Kindergarten CoP
Communities of Practice in the Transition to School

Sarah Heinrich

Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) (Honours)

A Dissertation
Submitted in Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
at
The University of Western Sydney
2009
APPROVAL PAGE

Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation

Kindergarten CoP
Communities of Practice in the Transition to School

Presented by

Sarah Heinrich
Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) (Honours)

Major Advisor

Diana Whitton

Associate Advisor

Christine Johnston

The University of Western Sydney
2009
Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

(Signature)
Acknowledgements

To the Kindergarten students, their Guardians, Teachers and School staff who formed the very essence of this study and made this study possible,

My sincere thanks and gratitude to you all for allowing me (a stranger at the outset) to be part of your school lives for an entire year. The extent of your acceptance, friendship, willingness to participate and even appreciation of me was beyond what I ever imagined. Thank you. It was truly a joy working with you all.

To my family and close friends,

Despite the challenges that a study of this magnitude and life during this time has thrown at me, you have stood fast in your belief in me and my ability to complete this dissertation. That kind of support is invaluable and will always be treasured as such. Whether you were there from the beginning or came on board at a later stage you played an integral role in seeing me to completion. Thank you.

To my supervisors present - Associate Professor Diana Whitton & Associate Professor Christine Johnston, and supervisors past - Professor Sue Dockett & Professor Bob Perry.

I sincerely thank you for your expertise, support, time, advice and quite often patience as you accompanied me on my journey at various stages. A particularly special thank you to Associate Professor Diana Whitton who through unexpected circumstances, willingly adopted me as her student and offered me the support, encouragement and motivation I needed to see this through until the end.

Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my boy “Doohan”, my champion mate, who was there with me from before the beginning but had to part ways with me just before the end.
All people are members of various communities of practice (for example, families, sports clubs, educational institutions, companies, divisions within organisations, religious groups, and community groups). A ‘communities of practice’ framework is a social theory of learning, one that sees learning as an instinctive and social process that occurs through engaging with others in context. To date, such a framework has not been applied to children’s experiences of starting school and has focused mainly on adults’ experiences of membership.

This thesis reports young children’s perspectives of becoming members of classroom and school communities of practice as they start school and how these perspectives evolved over the period of 1 year. It introduces a framework based on routines, rules, relationships, rituals and remarkable moments that describe children’s involvement in their school-based communities of practice. Further, the thesis demonstrates and celebrates young children’s competencies in negotiating and participating in a community of practice and in articulating their perspectives and experiences in a range of ways.
Table of Contents

Chapter One
Introduction
Rational for the Study 15
Purpose of the Study 16
Research Questions 18
Analysis of Data 20
Chapter Two 22
Literature Review
Starting School 23
Research with Children 29
Small Group Interviews 35
Role Play 36
Children’s Drawings 36
Digital Photography 37
Digital Video 38
Communities of Practice 39
Conclusion 48
Chapter Three
Methodology
Introduction 50
Research Methodology 52
The Research Context 54
The Surrounding Community 56
Local Community Context 57
Prior to Site Entry 58
School Context 62
Sample 65
Entry to School Site 66
Development of Rapport with Staff, Children and Families 66
Establishment of Relationships with Classroom Teachers and Kindergarten 68
Participants
Data Collection Methods 70
Observations 70
Interviews 72
Role Play 76
Drawing During Interviews 77
Video Diary 78
Digital Photographs 80
Data Analysis 81
Exit from Site in Negotiation with Participants 83
Conclusion to Link with Data Analysis 87
Chapter 4
Members of the KA Community of Practice
Profiles of Students 89
Chapter 5

Results and Discussion

Results and Discussion 103

Learning as Belonging

Relationships 111
Rules 120
Rituals 123
Routines 125
Remarkable Moments 128

Learning as Experience

Relationships 130
Rules 133
Rituals 135
Routines 138
Remarkable Moments 140

Learning as Doing

Relationships 142
Rules 146
Rituals 150
Routines 151
Remarkable Moments 154

Learning as Becoming
Appendices

A. Consent form for parents and guardians of Kindergarten students 234
B. Consent form for adult participants 236
C. Information statement for parents and guardians 238
D. Information statement for adult participants 240
E. Information statement for Kindergarten students 242
F. Video screening invitation for parents and caregivers 244
G. Photo CD note for parents and caregivers 245

List of Tables

Table 1. NSW school term dates 55
Table 2. Local and community statistics 57
Table 3. Percentage of population by age brackets 57
Table 4. Organisation of school years, curriculum stage and age bracket 62
Table 5. Summary of students’ video responses 202

List of Figures

Figure 1. Example of page from field note recording book 71
Figure 2. Example of page from field note book for students 72
Figure 3. Perpetually reflexive model 104
Chapter One

Introduction

Rationale for the Study

Starting school is a major life transition for young children. What happens in the first year of school can have significant impact on children’s identities and disposition towards being at school (Bailey, 1999; Fabian, 2000; Woods, Boyle, & Hubbard, 1999). However, research on starting school has traditionally focused on the views of adults, particularly school teachers and parents. It is only in recent years that children’s perspectives have been considered and sought out deliberately in educational research, particularly transition research. This may be so partly because as adults we have all experienced the transition to school and believe we understand what transition means to children. As children have been found to hold different perspectives to that of their parents and teachers (Dockett & Perry, 2003), it is vital that research continues to add children’s perspectives to research accounts, for a more holistic view of the range of contexts in which children and adults co-exist.

The present study is significant because it looks from children’s perspectives at the transition to school and considers it as a process of entering and establishing membership in a community of practice (CoP). Whilst some international studies have focused on children’s perspectives (Brooker, 2002 and Pollard & Filer, 1996 in the UK; Broström, 2000 in Sweden, and Corsaro, 2000 in the United States and Italy), they have not necessarily applied a CoP
framework as set out by Wenger (1998). Furthermore, no such study has been conducted in an Australian transition to school context.

The significance of children’s transition to school is well recognised and documented (Clyde, 2001; Dockett & Perry, 2004; Fabian, 2002; Ledger, Smith & Rich, 1998; Niesel & Griebel, 2001; Perry, Dockett, & Howard, 2000; Peters, 2000; Pianta, Rimm-Kaufman & Cox; 1999). Researchers such as Dockett and Perry (2001), and Pianta and Cox (1999) argue that positive transitions to school are linked to future school academic and social success and positive attitudes towards learning. Bailey (1999) states ‘Kindergarten is a context in which children make important conclusions about school as a place where they want to be and about themselves as learners’ (p. xv). Woods, Boyle and Hubbard (1999) assert that starting school is ‘one of the great status passages of life, having profound repercussions for identity’ (p. 117). This comment by Woods et al., (1999) comes closest to justifying the links being established in the present study between transition to school and membership in classroom and school CoP.

Within Wenger’s (1998) framework, CoP are the very places in which children learn, exist and develop their identities. The school and classroom are CoP that children enter and become members of by virtue of their age, and ability in some instances. Effective CoP give members a sense of competence through participation (Wenger, 1998). Studying how these CoP evolve and are negotiated can therefore greatly enhance our understanding of children’s early experience of school.

Purpose of the Study

Current attention to children’s voices has prompted researchers to identify ways to involve children as informed participants and co-researchers in the research process, in order to empower
children and allow their agendas to shape the research (Christensen, 2004; Cook-Sather, 2002; Fasoli, 2003; Nespor, 1998). Two major contributing factors to this movement is the new sociology of childhood (Corsaro, 1997; Hendrick, 2000; James, 1993; Mayall, 2001; James & Prout, 1997) and the United Nations [UN] Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and Child Rights Movement (Danby & Farrell, 2004; Einarsdottir, 2007; O’Kane, 2000; Sinclair Taylor, 2000; Woodhead & Brooker, 2008). Within these paradigms, children are firstly viewed as competent people, who influence and are influenced by their social contexts, and who have the right to be viewed as active agents. Complemented with Wenger’s (1998) CoP framework, understanding will be gained as to how children influence and are influenced by their classroom and school experiences.

Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford (2001) assert that there is currently a need for ‘more ethnographic research which can paint in the fine-grained reality of educational processes within early childhood settings’ (p. 194). The focus of this study is children’s perspectives, which will contribute to magnifying the threads of children’s lived experience within the fabric of classroom and school contexts. Researching children’s membership in these communities of practice as both individuals and communities develop, will contribute strategies for transition practices that ensure children’s sense of competence as members of their CoP, thus promoting children’s positive disposition towards school, future social and academic success at school, and a positive sense of identity as members of their school.

Children’s perspectives traditionally have not been sought in education research. Researchers (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Lewis, 1992; Murfin & Butterworth, 1999) have provided a range of reasons for this, including children being regarded as impressionable and therefore unreliable, immature or incompetent to inform research. This study is responding
to the current call from a vast number of researchers to include and highlight children’s voices, perspectives, participation and lived experience in research and to ensure that appropriate methodologies are used to achieve this (Barker & Weller, 2003a; Christensen & James, 2000; Clark & Moss, 2001; Clyde, 2001; Cook-Sather, 2002; Dockett & Perry, 2003; Griebel & Niesel, 2000; Jans, 2004; Lewis & Lindsay, 2000; Lloyd-Smith & Tarr, 2000; Pollard, Thiessen, & Filer, 1997; Sinclair Taylor; 2000).

Research Questions

The research question for this study was:

How do children’s perspectives of themselves as members of their classroom and school CoP evolve over their Kindergarten year?

Within this question, the research objectives for the study are to:

1. Investigate children’s perspectives of their personal interactions in the classroom;

2. Observe how children’s participation and modes of belonging change throughout their first year of school;

3. Ascertain what membership of classroom and school CoP means for children’s identity formation;

4. Discover how it feels to be a member of this classroom and school community from children’s perspectives and how they might like it to be different;

5. Discern how children’s understandings and acts of participation are reified, or incorporated into the valued meanings and practices by their classroom and school’s CoP;

6. Observe the extent to which children negotiate and even re-write understandings, meanings and practices in the classroom’s and school’s CoP, and how they go about this;
7. Ascertain how children learn how to operate in their classroom and school CoP;

8. Investigate how children’s ways of operating within their classroom’s and school’s CoP are different at the end of their first year of school to when they first started;

9. Consider how children’s perspectives and experiences of their classroom’s and school CoP impact on their transition and adaptation to the formal schooling environment; and,

10. Explore children’s experiences, participation in, and negotiation of the curriculum.
Analysis of Data

The students were consulted throughout the year of the study in order to gather a range of data including observations in field notes, interview transcripts, video transcripts and drawings. Using the data collected the researcher engaged children in small group conversation and reflection about the data informally. During this time the researcher asked the children open-ended questions to clarify meanings. This process facilitated students’ participation in the research process, as opposed to data collection only, and assisted the researcher’s ability to be reflexive. Data was coded using NVIVO software to categorise into key components of Wenger’s (1998) framework. During this process data driven themes were also identified which were then sorted back into Wenger’s framework to synthesise both the founding framework for data collection and resulting data driven themes.

Therefore, this research is about the voices and experiences of young children in their first year of school. This is not a phenomenon that can be researched and reduced to numbers without losing the essence of the participants’ voices.

A range of methods have been employed, as advised by researchers at the forefront of research concerning children’s voices, perspectives, experience and participation. Mixed methods, early establishment of rapport with all involved, particularly the students, and substantial time spent in their classroom and school environment contributed to a richer understanding and knowledge of these students’ experiences.

While only one group of Kindergarten students participated in this study, the question would remain if several groups of Kindergarten students participated. Each school and classroom is a unique context, with every student being unique in him or herself. The framework, data analysis and recommendations can be applied to many school or classroom contexts. This
research was not undertaken to find one true answer to the research question but to contribute to the growing body of research highlighting young children’s perspectives about starting school and ultimately contribute to the research reporting children’s voices.

Finally, the ongoing debate regarding the reliability of children sharing their perspectives is purely epistemological. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) insists on children having a say and being consulted in matters that concern them. As an early childhood educator, the key motivation of this research was to give young children a voice within research on an issue that is highly significant to them and their families. What should be remembered when questioning the validity of young children’s responses is:

a) Are we asking the right questions?

b) Are we asking in the right way?

c) Adults are capable of withholding or stretching the truth, so does that mean then that we should discredit research with adults as some might with young children?

d) What image do we hold of young children that allows us to seek out in faith or discredit their views?
Chapter Two

Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of literature pertinent to this study. Areas of literature significant to this study include: starting school and transition to school; researching children’s perspectives and experiences; and Wenger’s (1998) notion of Communities of Practice.

This study involved participants in their first year of school from the first day they started school. The literature reviewed highlighted why the area of starting school is an issue prevalent in society and research discussions today, why it is important to continue investigation into this significant transition in the lives of children and families, and how children starting school relates to a communities of practice framework.

Research with young children seeking their perspectives and voices on matters relevant to their lives is a rapidly growing area of research. Previously there had been a paucity of children’s voices in research accounts. Literature surrounding seeking children’s perspectives is discussed in order to justify why this research seeks children’s voices when other voices in the context can be sought, and highlight the importance of reporting children’s voices on issues that they are very much a part of.

Across a range of disciplines the ‘Communities of Practice’ [CoP] framework devised by Wenger (1998) has been used by many researchers. Literature using a CoP framework is reviewed and discussed in light of its application to the proposed study.
Starting School

Woods, et al (1999) assert that starting school is ‘one of the great status passages of life, having profound repercussions for identity’ (p. 117). It is this comment by Woods et al (1999) that comes closest to justifying the links being established in this research between transition to school and membership in classroom and school communities of practice.

Bailey (1999) stated,

Kindergarten is a context in which children make important conclusions about school as a place where they want to be and about themselves as learners vis-à-vis schools. If no other objectives are accomplished, it is essential that the transition to school occur in such a way that children and families have a positive view of school and that children have a feeling of perceived competence as learners (p. xv).

This is important because children will spend between 10-12 years of their life in formal education, and for this to be a rewarding experience and a promotion of a desire for life-long learning, positive first impressions and experiences of school are vital (Dockett & Perry, 2001). As Pianta and Cox (2002) stated, ‘the early elementary years, particularly kindergarten, are important in establishing competencies critical to children’s school success and achievement’ (p. 1).

The Centre for Community Child Health (2008) confirm this view highlighting that ‘a successful transition to school results in children who like school, look forward to going regularly, and show steady growth in academic and social skills’ (p. 1). When children feel that they belong in their school group and educational setting and are making achievements relative to those of their peers their self-esteem and their desire to be at school is increased (Dockett & Perry, 2001; Ramey & Ramey, 1999).

Starting formal schooling is a major transition in the lives of children and families (Dockett and Perry, 2001; Dockett, Perry, Howard & Meckley, 1999; Glazier, 2001; Kagan, 1999; Lam &
Pollard, 2006; Pianta and Cox, 1999; Richardson, 1997). Positive transitions are linked to future school success (Dockett & Perry, 2001; Margetts, 1997; New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 1999; Ramey & Ramey, 1998), and positive relationships between home and school – a key element in successful transitions, encourage students’ positive attitudes towards school and future learning (Corrie, 2001; Docket & Perry, 2001; Fleet, Patterson & Garrett, 1999; Richardson, 1997).

There has been much research in the area of transition to school. This research has focused on issues as diverse as:

- Children’s emotional readiness (Denham, 2006; Fabian, 2002; Hyson, 2002; Ladd, Herald & Kochel, 2006; Peth-Pierce, 2001; Raver, 2002; Ramey & Ramey, 1999);
- Starting school age of children (Datar, 2006; Rogers & Rose, 2007);
- Children’s physical health and well-being (Feeney, Grace, & Brandt, 2001; Kagan, 2003; Lewit & Baker, 1995; Ramey & Ramey, 1999);
- Children’s adjustment and adaptation to school (Brooker, 2002; Lam & Pollard, 2006; Pollard & Filer, 1999; Wentzel, 1999);
- The importance of relationships (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Corrie, 2001; Dockett & Perry, 2000; Fabian, 2002; Welsh, Park, Widaman, & O’Neil, 2000; The Centre for Community Child Health, 2008);
- Appropriate class sizes (Slavin, 1990; Vinson Report, 2002);
- The contextual nature of readiness (Dockett & Perry, 2009; Graue, 2006; Lam & Pollard, 2006; Meisels, 1999; Wentzel, 1999);
Partnerships between school, family and community (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2004; Dockett, Perry & Nicholson, 2002; Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000; Perry, 2001; Pianta & Walsh, 1996; Pianta, Rimm-Kauffman & Cox, 1999);

Primary caregiver involvement in school activities (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2004; Fabian, 2002; Perry, 2001);

The individual ways that children experience the transition to school (Dockett, Clyde & Perry; 1998; Lam & Pollard, 2006; Pianta & Cox, 1990);

What constitutes effective transition programs (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2004; Davidowitz, 1988; Dockett & Perry, 2003a; Margetts, 2002; Richardson, 1997);

What schools need to do to cater for the individual children as they start school (The Centre for Community Child Health, 2008; Feeney, et al., 2001; Stipek, 2002);

Children as agents in the transition to school (Graue & Walsh, 1998; Lam, 2009; Lam & Pollard, 2006);

Children’s sense of belonging when they transition to school (Woodhead & Brooker, 2008);

Continuity and discontinuity between prior-to-school and school experiences (Centre for Community Child Health, 2008; Lam & Pollard, 2006); and,

The differences between children’s capabilities as they start school (Bellisimo, Sacks & Mergendoller, 1995; Centre for Community Child Health, 2008; deCos, 1997; Tudge, Odero, Hogan & Etz, 2003).

Many areas of transition to school have been explored but there still seems to be no research of children’s voices in longitudinal studies of their experiences as members of a Kindergarten community of practice.
There are many dimensions of a successful start to school. One dimension that has attracted a great deal of research attention is the area of readiness. The debate around schools being ready for children has been ongoing and continues to be analysed (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005; Dockett & Perry, 2009; Early, Pianta, Taylor & Cox, 2001; Graue, 1993; Kagan, 1992; Shore, 1998; Stipek, 2002) as much as children being ready for school. Despite this research focus, most current research is dominated by adult conversations and perspectives surrounding children’s readiness for school and the ways to achieve this (Dockett & Perry, 2000).

Readiness is a problematic term due to the contextual nature of its definition. It is understood in a range of ways depending on the setting, educators within the setting, community views, parents and individual children (Dockett & Perry, 2009; Graue, 2006; Crnic & Lamberty, 1994). Perceptions of readiness have evolved over the years (Kagan, 1990; Lam & Pollard, 2006). It is acknowledged by Lockwood and Fleet (1999) that ‘readiness’ has a range of definitions, dependent on the ‘perceptions and attitudes of people in diverse settings’ (p. 18), rendering the term problematic. As Graue and Walsh (1998) assert ‘ideas are set within a complex web of meanings, in which conceptions of readiness are situated within particular life experience given meaning through personal interpretations of child characteristics’ (p. 214).

Perceptions of readiness are drawn from a range of theoretical frameworks, including the maturational focus on ‘the gift of time’ (Graue, 2006; Graue, Kroeger & Brown, 2002); behavioural emphasis on skills – as evidenced by many checklists of readiness skills (Meisels, 1999; Snow, 2006); and by developmental theory, where age and stage are correlated (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Datar, 2006). These frameworks tend to locate readiness in individual children, with the result that children are described as ‘ready’ or not (Snow, 2006).
A child viewed through these frameworks is presented as ‘a universal, naturally progressing being who is innocent, needs protection, and is distinctly different from adults’ (Canella, 1997). This view is perpetuated by perspectives of children as in the process of becoming (Fabian, 2002; Graue & Walsh, 1998; Holland, 1992; Kagan, 1992; Woodrow, 1999). Hendrick (2000) confirms this view arguing that adultism perpetuates the notion of children being ‘less than’ adults or incomplete.

Some prior-to-school settings develop and implement programs aimed to help many children become ready for school. One of the changes for many children and families as children start school is the emphasis on formal assessment. These assessments generally focus on knowledge, skills and abilities of the children. This can influence what prior-to-school settings and families are concerned about, in terms of preparing children for school (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2004; Dockett & Perry, 2009; Pianta, Rimm-Kaufman & Cox, 1999). Interestingly, Elliot (1998) reported many children interviewed in her study recognise prior-to-school settings are ‘designed to help them get ready for ‘big school’ (p. 29). It appears that the adult focus on being ‘ready’ for school has infiltrated children’s ideas about the function of prior-to-school settings.

However ready a child is deemed to be, a positive transition to school and support through relationships between home and school is related to increased success at school and positive attitudes towards learning (Centre for Community Child Health, 2008; Dockett & Perry 2001; Pianta, et al., 1999). This being the case, it would seem logical that more attention should be paid to the transition to school process and schools being ready for children (Feeney, Grace & Brandt, 2001, Stipek, 2002).

Recently there has been a call to frame the transition to school in an ecological perspective (Lam & Pollard, 2006; Pianta, et al., 1999). This model requires all stakeholders - including
students, parents, prior-to-school and school educators - to be acknowledged for the role they play in the transition to school. One result has been a move towards listening to all voices in the transition to school, including children (Christensen and James, 2000; Dockett & Perry, 2003b; Fabian 2002).

In such a contextual framework children are seen to be influencing and influenced by the contexts they operate in, and the relationships that occur within these contexts (Dockett & Perry, 2009; Lam & Pollard, 2006; Pianta & Cox, 1999; Pianta & Walsh, 1996). This paradigm shift repositions children as subjects of research, rather than objects of research (Christensen & James, 2000).

In addition, children are viewed as competent social actors interpreting and influencing the contexts they interact within (Christensen & James, 2000; Corsaro, 1997, 2003; James & Prout, 1997; Lam & Pollard, 2006). In this view, the diversity of the community and more importantly individuals is acknowledged and valued. Responsibility for being ready for school is lifted from children and placed on the community (Dockett & Perry, 2001).

Adult voices are predominant in starting school research. Parents, prior-to-school and school educators, and other school staff members have been called on to cite their ideas of what is important for children starting school (Dockett, Perry, Howard & Meckley, 1999; Elliot, 1998; Hains, Fowler, Schwartz, Kottwitz & Rosenkoetter, 1989; Lam, 2009; Maxwell & Eller, 1994; Perry, et al., 2000; Pianta & Cox, 1999).

Although there continues to be a strong focus on school readiness programs in a wide range of settings, it appears that this focus is shifting towards providing the best possible transition experience for children, regardless of how they are or are not ready for school (Dockett & Perry, 2009; Graue, 1998). Some specific examples are the recent early childhood curriculum
frameworks developed in New South Wales (Department of Community Services, 2001), and South Australia (Department of Education and Employment, 2002).

Much recent research attention has been focussed on children’s transition to school, including: Brooker (2002), Dockett and Perry (2000), Fabian (2002); Graue (1993); and, Pianta and Cox (1999). Reports have helped to clarify what adults generally believe will promote a positive transition to school. This information has assisted government and independent education departments, prior-to-school settings, schools and families to facilitate positive transitions for children.

The research cited above on starting school has highlighted a number of important findings:

1. There continues to be a focus on aspects of readiness that emphasise skills and attributes derived from readiness checklists, and on age as an indicator of maturity (Crnic & Lamberty, 1994; May & Kundert, 1997; Meisels, 1999; Shepard & Smith, 1986).

2. There are varying perspectives between groups of adults on what is required for positive transitions (Dockett & Perry, 1998, 2009; Harradine & Clifford, 1996; Knudsen-Lindauer & Harris, 1989; Powell, 1995; Shepard & Smith; 1986).

3. The vast majority of starting school research neglects to include the voices of children. Some exceptions are Christensen, 1998; Clyde, 2001; Corsaro, 2003; Dockett, Clyde and Perry 1998; Dockett, Simpson, Cusack and Perry, 2002; Einarsdottir, 2003; Fabian, 2002; Lam, 2009; Murray and Harrison, 2005; Potter and Briggs, 2003.

4. Children’s views about what is important as they start school are different from those of adults (Dockett & Perry, 1999; Perry, Dockett & Howard, 2000).

There have been number of excellent studies internationally and in Australia on investigating children’s perspectives of the transition to school. However as a process of entering
and establishing membership in a classroom they have not necessarily applied a communities of practice framework (Wenger, 1998).

**Research with Children**

It is acknowledged that childhood is constructed in and over time, is influenced by the discourses of those times and places, and impacts on how children are viewed and what forms of participation are valued and made available for children in any given context or community of practice (Hendrick, 2000; Hutchby & Moran-Ellis, 1998; James & Prout, 1997; Jans, 2004).

Recent developments in educational research have led to a shift in how children and childhood are viewed. A number of researchers are calling for children to be seen as actors in their own right and able to contribute their views and experiences to educational research (Alderson, 2000; Birbeck & Drummond, 2005; Corsaro, 1997; Danby & Farrell, 2004; Darbyshire, Schiller & MacDougall, 2005; Dockett & Perry, 2007; Einarsdottir, 2007; Graue & Walsh, 1998; James & Prout, 1997; Lloyd-Smith & Tarr, 2000; Lansdown, 2005; Mayall, 2002; Qvortrup, 1994; Tangen, 2008; Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000; Woodhead & Brooker, 2008).

The shift in focus to include children’s voices in research is clearly linked to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) and a ‘new sociology of childhood’ paradigm (Corsaro, 1997; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; Qvortrup, Bardy, Sgritta, & Wintersberger, 1994). These influences upon educational researchers’ thinking have led to their advocating for children to be seen as ‘beings’ whose experiences, ideas, choices and relationships are interesting and relevant to research accounts in their own right (Christensen & Prout, 2005; Clark, McQuail & Moss, 2003; Hogan 2005; James & Prout, 1997; Lansdown, 2005; Mayall, 2000; Smith, Duncan & Marshall, 2005). Children are seen to have unique
perspectives on their worlds, which should be sought, recorded and reported to provide a more accurate picture of what society is like for all people, not just adults (Hendrick, 2000). Cook-Sather (2002) supports this view stating that ‘students have a unique perspective on what happens in school and classrooms’ (p. 2) and if we do not seek those perspectives we have an incomplete picture. In addition, in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child ‘children have a right to articulate their concerns and be taken seriously’ (Lansdown, 2005, p. 11).

Edwards and Davis (2004) state that a ‘key principle of childhood studies should be the recognition of the centrality of the lived experience of children and young people’ (p. 98). Graue and Walsh (1998) reflect a similar view and note that in order to accomplish this, a substantial investment of time and a goal to ‘help children incorporate the researcher into their worlds’ (p. 146) is required.

Researchers who seek children’s perspectives and participation in research stress the importance of developing and maintaining relationships with participants during the research process, which is particularly important in addressing power relationships that exist between adults and children, and the effects of these on the research process (Birbeck & Drummon, 2005; Clark, McQuail & Moss, 2003; Corsaro & Molinari, 2000a; Danby & Farrell; 2004; Davis, Watson, & Cunningham-Burley, 2000; Dockett & Perry, 2007; Lewis & Lindsay, 2000; Linklater, 2006; Robbins, 2003; Sumson, 2003).

An ethnographic approach provides the time for relationships between the researcher and children to build, and for children to feel confident to influence and control the research, allowing for a more accurate account of children’s lived experiences in context (Graue & Walsh, 1998). The link between investigating membership in a community of practice evolving and the suitability of an ethnographic approach is succinctly written by Woods (1996) who stated that:
the minute by minute, day to day social life of individuals as they interact
together, as they develop understandings and meanings, as they engage in joint
action and respond to each other as they adapt to situations, and as they encounter
and move to resolve problems that arise through their circumstances (p. 37)

and reflects some of the key aspects of a Communities of Practice framework where interaction,
understandings, meanings and joint action are pivotal to Wenger’s (1998) theoretical framework.
As Skeggs (1999) asserts ‘for ethnography the relationship between theory and experience is
always dialectical, always about interpretation, always about the positioning of the researcher to
the knowledge to which they have access’ (p. 41).

According to Burns (2000), an ethnographic approach implies commitment to
understanding and interpretation, process, naturalism, holism, multiple perspectives and
employment of multiple techniques within the research site and with regards to the research
questions and process. Interviews, observations, field notes and participant observation are seen
as key to this approach (Burns, 2000). Hatch (2002) describes ethnography as a ‘particular kind
of qualitative research that seeks to describe culture or parts of culture from the point of view of
cultural insiders’ (p. 21)

Participant observation is a key element of ethnographic research (Hatch, 2002). The aim
of observation is to

‘understand the culture, setting, or social phenomenon being studied from the
perspectives of the participants. Observers attempt to see the world through the eyes of
those they are studying. They observe carefully in an effort to acquire ‘members’
knowledge and consequently understand from the participants’ point of view what
motivated the participants to do what the researcher has observed them doing and what
these acts mean at the time’ (Hatch, 2002, p. 72).

