

## **OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING ESL THROUGH INTERACTIONS WITH PEERS IN A NEW ENTRANTS CLASS**

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This article investigates opportunities for learning English as a second language (ESL) available to a five-year-old boy from Western Samoa through interactions with his English-speaking peers during a one-hour class session in a new entrants classroom.

The case study reported here is part of a larger collaborative project which uses a microethnographic data collection process developed by Alton-Lee and Nuthall (1992) in their classroom research methodology. It involves video, audio and observational monitoring of both individual and class activity and language use during a classroom unit of study. There are wall-mounted video cameras in the classroom, and a hand-held video camera. During data collection, the teacher wears an individual transmission microphone. All children wear identical objects that look like microphones, but only four of them contain functioning individual transmission microphones. As far as the children know, all of them are being recorded. The teacher knows that only four children are being recorded, but she does not know which four. The audio recordings from the individual transmission microphones allow for a detailed description and analysis of interactions between the wearers and other members of the class. Observers track the four focus children within the class activity.

Data for the current project were collected during a social studies curriculum unit in a new entrants class of five-year-old school beginners. There were 18 children in the class, 8 girls and 10 boys. Having a new member of the class was not unusual for them, because of New Zealand's policy of continuous entry into new entrants classes. What was unusual for them was that Fa'afetai was a Samoan speaker and a beginner at learning English as a second language. It was also new for the teacher, Ms Nikora. She is an experienced teacher, but she had never before had an ESL beginner join her class. Ms Nikora is Maori, and almost half the children in the class are Maori, but for all of them English is their main language of use, and some speak little or no Maori. There is one other Samoan child in the class, apart from Fa'afetai. However, she speaks English but not Samoan. The rest of the children are Pakeha. The ethnicities recorded here are those entered by the children's parents in the school's enrolment records.

At the time of the study, Fa'afetai was in the early stages of learning English as a second language. He had been at the school for about six weeks. At least three languages were in use in Fa'afetai's home among members of his extended family: Samoan, Niuean and

English. English was the main medium of instruction at school, and Maori was used incidentally in his class.

The social studies curriculum unit was entitled "Christmas in hospital", designed by Ms Nikora. In the diverse community she was working in, she wanted to focus on what Christmas means to different people and different ways that people experience it. One area of difference she wanted to address was physical disability, which was relevant and real to the children because they all knew Zack, a Year 3 boy at the school who has spina bifida and uses a wheelchair. Ms Nikora also found a teaching resource (Smythe, 1996) which connected the two issues, a set of pictures and accompanying story about a boy called Tyler who had spina bifida and had to spend a Christmas in hospital. Through the unit of study, she connected Tyler's story, Zack's experience, the experience of classroom visitors from community health institutions, the children's personal experiences of hospitals, and the children's personal experiences of Christmas.

Ms Nikora chose to work on the "Christmas in hospital" unit intensively with her class over three school days towards the end of the school year. Each day the class worked on the unit for three sessions of about an hour, for a total of approximately nine class hours. The data presented here come from the first one hour session of the unit.

Data from in-depth interviews with Ms Nikora show that she believed Fa'afetai's peers were supporting his learning in class through their interactions with him. This belief is consistent with a view of learning informed by sociohistorical theories of development arising from the work of Vygotsky (1978) in which learning is seen as a social process that occurs through joint activity.

I have drawn on the work of the Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group (Judith Green, Carol Dixon and colleagues, see, for example, Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group 1992a, 1992b; Green & Dixon, 1993; Tuyay et al, 1995; Crawford et al, 1997) to analyse the data from an ethnographic perspective. The Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group is "concerned with understanding how everyday life in classrooms is constructed by members through their interactions, verbal and other, and how these constructions influence what students have opportunities to access, accomplish, and thus, "learn" in schools" (Green & Dixon, 1993, p.231).

The purpose of the case study reported here is to investigate what opportunities for learning English as a second language were made available to Fa'afetai through interactions with his English-speaking peers during this one hour of class time.

