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Perspectives on the "Silent Period" for Emergent Bilinguals in England

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This article draws together the research findings from two ethnographic studies as a means to problematize the "silent period" as experienced by young bilingual learners in two English speaking early-years settings in England. Most teachers and senior early-years practitioners in England are monolingual English speakers. The children (regardless of their mother tongue) are taught through the medium of spoken and written English in and through all subject areas. Bilingual learning through the mother tongue is not only disregarded in most schools in England but even actively discouraged in some. Three emergent bilingual learners were re-examined as case studies. Suki and Adyta, of Japanese and Punjabi descent, respectively, and Nazma, of Kashmiri descent, were observed while they each negotiated new ways of knowing within and through an English preschool setting. Sociocultural insights into how these young children employ their silenced mother tongue to negotiate their learning creates a fuller and richer portrait of the emergent bilingual learner both in and outside of preschool. These collaborative research findings present the silent period as agentive and as a crucial time for self-mediated learning within the early-years community of practice.

Keywords: silent period, sociocultural, learning, bilingual, participation

This article provides collaborative insights into the additional learning experiences of three emergent bilingual learners on admission to an early-years setting in England. The findings from two research studies (Bligh, 2011; Drury, 2007) come together to unpack current perceptions of young bilingual learners' participation during the initial stage of additional language acquisition: the silent period. The researchers draw upon longitudinal participant observations in an English speaking preschool playgroup (Bligh) and a nursery setting (Drury) in an attempt to unravel the complexity of learning as experienced by three participants (Suki, age 4; Adyta, age 3; and Nazma, age 4) of Japanese, Punjabi, and Kashmiri descent, respectively.

Bilingualism and multilingualism are daily features of many societies, with more bilingual (using two or more languages) people in the world than there are monolingual. As defined by

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Hall (2001), *bilingualism* refers to "pupils who live in two languages, who have access to, or need to use, two or more languages at home and at school. It does not mean that they have fluency in both languages or that they are competent and literate in both languages" (p. 5). Without a national policy in place in England to advise on the teaching of bilingual learners, these children are served, at best, by a fragmented framework for teaching and learning; at worst, they have a disempowering framework.

During the first decade of the 21st century, there have been increasing numbers of bilingual children entering early-years settings in England, many of whom are new to the English language. Twelve percent of school children in the United Kingdom are identified as having a mother tongue other than English, and this number is close to 50% in urban areas such as inner London. In some London primary schools, 80% of the children are classified as bilingual, and more than 200 languages are spoken in the homes of children attending schools. In England, the results of the Department for Education (DfE) School Census (cited in National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum, 2012) indicate that one in six primary school pupils in England does not have English as their first language.

Most children in England enter noncompulsory part-time or full-time preschool from age 2 or 3. This includes attendance at voluntary playgroups, local authority and privately run child care nurseries, and/or educational nurseries attached to state-run primary schools. Children in England start compulsory schooling (reception class) in the term following their fourth birthday and attend primary school for 7 years. The predominant model of teaching in English primary schools is one teacher per age-based class (approximately 30 children) for the teaching of all the curricular areas in each school year.

The taught curriculum in primary schools in England is divided into three key stages, which are delivered in English through the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2012b) for children from age 3 to 5 years (nursery and reception classes) and the (draft) Primary National Curriculum (DfE, 2012a) for children in key Stage 1 (ages 6–8) and key Stage 2 (ages 9–11) from year 1 to year 6.

Children (regardless of their mother tongue) are taught through the medium of spoken and written English in and through all subject areas. The preschool and nursery where the research was conducted use spoken English as the language of instruction. In common with many early-years settings and primary schools in England, most of the teachers and practitioners are monolingual English speakers.

Although national policy does little to ensure the needs of bilingual learners are met within the curricular guidelines, all newly qualified teachers in England must meet the new eight Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012c), which relate to content, implementation, assessment, and professionalism which includes the directive. Standard 5 (DfE, 2012c) appears to suggest that teachers should adapt their teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils when stating, "Have a clear understanding of the needs of all pupils, including those . . . with English as an additional language . . . and be able to use and evaluate distinctive teaching approaches to engage and support them" (DfE, 2012c).

Not only does the DfE (2012c) in England appear to state its commitment to supporting pupils for whom English is not a first language, but its teaching standards policy directive clearly highlights the importance of supporting the teaching and learning of pupils for whom English is not a first language.

