CHAPTER 1
The Nature of Partnership Through Negotiation

What is this strange thing we are calling ‘teacher-child partnership through negotiation’? Teachers we spoke to had definite ideas but typically felt that negotiation as they understood it did not have a place in their classroom:

My children need direction; they need to be told what to do, otherwise there would be mayhem.

Well, we have a National Curriculum now; maybe in the past you could have let children make decisions about their learning, but not now; we have to get through the attainment targets.

It’s an interesting idea but the parents would never allow it.

It’s too progressive for me, I’m a traditional teacher, I’ve worked that way for a long time and it works, I’ll stick with that.

Now, consider the following brief encounters:

1. A 15-year-old enters a classroom on a Monday morning.

   T: Sit down, open your English book and copy down the words on the board ... sit down (raised voice) ... come on we haven’t got all day ... don’t forget the date.
   15-year-old: Miss ..., Miss ....
   T: I said open your book and copy the work on the board.

   After some chair scraping, bag searching and pencil sharpening, the 15-year-old begins to follow the instructions.

2. At a staff meeting on the National Curriculum the staff of a primary school are given a set of record-keeping forms, intended to link with the school mathematics scheme.

   Headteacher: These record forms are to be kept on each child in your class or group and passed on to the next teacher. They represent the minimum records on mathematics for the children to be kept by us all. They should be available for inspection at all times.
   T: What about the current records we keep?
   Headteacher: These new records are to be the official school records and must be
importance of this running example is that it highlights most of the action elements that model partnership through negotiation in the living classroom. The teacher has deliberately set up a classroom context to frame in the children’s minds their responsibility as negotiative partners for their own learning experiences. He has done this both physically through layout of the chairs, and temporally by starting the morning with this meeting. The teacher uses his knowledge of the children, the classroom resources and classroom language to move the children to a position of planning, reflection and self-organization, both physical and social, for their curricular activities.

Outside this simple classroom snapshot there is a wider confusion about what negotiation in fact is. From just a quick scan of dictionaries, negotiation has at least three slightly different definitions.

Conference, talks, parley, pow-wow, palaver, debate, exchange of views (Roger’s Thesaurus, 1979).

Negotiate; to traffic, to bargain, to confer for the purpose of mutual arrangement, to cope successfully (Chambers, 1975).

Bargain, contract, arrange, construct, agreement, compact, understanding, adjustment, co-ordinate (Strauss, 1978).

Furthermore, the example of partnered negotiation in the transcript above of JB and his boat music, contains elements found in six major areas of application outside the world of the classroom. There are:

- Business and politics
- Interpersonal conflict resolution
- Language acquisition and development
- Play
- Classroom interaction
- Coping behaviours

We can use these applications to find useful pointers for shaping up the idea of negotiation for learning.

**Business and political negotiation**

A whole range of studies in this field share a common view of negotiation. They see it as a process to bring about a resolution of differences. Negotiation is a game that has identifiable and limited pieces to be manipulated, really like a game of chess or backgammon, where a fixed number of elements, moves and counter-moves exist. The player (the negotiator) is seen as being able to train, to improve performance at the game.

We saw this element of negotiation in the teacher’s insistence that
JB gives fuller details of the proposed activity and not simply state that the activity should be music:

T: So what do you mean you want to do music?

JB: You know, the boat I'm going to make soon. I'm going to do some kind of music about boats, water.

In this business-political context the players themselves, be they individuals, groups or nations, are of no overriding importance; what moves. We may think of the 'game' of negotiating for hostages as a typical example, as in Fredrick Forsyth's The Negotiator, where the hero has only one aim, to use his skills at negotiation to release the kidnap victim. Such 'business' negotiation can again be seen when the teacher hints to JB that the planning of an activity needs more detail:

T: So what do you mean you want to 'do' music?

He indicates that the details of JB's 'move' for music require more specification if it is going to be accepted into the game.

Communication plays a paramount role in most notions of negotiation and this is particularly so in the business model. Part of the business use of communication is a constant referring back to the pre-negotiation aims, the game plan, the preferred outcome for the negotiator. We see in our example that the teacher aims to move JB to increasing specification of detail in the planning negotiation. This is the plan:

T: So you were doing your house yesterday, you rigged up the electrical circuits and now you want to do some music on boats. What sort of music are you going to do?