### **Timeline as frame for peer interactions**

The first step in the analysis of data was to take an ethnographic perspective on understanding what was happening in the class during the first session of the "Christmas in

hospital” unit of study. A timeline was constructed of the phases of whole class activity for the session (see Figure 1).

| Time    | Whole class phases   | Time     | Whole class phases   |
|---------|--|----------|--|
| 9.30 am | Transition: •clap pattern •explain next activity •get a partner  | 10.03 am | Transition: •explain what to do if you have finished   |
| 9.31    | •give out jigsaw puzzles<br><b>With a partner, put jigsaw puzzle together (father christmas)</b>                                       |          | <b>Draw in thinking books or read in the library corner</b>  |
| 9.32    | ↓  | 10.04    | ↓  |
| 9.33    | ↓  | 10.05    | ↓  |
| 9.34    | ↓  | 10.06    | ↓  |
| 9.35    | Transition: •clap pattern<br>•put puzzle away •sit in a circle   | 10.07    | <b>Draw in thinking books or read in the library corner or play with doctors kits</b>                |
| 9.36    | ↓  | 10.08    | ↓  |
| 9.37    | •explain next activity<br><b>Go round circle and ask what our study might be about</b>   | 10.09    | ↓  |
| 9.38    | ↓  | 10.10    | ↓  |
| 9.39    | ↓  | 10.11    | <b>Play with doctors kits</b>  |
| 9.40    | Transition:<br>•stand up •explain next activity<br><b>Look at what you thought our study might be about</b>                            | 10.12    | ↓  |
| 9.41    | Transition: •one clap •stretch<br>•sit down •explain next activity   | 10.13    | Transition:<br>•several claps + walk to mat area<br>•put away materials •sit on the mat              |
| 9.42    | <b>Put words (about hospital) on the board that are very important to a young boy's life</b>   | 10.14    | ↓  |
| 9.43    | ↓  | 10.15    | ↓  |
| 9.44    | Transition: •show picture of Tyler •get a partner •explain next activity   | 10.16    | •explain next activity<br><b>Read a story (“Going to the hospital” picture book)</b>                 |
| 9.45    | <b>With a partner, talk about what is happening in picture (Boy asleep in bed)</b>   | 10.17    | ↓  |
| 9.46    | Transition: •one clap<br>•class moves closer to MsN<br><b>Tell what is happening in picture</b>  | 10.18    | ↓  |
| 9.47    | Transition: •explain next activity<br>•work in two groups<br><b>Talk about what's happened to us when we have gone to the hospital</b> | 10.19    | ↓  |
| 9.48    | ↓  | 10.20    | ↓  |
| 9.49    | ↓  | 10.21    | ↓  |
| 9.50    | ↓  | 10.22    | Transition: •ask Huhana to tell about what happened when she went into the hospital •sit in a circle |
| 9.51    | ↓  | 10.23    | <b>Huhana tells about what happened when she went into the hospital</b>                              |
| 9.52    | Transition: •one clap •look at MsN<br>•explain next activity   | 10.24    | ↓  |
| 9.53    | •give out thinking books<br>•move to tables  | 10.25    | ↓  |
| 9.54    | <b>Draw a picture in your thinking book about being in hospital as a patient or visitor</b>  | 10.26    | End session:<br>•explain what happens after morning tea •take off mics<br><b>END OF VIDEOTAPE</b>    |
| 9.55    | ↓  |          |  |
| 9.56    | ↓  |          |  |
| 9.57    | ↓  |          |  |
| 9.58    | ↓  |          |  |
| 9.59    | ↓  |          |  |
| 10.00   | ↓  |          |  |
| 10.01   | ↓  |          |  |
| 10.02   | ↓  |          |  |

Figure 1: Timeline for “Christmas in hospital” unit of study, Session 1

The timeline represents how the participants constructed the session through what they said and what they did in that period of time. As far as possible, participants' words recorded in the video, audio and observational data are used to describe the phases of activity in the timeline. The minute-by-minute representation of the phases of whole class activity provides a frame to situate Fa'afetai's interactions with his peers, so we can understand where these interactions fitted into the ongoing life of the class. The times represented in the lefthand column are actual times (e.g. 9.30am) at which the phases occurred in the class. When I refer to times in my discussion of interactions, the references are to times in the session timeline. Arrows in the timeline indicate ongoing activity, boldface indicates pedagogical phases of activity, in most cases designed and planned by the teacher, and non-boldface indicates transition phases which link one pedagogical phase to the next.