Several significant studies have examined young children's language acquisition in early educational contexts during the silent period (Brooker, 2005; Clarke, 1992; Ochs, 1988; Tabors, 1997; Willett, 1995). However, though adding to the current knowledge on the initial stage of English as an additional language acquisition, there remains a need to unpack this stage of language acquisition in relation to sociocultural understandings of "other" learning.

This article collaboratively unpacks the learning experiences of emergent bilingual learners during the initial stage of language acquisition—the silent period. Challenging current understandings of the "silent period," the coauthors present sociocultural theorizing as an essential element in the interpretation of a young child's learning during the silent period.

For the purposes of this article, the terms *silent, young bilingual learner*, and *emergent bilingual learner* are employed when referring to a young child between ages 3 and 6 years of age who is in the first (nonverbal) stage of learning English as a new and additional spoken language within and beyond an early-years educational setting in England.

The key question driving this inquiry is: What are young bilingual children learning during the silent period?

Increasing numbers of bilingual learners are being referred to speech and language therapists and subsequently being diagnosed with speech and language disorders. The diagnosis of selective mutism is sometimes confirmed after as little as one month into the silent period. In fact, some Education Authority Ethnic Minority Achievement Services advise teachers (Hampshire Ethnic Minority Achievement Service, 2003, p. 2) that "it is crucial children are diagnosed and treated as early as possible."

THE SILENT PERIOD

Not every young bilingual learner encounters a silent period because not every child invests many of their hours, days, weeks, and years in an environment where their mother tongue may be disregarded (Bligh, 2011). The *silent period* (in this research) refers to a specific time when, on entering an early-years setting in England, the language of discourse and instruction (English) is not understood. It is the initial stage in the acquisition of English as an additional language.

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

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

Sociocultural Perspective

A sociocultural approach (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky; 1986; Wenger, 1998) provides an alternative lens through which to examine the silent period and the learning experienced by bilingual learners who on entering an English speaking preschool setting have no understanding of the spoken language of instruction. Applying a sociocultural lens to learning through the silent period assists in recognizing the complexities involved in comprehending how new understandings and ways of knowing (meaning making) are acquired and distributed through participation. A flexible lens is offered through which to make meaning of the interconnectedness between young children's thinking through their mother tongue—akin to private speech (Saville-Troike, 1988) and their increasing levels of participation in learning.

A sociocultural perspective recognizes the links between cultural understandings and silent negotiation in meaning making and participatory learning. For Gregory (2008), a sociocultural approach "rejects the difference between psychology and anthropology. . . . It's not just interdisciplinary; it actually transcends disciplines, as it focuses on the inextricable link between culture and cognition through engagement in activities, tasks, or events" (p. 2).

Sociocultural theorizing provides not only the platform through which the evolution of emergent bilingual learning can be presented, but also the thinking that underpins and contextualizes "legitimate peripheral participation" as a concept through which to explore silent experiences.

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

Fractionally Increasing Learning

Lave and Wenger (1991) articulated fractionally increasing learning developed through legitimate peripheral participation as a concept and context through which to examine the learning of a young bilingual child within an early-years setting. They suggested that learning is located in a social context, moving from that of apprenticeship to situated learning and, ultimately, to peripheral participation. From a sociocultural perspective, learning through legitimate peripheral participation involves fractional participation that is "a more encompassing process of being active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities" (Wenger, 1998, p. 4).

As such, the individual is moved from the role of "learner to learning as participation in the social world" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 43). Within legitimate peripheral participation, taking part is a means of "becoming" and gaining new ways of knowing—learning. Thus, Lave and Wenger (1991) considered legitimate peripheral participation as a means to enable newcomers (over time) to move toward fuller participation in the practices of a community. Through legitimate peripheral participation, newcomers can observe the "what and how" of participation as they move fractionally forward.

There is also a duality of meaning to legitimate peripheral participation. Although the young bilingual learner "settles" into the new learning environment without fearing the consequences of errors, she/he can also legitimately take risks, test the water, and trial the practices while silently participating from the safe keeping of the "look-out post" (legitimate peripheral participation). She or he contributes to and distributes meaning making through the participating members.

Improvised practice (practicing practices) appears to be significant during the movement from peripheral to fuller participation. Lave and Wenger (1991) suggested that "Learning itself is an improvised practice" (p. 93). Indeed, the role of participation is viewed as crucial to learning, which is anchored on "situated negotiation and renegotiation of meaning in the world" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 52). It is this very acceptance of the new and the unknown within legitimate peripheral participation that leads to the transformation of practices.

