

Creating Spaces for Children’s Agency: ‘I wonder...’ Formulations in Teacher–Child Interactions

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Published online: 21 September 2016
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Abstract Affording children’s agency is an important pedagogical underpinning of a high-quality early childhood program. Yet little is known about how teachers’ interactions create spaces for children’s agency. From the perspectives of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, this paper investigates how teachers and children navigate agency through their collaborative interactions that relate to classroom participation. Drawing on 170 h of video recordings of classroom interactions in nine preschool classrooms, this paper discusses the teachers’ use of ‘I wonder...’ formulations in their interactions with children. In total, there were 17 occasions where the teachers used this formulation to create a space for agency for children to make decisions regarding their participation in classroom experiences. The ‘I wonder...’ formulation is suggested as a strategy for teachers to use when inviting classroom participation at times when children really do have a choice. These findings contribute to understanding children’s agency and point to practical strategies for teachers to afford children agency within the bounds of classroom life. Building and using a repertoire of pedagogic strategies to encourage child

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participation and agency is demonstrable evidence of high-quality teacher–child interactions.

Keywords Children’s agency · Ethnomethodology (EM) · Conversation analysis (CA) · ‘I wonder...’ formulations · Teacher–child interaction

Résumé Permettre l’agentivité des enfants est une importante fondation pédagogique d’un programme de grande qualité destiné à de jeunes enfants. Et pourtant, on connaît peu de choses sur la façon dont les interactions des enseignants créent un espace pour l’agentivité des enfants. Du point de vue de l’ethnométhodologie et de l’analyse conversationnelle, cet article étudie comment les enseignants et les enfants négocient l’agentivité dans leurs interactions collaboratives liées à la participation en classe. Basé sur 170 heures d’enregistrements vidéo d’interactions en classe dans neuf classes maternelles, cet article discute de l’usage de l’expression «Je me demande si...» utilisée par les enseignants dans leurs interactions avec les enfants. Au total, on a pu compter 17 occasions où les enseignants ont utilisé cette expression pour créer un espace pour l’agentivité pour que les enfants prennent des décisions relatives à leur participation à des expériences en classe. La formulation «Je me demande si...» est suggérée aux enseignants comme stratégie à utiliser pour inviter les enfants à participer en classe quand les enfants ont un véritable choix. Ces résultats contribuent à mieux comprendre l’agentivité des enfants et signalent des stratégies pratiques pour que les enseignants permettent l’agentivité des enfants dans les limites de la vie en classe. Construire et utiliser un répertoire de stratégies pédagogiques pour encourager l’agentivité et la participation des enfants sont des preuves démontrables d’interactions enseignant-enfant de grande qualité

Resumen El hecho de promover la autonomía de los niños y las niñas, con respecto a un programa para la niñez temprana es importante desde un punto de vista pedagógico. Sin embargo, poco sabemos con respecto a cómo las interacciones de los maestros crean espacios para dicha autonomía. Desde la perspectiva de la etnometodología y del análisis de la conversación, este estudio investiga cómo los maestros y los niños exploran la autonomía a través de sus interacciones colaborativas que se relacionan a la participación en clase. Basado en 170 horas de grabación de video de interacciones en clases llevadas a cabo en nueve aulas de nivel preescolar, este estudio trata el uso de la fórmula “Me pregunto...” por parte de los maestros y con respecto a sus interacciones con los niños/as. En total, observamos 17 ocasiones en las que los maestros utilizaron esta fórmula para crear un espacio que permita la autonomía de los niños y las niñas, para tomar decisiones con respecto a su participación en experiencias en el aula. La fórmula “Me pregunto...” se sugiere como estrategia para ser utilizada por los maestros al invitar la participación de la clase cuando los niños/as verdaderamente tienen una opción. Estas conclusiones contribuyen a la comprensión de la autonomía de los niños/as y nos guían hacia estrategias prácticas para que los maestros promuevan dicha autonomía dentro de los límites de la vida en el aula. La construcción y el uso de un repertorio de estrategias pedagógicas para alentar la participación del niño y la niña, su

autonomía es evidencia verificable de interacciones de gran calidad entre el maestro y el niño/a

Introduction

Interactions between teachers and children in early childhood classrooms have similar features to adult–child interactions in everyday life. Adults, whether teachers or parents, have differing rights to hold the conversational floor than do children; in that adults typically manage children's speaking turns (Sacks 1995; Speier 1976). For example, a teacher can dismiss a child from whole class story time for chatting instead of listening. There is a 'formality' to classroom talk (McHoul 1978, p. 183). In classrooms, turns of talk often are pre-allocated, as teachers have more authority to talk than students, they select next speakers and, most often, the teachers take up the speaking floor after the student responds (McHoul 1978). Teachers use direct requests, such as directives (e.g. Tom, sit down), to manage students during the opening and closing phases of lessons (Mehan 1979). These interactional resources work to position teachers as 'directors' (McHoul 1978, p. 188) of classrooms.