This continual referring back to objectives is also like the lesson plan of the student in teacher training, using it as a referral map to steer through the lesson (a kind of A-Z of continuity through the current learning).

One of the more regrettable aspects of business negotiation is already in our classrooms. This is when teachers attempt to maximize children's efforts while children attempt to minimize them. This aspect is represented in Woods (1990) use of the term 'open negotiation'.

Open negotiation is played out along set and practised lines and with a great deal of effort being applied by both teacher and pupil in the study of their opposite number before, during and after the negotiations. The final aim for both is then to maximize/minimize effort and production. Rather than a climate of partnership, it is one of 'competitiveness'. This rather pessimistic aspect of classroom life emphasizes the 'objective' nature of teacher-child relationships. We are therefore implying that to negotiate in the classroom, teacher and child need to enter the partnership 'deal' honestly without hidden aims. We see this 'honesty' in JB's recognition that the teacher will perceive problems with John joining the activity group:

JB: Caroline and John, I'll take care of him and make sure he doesn't muck about.

As teachers, what we can take from the business model is an emphasis on the teacher and the child sharing the same classroom language if they are to share the same classroom aims. Without a common language, the teacher and child will focus on different aspects of classroom life. Power is an important part in the business model. It becomes obvious that if negotiation is to succeed, our classrooms may need to shift some responsibility and with it 'power' from the teacher to the children. Power in the traditional classroom obviously lies mostly with the teacher. We should recognize, however, that in some situations this power undergoes a redistribution. For instance, Woods (1990) outlines how children unhappy with implementation of new classroom regimes or practices actively pursued counter-strategies. The children thus created a shift of power by using their behaviour as a lever to bring about renegotiation of the new practices. When compromise had occurred, the power was then returned to the teacher in the form of 'good', submissive behaviour in step with the teacher's directions.

Woods gives another example. In a centre for truants where the pupils demanded chalk and talk and a highly structured form of traditional teaching, any attempt to move to a more liberal regime always led to disruptive behaviour. The children wanted simply to write neatly in their books; no more, no less. In a less dramatic way, such adjusting and equilibrating of power occurs in all classrooms.

Of course, the power of children is based not only in the way in which they can use their behaviours but also in their weight of numbers in relation to the teacher. Both elements work to bring about a compromise between the teacher's aims and the children's. Since these power processes already exist, albeit covertly, in all classrooms, why not make such redistribution of power explicit and use it to the advantage of learning as in the Teacher-JB transcript?

Negotiation and conflict resolution

Unlike the case of business, negotiation in conflict resolution starts
from the idea that differences between negotiators (teachers and children) are to be explicitly identified from the start. In our example, the teacher does not attempt to hide his doubts about JB's bid for the three children, JB, Caroline and John, to work together on a music activity:

T: Er, I think you should work with John, not three of you.

Whereas in business the skills of manipulation were paramount, in conflict resolution, honest communication, compromise and open expression become paramount. The aim is to create empathy, the ability to see the classroom and curriculum through the eyes of others, be the 'other' teacher or child.

Schools in the United States have been involved in developing negotiation between children along these lines for some time. Roderick's article, 'Johnny can negotiate' (1987), is a study of playground arguments and how child 'conflict managers' can act as go-betweens in these situations. The skills emphasized in this kind of training are those needed in the negotiating classroom: active listening and direct communication.

**Negotiation in the context of language acquisition and development**

The angle here is the developmental nature of negotiation skills. From birth children are immersed in interactive behaviours and subsequent moulding by the care-giver. Negotiation is seen as a developing part of an everyday life skill. Children therefore enter school already skilled in the use of negotiation having learnt its rudiments through the process of language development.

We saw that JB has no hesitation in initiating a fairly complex negotiation for a 7-year-old:

T: Right, now who's doing what?
JB: Sir, can I do some music, me, Caroline and John?
T: What were you doing yesterday?
JB: Ummm, my house.
T: House?
JB: Yea, and Clare's going to help me do the table and chairs ....

Sociolinguists begin with this fact, that from birth the child is interacting with the care-giver. How, with each language interaction, does the care-giver accept each initiation by the child and develop and extend it?