Clark, McQuail and Moss (2003) cite Warming (2002) who states that it is ‘reflexive
participant observation which has the particular goal of trying to figure out how life must be for
the children in a concrete setting, and how one can successfully invite the children to talk about
it’ (p. 65). Researcher positioning/roles of unusual and interested adult (Christensen, 2004), combined with a least adult role (Mandell, 1988) should be consciously employed by the researcher, acknowledging that researcher roles are negotiated on a day to day, moment to moment basis with participants and adults (Davis, et al, 2000).

Researcher positioning is vital for research that aims to be empowering for children and to record their perspectives accurately. Holmes (1998) warns ethnographers that consideration must be given to the balance between participation and observation within a participant observation role. It is important that the researcher maintains this balance by not becoming overly involved in the classroom experiences, while participating to the extent where relationships can form with the participants. Danby and Farrell (2004) concur saying ‘the sensitivities of listening to young children in ways that respect their competence, on the one hand, and recognise the power differentials between adults and children, on the other, require ongoing consideration and negotiation’ (p. 41). Reactive entry strategies (Corsaro, 1997) complement participant observation by providing opportunities for children to initiate interactions with the researcher on their terms.

Methodological aspects of research that seeks to listen to children need to be conducted in ways that interest children (for example, drawing and photography), allow children to exert some control over the research process, and most importantly acknowledge their reliability as informers (Alderson, 2000; Brooker, 2001; Clark, McQuail & Moss, 2003; Danby & Farrell, 2004; Dockett & Perry, 2007; Einarsdóttir, 2005 & 2007; Smith, Duncan & Marshall, 2005; Tangen, 2008).

Danby and Farrell (2004) state ‘new perspectives from the sociology of childhood legitimate children’s rights to participate in (and withdraw from) research’ (p. 43). Einarsdottir
(2005) confirms this view saying ‘children, just like adults, hold their own views and opinions, they have the right to express their ideas, and they are capable of expressing their ideas’ (p. 524). Birbeck & Drummon (2005) assert that researchers must not discount the voices of young children. Researchers must ‘embrace what they have to say and find a better way to listen, understand and interpret their meanings. Ultimately children should be seen and heard’ (p. 595). In addition, Lansdown (2005) warns that adults should be mindful of how children understand the words we use as this may vary from what we intend when using them.

Ethnography provides the scope for an extended period of time to gain access, develop trust, form relationships, and watch identity, membership and community evolve. Corsaro and Molinari (2000a) state that in order to investigate collective processes (which communities of practice are), and evolving memberships of children, an ethnographic approach is essential. Denzin (1997) confirms that an ethnographic approach captures and records the voices of lived experience … contextualizes experience…goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances…presents details, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another (p. 83).

Informed by a new sociology of childhood and children’s rights movements, children are regarded as expert informants and participants in their communities of practice. Interpretive reproduction, within a new sociology of childhood highlights the ‘importance of children’s participation in collective processes with adults and peers in the local cultures which signify that one is a part of a group’ (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000a, p. 194). Wenger’s (1998) theory is important to the new sociology of childhood paradigm that argues against seeing children as ‘incomplete’ and ‘becoming adults’ (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000, p. 38). Children are seen to have status as members, where membership – like personhood – has traditionally been associated
with being an adult (Hendrick, 2000). Children ‘both construct their worlds and are constructed by their worlds’ (Kincheloe, 2004, p. xii).

Mixed method and positive relationships with child participants can assist the researcher in acknowledging the trustworthiness of student’s responses. As Dockett and Perry (2007) discuss ‘in order to make some judgements about the nature of responses, we have found it important to be involved in ongoing interactions within the research context and to build relationships that support this involvement. Knowing children, and their knowing the researcher, as well as the context, are essential parts of constructing meaning and interpreting the data’ (p. 51-52).

The study by Clark and Moss (2001), coining the term ‘mosaic approach’, best describes the current view of many researchers that mixed methods are essential in researching with children. A range of methods have been suggested as the best way to research with children, rather than one best way to research with children (Dockett & Perry, 2005; Einarsdottir, 2005; Smith et al, 2005). Using mixed methods allows young children to communicate in ways that are suitable or preferable for them (Barker & Weller, 2003b; Christensen & James, 2000b; Clark & Moss, 2001; Einarsdottir, 2007; Morrow & Richards, 1996). Employing a range of methods to communicate acknowledges that children have a range of languages they draw upon to express themselves and demonstrate their skill as communicators (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1994).

Small group interviews

Many authors have discussed the advantages of interviewing children in small groups or pairs (Clark, 2005b; Evans & Fuller, 1996; Einarsdottir, 2007; Eyres, Cable, Hancock & Turner, 2004; Fabian, 1996; Graue & Walsh, 1998; Greig & Taylor, 1999; Mayall, 2000). Small groups or pairs in interviews are reported to assist children to feel more relaxed and it also addresses
issues of power imbalance between adults and children when there are more children than adults in the group (Brooker, 2001; Clark, 2005b; Dockrell, Lewis & Lindsay, 2000; Graue & Walsh, 1998; Greig & Taylor, 1999; Masson, 2000; Mayall, 2000; Morrow & Richards, 1996).

Role Play

Role play has been described by Clark, McQuail and Moss (2003) as ‘an important tool for young children to express their feelings’ (p. 34). Some research exists that where role play has been implemented in varying forms with young children. For example, using small play figurines (Clark & Moss, 2001), using telephones as a prop (Evans & Fuller, 1996), puppets and storytelling (Carr, 2000), and persona dolls (Hall, Hughes & Jarrett, 2002). Researchers such as Clark and Moss (2001), Cousins (1999), Finch (1998) and Miller (1997) report that using drama, which role play is a form of, provides a powerful medium for children to communicate their experiences.

Children’s drawings

A number of researchers assert that children’s drawings can serve to represent children’s voices and views on matters that are of interest to them (Brooker, 2001; Clark, 2005a; Clark, McQuail & Moss, 2003; Dockett & Perry, 2005; Einarsdóttir, 2007; Parkinson, 2001). When viewed in conjunction with interview responses it can add additional validation to children’s verbal responses (Clark & Moss, 2001; Dockett & Perry; 2007; Dockrell, Lewis & Lindsay, 2000). As Clark (2005a, p. 496) asserts ‘listening to children talking about their own drawings can reveal important insights into their understandings.’ Providing opportunity for children to draw while being interviewed is then a useful way to combine data collection methods and at the
same time gauge where the child’s understanding is at during the interview. Drawing can also assist young children in feeling comfortable during interview situations by reducing eye gaze (Cameron, 2005).

**Digital Photography**

Several studies have been conducted using photography as a method of data collection (Barker & Weller, 2003; Clark & Moss, 2001; Dockett & Perry, 2005; Einarsdottir, 2007 & 2005; Fasoli, 2003; Simpson, 2003). Each of these authors report that giving children cameras can assist in promoting children’s power in the study. Barker & Weller (2003) report that providing children with a camera to take responsibility of can contribute to positive relationships with children. Of course, photography in the past was an expensive method with cost of camera and processing film. Researchers such as Clark and Moss (2001) avoided the expense of a number of cameras by purchasing disposable cameras to give to children to take photos of aspects of their day care that were important to them.

Simpson (2003) used a supervised digital camera for children to take photos of what was important to know about in their school. Einarsdottir (2005) used a similar method with digital photography where children were supervised using a digital camera to take photos of important things in their playschool. However, as reported by Einarsdottir (2005) and Fasoli (2003), photographs can be an incomplete picture and should be supported by other forms of data collection to provide a more complete picture of children’s lives. Today a number of technologies are now more affordable and readily available, easy to use and download making it easier for researchers today to use digital technology without exorbitant cost.
Digital Video

There have been a number of studies that have used video footage as a means of data collection, however they involved camera operation by an adult (Dockett & Perry, 2005; Flewitt, 2005; Simpson 2003) and was generally to record interactions and discussions of children. As Dockett and Perry (2005) report, video footage from a data analysis perspective can sometimes create difficulties in the amount of information to process (p. 517). Flewitt (2005) reports that ethical difficulties exist as currently no ethical practices have been established for visual methods of data collection that can identify children (p. 558). If giving cameras to children does indeed assist in addressing power imbalances between children and adults (Barker & Weller, 2003b; Clark & Moss, 2001), it would be a realistic assumption that allowing independent use of a video camera may do the same.

No research could be found to date where young children had access to a digital video camera in their classroom to record their thoughts and feelings as they chose. Popular culture television such as ‘Big Brother’ and ‘Biggest Loser’ implement a video diary for spontaneous participant documentation. While these shows may not be ideal for four and five year olds to watch, many young children do view them. If children were given the opportunity to familiarize themselves with this kind of equipment it is quite likely that they would embrace this type of technology.
Communities of Practice

In Sydney’s Greater Western Suburbs attendance and retention rates for students have been documented as lower than that of other areas of Sydney (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001). As membership in a community of practice is inextricably linked to issues of identity and identity is so heavily influenced by self-esteem it would appear that investigating Kindergarten children’s experiences of their first formal experience of a classroom and school community of practice may shed some light on what takes place for children in Kindergarten that can impact on their sense of worth and belonging in their educational setting. This information could in turn be used to promote the desire for life-long learning and higher school attendance and retention rates.

Clinton (2008) cites Capps (2003) saying that ‘in children, the sense of belonging has been linked to school success as well as later life success (p.32). Woodhead and Brooker (2008) confirm this view stating that ‘the well-being and sense of identity that is established through children’s early experiences can be undermined where children encounter new situations and settings, including school transitions where they struggle to feel they belong’ (p. 6). It is clear that a sense of belonging is critical to a successful transition to school for young children.

Within Wenger’s (1998) framework, communities of practice are the very places in which children learn, exist and develop their identities. The school and classroom are communities of practice that children enter and become members of by virtue of their age, and ability in some instances. Effective communities of practice give members a sense of competence through participation (Wenger, 1998). If children feel they are competent members of their community of practice they are more likely to feel like school is a place they want to be.

Communities of practice originated in the publication of Lave and Wenger’s ‘Legitimate Peripheral Participation’ (1991) conceptualizing their social learning theory to investigate
apprenticeships ethnographically. Themes that arose from Lave and Wenger’s study (such as reframing mentor/mentee relationships to see these as transformations in participation and identity in a community of practice), led Wenger (1998) to concentrate on the concepts of identity and community of practice in his more recent application of the original theory. Wenger’s (1998) notion of ‘communities of practice’ provides a conceptual framework for analysis and language for talking about children’s lived experiences as members of their classroom and school. Both of these publications have led to a large number of current research articles using these ideas and frameworks.

Wenger (1998) believes that all people are members of various communities of practice. These include: families, sports clubs, educational institutions, companies, divisions within organizations, religious groups, and community groups. When people converge as a group, a ‘nexus of perspectives’ is created due to the range of communities of practice to which the members belong (Wenger, 1998, p. 105).

The dual processes of participation and reification explore the relationship between how people choose to participate, how their participation (and modes of belonging) is made possible, how communities of practice acknowledge what members bring to the community, and how communities of practice negotiate meaning within this ‘nexus of perspectives’ to incorporate these attributes (Wenger, 1998, p. 105).

These concepts are important to explore in relation to children’s transition to school and early experience of school due to the impact this time in a child’s life has on their identity. Regardless of whether or not children are deemed ‘ready’ to start school, children do start school and bring with them a range of memberships, supports, experiences, knowledge, and skills that all play a large role in their membership in their school community (Dockett & Perry, 2009).
Wenger (1998) stated that we are social beings, our knowledge is a matter of competence with respect to valued enterprises, our knowing is a matter of participating in the pursuit of such enterprises, and meaning represents our ability to experience the world in meaningful engagement (Wenger, 1998). Therefore, learning is about belonging through community (social configurations), becoming through identity (learning changes who we are in the context of communities), experience through meaning (changing ability to experience life meaningfully) and doing through practice (shared historical and social resources, frameworks, and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action) (Wenger, 1998).

This theory places learning ‘in the context of our lived experience of participation in the world’ (Wenger, 1998, p. 3) and incorporates theories of social structure, identity, practice and situated experience. Many researchers who have researched with young children starting school have consistently found that relationships and friends are the most important concern reported by kindergarten children (Brooker, 2002; Corsaro, 2003; Dockett & Perry, 2003; Fabian, 2002, Pianta, 1999).

Community membership requires mutuality of engagement (engaging in action in ways that are valued), negotiability of repertoire (each practice has a repertoire which is valued; sustained engagement in the practice allows interpretation and use of these practices by members), and accountability to an enterprise (personal investment in an enterprise which in turn alters our view on the world) (adapted from Wenger, 1998, p. 5).

Issues of identity cannot be separated from issues of practice, community and meaning (Wenger, 1998). As people negotiate their social communities, their experiences give rise to new meanings, which contribute to their identities. Wenger (1998) identifies six aspects to practice: meaning, community, learning, boundary, locality; and knowing in practice. When considering
the importance of the transition to school experience on young children’s identities, using this approach is long overdue. As Wenger (1998) states, this framework can be used to analyze the ‘transformation of communities over time and appreciate the kinds of work of belonging that such transformations require’ (p. 183). Edwards and Davis (2004) stress the importance of ‘undertaking theoretical work in relation to children and young people’s participation, of asking how, as well as why, things are as they are’ (p. 99).

Researchers from a range of disciplines such as: agriculture, business management, nursing practice, social welfare, medicine, information technology, and education have utilized this framework. The applications for this framework within these disciplines are as diverse as the number of disciplines using it. Generally the framework is used to discuss a group of people and how this group engages in learning together through the use of common tools and artifacts, and how this group maintains and extends itself through mutual engagement.

The groupings of people discussed can range from a small number of tertiary students taking part in online learning to develop a community of practice, or a medium sized group of researchers aiming to extend their profession through communication and information sharing, to a large group of people in a profession who are sustaining their profession through communities of practice.

In the education sector alone, there is a vast range of sub-groups that researchers have considered in the light of a communities of practice framework. These include: higher education (Schwier, Campbell & Kenny, 2004), education practitioners’ professional development (Webb, Robertson & Fluck, 2005), online learning (Purnell, Callan, Whymark & Gralton, 2004), primary and secondary education (Cawrse & D’Arcy Walch, 2005), and educational research fields (Sim,
Within these fields or sub-groups of education, the variety of applications is immense, although the same framework is being used.

Some researchers involved in the higher education field have used a communities of practice framework in diverse ways ranging from academics’ survival in the university community of practice and academic staff development and professional identity (Roxa, 2005; Bathmaker & Avis, 2005) and bridging the gap between education institutions and workplaces (Stein, Isaacs & Andrews, 2004) to how higher education students can be encouraged to develop and foster a community of practice through e-learning (Lander, 2005; Strand, Udas & Lee, 2004).

There is a particular concentration of research within higher education related to the education of nursing and education students, with emphasis on how these students integrate themselves into their practicum school or hospital community of practice (Fleer & Robbins, 2003; Sim, 2004; Walshaw, 2004) or develop communities of practice online to sustain contact between services and organisations (Goos & Hennison, 2004; Purnell, Callan, Whymark & Gralton, 2004; Sutherland, Scanlon & Sperring, 2005).

Only a small amount of literature incorporating a communities of practice framework and children’s education was found. While there are some examples of communities of practice in primary school classrooms, the main focus is on professional development and community as opposed to children’s experience of classrooms as community of practice. One exception found was a study conducted by Brown (2002) where one student’s journal writing in an upper primary mathematics classroom was analysed using a communities of practice framework.

Searching in the early childhood field yielded a similar array of studies focusing on communities of practice from the adult or researcher perspective and a paucity of research on
young children’s experiences viewed through a communities of practice framework. Fasoli (2003a) described a previous study conducted with young children visiting the art gallery. She explained how through the process of engaging young children in research, the children became members of a research community of practice. Wenger’s framework is used to consider the information we need to give to children to allow children to be active participants and collaborators in research.

Barron (2007) investigated young children’s ethnic identities as communities of practice. This ethnographic study utilised observation as the only method of data collection in the children’s education settings and homes, therefore young children’s perspectives were not sought. Anning (2002) describes an exploration of how young children use drawing to communicate their ‘emergent understanding of their worlds’ and how their home and school communities of practice ‘informs or influences their representations’ (p. 198).

There are examples of how the field of early intervention is a community of practice (Buysse, Sparkman & Wesley, 2003; Wesley & Buysse, 2001), how early childhood education is based on taken for granted historical discourse (Fleer, 2003), and how children’s learning is a social and transformative process (Fasoli, 2002). Although there are academics and researchers in the early childhood field who see a communities of practice as valuable in deconstructing the way people live and learn, no study has been found to date that validates children as participants in communities of practice and seeks their voices when documenting their experiences.

Wesley and Buysse (2001) introduced the concept of expanding professional roles within the field of early intervention to include collaborative reflective inquiry within communities of practice in order to reform professional practices. The authors claim that reflection within communities of practice could advance the field of early intervention.
Fleer (2003) challenged how current early childhood education practices have been reified for generations resulting in the creation of a specialist discourse. This specialist discourse defines what is good and quality practice. This research can be applied to young children in the sense of what makes a ‘good student’ which could lend to the readiness debate. It is also applicable in that it leads us to question whether what is perceived as good and quality practice, as far as the transition process for children is concerned, is really the best thing for children today. Current transition practices may be ‘taken for granted’ assumptions we hold due to our community of practice that has evolved over the years. In addition it makes a place for discussion of the images we hold as part of our pedagogy and why it is important to review the status we allow for children as research participants.

Fleer and Robbins (2003) expand on the above article by Fleer (2003) stating again that communities of practice tend to have their own context-specific ways of thinking, values, histories and artefacts or tools they use. This article describes teacher education students’ moving from a developmental approach which continues to be drawn upon in the field of education to a socio-cultural theory. This article discusses the challenges for these education students when they attempt to apply socio-cultural theory in their planning while on practicum in a setting that traditionally values developmental approaches.

Sutherland, Scanlon and Sperring (2005) found that students who were engaged in the school’s community of practice had more favorable experiences whilst on practicum than did those students who were not included in the school’s community of practice. This has important implications for young children starting school. Engagement is a key aspect of Wenger’s CoP framework and without engagement membership becomes limited.
Bathmaker and Avis (2005) explore the development of professional identity during trainee teacher placements and how increasing participation contributes to this. They also found that using Wenger’s CoP model to understand their data led to the describing of new forms of professional identity and participation. This can be applied to young children and the development of their student identity during the transition to school. It is an empowering image of young children demonstrating their active participation in their education and identity formation.

There is a clear gap in the research that provides space for children’s experiences in communities of practice to be documented. It could be said that Kindergarten is apprenticeship into the formal school system much like Lave and Wenger’s ‘Legitimate Peripheral Participation’ (1991). Kindergarten tasks are more or less suitable for their ability and Kindergarten is one year out of 10 years of formal compulsory schooling (with years 11 and 12 being optional to students in NSW).

However, it can be argued the substantial orientation sessions the school holds to aid in transition to school act as an ‘apprenticeship’. During these sessions children and parents attend school and children experience some of the activities they will engage in once they formally commence school. Starting Kindergarten then signifies the beginning of full membership in that school community.

Thus, the viewpoint this thesis is written from is that Kindergarten is indeed full membership in a school CoP. The work tasks and expectations may be less challenging for Kindergarten students than those of the year one students, however it is relative. It would be remiss and disrespectful to espouse that Kindergarten students are not full members of their
school and classroom CoP from their first day of school. As Wenger (1998) states, membership in communities of practice takes time to evolve.

As already noted in the previous chapter, Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford (2001) assert that there is currently a need for ‘more ethnographic research which can paint in the fine grained reality of educational processes within early childhood settings’ (p. 194). Focusing on children’s perspectives will assist in obtaining a more complete picture of educational processes. Through researching children’s membership in these communities of practice as both individuals and communities develop over the first year of school, not only will the experience of starting school be better understood but strategies identified for enhancing children’s sense of competence as members of their school and class community.

The research question this thesis is addressing is: How do children’s perspectives of themselves as members of their classroom and school communities of practice evolve over their first year of school (Kindergarten in NSW)? Within this question lies a number of sub-questions generating a range of objectives that will assist understanding children’s membership through a ‘communities of practice’ framework (Wenger, 1998). The transition to school involves more than the first day or week of school, as do the processes of communities of practice formation and membership. All the literature involving a communities of practice framework addresses this issue but none addresses the issue by investigating children’s experiences of this process.

A communities of practice perspective assumes that learning is a natural ‘life-sustaining and inevitable’ practice that is essentially a ‘social phenomenon’ occurring in the lived experiences of participation in context (Wenger, 1998, p. 3). In addition, Wenger (1998) believes that all people are members of various communities of practice (such as families, sports clubs, educational institutions, companies, divisions within organizations, religious groups, and
community groups). When people converge together as a group, a ‘nexus of perspectives’ (Wenger, 1998, p. 105) is created due to the range of communities of practice to which members belong.

The dual process of participation and reification explores the relationship between how people choose to participate, how their participation (and modes of belonging) is made possible, how communities of practice acknowledge what members bring to the community, and how communities of practice negotiate meaning within this ‘nexus of perspectives’ to incorporate these attributes (Wenger, 1998, p. 105).

Conclusion

There is an ongoing need for research into the transition to school from children’s perspectives. Whilst several prominent researchers are engaged in this topic, there are limited longitudinal and ethnographic accounts of how the transition to school impacts on children, their identities and ongoing success in school.

Researching with children is a rapidly growing field that still requires attention. It appears that there are philosophical and political advances in perspectives of children as active citizens with opinions in their own right. However, work still needs to be done to highlight the range of voices in childhood rather than attempts to homogenize the voice of childhood. More attention needs to be paid to children’s various contexts and how these contexts vary across time, generations and geography. Within this lies the need for re-evaluation, redefinition and reinvention of methods and frameworks that are suitable for researching and explaining children’s lived experiences.
A Communities of Practice framework is under utilised when considering young children’s membership in any realm of society. In addition it would seem that membership is linked more clearly to adulthood than childhood. In reality, children are members of communities of practice and their lives, whilst perhaps not as complex as adults’, are comparatively complex for their age, experience and responsibilities in society. It is clearly time that links are made between the importance of transition to school, acknowledgement that this transition is over a period of time and not a one off event, that there are still gains to be made in understanding children’s experiences of this to improve practice and policy, that these gains will take time to unfold and appreciate and that the complexity of Wenger’s Communities of Practice framework is very much suitable for investigating and understanding what membership is for young children.
Chapter Three

Methodology

This chapter provides details of the research methodology, including the contextual description of the research site; participant information; data collection tools and data analysis processes; significant issues of ethnography as a methodological approach; and, how it is used in this study.

Introduction

This research investigated how children’s perspectives of themselves, as members of their classroom and school communities of practice (CoP) evolved over their first year of formal schooling. This first year of school is called Kindergarten in New South Wales (NSW), Australia, where children legally must begin school by the age of six but may begin as young as four and a half depending on their birth date.

Within the main question that asks how children’s perspectives of themselves, as members of their classroom and CoP evolve over their first year of formal schooling, the research objectives of the study were to:
11. Investigate children’s perspectives of their personal interactions in the classroom;

12. Observe how children’s participation and modes of belonging change throughout their first year of school;

13. Ascertain what membership of classroom and school COP means for children’s identity formation;

14. Discover how it feels to be a member of this classroom and school community from children’s perspectives and how they might like it to be different;

15. Discern how children’s understandings and acts of participation are reified, or incorporated into the valued meanings and practices by their classroom and school’s Communities of Practice;

16. Observe the extent to which children negotiate and even re-write understandings, meanings and practices in the classroom’s and school’s Communities of Practice, and how they go about this;

17. Ascertain how children learn how to operate in their classroom and school Communities of Practice;

18. Investigate how different children’s ways of operating within their classroom’s and school’s Communities of Practice are when they first start school compared to the end of their first year at school;

19. Consider how children’s perspectives and experiences of their classroom’s and school’s Communities of Practice impact on their transition and adaptation to the formal schooling environment; and,

20. Explore children’s experiences, participation in, and negotiation of the curriculum.
Research methodology

For the purpose of this thesis pseudonyms are used for the research context and adult and child participants in order to maintain privacy and confidentiality. Statistics presented in this thesis are drawn from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)\(^1\).

A partial ethnography was used to investigate the research question. The method is described as a partial ethnography as one group of voices, the child participants, wasrecorded where other voices in this context could have been sought. Those of school staff members and parents were not used. This is an alternative to traditional ethnography where all the stakeholders’ experiences of a particular context are investigated (Siraj-Blatchford & Siraj-Blatchford, 2001). The general principles of ethnography still apply including: studying people’s behaviour in everyday contexts; gathering data from a range of sources with a focus on observation and somewhat informal conversations; an unstructured approach to data collection; focusing upon a single setting; and, use of interpretation during data analysis (Hammersley, 1999).

According to Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford (2001), ethnography ‘encompasses any study that aims to describe some aspect of the socio-cultural understandings and practices of a group of people’ (p. 193). A partial ethnography has been selected as the overarching methodological approach due to its suitability for the study and underpinning theory.

Corsaro and Molinari (2000b) state that in order to investigate collective processes (which communities of practice are), and evolving memberships of children, an ethnographic approach is essential. According to Burns (2000), ethnography implies commitment to understanding and interpretation, process, naturalism, holism, multiple perspectives and employment of multiple

---

\(^1\) Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001 Census Data. More recent Census Data was not available until 2007 which would not apply to the research site at the time of the study.
techniques within the research site and with regards to the research questions and process. Interviews, observations, field notes and participant observation are seen as key to this approach (Burns, 2000; Hatch, 2002). The study involves a ‘selective intermittent time mode’ of field visits as described by Jeffrey and Troman (2004, p. 540), consisting of a lengthy period of study with flexibly arranged field visits.

This ethnography is unique in that it sought to highlight children’s perspectives within a context where other perspectives could be sought and reported. The researcher has made a conscious decision about this focus in order to exemplify children’s voices in a topic often preoccupied with adult voices and perspectives (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2004; Dockett & Perry, 2005; Elliott, 1998; Hains, Fowler, Schwartz, Kottwitz & Rosenkoetter, 1989; Hannigan, 1998; Maxwell & Eller, 1994; Pianta & Cox, 1999; Rimm-Kaufman, Cox & Pianta, 1998; Westcott, Perry, Jones & Dockett, 2000). The method can then be seen to be ‘contributing towards an ethnographic approach’ (Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford, 2001, p. 193), rather than a traditional ethnography where often as many perspectives as possible are sought, on a daily basis. Other contextual factors (i.e. other than adults’ perspectives) will certainly be considered in a way that informs the researcher’s understanding of children’s lived experiences of membership in communities of practice enhancing researcher reflexivity.

A substantial amount of time was spent on field visits for this study, in total over 480 hours. This investment of time was essential because time is required in order to gain access, develop trust, form relationships (Burns 2000), and watch the evolution of identity, membership and community.

The selected approaches for this research address the new sociology of childhood perspective that seeks to redistribute power to children that is more readily afforded to and
accessible to adults, and considers children to be competent and reliable co-researchers through the use of equitable research methods and researcher reflexivity (Barker & Weller, 2003a; Connolly, 1997; Fasoli, 2003a).

Based on requirements of this methodological approach, a number of data collection tools were used in addition to a lengthy period of time for observation of and engagement with the students. These included:

- semi-structured interviews with students in small groups;
- role play during interviews;
- opportunity for children to draw pictures to support or complement the interview process;
- observations documented in field notes;
- informal conversations with students throughout the school day;
- digital photography taken by me and the students;
- video diary recording operated by students; and,
- use of participant observation.

The Research Context

The education system at the Primary level is coordinated by the New South Wales Department of Education, the Catholic Education Office [CEO] or by Independent schools. The school used for this research is a member of the CEO. The Catholic diocesan school system is divided into eleven dioceses. Each diocese is autonomous and controls the employment of teachers, the management of schools and planning of guidelines for curriculum development. A bishop is responsible for each diocese and there is an executive director of schools. Each diocese
has a number of regional directors, consultants and advisors who are responsible for the schools’ curricular development, in servicing and building and physical development.