Teachers orient to specific institutional goals framed by legal, theoretical, policy, and curriculum frameworks that encourage child agency. For example, the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)* (United Nations 1989) affords children legal rights to decision-making on matters that affect them. In turn, the theoretical framing of the new sociology of childhood (James et al. 1998) identified children as a 'minority group' (p. 210) whose social relationships and perspectives are worthy of study in their own right. Children, in turn, are identified as agentic in their own social worlds, competent to use interactional resources to co-construct interactions (cf. Corsaro 2005; Cromdal 2006, 2008; Danby 1997, 2002b, 2009; James et al. 1998; James and Prout 1997; Mayall 2002). Agency is socially distributed (Enfield 2014), produced in social interaction (Esser et al. 2016, p. 12). Agency, then, can be understood as being framed through interactions between teachers and children.

Children's Agency—One Key to 'Best Practice' in Early Childhood Education

International early childhood policy and programs embrace agency as a child's right. Prominent programs such as the *Swedish National Curriculum* (Sandberg and Årlemalm-hagsér 2011), the *Reggio Emilia* approach (Edwards et al. 1998), the *Nature Kindergartens and Forest Schools* (Warden 2012), and the *Te Whā-riki* (New Zealand. Ministry of Education 1996) recommend practices that orient to children's agency. Agentic perspectives are reflected in Australia's early childhood curriculum framework, *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)* (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations for the Council of Australian Governments (DEEWR 2009).

The key Australian early childhood frameworks describe agency as children being afforded decision-making opportunities through which they can influence their worlds (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority 2013; Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations for the Council of Australian Governments (DEEWR 2009). Agency involves (i) giving children opportunities to make decisions and (ii) providing a forum for children's voices to be heard (Gowrie South Australia 2015); the corollary requiring teachers to make curriculum decisions that promote children's agency. Within these policy guidelines, however, little is known about how agency 'gets done' interactionally.

Classroom contexts are typically teacher-led settings, where teachers and children have asymmetrical rights (Speier 1976). A dilemma for teachers is how to align the imperatives of children's agency without replacing the teacher-led order with an untenable child-led one. Teachers play significant roles in affording child agency. Investigating agency in a fourth-grade classroom, Siry et al. (2016) describe a 'dance of agency and structure' (p. 13). Teachers and children orient to a 'locally assembled set of adult-child... social orders' (Theobald and Danby 2016, p. 122). These orders can include knowledge of the classroom rules and the expectations of the teacher (Theobald and Danby 2016). Teachers in early childhood classrooms, in supporting the resolution of peer disputes, can afford child agency through encouraging solution-focussed interactions where teachers 'give' agency and children 'actively "take up" or accept opportunities presented to them' (Mashford-Scott and Church 2011, p. 32). This finding reveals theoretical tensions about children's competence to assert agentic rights. Mashford-Scott and Church (2011) address these tensions by showing that teachers and children 'co-determine the effectiveness of teacher interventions or approaches to resolving disputes' (p. 32) during moment-by-moment turns at talk. Agency is co-constructed through the unfolding sequences of talk, with contributions from both teachers and children. Theobald and Kultti (2012) show how teachers promote children's participation through an allocation of time that enabled children to follow their interests, listen to each other, and negotiate suggested ideas to solve turn-taking issues. In both studies, the teacher afforded agency and the children accepted the opportunity or not (Mashford-Scott and Church 2011; Theobald and Kultti 2012). In this paper, we show how teachers and children, through social interaction, choreograph agency within the bounds of classroom life.