### **Use of spoken English in Fa'afetai-peer interactions**

I will discuss every instance of the use of spoken English between Fa'afetai and his peers that was captured by our videotapes and microphones in the first session of the "Christmas in hospital" unit of study. There is very little spoken English used by his peers in interactions with Fa'afetai in this period. However, it is important to note that this is not a silent classroom. There is a lot of talk between peers, and between teacher and children, including Fa'afetai, but not very much talk between Fa'afetai and his peers.

In the transcripts of these interactions (Figures 2 to 7), the first column shows time, and links with the times shown in the session timeline (Figure 1). The second column shows speaker and who the speaker appears to be talking to, e.g. F/W indicates that Fa'afetai is speaking and he appears to be addressing William, F/? indicates that Fa'afetai is speaking and it is not clear who he is addressing. The third column shows the speakers' utterances, i.e. the words they said. The fourth column describes what the participants were doing during the interaction.

### **Jigsaw puzzle**

This episode occurs at 9.31am which is at the beginning of the session (see Figure 2 for transcript, and Figure 1 for where it fits within the session as a whole).

Ms Nikora (MsN) has made a set of identical jigsaw puzzles. The puzzle is a picture of Father Christmas sitting in a chair with some big gift boxes beside him, and a Christmas tree behind him. Each puzzle is on a large sheet of paper that has been cut into five pieces. The puzzles are being shared between pairs of children. Fa'afetai's partner is William (W). Fa'afetai (F) is sitting on the floor next to William, looking at the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle. Next to Fa'afetai and William are Kimberly (K) and her partner Brian (B) working on their jigsaw puzzle.



|         |       |  |  |
|---------|-------|--|--|
| 9.31.45 | F/W   | oo<br>mee kismas<br>(unclear)              | F is looking at puzzle pieces and rocking forwards and backwards, looks around room, moves from one side of W to other   |
| 9.32.00 | F/W   | kismas tree<br>kismas tree                 |  |
| 9.32.15 | F/W   | ahhhh<br>mee kismas                        | F tries to take a piece of puzzle away from W, W offers F a different piece of puzzle but F doesn't take it, F tries to get the piece he wants, W won't give it to him, F hits W twice |
|         | F/W   | oo aa kismas                               | F puts out his hand to W, W gives him a different piece again, F throws it on floor, W picks it up and F tries to grab the piece he wants  |
| 9.32.30 | W/F   | help me<br>help me make it                 | F and W have tug of war over piece, F gets it  |
|         | F/W   | ohhh ai                                    | F turns his back on W and looks at K and B's work  |
|         | F/?   | ohhh<br>kismas<br>aa kismas                |  |
| 9.32.45 |       |  | W tries to get piece of puzzle back  |
|         | K/F   | Fa'afetai                                  | F does not respond to K, F gives W a different piece, they work on puzzle separately   |
|         | F/?   | aa kismas                                  |  |
| 9.33.00 | F/W   | kismas tree<br>ia kismas<br>kismas         | F picks up piece of puzzle, turns to W and points to it, W grabs piece and adds it to puzzle   |
|         | W/K   | now we got it right Kimberly               |  |
|         | K/W   | I know<br>we've got it right too<br>look   |  |
| 9.33.15 |       |  | F watches W put pieces together  |
|         | F/W   | oh kismas                                  |  |
|         | F/W   | kismas tree                                | F turns back to his pieces, picks up another piece and shows W, W takes it and adds it to the puzzle   |
| 9.33.30 | F/W   | aa kismas<br>kismas tree<br>oh kismas tree |  |
|         | K/MsN | it's about father christmas                |  |
|         | F/?   | about kismas<br>about kismas<br>oh yeah    | F turns to K, B and MsN  |

Figure 2: Transcript of "jigsaw puzzle" episode

Fa'afetai appears to be focusing on and commenting on what he can see on the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle. We have evidence from an interview with Fa'afetai before the unit of study began that he already knew the terms "Christmas" and "Christmas tree". In this episode, he is using variations on his word "kismas". It seems that he sounds angry because he wants a piece of the jigsaw puzzle, one particular piece which interests him. William, on the other hand, is focusing on solving the puzzle. He is not trying to keep all

the pieces to himself, but he and Fa'afetai both want the same piece. Throughout the episode, and the tussle over the piece, William's only comment to Fa'afetai is a plea for Fa'afetai to help him. William does not take up Fa'afetai's naming of what he can see on the pieces. So from William, Fa'afetai has an opportunity to hear how to express in English a plea for help, but no opportunity to hear English related to the content of the activity. William's utterance is about the process of doing this part of the "Christmas in hospital" study.