At the school level, an hierarchical structure also exists. A school is coordinated by a principal who is supported by an assistant principal and various other executive staff depending on the school population. The Catholic system of education accounts for approximately twenty percent of the school population in NSW. The research took place in Hosanna Catholic School situated in Montague, a suburb of Westown Local Government Area [LGA], NSW.

An Australian school year runs from late January to late December and consists of four terms of attendance. States (6) and Territories (2) in Australia vary slightly in term starting and finishing dates. Each year school term dates change. Table 1 below shows the term dates for NSW in the year the study took place where each term was ten weeks long.

Table 1

**NSW School Term Dates**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New South Wales School term dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Start Date</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Field visits took place in one Kindergarten classroom within the school site for two days each week of terms one to four. A school day begins at 9am and finishes at 3pm. This equates to 480 hours of field visits that were conducted and recorded for the year of the study. The days of the week that field visits took place were varied in order to gain a better understanding of what a school week entailed. This was also useful due to the focus class having two Teachers who job shared during the week. Mrs. B. taught the class Monday – Wednesday and Mrs. G. taught the class on Thursday and Friday.

The surrounding community

The local Government area (LGA) of Westown is divided into forty-five suburbs. At the time of this study (ABS, 2001) one out of every seventy-four Australians were residents of Westown giving this LGA the highest population of any in the State of NSW. Westown also had the highest population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents in the State. Generally the population represented fairly young residents with a median age of twenty-nine years.

While the Sydney train network services Westown, there are limited stations available with only nine of the forty-five residential suburbs accessible directly by train. The rest of Westown, including Montague is serviced by bus lines. This means that students who attend Hosanna Catholic School either arrive by foot, car or bus. Westown has three hospitals, two public and one private, and two major business districts. One of these business districts is within 10 minutes drive of Hosanna Catholic school and accessible by car, bus and train.

Official statistics show the general population of Westown LGA comprises residents who are relatively disadvantaged. The table below provides an overview and comparison of Westown LGA and Montague statistics collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001).
Table 2

Local and Community Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic Area</th>
<th>Westown LGA</th>
<th>Montague</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Households with low incomes</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals with low incomes</td>
<td>43.9%</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single parent households</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-school qualifications</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to private vehicles</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(private dwellings)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government authority</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>housing rental</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Australian Bureau of Statistics Census (2001)

Local Community Context

Statistics from the Westown 2001 Social Plan showed that Montague had a population of 2,489 people. The population by comparison to other suburbs in Westown was relatively young. Table 2 below provides an overview of the population and age brackets in Montague.

Table 3

Percentage of population by age bracket

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of population</th>
<th>Age bracket</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>0 - 14 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>15 – 49 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>50 – 79 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thirty percent of the population was born overseas, only ten percent of these residents were born in English speaking countries. This indicates a culturally and linguistically diverse population. Almost one quarter of local residents spoke a language other than English at home (ABS, 2001).

Prior to site entry

The year prior to data collection contact was made with a colleague at the Catholic Education Office [CEO] to inquire about possible research sites. Following discussions about the aims of the research, a Catholic primary school in Montague was suggested as a school to be approached to participate. Upon receiving this advice, permission was sought from the CEO ethics committee to approach the school, Hosanna Catholic School, for the purpose of this study. Consent was granted by the CEO and in October of that year a meeting was arranged with the School Principal to discuss the possibility of Hosanna Catholic School being the research site. A summary of the research aims and method as well as examples of the consent forms and information statements for parents and guardians of Kindergarten students as well as adult participants were provided (see appendices A, B, C & D). Following this meeting permission was granted by the Principal for the research to be conducted at Hosanna Catholic School with the Kindergarten children pending consent from the Kindergarten Teachers.

After approval by the School Principal, a meeting was held later that month with the Kindergarten Teachers to explain the research and seek their consent to be involved. The three Kindergarten Teachers agreed to be involved, although it was understood that the focus participants would be from KA where two Teachers job shared each week. As other support staff worked on alternate days they were also given a brief explanation of the study. Staff were each
given an information statement and consent form as they would be involved in observations of
the children, even though they were not the focus of the research. All staff involved with the
Kindergarten students gave written consent to be included in observations and photographs.

Final ethics approval from the University of Western Sydney and CEO was given by
November in the year prior to data collection. Once ethics approval was received, the Principal
and Kindergarten Teachers allowed me to attend the Kindergarten transition sessions that had
already begun in late October. These sessions provided me with an opportunity to begin the
process of developing rapport and seeking permission from caregivers. As family units varied at
this site and various adults were responsible for the students I researched with, they will be
called Caregivers for the purpose of this thesis. This can mean a parent, aunty, uncle,
grandparent, or guardian and refers to the adult I had contact with during the data collection year.

Towards the end of the transition program the school held parent information sessions.
During one session I was introduced to the caregivers and given the opportunity to explain the
research and how it was hoped their children would be involved. Caregivers were each given an
information statement on the project (Appendix C) and two copies of the consent form
(Appendix A), one of which was returned to me for my records and the other retained by the
caregiver.

Parent/Guardian consent forms advised that children (with permission) would be involved in
small interview groups, drawing during interviews, recording of conversations with children
and observations of children by me throughout the day, taking and being included in digital
photographs, and video diary use by the children which would be used as data in my final thesis.

Consent was obtained from the majority of Kindergarten students by the end of the
transition program. During the first two weeks of term 1, the following year when the
Kindergarten students had commenced school, consent from remaining caregivers was sought before and after school. Where this was not possible, information statements and consent forms were sent home with the students.

Permission was sought for students from both Kindergarten classes (known as KA and KB for the purpose of this study) as they participated in activities together such as numeracy and literacy groups, library groups, sport and singing. Students in KB were often involved in observations and photographs taken due to these joint class activities and friendships that existed between students from the two classes. Some of these friendships existed prior to the start of school as children attended prior-to-school early childhood settings such as preschool and playgroup together and these friendships developed throughout the school year as the children participated in joint class activities and interaction during meal times.

Permission was granted by the caregivers for the forty-three Kindergarten students so all the students could be included in the research. Throughout the year some participants left the school and to gain permission to include new students into the study was difficult. Efforts to gain permission to research with new students were unsuccessful for a range of reasons. These reasons included: caregivers not attending the school; sending permission notes home with students and not having face to face contact with caregivers; no relationship established with the new students and their caregivers as they began later in the year; and, perhaps barriers in communication due to families’ using English as a second language.

The sample consisted of twenty-two Kindergarten students in KA (eleven females and eleven males) representing a range of cultural backgrounds, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (six), Singaporean (one), Spanish (one) and Anglo-Celtic (fourteen). Students in the focus classroom resided in fifteen different suburbs surrounding the school, with none of the
children actually residing in the same suburb as the school. Given the location of the school in a large LGA with many small suburbs surrounding, it was not unreasonable that children resided in a range of suburbs but still in the same LGA. Also, as it was a Catholic Systemic school there are certain policies that allow families to enrol their child at a school some distance from their residence. The distance families travelled demonstrated the commitment of families for their children to attend Hosanna Catholic School. If the family did not have access to a private car, the alternative was to walk or catch a public bus to school.

Hosanna Catholic School has admission policies and procedures that are derived from the CEO enrolment policy (2002). The policy stated that:

Hosanna Catholic School, ‘as part of the Hosanna Community, has a particular responsibility to welcome and support the Indigenous Community and those who experience poverty, need and exclusion’ and goes on to say ‘When the number of places available in the School is exceeded by the demand for placement, the priority for admission is given in the following order:

1. Children living in families within the geographic boundaries of Hosanna Catholic School, who identify with and seek the values of the Hosanna Community.

2. Children living in families who identify with and seek the values of the Hosanna Community, even though they live outside the geographic boundaries of the closest CBD’ (Hosanna Website, 2002).

---

2 In order to protect the identity of the diocese an exact reference cannot be given.
3 In order to protect the identity of the school an exact web address for where the policy was obtained cannot be given.
School Context

Hosanna Catholic School was a newly established school. At the time of data collection the school had been operating for one year and in its second year had a total of eighty-eight enrolments in Kindergarten and Year one, with slight fluctuations due to a few students leaving and new enrolments at various times throughout the year. Rather than enrolling students into all primary classes the school plan saw the development of the school grow each year with the initial cohort of students as they moved onto the next year in education.

During the data collection year the school was officially opened, with the ceremony taking place in the Catholic Church adjoining the school grounds. Hosanna Catholic School is closely associated with the Catholic Church and preschool on the same block of land as well as a community centre and local men’s centre supporting the Indigenous community. A fence separates the school buildings from the other facilities.

The first seven years of formal compulsory schooling in NSW are called primary school. Table 3 shows the way formal school years are divided by generic name, curriculum stage and average starting age of children in each formal school year.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Curriculum Stage</th>
<th>Age Bracket</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>Early stage 1</td>
<td>4 ½ - 6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 1 &amp; Year 2</td>
<td>Stage 1</td>
<td>5 ½ - 8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3 &amp; Year 4</td>
<td>Stage 2</td>
<td>7 ½ years – 10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5 and Year 6</td>
<td>Stage 3</td>
<td>9 ½ years – 12 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The starting school age is between 4 ½ and 6 years as the earliest children may start school is in the year they turn 5 on or before the 31st July. However, children may start school as late as the year they turn 6 years with permission from the NSW Department of Education (2009).

The foundation or original students who enrolled in the first year Hosanna Catholic School opened will be the first students to reach each year of schooling and therefore the oldest students of the school for their entire primary school career. At the time of the study there were only two Kindergartens and two Year 1 classes, therefore the school was and will constantly be in a state of physical change and modification throughout the study sample Kindergarten participants’ experience of attending Hosanna Catholic School. The physical structure of the school was being modified to meet the future needs of the school.

At the beginning of the study the school consisted of:

- one large demountable or semi-permanent building containing the school office/reception, sick bay, staffroom, utilities room for photocopying and stationery, staff toilets, a room used for small group work such as reading recovery, an office for the Principal and an office for the Assistant Principal;
- a second demountable building that held the library and Librarian’s office; and
- two brick classroom buildings each containing two classrooms, a set of toilets, and an equipment storage room.

Each year a new classroom building will be built to allow for incoming Kindergarten children as existing students of Hosanna move onwards to Year six. During the data collection year a third classroom building was being constructed and a basketball court was added to the playground. The playground consisted of a large fenced grass field with a well established tree for shade prior to the basketball court being added. During construction of the new building and
basketball court, sections of the playground were fenced off to ensure children’s safety. This impacted on how much room the students had to move around during break times. Areas of the school grounds became out of bounds and so created illicit play opportunities for students where it became a game to throw hats and drink bottles over the fence into the construction sites.

At the completion of the data collection year, in addition to the above facilities the construction of the following had been completed:

- A third demountable that was used for the staff room;
- One more brick classroom building containing two classrooms, a set of toilets, and equipment storage room;
- An asphalt basketball court; and,
- A parking lot for staff vehicles and parent drop-off zones to allow parents to drop off their children safely by the school gate.

School staff over a week generally consisted of seven full time and ten part time staff members, four of whom are from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. Given the high population of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander residents in this LGA, also reflected in enrolments, it was seen as best practice to employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island staff to support these students in their learning styles and culture.

The makeup of the staff included (the pseudonym used is given after each staff member):

- School Principal (Sister A)
- Assistant Principal (Mrs B)
- Librarian (Mrs C)
- Administration Officer (Mrs D)
- 2 Year 1 Teachers (Mr E & Mrs F)
• 3 Kindergarten Teachers (Mrs B & Mrs G – part time, and Miss H)
• 1 Aboriginal Education Officer (Mrs I)
• 1 Reading Recovery Teacher (Miss J)
• 2 Casual Support Staff (Mrs K and Mrs L)
• 1 Cleaner (Mrs M)
• Casual Teachers were employed to allow time for permanent staff programming
time and days off.
• Parents volunteered to assist with weekly literacy and numeracy groups.

Sample

At the beginning of the data collection year, there were 43 Kindergarten students divided
into two classes (KA and KB). Throughout the year, numbers varied slightly due to students’
leaving and new enrolments.

KA was chosen as a focus class (sample) because:

• Researching with children requires the building of relationships and trust. Hence
twenty-three students in KA were sufficient numbers to establish a relationship with to
enable participant observation in the classroom;
• Interviewing students at a pace that enabled open-ended discussion required
flexibility to ensure students are not rushed. The two classroom Teachers (Mrs B & Mrs G)
who job shared in KA were receptive to the research being conducted in their classroom;
• It was a convenience sample recommended by the School Principal;
• The sample would provide a manageable amount of data to be analysed;
The principle of partial ethnography is that one group of voices can be sought while other voices are available. Therefore one focus class was appropriate for the depth of data collection intended; and

- This research is about a Kindergarten classroom community of practice and not a kindergarten community of practice, therefore one class of students was appropriate.

Entry to the school site

Corsaro and Molinari’s (2000a) research informed the practices undertaken prior to the site entry, the choosing of a focus class and the methods used to develop rapport with the students and staff. They state:

In research in educational settings with young children these goals depend on: dealing with and developing the trust of a range of adult gatekeepers; acquiring working knowledge of the social structure, nature of interpersonal relations, and daily routines in the setting; and gaining the acceptance of Teachers and children (p. 182).

The facets of establishing my membership status and an insider’s perspective were imperative to the ethnographic study.

Development of rapport with staff, children and families

Data collection began on the first formal day of schooling for the Kindergarten students (31st January). For the first three weeks, time was spent becoming familiar with the school and classroom routines and procedures, and getting to know the students and staff informally. Part of developing rapport was to determine the level of involvement with the children. Consideration was given to the role the researcher was taking in the classroom. When students asked for assistance on a task I would assist as requested provided it was appropriate to do so. An
inappropriate time would include during an assessment task where the students needed to do the
task on their own to inform the Teachers of their level of knowledge. Assisting students when
appropriate began the process of building relationships with the students. The act of waiting for a
student to request help was a fundamental part of the participant observer role I hoped to
maintain throughout the year.

In the second week of school the Teachers provided an opportunity for me to briefly
explain to the Kindergarten students why I was there and how it was hoped they would be
involved in the research. An information statement for Kindergarten students (see Appendix E)
was used as a guide for this discussion. It was important at this stage to ensure students knew I
was not there to teach or discipline them but willing to assist them if they asked. This was to
maintain non-authoritarian and participant observer position in their classroom (James, 1993).
Students indicated with nods and raised hands to indicate they understood that I was there to find
out what it is like to be a Kindergarten student. Students were assured that if they had questions
in the future they were welcome to ask either me, or their classroom Teachers.

Emphasis was placed on the students’ understanding that, while their caregivers had
granted permission for them to be involved, they could at any time withdraw from the research
without penalty. If a student did not want to participate on certain occasions (such as an
interview on a certain day) but did want to be involved at other times this was also acceptable.

To assist in developing rapport with the students I did not use a title and surname as most
adults in the school. Therefore, to facilitate students and families viewing me as a visitor and
participant observer rather than a staff member my name tag stated my first name and university
name only.
Each data collection day began with arrival at the school prior to the school bell. This was an opportunity to be visible to students and caregivers and greet and talk to them to develop rapport and relationships. This time also provided an opportunity for caregivers to ask about the research. As the year progressed and caregivers became familiar with me, caregivers would ask specifically about their children and share stories about what the children had said or done since the previous field visit.

Establishment of relationships with classroom Teachers and Kindergarten participants

Establishing relationships with the Teachers and Kindergarten students involved negotiating and establishing my role within the classroom. The staff’s understanding and supporting my role of participant observer, helped ensure that I would not be asked to be involved beyond what is consistent with that role. For example, I did not want to engage in reprimanding or rewarding students. At the beginning of data collection I established my “helper/observer” role with the staff and frequently reminded students throughout the first term that I was not a teacher to maintain a certain amount of distance from the more powerful role of ‘Teacher’ that the other adults at the school engaged in.

In a school environment, much like most social environments in society a child would encounter, adults are generally afforded more power in relationships than children. Current studies suggest that an adult who engages with children in research is required to address this imbalance of power (Davis, Watson & Cunningham-Burley, 2000; Fraser, 2004; O’Kane, 2000). Taking the role of a participant observer contributed to minimizing the power inequities between the students and me. This role however, was one that took some time for the students to adjust to.
It would be remiss of me not to record that this role was also one, as an early childhood educator, that was somewhat difficult for me to negotiate at times.

During the first term, students frequently came to me because another student was doing the wrong thing. However, by term two students had accepted that it was not my role to reprimand other students or enforce school and classroom rules. I utilised an extended reactive entry method inspired by Corsaro (2003), which allowed the children to engage with me as required or desired, leaving the power of relations with the children. Corsaro (2000) described this method simply as ‘making myself available in child-dominated areas of the school and waited for the kids to react to me’ (p. 10). I extended upon this by frequently positioning myself around the students, either in the classroom or playground, documenting my observations and waiting for students to engage with me.

Reactive entry also assisted with staff relations where the staff knew they could ask for assistance from me in day to day happenings of the classroom without me taking on any ‘Teacher role’ that may have interfered with the Teacher’s intentions or plans for the class. Assistance was always willingly given provided it did not overstep the participant observer role as described above. This was considered to be a form of compensation and sign of appreciation to the classroom Teacher’s allowing me to be in her classroom two days per week for an entire year. Examples of times it was appropriate to assist included: tying shoe laces, accompanying a student to sick bay when hurt, helping students with activities that were not assessments, and getting equipment from another room so the Teacher could supervise the students.
Data Collection Methods

To gain the most comprehensive record of the experiences of Kindergarten children a combination of data collection methods was used in this study including:

- Observations;
- Small group semi-structured interviews;
- Role play;
- Child drawings;
- Video Diary;
- Digital photography; and,
- Informal child consultations.

Each of these methods is outlined below.

Observations

Each field visit day was recorded in a small notebook. The observations of classroom, playground activities and discussions formed the field notes. They were generally jottings about the context, situations, friendships, grouping during class time and students’ reactions/interactions with each other, their Teachers and often the researcher. Observations were as detailed and frequent as time and action would allow.
In order to ensure a comprehensive record of this classroom community of practice and the members that formed it, particular effort was made to focus on particular students at different times to account for all of the participants. At times the detailed note taking became impractical due to the amount of activity taking place and digital photography assisted with this.

Figure 1. Example of page from field note recording book.

Following a field visit day, field notes and photographs were reviewed and linked where possible and field notes were typed up as soon as possible while the day’s events were still clear. Reviewing the day also provided an opportunity to be reflective about the data collected and interpretations of these. This process highlighted instances where a student’s clarification or correction of impressions was required. One issue that arose throughout the year was that the children were often keen to contribute to the field note book during their lunch breaks. Finding this to be problematic for recording observations as action occurred, a second book was taken to
the playground during lunch breaks so children could write in one and research observations could continue to be recorded.

Figure 2. Example of page from field note book for students

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to interview students in KA at the end of each term in groups of two or three. There was no set time of day for interviews to take place and this was always negotiated with the classroom Teacher at the beginning and during the day. Interviews were generally conducted during the last 2 weeks of term and at any time it was appropriate to have students leave the classroom. The students were invited to participate and were asked to choose a friend to be interviewed with them. Generally students who had completed their work were invited to be interviewed first. It was not always possible for students to have their first choice of friend to accompany them as they had already been interviewed.
As interviews were time consuming and the school day was generally very busy it was not possible to re-interview students. There were many aspects of a school day to work around including numeracy and literacy groups, library groups, craft time, sport, assessments, school excursions and special days, school assemblies/masses and practices, and other religious events and ceremonies. It was important to be sensitive to these routines to ensure that the research did not impact negatively on the students’ progress in their first year of school.

Interviews were conducted just outside the classroom door within view of the classroom Teacher. A small digital tape recorder was used for each interview. Prior to the interview beginning, the tape recorder was shown to the students being interviewed and permission was always sought from the students to be recorded during our discussions. If permission was granted I introduced myself on the recorder and played it back so I was sure the students knew the purpose of the recorder. I reminded students that they could end the interview at any time without any negative consequences to them.

Interviews generally involved two students but with an odd number of students, absences, and student choice, occasionally three students were interviewed together. The popularity of a student made interview groupings difficult from time to time as several students would want the same friend to be interviewed with them. Interviews generally lasted forty minutes on average. Towards the end of the year interviews lasted longer, possibly because students had more to say about their school experiences or they were more comfortable talking with me. It also seemed that at the beginning of the year some students were not sure of the purpose and process of an interview. I became aware of this during term 2 when students asked me when they would get another interview with me. In this way, students became members of the research community of
practice by engaging with me throughout the year. Students were always thanked for their time at the conclusion of their interview.

Listed below are the guiding questions that were used to prompt discussion during the semi-structured interviews. The questions asked would depend on where the students chose to take the conversation, time limitations and engagement of the students. If students began talking about a particular aspect or occurrence at school this would prompt a question to elicit more information about the particular thing they were talking about.

Possible interview questions were:

- What do you like about school?
- What don’t you like about school?
- How did you feel when you started school?
- Is it hard starting school? Why or why not?
- How do you feel about school?
• What makes you feel good about school?
• Do you like being in this classroom?
• What do you like about being in the classroom?
• What kinds of things do you like doing?
• What do you think is the best thing about being a kindergarten kid?
• What do you like doing at school?
• If there’s anything about school that you could change, what would you change to make it better?
• Do you know what I mean when I say you are a member of this class?
• How do you feel about being a member of this class?
• Do you like the people in your classroom?
• Who are your favourite people in your class?
• Is there anything that makes you feel really special about being in your classroom?

Being sensitive to what Teachers had planned for each day, what students would miss or not complete if they left the classroom and willingness of students to be interviewed on any given day was also essential. At least 11 interviews (generally two students per interview group) were conducted each term, and each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes. This equates to around seven and a half hours of interviewing each term of the one hundred and twenty hours of data collection time per term. Once inappropriate times to interview were deducted appropriate times to interview were quite limited. Inappropriate times included: meal times, literacy and numeracy groups, library visits, sport time, excursions, whole Kindergarten activities, religious events, practice for special occasions, school assemblies and assessments;
Role Play

At the end of term two, parent Teacher interviews took place. These involved the parents or caregivers attending the school and meeting with their child’s classroom Teacher to discuss their child’s progress. From observations I noticed that this was a point of interest to the students. As a result, I suggested to students during our interviews that they might like to role play a parent Teacher interview. This made the interviews take a slightly different form in term 3 of the school year compared to interviews in terms 1 and 2. The students chose which Teacher they would be and I pretended to be their parent. I gave the students the choice of which Teacher they would be because they had two classroom Teachers. It is noteworthy that many times the boys chose to be the one male Teacher at the school, even though that Teacher had never taught them. They enjoyed role play, however most boys did not want to pretend to be their female Teacher.

Questions that led our ‘parent-Teacher’ interviews included:

- How do you think [student’s name] is doing at school?
- What are they good at?
- What do they need to work on?
- What makes [student’s name] happy at school?
- Is there anything you would like to tell me about [child’s name] that would help with school?
Drawing during interviews

At the beginning of each interview the students were given a coloured clip board, brightly coloured marker pens and white craft paper for drawing during interviews. The students were always given the option to draw while they were talking to me and students always took up this offer and seemed eager to do so. This activity seemed to help the students relax during the interview and provided students with a vehicle to communicate their ideas. While all the students appeared happy to be interviewed, it was often their drawings that facilitated discussion that could be related back to the research questions.

The drawing activity also seemed to be something students enjoyed. They were not directed what to draw in particular, rather it was suggested they could draw something about school. Some students opted not to draw something about school and preferred to draw something about their home or family. For example ‘this is me playing cricket at home with my brother’. Most students did choose to draw something about school and the vast majority of them drew themselves with their friends. This provided an opportunity to talk about friendship, which is an important aspect of school for students just as relationships are an important aspect of ‘Communities of Practice’. Children were never asked for their drawings. If they were offered to me I accepted them. If not I asked to take a photograph of them.
Video diary

The aim of the video diary was to give students the opportunity to record their thoughts and feelings more spontaneously than in an interview. No evidence could be found at the time of the study that this type of tool had been used by Kindergarten children to record their perspectives. It was felt that an innovative approach to data collection such as this was ideal for a study that in itself was within a new and rapidly growing body of research about and with young children.

The vast majority of students engaged with this data collection method with interest and enthusiasm. This was demonstrated by students requesting ‘a turn’ and using the video camera with a high degree of independence once a demonstration had been provided. There were a few reasons behind using a digital video camera. First it was felt that it may be less intimidating than talking to an adult researcher, second that it may empower students to choose when they wished to record their ideas, and third that it would connect with students’ experiences of popular television culture where ‘video diaries’ were often used by reality program participants. Although these students were quite young to be viewing some of the television programs that used this tool, it became clear that my suspicions were correct in that they were quite familiar with the idea behind recording their ideas and thoughts on a video camera.

It seemed clear from their enthusiasm to be involved that students were familiar and comfortable with this type of technology. As term one was more focused on getting to know the students, allowing the students to get to know me and ask questions about the research, and adjusting to being at school each day, the video diary was not implemented until term two. In term two, the video camera was introduced and an explanation of how to operate it and how it was hoped they would use it was provided.
It took the students very little time to acquire the skills to operate the camera, with prompts only provided upon request. The video camera was set up on a tripod in the classroom with a remote control and lapel microphone, which was not always ideal due to noise in the classroom and other students interrupting the students operating the camera. The classroom was really the only space available that would allow students to use the camera unsupervised and regularly.

Students were often invited to have a turn of the video when they had finished their work. It was found that some students frequently struggled to complete work for various reasons and offering another distraction would not have assisted their learning or completion of a task. While this meant that a couple of students had fewer turns than other more efficient workers in their class, the challenge of ensuring that students were getting their work done and the desire to avoid disrupting the Teacher’s plans often took priority. While it was a popular tool with most of the students, there were five students in the class who were not comfortable with the idea of talking to a camera and there was no pressure put on them to use it. The video camera was also used to produce a short video on the students’ experiences of Kindergarten which was presented to the students, families and staff at the end of the year as a site exit strategy.
**Digital photographs**

Digital photography was used throughout the year to:

- record actions and situations that were difficult to describe at the time;
- record actions and situations during periods of high activity that were too complex to record in writing;
- provide illustrations of actions and situations to complement the descriptive data;
- assist me with making sense of observations I had collected and comments that students had made;
- give students another way of expressing themselves and demonstrate their friendships and points of interest;
- collect data that could be shared with the students’ caregivers and Teachers at the end of the data collection year as an exit strategy; and,
- provide me with a vehicle to engage with students in a way they appeared to enjoy but allowing them time to use the camera and take photos of their friends.

Students appeared very interested in the digital camera, having their photographs taken with friends and taking photographs of their friends. The camera was always available to use, although it was brought out selectively as sometimes it was quite a distraction and queues would appear for a turn when students were aware it was available.

Most often the students used the camera during free play time in the classroom, developmental play sessions, sport times and lunch times. The advantages of using a digital camera was that the students could view their photo as soon as they had taken it and shots they were not happy with could be deleted straight away. The disadvantages were that it was a personal camera, slightly large for the students’ hands and quite expensive. This meant that it
was difficult to give the students free rein over the camera to wander away with it. Supervision was required to ensure the camera was still in operation for the entire year. Limits also had to be placed on how much the camera was used by the students as I was using it as a data collection tool.

**Data Analysis**

In order to analyse data collected, the students were consulted throughout the year of the study. As mentioned previously, data collected sometimes needed clarification from students. It was also important to check that the way the data were understood was accurate in the students’ opinions. I chose informal times during the day to ask the students open-ended questions to clarify meanings and understandings such as during craft time and break times.

This process facilitated students’ participation in the research process, as opposed to data collection only, and assisted my ability to be reflective. Following reflection and analysis with the students, data were applied to a ‘Communities of Practice’ framework (Wenger, 1998). The students engaged in this study contributed to, and enriched understandings and applications of Wenger’s (1998) theory, re-envisioning students as active members of society and how it is to be an active member of a classroom and school community of practice.