The process is seen as one of systematic 'negotiating' of meaning and syntax between the child and care-giver throughout the early years and on into later life, just as we saw JB developing the meanings and syntax of classroom negotiation – the language of partnership – with teacher. The key ideas in this perspective are evidently not those of formal skills training or of gamesmanship, nor is there even explicit recognition of each party's position. Rather they are the ideas of social interaction, obviously developmental in nature, and based in unconscious as well as conscious interactions between care-giver and child. An important aspect of this interactive process can be observed in studies of telegraphic speech; the moving toward shared language structures which develops between mother and child as they interact.

It can again be seen in the learning of a second language. When the child emits a word or phrase or guesses a response to a cue, the teacher responds by leading the child through a defined and structured network of negotiations towards an agreed or 'true' meaning. We see this as we follow JB's initial opening negotiation:

T: Right, now who's doing what?
JB: Sir, can I do some music, me, Caroline and John?

through to the end result:

JB: I think we'll use the harp and you know, that er, electric organ.
T: Ok, who are you going to work with?
JB: Caroline and John, I'll take care of him and make sure he doesn't muck about.
T: Er, I think you should work with John, not three of you.
JB: Ok.

The child uses this negotiation to work through and reach an agreed meaning in a way which is best suited to the individual child. This idea of working through to an agreed meaning suggests we need to consider the individuality of partnered negotiation. Negotiation is a movement towards the teacher and the individual child sharing the same conceptual view of each other's ways of working and each other's role within that individual partnership.

**Negotiation and play**

The use of negotiation in play research is similar to its use in the language model. Both place emphasis on developmental aspects. Pretend play is seen as a process of negotiation involving children's attempts to reach a shared meaning in order to structure and maintain their play activities:

You be doctor, I'll be patient ...
Alright, I'll be the doctor you be the patient.
This classic fragment emphasizes the two-way active interaction between both partners. An important element in play negotiation, and quality of the process changes as the form of the child's play itself develops. Different elements that make up play negotiation are held to develop at different points and at different rates for different children. Thus individuality is again important. This is brought out if we compare JB's extended style of negotiation with the single input of CT:

CT: Yes, I'll do the table and chairs for her.

More detailed individual differences in classroom negotiation will be shown in the transcripts of a number of children in Chapter 4. We will see that children negotiate from a very individual repertoire of skills, approach to support the individual child's repertoire.

Inherent in this play perspective, then, are two emphases: an emphasis on development, and an emphasis on movement through social interactions to a position of shared meaning. Experienced nursery assistants and teachers are well aware of their responsibility and bargaining. They emphasize the individuality of the process, development of these skills. But if negotiation and partnership skills are developing during the early years in the child's natural environment, it could be asked why we then apparently de-skill them on entering school.

Moreover, nursery teachers typically take notions of partnered negotiation a step further by recognizing variability within the individual child. That is to say, when working with a 3- or 4-year-old, the negotiating skills that the child might use one day may be reported as not used on later occasions although they would still be available in the child's negotiating repertoire. This latency principle is not brought out in the negotiation models outlined earlier. Rather, they tacitly assumed that as long as situational factors are held steady, then the same type of negotiative behaviour is to be expected.

Classroom interaction: the relationship between school knowledge and negotiation

Of all forms of knowledge, school knowledge in particular is 'socially constructed'. It is the type of knowledge found in most classrooms, supported by the National Curriculum, and given further validity by the transmitting teacher.

Teachers use a range of processes to convince children of the validity of classroom knowledge. In the National Curriculum we see from the form and content of classroom knowledge that teachers are already using pseudo-negotiative skills on the children. These skills are 'pseudo' in the sense that the teacher is only mock-'negotiating' with the child, using a fixed agenda of curricular experience, rather as in the business model. This appears to be one strategy that teachers have adopted in order to link the seemingly different demands of a prescribed National Curriculum with the notions of child-centred education.

Knowledge negotiation and business negotiation do appear to have certain similarities. The teacher is often aware of using negotiation in the manipulative sense. There is often in the teacher's mind an explicit end-objective, perhaps some parcel of facts the child should be able to repeat, perhaps the development of a skill, or often simply a basic docility. To such an end, teachers use this highly structured pseudo-negotiation, with its finite moves, set expectations and set responses.

We now begin to see a much broader use of negotiation, one linked to institutional knowledge and to the infrastructure of schools and classrooms as places that mould and shape knowledge.