At that point, Fa'afetai turns away from William and looks at what Kimberly and Brian are doing next to him. Now he sounds interested, rather than angry. It seems likely that what he sees of their work changes his view of the purpose of the partner activity. When he turns back to William, his actions change a little. He is still trying to keep the piece of puzzle he wants, but he is also working on the puzzle.

A little later in the episode, Fa'afetai still appears to be trying to draw William's attention to what he can see on a piece of the puzzle. He picks up the piece, turns to William, and points to the piece of puzzle, saying "kismas tree, ia kismas, kismas". William's focus is still on solving the puzzle. He does not take up Fa'afetai's comment. Instead he tells the girl next to him, "now we got it right Kimberly".

At the end of the episode, Fa'afetai's follow-up when Kimberly said "it's about Father Christmas" to Ms Nikora suggests that he has been attending to language used by others nearby, and his "oh yeah" may be an indication that he was pleased to get some confirmation of what he had been saying all along.

### Sit in a circle

This episode occurs at 9.35am, just after the "jigsaw puzzle" phase (see Figure 3 for transcript, and Figure 1 for where it fits within the session as a whole).

|         |           |   |   |
|---------|-----------|---|---|
| 9.35.30 | MsN/class | ok come and sit back in a circle please |   |
|         | H/MsN     | I was already in a circle               | F is playing with his microphone            |
|         | F/W       | I in a circle eh                        |   |
| 9.35.45 |           |   | W and F hold hands as they move into circle |

**Figure 3: Transcript of "sit in a circle" episode**

Again, in this example, one of Fa'afetai's classmates, Huhana (H), was not actually speaking to him, but it seems likely that Fa'afetai was attending to English used in his vicinity, either by Huhana or by the teacher in her instruction to the class, or both, and picking up on it in his own interaction with William where he also talked about being in a circle. All of them are talking about a class routine - sitting in a circle in readiness for a class activity.

**Not responding to a peer**

This episode begins at 9.36am during the same “transition” phase as the “sit in a circle” episode discussed above. In this “transition” phase, the children are packing up their jigsaw puzzles and moving into a circle (see Figure 4 for transcript, and Figure 1 for where it fits within the session as a whole). Fa’afetai is in the mat area and he is playing with his microphone. He is near Ms Nikora and Huhana is behind him.

|         |     |                                 |   |
|---------|-----|---------------------------------|---|
| 9.36.00 | H/F | Fa’afetai<br>move out Fa’afetai | H taps F on his back                                      |
| 9.36.15 | H/F | Fa’afetai<br>hey                |   |
| 9.36.30 | H/F | Fa’afetai<br>Fa’afetai          | H taps floor as she says F’s name, she looks at MsN       |
| 9.36.45 | H/F | Fa’afetai                       |   |
| 9.37.00 |     |                                 | H moves next to F   |
| 9.37.15 |     |                                 | F looks at H, then at MsN                                 |
| 9.37.45 |     |                                 | H looks at F, then at MsN                                 |
| 9.38.00 |     |                                 | F looks at H, H takes F’s hand and pulls it into her lap. |

**Figure 4: Transcript of “not responding to a peer” episode**

Huhana has demonstrated for Fa’afetai several verbal ways of attempting to attract someone’s attention (calling his name, giving him an instruction, and saying “hey”), accompanied by some nonverbal ways (tapping on his back, tapping on the floor). We do not know whether Fa’afetai noticed them, but we do know that he did not respond. Huhana followed those unsuccessful attempts with a successful nonverbal attempt, sitting next to him and holding his hand. Notice that as soon as she moved next to him, he looked at her. It may be that he responds to proximity, rather than to other attention-getting strategies.