At times what the students were saying or doing was difficult to understand. The students would try to explain it in a way that I understood but now and then I was not able to. In these situations as a last resort other stakeholders such as caregivers and educators were consulted but only to provide a better understanding of the students’ lived experiences. For example, one morning in term 3 after I had been away for a few days a student came to me and told me that they were upset because they did not get the smile yesterday. I asked them what they meant by
the smile and they told me “the smile you put on.” I enquired further but was not sure still what the student meant. Later that day I asked the teacher about the smile. She explained that they had some “smile for life” badges that they had introduced as a type of reward earlier in the week and students who were given them to wear had made the teachers smile for good behaviour or work.

Consulting with adults was not used as a strategy to validate what students said or to question their reliability. This was used in situations where I had trouble understanding the conversational world of children (Siegal, 1991) and needed clarification beyond the students themselves, due to my inability to understand student culture sometimes. This can also be because the students were engaged in the classroom community of practice five days per week. Field visits occurred two days per week and much took place during the other three days of the school week. Field visit days were varied to counteract this, however many things did occur apart from the school routine. Examples of these occurrences include: students’ learning a new activity; making or breaking a friendship; accidents; rule breaking and resulting consequences; and, personal circumstance changes for students.

These students were also members of their family community of practice and other communities of practice such as church groups and sport clubs. These memberships impacted on their sense of identity, understandings and practices that they brought with them to school. Events did occur in other communities of practice that impacted on membership in the classroom community of practice. Not being privy to the student’s family community of practices meant that it was sometimes difficult to understand certain actions, behaviours, understandings and practices.
Exit from the site in negotiation with participants.

The students’ welcomes in the morning, drawings that included me, and written word once they had learnt how to write demonstrated that my work to develop a positive rapport with them had come to fruition. This did not just happen automatically. It took time to evolve, as did the students’ comfort in being at school, their confidence in themselves as students and their ever broadening abilities to cope with the school curriculum and timetable demands.

The considerable investment of time in field visits and relationship building made exit from the site as important as entry into the research site. It was essential that the willingness of the Principal and classroom Teachers for me to be there was appropriately acknowledged. They saw the relationship between my research and the possible benefits of the development of their school and educational research. The acceptance of the students, their families and staff made it possible for me to gain a form of membership in the Hosanna school community and this needed to be duly recognized.

The following is a common interaction between the students and me:

*Brianna: Everybody likes you, isn’t it?*

S: Do they?

Brianna: Yeah and everybody hugs you.

S: Hates me?

*Brianna: No, hugs you, in case you can’t hear.*

Bethany: We like you Sarah

S: Thanks you two. I like you both too.

Positive relationships were formed with the Kindergarten students and their caregivers, particularly in the focus class. Together we shared many humorous moments and the students
would often ask me to play with them, hold their hand or sit with me during lunch. Sometimes squabbles took place between students because someone had sat beside me first when they wanted to. On each field visit I was aware of times that the students did not tell me everything and withheld information but that was their prerogative and they had a right to keep things from me if they chose, so their silence or reluctance to answer was respected and no more questions were asked about these instances.

The established relationships meant it was important that my exit was something meaningful to all concerned. This was an idea that I shared with the principal and Kindergarten Teachers prior to undertaking the task. It was critical to have their support and approval to ensure my plans were appropriate. My plan was to produce a video that included all the Kindergarten students from both classes I had permission to research with, individually answering a couple of open-ended questions about their Kindergarten year. This video would then be edited by me and screened in the last week of term for all the Kindergarten students, caregivers and staff.

After gaining staff support, for the final weeks of term four, I invited each Kindergarten student to spend a few minutes to be interviewed for the video. I had spent a couple of minutes with each class explaining my plans and letting them know that I would put all their comments together to make a film that we would show their families in the second last week of school. I asked each student what they liked about school and what the best thing was that they learnt at school. Following this I asked them if they had any other comments about school they would like to make. All the students agreed to be on the video and seemed quite excited about it.
The steps involved in the major exiting strategy were as follows:

- Approval for negotiation of timing and resources for showing film;
- Drafting and approval of invitation letter to caregivers;
- Filming of each student in Kindergarten willing to participate;
- Booking of required equipment with staff – data projector and screen
- Distribution of invitations to caregivers and staff members (see Appendix F);
- Editing and production of film on home laptop using InterVideo WinDVD;
- Testing of equipment;
- Making of individual popcorn bags for each Kindergarten student and their family members;
- Set up of equipment and viewing space in Kindergarten classroom; and,
- Viewing of video by Kindergarten students, guardians and staff members who could attend.

As it was the end of the year small gifts were purchased for each Kindergarten student and put together in a Christmas package which included stationery items, bubbles, a Christmas window decoration and a candy cane. For the students I had permission to research with (all but two) I compiled a photo CD for them and their caregivers. This involved going through all the photographs I had taken throughout the year and copying them into individual folders for each student. While most of the photographs on each disc were of individual students there were some students I did not have as many individual photographs of.

With the Principal’s permission I included photos of students with their friends to give caregivers an idea of their child at school. A brief note was included within the cover of the disc explaining to caregivers what it was (see Appendix G). I felt this was an important way to
acknowledge the caregivers consent and as Dockett and Perry (2005) stated ‘for many parents, there is also a sense of loss, in that families become much less aware of what children are doing, when they are doing it, and who they are doing it with as children start school’ (p. 7). The following day several parents expressed their thanks for the disc. As one parent told me ‘you have given me a record of my child during their first year of school that I would not have seen otherwise, thank you’. All the caregivers I saw expressed similar views and could not wait to watch it. I ensured that it was a DVD so that families who did not have access to a personal computer were able to view it on their DVD player or video game console.

There were a couple of indicators that confirmed my efforts to form positive relationships within the school had been successful and a reciprocal exit took place. On a staff level, I was invited to join the staff for their Christmas dinner outing as well as invited to participate in the staff Kris Kringle Christmas gift initiative. Following the completion of the data collection year I was invited to join the staff for a dinner outing early the next year. On a Kindergarten staff member level the Kindergarten Teachers bought me a bunch of flowers and asked all the children to sign a card for me to say thank you for my help that year. On a family level, the Kindergarten parents each put in some money to contribute towards a gift which two of the Kindergarten mothers purchased and presented to me on the video screening day.

In addition to this, I received a number of hugs and phone numbers and was asked for my phone number so we could stay in touch as well as numerous Christmas cards and a couple of individual Christmas cards and gifts from students. On the student level, students would always greet me cheerfully and often several of the students would run up and hug me as I arrived at school, as well as five of the students in my focus class (KA) phoning me to say hello and tell me they missed me the following year.
Example of the beginning of a phone call from a child participant in February the following year after data collection:

Sarah: Hello?

Jasmine: Hello, who is this?

Sarah: It’s Sarah. Is that you Jasmine?

Jasmine: Yes……I miss you Sarah

Conclusion to link with Data Analysis

Data collected throughout the year were analysed using Wenger’s (1998) Communities of Practice framework. Wenger (1998) uses a vignette of a claims processor, within a claims processing division, within a large insurance company to provide concrete examples of membership in communities of practice in order to explain his social theory of learning.

Although Wenger (1998) does discuss applications of his theory to educational institutions, a vignette of student’s actual experiences as members in communities of practice is not provided. This theory is more commonly applied to workforce organization phenomena within large companies (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). However, understanding of and reflection upon the communities of practice framework provides new avenues for considering and talking about student’s active membership in their classroom and school communities of practice.

This project extends beyond the vignette of one person considered in the contexts of various communities of practice to which they belong, to a vignette of one group of Kindergarten students considered in the context of their classroom and school communities of practice, whilst acknowledging that each child is representative of a number of communities of practice.
A key aspect of the communities of practice framework is relationships – focusing on joint enterprise, mutual engagement and shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998). It is these foci that were concentrated on through observations and interviews. An in-depth understanding of each of the participants’ memberships in their classroom and school communities of practice was therefore necessary.

Observing and researching with children throughout their first year of school allowed the researcher to see the modes of belonging (engagement, imagination, and alignment) valued by their classroom and school context. The extent to which the repertoire that exists in the classroom and school communities can be negotiated by children, in a way that incorporates their own values (experiences, ways of being and seeing), was also observed using this framework.
Chapter Four

Members of the KA Community of Practice

Within a few weeks of school, students had begun gaining a reputation for themselves in certain areas of the school day for various reasons. Throughout the data collection year some students began to show different sides to their personalities. All students appeared to gain confidence in their classroom CoP during the year. This development was more obvious in some students than others due to their comparative lack of confidence observed at the outset of the school year. Data collected were impacted upon by the fact that some children were far more forthcoming in their interactions with me.

An observation schedule to track data collected on each student was used, however the variety of attributes of students influenced how much data were collected on each student.

Profiles of students

Following is a brief profile (in alphabetical order of pseudonyms used for each child) of each student in the sample to provide insight into the actors in this study and the subsequent data analysis chapter. I have indicated at the end of each profile how dominant the student is in the
data collected. It should be noted that references to types of behaviour (i.e. ‘naughty’ or ‘silly’), and popularity or likeability of students is informed by students and Teachers identifying this to me during observations and conversations. These references should not be taken to indicate that I am reflecting the classroom CoP valued practices and identities that can include as well as exclude students. Issues that could be seen as related to ethnicity were never raised by the students and hence were not explored. However, this might be an area for future research.

Abe

Abe started at Hosanna Catholic School at the beginning of term 3. Abe is the tallest and oldest boy in the class. He is very quiet natured and often observed the other students more than engaged in ‘silly behaviours’ that occurred during class time. He always completed his school work quickly with a good standard and would often help out others in his class who had trouble finishing their own work. While Abe was confident in his class work he was generally reluctant to engage in physical components of the school curriculum such as sport and dancing. During outdoor free play time he tended to engage in more sedentary socialization with peers who chose to sit with him. Abe had a good sense of humor and would often engage in funny discussion with me about things his brother did or other members of the class and often exchanged knowing looks with me when someone was getting into trouble, being naughty or being silly.

Data collected on Abe were generally through observations involving other more prominent characters and some interviews although he was a student of few words.
Bethany

Bethany was very sensitive and quite emotional at school especially when picked on or left out. She was often left out by some of the more ‘popular’ or dominant girls in the class. Bethany’s speech was somewhat hard to understand and this could have been a contributing factor to her not being accepted regularly by the more dominant girls in the class. Her sensitivity also made her a caring and compassionate student in the class who was rarely unkind to others. Bethany often sought me out when she could not find someone to play with. Academically she worked very hard and took a great deal of pride in her work, particularly creative activities. This was evident when she was always keen to show me her work.

Data collected on Bethany spanned across all data collection methods. She did not feature as much in observations as some of the more prominent girls in the class. She was always enthusiastic about interviews but sometimes would not elaborate on her short answers.

Brianna

Brianna was a friendly girl who did her best to be caring to her class mates. She often appeared to try quite hard to be ‘liked’ especially by the ‘popular’ girls. Brianna did not always have access to all the cultural capital that other female students did (such as popular culture) and this may have impacted on acceptance by peers. She was sometimes outspoken at inappropriate times or about inappropriate things. Brianna would sometimes find herself in trouble for doing things that might be alright at home but were not alright at school. Changes to her family life part way through the year and her attention seeking at school could have been influenced by this. Brianna was a student who knew the rules but sometimes chose the rules she followed depending on her desires (for example asking others for some of their food when this was not allowed) or
not thinking before she acted. Essentially Brianna was a kind girl with a good sense of humour. She reported to like everyone, and often displayed affection to her friends.

Data collected on Brianna were across all data collection methods. She seemed to enjoy having interviews with me but did not seek me out during the day as much as some of her peers. This impacted on the number of observations taken on her.

**Christopher**

Christopher was the youngest student in the class. Compared to his peers he was quite immature. He was a very friendly, likeable and caring boy with a good sense of humour. Other students, particularly the older girls tended to ‘mother’ him and help him with tasks he had trouble doing. He struggled with school work and was physically very little. His mother was advised by the end of term one that he should leave school and return the following year when he was a bit older. In term 2 when he had gone all the students asked about him and where he went and any time the role was called and his name was accidentally called by a casual teacher all the students would say ‘Christopher’s not here anymore’ in unison.

Very little data were collected on Christopher as term 1 interviews were quite short and I only interviewed him once.

**Eduardo**

Eduardo was one of the younger boys in the class who really struggled with his academic work and fine motor activities. He was highly interested in sports and physical activities. He also engaged enthusiastically in verbal classroom activities such as news. Eduardo often sought out adults or friends to help him before attempting tasks himself. He had a lively sense of humor and was well liked by the whole class, particularly Tyler. Due to his size and ‘cute’ nature (which he played on), he was often mothered by the girls, particularly Hannah. The mothering became less
frequent through the year as Eduardo seemed to mature, develop friendships with the boys and become more confident.

A reasonable amount of data were collected on Eduardo across all areas with the exception of the video diary.

Eloise

Eloise was consistently the quiet student. She was an observer of people, rather than an engager. She was friends with Bethany because their families spent time together and took turns picking up the girls from school. Eloise took quite a while warming up to people, including me. It was not until towards the end of term 2 that Eloise showed confidence in her school work and separated from Mum in the morning without tears. By the end of the year she initiated engagement with other students more. She initiated communication with me a lot more by term 2, perhaps because her mother and I talked often before school. She was generally well behaved and rarely got into trouble. Eloise was very rarely the centre of attention and sometimes missed out on opportunities (such as taking the office bag to the office) because she was quiet.

Data collected on Eloise were more from interviews and the occasions when she would initiate contact with me. She tended not to be prominent in observations or the video diary.

Grace

Grace began the year as an incredibly quiet student. It was not until term 3 that Grace seemed to really develop her confidence at school. At this time even the teachers had commented that she had found her voice. She was often engaged in various disputes between Hannah, Winona, Jasmine and Lily. She was often used as a pawn in the ongoing power struggles between Hannah, Winona and Jasmine. She did not get into trouble all that often. When she did it was usually for talking when she should not but it was never for being nasty or unkind.
Grace was somewhat quiet during interviews in term 1 and 2 although always willing to participate.

Data collected on Grace varied as the year progressed. As her confidence grew so too did her participation in class and interviews. She also became more prominent in observations, somewhat due to her affiliation with the more confident girls in the class.

**Gregory**

Gregory was generally very well behaved, quite bright and good at academic tasks. He was enthusiastic and highly involved in all school activities. He enjoyed being the class clown quite often and usually chose appropriate times to behave in this way. He was well liked by all the students in his class. Gregory seemed to find being reprimanded by teachers very difficult to take and would get a bit teary or sulk for a short time. He also had a strong sense of social justice and morals and would have no trouble drawing the teacher’s attention to other students’ mean behaviour towards himself and others.

Data collected on Gregory spanned all methods. His confidence meant that he was keen to be interviewed and talk on the video camera. He seemed to get enjoyment from me writing about him in my book and would ask me what I had written and often laugh about it.

**Hannah**

Hannah was quite possibly the most popular girl whom all the other girls wanted as their friend or partner during activities. Hannah would sometimes use this to her advantage and get what she wanted with her peers. She was generally caring and kind and a thoughtful student but could at times be quite hurtful and spiteful to her friends, particularly her close friends (Winona and Jasmine) who also used the same strategies. Hannah was a very high achieving student who
was in the top groups for reading and mathematics. She also generally did her work very well in
class and followed her teacher’s instructions and expectations throughout the day.

Hannah featured in data collected sometimes due to her popularity and also because she
seemed to be a prominent character in what was taking place in the classroom or playground.

Jasmine

Jasmine was a high achieving student who took pride in her work. She was good friends
with Hannah and Winona in particular but also engaged in the hurtful and spiteful behaviour
throughout the year. Jasmine was not as popular as Hannah but still well-liked by her classmates.
I felt that Jasmine was often envious of Hannah for various reasons from appearance to
achievement in class. Jasmine liked to please her teachers and followed instructions and met
expectations most of the time. She was also quite clever (as were many of the students) in
working out when were times she could get away with not doing as the teacher said.

Data collected on Jasmine were numerous as she often sought me out to talk to, mediate
disputes, write in my book and be interviewed even when she had already been interviewed that
term.

Jayden

Jayden was known as a bit of a ‘naughty’ boy in his class and often acted the clown during
class. He was quite immature compared to some of his peers and often struggled with class work.
This may have been somewhat because he did not attend preschool like his peers. Jayden was a
very active student and quite free spirited and mischievous. He was also very kind to his class
mates and rarely lashed out at them. On the other hand he would very easily get caught in an
argument with his peers. He was keen to please his teachers but often the temptation to do
something silly would outweigh the desire to please or get acceptance.
Data collected on Jayden were strongest during class time and observations. His answers during interviews were quite brief, possibly because it was not entirely of interest to him. He did however enjoy being interviewed, more than likely because he was out of the classroom and could draw what he wanted and say silly things.

**Joshua**

Joshua was smaller in size that the other boys in the class but big in character. He was a bit of an attention seeker which other students seemed to find annoying at times. He was generally well liked but sometimes chose inappropriate ways or times to demonstrate his like of others. He was quite bright but would not get his work done because of ‘mucking around’ or talking or just wasting time. Joshua was frequently in trouble for annoying someone or not paying attention when he should, was very physical with people and sometimes a bit rough. Joshua struggled with peers not accepting him when he desired it and would use whinging or ‘dobbing on friends’ (reporting to the teacher the actions of other children) to get the attention he wanted.

Data collected on Joshua were greater towards the second half of the year as his confidence in the group grew. He seemed to enjoy interviews and had plenty to say to answer my questions.

**Kristy**

Kristy was a very kind student who was quiet most of the time. She was talkative in small groups but quite shy in whole class situations. More often than not Kristy had trouble separating from mum in the morning without tears. Sometimes these tears would reappear throughout the day. Kristy sought my attention quite a lot during the time she was at Hosanna. She often wanted to be my partner, show me jewellery or trinkets she brought from home and sit next to me at lunch time. She looked for reassurance often from any adult that was available during the day. Kristy was not one of the popular girls as far as the girls were concerned but liked just the same.
Data collected on Kristy were limited by comparison to other students as she left the school at the end of term 2 due to changes in her family situation.

**Leticia**

Leticia was not really in the ‘popular’ group of girls. While she did interact with the ‘popular’ girls and was well-liked by her peers she was not one of the girls that would get quickly chosen by her peers to ask questions in news time or take the office bag with them (these were indicators of popularity). Leticia had a cousin in KB so often spent time with KB students rather than playing with the KA students. Leticia was a nice girl who had a good sense of humour. She sometimes avoided tasks in class and sometimes I felt this was because she just did not want to try, not that she could not do the task. She was often away from school from illness or holidays out of school holiday time which may have impacted on her desire to do her class work. Leticia would often seek me out and wanted to be interviewed nearly every week.

Data collection on Leticia spanned all methods. She was not as prominent as some students in class observations, however she is in many field notes due to her seeking me out.

**Lily**

Lily began the year being very quiet but had developed her confidence and social competence by the end of the year. She was generally a very nice girl but would often get into arguments that were instigated by Hannah, Winona or Jasmine. She often wanted Hannah’s attention and often did not get it the way she wanted it. Lily was regularly observed trying to impress the popular girls (by pointing out things they had in common like a library bag or DVD) to get them to like her. I had the sense that Lily did not have as much access to items that would impress her friends which made her try quite hard sometimes to impress. Lily was quite good at
school work and generally conscientious. She had a very caring nature and enjoyed being involved in classroom discussions.

Data collected on Lily were greater during the second half of the year as her confidence grew and she initiated conversations with me more frequently. She seemed to enjoy being interviewed, particularly when she got to choose the friend she was being interviewed with.

Lucas

Lucas was a nice natured boy who had trouble with his speech and attended speech therapy. This may have impacted on his popularity in the class at times. He had a quirky sense of humour that made others laugh often. I felt this was his way of being liked in the class. He was good friends with Marcus and students generally liked him although he was not one of the boys the girls would talk about. Lucas was never observed being nasty to anyone, even when someone was nasty to him. If anything he would become upset and cry. He struggled a bit with his academic work and avoided tasks or moved very slowly on tasks he was not good at or not interested in.

Data collected on Lucas were somewhat limited. He rarely sought me out although he was often present when others did. His speech impacted on his confidence during interviews even when he was with Marcus, although he was happy to be interviewed.

Marcus

Marcus was well liked by everyone in the class. He had a good sense of humor, and enjoyed silly talk with his peers (particularly Lucas and Ryan). Marcus was quite good at academic work when he was ‘not mucking around’ (playing up) or talking during class. He was generally actively engaged in all class activities, even music and dancing. Lucas and Ryan were his closest friends. Marcus demonstrated a strong sense of fairness and often cited school rules at
other students even though he was occasionally sneaky about breaking them himself like sneaking toys from home into the classroom by keeping them in his pocket. Marcus was always on the list of possible ‘boys to marry’ according to the girls and he was often discussing kissing and marriage and at one point told the class he was going to marry me.

Data collected on Marcus were substantial as he often engaged in conversations with me throughout the day and was one of the more prominent characters in the class.

**Ryan**

Ryan was one of the quieter students in the class who took quite some time to settle in to school. His family was going through quite a bit with illness throughout the year and this may have impacted on his ability to settle in. Ryan was a lovely, funny and gentle natured student. Unfortunately he seemed quite insecure and scared of ‘having a go’ which would result in emotional times that seemed to shut down his ability to do his work. He was a little awkward at physical activities but was enthusiastic in the majority of activities at school. He was liked by the other students and never nasty to his peers. This sometimes meant that other students’ harsh actions towards him easily upset him. His sense of humour was quite quirky and got his peers laughing mostly about the pure silliness of what he was doing or saying. In a sense this was his capital in the classroom.

Data collected on Ryan were across all methods throughout the year. He was not as confident using the video camera but enjoyed interviews. Responses during interviews were impacted upon by who he was interviewed with. He is not as prominent in observations as some of his peers due to his quiet nature.
Tamika

Tamika was a very bright student with amazing knowledge about all sorts of topics, especially about nature. She had a somewhat difficult beginning to life and this impacted on her abilities physically. She quite often sought attention in class from her peers and teachers. Tamika’s social strategies did not always appeal to her peers which would often leave her playing on her own. This being said, she was a very kind, sensitive and thoughtful girl. She had an interesting sense of humour and thought about things in a unique way. She did quite regularly get into trouble for not working to her potential and was easily distracted talking to other students at her table in class. Even though she was not the most popular girl in the class I felt she had a healthy self esteem that made her come across quite confident even when she was feeling insecure.

Data collected on Tamika were quite substantial as she frequently initiated discussion with me. She enjoyed talking so interviews with her were usually quite long. She was outspoken in class so observations of her were regular. She was enthusiastic using the video camera although some of these data were unusable for the purpose of this thesis as she seemed to think it was funny to demonstrate picking her nose.

Timothy

Timothy was a very bright student with computers and machinery. He attended school for half days for the majority of the year because of his behaviour associated with ADHD. Timothy had a very caring side but was not as accepted by his peers. This was mostly due to his frequently disruptive and sometimes quite rough behaviour. Perhaps his best friend was Jayden, although this was somewhat of a love/hate relationship at times. I felt they were drawn to each
other as both of them struggled with school rules and routines and neither of them had a ‘best friend’.

Data collected on Timothy were generally from observations. I always consciously looked for good things to observe in Timothy as he often featured in observations because he was acting out or misbehaving. Interviews were somewhat difficult as his receptive and expressive language was delayed compared to his peers. I also felt that he had trouble paying attention and this could also be attributed to the fact that he did not find my questions relevant to him.

Tyler

Tyler was very well liked by everyone in the class, particularly Eduardo, Marcus and Gregory. He was one of the boys that the girls often spoke about and his name mentioned in marriage plans. Tyler was very up to date with all the latest kid culture (super heroes) as well as some more adult culture such as ‘Big Brother’. This seemed to give him a fair bit of capital in the classroom and he often discussed the latest game or DVD he had been given. Tyler enjoyed sports and computer games, but was a bit embarrassed to participate in dancing during sport time (this was considered more of a girl’s activity). He struggled a bit with academic work and did not like the popular girls seeing his efforts. He was kind to all the students in his class for the vast majority of the year. He had a strong sense of fairness and had no trouble telling the teacher when other students were disobeying class or school rules. Tyler was quite confident in the class until the day he got his eye glasses but after a few compliments from the popular girls this slip in confidence seemed to correct itself.

Data collected on Tyler were evident in all methods throughout the year. He interviewed well and seemed to enjoy doing this with me, particularly role play later in the year. He features
in many field notes and observations due to his prominence and popularity in the class and his frequent initiation of conversation with me.

**Winona**

Winona was one of the more academically immature students in the class who also liked to act like a 15 year old. She was very outspoken, dynamic, theatrical and extroverted. Winona was frequently observed lying to stay out of trouble or get people’s attention (feel sorry for her or think she is cool), showing off, and sulking when she did not get her own way. Winona demonstrated high social awareness in the way she used classroom practice to manipulate others and get what she wanted. She was often embroiled in disputes with Jasmine and Hannah and often retaliated. She was also often observed being very caring to her peers when they showed distress and could be quite affectionate. Winona often avoided doing class work and did not seem confident to attempt her work without major encouragement. She was very ‘world wise’ beyond her years which she would often wield as a power play with her peers.

Winona’s personality dominated the room and therefore, many observations and field notes. She seemed to enjoy talking with me during interviews and frequently sought me out during the day. Unfortunately sometimes this was to settle disputes between her friends which I consistently reminded her I was not there to do. I spent a lot of time reassuring her though so she did not feel that her feelings were irrelevant to me.

These then are the members of the KA community practice.
Chapter five

Results and discussion

At the outset of this study Etienne Wenger’s Community of Practice [CoP] framework was chosen as a way to think about what data should be collected. The literature review has identified that very little research exists where studies of young children involve Wenger’s CoP framework. Thus this study highlighted that a CoP framework is relevant to five year olds in their Kindergarten classroom. Students’ membership in a class very much reflects the overall idea of a community of practice. As Wenger (1998) stated ‘students go to school and, as they come together to deal in their own fashion with the agenda of the imposing institution and the unsettling mysteries of youth, communities of practice sprout everywhere – in the classroom as well as on the playground, officially or in the cracks. And in spite of curriculum, discipline, and exhortation, the learning that is most personally transformative turns out to be the learning that involves membership in these communities of practice’ (p. 6).
However, upon engaging in this study and analysing data collected the need to modify Wenger’s CoP framework to enable a more complete encapsulation of the context became clear. Thus, whilst the data collected confirmed every aspect of Wenger’s complex model it was also apparent that they could be seen as generating themes which applied to the specific situation under study and that they assisted in understanding the experiences of the children in their kindergarten community of practice. These themes can best be seen as overlapping with one or more aspects of Wenger’s framework. To illustrate, Figure 1, a perpetually reflexive model, shows how the CoP framework guided the data collection, which resulted in the data generated themes. Students’ perspectives of CoP took the form of the research driven themes which were derived originally from Wenger. Wenger’s model was unpacked into the R’s (Relationships,
Rules, Routines, Rituals, Remarkable moments, and Researcher) to make it workable and more salient to this research and to these students’ experiences. The research driven themes were then related back to Wenger’s CoP framework which was used as a springboard for the research, informed implementation and was a useful tool in guiding understandings of membership. As this is the first study of its kind, the primary emphasis of the study therefore was to describe what the experience of children was in their first year of school.

The model I devised when looking at an early childhood setting addressed and acknowledged the different patterns of thinking found in these students: Wenger’s model was not developed to apply to such a group and thus needed to be adapted or modified to take full account of the context. As a result, Wenger’s CoP Framework is used to explain the underpinnings of the study rather than being used as a framework for analysis in its original form.

The following data analysis is a modified version of Wenger’s model and provides a different way of categorising aspects of a CoP framework. This will be demonstrated by taking the four key components of Wenger’s framework which are learning as belonging, learning as becoming, learning as experience, and learning as doing.

- Learning as belonging:
  Community: a way of talking about the social configurations in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognizable as competence.

- Learning as becoming:
  Identity: a way of talking about how learning changes who we are and creates personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities.
• Learning as experience;

Meaning: a way of talking about our (changing) ability – individually and collectively – to experience our life and the world as meaningful, and

• Learning as doing.