To summarize, many young bilingual learners pass through a silent period on entering an early-years setting where their mother tongue is not understood. Differing perspectives on the silent period (linguistic and sociocultural) lead to interpretations that can be negative (Suki's experience) or positive (sociocultural).

A sociocultural perspective views the silent period as a time of fractionally increasing participation during which the young child improvises the practices within the new learning environment.

METHOD

Both studies employed ethnography as the methodological means through which to observe behaviors and make meaning of those behaviors. Ethnography not only facilitated the unfolding of meaning making (Silverman, 2005) within the silent period but also aided in conceptualizing the sociocultural framework. Wolcott (1999) drew attention to the importance of the sociocultural context and, in particular, culture-sharing communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) as a means through which to make meaning of the shared practices within an early-years setting.

Ethnography best facilitated Toohey (2000) in exploring the connections between the sociohistorical, language, and identity in classroom-based young bilingual learners. Likewise, in Drury (2007), ethnographic methods served to capture the children's multilingual voices at school in ways that highlighted the rich context of the children's experiences. An essential concern was to give the children and their families a voice throughout the study, but not to focus too narrowly on specific linguistic features of second language acquisition.

Consequently, ethnography was chosen by both researchers because it enables naturalistic investigations of people, their behaviors, and their perspectives. Ethnography as a methodology offers opportunities to gain insights into children's learning in a range of contexts. As close working relationships were established with both early-years settings, this provided the researchers with access to the children's family members to discuss ethical issues were discussed and seek permissions to undertake research into the experiences of their children in nursery.

Thematic Analysis

Through the writing of field notes and reflective accounts of what was noticed and heard, connections were constantly being made between researcher thoughts and what was being observed.

As the main instrument of data analysis (as researcher), initial "incidental" themes began to emerge (Angrosino, 2007). As Rogoff (2003) stated, "The hand holding the lens was of importance . . . [and] *the focus of analysis stems from what we as observers choose to examine*" [Rogoff's emphasis] (p. 58).

Thematic analysis was adopted as the qualitative analytic method because it is a method that can be applied across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches. As stated by Braun and Clarke (2006), "Through its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data" (p. 78).

In contrast to alternative methods of analysis, such as interpretive phenomenological, grounded theory, narrative, discourse (or conversational), thematic analysis adapts to suit the needs of any given theoretical framework, "and can be used to do different things within them. Thematic analysis . . . reports experiences, meanings and the reality of participants, and examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences . . . are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81).

According to Flick, van Kardorff, and Steinke (2004), thematic analysis is an approach that involves the creation and application of "codes" to data. The task of formalizing thematic analysis began with hours of rereading the rather "messy" (Gibbs, 2007) field notes written in well-worn note books and on endless scraps of paper, plus studying audible and inaudible tape recordings.

The field notes were analyzed thematically (as in Marandet & Wainwright, 2010) with open and axial coding (Babbie, 2009) applied to identify key themes and groupings. The coded themes were presented "in a manageable form" (Trochim, 2006), through frequency distribution and central tendency.

Case Study 1

Bligh (2011) recalled a professional teaching experience in a reception class from 2005 that highlights common misunderstandings of learning through the silent period:

> I encountered a five-year-old girl of Japanese heritage ("Suki") for whom English was her additional language, whilst teaching in a reception class. Not only did she not speak at all in class (nor had she in her nursery class) but she presented with a facial expression which remained "fixed" and unsmiling at all times. (p. 5)

Although initial concern focused on Suki's prolonged silent period in relation to Suki's educational attainment (difficulties in assessment of reading), it was the perceived limitations of her participation that was a prioritized concern. Suki was referred to a speech and language therapist in an attempt at a "diagnosis."

A speech and language therapist (a linguist's perspective) interpreted Suki's silence as the communication disorder "selective mutism" (Selective Mutism Information and Research Association, www.selectivemutism.co.uk) and forwarded her referral to an educational psychologist. Employing a psychological lens, the educational psychologist focused upon Suki's individual, developmental processes in relation to whether Suki was, or was not, functioning cognitively at the "correct" developmental point. After interviewing Suki and her mother, a diagnosis of "selective mutism" was reached. Suki's status became that of a deficit medical model, which disregarded the significance of her learning through the silent period.