**Sticker**

This episode occurs at 9.41am, at the end of the “Look at what you thought our study might be about” phase (see Figure 5 for transcript, and Figure 1 for where it fits within the session as a whole). Ms Nikora has asked the children to “stretch up” and Fa’afetai and Huhana drop hands while stretching. When they sit down again as this transcript begins, Fa’afetai takes Huhana’s hand. While Ms Nikora is explaining the next activity, a discussion of some words related to hospitals that she will put on the display board, and starting the activity, the interaction in Figure 5 takes place between Fa’afetai and Huhana. Note that “tama” is Maori and Samoan for “boy”.

|         |           |  |   |
|---------|-----------|--|---|
| 9.41.30 |           |  | F sits down, takes H's hand, takes a sticker out of his pocket and puts it on his t-shirt, H looks at the sticker |
|         | H/F       | Fa'afetai<br>good boy<br>good tama<br>good tama  |   |
| 9.41.45 | H/F       | good tama<br>sticker<br>sticker  | F takes the sticker off his t-shirt and looks at it, shows it to H, H looks at the sticker                        |
|         | F/H       | sticker<br>sticker<br>dog<br>sticker<br>dog  |   |
| 9.42.00 |           |  | H looks at F, F passes her the sticker, H smells it and passes it back, F sticks it on his nose                   |
|         | F/H       | oh sticky  | F puts the sticker on H's nose, H takes it, puts it back on F's t-shirt   |
|         | H/F       | put it on (whisper)  | F passes the sticker back to H, H sticks it on her forehead   |
| 9.42.15 | MsN/class | ok<br>can you see Ellis and William<br>and Fa'afetai<br>you might have to shift<br>around so that you can see<br>does anyone know what this<br>word might be |   |

**Figure 5: Transcript of “sticker” episode**

This interaction differs from the others we have looked at so far in that Huhana appeared to be making a direct effort to teach Fa'afetai an English word “sticker” by repeating it to him. Fa'afetai took up the word and elaborated on it. The interaction also differs in that it did not connect with the phases of activity that the class was engaged in at the time. It began during a transition phase while Ms Nikora was explaining the next activity, and continued as the “words about hospital” phase began. Ms Nikora signalled her awareness of that by directly addressing Fa'afetai and others near him, which in effect ended the episode and brought the children back into the current class phase.

#### **Barry's offer of help**

This episode occurs at 9.47am, at the end of the “Tell what is happening in the picture” phase of the session, as the class is moving into a transition phase (see Figure 6 for transcript, and Figure 1 for where it fits within the session as a whole). Fa'afetai is playing with his microphone and undoes its strap.



|         |      |                      |   |
|---------|------|----------------------|---|
| 9.47.00 |      |                      | W helps F put his microphone back around his neck, F does it up then undoes it                |
| 9.47.15 |      |                      | F pulls the microphone strap, the microphone fall on the floor, F picks it up and looks at it |
|         | Ba/F | I'll do it Fa'afetai | W shakes his head and moves in closer to F  |

**Figure 6: Transcript of "Barry's offer of help" episode**

Barry (Ba) has provided Fa'afetai with an opportunity to hear how an offer of help can be expressed in English. William had earlier provided similar assistance to Fa'afetai without comment. On this occasion, William shut down any opportunity for us to see whether Fa'afetai understood Barry's offer or how he would respond to it. What William appears to be signalling to Fa'afetai is that it matters not just whether or not you need or want help, but who is offering it and who you should interact with.

### Monique says 'don't'

This episode occurs at 10.19am, towards the end of the session while Ms Nikora is reading a story to the class (see Figure 7 for transcript, and Figure 1 for where it fits within the session as a whole).

|          |       |   |  |
|----------|-------|---|--|
| 10.18.30 |       |   | F shows his thumb to M   |
| 10.18.45 |       |   | F and M look closely at F's thumb, F moves his hand quickly towards M's face |
|          | M/F   | don't Fa'afetai                                     | M pulls back from F  |
| 10.19.00 | MsN/F | Fa'afetai/come over here (quietly)                  | MsN moves off her chair and moves F to a new position                        |
| 10.19.15 |       |   | F moves back by M, M pushes against F's arm, F plays with M's shoe           |
| 10.19.30 |       |   | F shows M something he has taken from her shoe                               |
|          | M/F   | don't Fa'afetai                                     | M pulls back from F  |
|          |       |   | F sits back and looks at his hands   |
| 10.19.45 | MsN/F | Fa'afetai can you see<br>can you see Ben on the bed | MsN points to Ben on the bed, F looks up                                     |