Practice: a way of talking about the shared historical and social resources, frameworks, and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action.

In addition, it can be shown how data driven themes fit within these four broad components. These themes are relationships, rules, rituals, routines, remarkable moments and researcher. Each of these themes is defined and examples are given.

• Relationships ‘an emotional connection between people’ (Macquarie Essential Dictionary, 1999, p. 666).

This theme refers to the social interactions engaged in by students among each other and school staff. These include verbal and non-verbal interactions, and power exerted by students upon one another for various reasons such as ‘dobbing on each other’ or excluding a person from play or conversation. Data relating to relationships were evident throughout the study in interviews with students, classroom and playground field notes and observations, students’ drawings, photographs and video diary entries.

• Rules ‘a principle or regulation governing conduct, action, procedure, arrangement’ (Macquarie Essential Dictionary, 1999, p. 694).

Rules include those mandated by the school in policy documents including attendance, dress code, hair styles, and child protection, as well as rules relating to day-to-day routines and rituals including listening to the teacher, being respectful during prayer times, and following the teacher’s instructions. Rules were also developed by the students throughout the year involving peer culture, popular culture, and interpretations of school and classroom rules. Rules were
present throughout data collection most often in the interviews with students, classroom and playground field notes and observations.

- Rituals ‘an established or set procedure, code, form, system, etc…for a religious or other rite. Any solemn or customary action, code of behaviour, etc., determining social conduct’ (Macquarie Essential Dictionary, 1999, p. 684).

Rituals are seen as religious actions/practices of the classroom and school including praying before meal times, blessing themselves at appropriate times, attending mass where children learn and are given the responsibility to perform certain tasks at these ceremonies, and the blessing of children at morning assemblies. They can also be seen in non-religious ceremonies and significant practices of the school, such as special assemblies. Rituals were identified through participation and observation in the school and classroom setting, as well as in some students’ drawings and interview transcripts.

- Routines ‘a regular course of action or conduct. Regular, unvarying, or mechanical way of doing something (Macquarie Essential Dictionary, 1999, p. 612).

Routines included: weekly reading groups, library visits, meal breaks, taking the office bag to the office, news time in classroom, and morning assembly each day. Routines were evident in many forms of data collection but in particular in the classroom and playground field notes/observations and some interviews with students.

- Remarkable Moments. These refer to changes and experiences in life worth noting by students to each other without necessarily being prompted by an adult. This theme covers those things related to change in children’s lives that may seem ordinary to adults but are considered significant by children.
These included: losing teeth, discussing birthday plans and having birthdays, shared popular culture interests acted out/drawn upon/wielded as power, and occurrences outside of school from health issues to family experiences. Remarkable moments commonly appeared in photography, classroom and playground field notes/observations and student interview data collection methods.

To illustrate the above data analysis method, the four key components of Wenger’s framework will be linked to each of the data driven themes with excerpts from the data. The examples from the field notes, observations, interviews, photographs, video diary and students’ drawing are in chronological order and therefore do not indicate the level of importance of each example. It shows that within each of the key components the data driven themes were evident throughout the year.

Before looking at the findings it is useful to consider how effective data gathering techniques were. Some techniques were more effective in yielding significant data than others.

- Semi-structured interviews with students in small groups;

Semi-structured interviews generally provided a great deal of data about students’ perspectives. Each student was interviewed in a small group (of their choosing where appropriate) once per term. It was noticed that term 1 interviews did not yield as much information as interviews later in the year. There are three possible reasons for this phenomenon. Firstly, students were still fairly unfamiliar with me in term 1 as I was still developing rapport with them. Secondly, students were fairly new to the school environment and perhaps were still developing their opinions about school and classroom life. Thirdly, it appeared that students were unfamiliar with the procedure of ‘interviews’ as far as being questioned and elaborating on their answers. This
could also be unfamiliarity with being asked to give their perspectives on something as broad as class and school life.

- Role play during interviews;

This data gathering technique was not tested until term 3 and 4 interviews. Accordingly there was less data from this technique as opposed to standard open-ended interviews. This technique asked students to pretend they were one of their caregivers being interviewed by their teacher and was not equally effective with all students or perhaps not as appealing to all students. This form of data still yielded some useful insights into how they perceived themselves (and their caregivers perceived them) as members of their classroom and school CoP.

- Opportunity for children to draw pictures to support or complement the interview process;

This data gathering technique had two purposes. First and foremost it was used as a tool to assist in the comfort of students being interviewed. It was felt that students might have felt intimidated by being interviewed (although all reasonable steps were taken to eliminate this) and that providing drawing materials would reduce the sense of pressure students may have felt to talk to me and make eye contact. Secondly, this tool was used to support students’ spoken word and as a vehicle for prompting further discussion based on their drawings. All the students chose to draw during their interviews and some were offered to me, while most were photographed and remained in the possession of the students. The drawings provided some data in that they supported discussions during interviews. However, the drawings in themselves were best understood in the context of the open-ended interviews.
• Observations documented in field notes;

This form of data collection yielded the majority of the data. The documentation of ‘as it happened’ verbal and non-verbal student perspectives and experiences throughout the year provided rich data that complemented open-ended interviews. This documentation supported and sometimes provided a starting place for the informal conversations with students that were initiated by both me and the students.

• Informal conversations with students throughout the school day;

Data collection using this method enriched observations and field notes and therefore yielded a great deal of data as they were most often recorded in field notes as they happened. On some occasions these discussions were captured on a digital voice recorder and later transcribed. These conversations became more prevalent in the data collected as students became more familiar with me from midway in term one.

• Digital photography taken by me and the students;

Digital photography was used more as a rapport building tool with the students. It assisted with the development of personal relationships with the students and sometimes between students. As a data collection tool it added little to understanding CoP, however the fact that students only ever took photos of themselves and each other it would indicate the importance of friends and relationships to them as members. Photographs that I took were generally used as a tool to support field notes and anecdotal writing after a data collection day and were most useful as data when supported by field notes and observations.
Video diary recording operated by students

The video diary data collection tool was introduced late in the year. As a result this method did not yield as much data as the interviews, field notes/observations, and informal conversations. The majority of students enjoyed using this tool and often replicated interview techniques I had used with them, when using the video with their peers. Some students chose not to use the video diary at all even though it was offered to them. While some interesting and useful data were collected using this tool it did not represent all the students in the class as the interviews did.

Learning as belonging

Relationships

It has been reported in starting school research that friends are most often reported by children as important to them when they start school. The struggles within relationships and the importance of these to children impact upon their sense of belonging in their classroom CoP.

The daily challenges for students as far as acceptance and fitting in, and the power struggles children engaged in are examples of this. These challenges included the frequent statements of ‘I’m not your friend anymore’ and discussions between children about who they are going to marry, invite to their birthday parties, sit with, hold hands with, play with, who has what in common as far as belongings and interests, and who does well in school, are all part of their belonging to their classroom community of practice.
Within the classroom community of practice there were also a couple of clearly defined friendship based communities of practice where key members would, on any given occasion, draw in or reject other members and even refuse membership or be refused membership momentarily based on disagreements and power struggles. These negotiations often took place on a daily basis and impacted upon students’ feelings about school on any given day.
Monday 14th February - Field Notes

Tamika told me that Winona, Nahla and Kristy were hitting her with sticks and would not stop. Later, Winona complained to me that Tamika wasn’t her friend anymore. I replied ‘that is probably because you were hitting her with sticks’ and Winona replied ‘yeah but I said sorry.’
Thursday 10th March - Interview

Sarah: So was it hard making friends when you started school?

Jasmine: Yeah.

Sarah: What did you find the hardest?

Jasmine: Everyone in the playground saying I’m not your friend anymore and they keep doing it [sic].

Sarah: Yes? Why do you think they say that?

Jasmine: Because they being naughty to you and then they won’t be your friend [sic].

Sarah: Do you think they are really not your friend when they say that?

Jasmine: [nodding]

Sarah: Yes? Do you mean it when you say it?

Jasmine: Um I don’t know.

Jasmine’s answer to my question about whether or not she means it when she says ‘I’m not your friend anymore’ is interesting. I could not obtain any more information from her about whether she really did mean it when she said it. Perhaps not knowing means she is afraid to admit that she does? The number of times this line was used throughout the year by a range of students indicates that they do not really mean ‘anymore’ but just at this moment in time. It seems this way because the next day they are friends again and this occurs over and over again with the same people the whole year. Students know from their own experiences that this hurts to hear, and I believe their intent at the time is to hurt to some degree but also to let their friend know they are very unhappy with them and not being a friend anymore is a serious consequence
of their actions. Saying ‘I’m not your friend anymore’ is a more powerful statement than ‘I don’t like what you have done’ or ‘you have upset me’.

Tuesday 15th March - Field Notes

Hannah and Winona approached and Hannah told me, ‘Winona poked her tongue out at me’ I asked her why and Winona replied, ‘because she’s not my friend’.

Hannah and Winona are friends and remain friends the entire year. However, there are often altercations between these two girls and ‘I’m not your friend anymore’ is reversed in the above excerpt where an action results in the understanding that they are not friends. It is possible that Winona believes that telling me that Hannah is not her friend is a way to let me know that she was justified in her action that must have been caused by something that Hannah had done. Perhaps they thought I would get involved in their dispute but I avoided this as much as possible.

Friday 20th May - Classroom Observation

Tyler (to Joshua) ‘You’re not coming to my party, just my play boy Eduardo’ [Tyler then puts his arm around Eduardo’s shoulders and Eduardo smiles]. Eduardo (to Tyler & Gregory) ‘You and you can come to my party’. Joshua then replies to Tyler, Eduardo and Gregory in a very sad tone ‘Well you and you and you can come to my party’.
Monday 18\textsuperscript{th} July – Classroom Observation

Tyler walked up to Winona with his finished colouring and said ‘Do you like my work?’

Winona replied ‘Yes, it’s very nice’.

Tyler then told Winona ‘Because you said that you can come to my party’.

These two examples show how birthday parties are significant to young children. Birthday parties are one time when students have some control over, or say, in an event in their lives. Also, not all students actually had birthday parties so it was a source of power the students could use. These events or being invited to them were used in a way to manipulate or reward other classmates. While these discussions were very much a part of the classroom CoP and something Teachers had little control over except perhaps to disallow discussion of them, they also show the way family communities of practice overlap and impact upon the classroom CoP.

Wednesday 7\textsuperscript{th} September – Term 3 Interview

\textit{Sarah: What don’t you like about school?}

\textit{Bethany: Because it’s stupid.}

Sarah: Why is it stupid?

Bethany: Because no one plays with me at play time.

Sarah: Why?

\textit{Bethany: Because they’re playing with another friend.}

The above interview transcript reiterates just how important friends are to young children. While not having a friend to play with may not make school entirely ‘stupid’ as Bethany says in
this interview, it does impact on overall feelings about school at the time of this interview. Given that this type of experience happened often to many of the students there were likely to be many times throughout the year when various students would agree with what Bethany said. This would possibly impact on what students would learn on a day or in a week when they had these similar sentiments about school. Belonging is about sharing experiences with others and the most enjoyable times shared were during play, as many students reported in numerous interviews.

Monday 21st November – Classroom field notes

Winona: Hey, where did you get the sticker from?

Jasmine: Me and Hannah got one from Marcus.

Winona: He didn’t give me one.

Jasmine: Maybe he didn’t have any left or he doesn’t like you.

Winona: [with tears in her eyes she looked away from Jasmine and then got up and walked away].

Jasmine: She always gets upset when we say things to her [addressing me].

In the field notes above Winona gets quite upset for a couple of reasons. First, she was upset that she did not get a sticker from Marcus. Stickers were a form of power as they were often used as a reward by the Teachers. If a student was handing them out it represented a reward to other students who got them. They also indicated acceptance and friendship, which all students wanted. Second, the fact that Jasmine added that Winona may not have got one because Marcus does not like her would have upset Winona because she was quite fond of Marcus. In
addition, there was constant power play between Jasmine and Winona and it may have felt to Winona that Jasmine had the upper hand or more friends than Winona did.

Monday 28th November – Term 4 Interview

Sarah: Is there anything that makes you feel not so good about being in this class?

Lily: Not playing with friends.

Sarah: Do you mean when friends don’t play with you or when it is time to work and not play?

Lily: When someone says you can’t play with them.

Brianna: Hannah and Jasmine don’t let me play.

Sarah: Don’t they? Why do you think they do that?

Brianna: Because they don’t like me...sometimes they do. Hannah and Jasmine, they like Winona and Lily.

As demonstrated in the images on the following page, being told you cannot play or you have done the wrong thing, or that you are not a friend anymore impacts on a students’ time during school and can leave other students feeling quite awkward or sad for one of their friends.
Rules

As with Wenger’s framework where he agrees that the four key components can overlap, so too do the data driven themes. Rules set out by the school and classroom teacher were often wielded as power over another student. Knowledge of the rules in this sense is social capital to successfully negotiate the community of practice. It also impacted on students’ relationships.

Often students learn the rules because they have done something that has got them into trouble. If it was not them in trouble, they learnt from watching one of the other students get into trouble. Rather than school rules being laid down in their first days of school the rules tended to unfold as children participated in school. Besides basic codes of conduct, rules were reactive to the students’ behaviour and this makes sense in that it would not be possible to anticipate everything students will do on their second day at school. On their first day they learnt they had to put their hand up before they speak.

Thursday 3rd February – Classroom Field Notes

It wasn’t until first lunch was almost over and kids had run through the garden, jumped the low brick wall several times, rolled around in the dirt at the bottom of the hill, played in the classrooms when there was no teacher in there and run around the buildings out of the sight of the Teachers, that the kids were given some rules. Miss H. sat all the kids down and told them they were not to jump off the wall or they might hurt themselves like hitting their heads; they were not to run on the concrete; they were not to go in the classrooms during break; they were not to run around the sides or back of buildings where Teachers can’t see them.
When interviewing students I asked them what they would tell the new Kindergarten students coming next year. Rules were consistently mentioned as things you needed to know when you start school.

Wednesday 24th August – Interview

Sarah: What would you tell the new Kindergarten students so they knew what to do at school?

Tyler: You have to be good in Kindergarten because, um, you have to. You can’t be naughty because the Teachers will get angry.

Tamika: Ask the Teacher if you have to go to the toilet or she doesn’t know where you are. You have to do your work properly or if you’re naughty you have to sit on the naughty chair.

Tyler: If you are naughty in the playground you have to sit on the naughty bench. Be good at school and don’t be naughty at school and don’t fight, and don’t swear because that’s one big thing!
Friday 2\textsuperscript{nd} September – Term 3 Interview

Sarah: What would you tell the new Kindergarten students so they knew what to do at school?

\textit{Gregory: Ah, hands and feet to yourself. Talk nicely and look after things. Don’t fight.}

Wednesday 7\textsuperscript{th} September – Term 3 Interview

Sarah: What would you tell the new Kindergarten students so they knew what to do at school?


Kristy: Say thank you.

\textit{Bethany: Do your work or you’ll get in trouble. Look after things. Talk nicely, yeah be a bit quiet and ‘can I please have it?’ and you wait your turn.}

Through experience the students learnt how to categorise behaviours into the general rules such as being kind to each other, looking after things, and doing your work properly. However, even late in the year students were still doing things that got them into trouble. Sometimes this was because this particular event had not occurred before and they did not know it was a bad thing. Sometimes I observed that students knew what they were doing was bad but it either occurred in the heat of the moment or because the temptation outweighed the consequences. Either way, belonging involves engagement and requires participation, ongoing negotiation of meaning and unfolding histories of practice which in essence is what learning the rules is about.
Rituals

Belonging to this school means participating in many religious or special events. These events often entailed learning songs and verses to participate. Once students had learnt these songs or verses they became part of their repertoire of practice leading to learning as belonging.

Friday 4\textsuperscript{th} March – Field Notes

On the way to the library Hannah, Winona, Lily and Jasmine were walking hand in hand in pairs. Out of nowhere they began singing a song they had learned for the welcoming ceremony \textit{‘Welcome to the Family’}. \textit{They had sung this song earlier in the day at Mass.}

Throughout the year students had many different kinds of experiences in the Church that was used in a similar way to a school hall at times. These included the welcoming ceremony, school opening ceremony, Kindergarten Mass, Easter Mass and other general school Masses. It took some students longer to learn the routines and actions associated with attending Mass. This was sometimes due to some students actually attending Mass with their families outside of school. As the year progressed students’ competence in the rituals of the school and classroom demonstrated their belonging in these communities of practice.

Friday 3\textsuperscript{rd} June – Church Field Notes

After a few weeks of practice all the students have learnt their jobs and the songs to perform very well. Some students have been allocated roles in the Kindergarten Mass such as ringing bells or carrying a bible or candle or basket of food donations to Father W. at the front
of the Church. Other students remained in their seats and participated in the songs with actions they had been learning. Compared to the beginning of the year the students seem to have more reverence when attending Church. Only one student I noticed (Joshua) was mucking up a little, however he has a bit of a reputation for being a bit silly. What surprised me was the amount of attention Timothy was paying in the Mass and how well he behaved. At various times in the Mass some students went up the front to partake in the Mass (a reading or prayer for example), and forgot to bow to the tabernacle when they got there. Timothy leant over to his teacher and said ‘They didn’t bow to the tabernacle; they didn’t bow to the tabernacle.’ This was most surprising when Timothy is one student who rarely behaves in Mass or seems to be paying attention.

Rituals were always used as a power play when looking at them in a community and belonging sense. A particular example was the classroom prayers. The class prayed before lunch and at the end of the day before they went home. Three children in particular vied for this privileged job. Hannah and Jasmine were constantly in competition with each other even when they would tell you they were best friends. Many times, too many to document in this thesis, one
or the other of them would remember to ask to say the prayer at the next opportunity if they had missed the before lunch opportunity. One such example is:

Wednesday 19\textsuperscript{th} October – Classroom field notes

Joshua asked if he could say the prayer and Mrs. B. allowed it.

Joshua: Please help us and help us to have lots of fun and also to have fun with our friends.

AMEN.

Jasmine: Mrs. B. can I say the prayer when we go home?

Mrs. B.: Yes you can Jasmine.

I then noticed Jasmine look at Hannah with a smile and Hannah returning an icy stare at Jasmine.

Visits to Church were part of the practice of this classroom community of practice.

\textbf{Routines}

Routines often created opportunities for students to feel a sense of belonging or importance in their daily classroom lives. For example, students were on a roster to tell ‘news’ where they brought in something from home and shared it with the class as a whole group or in small groups. After each news session the teacher would select one student’s news to write up on the board and everyone in the class had to write in their books.

Monday 7\textsuperscript{th} March – Field Notes

Joshua: Can I be on the board? Can I be on the board?

Mrs. B: Yes, Joshua, you can have your news on the board.
Joshua grins broadly and looks over at Leticia who also told news but did not get to be on the board.

Routines of this Kindergarten Classroom often involved students from the other Kindergarten class. Within these routines there was friction caused by students in one class being grouped with students who were perhaps the more popular students in the other class. This did not necessarily mean that the respect flowed between the classrooms. The excerpt below also demonstrates what I was quite aware of all year and that was that there was a different climate in each of the classrooms. Each classroom was its own community of practice and the shared repertoire or values placed on certain things did not necessary match in each CoP.

Thursday 10\textsuperscript{th} November – Classroom field notes

\textit{During reading group Tamika’s group was playing word games.}

\textit{Tamika: It’s not about winning. It’s a game! It’s about having fun. Sarah, all Belle cares about is winning but I told her it’s not about that. It’s about having fun.}
Belle: we won the card game 5 times.

Tamika: All she cares about is winning. There’s more to life!

Birthday parties were a common theme throughout the year. As part of belonging, outside events that involved the students were brought into the classroom often during routines of the classroom such as news time. In the excerpt below it also became clear that students were interested to see the reaction of the birthday boy and possibly their class mates about the present they each bought for him.

Monday 28th November – Classroom field notes.

News time is up first and Tyler gets to tell the class about his party, even though the majority of the kids went. The class asked mostly about the presents he got.

Lucas: Did you like the punching bag I got you?

Tyler: Yeah, but you know the handle? When I picked it up half of it snapped off.

Tamika: What present did I get you?

Tyler: Ummmm [thinks for a minute]. I can’t remember.

Tamika: [frowns at Tyler]

Lily: Did you like the car I got you?

Tyler: Yes.

Jasmine: Did you like your birthday cake?

Tyler: I didn’t have any, but you should know that. You were there.
Remarkable Moments

The following excerpt is an example of shared repertoire which is part of belonging. While losing teeth is not something children have control over, it is very much a part of Kindergarten as it is a new experience for these students and something to be excited about and be like everyone else. The remarkable moment of losing teeth is important to the students as part of the shared experience or fitting in with the community of practice.

Friday 10th June – Classroom field notes

Tamika came up to me and said, ‘I haven’t got a wobble tooth yet’ I said ‘oh, you mean you don’t have a loose tooth yet?’ She said ‘Yeah, everyone else has wobble teeth but I haven’t had one yet.’ I asked her how that makes her feel and she said, ‘a bit left out, yeah, I want a wobble tooth’.
Throughout the year students did not always experience a sense of community, where learning as belonging is drawn from. Belonging requires mutual engagement or doing things together, joint enterprise and shared repertoire. As has been pointed out, birthdays were a big deal and invitations to them were wielded as power over other students. This was the case even if the student was not sure they were going to have a party or it was several months away. The following excerpt demonstrates how hard it was for students to not be included and therefore making them feel they did not belong.

Friday 17\textsuperscript{th} June – Classroom field notes

After lunch Mrs. G had to hand out invitations for Winona’s birthday. Winona’s mum gave them to her to hand out and Winona had left early for the day. Leticia, Hannah, Grace, Rebecca, Jasmine, Lily, Kristy, Tyler, Marcus and Bethany have been invited.

Hannah: I have two on the fridge now.
Grace: Me too!
Tamika: Winona didn’t invite me. She’s my friend and she still didn’t invite me.
Gregory: Do I have a card?
Mrs. G.: No, Gregory.
Gregory: So I’m not going to Winona’s party? [Looking at me very sadly with his bottom lip drooping].
Mrs. G.: Sorry Gregory, it’s all the cards I had. She then whispered to me that she hates birthdays – referring to Gregory’s comment and the very sad look on his face. Gregory said to me a little while later that he didn’t understand why Winona didn’t like him. He’s always nice to her.
Wednesday 17th August – Classroom field notes

The students are doing work at their desks and chatting as usual about birthday parties.

_Brianna:_ I went to Leticia’s party a long time ago and I had fun and went on a jumping castle and I saw Leticia’s room. I will choose you to come to my birthday [to Tyler].

_Tyler:_ Cool, you can come to my party too [even though he has already had his this year].

_Brianna:_ and you [to Gregory].

_Gregory:_ No, you didn’t say me.

_Brianna:_ Yes I did.

_Tyler:_ Seven thousand, six hundred and fifty people are coming to my party. You [Hannah], Joshua, Brianna…

_Gregory:_ No, you didn’t say me; you said Hannah, Brianna, Joshua…

_Tyler:_ You can come to my party.

_Gregory:_ and you can come to my party…no, only one person can come to my party.

_Hannah… oh and Sarah.

Learning as experience

 Relationships

Throughout the year experiencing the classroom community of practice helped students to learn how to live in their world, interact with others and how to be a member. There were times throughout the year where a student or students would be doing something that another student thought was against the rules. Either that, or they used ‘you’re not allowed to do that’ as a way to get their own way as seems to be demonstrated in the excerpt below.
Friday 18th March – Classroom Field Notes

*During work time Lily says ‘we can share can’t we?’ and puts her head on Hannah’s shoulder.* Lily and Hannah are sharing a seat at the table. Jasmine comes over to table and physically tries to get Lily up by tugging on her arm. When she is unsuccessful Jasmine says ‘you’re not allowed to sit there’ to which Lily and Hannah reply in unison ‘We’re sharing.’ Jasmine insists ‘you’re not allowed to sit there, you’re not allowed’ looking very cross at them both. Both Lily and Hannah ignore Jasmine until she walks away. Marcus who is at the same table then asks them ‘are you both sitting in the same chair?’ Lily replies ‘Yep.’ Marcus then checks this by looking under the table then sitting back up and laughing at them.

It is clear that it is not a problem with Marcus and Mrs. B. does not seem to mind. This leads to the belief that Jasmine was envious of Lily as Hannah was the most sought after friend.
in the class and Jasmine and Hannah were usually quite close. Interestingly, Lily would usually back down from Jasmine when Hannah was on Jasmine’s side but when Hannah is on Lily’s side it appears it gives her the strength to stand up to Jasmine.

Knowing the rules is one thing but knowing how to use these as power over another person was also used frequently. The following excerpt shows how some students were not only quite expert in wielding the rules to get another student in trouble but in knowing how to make sure it worked.

Tuesday 25th October – Classroom Field Notes

Mrs. B.: When should you dob on people? [Trying to angle the discussion towards a lot of unnecessary or excessive ‘dobbing’ or telling the Teacher on another student]

Jasmine: When they’re not looking you tell the Teacher, you go and dob on them.

Mrs. B.: Why would you wait until they’re not looking?

Jasmine: Because they might try to stop you.

News time was meaningful to the students because it was their chance to share something about their life with their classmates. They all wanted a chance to participate in this activity and many told me that news was one of their favourite things to do at school. It was quite devastating for students to miss their turn and all the students knew it. The excerpt below reflects not only this importance but how relationships and people are very dynamic in the classroom. Students sometimes did out of character things such as be nasty when they were usually nice or be caring when they did not usually notice someone upset.
Monday 28th November – Classroom field notes

Mrs. B.: Lucas, why are you crying?

Lucas: Because Tamika is lying.

Mrs. B.: Are you crying because she is lying? Why are you so upset?

Lucas: Because she’s lying. My news is today and she says it isn’t but she’s wrong [in between sobs].

Mrs. B.: Is that really a reason to cry? You worried me. I thought someone hurt you.

Timothy got up and got the box of tissues and took them to Lucas who took two out and wiped his eyes.

Timothy: I was a friend.

Mrs. B.: You were Timothy, thank you very much.

Rules

The students’ knowledge of school rules evolved throughout the year. Sometimes the rules themselves were created throughout the year because behaviours would occur and would have to be addressed. In this way experiencing a classroom CoP involved doing or saying things that would be outlawed. From these experiences students quickly learnt the rules. On occasion events that happened outside of the school could impact on the classroom COP. The excerpt below is in relation to an earlier discussion about what was appropriate to wear to ‘plain clothes day’ at school and the school disco that was held the night previously (in short, not to dress up and behave like teenagers. Even at five years old this was happening).
Monday 7th November – Classroom field notes

*Mrs. B.*: *Hands up who went to the disco* [the only students who didn’t put up their hands were Jayden, Gregory & Grace].

*Mrs. B.*: Winona, tell us about the disco.

Winona: We played games and danced to songs.

*Mrs. B.*: Okay, now who remembers our talk about teenagers?

*Lily*: *Don’t dress up like teenagers and don’t talk sexy.*

*Tamika*: *No talking about who’s girlfriends and boyfriends.*

*Letticia*: No kissing.

*Tamika*: And not talking about who you are marrying.

The following excerpt demonstrates how an incident that occurred led to a discussion about rules that was a culmination of previous incidents throughout the year. It also demonstrates the students’ competence in knowledge of the rules.
Wednesday 7\textsuperscript{th} December – Classroom Observation

\textit{Winona: You’re not allowed to say boyfriend or girlfriend.}

\textit{Joshua: Yeah, you’re not allowed to say love.}

\textit{Mrs. B.: Yes you’re allowed to say love.}

Winona: Just not boyfriend or girlfriend.

Jayden: And not swear words.

Mrs. B.: No.

\textit{Winona: And not the ‘f” word.}

Mrs. B.: Certainly not!

\section*{Rituals}

Students developed their ideas about certain rituals of the school through experience in engaging with them. Formal school assemblies where parents were invited and where one class was responsible for running it were conducted fortnightly. There was a rotating roster throughout the year to ensure all classes had equal turns. A lot of preparation on behalf of the staff and students went into assemblies. They generally consisted of music items, poetry, class work and students reading their work accompanied by paintings and awards presentations. As the year progressed students formed opinions about these assemblies.