At times, children assert their agency. They use their knowledge of classroom order to assert their agentic rights, and sometimes to manipulate teacher authority (Danby and Baker 1998a, b; Danby 1998; Theobald and Danby 2016). Theobald and Danby (2016) reveal how two girls managed issues with sharing the play resources with others by threatening to involve the teacher. When teachers become involved, however, this 'can be risky for those involved as the teacher's input may weaken their social positions' (Theobald and Danby 2016, p. 122). Given that teachers predominantly locate themselves as 'directors' of classroom interaction (McHoul 1978, p. 188), the notion of teacher control without providing opportunities for agency seems at odds with the practices of agency espoused for early

childhood education from both children's rights and policy perspectives. The task for teachers, then, is how to afford children agency while still maintaining classroom order. One way that teachers can do this is through inviting or requesting children's participation in currently underway experiences. The notion of teachers requesting children's participation is a relatively under-explored area of teacher-child classroom talk. Requests can be made in a variety of ways. The next section discusses request designs in social interaction.

Designing Requests for Children's Participation and Agency

In everyday life, requests are designed to seek cooperation from another (Drew and Couper-Kuhlen 2014; Enfield 2014; Kendrick and Drew 2016; Stivers and Sidnell 2016). Requests do 'asking' first, and the recipient either accepts or declines that request. Requesters ask in direct and indirect ways for objects, services, help, permission, or information (Curl and Drew 2008; Rauniomaa and Keisanen 2012). Direct requests can be made by labelling the object, such as *door*, by implementing a directive, such as *close the door* or by asking using a modal verb, such as *would/could you close the door*, whereas indirect requests are delivered in a softer implicit way, such as *I wonder if you'd mind closing the door* (Curl and Drew 2008). Direct requests expect compliance, whereas indirect requests offer elements of choice.

Request designs relate to the perceived entitlement of the requester (Antaki and Kent 2012; Craven and Potter 2010; Curl and Drew 2008; Heinemann 2006; Lindstrom 2005), and to the ability of the recipient to grant the request (Curl and Drew 2008). Lindstrom (2005) identified entitlement in request designs when she showed how senior citizens used directives to request the home helpers to do something for them to which they felt they were entitled to ask, and interrogatives in situations where they felt that they were not so entitled. Similarly, Heinemann (2006), when investigating the interrogative designs of *will you/can't you* in requests sequences between elderly care recipients and their in home care providers, found that the requests of the elder care recipients oriented to their perceived entitlement to make the request. Heinemann (2006) found that the positive request construction (*will you do x?*) was used when the requester was not as entitled to make the request, whereas the negative construction (*can't you x?*) was used when the requester displayed entitlement to make the request. In a study of parents' requests of their children during family meal time, Craven and Potter (2010) found that parents regularly implemented directives, which revealed their strong sense of entitlement to make requests of their children. In parent-child interactions, directives preference compliance and, when compliance is not achieved, additional devices such as upgrading the directive or using physical support are implemented to accomplish the directive. Along similar lines, Aronsson and Cekaite (2011) found that parents viewed themselves as entitled to hold their children accountable for not fulfilling their 'contract', such as cleaning their room.

Request designs also relate to the contingencies associated with the granting of the request (Curl and Drew 2008). In examining request designs in everyday face-

to-face and telephone conversations between family and friends, and requests made to an out-of-hours doctor service, Curl and Drew (2008) found the design of the request related to the perceived entitlement to make the request and also to the contingencies in relation to the ability/willingness of the recipient being able to grant the request. Requesters who considered themselves entitled to make requests and viewed recipients as being able to fulfil the requests easily used direct requests with modal verbs (would you/could you x). Requesters who considered themselves less entitled to make the request or considered the granting of the request potentially problematic for the recipient used indirect requests.

When indirect request designs were implemented, requesters viewed the request as potentially problematic, in that the request may not be easily granted or it may burden the recipient of the request. Curl and Drew (2008) found that a common way to frame an indirect request was to use the formulation, 'I wonder if...' (p. 130). This design provided an interactional space for the recipient of the request to decline while minimising interactional trouble. This type of request has not been investigated in early childhood classrooms. This paper contributes to understanding how requests via 'I wonder...' formulations work in a new interactional context—the institutional space of the classroom.

In everyday interactions, requests work to 'do asking'. On the other hand, directives work to 'do telling' (Antaki and Kent 2012; Craven and Potter 2010). Directives display absolute entitlement and do not allow for, or consider, contingencies (Craven and Potter 2010). Selected designs orient to how burdensome the request is on the person being requested. For this reason, request designs have the potential to affect the provision of agency (Enfield 2014).

In the research presented in this paper, the relationship between the design of teachers' requests and the affordance of agency for children is explored. Specifically, the analyses examine how teachers use 'I wonder...' formulations to request rather than mandate participation in classroom experiences. This investigation contributes to understanding children's agency through social interaction and points to practical strategies for teachers to use to provide children with opportunities to enact agency.