**Figure 7: Transcript of "Monique says 'don't'" episode**

In this episode, Fa'afetai had two opportunities to hear how a direction to stop doing something can be expressed in English: Monique (M) said "don't Fa'afetai" twice. In both cases Ms Nikora intervened, first by asking Fa'afetai to move, and second by redirecting his attention by asking him a question about a picture in the book. In this second case, Fa'afetai did stop, at least for the moment, before Ms Nikora intervened, which suggests that he understood what Monique was trying to communicate to him.

### **Extensive nonverbal interaction with peers**

We can see from the above data that, in this one hour of class time, if Fa'afetai was relying on interactions with his peers as a site for learning spoken English, he had few opportunities for such learning, and that the few opportunities he did have were not related to the content of the curriculum unit the class was studying.

While there may not have been much spoken English used in Fa'afetai's interactions with his peers, there is evidence of extensive nonverbal interaction, so extensive in fact that it is only possible here to develop just a few examples of the many nonverbal interactions between Fa'afetai and his peers to demonstrate their nature and context. These episodes will be presented as brief narratives rather than as transcripts since there is no spoken language to record.

#### **Fa'afetai does not wish to be interrupted**

This episode occurs at 10.05am, during a phase of activity where children are either drawing in their "thinking books" or reading books from the library corner. Fa'afetai is sitting at a table reading a picture book. David approaches the table next to Fa'afetai and taps on Fa'afetai's open book with the book he is holding. Fa'afetai makes a hitting movement towards David who backs off quickly and out of camera range.

I do not know what David was intending by what he did with his book, but it seems that Fa'afetai successfully communicated to David that he did not want him to do it, but he communicated it nonverbally. We have already seen that in a similar situation a little later in the morning, Monique communicated a similar message to Fa'afetai verbally by saying "don't Fa'afetai".

#### **Fa'afetai does not wish to share**

This episode occurs at 10.11am during the "play with doctors kits" class phase of activity. Fa'afetai is sitting at a table next to William playing with objects from a toy doctors kit. Campbell is standing on the other side of William. Fa'afetai puts one object down and picks up another. Campbell reaches across the table and picks up the object Fa'afetai put down. Fa'afetai looks up at Campbell, half stands up and makes an "ohhh" noise in an angry tone. Campbell puts the object down and pulls back quickly. Fa'afetai stands right up, reaches across the table and hits Campbell. Ms Nikora intervenes briefly.

In this instance, Fa'afetai had made his point orally ("ohhh" with a fall-rise intonation), though not in words, and Campbell had backed off, but Fa'afetai still followed up physically.

#### **Fa'afetai communicates his plan to William**

This episode occurs at 10.13am, still in the "play with doctors kits" class phase of activity. Fa'afetai is still sitting at the table next to William playing with objects from the toy doctors kit. Fa'afetai stands up, taps William on the arm and points to Campbell who is

still on the other side of William. Fa'afetai moves behind William and Campbell to the far side of Campbell and puts his hands up towards Campbell's ear. It is not clear from the video whether he has something in his hands. Campbell pulls away and puts his hands up to his ear. Fa'afetai runs back to his seat.

In this example, Fa'afetai's communicative intentions seem clear in terms of letting William know what he planned to do, but he achieved them by nonverbal means, tapping and pointing.

#### **Fa'afetai shows Monique his doctors kit**

This episode occurs at 10.15am during the transition time when children are putting away materials and coming to sit on the mat. Fa'afetai has packed up his doctors kit and is walking onto the mat area. Monique is sitting there. He goes up to her, taps her on the head and shows her the kit. He sits down beside her, shows her the kit, opens it, takes out an object and puts it up to Monique's ear.

Again, Fa'afetai's intentions seem clear, to get Monique's attention and show her the kit, but he achieved them by nonverbal means.