Thursday 18\textsuperscript{th} August – Interview

Sarah: Out of going to Church for mass and assemblies and those kinds of things, what is the best thing you have done in Kindy this year?

Leticia: I hate assemblies.
Sarah: Why do you hate assemblies?

Leticia: Because they stink.

Sarah: Why do they stink?

Leticia: Because we have to sing.

Sarah: You don't like singing?

Leticia: I get tired of singing and dancing and standing and my legs hurt.

Sarah: How about you Eloise?

Eloise: I hate them.

Sarah: Why do you hate them?

Eloise: Because they are long and you don't always get an award.
Although the Teachers kept a record of who got what awards and made sure that every child received one some students found the wait for another one too long. Perhaps if they realised how the Teachers were working it out they may not be so concerned. It will take some years of experience in the classroom to work this system out if they ever do. If they did work it out it would quite possibly detract from the joy in receiving one. The appeal of certain rituals also varied for students depending on their interests in the various activities and what they entailed. Eloise liked singing but the award system annoyed her. Leticia did not really mind about the awards but found the process of performing too much. While students participated in school rituals because they had to, their reification of the importance of these rituals was not in alignment with their Teachers and sometimes with each other.

As discussed earlier, the research site is a Catholic School and religion was very much a part of school rituals. Some students’ families were not Catholic, so practices of the school were not entirely familiar to the students. Other students’ families did engage in a religious community of
practice outside of the school. Both the students below were apparently familiar with a religious community of practice or at least religion as a practice in their home community of practice. What should be pointed out, however, is that it is through experience in their classroom community of practice that religious practices familiar to them at home seemed much more of an expectation of membership in the classroom and school. Joshua developed his understanding of expectations of the ritual of class prayers because through experience of not meeting or complying with expectations he met with consequences – giving him his knowledge.

Wednesday 7th December - Interview

Sarah: What do you have to do in your Kindergarten Classroom?

Joshua: You gotta listen to prayers [sic].

Eduardo: And bless.

Sarah: Do you mean bless yourselves?

Eduardo: Yeah, I do that at home too.

Sarah: What happens if you don’t?

Joshua: You might have to do it again or go to lunch late.

Routines

‘Participation in social communities shapes our experience and it also shapes those communities. Our ability to shape the practice of our communities is an important aspect of our experience of participation’ (Wenger, 1998, p.56).

Participation is more than mere engagement in practice. Participation is part of who we are and ‘not restricted to the specific context of our engagement’. So we may finish school for the
day but it continues to affect us when we get home and impact on how we negotiate meaning in other communities of practice we are members of, such as our families at home. Routines that occur in the classroom are often reified in the home community of practice where parents may develop learning routines with their child.

Wednesday 29th June - Classroom Field Notes

Kristy: Look Sarah. My Mum takes me to school. [Referring to the sentence she has written].

Sarah: Wow Kristy, you are a good speller.

Kristy: That's because I've been sounding out. I sound out at home.

Routines of the classroom such as work time have routines embedded in them. As with the above example, many of the students cite ‘sounding out’ as something that is part of their school day. From participating in their classroom community of practice they have learnt that before you ask a teacher how to spell they want you to sound it out and ‘have a go’. Some students found this much more difficult than others. While they knew what was expected of them, many times the actual environment combined with their sense of ability prevented them from being able to do this. Experience of ‘yelling Teachers’ and noisy classrooms seemed to disable some students before they could even find the courage to ‘have a go’.

Friday 2nd September – Interview

Sarah: What do you have to do at school as a Kindergarten student?

Gregory: Writing. And if you don’t know how to spell you have to sound it out.
Ryan: I can’t even sound out?

Sarah: Why?

Ryan: Because in Miss. H’s room I can’t sound out.

Sarah: Why is that Ryan?

Ryan: Because it’s noisy and sometimes she’s a scary monster.

**Remarkable Moments**

As well as birthday parties, invitations to go to each other’s house were quite popular. It seemed significant to the students that even though they saw their friends all week, that they could also see their friends outside of school hours. This bond outside of school hours that happened with some children seemed to make friendships more meaningful for students. Perhaps it was also an aspect of power related to belonging to something outside of school with a peer.

Monday 18th July – Classroom field notes

The students are doing math work at their tables.

Gregory: You can come to my house. You better ask your mum.

Tyler: When is it your birthday?

Gregory: Tomorrow [silence for a minute], Sarah, Tyler can come to my house because my room is clean and he can ask his mum if he can come tomorrow.

Tamika: Sarah, nobody invites me to their house [in a sulky voice].

Sarah: You have been to Marcus’s house haven’t you?

Tamika: Only one, no one else invites me to their house [silence for a minute] you want to come to my house Brianna? I’ve got swings.
Marcus: You can come to my house too.

*Brianna: Skye, it’s Skye’s house.*

*Marcus: It’s Tamika’s house too!*

Brianna: I like Skye because she has cool stuff and you have boys’ stuff.

Tamika: I have stuff for boys and girls.

Marcus: And they have a cubby and 2 Barbie bikes too!

Wednesday 24th August – Classroom field notes

*Bethany: Sarah, tomorrow I’m going to Eloise’s house and I’ll play and I’ll have a bath and I’ll put on my p.j’s and I’ll watch TV and I’ll have dinner there too!*

Sarah: Will you sleep there too?

Bethany: Maybe, or maybe my dad will pick me up late.
Learning as doing

Relationships

Learning as doing involves mutual engagement, doing things together, sharing and community maintenance. During table work time in the classroom children often chatted to each other or me. Despite the power relations that happened frequently in this classroom there were also times of harmony. The following excerpt gives an example of what a few of the boys did on and off throughout the year as part of their shared repertoire of silly word games they would engage in when not being supervised, for example at lunch breaks or when their Teacher was distracted with something else. Early in the year I felt it was a form of bonding and getting to know you that they participated in, perhaps to work out who was going to be fun.

Monday 7th February – Classroom Field Notes

Mrs. B. and Miss. H. were sorting something out as the Kindergarten students were sitting on the floor waiting for them. Ryan, Marcus, Lucas and Joshua are having a funny discussion about boogers (nose discharge) while I am sitting behind them within earshot. This led to the following transcript:

Marcus: You have a booger on your shirt [all the boys roar with laughter].

Lucas: You have a booger on your ear [all the boys laugh].

Ryan: You have a booger in your ear [all the boys laugh].

Marcus: You have a booger on your shoe [all the boys laugh very loudly].
The Teachers then return their attention to the class and the boys stop talking but all have smirks on their faces.

The following excerpt was recorded during class work time at the students’ desks. There are frequent disputes through the year over who has whose colours or pencil pots or pointers but they are not always used as weapons, they are often used as a way to maintain community harmony.
Thursday 10\textsuperscript{th} November – Classroom Field Notes

\textit{Winona: We’re going to share our colours because we’re best friends.}

Lily: Yeah.

Sarah: What makes people best friends?

Jayden: Playing with each other, doing work together, share their colours with each other.
While students would tell the Teacher on each other it seemed that the initial pleasure or satisfaction they got from telling the Teacher and being ‘right’ did not last when the Teacher’s reaction was perhaps more than they expected.

Friday 26\textsuperscript{th} August – Interview

Sarah: How do you feel about being in your classroom?

\textit{Lily: I don’t like it when the teacher is yelling.}

\textit{Jasmine: I just don’t want my friends to get in trouble and she does.}

Sarah: What do you mean?

Jasmine: When I tell on her, I thought I wanted it.

Sarah: For her to be in trouble.

Jasmine: Yes. And I hate having to go on the time out chair when they get me in trouble.

And Grace got in to trouble yesterday. She said the naughty word that when you fluff, the other word.

Sarah: Oh and she got into trouble did she?

Lily: Yeah.

Sarah: How did the teacher know she said a naughty word?

\textit{Lily: Um....}

\textit{Jasmine: Um, we didn’t tell she said it out loud.}

The playground created other communities of practice such as cliques and gender groups that often left others out. Social capital involved who had what in their lunch box on top of who
were friends with whom at the time. In the following excerpt, not even the contents of a lunch box could entice a lunch time community of practice to allow another member.

Monday 18\textsuperscript{th} July – Playground field notes

Hannah, Jasmine, Winona, Lily and Tamika are sitting in a circle on the ground.

Joshua: Can I sit with you?

\textit{Hannah: No, it’s just for girls.}

Joshua: I have a muesli bar too. [None of the girls spoke to him, they just ignored him. Joshua stood next to them swinging his lunch box then walked to the other side of the circle]. \textit{No one’s my friend. Hannah, why won’t you let me sit with you? [Hannah continues to ignore him].}

Tamika: You can sit next to me.

Joshua: \textit{[sitting down next to Tamika] Look I’ve got two rolls; I’ve got two rolls [again to Hannah who again ignored him. Joshua just sat and ate his lunch in silence next to them].}

\textbf{Rules}

The students know that being honest is valued in this community of practice. This is not a classroom or school rule written down in a policy but an expectation of the students. Students see anything you get in trouble for as part of the rules of their classroom. In the following example, a student knew that not taking care of things so something breaks is bad so in reality, it was part of the classroom rules.
Wednesday 24th August – Interview

Sarah: What makes you feel not so good about school?

Tyler: When I broke a pen Gregory said ‘I’m telling on you’ but it was just an accident so I took it to the teacher and she said ‘thank you for being honest’ and um I also felt very bad when one of the kids stole the money from the money box.

Tamika: Yeah, that made me feel mad because I put money in there for the poor.

During this same interview the following was said:

Tamika: I like Tyler but sometimes Tyler dobs on me. He says he’s going to dob on me but he doesn’t and he really is a nice guy, look at him.

Sarah: What did you do that made him want to dob on you?

Tamika: Um, maybe because he saw me break a pencil.

As said previously, rules are used by students against each other to maintain their CoP values. The threat of dobbing is usually enough for a student to desist from their behaviour or at least feel bad about it. Tyler did not go through with his threat but he was aware of how it feels to be threatened of this.

Students on many occasions reported that doing as the teacher said was a very important rule to observe. Doing what the Teacher said meant you did not get into trouble. All the students at various times throughout the year disobeyed their teachers. Most of them were resourceful enough not to get caught doing what they should not do. The ‘rules’ they broke varied in severity from wasting time during class work when they knew they were not supposed to, swearing, and wearing jewellery, to acting badly towards a friend in a moment of anger. There were very few students who were bold enough to blatantly disobey the Teachers. Timothy was one of those
students (mostly due to his diagnosed ADHD) who did blatantly disobey. His frequent misbehaviour had not only earned him half days at school for most of the year but also a reputation with the other students. This does not mean he was a not a member. In a sense he did not reify the importance his peers placed on being good and having friends. It also must be remembered that a child with ADHD will have difficulty in staying within the boundaries of a classroom community of practice. Wenger’s framework highlights the fact that there is negotiation in ‘doing’. The excerpt below could also be seen through learning as belonging and becoming. Timothy in a sense was reinventing for himself what membership entailed as far as belonging, beyond what the Teachers and other students would imagine membership entailed.

Thursday 30th June – Classroom Field Notes

Timothy wasn’t doing any of his work and just wandered around the room picking up objects and playing with them. I offered to colour with him and he didn’t want to do it. Mrs. G. said she’d help him by making a start on it for him. Timothy: NO, I don’t want to do it.

Mrs. G.: You can come to school and play with toys and do no work.

Timothy: I don’t want to. I don’t need to.

Mrs. G.: Okay, well you need to go to Miss. H’s time out chair in her class.

Timothy: NO, I don’t want to!

The door between the two kindergarten classes was open and Miss. H heard the commotion coming from Timothy. Miss. H came in and helped Mrs. G attempt to escort Timothy into Miss. H’s room. Timothy threw himself on the ground, pulled up the zipper on his jumper and pulled his jumper over his head crying. He was wriggling and squirming on the floor.
Timothy: I’m crying. I’m crying. [curled up into a ball on the floor].

Mrs. G: We’ll let you stay in here if you do your work.

Timothy went back to his table and pulled his head back inside his jumper.

Timothy: I DON’T WANT TO!!!

The room was dead quiet with everyone watching while Miss. H. and Mrs. G lifted him by an arm each while Timothy kicked and screamed and grabbed onto anything he could.

When he got to Miss. H’s classroom he curled up into a ball by the door with his head back inside his jumper.

All the other students in KA just shared knowing looks with each other. Tamika whispered to me ‘Timothy is a big blubberhead’ with a very serious look on her face.

Rules often came into being because of what students were doing or had done. As discussed in previous sections, rules tended to evolve and so too did students’ knowledge of them as they engaged in practice.

Thursday 1\textsuperscript{st} September – Term 3 Interview

Sarah: What do you have to do at school?

Hannah: You have to talk nicely.

Winona: You have to keep safe and take care of the tables.

Sarah: Yes, and not scribble underneath them.

Winona: Ooh, that’s naughty. I didn’t do that, I didn’t do that.

Sarah: There were lots of tables with scribble weren’t there?

Winona: Ooh, who did that?
Hannah: Timothy, Timothy, Timothy, Timothy.

Sarah: Timothy did all of them do you think?

Hannah: Yep.

This particular ‘rule’ only came about because at the end of the term the students’ trays are cleaned out and tables and chairs stacked for carpet cleaning. When the tables were turned upside down several of them had scribble on them. The Teacher was quite upset with the class and sat them all down to talk about caring for their classroom.

**Rituals**

Taking part in rituals of the school was also part of the classroom community of practice as all classes were expected to participate. Taking part in these rituals such as school concerts and masses gave the students a shared history of learning. Their interest in these varied and often depended on the excitement or interest of the rest of the group.
Thursday 10\textsuperscript{th} November - Classroom field notes

Mrs. B. explained to both Kindergarten classes who had just had a joint music group that they were organizing parts for the end of your Christmas concert. Students who wanted a role should be sitting up straight and look at the teacher and listen. Tamika is slouching around and staring out the window.

\textit{Sarah: [in a whisper to Tamika] don’t you want a part to play in the concert?}

Tamika: [just shrugs].

\textit{Sarah: If you want a part I think you’d better look at Mrs. B. and sit up a bit, you don’t want to miss out.}

Isabella: Yeah, like Cheyenne did [who had just got into trouble for playing up and told she would not get a part].

\textit{Sarah: Yeah, like Cheyenne, you don’t want that to happen do you?}

\textit{Tamika: Well I don’t want a part.}

Isabella: Well I do want a part.

Tamika: Okay, so do I [she sits up straight and looks at the Teacher quietly].

\textbf{Routines}

Sometimes routines are established by the students. These routines become part of their way of ‘doing’ their community of practice through mutual engagement. Below is an excerpt where the students negotiate the meaning of ‘roll call’ and in effect engage in something together that even though not all were courageous to make it humorous, all were happy to engage in laughter about it together.
Monday 18th July – Classroom Field Notes

Today is the first day back in term 3. The students are all very chatty and seem happy to see each other. Mrs. G. is now taking the class full time and Mrs. B. is the full time principal until Sister A. returns.

Mrs. G. calls the class roll. Many of the students have taken to saying ‘I love you Mrs. G’ instead of saying ‘here’ or ‘present’. They include: Brianna, Jasmine, Eduardo, Gregory and Tyler. Marcus, it seems for a laugh says ‘Love you Mr Mees’ and the whole class laughs. Jayden follows his lead and says ‘Love you Mr….Mead’ and laughs although he didn’t get quite the response that Marcus did. Mrs. G. said ‘It’s Mrs. G.’ but continues calling the roll and doesn’t get mad with him.

Below is an example of the students’ shared history of learning, knowledge of their classroom practice and how this knowledge is sometimes used to control other students. It demonstrates Joshua reifying a practice of the Teacher, as he uses that knowledge to try and get a friend into trouble who he is actually envious of because she is on the floor playing. He wants to be able to play but has been distracted and off task and now has to stay at his desk and finish his work instead of playing. He is also demonstrating knowledge of other students because usually Leticia would be one of the last to finish. Unfortunately for Joshua, Leticia did not live up to her usual reputation today.

Wednesday 7th December – Classroom Field Notes

When the students have finished their work they are allowed to get some toys out to play with. Leticia sat on the floor to play with Tamika. Tamika had returned to Mrs. B. four times
telling her what she had fixed with her colouring before being allowed to finally play. When Joshua saw Leticia playing he called out to her...

Justin: Have you finished your work Leticia?

Leticia [nods and keeps playing].

Joshua: Leticia you haven’t finished your work yet! [very loudly so that Mrs. B. could hear him].

Mrs. B.: Leticia, have you finished your work?

Leticia: Yes, and I stuck it in my book too.

Joshua: Let me have a look at it then [in a very sarcastic voice].

Mrs. B. ignores Joshua and leaves Leticia to continue playing.
Remarkable Moments

The students often mentioned personal interests that became group discussions because they found that other students shared their interests. These interests often came from other communities of practice (such as their family, dance group, and activities together outside of school), demonstrating the constellations of communities of practice evident within their classroom community of practice. This also provided a source of community for the students and a place to negotiate meaning within practice.

Friday 27th May – Classroom Field Notes

After singing practice the students were back in their classroom. Eduardo announces to Mrs. G. ‘I’m watching the footy tonight.’ Mrs. G. asked which team he will watch and Eduardo said ‘The Bulldogs.’ Brianna then called out ‘I go for the Rabbitohs.’ Then Jayden called out ‘I go for the Roosters, and the Tigers….and the Panthers’. Abe then said ‘I go for West Tigers’. Mrs. G. then said that while we might go for different teams lots of us like football and that’s something we have in common. Eduardo and Jayden say in unison ‘Hey yeah’ and smile at each other.

School uniform can be seen as a rule in that students must be in school uniform but it seemed to be taken differently by the students. Having a school uniform was part of the practice of the school; it symbolized ‘doing’ school. While having the uniform would perhaps not seem all that remarkable to adults, the significance was evident when the change of summer to winter uniform occurred. It not only signified the ‘doing’ of school and fitting in but also, for the female
students ‘a growing up’ impacting on their identity or sense of self because they could wear stockings.

Friday 27th May – Classroom Field Notes

Hannah, Jasmine and Leticia are talking about their stockings and how their mums said they could wear them because they are big girls now. Leticia was observing at first but when she heard Jasmine say this she said ‘I’m a grown up too’ and they all smiled at each other. I noticed Grace quietly watching them. She was the only girl in the class who was still wearing a summer uniform. See photo taken by a Kindergarten student.

Wednesday 1st June – Field Notes

I walked into class the same time that Grace and her mother did and Grace had a big smile on her face. I commented on the fact that she looked very happy and how nice she looked in her winter uniform. Her smile grew even bigger. Her mum told me that she was so excited to get it (the other kids had been in their winter uniforms for a week or so now and Grace had not been).
Apparently when she got the uniform on the weekend she asked her mum on Sunday if it was Monday yet because she wanted to wear her new uniform.

Learning as becoming

Relationships

The students often defined their worth by the friends that they had. Throughout the year students vied for each other’s attention particularly those students who were not as popular as others. Sometimes they may have been stronger personalities in the class but their self-esteem required a lot more attention. Learning at school is not all about reading, writing and numbers. It is also about learning who we are and what our limits are in relation to other people.

Wednesday 1st June – Playground field notes

The students are allowed to play once they have eaten their lunch and shown a teacher that they have finished. I overheard a discussion between Hannah & Winona.

Hannah: Do you want to play?

Winona: No I can’t.

Hannah: Why not?

Winona: I’m doing something special.

Hannah: What?

Winona: Playing with some other people.

Hannah: Okay [Hannah walks away from Winona].

Winona: Okay, Okay. Wait Hannah, come back, let’s talk about friendships.
Rules

The students seem to take pride in their uniforms and liked being one of the group and fitting in. However, for the girls in particular they also liked to display individuality in what they brought or wore to school. Everything from hair extensions, fluffy scarves, special hair clips and jewellery was worn to assert their individuality or identity. While the students knew that it was generally against the school rules, they seemed willing to risk it even if it meant only having it on for arrival in the classroom.

Wednesday 1st June – Classroom field notes

Grace is wearing a string of yellow and red beads and not making any effort to hide them. *She’s had them on all day and showed them to me this morning with a look on her face to express mischief*. As the students work Kristy then points out the pearl bracelet she is wearing *that is apparently her mum’s*. *Then Winona whispers to me ‘and I have this’* [it is a silver chain that she has been told not to wear before with half a heart on it. Her mum wears the other half]. At that point, Mrs. B. tells the girls that they should not be wearing these items and she does not want to see them tomorrow. I look at them and Winona rolls her eyes, Kristy looks sad and Grace looks mischievous again as if to say *‘well I got to wear them for the whole day at least.’* 

Rituals

Sometimes the rituals of the school provided students a chance to ‘become’ members in a more significant way. ‘Becoming’ entails membership and belonging and new learning trajectories. Church was still very new to many of the students when the excerpt below took
place. The reactions of the students to this experience varied with their familiarity of Church practice.

Monday 14\textsuperscript{th} February – Church Field Notes

Today was the second time the Kindergarten students visited the Church. They were there to practise \textit{for the ‘Welcoming Ceremony’ on Friday which is a yearly ritual of the school. It is a way of introducing and welcoming the new Kindergarten students to the school}. The Kindergarten students were paired up with Year 1 students in 2 lines. They were all told not to dip into the Holy Water this time (this was to make sure they would not do it on the ceremony day where this could delay proceedings). Several children still did so but this could be because they were used to doing this as they attended Church with their families. They were all seated on the stage and rehearsed the songs for the day. They all participated and seemed to be enjoying themselves as most had big smiles on their faces. After the singing Mrs. B. told the students that they would all be given a medal with a ribbon around their necks. When I looked at the Kindergarten students, many including Ryan were looking at me with wide eyes and big smiles.

The students all took delight in their official welcome to Hosanna Catholic School. This was obvious from their facial expressions and excited gestures.

This was an important event for them and many students reported feeling good about this day. This event gave them a sense of belonging and membership which is part of their identity and learning as becoming.
Thursday 24th February – Term 1 Interview

Sarah: How did you feel about the welcoming ceremony?

Tyler: I felt a bit weird and good.

Sarah: Why did you feel that way?

Tyler: Well walking out and people looking but good because I was there, I mean I’m here now.

Sarah: What do you mean here now?

Tyler: Well everyone knows I’m at this school now.

Gregory: I felt good about myself.

Sarah: Why is that Gregory?

Gregory: Because I got my special badge and I took it home with me.
Thursday 24th February – Term 1 Interview

Sarah: How did you feel about the welcoming ceremony Ryan and Lucas?

Ryan: I was a bit shy, lots of people.

Sarah: How did you feel that it was a ceremony just for Kindergarten kids?

Ryan: I felt very good.

Lucas: I felt good too, happy and laughing.

Rituals, by the set definition, also occurred in routine ways in the classroom. This included prayer before meal times. Most students eagerly asked to be allowed to say the prayer and the teacher would choose a student to do it. This practice is part of becoming a class member and took some courage for some students to perform.
Wednesday 1st June – Classroom Field Notes

Mrs. B. gets the kids to bless themselves (Father, Son & Holy Spirit) and Kristy for the first time asks if she can do the prayer. Mrs. B. smiles at her and tells her that would be fine. Kristy then prays ‘Dear God, Thank you for the food we are about to eat and the friends we are going to play with.’ The rest of the class repeats her prayer (I see Kristy smiling); they bless themselves again and then are allowed to move out to lunch.

Routines

News time and writing activities often provided an opportunity for students to share with the class or their Teacher remarkable moments in their class. This was a positive way the Teacher incorporated things that were important to students in routine learning experiences in the
classroom. In turn it validated what was important to students and gave students an opportunity to share with others about their changing selves and identities.

Monday 7th March – Classroom Field Notes

*It was Tyler’s turn for news* and he shared with the class that his tooth was growing back (the tooth that is replacing the one that fell out a little earlier in the term). Marcus asked if he got any money from the tooth fairy for the one that fell out. Tyler replied that he got $6.25. Joshua asked if he had spent any of the money yet (without being asked to ask a question). Tyler ignored him and said he had something else to tell. Hannah put her hand up and Tyler pointed to her. Hannah asked ‘what’s the tooth made of?’ Tyler stopped and seemed to think about it for a minute then replied ‘I don’t know’ then Mrs. B. said ‘I don’t know either……teeth?’ and the whole class burst out laughing.

One of the regular classroom routines was the tidy up after each activity. Some students were more enthusiastic than others and this was often related to the possibility of a lolly or sticker. While lollies were a reward with these students so too was praise from their Teacher which in turn promoted their sense of self and identity and encouraged achievement. Effectively the rewards and praise reflect the shared repertoire of the classroom where the rewards could be seen as maintaining and sustaining practice. Students also know through learning as experience that when they reify the classroom practices effectively their efforts are reified by the Teacher.
Monday 7th November – Classroom field notes

Leticia came to show me her work and she had a big grin on her face.

**Sarah:** *That’s nice work Leticia. You have been really careful haven’t you?*

Leticia: Yeah.

**Sarah:** Why did you work so carefully?

Leticia: *Because Mrs. B. said I’m good at this work.*

Monday 21st November – Classroom field notes

The students were told to tidy up the floor because it was covered in pieces of paper from craft. Leticia picked up a huge bunch of papers and walked up to show Mrs. B.

Mrs. B.: Leticia, you are an angel, an absolute angel.

**Gregory:** *I’m Jesus! [as he approached with an equally large handful of paper trimmings].*

Learning as becoming is tied to identity and subjectivity. Students negotiate their experiences of self, which is also linked to their learning as belonging, and in turn impacts on their engagement, imagination (expanding their view of themselves and their world) and alignment with practices of membership. Belonging is experienced as students participate in their community of practice. Below is an example of how participation and following the procedures of a routine in their classroom can impact on a student’s identity and sense of self which then impacts on their satisfaction of membership. This also impacts on whether or not they find a particular activity easy or hard. In the example below, what is hard for this student is the rejection of peers. Friends are the most important thing to students and an activity becomes hard when rejection is possible.
Wednesday 7th December – Interview

Sarah: What do you think the hardest thing is you have had to do since you have started school Joshua?

Joshua: We have to, um, ask questions.

Sarah: You have to ask questions?

Joshua: Yeah, because sometimes they don’t choose you.

Sarah: When do you mean?

Joshua: Like in news time.

Sarah: Do you mean when the person telling news gets to choose 3 people to ask them a question?

Joshua: Yeah.

Sarah: Why do you feel bad about that?

Joshua: I feel worried and sad because they don’t choose you.

Sarah: Why does it worry you Joshua?

Joshua: Because I want to be their friend.

Sarah: When they do not pick you does that mean they are not your friend?

Joshua: Yeah.
Remarkable Moments

Remarkable moments for students most often fall within learning as becoming as they are part of their identity. Getting bigger, having birthdays and losing teeth for example are very much a part of who they are.

The example from my field notes demonstrates that even before school started they were ‘becoming’ or preparing to become members of their classroom community of practice. Guardians must supply evidence of their child’s immunisation prior to enrolling at school. Guardians can choose not to immunise their children but their child will be excluded from school should there be any contagious outbreak in the classroom or school. Grace initiated the discussion below although there had been no prior talk about needles. This would indicate that having needles for school was a big deal for students.

Friday 4th March – Classroom Field Notes

The students were completing work at their tables and as usual there is discussion between them as they are doing their work. Grace announces to the group ‘I had to go to the doctor and get a needle for big school’. Marcus then replies ‘Yeah, I had to have a needle too!’ The other students nod in agreement. I asked them ‘why do you have to have a needle for big school?’ and Marcus replied ‘Because you can’t come to big school unless you have one’.

Asking the students how they felt about going to year 1 the following year revealed some great insights into how they view themselves. Towards the end of the year I was interested to see how they were feeling about themselves and whether the last 8 – 10 months had developed their confidence and ability enough in their minds to move on to year 1. The following excerpt shows
how towards the end of the year students were excited about moving into year 1 and it seems not being a baby anymore. Ability seemed to be a key to feeling ready for year 1.

Thursday 18th August – Interview

Sarah: You both know you are going to year 1 next year right?

Leticia & Eloise: Yeah.

Sarah: How does that make you feel?

Eloise: Yay!

Leticia: I used to be like a baby when I was here.

Sarah: Really? Do you think you have changed much?

Leticia: Yep, I jump bigger now and I know every stuff I learnt like numbers and letters.

Eloise: Yeah me too.