Methodology

The theoretical and methodological perspectives underpinning the study are ethnomethodology and conversation analysis. An ethnomethodological investigation describes the methods that people use to accomplish their daily life (Heritage 1984). Studying members' methods starts with 'actual instances of talk-in-interaction' (Baker 1997, p. 44). Emphasis is placed on how members accomplish meaning through multimodal actions, including talk and gestures. Conversation analysis focuses on the sequential features of talk, including non-verbal aspects through a fine-grained approach that describes the interactional resources used to co-construct the social interaction on a moment-by-moment basis.

After gaining ethical clearance and informed consent from participants, video recordings captured classroom interactions in nine preschool classrooms with

children aged 3.5–5 years of age. The data set comprised 170 h of video recordings over a three-week period in each classroom. The classrooms were located in a large urban city in Queensland, Australia. Video recordings enabled repeated viewing of the classroom interactions of selected extracts (Heath et al. 2010). The transcriptions identified key features of talk, including pauses and intonation, and non-verbal interactions. [See “Appendix” for an explanation of the Jeffersonian symbols (Jefferson 2004)]. Pseudonyms were used to ensure anonymity.

The focus on teachers' 'I wonder...' formulations that request children's participation in classroom experiences considers what happens in the unfolding talk. The 'I wonder...' formulation was first observed in an extended interaction between an early childhood teacher and two children as they performed a Web search (cf. Houen et al. 2016). Findings revealed that, although used sparingly, the formulation appeared to invite, but not insist, children contribute a response. This finding prompted the current investigation on a collection of 'I wonder...' formulations.

In order to assemble a collection, the first step required the full data set to be scoped for 'I wonder...' formulations. There were 70 occasions of 'I wonder...' in the data set. Verbatim transcripts were made of each 'I wonder...' occurrence. As this study was particularly interested in (i) teacher–child interactions that feature 'I wonder...' formulations, and (ii) the consequences of such formulations as part of the unfolding sequences of talk, instances that did not fit these criteria, such as the wondering not being oriented to by the children, were removed from consideration. A final collection of 41 occasions was formed. We found that 'I wonder...' formulations predominantly were used in two ways. The first way was to request children's participation in a classroom experience ($n = 17$), and the second way was a request for children's knowledge or ideas ($n = 24$).

This paper specifically focuses on the use of 'I wonder...' formulations to request children's participation in classroom experiences. It explores 'I wonder...' formulations and the affordance of children's agency. (A second paper relating to 'I wonder...' formulations as requests for displays of knowledge is forthcoming. It investigates when and how teachers implement 'I wonder...' requests when calling for children's factual knowledge or ideas.) In total, five out of the nine teachers involved in the study used the formulation, showing that it was a strategy that is more prevalent in teacher–child talk than by a single teacher. We asked whether the formulation invited participation in classroom experiences as it did in the extended example of a request for a display of factual knowledge (Houen et al. 2016). We wondered whether teachers might employ 'I wonder...' formulations with children, as a pedagogical strategy to afford children's agency. For example, could 'I wonder...' formulations be used to request participation in learning experiences to offer children a genuine choice. Theoretically, we investigated whether 'I wonder...' formulations could contribute to understanding children's agency, and specifically how request designs influenced children's agentic actions.

Findings: ‘I wonder...’ Requests

In exploring how teachers use ‘I wonder...’ formulations to request children’s participation in a classroom experience, Extract 1 shows the child accepting the teacher’s request immediately. In Extract 2, the child accepts the request with a proviso. Extract 3 shows a child declining the teacher’s request.

The Teacher’s ‘I wonder...’ Request Gains Immediate Acceptance

Extract 1 shows a child accepting immediately a teachers’ use of an ‘I wonder ...’ formulation. This extract commences with the group of children sitting on the carpet in front of the teacher. This daily routine is where the teacher and children come together to reflect on their activities. Prior to the group time, one child, Bill, had made a robot costume using boxes. Below, the teacher facilitates a discussion with Bill about his robot.