Case Study 2

Nazma: Silence in the nursery. Using ethnographic approaches, Drury's study (2007) explored the experiences of a Pahari-speaking girl, Nazma, in a multiethnic nursery classes in a town near London, over the period of one school year. Audio-recordings were made using radio-transmitter microphones in the nursery contexts. The 2.5 hour-long nursery session was recorded six times. The first recording occurred when the child started nursery and subsequently once every half-term until she entered the reception class for 4- to 5-year-olds. "Naturally occurring" interactions were recorded, when the child was engaged in normal activities. The tapes were transcribed by working with a bilingual teaching assistant who is a native speaker of Pahari and a respected member of the community. Then, observations of the child in the nursery were carried out while audio recordings were being made. Finally, two interviews each were conducted with the nursery teacher and the child's parents in addition to informal conversations.

Nazma, of British Pakistani background, is nearly age 4 years. There are six children in the family, and they all attended the same nursery and primary school. Nazma is the youngest child in the family. Her family originates from Azad Kashmir, which borders North-East Pakistan, and her mother tongue is Pahari (a Punjabi dialect spoken in this area). Nazma uses Pahari with all members of the family. She was born in a town near London and entered nursery as a developing bilingual child who does not share the language or culture of the school. Nazma did not attend any preschool setting outside her home before starting school and during her first term at nursery, she does not speak to other children or participate in nursery activities. Although there are other bilingual children in the class (the majority of whom are Pahari speakers), she watches and is silent for much of her time in nursery sessions.

What can we understand about her invisible learning? How can we capture her silent voice as she begins the task of learning in school? The following example of Nazma as she enters nursery arises from observations in the early-years setting and interviews with nursery staff.

Nazma enters nursery.

Nazma enters nursery holding her sister's hand. Her sister, Yasmin (age 4½), moves over to the large carpet where the children sit with the nursery teacher at the beginning of every session. Nazma follows her, chewing her dress, staying close to her sister and watching everything. She had stopped crying during the fifth week at nursery and she now comes every afternoon. The children listen to the teacher talking about caterpillars and many join in the discussion in English. Nazma is silent. Mussarat, the bilingual teaching assistant, enters the nursery. She gathers a small group of Pahari speaking children together to share a book. This activity had been planned with the nursery teacher and linked to the current topic. The children switch to Pahari (their mother tongue) for this activity. Nazma listens and points to a picture of a dog (*kutha*) and cat (*billee*) in an Urdu alphabet picture book but does not speak. They go outside to play. Nazma stands on the outside watching the other children and holds Mussarat's hand. She has learned the climbing frame routine and repeats the climbing and sliding activity several times. The children go inside and choose from a range of play activities. Nazma watches. She stays at an activity for one minute and moves on. This is repeated several times. Then she wanders around the room sucking her fingers. It is now story time on the carpet. The children sit and listen to the story of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar.* Nazma sits close to her sister and watches. Their mother appears at the door and they go home. (Drury, 2007, p. 31)

As the learning environment Nazma first enters is determined by current policy and the knowledge, understanding, and training of their nursery teachers, I look carefully at what happens to her when she begins nursery and how her teacher views her and her experience of schooling.

First term at nursery: Nazma's "silence." The following compilation of observation notes made by the nursery staff creates a picture of Nazma's first term in nursery:

April 17 first nursery visit, clung to mum crying

April 18 played with sister Yasmin

April 23 started nursery today, cried, wouldn't settle for an hour or so, just sobbed and sucked fingers and had cuddles

April 24 cried most of the time, stayed with her sister for a little while

April 25 bilingual teaching assistant (BTA) brought Nazma and Yasmin from home, upset, mum stayed and joined in

April 29 mum said she would keep her at home and bring her to nursery after the summer holiday, teacher suggested she only comes to nursery on Wednesdays and Thursdays when BTA is there

May 1 came in happily with mum, but then upset all afternoon

May 2 started to cry when mum left, sat on BTA's lap, followed BTA around

May 3 crying, teacher again suggested she only attends on Wednesdays and Thursdays

May 7 absent, doesn't seem to be attending very regularly

May 8 more settled, played in home corner

May 9 cried for a while, did some coloring

May 15 sobbed quietly for a bit

May 20 came in with her sister, Yasmin, did drawing

May 23 Yasmin holds her hand and leads her around, she watches, sucking her fingers

June 4 did tracing, wouldn't attempt tracing over her name until helped

June 10 wouldn't try to trace over her name unless helped by an adult, keeps putting fingers in her mouth

June 17 separating a bit from Yasmin today.