The next excerpt demonstrates students’ understanding of growing up at school. It seems that some students cannot comprehend being the year 1 students even though the year 1 students got to year 1 the same way they will, by finishing Kindergarten. Some students seem more ready to take on the challenge than others. The students less ready seem to be those who have a lower self-esteem or less self confidence as is the case with these two students.

Wednesday 7th September – Interview

Sarah: You get to go to Year 1 next year, you only have a couple of months to go. How do you feel about that?

Kristy: I don't think I’m ready for year 1 yet because it’s got big people in it.
Sarah: But when you get to year 1 you and your class mates will be the big kids. Well bigger than the new Kindergarten students.

Bethany: Yeah and if you stay in Kindergarten you be a big sookie [sic] baby.

The following interaction demonstrates the more confident students and how they may use this confidence to exert power over the students who will be younger than them the following year. Some students like Winona have difficulty understanding that their peers will grow up as quickly as they do. Winona is also the kind of person who will say things to try to impress people until she realizes that it does not impress anyone. This is part of Winona’s identity and there is a chance that she will go through with her imagined mode of belonging. Something Winona has demonstrated through the year though is that she will align with her peers when confronted with a choice of having friends approve of her.

Thursday 1st September – Interview

Sarah: You get to go to Year 1 next year, you only have a couple of months to go. How do you feel about that?

*Winona: Hmm, when I’m older than Hannah and everybody else I’m going to be like 16.*

Sarah: Oh right, and what happens when you are 16?

*Winona: I’m going to be mean to the little kids and play netball.*

Hannah: You are supposed to be nice to little kids.

Sarah: Why would you be mean to the little kids?

*Winona: Because I’m bigger then.*
Thursday 1\textsuperscript{st} December – Classroom field notes

\textit{Eduardo:} Sarah, I had a birthday and I’m six.

Sarah: Wow! Congratulations! Mr. six year old.

Eduardo: I have a new friend too.

Sarah: Oh, who is it?

Eduardo: [just nods at me].

Tamika: Sarah, look [she pulls a big grin to show me she has lost a tooth].

Sarah: Oooh, congratulations!

Tamika: And the tooth fairy gave me $3.

\textit{Sarah:} You’re lucky.

Tamika: Yeah and I left her a glass of water and she drank it all.

The next excerpt demonstrates how perhaps when learning does not come as easily to some students (and in this case one student in particular) it depends on how the teacher handles this situation as to how it will impact on a student’s identity. It has been decided by the teacher and Jayden’s mother that he needs to repeat Kindergarten. Below is how this was explained to the class to avoid future detrimental questions.

Monday 28\textsuperscript{th} November – Classroom field notes

Mrs. B.: Tell KA what is happening next year Jayden. What special job do you have?

\textit{Jayden:} Um, I’m gonna teach the new kindies.

\textit{Mrs. B.: He’s not going to year 1 next year; he’s staying here to help me and Miss. H.}

Jayden: [grinning shyly].
Tamika: Are you going to help my sister?

Mrs. B: He might.

Tamika: Her name is Skye.

Sarah: That’s pretty exciting to hear about you staying on in Kindy as a helper.

Jayden: Yeah! [big smile].

Tyler: I want to too.

Lily: Yeah, me too.

Jayden: Well I was the one to be asked.

Losing teeth is an important part of being a person in this Kindergarten CoP. Losing teeth meant getting bigger and being seen as bigger by your peers.

Monday 7\textsuperscript{th} November – Waiting in Church – field notes

Marcus: Sarah, I have 2 wobble teeth.

Tyler: I already lost 2 and new ones are growing.

Tamika: are they your grown up teeth?

Tyler: Yep.

Tamika: Cool! Sarah, Tyler has his grown up teeth!

Students sometimes reflected with me and their peers either in interviews or throughout the course of their day how things were different before they came to school or how things have changed for them now they are at school. This shows a growing sense of identity and how they experience ‘becoming’ in their membership of their classroom community of practice.
Thursday 18\textsuperscript{th} August – Classroom field notes

Tyler: Sarah I was too shy to move into this school.

Tamika: Are you a chicken boy?

Tyler: Sarah, can I tell? [on Tamika]

Brianna: I will.

Tyler: Cause when the scissors, I was too afraid I would cut myself and I opened them and I cut myself.

\textit{Sarah: You’re okay with them now but aren’t you?}

Tyler: Yeah, of course I am now.
Researcher

Linking to Belonging, Becoming, Experiencing, and Doing.

The final data driven theme entitled ‘Researcher’ provided a way to categorise data that involved me as a researcher. This involved data where reflection took place by the students or me about my membership in the class, researcher role, actions, reactions and interactions with students and staff. This theme provided the space to be reflexive as a researcher and aided the thinking through of data.

This theme reflects the two sides to researching with children. One side, as discussed by Fasoli (2003) was children engaging in a research community of practice during the study. The alternate side is my negotiating the practices of the Kindergarten CoP while still remaining in the research CoP. The process both researcher and students are involved in when each party is involved in participation and reification of each other’s practices is described by Wenger as brokering (1998, p. 104). This involves ‘connections provided by people who can introduce elements of one practice into another’ (Wenger, 1998, p. 105). Engaging with children in research over the period of one year creates the space for the researcher to broker practices of research.

The following analysis will discuss excerpts from the data to address this data driven theme. Examples will be linked to the four key components of Wenger’s CoP framework as with the previous data driven themes focusing on the students. This research is about children’s perspectives of their classroom and school community of practice; accordingly less weight will be given to this section than that of previous analysis.
Belonging

Throughout the year my sense of belonging grew both as a researcher in a school and often as a participating member of the classroom. It seemed that once I had proven myself as ‘not a Teacher’ and as someone who would help out students when they were having difficulty, not take sides and laugh with them, more and more opportunities opened up for me to belong as a member of the classroom. The students and I began to develop shared repertoire where they would engage with me in discussions about the past and present.

24th February – Playground field notes

Lunch was usually a social time. Although students were not allowed to get up and play until they had finished their lunch they regularly took time eating lunch because they were so engaged in socialising. Today Tamika was sitting next to me while we were having lunch. Kristy and Jayden had already pointed out the ‘same things’ we had in our lunch boxes. Tamika turned to me and asked me what my favourite food was. I told her it was Spaghetti. She said ‘me too and I even like it on brown bread toast.’ I made a sound indicating yum (mmm). Then Tamika said ‘What’s your favourite colour?’ and I told her it was purple. She said ‘me too’. Then she asked me what my favourite name was and I told her it was ‘Tamika’ with a bit of a smile. Tamika replied ‘you know what Sarah? We have a lot of things in common’.

The students often asked me about things like this, looking for things we had in common. This can be seen as an example of shared repertoire that we did not realise before we had until
we discussed it. Therefore, we discovered our shared repertoire through belonging and mutual engagement.

The following example is another instance where students demonstrated through discussions with me that I belonged there. Discussions about kissing and marriage were frequent and frowned upon by the Teachers as students could be become quite silly about it, particularly the kissing. Students often spoke about who they were going to marry. By engaging in or being drawn into shared repertoire they were treating me as a member of their classroom CoP.

Thursday 30th June – Playground field notes

It is 1st lunch (sometimes called recess) and we are sitting outside the classroom on benches where there is concrete. It has been raining a lot and the back paddock where students usually eat is very damp and muddy. I am sitting next to Marcus and Lucas.

Marcus: Hey Sarah, boys are rotten, made out of cotton. Girls are sexy, made out of Pepsi. My cousin taught me that. Boys are cool, made out of wool. Girls are sexy, made out of Pepsi. [Lucas laughs at him.]

I laugh at him and he has another bite to eat then continues to chat.

Marcus: We’re still going to be in Kindergarten tomorrow so we won’t be married. Sarah, if you kiss you’re gonna [sic] get married. I’m going to marry Sarah. Sarah, I’m going to marry you [more loudly than first sentence].

Sarah: But I am already married.

Marcus: I’m still going to marry you.

Sarah: But what will my husband think?

Marcus: Ants in your pants make your belly button dance.
We both laugh and conversation moves to another topic.

It could also be inferred that Marcus was using me as a tool or prop in his performance. The fact that he spoke more quietly when he told me we’re still in Kindergarten tomorrow so we will not be married and more loudly following this made me wonder if he was performing for his friends. Letting me know we will not be married was perhaps Marcus’ way of saying ‘I am just joking’ and then speaking more loudly when he thought I was in on his performance so his peers could hear. I knew that students did not usually protest about people saying they were going to marry them so I kept quiet and in effect reified the classroom or peer CoP experience.

**Becoming**

From the very beginning of the year I was negotiating my identity as I became a researcher of ethnography and a participant in some forms of the classroom and school CoP. Earliest field notes revealed the reflexive process I went through to establish and maintain my role. Teachers and students were informed of the role I hoped to take in the classroom. However, it was quite easy for any of us to forget as situations arose. The example below demonstrates how on day one I made a mistake in judgment regarding my participation that I reflected upon at the end of the day.

**Wednesday 2nd February – Classroom field notes**

A big no, no from today. Mrs. B. asked me to get some stickers out of her drawer. Wanting to appear helpful on my first day and develop rapport with the Teachers I willingly got the stickers. As I went to hand them to her she asked me to hold on to them and look for well
behaved people. Straight away I was concerned that I should not be doing that. Stickers were a reward and so in a sense the opposite of disciplining students which was not what I envisioned for my participant observer role. I felt like I could not say no in front of all the students and I was not quite sure how to tell the Teacher that I would rather not. I do not want the students to see me having that power as it will be difficult enough redressing power imbalances throughout the year during interviews and observations. I will talk to Mrs. B. tomorrow about avoiding these types of activities but will help in other practical ways like tying shoelaces, getting materials out for activities, and helping students with their work if they ask me to, if she would like me to.

Tuesday 22nd March – Classroom field notes

Tyler had whispered to me at the beginning of news that it was his news today and he wanted me to ask a question. News time progressed and when it was his turn I listened and put my hand up to ask a question. I was the first one picked…..later when it was another student’s turn to tell news Tyler kept turning around and grinning at me and finally said, ‘That was funny that you asked me a question Sarah’ I just grinned back at him.

Lunchtime – I was sitting with a group of students on the ground in a circle having lunch and Tyler came and squeezed himself in next to me. He then said ‘Hey Sarah, remember how you asked me a question at news time?’ I said ‘Yes’ then he replied, ‘Yeah, that was funny’. I asked him why it was funny and he said that he did not think I would do it. I told him that he asked me to do it so I did not mind. Joshua asked in a whiney voice why I did not ask him a question and I told him it was because he did not ask me to. To this Joshua replied, ‘Oh, okay I will next time’.
My asking a question during news time was somewhat of a reactive entry strategy (Corsaro, 2003). I had never done it before but upon request I did not see that there would be a problem with it. At least one of the questions would not be ‘do you like it’ which was sometimes asked of a student two out of the three questions they were asked. Asking a different question perhaps contributed to the students’ repertoire of questions and perhaps expanded their practices. I felt my identity as an interested and unusual adult was becoming more established with both me and the students.

**Experiencing**

Quite often I was engaged in classroom activities to help support the Teachers and students. Sometimes these activities impacted on my ability to collect data. However, there is give-and-take in relationships. The Teachers and students were willing to have me in their classroom and in return I felt it was important to assist when required. For example run a reading group or math group when there was a shortage of parent helpers. My relationships with the Teacher and students involved me in participation and reification of classroom practices. Sometimes participating, which is also a key aspect of my participant observer role, needed to take precedence or simply did take precedence over my observations and data collection.

**Tuesday 29th March – Classroom field notes**

I did not observe a great deal during reading groups as I was asked to assist the students using the computers. They were short on parent helpers and the computer work stations are often fraught with disputes over whose turn it is and issues such as students incorrectly
using the software and shutting it down or getting to a section where they were not sure what to do. I do not mind doing this as I know the students enjoy the computers and it frustrates them when issues arise. Reading groups are a very busy time in the classroom and Teachers cannot effectively deal with all the groups when helpers are not available. I do miss out on observing the students in their groups and it seems that lately there has been a regular shortage of helpers. I may need to consider attending on reading group days once per fortnight but I feel bad doing that in order to avoid helping.

Tuesday 17th May – Classroom field notes

We are back in class after 2nd lunch. Mrs. N. (the casual Teacher for today) asked me to play a game with her. I was not sure what she meant but I agreed. Mrs. N. gave me a dog puppet called Fred and she had an echidna puppet called Spikey. Mrs. N. told me that the puppets were going to get to know each other and have a conversation. I pretended that Fred was a shy puppet who got scared when Spikey spoke in a loud voice. The students all laughed. Spikey asked how old I was and I said ‘Five’ and all the students start calling out ‘Hey I’m five too’. I tried hard not to laugh. I asked Spikey if she’d like to play with me and all the students smiled and laughed when Spikey answered my question with a really loud voice and I pretended to be scared. The puppet show continued for another 5 minutes and then Mrs. N. asked for students to have a turn. Observing the students taking turns, I noticed that they used close to the same lines that Mrs. N. and I had. I felt bad about this at first and wished they could have expanded their horizons but then I realised that what I had done was exactly what I have observed them doing this year. In reality I was performing their acts of participation.
Not only was I participating in classroom practice of the Teacher but I was also utilising my knowledge of the students’ experiences and acts of negotiation with their friends as my script. I believe this is why they enjoyed watching so much. Not because two adults were standing up and pretending to be an echidna and a dog but because they could relate to the story.

**Doing**

There were many occasions where students would draw me into their practice in a range of ways. Besides observing in the classroom and other class-based activities I often had lunch with the students in the playground.

**Wednesday 4th May – Playground field notes**

Marcus, Lucas and a boy from the other Kindergarten class are tearing around the tree where everyone eats lunch, roaring loudly at each other and laughing. Marcus must have noticed me laughing at them (I was amused that they seemed to be scaring each other even though it was a highly predictable game). Next thing I knew Marcus stopped, whispered something to Lucas and the three of them came racing towards me roaring, stopping just short of me and then roaring in my face. A couple of seconds passed as they looked at me for a reaction then I loudly roared back. I think I scared them a little because they ran away but then came straight back laughing at first then roaring again. Again I roared back and moved towards them. Other students observing this interaction then joined in until a group of eight children were roaring at me and running away laughing as I lunged towards
them roaring back. This continued for around 10 minutes until my throat hurt and I had to pull out of the game.

This was one of many occasions where children drew me into their play in a way I did not observe them doing with the teacher. By this time of the year the students had worked out that I was not a teacher after many reminders by myself and their peers. I felt I had succeeded in establishing an interested adult role and students seemed to know they could be perhaps more playful with me than their teachers. This mutual engagement in play worked towards building on my membership in the students’ CoP.

During the year students frequently questioned me about what I was writing in my book, would I write it down, and why am I writing it down, referring to my field note journal. They seemed quite interested in what I was doing and I always answered their questions truthfully to
promote transparency and rapport. After all, the book was about them and their friends so they had every right to know. If students did not like something I wrote I scribbled it out while they were watching me. There were only a couple of occasions when this happened, the majority of the time students either smiled or laughed at what I had written and appeared happy to be in my book. An example of this is below.

Tuesday 29th March – Library Field notes

Library time – the students are borrowing books. I have taken more photos than notes this time just to collect some images of their weekly routines. Jasmine walked up to me and said, ‘Sarah, you have to write this in your book?’ I asked her what she wanted me to write. Jasmine replied, ‘Jasmine borrowed ‘A nice walk in the Jungle’’. I recorded this in my
book and added a P.S. which I read out loud to Jasmine as I wrote it. ‘Jasmine told me I have to write this’, and Jasmine giggled.

Wednesday 10th August – Classroom field notes

I was sitting behind Tamika on a small chair and she turned around and sniffed my hand. I gave her a questioning look but did not say anything because the Teacher was talking.

Tanesha whispered, ‘What are you writing Sarah?’ I told her that I was writing about what all the students are doing while the Teacher is talking. Tamika then said, ‘Are you going to write that I sniffed your hand?’ I told her that I might and she smiled broadly. I asked her if that was okay and she said, ‘Sure, I only sniffed’.

Tuesday 25th October – Church field notes

Kindergarten is at the church to practice for the Christmas concert. Students who do not have a role yet are sitting and waiting. Tyler was sitting next to me and nudged me then pointed at Hannah and Leticia who are tickling each other. I asked Tyler if I should write that down. Tyler replied, ‘Yes and write this down too’ then he stuck his leg out and pretended to untie his shoelace and grinned at me. I said, ‘No, not interesting enough’. Tyler scrunched up his face and kept threatening to untie his shoelace. I told him that I would not tie it up again (this is an ongoing joke between us because I must tie up his shoelaces at least 3 times each day I visit as they are always coming undone).

I began to write down what had happened thinking it was funny that he told me what to write in my book. Tyler interrupted me.

Tyler: Is my name on that page by any chance?
Sarah: Yes, right here (I had only just written it).

Tyler grinned at me.

Sarah: Is that okay?

Tyler: Sure.

Above is an example of sharing practices. Tyler may not have completely understood why I used the book although I often told them I wrote about what they do and what they say so I can understand what school is like for them. Without overanalyzing the situation I think Tyler enjoyed being mentioned in my book as all the students seemed to do. Telling me what to write demonstrated Tyler engaging in my research practice but also drawing upon ‘shared history’ of the shoelaces as we joked about it every time I tied his shoes.

The students in this study engaged with me on many levels and in many forms. As I engaged in their classroom CoP, they engaged with me in my research CoP. Neither the students nor I entirely understood what the other was doing all of the time, as understanding, participation, and experience are personal experiences. However, due to the rapport we had established and the relationships we had built and maintained, mutual engagement was possible in many ways.

In concluding discussion of the researcher theme, the following interaction offers some valuable insights:
Wednesday 10th August – Classroom field notes

Tamika: Hey Sarah, I told my Mum and Dad that you don’t know about kids and that’s why you’re here..

Sarah: Really, and what did they have to say about that?

Tamika: They laugh. I know that everyone understands kids…except you!

The power of this quote is twofold. Firstly, it appeared that generally the students had a good understanding of why I was there in their classroom talking to and observing them. This would indicate that my explanations to students were clear enough.

Secondly, it may be that young children are so accustomed to adults telling them what is best for them that they are not used to being consulted on many issues that concern them.

Continued research with young children that genuinely seeks their perspectives may work towards their appreciating, as many adults today do, that they are not a homogenous group and that their experiences and perspectives are unique, valued and worth listening to.

At the least, it may prompt adults to acknowledge that we should do more for young children to recognise and enact upon this through the way we interact with and involve them in issues that concern them.

Wenger’s ‘Communities of Practice’ framework is highly complex. It is unlikely that another text besides Wenger’s (1998) publication could identify every aspect addressed in his framework. This became even clearer as data analysis was conducted and parallels were drawn to a CoP framework. It is evident that the components of Wenger’s CoP Framework – belonging, becoming, experience and doing are complemented and clarified by the data driven themes of this study – relationships, rules, routines, rituals and remarkable moments.
What Wenger’s framework and the data driven themes in this research are in complete agreement about is that learning is very much a social activity. In addition, while aspects of practice such as shared history, tools, artifacts, identity formation and engagement constantly overlap, so too do aspects of the data driven themes so that rules and routines impact on relationships and relationships impact upon rituals and remarkable moments. At the very heart of both Wenger’s framework and the data driven themes is people which by definition entails identity and relations with others. As with Wenger’s framework, a social theory of learning involves dynamics which are not harmonious all the time and is fraught with conflict and negotiation. So too are the data driven themes, sometimes on a personal level for children and at other times a social level.

The students in this study engaged with me on many levels and in many forms. As I engaged in their classroom CoP, they engaged with me in my research CoP. Neither the students nor myself were ever entirely understanding what the other was doing all of the time, as understanding, participation, and experience is a personal experience. However, due to the rapport we had established and the relationships we had built and maintained, mutual engagement in many ways was possible.

The following chapter will draw in the analysis of data with the above information in mind to address the research questions proposed at the outset of this study.
The key research question of this study was: How do children’s perspectives of themselves, as members of their classroom and school communities of practice evolve over their first year of formal schooling? It will be discussed in light of the objectives.

The objectives to be explored:

1. investigate children’s perspectives of their personal interactions in the classroom;
2. observe how children’s participation and modes of belonging change throughout their first year of school;
3. ascertain what membership of classroom and school CoP means for children’s identity formation;
4. discover how it feels to be a member of this classroom and school community from children’s perspectives and how they might like it to be different;
5. discern how children’s understandings and acts of participation are reified, or incorporated into the valued meanings and practices of their classroom and school’s Communities of Practice;

6. observe the extent to which children negotiate and even re-write understandings, meanings and practices in the classroom’s and school’s Communities of Practice, and how they go about this;

7. ascertain how children learn how to operate in their classroom and school Communities of Practice;

8. investigate how different children’s ways of operating within their classroom’s and school’s Communities of Practice are when they first start school compared to the end of their first year at school;

9. consider how children’s perspectives and experiences of their classroom’s and school Communities of Practice impact on their transition and adaptation to the formal schooling environment; and,

10. explore children’s experiences, participation in, and negotiation of the curriculum.

These objectives are discussed in relation to the data analysis presented in the previous chapter.

1. Children’s perspectives of their personal interactions in the classroom.

Overall, the students were generally happy in their classroom. This happiness or content in their classroom was due mostly to their friendships with their peers. When students were asked at the end of the year what the best thing was that they do at school, the most common response was ‘playing with my friends.’ Students also frequently mentioned playing as a favorite activity.
and one could assume that playing involved personal interactions with peers. This can be assumed because overwhelmingly the worst thing about school and the classroom was ‘not having friends’ and people saying ‘I’m not your friend anymore’. Students also disliked strongly other students ‘dobbing’ or telling the teacher on them. When they chose to tell the Teacher on a classmate it was most commonly about the other student saying they are not their friend anymore. The other most common reason was when they witnessed rule breaking in relation to other students’ wellbeing, language, school property and school routines. Photographs taken by students were of their classmates around ninety-five percent of the time. Photographs that students requested me to take involved them and their friends ninety-nine percent of the time.

Classroom Teachers were also very important to students with some students saying that their Teachers were one of the best things about their classroom. Students mentioned in particular that Teachers do things for them like teach them to write sentences, trace, colour, draw, read to them and sing songs. This group of students, as mentioned previously had two Teachers on different days during their school week. Most students reported to like both their Teachers equally. Some of these responses could possibly have been because students were concerned I would tell their Teachers even though I assured them I would not. From observations however, it certainly appeared that they enjoyed having both of their Teachers and missed the Teacher who was not present on the days they had their alternate Teacher. Teachers were less favored when they yelled and this impacted on students even when it was not them being yelled at. Occasions where students were not as content with their Teacher or favored the other one more could usually be linked with days the student had been in trouble for something themselves. Students also reported not really liking Teachers who would not let them do what they would like to do like such as ‘let us lay down because we are tired’.
From the data collected and analysed it can be concluded that for these students, friendship was a key priority. Further, supportive relationships with Teachers that involved some degree of choice throughout the day, fair treatment, and a friendly disposition made school a good place to be.

2. Observing how children’s participation and modes of belonging change throughout their first year of school.

Wenger (1998) describes three modes of belonging:

- **Engagement** – involving ongoing negotiation of meaning, the formation of trajectories and the unfolding of histories of practice (Wenger, 1998, p.174);

- **Imagination** – creating and producing new images of the self and world that surpass engagement (Wenger, 1998, p.177); and

- **Alignment** – where ‘participants become connected through the coordination of their energies, actions and practices’ (Wenger, 1998, p.179).

For clarity each mode of belonging will be addressed in relation to the research objective.

**Engagement**

All students experienced belonging through engagement as all students throughout the year engaged in classroom and school activities. At the outset of their school year students were involved in developing competence in negotiating their classroom community of practice. Some students were quicker to openly engage in practice such as asking to say the prayer, speaking out at group time, and taking on roles in the daily routines. Other students took their time to observe, learn and participate in the practices of the classroom. Students who had prior-to-school education (this refers to an early childhood education setting such as preschool or day care) were
often the students who demonstrated the most confidence at the outset resulting in a perceived competence earlier in the year. It was partly because of this confidence that some students had more power in the classroom as they had competence in the practices of the classroom.

Imagination

From the data collected it appears that all the students engaged in imagination as a mode of belonging at various points in time. As the students began school they had already been involved in imagination, albeit at a peripheral level in their classroom community of practice. The transition to school program provided by the school gave the students a starting place to be a member of their classroom, and starting school meant being ‘a big kid.’ During the school year imagination happened on a range of levels. The very act of learning to write their name was exciting and students commented that they could not do that before and they were going to learn sentences. This may seem insignificant to adults but for many students this was empowering, and for some students a challenge.

Being able to identify single words led to students looking forward to learning to read sentences and books. One student ran up to me with great excitement and exclaimed, ‘Sarah, I can read!’ after participating in her first reading group. Students towards the end of the year were discussing moving on to year 1 and what that would mean for them. Young children do not see time the same way adults do. Adults might imagine retirement which may take twenty years to reach, whereas young children think grown up is sixteen. Students also engaged in imagination on a social level with their peers. Frequent discussions of who they like and who they are going to marry – even at five years of age – indicate that children do put energy into thinking about the bigger picture even if they may not comprehend all that will happen in between.
Alignment

The data collected demonstrate that students constantly engaged in alignment as a mode of belonging. Alignment for students occurred at school, classroom and peer group levels. Obvious signs of alignment for these students included: students’ wearing their school uniforms, doing as the Teacher says, following school rules, completing classroom tasks, and partaking in routines and rituals of the school. Students consistently cited school rules and ‘doing as the Teacher says’ to me, and to each other throughout the entire school year beginning in the first weeks of school.

Students learnt very quickly that there are consequences for not aligning their practices with school and classroom practices. Not aligning themselves with school practices impacted upon their engagement and created the unfolding of histories of practice within engagement. As mentioned in the data, school rules sometimes unfolded during the school year as a reaction to students’ actions and behaviours.

Students also engaged in alignment with their peers in a range of ways. This was in part due to other students reminding them of classroom practices. It was also often due to personal interests and popular culture. If a student wanted to be a friend with someone it was helpful to have shared interests as many students reported, or access to the popular culture of their age group. Access to popular culture was an important part of the students’ community of practice because it allowed for engagement with competence, and imagination in play, which for young children is a form of imagining or acting out roles they would desire for themselves in the real world. For example, knowledge of Saddle Club, Bratz, or comic book heroes like Spiderman, empowered students in their play and relations with their peers.
3. What does membership of classroom and school CoP mean for children’s identity formation?

Wenger states that ‘identity is an integral aspect of a social theory of learning and is thus inseparable from issues of practice, community, and meaning’ (1998, p.145). Identity formation is both an individual and collective activity.

Generally students began school with an idea about themselves as a school student or in their words ‘a big kid’ because they were starting ‘big school’. Students brought with them the practices of other past or present communities of practice they belong/ed to such as ‘little school’ and their family. Students who began school with prior-to-school education appeared to have more confidence socially and sometimes more ability in skills based activities. Generally the reverse could be said of students who had no prior-to-school education. Towards the end of the year many students reflected with me about what they were like when they started school compared to what they are like after nearly a full year at school. Students reported that they still felt good about school, they felt grown up, they had learnt more things and they could do more things like jump higher. As Lily said in her video diary entry ‘I can do everything because I’m good and I’m a big girl now!’

Confidence in tasks and ability to negotiate social conflict came more readily to those students who had prior-to-school education. From observations and interviews this appeared to impact on students’ perseverance as school students as their desire for approval from Teachers and other students was frequently documented. Students who struggled with tasks found it harder to become good at tasks and reported finding work hard and school hard. On the other hand, when students mastered tasks they were openly delighted in their achievements. Students’ social relations and ability to participate effectively in these impacted upon their day and contentment at school. It could be assumed that this in turn impacted on their sense of self; however, students
often reported that acts of unkindness were the other student’s fault. They may have felt the fault lay with them or this made them less confident in themselves but they did not report this to me. Students with greater social maturity were observed to be less openly upset about social altercations. All students in one way or another throughout the year expressed concern about other students not liking them, not being their friend or not being allowed to play. The difference between students was how much this appeared to impact on them to varying degrees.

