et al.’s (2001) study of linguistic minority families demonstrates the complications caused by teachers and researchers in emphasising the ‘sameness’ of monolingual and bilingual learners. Rather than addressing the difficulties that barriers to participation create in learning communities, this attitude creates and reinforces an additional barrier to participation. Disturbingly, government policy also attempts to create a ‘common culture’ (Tate, 1995) in order to ‘iron out’ cultural differences between groups (English National Curriculum, 1995), thus ‘failing to acknowledge the learning practices of different minority groups’ (Kelly et al., 2001). This, ‘sameness’ may be misinterpreted as equality of opportunity. Treating all children as ‘the same’ suggests (at best) indifference and, at worst, benign neglect of minority groups – including bilingual learners.
SOCIO-POLITICAL ISSUES: POLICY AND PRACTICE

Akin to feminism, critical race theory or deconstructive discourse analysis (Agger, 2006), unpacking pedagogical issues arising through the application of a sociocultural lens unavoidably politicizes current policy and practice. Historically embedded within Marxist ideology, Vygotsky’s (1966) sociocultural model of human development prioritises the significance of socially distributed, collaborative participation through shared cultural practices.

Key elements within sociocultural theorising have been assimilated within current early years policy and practice, including the provision of shared ‘areas of learning’ resourced with hexagonally constructed tables, which have been constructed to facilitate collaborative participation. In addition to early years theorizing, the norms and expectations within an early years CoP are inevitably driven by whichever political driver is ‘fueling’ the early years agenda at any given time. At the time of writing (April, 2001) a Conservative/Liberal coalition government is making substantive educational reforms. The current Department of Education (2010) which has replaced the former Department of Children, Schools and Families (2010), is currently reviewing both the National Curriculum (DFEE, 1999) and the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework (DCSF, 2007).

Whether the removal by the government of the words ‘children, schools and families’ and the withdrawal of significant sources of funding from ‘Sure-Start’ schemes (including the development of children’s centres) signifies a shift away from prioritising the needs and rights of the youngest children, is not yet known. Also yet to be ‘seen’ are the outcomes of young bilingual learners, in terms of equity, social justice and inclusion, in relation to any ‘down playing’ of sociocultural theorising, in favour of upholding a more formal and classically underpinned education ideology.

Discussions related to the needs and rights of emergent bilingual learners inevitably raises contentious issues not only in relation to the socio-political messages received via current policy and practice, but also in relation to perspectives on social justice (Levinson, 2001). Silence, (like spoken language) is also intertwined with issues of power and justice (Berry, 2004); and yet (remarkably) it has the ability to serve as a culturally shared and politically neutral agentive action in providing a ‘level playing field’ to participation. Comparable to ideological values (underpinning socio-political beliefs) being passed on generationally through shared ideas and events of family members; so too early years CoPs carry their own cultural knowledge which plays its part in partially shaping values and beliefs. These institutionally laden values and beliefs may or may not be shared by the children. Vygotsky’s (1966) sociocultural conception of learning and development inherently acknowledges the significance of these socio-political forces in shaping children’s lives (Cole & Wersch, 2003) and development.

It becomes apparent that the beliefs and values held by members of each and every sociocultural context determine the knowledge and skills that are considered worth learning. The influences which shape understandings of experiences within
early years environments for young learners (Rogoff, 1990) are already evident within the family, and continue to be formed through exposure to external socio-political influences. Ecological contexts shaping child development (Zubrick & Silburn, 2000) such as Bronfenbrenner’s (1994) ‘ecological systems theory’ (Figure 3) position the young child at the centre of a multifaceted social network. Most notably identified within the model are the wider political, economic and sociocultural frameworks on which the emergent bilingual learner’s life chances are inevitably dependent.

**Figure 3. Ecological Contexts Shaping Child Development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994)**

**DISCUSSION**

The application of sociocultural theory has built upon previously accepted models of ‘second language’ acquisition as a means to ‘clear a pathway’ through which the exploration of Suki’s silent experiences can take place – the extraordinary bilingual learning (Drury, 2007) within the silent period. The silent period has been explored through the employment of Vygotsky’s (1986, chap. 7) thinking on the transformative internalisation of the spoken word (the mother tongue) into thought (as mother tongue thinking). This theorising attempts to ‘unravel’ the movement of emergent bilingual learning from the social (interpersonal) to that of the individual
(intrapersonal) as she/he works (in silence) with, through, and beyond appropriated social participation. Mead’s (1962) ‘conversation of gestures’ may serve to strengthen Vygotsky’s theorising through presenting a synthesis of simultaneous and multiple practices – in the co-construction of new and alternative ways of knowing.

Not only are thought and language situated and distributed in participatory and culturally appropriated practices, but they are also confirmed as the crucial mediating tools through which learning occurs. Lave and Wenger’s (1991) concept ‘situated learning’ articulates silent participation as a function of, and embedded in, situations of engagement in an active process of improvised and transformative practices. Through guided participation (Rogoff, 2003) CoPs beyond the school are seen to positively build upon the specific behaviours and discourses embedded within early years CoPs.

Through an examination of the concept ‘Legitimate Peripheral Participation’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991), Wenger’s (1999) concept of a ‘community of practice’ presented LPP as a context through which to examine the practices of a silent young bilingual learner within an early years setting – thus highlighting the potential of ‘legitimised’ learning ‘spaces’ (Conteh & Brock, 2010; Hancock & Gillen, 2007). Wenger’s (1999) discussions highlight the potential ‘pitfalls’ of reification, which might lead to a young bilingual learner being assessed solely on the visible results of her/his learning, in preference to being assessed through increasing levels of silent participation. In addition, the importance of the teacher/practitioner’s role in mediation and provision of alternative discourses for learning (Gee, 2004; Jackson & Conteh, 2008) emphasised the need to provide a ‘level playing field’ for learning on an ‘equal footing’ to her/his monolingual peers.

What becomes apparent is the complexity and fluidity of emergent bilingual learning in, and beyond, CoPs, as each child contributes to and distributes cross cultural knowledge through learning practices, within families (Kemner et al., 2007), communities (Gregory, 2004) and across a multitude of alternative learning spaces (Conteh & Brock, 2010; Gee, 2005).

Chapter 2 has painted the backdrop to Suki’s silent experiences. The reader has walked through contrasting and complementary theories of emergent bilingual learning. In doing so, an explanation has been presented of how a sociocultural lens provides a rich layer to this enquiry, bringing together the significance and interconnectedness of the mother tongue (Cummins, 1991) within and through thought, language and learning (Vygotsky, 1986). Although linguists, sociolinguists and sociocultural theorists may attempt to ‘hold hands’ when unpacking the complexities of bilingual learning, each approach stems from theoretically different ‘starting blocks’. However, this divergence in thinking does not inhibit each contributor from adding their unique ‘pattern’ to a much larger body of knowledge – the ‘multi-coloured quilt’ of bilingualism in education.