A teacher's perspective. The nursery Nazma attended was in a large Victorian building, across the playground from the main school. There were 30 children in the afternoon session of the nursery, which Nazma attended for 2.5 hours a day. The nursery teacher worked with two nursery nurses and a part-time BTA and she was experienced at working in multilingual early-years settings. The following report was written at the end of her four terms at nursery:

> Nazma is extremely reluctant to communicate in English. She understands most instructions given to her but obstinately refuses to say anything. Occasionally, she will say a whole sentence but soon becomes silent again. She communicates with other Asian children in her home language. She enjoys

> playing in the home corner and can be quite assertive. Nazma knows and recognizes basic colors in English. She can name a circle shape. During collaborative reading sessions, Nazma is often distracted. She will sometimes point to the text but will not say anything. She recognizes eight out of 13 children's name cards in her group. Nazma is recalcitrant about joining in with PE sessions.
>
> When interviewed, her teacher commented on Nazma's self-sufficient and stubborn personality: "She is refusing to speak, knowing it is required of her. . . . I expected her to verbalize more, language is taking a long time to come out." In terms of her language development, there was an understanding of the difficulty of the task facing Nazma when she started nursery: "It was a strange place, with people speaking a foreign language." She added, "She's saying: 'I know you want me to speak and I'm not going to.' " (Drury, 2007, p. 35)

When Nazma entered the reception class, her teacher completed an assessment of Nazma's learning and commented, "Hardly ever speaks unless she wants something." The central concern was Nazma's silence: "When she speaks, she can speak a sentence. But she doesn't speak much. She has stopped talking to me. She doesn't appear to listen. She doesn't look at the teacher. Is she pretending?"

Nazma's teachers' concerns about her silence underlines the need for teachers to understand young bilingual children's learning during her early years of schooling.

Learning through mother tongue. Mussarat (BTA) tells the story of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* in Pahari.

(Pahari in italics)

1 Nazma: *we eat it at home* [pointing to picture of watermelon in book]

we eat it [excitedly]

[Nazma joins in counting the fruit in the book – in English]

Mussarat: he was a beautiful butterfly

Nazma: *I've seen a butterfly in my garden*

5 Mussarat: *how many eyes?*

Nazma: two *eyes*

One came in my garden and I hit it

Evaluating the first term at nursery: Nazma's "silence." Nazma was clearly distressed by the early transition to school. This is most evident in the recurring notes about her crying, sucking fingers, holding her sister Yasmin's or the BTA's hand or clinging to her mother. The BTA plays an important role in this transition period, even collecting her from home on one occasion. The suggestion that she should attend only on the days when the BTA works in the nursery (Wednesdays and Thursdays) is significant here, as there is an understanding of the crucial role the BTA plays in creating a link between home and school. The nursery staff, however, appeared concerned that she "wouldn't trace over her name, unless helped by an adult." This note appeared twice during June and demonstrates the importance they place on children learning to be independent and on the early literacy activities based on writing her name. However, the observation

notes create an unhappy picture and this early experience of schooling will form the basis for all Nazma's future learning.

When analyzing the strategies Nazma uses at school, Drury (2007) delivered a powerful and agentive perspective on the "silent period," referring to it as a period of self-assertion. "We see her inside her shell. She clings to the powerful strategy of silence when she is with nursery staff and other children" (Drury, 2007, p. 73).

Evaluating learning through Nazma's mother tongue. The excerpt shows Nazma at her most responsive in nursery. Unlike any other interaction in this context, she is able to contribute her personal experience to the storytelling session with the BTA. Nazma's spontaneous response to the picture of the butterfly at the end of the story is to relate this to her own experience of butterflies in her garden. Mussarat is able to build on her contribution by asking how many eyes it has (see line 6), but Nazma continues with her personal story about the butterfly in the garden, using her first language with considerable fluency in this context. Here, she demonstrates her confidence to contribute in a small group, using her developing language skills appropriately. It provides a striking contrast to her "silence" and unwillingness to engage during most of the nursery recordings and demonstrates her agency in the use of silence in the nursery.

Case Study 3

Adyta's learning in preschool. The researcher (Bligh) liaised with Adyta's preschool playgroup for one year prior to his admission in September 2007. Being familiar to the practitioners and its daily activities, the preschool playgroup was an appropriate context within which to initiate the ethnographic field work.