Extract 1 (13.08.2012_00074_1:12-1:34)

Participants -

TEA: Teacher
Bil: Bill (Child)

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1  TEA:  can I push a button to turn you=
2  =[onʒ ((mimics pressing button on chds chest))]
3  TAI:  [giggling ]=
4  Bil:  =beep nn nner ((turns body around))
5  TEA:  >oh that one makes< him go round and round_
6  TEA:  (((pretends to press button on chds chest))
7  Bil:  beep [dah ja dah ja dah ja]
8  Bil:  [((moves arms up and down)) ]
9  TEA:  [oh that one moves his a:rms_]
10 Bil:  [((continues arm movement)) ]dah ja
11 TEA:  ((pretends to press button on chds chest))
12 Bil:  [°beep°((points fingers in front of his body))]
13 Chn:  [((giggle )]
14 TEA:  oh it’s a pointing one.
15 Bil:  ((moves pointed finger in circular motion in front of body))
16 TEA:  → I wonder if >this is the< one to turn it off. ((presses child’s
17 chest))
18 Bil:  beep scho. ((bends knees and leans shoulders forward
19 stops moving))
20 TEA:  ohp (.) it did (.) it went ↑back to ↓sleep?
21 TEA:  that’s a great (1.5)[robot ]
22 TEA:  [((takes box off child’s head))]

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The teacher initiates a yes/no question requesting to ‘push a button’ to turn on Bill, wearing the robot costume (1). Yes/no questions work to restrict responses (Raymond 2006) and here Bill preferences a ‘yes’ response. The teacher displays her high sense of entitlement to make the request by selecting the modal ‘can you...’. ‘Can you’ requests are used when the requester has good reason to think that the request is reasonable and easily granted (Curl and Drew 2008). The teacher’s entitlement is further displayed when, during her same turn, she does not wait for a response to her yes/no question, but instead immediately actions

it, by simulating pressing a button on the child's chest to turn on the robot. She progresses the interaction and displays that she can 'turn on' the robot. Bill accepts and actions the teacher's request, saying 'beep' (4), indicating that there are no contingencies associated with the teacher's request. Bill turns around using jilted movements, suggesting his embodied actions took on the role of robot. The teacher provides the whole class with a running commentary of Bill's actions, making the connection between her pressing the 'button' and Bill's robotic actions.

The teacher next pretends to push a different button (6). This also is packaged as a request being made with absolute entitlement, with a high expectation that the request will be actioned. Bill responds with a 'beep', verbalises 'dah ja, dah ja, dah ja' (7) and produces a different robotic action, the action of moving his arms up and down (8). The teacher again provides a running commentary to describe Bill's actions (9). The pattern of the teacher making a request and pressing a button, and the child performing an action, repeats in lines 11–14. The teacher presses Bill's chest (11), Bill responds with a 'beep' and a pointing action (12), and the teacher verbalises the action (14).

A change in the teacher's interactional strategy occurs in line 16 when the teacher commences her turn with an 'I wonder...' formulation. Before pressing Bill's chest, the teacher 'wonders' if the button she is about to press is one that turns off the robot (15). The 'I wonder...' displaces the teacher's displayed entitlement. Instead, she displays that there may be contingencies associated with her request of powering down the robot. One possible contingency is that the child may decide to perform another action rather than powering down. It is not until Bill takes a turn, says 'beep scho' (18) with the embodied action of switching off, that we see he did accept the teacher's request. The teacher acknowledges Bill's acceptance of her request by commenting to the group that the button she pressed was the one to power down (20) the robot. The teacher brings closure to this sequence when she assesses Bill's costume as a 'great robot' (21) and removes the box from his head (22). It was through the interactional resource of 'I wonder...' that the teacher invited closure to the talk about the robot costume, and the child recognised his entitlement to enacting his agency by accepting the invitation.

The Teacher's 'I wonder...' Request Gains Acceptance with a Proviso

Extract 2 occurs when the whole class discuss plans for the day. All children sit on the carpet in front of the teacher and discuss a propeller-driven toy that Jayda has brought in from home. The teacher proposes to Jayda using an 'I wonder...' formulation, to which Jayda responds with a proviso.