Many students who had prior-to-school education and were more emotionally developed, seemed to cope better with difficulty at school. However, much can still be learned from children who seem to have resilience, prior-to-school experience or not. Some Kindergarten students may not be advanced in academic and social skills compared to peers but their confidence or self-esteem appeared to give them the ability to cope.

4. How it feels to be a member of this classroom and school community from children’s perspectives and how they might like it to be different?

Students consistently reported throughout the year that it feels good to be a member of their classroom and school. They reported being happy and having fun. School feels best when friends are being kind to each other, sharing, playing together, and everyone is doing the right thing. Students also enjoyed learning things as reported by Joshua who told me that ‘even though we learnt a bit it’s still fun’ because in his opinion ‘learning is work’. Students’ perspectives of being a member of their class were not so favorable when: their friends were mean to them; they were left out of play; their classmates told the teacher on them, getting them into trouble; students in their class broke the rules; the teachers yell; they have to line up; and when it is raining they cannot play down in the back paddock.
Despite the positives and negatives of being a member most students had a clear idea about what membership means to them. Some of examples of these are:

   Bethany: You can go in there.

   Tamika: To be special and it feels good inside your heart.

   Joshua: You don’t be really naughty.

   Eduardo: You don’t do naughty things.

   Lily: Playing with your friends nice.

   Lewis: You learn things.

These responses reflect the things that students reported throughout the year as things they liked or did not like at school. What membership means for students could then be assumed to be in essence, the things that students’ value for themselves and make them feel good. At the very least, that is what they hoped for when we talked about being a member.

The same could be said for what students would change about school. Students value kindness, friendship, fun, participating and items from home. The changes students suggested through the year included:

   Kristy: Be allowed to wear jewellery to school.

   Gregory: People not being naughty.

   Jasmine: Have a different uniform because you get all sweaty.

   Jayden: Have more play time.

   Hannah: When people don’t say I’m not your friend anymore.

   Grace: People being nice to you all the time.

   Lewis: More games to play.
5. How are children’s understandings and acts of participation reified, or incorporated into the valued meanings and practices by their classroom and school’s Communities of Practice?

There are two levels for students within this research objective. The first is Teacher reification and incorporation of this into classroom and school practices. The second is classmate and friend reification and incorporation of this into peer and classroom communities of practice.

Reification involves both product and process. Products include ‘tools, symbols, stories, term, and concepts that reify something of that practice’ (Wenger, 1998, p. 59). Processes include ‘making, designing, representing, naming, encoding, and describing, as well as perceiving, interpreting, using, reusing, decoding, and recasting’ (Wenger, 1998, p. 59). Reification is interwoven in our participation within experience, meaning, negotiation and our worlds.

Teacher and school reification of students’ participation at this site included things such as:

- School and classroom awards.

Students took great delight in receiving merit and achievement awards at assembly. These awards were presented for specific reasons that reified student’s efforts and achievements that reified school practices such as: beautiful manners and behaviour, great drawing, trying hard with their writing, being friendly, and writing a fantastic sentence. As discussed in the data analysis chapter, the Teachers’ ensured that all students got an award at some point in time. Awards to some extent were extrinsic motivation for students to participate appropriately. However, students were not observed discussing awards in the context of being polite to get one. Although they were recorded commenting when they had not yet received one and other students had.
- **Rewards.**

Throughout the week sweets and stickers were used as rewards for good work and/or competence in classroom practices. These seemed to be far more enticing to students than the awards handed out at assembly, mostly due to their immediacy of response to students but also because children generally enjoy sweets. It was not uncommon to hear students bragging to other students about the stickers they had received and they proudly wore them on their uniforms for the day. There were many observations where students were quite upset when their stickers fell off and they could not find them. Reification can become quite a circular process as students made Teacher’s reification of their participation part of their peer community of practice, particularly when they bragged about their reward. Students knew that this was valued in their peer community of practice. What they also learnt is that this type of reification can only be given and not asked for. This sometimes confused students who may have received a reward for a certain action one week, such as being helpful and picking up rubbish after craft in the classroom. Upon repeating this task another week they found that when they asked for the same reward as the previous week they would be reminded they should not ask for a reward. It is not surprising that in their peer community of practice, if students came to school with sweets or stickers they were wielded as power and given or withheld as the owner saw fit. Again, this could be seen as students reifying Teacher behaviour.

- **Verbal praise.**

Observations in field notes show that students frequently referred to good things their Teacher had said to them that either proved they were good at something or made them do good work to seek out positive feedback from their Teacher. A great deal of emphasis and value was
placed on the positive feedback from Teachers. Once again, the data provides examples of students replicating this praise with their classmates. For example, if a student asked if another student liked their work and the answer was ‘yes’ a common reply was, ‘Okay then, because you said that you can come to my party’.

Awards, rewards and praise are all in some form a method of manipulation as well as reification, albeit with positive intentions. If we wondered where children learn to manipulate we only have to look at ourselves (adults) to reveal the answer.

- Student news time and classroom activities.

Classroom activities were frequently geared around the students’ interests and other communities of practice they belonged to such as their family. Activities such as news time, free play, and writing activities allowed the child to draw upon their interests and other memberships. Students’ participation in these activities gave them the opportunity to engage in the curriculum in a way that acknowledged their competence in their personal lives and ability/desire to play. Sharing their participation with their peers helped them to identify who had similar interests which would carry on into their peer community of practice. Provided students were doing their work they would often be permitted to participate in their peer CoP throughout the day. Examples of this in the data include: discussions about movies, chanting silly lines from movies, breaking into song from popular artists and performing for each other during more relaxed periods of the year. Students seemed to both value and enjoy these opportunities.
6. What opportunities do children have to negotiate and even re-write understandings, meanings and practices in the classroom’s and school’s Communities of Practice, and how do they go about this?

Wenger describes negotiation of meaning as a ‘continuous interaction, of gradual achievement, and of give-and-take’ (1998, p. 53). As students participate in school activities, for example a work sheet, they are reifying a school practice. It is through this that they are negotiating what it means for them to be a student. Negotiation is not always something that means everyone will agree. It could be viewed more as a continuum for students with some participation and reification being non-negotiable and room for flexibility at the other end of the continuum.

Students knew they must do their work and do what the Teacher told them to do. These things were non-negotiable as far as the Teacher was concerned. Students also frequently mentioned in interviews and field notes that you have to do what the Teacher tells you and you have to do your work. For a young student, these may be non-negotiable, although there was still room to negotiate these things away from the watchful eye of the teacher. A student might talk too much and not get their work done. They may break a rule that they would not while the Teacher was looking. The data demonstrated this time and time again. No one liked getting into trouble either through being told on or being caught. At the same time it seemed that the urge to do something they should not outweighed the possible consequences, sometimes to the point that they did not think about consequences at all until it was too late.

As demonstrated in the discussion of the previous research objective, students did have opportunities to negotiate meanings and practices most legitimately through Teacher reification.
They would do this by participating, offering their thoughts, sharing ideas and artifacts from home and engaging in the practices of the classroom and school and replicating these in their peer CoP. The Teachers of this class of students provided many opportunities for students to influence or negotiate how things were done. This assisted in balancing somewhat the power of Teachers and students because there are many things in a school and classroom that are not negotiable. Non-negotiability meant keeping students safe and ensuring that they were working towards and meeting curriculum outcomes necessary for them to be successful at school.

7. How do children learn to operate in their classroom and school Communities of Practice?

The students of this class learnt how to operate in this classroom and school CoP by ‘belonging’, ‘becoming’, ‘experiencing’, and ‘doing’. Through these four aspects of a CoP framework were impacted by relationships, rules, routines, rituals and remarkable moments.

The data highlight that through relationships with people, in particular their Teachers and friends, students learnt much of what they needed to know through the year. As mentioned previously, students reported that Teachers taught the skills and activities that were required for school. Students learned by listening to the Teacher, following her lead, example or instructions, and participating and practicing in these skills or activities. Teachers also taught students the school and classroom rules. In particular, ‘listen to the Teacher’ which encompasses many of the rules because if a Teacher told them to ‘stop it’ they knew they were doing the wrong thing. Students also learned very quickly that not listening to the Teacher, even if they were doing the right thing, could mean getting into trouble. For example when a student was asked to put their work away and did not do it.
Students often learned from their friends about the right and wrong things to do. Sometimes this occurred from watching them get into trouble for something and other times because their peers told them it was wrong resulting in being ‘told’ on. Observations across the year showed the expanding repertoire of knowledge regarding what the right and wrong things were to do. They also provide many examples of students using their knowledge of the rules to reprimand or get one of their friends into trouble. This tended to provide a quick lesson to students about what the right thing to do was. As Jasmine said in an interview in term four, ‘Being a member means making the right choices’.

I have focused on rules because this was the primary concern for students. There were many other things that students learnt besides academic skills and rules. For example, religious practices such as rosary beads and blessing themselves, school practices such as songs and poems for assemblies and masses, games they were unfamiliar with, borrowing library books and using the browsing cards, and conduct in relation to manners. Overall, the data showed that students learnt through instruction, demonstration, observation and doing the activities themselves.

8. How different are children’s ways of operating within their classroom’s and school’s Communities of Practice between when they first start school and towards the end of their first year at school?

As expected at the outset of this study, the students gained confidence in their classroom and school as the year progressed. Even though some students were naturally quieter or more reserved than others, their confidence was still evident in their actions and participation. Students recalled for me on many occasions, some of which are presented in the data analysis chapter, of...
knowing more things, being more grown up now, and being able to do particular things that they could not do before such as writing long sentences or reading.

The growth in confidence and knowledge of operating in a classroom and school community of practice meant that students generally became more independent in their work. For example, at the beginning of the year there were some students I could not sit near because they would not attempt tasks such as spelling if I was close by. As a participant observer I avoided reminding them that they needed to ‘sound it out’ and relied on their friends telling them to do that. As the year progressed students were ‘sounding out’ without being asked and accessing the word wall\(^4\) for assistance rather than seeking out adults.

From the data collected and knowledge of the students it should also be noted that while confidence and competence grew, it seemed somewhat relative to how students presented at the beginning of school. To clarify, a student who began school more competent than another student generally performed better than the less competent students towards the end of the year. At the same time, progress in ability in a student who seemed less competent at the beginning of the year seemed more marked at the end of the year, perhaps because they had further to go in developing the competence other peers had. While the progress was observed to be relative as discussed above, the differences in competence between a more or less competent student at the end of the year also seemed to balance. Perhaps it was the confidence and developing sense of identity of less competent students that in my eyes detracted from any gap in competence between students.

---

\(^4\) A wall in the classroom where students could access commonly required words to take back to their desks for writing tasks.
9. How do children’s perspectives and experiences of their classroom and school Communities of Practice impact on their transition and adaptation to the formal schooling environment?

Research discussed in the literature review highlights that a positive transition to school impacts on future school success and children’s sense of themselves as learners. Further starting school research indicates that the transition to school should not be viewed as a one off event but an ongoing process. The school this study was conducted in held six half day sessions in the classroom for incoming Kindergarten students in the year prior to them starting school. When the students started school they commented that some faces were familiar to them but they did not necessarily know anyone. It is felt that although the orientation sessions were a positive start to the transition to school, the Kindergarten year is a transition to formal schooling in itself.

Students do, by beginning school gain membership into a school. The process of membership is seen to be ongoing and evolving over time.

The data presented clearly show that issues of membership such as relationships, rules, routines, rituals and remarkable moments, as well as belonging, becoming, experiencing and doing are a fluid and constantly evolving. However, what the data also show are that this group of students was happy to be at school most of the time. Their perspectives and experiences if graphed would show something similar to a financial market. Students’ feeling good about school was volatile, increasing and decreasing on a daily basis particularly due to relationships and interpersonal experiences. When combining observations, field notes, interviews, video data, student drawings and knowledge gained of students throughout the year it is clear that they adapted to school in varying degrees at varying rates. It appears there can be no final answer to this except that a student’s ability to adapt is contextual. In this case, students adapted to the
unpredictability of social life within a fairly predictable environment as competently as their individuality and self-esteem would allow.

10. What were children’s experiences, participation in, and negotiation of the curriculum?

Many students reported to enjoy learning. The final year video documenting each Kindergarten student commenting on what was the best thing they did and best thing they learnt at school that year demonstrated this. Table 4 gives their responses.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary of Students’ Video Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brianna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eloise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eduardo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jayden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jasmine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leticia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamika</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timothy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winona</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A number of students found learning academic skills to be quite challenging. While class work was not negotiable, some students found creative ways to negotiate without permission how they would go about their work or how much effort they would put it. This creative negotiation was sometimes due to a student’s inability to complete a task, a student lacking motivation to complete a task, a student lacking belief they could complete a task resulting in unwillingness to try or persevere, a student simply not wanting to engage or participate in a task due to dislike for the task, and even occasions when the student was tired or not in the frame of mind for work. Teachers were often flexible with students they knew struggled with these tasks.
and would offer more time or assistance. Students who were known to be capable were generally met with a direction to complete the task to the Teacher’s expectations.

The data analysis, discussion of research objectives and overall conducting of this research study have highlighted some key recommendations. The follow chapter will provide these recommendations surrounding classroom management, limitations and abilities of five year old students, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, taking into account young children’s prior and current CoP, insights into young children’s thinking and research methods with young children.
Chapter seven

Recommendations

A number of recommendations arose from this study pertaining to young children starting school. These include: classroom management, limitations and abilities of five year old students, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills; taking into account young children’s prior and current CoP, insights into young children’s thinking, and research methods with young children have arisen from this study. This was a new school and findings may not be as applicable to schools that are more established. However, the findings provide an understanding of the experiences of the first year of school and establishment of CoP which can and should be tested in other settings.

1. Kindergarten curriculum include work on interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and understanding to support children’s social development and assist them in negotiating relationships that are of the highest priority to them.

2. Board of Studies curriculum extend beyond Personal Development, Health and Physical Education to include units of work that provide teaching guidelines for daily classroom relations.
3. Greater regular use of critical thinking in a classroom to develop interpersonal and intrapersonal skills.

4. Time be given to develop programs that promote students’ resiliency and self-efficacy in challenging environments.

5. Children’s memberships in other CoP such as families are considered from a strengths based approach which would entail strong relations wherever possible with parents and guardians of children.

6. Mismatches between family and school CoP are inevitable. While students can and should be expected to learn appropriate participation in the classroom and school CoP, schools should be expected to incorporate and where this is not appropriate be sensitive to other practices students are exposed to.

7. Attention is given by Teachers regarding the way they manage a classroom and understand the positive impact of strong and firm yet caring, understanding and supportive relationships with young children to promote their identity building and sense of safety and security in their classroom.

8. Teachers have demands and expectations that are realistic for young children remembering that competence in a classroom can be seen as a continuum across students and within individual students.

9. It is acknowledged that membership, just as the transition to formal schooling is a process that evolves and not an event.

10. The development of intentional, programmed, and targeted support for students to assist them in developing a positive identity through membership which in turn can impact on school success.
11. Greater support be given to Teachers to support their students in forming secure attachments with them as this is critical in the early years of life.

Suggestions for Further Research

To continue to build on the currently growing body of research into children’s perspectives on the transition to school it would be beneficial if the following areas were investigated:

1. The relationship between a researcher and child participants in a longitudinal ethnography.

2. The effectiveness of using technological data collection tools with young children.

3. Young children’s perspectives of their school community of practice as they progress through primary school.


5. Methods of research that give a greater understanding of identity building in young children and what impacts upon this.

The literature review indicated that there is a plethora of research on children’s transition to school. However, the accounts of children’s voices and perspectives on this subject are comparatively less than those of adults. Similarly, Wenger’s (1998) Communities of Practice framework is currently widely used in educational research. Minimal work has been undertaken, besides a few exemplar studies that have implemented a Communities of Practice framework with young children. The results of this study highlight that a Communities of Practice framework combined with data driven themes and analysis is applicable to young children’s lives and works towards explaining the complexities of their lived experiences. Not only does this study show the relevance of Communities of Practice Framework but it also gives valuable
and powerful insights to children’s experiences of the first year and school and their competence and confidence in communicating this.
Bibliography


Catholic Education Office (2002). Retrieved from

organisational capacity: a case study of the Philippines-Australia Basic Education Assistance

perspectives*. Paper presented at the OMEP XXII World Congress. Copenhagen, August.

Christensen, P. (2004). Children’s participation in ethnographic research: Issues of power and

Methodological Insights. In P. Christensen & A. James (Eds.). Research with Children:

Cultures of Communication. In P. Christensen & A. James (Eds.). Research with Children:

methodological insights. In P. Christensen & A. James (Eds.). Research with Children:

of children. In S. Greene and D. Hogan (Eds.). *Researching children’s experience:*


Cousins, J. (1999). Listening to children aged four: time is as long as it takes. London: National Early Years Network.


Einarsdottir, J. (2003). When the bell rings we have to go inside: Preschool children’s views on the primary school. European Early Childhood Education Research Monograph, 1, 35 – 49.


   Ethnography, 16, 433 – 467.

Margetts, K. (1997). Factors impacting on children’s adjustment to the first years of primary 

Margetts, K. (2002). Transition to school – Complexity and diversity. European Childhood 
   Education Research Journal, 10(2), 103 – 114.

   (Eds.). Researching children’s perspectives (pp. 34 – 45). Buckingham: Open University 
   Press.

   49(6), 56 – 63.

   the issues. Psychology in the Schools, 34(2), 73 – 84.

   Christensen & A. James (Eds.). Research with children: Perspectives and practices (pp. 120 

   Buckingham: Open University Press.

Miller, J. (1997). Never too young: how many children can take responsibility and make
decisions. London: National Early Years Network/Save the Children.

Children and Society, 10(2), 90 – 105.


Murray, E., & Harrison, L. J. (2005). Children’s perspectives on their first year of school:
introducing a new pictorial measure of school stress. European Early Childhood Education

New South Wales Commission for Children and Young People and Commission for Children
and Young People (Queensland). (2004). A Head Start for Australia: An Early Years

NSW Department of Community Services, Office of Childcare (2001). NSW Curriculum
Framework for children’s services. The practice of relationships. Essential provisions for

Sydney: Author.

NSW Department of Education. (2009). Retrieved from

about decisions which affect them. In P. Christensen & A. James (Eds.). Research with


www.nimh.nih.gov/childhp/fdnconsb.htm


Appendix A

Children’s perspectives of their membership in classroom and school ‘communities of practice’. How do they evolve over the first year of school?

Consent form for parents and guardians of Kindergarten students

Dear Parents/Guardians,

The project I will be conducting in your child’s school (Hosanna Catholic School), throughout next year, is investigating how your child feels about being at school and in their classroom. An information letter accompanies this consent form providing details about the project.

If you are willing for your child to be involved in:

- Small friendship group interviews with the researcher in view of their classroom teacher (recorded on a tape recorder),
- Drawing during the interviews,
- Talking freely to the researcher throughout the day when appropriate,
- Taking and being included in digital photographs (that other children might take or request be taken),
- Classroom observations (by the researcher) while children are with their teacher,
- Playground observations in view of teacher on playground duty,
- Video diary making that children record independently,

I would appreciate you signing this consent form below and returning it to the school. A second copy of the consent form is included for you to keep.

I can be contacted using the details below if you would like any further information. Thank you.

Sarah Heinrich
Phone: 9671 5511
Fax: 9772 6738
Consent form

I have read (or have had read to me) and understand the information about the study *Children’s perspectives of their membership in classroom and school ‘communities of practice’. How do they evolve over the first year of school?*

I agree to my child’s participation in the research and know that I, or my child, can choose to withdraw from the study at any time.

I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

I agree to the participation of my child ________________________________

Parent/Guardian’s name: _________________________________________

Parents/Guardian’s signature: ______________________________________

Date:_______________________

NOTE: This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officers (tel: 02 4570 1136). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix B

Children’s perspectives of their membership in classroom and school ‘communities of practice’. How do they evolve over the first year of school?

Consent form for adult participants

The project I will be conducting at Hosanna Catholic School is investigating how children feel about their classroom and school membership. This letter invites you to consider giving consent to be a part of this project over the next year school year.

If you are willing to be involved in:

- Classroom/playground observations recorded in field notes by researcher,
- Digital photography taken by children and/or researcher,

I would appreciate you signing this consent form below and returning it to the school. A second copy of the consent form is included for you to keep.

I can be contacted using the details below if you would like any further information.

Thank you.

Sarah Heinrich
Phone: 9671 5511
Fax: 9772 6738

NOTE: This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officers (tel: 02 4570 1136). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Consent form

I have read (or have had read to me) and understand the information about the study *Children’s perspectives of their membership in classroom and school ‘communities of practice’. How do they evolve over the first year of school?*

I agree to participate in the research and know that I can choose to withdraw from the study at any time.

I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

**Name:** _______________________________________

**Signature:** _______________________________________

**Position in the school:** _______________________________________

**Date:** ____________________________
Children’s perspectives of their membership in classroom and school ‘communities of practice’. How do they evolve over the first year of school?

Information statement for parents and guardians.

Starting school is more than the first day of school. For many children, it takes time to adjust to and be comfortable with the new situation. The start of school can have a big impact on children’s feelings about themselves as students, which can also affect how they feel about school, being a learner now, learning in the future, and themselves as people. When children start school they become a member of a classroom and school.

This study is a postgraduate research project, being conducted by a University of Western Sydney early childhood trained teacher. The aim of the study is to find out how your child feels about school. Having this knowledge can help adults (parents, guardians, community members, educators) make membership in classrooms and schools a positive experience for these children, and future members.

This study will involve my observing Kindergarten children in their class and playground environments at Hosanna Catholic School. I want to find out how children engage in these places with their peers and school staff (members of their classroom and school communities). On my visits I will set up a video camera in a corner of the classroom behind a semi-transparent screen for children to record their ideas on their own, at times which suit the teacher.

I also would like to record interviews with Kindergarten children in small friendship groups at the beginning of the year, and the end of each term, to find out how they are feeling about their classroom and school. During these interviews that would be held in clear view of the teacher, children would also be invited to draw pictures about their ideas. This would be done as part of the school day and organised with the teacher.

I will ask the children for permission to copy their drawings and where photographs, videos, tape recordings of/by children are used in reports and conference presentations, pretend names will be used so children and the school are not identified. I will be happy to provide the school with copies of any publications or other materials that are generated through this project.

Even if parents / guardians have given consent for their child to be involved, I will check with the child at any time I invite them to do an activity. If they are not interested, they will not be pressured to join in. All the discussions and activities will take place in the classroom or grounds at school, in sight of staff members. Even if the children choose to participate and then change
their mind, they will be able to leave the activities or withdraw from the research entirely at any time. There are no negative consequences for you or your child should you choose not to give consent, or should your child not wish to participate.

I can be contacted using the details below if you would like any further information.

Thank you.

Sarah Heinrich  
Phone: 9671 5511  
Fax: 9772 6738

NOTE: This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officers (tel: 02 4570 1136). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Children’s perspectives of their membership in classroom and school ‘communities of practice’. How do they evolve over the first year of school?

Information statement for adult participants

Starting school is more than the first day of school. For many children, it takes time to adjust to and be comfortable with the new situation. The start of school can have a big impact on children’s feelings about themselves as students, which can also affect how they feel about school, being a learner now, learning in the future, and themselves as people. When children start school they become a member of a classroom and school.

This study is a postgraduate research project, being conducted by a University of Western Sydney early childhood trained teacher. The aim of the study is to find out what membership of a classroom and school is like for children in their first year of school. Having this knowledge can help adults (parents, guardians, community members, educators) make membership in classrooms and schools a positive experience for these children, and future members.

This study will involve my observing children in their class and playground environments at Hosanna Catholic School. I want to find out how children engage in these places with their peers and school staff (members of their classroom and school communities). On my visits I will set up a video camera in a corner of the classroom behind a semi-transparent screen for children to record their ideas on their own, at times which suit the teacher.

I also would like to record interviews with children in small friendship groups at the beginning of the year, and the end of each term, to find out how they are feeling about their classroom and school. During these interviews that would be held in clear view of the teacher, children would also be invited to draw pictures about their ideas. This would be done as part of the school day and organised with the teacher.

I will ask the children for permission to copy their drawings and where photographs, videos, tape recordings of/by children are used in reports and conference presentations pretend names will be used so children, adults and school are not identified. I will be happy to provide the school with copies of any publications or other materials that are generated through this project.

Any activities that take place will be done in negotiation with the classroom teacher. There may be times when teachers and other school staff are interacting with children I am observing. In all cases it will be the child who will be my focus but school staff, of course, have the right to request that I cease my observations. I shall, of course, accede to such requests without question.
Should you give consent to participate then change your mind, you can withdraw from the project at any stage with no penalty or consequence to you. Should you choose not to give consent, your decision is respected and there are no penalties or negative consequences for you.

I can be contacted using the details below if you would like any further information.

Thank you.

Sarah Heinrich  
Phone: 9671 5511  
Fax: 9772 6738

NOTE: This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officers (tel: 02 4570 1136). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Information statement (to be used to describe project to Kindergarten children)

Whole class discussion

My name is Sarah. I am here to find out about how you feel about being in this class and school in your first year of school. That’s why you will see me around your classroom and school from time to time. I am from a uni, so I’m still a student, like you, but in a different place with different rules. I have a really big assignment – like homework, and I need your help to get it done. I need your help because it’s all about what kids think, and I’m not a kid.

Things have changed a lot from when grown-ups, like your parents or grandparents, and me, were at school and there are a lot of grown-ups – including me – who think it is important to find out from kids who are at school today (that means you) what it is like for you so we can together make sure it’s the best place for you to learn and feel happy at.

Would you agree that you see things different from mum, dad, uncle or granny about life today? Do you think that it’s important that kids get to talk about how it is? Would you like to talk to me about school?

When I visit there are some things I’d like to do. Sometimes I will invite you to come and talk to me about your classroom and school with one or two of your friends, sometimes I will be in your classroom, watching what is going on. Other times I will invite you to draw pictures, take photographs, or video yourself about being at school, if you would like to do that, and when it’s okay with your teacher.

Any drawings you do I would like a copy of if that is okay with you. This would mean that I would have to take them away and copy them and then bring them back so you can keep them. All these things we can do together will happen where you can see your teacher or another teacher of the school and they can see you. If you don’t want to join in, that’s okay. I will not have any bad feelings about you and you will not get into trouble from anyone. If you join in and decide you have had enough while the activity is still going, you can stop joining in at any time and go back to your teacher and I won’t have any bad feelings about you and you will not get into trouble from anyone.

Your Mum/Dad/Guardian has said it is okay for me to talk with you and for you to be part of the activities I have planned. How do you feel about what I’ve talked about? Do you think you’d like to be a part of it?…even sometimes? You can just think about it for now if you like. Just remember when I am here and I invite you to join in an activity (like talking to me with your friends, drawing, taking a photo, letting me record a conversation with you on tape), that you NEVER HAVE TO JOIN IN. It is only something you should do if you want to do it.
I would also like you to know that if you do choose to join in, I will be using what you say to show grown-ups what it is like to be a Kindergarten kid at school today. I’m really looking forward to getting to know you all this year. Thanks for listening. I hope that you will be interested in doing some of the things I just talked about with me.

Thank you
Appendix F

Dear Parents and Guardians of Hosanna Kindergarten Students,

With the help of all the Kindy kids this year, as well as the cooperation of the Kindergarten teachers, I have made a video. This is my way of saying thank you for having me at Hosanna Primary School this year.

The video stars every child in Kindergarten this year talking briefly about what they’ve enjoyed and learnt in their first year of school.

On Thursday the 15th December at 2.20pm, a premier screening of the video will take place in the Kindergarten rooms.

I would like to invite you all to this special screening so I can personally say thank you to you all, and give you a glimpse of what Kindergarten has been for your children this year.

I hope to see you all there,

Sarah
Appendix G

Dear Parents & Guardians

This CD contains pictures of your child at school in Kindergarten this year. Some are portraits, some are with friends, some of them are your child in action in the classroom or playground. I’m sorry I didn’t have the money to get all the prints of each child in Kindergarten made up, but if you don’t have a computer try taking it the Kmart photo machines to have a look at them and see if you’d like to get any printed. I just wanted to give you a little something to say thank you for allowing me to research with your child this year, and thought you might appreciate a small record of your child’s time in Kindergarten.

Have a safe and happy Christmas and New Year.

Sarah 😊