Twenty-six children attended the preschool playgroup (situated in a busy suburb of Leeds) at any one time, with full-time and part-time attendance. The practitioners and the majority of the children were monolingual and English speaking. In addition, there was ease of accessibility for conducting weekly participant observations; as the majority of the children were monolingual and English speaking at the time of the research, the participant, Adyta, was clearly identifiable.

The playgroup was found to be welcoming and willing to share information and the nature of the research was well supported and accepted by the gate-keeper (Nicole, the graduate preschool leader). The data (field notes) were gathered through participant observations over a 3-year period as Adyta developed his participation in practice within the early-years setting, reception class, and Year 1 of primary school.

Adyta remained almost silent in the preschool setting; though family members describe him as a confident, fun-loving boy at home. It was initially presumed that Adyta would communicate in spoken English because he and his parents were born in England and his parents were articulate Punjabi/English speakers. However, as is customary in many South Asian communities, the paternal grandmother, "Jasmit," lived with Adyta's parents. According to Adyta's mother, her mother-in-law kept the Punjabi alive and active within the family. Although Adyta's parents could and would speak English in alternative situations, out of respect to Adyta's grandmother, family members spoke Punjabi in her presence.

As both of Adyta's parents worked full-time (Adyta's father worked for a property company and his mother worked in a large department store), Adyta's grandmother was his main carer and educator during weekdays between 8.00 a.m. and 5.30 p.m. Adyta's mother (who collected

Adyta from preschool occasionally) encouraged Adyta to refer to Nicole (the play-school leader) as "Auntie." According to Dasgupta's (1993) study, many families in the Bay area of India (South Asia) commonly adopt the "Western" term *auntie* as an expression of intimacy toward significant others, and pass this practice on to their children.

Following Adyta's silence in the preschool. Bligh (2011) initially focused upon articulating Adyta's nonverbal communications during the silent period. It is acknowledged that nonverbal communication via gesture and expression (British Council, 2005) adds an extra dimension to cultural understandings normally carried through mother tongue speech. Therefore, nonverbal communication appears to provide a legitimate means through which young bilingual learners attempt to convey meaning, avoid misunderstandings, and "fit in" to the target culture during the silent period.

Focusing tightly upon non-verbal communication, methodological interest was drawn toward comprehending "eye movements," "gesture," and "facial expressions" and the child as a "spectator" (Saville-Troike, 1988). Tabors (1997) discussed the use of facial expressions by a bilingual learner who was participating in a "spectator" role—that of quiet observation within legitimate peripheral participation.

How a young child looks to and from the early-years practitioner and to and from the observing researcher (Tabors, 1997) defines how a young child uses facial expressions to exhibit that help is required. Lancaster's (2001) study into the functions of gaze in young children's interpretations of symbolic forms suggests that young children are capable of complex abstract reasoning, rooted in their physical engagement with the world, which is mediated through physical and bodily resources—gaze being crucial when devoid of other culturally shared means of representation.

Building upon Flewitt (2005) and Lancaster's (2001) studies that identify "gaze following" as an expression of communication, Bligh (2011) also utilized gaze following as a complementary participant observational tool to capture the more diverse and multimodal means that children choose to express meaning. This technique is made evident in the vignette below.

The vignette below is drawn from field notes that demonstrate the complexities involved in Adyta's attempts at participatory learning—learning which is additional and complementary to his English language acquisition.

Adyta's additional learning.

Thunder, lightning and torrential rain has started, and the children run inside. Nicole decides to suspend the outside activities and tells the children that she is going to put the television on. When the children have settled down in the carpet area, Nicole and her two assistants move away from the carpet area as they start to tidy the morning's activities away.

Adyta sits on the carpet with all the other children watching a humorous children's DVD. Some of the other children have started to move into smaller groupings on the carpet and are chatting informally. . . . Adyta's eyes circle the television monitor.

There is loud laughter from the other children as a humorous incident occurs on the screen. . . . Adyta opens his eyes wide and stares in surprise at the rest of the children, turning his head around in both directions. There is a pause and then Adyta copies the other children laughing and he laughs really loudly. . . . Adyta doesn't realize at first when the rest of the children have stopped laughing.

Adyta suddenly turns his head and looks in all directions; he lowers his head a little, looks at his fingers and stops laughing. This same pattern of attempting to "join in" with the other children's behaviour patterns continues throughout the 15-minute episode shown on the television. (Adyta observed in preschool, February 19, 2008.)