Extract 2 (13082012_00066_22-.56)

Participants -

TEA: Teacher
 Jay: Jayda (Child)
 Chn: Children in class
 Ch?: unsure who

1 TEA: >and it spins< ((points to propeller)) and ↑what ↑ha↑↑ppe::ns?
 2 (0.4) when you put it in wa:ter?
 3 Jay: u:m (.) it u:m (2.0) mo::ves alo:ng. ((moves toy along in the
 4 air))
 5 TEA: the propeller (.) makes it move in the water [does ↑↑it?]
 6 Jay: [(nods)]
 7 TEA: .hhh ↑Jayda I was ↑wondering toda::y, (.) whether we'd
 8 ((gazing at whole group)) be able to fill up the ↓baby
 9 ↓\$ba:th\$ (0.8)
 10 Jay: ((smiles, pokes tongue out))
 11 TEA: \$with wa:ter\$(returns gaze to Jayda)
 12 Jay: ((looks down smiling))
 13 Chn: ↑.hhh ↑huh huh
 14 TEA: .hh on the verandah
 15 TEA: [and we could put,] (.)
 16 Jay: [(nods yes)]
 17 TEA: Elmo:: in the::re in the subma↑rine (0.4) .hh a::nd ((takes
 18 toy from Jayda and turns propeller)) (.) people could have a
 19 turn at using the prope↑↑llor to see how the propeller mo:ves
 20 it through the ↑wa↑↑ter?
 21 Ch?: may↑[be]
 22 Chn: [?] [?]
 23 TEA: [would that be ↑al↑↑ri::ght?
 24 Ch?: [?]] (maybe at the end)
 25 Jay: [(slight nod)]
 26 TEA: would that be o[↑kay?] ((gazes at children))
 27 Ch?: ((gazing at TAI)) [he::y] (0.4)
 28 Jay: ((nods))[but they have to be bery careful]
 29 Ch?: I'm [I'm not I'm not having a]turn
 30 because (.) when I used it one day I turned it around and it
 31 mo::ved ((showing movement through the water with hand))
 32 TEA: it does

Jayda shows the group of children a propeller-driven toy that she brought in from home. The teacher uses the 'chaining rule' (Sacks 1995, p. 256), related to questioning to manage Jayda's 'show and tell' (Danby 2002a). The chaining rule means that once a response to the question has been proffered, the questioner gains the right to talk again. This might be to ask another question, provide feedback, summarise, or comment. In effect, the 'chaining rule' works to provide a vehicle for an extended period of talk (Sacks 1995). Here, the teacher questions Jayda about what happens when she puts the toy in the water, and names the technical term for propeller (5). Next, the teacher uses an 'I am wondering ...' formulation to make a request relating to a classroom activity that requires using Jayda's toy (7).

The teacher addresses Jayda by name and wonders 'whether ...people could have a turn using the propeller to see how it moves through the water (7–8, 12–15, and

17–20). Here, the teacher's 'I wonder...' formulation orients to possible contingencies associated with the request. Her animated voice presents the experience as exciting and may work to convince Jayda to accept the teacher's invitation. Ultimately, however, the decision rests with Jayda. The request using 'I am wondering...' affords agentic rights to Jayda and it is well within her rights to accept or to decline the request. During this turn, we see Jayda smile and poke her tongue out (10), suggesting that she sees the humour in the teacher's suggestion. While we see Jayda's minimal acceptance (16), this acceptance was in overlap with the teacher's turn in line 15 and is not oriented to by the teacher.

Perhaps aimed at convincing Jayda, the teacher clarifies the request in an extended sequence of talk (17–20). She provides a justification concerning the request; 'that people could have a turn at using the propeller to see how the propeller moves it through the water'. While other children respond (21), the teacher gazes at Jayda to seek clarification, asking whether 'that would be alright' (23). Jayda once again is charged with accepting or declining the request. In her next turn, Jayda minimally accepts with a slight head nod (25). Not oriented to by the teacher as it overlaps with talk from others, the teacher again calls for acceptance (26). Jayda enacts her agentic rights when she accepts with a condition (28). This proviso is not oriented to by the teacher and, for this reason, it can be assumed that Jayda's proviso is established. Jayda's response is in overlap with another child who has treated the teacher's request as an invitation issued to the whole class. This other child declines and justifies her decision (lines 29–32). Her reasons about already having prior experience and knowledge about how the propeller moves seem to be in direct response to the teacher's justification relating to reasons why Jayda should accept the request, which was that the other children can see, and possibly learn about, how the propeller moves in water.

In this extract, the teacher used an 'I wonder...' formulation to request Jayda share her toy so that it can be used in a classroom experience. While the teacher's request to use the toy was issued twice, the analysis reveals that Jayda's hesitation in accepting was occurring at the same time as overlaps in the talk. The overlaps interfered with Jayda's acceptance being noticed by the teacher. The 'I wonder...' formulation positioned the child with an opportunity for agentic decision-making, which she accepted along with a condition of acceptance. Given such a request, it is not surprising that the teacher accepted the condition of use proposed by the child. This example of agency shows social negotiation and distribution through the unfolding sequences of talk. In the next extract, the teacher's request does not get 'taken up'.