If partnered negotiation is to become an accepted part of classroom strategy, teachers have to allow it in some way to become part of school 'knowledge'. One well-known attempt to change the nature of acceptable school knowledge and approach to learning can be found in the experience of Countesthorpe College. The College is run on an explicit model of negotiation with five basic principles:

1. Teacher and child to be seen as equal.
2. Teacher and child interests to be explicitly valued.
3. Direct speaking and active listening to be emphasized.
4. Learning activities to be planned, with clear objectives and two-way feedback between child and teacher.
5. Children's self-directed learning to be preferable to teacher-directed learning.

Heavy emphasis is placed on the teacher as facilitator. Rather like our teacher in the JB transcript, the Countesthorpe teacher runs negotiation as a lattice of the five principles (see Hincks, 1986).

It is also clear that the strategies of partnered negotiation need to be used within an explicit classroom approach that supports them and where the approach is clearly identified by teacher and children. One element of such 'explicitness' in the JB example was the way in which the teacher organized the classroom day to begin with a public negotiation session which holds value for all parties:
It is the start of morning session, post-register, in an urban primary classroom. 16 children aged 7 and 8 years are seated in a circle of chairs, facing inwards with the teacher as part of the circle and seated on the same sort of chair. Teacher waits for silence.

In contrast, many schools are run on a model that provides a very different context for any traces of negotiation processes that may be potentially present. In the UK it is common for schools to emphasize 'knowledge production'. This places the main focus on instructional techniques and rather little on the contribution of the pupil. The pupil is seen as a passive 'inevitable' member of the learning situation – and as such a 'non-partner'.

Of course, any concept of negotiation must fit into a teacher-run environment and into an explicit focus on National Curriculum attainment targets. But in this parody of negotiation, child and teacher personal interest, opinion and knowledge have little place; they are displaced by direction, manipulation, and non-humanistic values of the kind too often found in business:

Well, we have a National Curriculum now; maybe in the past you could have let children make decisions about their learning, but not now, we have to get through the attainment targets. (A teacher talking about a negotiating classroom set up in her school.)

These classroom behaviours and values of course function very effectively given the main objective of such a school: the transmission of knowledge. They do not reach out to interests of the learner. Recall the earlier transcript:

A 15-year-old enters a classroom on a Monday morning.
T: Sit down, open your English book and copy down the words on the board ... sit down (raised voice) ... come on we haven't got all day ... don't forget the date.
15-year-old: 'Miss ... Miss ....
T: I said open your book and copy the work on the board.

As a reward for playing the role of silent, attentive, docile pupils, children are offered pre-packaged units of knowledge to be noted and memorized. They are not expected to expend too much energy on reading, researching or classroom work, as long as they play the expected passive, institutional role. This form of covert negotiation leads to a false consensus on the part of both the teacher and the pupil. While both are aware of how they really feel about the type of role they are playing and the type of learning occurring, they remain silent. The reason is that this knowledge has little value in a public arena where only 'official' behaviours are recognized. There is no forum for real learning interests.

If this process is to be countered and the child to develop to the negotiation skill level of JB at 7 years of age, then the teacher and school need to define an active role for the child in learning and provide continuous support through classroom organization, management and interaction with the child toward this development. Each school attempting partnered negotiation needs a clear learning policy just as it would traditionally and obviously have, say, a language or mathematics policy.

**An active role for the child?**

It seems fair to say that in many traditional classrooms the teacher does most of the learning, in terms of hunting out information books, preparatory reading, thinking through and reflecting on how best to transmit and organize the children's experiences of knowledge – all skills that children are themselves capable of learning and applying. In our running example, we saw JB not only develop a learning idea and creating a collaborative work group but then leave the negotiation circle and organize resources. In traditional classrooms the children are denied these active skills.

There are nowadays a few more optimistic indicators in classrooms. The most interesting pointer in recent years was a conference paper given by Krappman and Oswald in North America in 1987. They carried out a classroom study observing the behaviour of 10–12-year-olds and categorized some 200 interactions as possibly of a negotiation type. They suggest that the following seven points characterize negotiative behaviour:

1. The child is active in learning.
2. There is an interactive relationship basis between teacher and children.
3. There are individual differences in interactive strategies.
4. A communication basis exists between teacher and children.
5. There is an affective element in learning and in interaction with the teacher and others.
6. Attempts occur to influence the behaviour and negotiative style of others.
7. There is evidence that a social effect may also be present whereby friendship pairs use styles of negotiation appropriate to themselves and different from those of non-friends.