Evaluating Adyta's additional learning. In the absence of others who could share learning through Adyta's mother tongue, it is apparent that Adyta's learning was dependent on making connections between what he already knew (children laughing) and what he was capable of understanding (something amusing on the television had caused this reaction). There is no intentional mediation apparent from observing the practices of the practitioners and other children within the early-years setting. Adyta's self-mediation occurred as a "by-product" of interpersonal social practices. To clarify, there was no intent by others in the facilitation of Adyta's learning. Adyta learned through the incidental mediation by others as they provided him with "clues" on how he could participate. An example of this is where Adyta learns to stop laughing when the other children have ceased their laughter. Adyta drew upon his mother tongue thinking (thought) in the development of additional learning strategies as a self-mediating learning tool.

Through the employment of a self-mediated tool for learning (mother tongue thought), he endeavored to follow the story-line on the television while also observing and copying the practices of the other children on the carpet area. As Adyta endeavored to "observe and listen with intent concentration and initiative" (Rogoff, 2003, p. 176), he was learning. The pause (before Adyta laughs) represented Adyta's realization (through hearing laughter) that something amusing had happened. Adyta did not join in with the laughter until he could see and hear that all the children around him laughing. He then copied the laughter and contributed to this shared endeavor by laughing really loudly, until he heard and observed that the laughing had ceased. Adyta then stopped laughing. His participation was peripheral and fractional.

Adyta was neither being drawn into the conversations, nor referred to directly, thus allowing him the perfect opportunity to "eavesdrop" on the practices of the community while situated in legitimate peripheral participation. Adyta did not listen unobtrusively to adult conversations, he listened with intent. Despite the lack of engagement in conversation with other children and adults (in the early-years setting), his learning progressed. Legitimate peripheral participation provided the ideal conditions for Adyta to listen intently to the conversations of children and adults alike through silent participation.

Like Nazma (Drury, 2007), Adyta absorbed "the everyday language . . . [and the] routines and expectations" within the early-years setting. The synthesizing of practices (Kenner, 2004) were presented as fluid, overlapping, and intersecting pathways that mediated Adyta's increasing participation.

Revisiting sociocultural understandings of children's learning, Adyta was attempting to connect on an interpersonal level with the other children through the practice of laughing. Adyta built upon his repertoire of known and unfamiliar cultural tools (English), signs (laughing), and symbols (the television) to transform his learning to a new level of participation (laughing), resulting in engagement in shared practices (enjoying the amusing incident).

To negotiate his participation more centrally within the early-years setting, Adyta transformed his language (mother tongue turned inward) and narrative style, relationships, and learning styles appropriate to the observed practice. However, there was no active mediation apparent from the practitioners in either guiding his transformation as he moved through one language and cultural experience to the next nor in assisting negotiation through his levels of participation.

COLLABORATIVE FINDINGS

Building upon the agentive perspective of the silent period (Drury, 2007), Bligh (2011) revealed it to be a crucial time for self-mediated learning within the early-years community of practice. Data demonstrated how Adyta "built upon his repertoire of known and unfamiliar cultural tools (English), signs (laughing), and symbols (the television) to transform his learning to a new level of participation (laughing), resulting in engagement in shared practices" (Bligh, 2011, p. 125).

The collaborative findings reveal active learning throughout the silent period contextualized within legitimate peripheral participation. Legitimate peripheral participation acts as a safe location through which Adyta and Nazma can mediate their learning and make meaning of the practices around them.

Not only does the knowing of the individual becomes apparent through relationships within and through the cultural and institutional context (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2003), but greater insight, meaning, and understanding of the child's learning is revealed through the dynamics of an ever-evolving cultural context (Rogoff, 2003). The significance of sociocultural understandings in relation to teaching and learning practices is presented by Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gomez (1992) through an examination into community literacy practices:

> [I]n studying human beings dynamically, within their social circumstances, in their full complexity, we gain a much more complete and valid understanding of them. We also gain, particularly in the case of minority children, a more positive view of their capabilities and how our pedagogy often constrains, and just as often distorts, what they do and what they are capable of doing. (Moll et al., 1992, p. 139)

These "funds of knowledge" (Moll et al., 1992) that are embedded in the everyday practices of young bilingual learners afford others (such as teachers) opportunities to gain more complete understandings of the importance of "other learning."