The Teacher's 'I wonder...' Request Does not get Taken Up

Extract 3 occurs during a whole class session when children first arrive in the classroom. Just prior, the teacher had facilitated a discussion about artists that linked 'real' artists with current happenings in the classroom. The teacher uses yes/no questions to remind children that artists do not finish their paintings in one session. She connects this discussion to the current context in which she focuses on paintings



Fig. 1 Lachlan's painting that is the focus of a request

that the children had done during the previous day. With a particular focus on one painting held up to show the whole class (see Fig. 1), the teacher uses an 'I wonder...' formulation to request the child add additional colours to his painting, to which the child declines.

Extract 3 (20121026092222_16.59-17.45)

Participants -

TEA: Teacher
 Lac: Lachlan (Child)
 Chn: group of children in unison

18 TEA: so:::, (0.4) >do you< remember we (0.4) talked about our
 19 work in progress?
 20 Chn: ye::s,
 21 TEA: Lachlan (.) I wonder if today (.) if you took this one
 22 back to the easel, (0.4) >↑↑do ↑↑↑you ↑↑think ↑↑you
 23 ↑↑↑could?< (0.6) find some more exciting colours to add
 24 to this one and do a work in pro↑↑gress?
 25 Lac: mm:::.,,
 26 TEA: add some ↑↑more?
 27 (0.4)
 28 Lac: well the picture↑↑↑re (0.4) already all do:::n[e,]
 29 TEA: [it] is=
 30 =↑a:ll ↑↑done?
 31 Lac: mm::

The teacher begins by re-orienting the children to a previous discussion regarding artists' work in progress (18–19). She holds up Lachlan's painting, which has a limited amount of colour on it (see Fig. 1). Using an 'I wonder ...' formulation, the teacher requests Lachlan add some more exciting colours to it (21–24). Rather than

issuing a directive for Lachlan to add more colours, which Lachlan could have refused to do, the teacher frames the 'I wonder ...' formulation within the context of possible contingencies. Such contingencies include that the painting is finished, or that he might not want to add additional colours. Given teachers' authority within teacher-child interactions, it would be well possible that the teacher could dictate classroom experiences, but the 'I wonder...' formulation works to provide Lachlan with agentic rights to decline the request. He does this, not with an outright rejection but through a justification for why he will not add more paint.

After the teacher's 'wondering', Lachlan delays his response with a non-committal response (25). A delayed response suggests thinking time to consider the teacher's request, as declinations are not the preferred response (Kendrick and Drew 2016). While we cannot specify Lachlan's thoughts, his delay reveals the request is problematic to him; that he might not be completely on board with adding more colours to his painting. Requests when they are unproblematic are accepted quickly and without hesitation (Stivers and Sidnell 2016). The teacher does additional interactional work to increase the likelihood of her request being accepted. She offers an entreaty (26) that is delivered with an upward intonation to seek Lachlan's cooperation. He alerts the teacher to a possible rejection through his talk that commences with 'well' (28). A turn beginning with 'well' can indicate 'incipient disaffiliation, rejection, misalignment, and the like' (Schegloff and Lerner 2009, p. 98). He declines the teacher's request through a justification that his painting is already finished (28). Declinations often come with justifications as to why the request is not going to be fulfilled (Enfield 2014). The teacher calls for confirmation that the picture is 'all done' (29) through her assertion with rising intonation, and Lachlan responds with a minimal 'mm::' (31). Lachlan's declination is shown to be accepted by the teacher as she changes the conversational topic and asks him to put the painting on the shelf so that it could be hung in the kindergarten's art gallery.

Discussion

This investigation of 'I wonder...' formulations in teacher-child talk shows how this formulation can work in school settings. The teachers utilised the formulation based on contingencies associated with fulfilling the requests. In Extract 1, the teacher used the 'I wonder...' formulation to suggest powering down of the robot. This request could have been declined by the child, and he could have enacted a different action (i.e. not powering down). The construction of the request was such that the child's agency was enacted. In Extracts 2 and 3, the ownership of the resource is the target of the request. Ownership of the toy (Extract 2) and ownership of the painting (Extract 3) afforded the children agentic rights in relation to their responses. Instead of declining, the child in Extract 2 set parameters for others when using her toy, 'but they have to be very careful' (28). In Extract 3, the child declined the teacher's request even though the teacher made repeated requests for the addition of coloured paint.