#### **Fa'afetai discovers the stethoscope**

This episode begins at 10.05am, during the whole class "draw in thinking books or read in the library corner" phase of activity. Fa'afetai finishes reading his picture book. He goes to the front of the room and picks up a toy stethoscope from a container there and puts it in his mouth. William has followed Fa'afetai. He takes the stethoscope from Fa'afetai, puts the ear pieces in Fa'afetai's ears and holds the stethoscope to his own chest. William then holds his back pocket open for Fa'afetai to put the stethoscope in. Fa'afetai doesn't. William takes the stethoscope away from Fa'afetai. Fa'afetai picks up another one and plays with it briefly. He puts it round the back of his neck. He walks to the back of the room where Ms Nikora is talking to another child at a table. Ms Nikora looks at Fa'afetai who has the stethoscope on back to front still. She suggests to William that he might like to show Fa'afetai what is in the doctors kit. William and Fa'afetai go and get doctors kits from the container at the front of the room and take them to a table to play with them. Gradually other children follow suit until everyone in the class is playing with kits.

In this example, Fa'afetai has instigated a change in the class phases of activity. He was the first in the class to take something from the container of toy medical equipment. Ms Nikora did validate the activity of playing with the equipment but only after Fa'afetai had initiated it, and then she only validated it personally to Fa'afetai and William. This is the only phase in this session which does not have a class "transition" phase leading into it. Once Fa'afetai and William were playing with the kits, other children simply followed suit. This example is noteworthy partly because Fa'afetai was a newcomer to the class, and an ESL beginner as well. We might not expect to see him having an effect on the whole class activity, but in

this case he did, in effect instigating a new class phase of activity. I am not suggesting that he intended to achieve that particular outcome, but his actions certainly led to it.

## Conclusion

What we are seeing in this session is that much more of Fa'afetai's interaction with his peers is carried out nonverbally than verbally. We saw earlier an episode where Huhana appeared to take account of that when she followed up her unsuccessful attempts to attract his attention verbally with a successful nonverbal interaction with him, the "not responding to a peer" episode, which ended with Huhana holding Fa'afetai's hand. Fa'afetai later attempted some handholding of his own with Monique, but it was not well received. We have seen him showing her his doctors kit on his way to put it away. When he had put it away, he came back and sat next to Monique and made repeated attempts to hold her hand. She pulled her hand away at each attempt. Soon after that came the two instances described earlier of Monique saying "don't" to Fa'afetai. Whereas Huhana moved from a verbal to a nonverbal interaction with Fa'afetai when she was trying to get his attention, Monique moved in the opposite direction, from nonverbal to verbal in trying to deflect his attention. It is possible that through her verbal interactions with Fa'afetai, Monique was in fact looking for just what happened - intervention from Ms Nikora. In that sense, her saying "don't" may have been directed at Ms Nikora as much as at Fa'afetai, or indeed, instead of at Fa'afetai.

It is also interesting to note that the next morning, when Ms Nikora was handing pictures out to the children for an activity, she handed one to Fa'afetai who frowned and said "don't" to William who was reaching for the picture as well. This may be evidence that Fa'afetai was learning to express this meaning verbally in English as well as nonverbally, or that he was learning a strategy of indirectly seeking Ms Nikora's intervention.

While I have found very little evidence in this session that Fa'afetai's verbal interactions with his peers provide many opportunities for learning English language, there is plenty of evidence, as in the examples I have presented, that his nonverbal interactions with his peers provide frequent opportunities for him to learn how to participate in the class as culture.

Spradley writes that:

Children in every society grow up and learn the domains of their culture without even knowing such a thing as a "domain" exists. At a young age they become "participant observers," watching others, listening to them, and slowly they learn to classify and code experience in the same way as adults.

(1980, p.92)

This applies to Fa'afetai, not just in his primary culture, but also in the culture of his New Zealand school class, which was new to him. He was learning how to act in the class as culture both from his peers' responses to his actions, and from Ms Nikora's responses.



It seems that our understanding of the importance of Fa'afetai's interactions with his peers could be enhanced by a view of language that is explained thus by Agar:

Language, in all its varieties, in all the ways it appears in everyday life, builds a world of meanings. When you run into different meanings, when you become aware of your own and work to build a bridge to the others, "culture" is what you're up to. Language fills the spaces between us with sound; culture forges the human connection through them. Culture is in language, and language is loaded with culture.  
(1994, p.28)

Agar uses the term "languaculture" (1994, p.60) to encapsulate what he sees as the necessary link between language and culture.