Applying a sociocultural lens upon this research is, therefore, "less about revealing the external child and more about uncovering the historical child" (Fleer, Anning, & Cullen, 2004, p. 175). Consequently, a sociocultural perspective seeks to reveal the whole picture through understanding the social, historical, and cultural aspects of children's daily practices. Through shared sociocultural understandings, this collaborative inquiry articulates the silent period in terms of the child actively participating through her/his inner thoughts—deep in her or his mind through internalization of the spoken word.

The joint findings reveal that during the silent period young bilingual learners who cannot be understood through their externalized mother tongue (speech) apply their mother tongue thinking as a means through which to learn (a tool). It is through practicing participation (silent participation) that the emergent bilingual learner mediates her or his own learning, inside and outside of the early-years setting.

Also revealed is the significance of the young bilingual learner being able to negotiate her/his own levels of silent participation through legitimate peripheral participation. The self-mediation of learning through fractionally increasing participation proved to be an agentive strategy of silence formed through "self-assertion."

The findings also emphasize how the role of children as agents in control of their own learning occurred simultaneously with that of learning English as a spoken language. There was no evidence to suggest that English language learning preceded other learning.

Of significance is the finding that through increasing participating in the social practices, the young bilingual learner makes the practices her or his own. The child modifies practices through shared ownership, contribution, and distribution of what is learned.

Drawing upon the sociocultural understandings of Lave and Wenger (1991) and Vygotsky, 1978), the findings make evident that learning takes place within and through participation with others who model the practices to be learnt. Drury (2007) and Bligh (2011) reveal that for emergent young bilingual learners, the silent period presents as a phase of intense learning, through fractionally increasing participation in the practices within the early-years setting.

During the silent period, mother tongue (thought) acts as an agentive and self-mediating tool through which young bilingual learners learn. The findings also reveal that for this small number of children, there is a preferred location for the emergent bilingual learner within the early years—on the periphery of practice. This location (legitimate, peripheral participation) facilitates fractionally increasing participation and offers the emergent bilingual learner a "safe" location (on the periphery of practice) through which to observe, listen, and copy the practices within the early-years setting.

Implications and Limitations of the Study

Although the authors do not set out to provide teachers with pedagogical solutions, deepening understandings of the silent period do present implications for classroom teachers with regard to supporting children in their classrooms who may be experiencing the silent period. However, opening up new understandings of the silent period inevitably challenges teachers' current pedagogical thinking—which inevitably may benefit young bilingual learners such as Suki, Nazma, and Adyta.

Within the limitations of this study, the authors cannot and do not suggest ideas for teachers on how issues surrounding the silent period, learning, and participation might affect upon their role in relation to the facilitation of learning throughout the silent period, nor whether this might signify the need for the teacher's role to include that of a cultural broker. However, knowing that the emergent bilingual learner applies silence as an agentive strategy to mediate her/his own learning through fractionally increasing participation may lead the classroom teacher to question the appropriateness of her or his current teaching strategies.

CONCLUSION

The findings of Drury (2007) and Bligh (2011) present learning through the silent period as fractional, complex, and agentive. The researchers have come together with new sociocultural understandings of how learning is encapsulated, inside and outside of spoken English acquisition. Through fractionally increasing participation, the young child is seen to be agentive in improvising the early-years practices. Sociocultural understandings assist in explaining Nazma's and Adyta's incidental mediation of learning throughout their fractionally increasing participation.

Both researchers drew upon sample vignettes to articulate the scope of the data, which present "snapshots" of Adyta's and Nazma's lived silent experiences. Even without the support of a bilingual teaching assistant, Adyta and Nazma attempted to gain control of their learning through the agentive action of silence. Through silence Adyta and Nazma were able to articulate their

mother tongue thoughts to the monolingual English speaking early-years practitioners. The samples revealed the complex struggle that exists for young bilingual learners when attempting to mediate their negotiation of learning while positioned on the periphery of practice.

Despite the demands put upon Adyta and Nazma, they silently attempted to carve a "path to success in the face of the dominant monolingual discourse." Gee and Green (1998) defined this agentive action as "changing patterns of participation in specific social practices within communities of practice" (p. 147).

Through the combined sociocultural research of Bligh and Drury, the silent period is revealed through the meaning making of two young bilingual learners: Adyta and Nazma.

Adyta and Nazma's learning was defined through:

- The application of silence as an agentive action
- Utilizing silence as a tool for learning
- Fractionally increasing participation
- Self-mediated learning.

Through internalizing the mother tongue as a tool for learning, the two young children negotiated their separate paths to make meaning of the new worlds around them—without the application of spoken English.

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