



Towards a community of practice

*Exploring the experiences of
junior infants in a multigrade class*



Background to the topic

Multigrade class

Two or more grades within the same classroom with one teacher having responsibility for the instruction of all grades in this classroom within a time-tabled period (Little, 2001)

Statistics:

1 teacher: 8 schools

2 teacher: 444 schools

3 teacher: 299 schools

(DES, 2009)

Early Childhood Pedagogy in Primary School

Research Question:

How do junior infant children experience learning in multigrade classrooms?
What are the contextual influences that constrain or facilitate learning?



Research Methods

Mixed Methods Design

- Qualitative Methods

Observation

Running record

Target child study

Teacher, child and parent interviews

- Quantitative Methods

Nationwide questionnaire



Focus of the inquiry

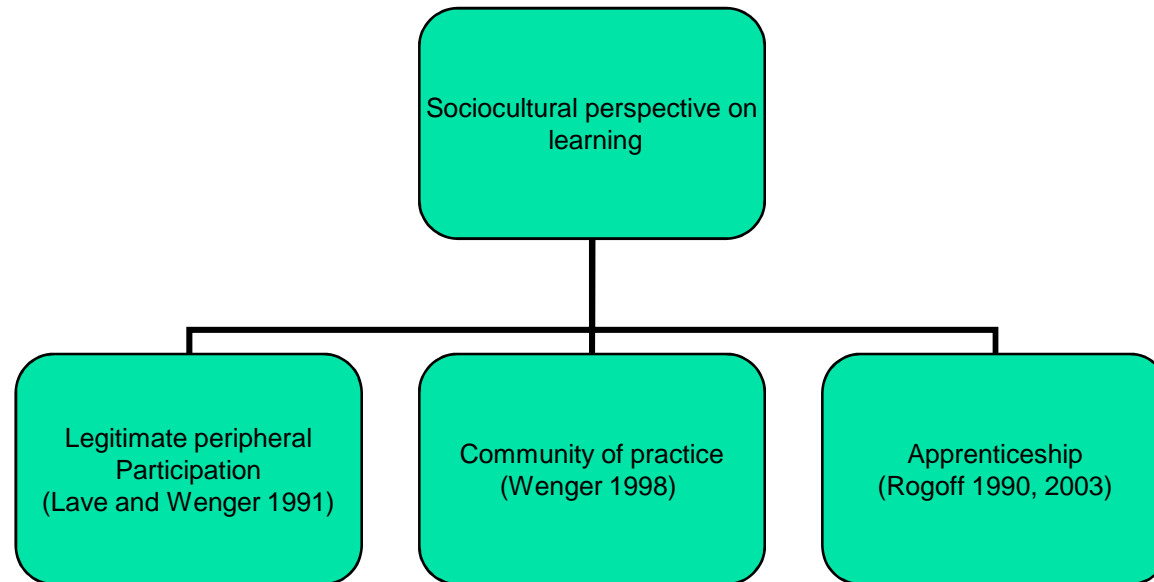
Observation of 42 children in 8 multigrade schools over a period of 8 months in their first year of school

Pedagogy: Play, whole class teaching, cross age tutoring, class teaching, teacher with individual children.

Science lesson in a 2 teacher rural school
12 children age 4 to 9 in a multigrade class
Class Teacher + Support teacher
Gathered around tables in a u shape



Analytical Framework



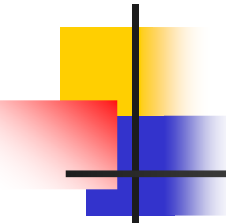
Key Terms



Brokering (Wenger, 1998) 'Brokers make connections across communities of practice, enable co-ordination and alignment between perspectives.' (Wenger, 1998, p. 109)

Sustained shared thinking (Sylva et al. 2004) ... an episode in which two or more individuals work together in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, extend a narrative etc. Both parties must contribute to thinking and it must develop and extend thinking. (Sylva et al., p. 36)

Scaffolding (NAEYC, 1991) Scaffolding The support of adults and more competent peers provides the necessary assistance or scaffold that enables the child to move to the next level of independent functioning. (NAEYC, 1991)



Teacher as 'broker' (Wenger 1998)

- *P: Why didn't the water turn to ice?*
- *O: What happened at 11 Rory?*
- *R: The sun was creeping up.*
- *P: What's the temperature now?*
- *2nd: Can I check the thermometer? It says 1 degree.*
- *P: Only 1 degree?*
- *2nd: Yes, it's up to the line. (Points to the line halfway between 0 and 10 on the thermometer in the photo)*
- *P: Yes, let's look at that. (Teacher shows 1 degree and they count together) Yes, that's five degrees.*



'Sustained shared thinking'

(Sylva et al., 2004)

- *R: How can frost get into houses?*
- *P: That's a good question. What do you think?*
- *2nd: Lots of cold air comes in under the door.*
- *1st: Doesn't happen in Ireland because it's never that cold.*
- *P: Why don't houses freeze on the inside?*
- *Senior Infant: Windows only let some cold air in.*



'Scaffolding'

- *R: If you block some cold coming in you could stop it.*
- *P: What would you do? Build a high wall?*
- *R: If we are in the house you can block the door.*
- *J: How could you get out?*
- *O: Do you remember Jim when you were in the yard at break time, you pointed at something, you said what is that? Sean (the school caretaker) did something. He wrapped the cloth on the pipe.*
- *P: What special word is there for this, when something is wrapped up to keep it warm or cold?*
- *Senior Infant: Insulation!*
- *P and O: Well done!*
- *Senior Infant: It just popped out. (Smiles broadly)*
- *P: It was just in there somewhere and it came out at just the right time. Yes, we can make our houses insulated.*



Conclusion

Key role for teachers in whole class teaching

Openness of community of practice

Transformation in participation