At first glance, we could think that Fa'afetai had few opportunities for learning English in this hour of class time, but if we reconceive of English as the English *languaculture* of the class, rather than as English language, then his opportunities for learning are considerable. The verbal and nonverbal aspects of his interactions with his peers are making available to him opportunities for learning aspects of the English languaculture of the class, with respect to the content of the curriculum unit, class processes and routines, and peer relationships.

Agar (1994) has coined the term "rich point" which may further contribute to our understanding of how Fa'afetai had opportunities for learning through both his peers' and Ms Nikora's responses to some of his actions. Agar explains his "rich point" concept in this way:

When two languacultures come into contact, *yours* and *theirs*, the most interesting problems, the ones that attract your attention, are the vertical cliffs. These cliffs are difficult because - on one side of the barrier or another, or perhaps on both sides - the problem bit of language is puttied thickly into far-reaching networks of association and many situations of use. When one grabs such a piece of language, the putty is so thick and so spread out that it's almost impossible to lift the piece of language out. I need a name for this location, this Whorfian cliff, this particular place in one languaculture that makes it so difficult to connect with another. I'll call it *rich*, with the connotations of tasty, thick, and wealthy all intended.  
(1994, pp.99-100)

In my view, the term "languaculture" should be substituted for "language" throughout Agar's explanation. While it may sometimes be a "piece of language" that gives rise to a vertical cliff, it may just as well be an associated action or some other aspect of the languaculture.

In the data presented above, we have seen responses from some of Fa'afetai's peers and from Ms Nikora to some of Fa'afetai's actions that might signal to him that he has

encountered a “rich point”, that his actions do not fit within the accepted ways of acting in the languaculture of the class. Ms Nikora intervenes in response to his actions, or his peers tell him to stop some action he is engaged in, or they tell him so in the hearing of Ms Nikora and the result is that she intervenes. Fa’afetai usually takes heed of Ms Nikora’s interventions (though not always of his peers’ responses), which suggests that he recognises her intervention as in a sense serving to signal the existence of one of Agar’s “vertical cliffs”. There is something he needs to understand here about what are accepted ways of participating in the class languaculture.

Agar (1994, p.250) argues that it is possible for immigrants to make sense of differences they notice between their “languaculture one” and the “languaculture two” they are meeting in terms of the frames of their first languaculture, in which case they “can probably communicate to survive but that’ll be about it”. What they won’t have is:

how those words and sentences shimmer with associations, connotations ... a sense of how to converse, argue, and tell a lie ... the sense of who they’re talking with and how they see them, of how that specific moment ties in with all the others that go into the flow of daily life, of how the talk fits into the society and the currents of history that lie behind it.

What they will have is “*langua* without the culture”.

Just as I am taking on the role of ethnographer in this class, and trying to understand its languaculture, so is Fa’afetai. As the Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group has pointed out), any outsider, be she/he a researcher or a new student, has to learn the ways of the group:

Outsiders have the task of learning to see, evaluate, and interpret the norms and expectations, roles and relationships, and rights and obligations in socially appropriate ways for the life of the group they wish to enter.

(1992b, p.30)

In this session, Fa’afetai and his peers, in their interactions with him, appear to be concentrating on Fa’afetai’s learning to see, evaluate and interpret ways of acting in this class as culture nonverbally rather than through spoken English. However, if we draw on the concept of “languaculture”, we can see that these are in effect aspects of the one enterprise. Learning language means more than learning words and arranging them in sentences. It means learning language together with the associated culture. The verbal and nonverbal actions of Fa’afetai and his peers are necessarily linked with culture(s).

## Notes

This research has been undertaken in collaboration with the Educational Research Underpinning Development In Teacher Education (ERUDITE) project, funded by Pub Charity, Wellington, and directed by Adrienne Alton-Lee.

The data analysis and writing of this paper was undertaken largely during the period December 1997-June 1998 when the author was a Visiting Scholar with the UC Linguistic Minority Research Institute, University of California, Santa Barbara, USA.

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the American Association for Applied Linguistics Annual Conference, Seattle, Washington, USA in March 1998.

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