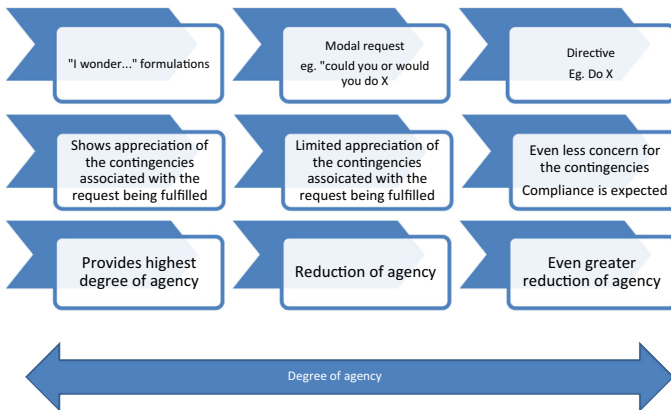


Fig. 2 Request designs and the affordance of agency

Drawing on request formulations (Antaki and Kent 2012; Craven and Potter 2010), and this study, Fig. 2 represents a spectrum of agency afforded to the recipient through request designs.

Our findings extend the idea of teachers enabling child agency by highlighting the crucial role of the teachers' third turn at talk (Lee 2007) in accepting children's decisions when they do enact agency. We have shown that agency is enacted through the moment-by-moment interactions of teachers and children, and therefore is a co-constructed exchange. Although teachers are highly entitled to make requests of children, the teachers' formulations of 'I wonder...' made possible children's responses to be in agreement, moderated or declined. In each extract, the acceptance or declination of the request was afforded to the student and compliance was not mandated by the teacher. In so doing, the teachers' requests were treated as suggestions of possible future experiences that were acceptable, negotiable, or rejectable. In this way, our findings both align with and build onto assertions made by Mashford-Scott and Church (2011) and Theobald and Kultti (2012) in relation to teachers enabling child agency.

Conclusions

In the extracts discussed in this paper, the teacher's interactional strategies used the same 'I wonder' formulation, but each child had a different response. Knowledge about request designs can inform teachers about intentionally selecting request designs to afford agency, at times when children really do have a choice. Our findings showed that the 'I wonder...' formulation was a teacher-led strategy that afforded agency, for children to decide as to whether to fulfil the teacher's request or not. 'I wonder...' formulations are suggested as an interactional strategy that teachers could draw upon to request participation in classroom experiences in ways that afford children's agency. Building and using a repertoire of pedagogic

strategies to encourage child participation, and agency is demonstrable evidence of high-quality teacher–child interactions.

Acknowledgments The study was funded by the Australian Research Council (DP110104227), with ethics approval by Queensland University of Technology's University Human Research Ethics Committee (Reference No.: 1100001480) and Charles Sturt University's Research Ethics Office (Reference No.: 2012/40). We thank the teachers, children, and families of the Crèche and Kindergarten Association for their participation in this study.

Appendix: Transcript Notation

Transcription Notation

The transcription system used to transcribe conversational data was developed by Gail Jefferson (2004). The following notational features were used in the transcripts presented in this chapter. The following punctuation marks depict the characteristics of speech production, not the conventions of grammar.

bu-u-	Hyphens mark a cut-off of the preceding sound.
[A left bracket indicates the overlap onset
]	A right bracket indicates where the overlapped speech ends
=	No break or gap between turns
(0.3)	Number in second and tenths of a second indicates the length of an interval
(.)	Brief interval (<0.2) within or between utterances
so::rry	Colon represents a sound stretch of immediately prior sound
↑	Shifts into high pitch
↓	Shifts into low pitch
hey?	A question mark indicates a rising intonation
dog¿	A Spanish question mark indicates a substantial rise that ends up in the mid to mid-high end of the speaker's range
here,	A comma indicates a continuing intonation with a slight rise
did.	A full stop indicates falling, final intonation
<u>boots</u>	Underline indicates stress or emphasis via pitch or amplitude.
°soft°	Softer, quieter sounds
.>quick<	Talk is speeded up
<slow>	Talk is slowed down
.hhh	A dot prior to h indicates an in-breath
hhh	Indicates an out-breath
()	The talk is not audible
(house)	Transcriber's best guess for the talk
together!	An exclamation mark indicates an animated tone
dr-dirt	A single dash indicates a noticeable cut-off of the prior word or sound
((walking))	Annotation of non-verbal activity

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