It appears then that there is wider evidence for the view being argued
here: the notion that children already have a foundation of negotiative skills for use within the classroom partnership and actively use elements of these skills in day-to-day classroom life.

**Paying lip-service to negotiation**

Even the existence of a 'partnership' policy in a school does not mean that it will actually take place. There is often a distinct difference between what teachers set out to teach in the classroom (the ideal) and what they actually do teach and impart.

We found in a study carried out in 1990 that teachers may not be all that aware of children's true curricular experiences. While the teacher in our study ran traditional-type classrooms and claimed a detailed knowledge of the children's curriculum coverage, it turned out that a distinct perceptual gap existed between what the teacher thought was being covered and what the children from observation and being asked, actually were covering. We say more about this chapter 2.

When within a school structured for negotiation, like Countesthorpe College, the very nature of outside pressures from the local education authority or governmental education departments could create differences between the teachers' intended way of working and the actual way it happened. Is it really possible to claim to be running a classroom-based on negotiation when, as at Countesthorpe, there are compulsory subject lessons for all pupils and teachers attempt a record-keeping system based on teacher-student discussion in groups of 30 students?

Certainly the setting up of a negotiating classroom based on partnership needs to take account of pressures it may meet from outside the school, including parental misunderstanding, local authority expectations and possible restrictions placed on it by the National Curriculum. In our JB transcript, the teacher was required by legal constraints to ensure that JB was 'receiving' a fair balance of the externally-defined National Curriculum. So, while teachers may talk about the negotiating process, there is a need to recognize such practical limitations on available scope.

**Through the eyes of a child**

It seems unquestionable that children are all individuals and respond quite differently. How is this individuality to find expression within the negotiating classroom? We need to look at classroom life through the eyes of the child. With one teacher and 27 children, it could well be

28 different 'classrooms', those of the teacher and the children present, that require recognition. We get a flavour of this individuality in the negotiations between JB and the teacher. They each have very distinct individual positions from which they are negotiating. Note also a type of 'sussing out' of the other person and attempts to find out where they are 'coming from'. We recognize this in JB's 'testing' of her teacher on the question of John:

**The cut and thrust of classroom life**

'Strategic-level' decisions made away from the classroom are very different from the 'tactical-level' decisions that have to be made in the flux of classroom life. The cut and thrust of classrooms leads to covert negotiation between children and teacher in order to maintain a balance between the teacher's authority and the pupils' autonomy.

One of many instances we have come across was of a child who initially arranged for his small group to take as long as possible over a painting to avoid the next activity of story writing. However, he then renegotiated with the group to change the tactic when the class were told that as soon as they had finished they could play rounders. Again, we saw this in JB's evidently pre-negotiation decision to go for a music activity with John and friends, but making adjustments in the immediacy of the negotiations with teacher.

**Partnered negotiation as coping**

Different children develop distinct styles of coping when given the opportunity. Galton (1987a) suggests three distinct styles used by older children in secondary classrooms. The largest group, 80 per cent of children reported in his 1987 paper, were observed to adopt a strategy called 'easy riding'. This involved the child giving the appearance of effortful working while in fact going as slowly as possible. A second group, 50 per cent of pupils, adopted an 'intermittent worker's' strategy, working only when the teacher's attention was on them. A third strategy group, named 'the hard grinders', were those who worked hard purely in order to finish quickly. At some level the teacher knows what is going on, and the pupils know the teacher knows.

We came across parallel examples of negotiated coping in a study of how children who were always ahead of the rest ('front-runners') differed from those who were always behind ('back-markers') (Ingram
and Wong, 1990). Front-runners used active strategies such as (a) doing more of the same activity or (b) reading, when teacher-set work was completed, while back-markers tended to use passive strategies such as simply allowing work to build up across the day or days instead of telling the teacher the pace was too fast. Support for a notion of strategy repertoires comes from Galton’s observation that some 80 per cent of pupils actively adjusted their behaviour to the style of the class teacher. This suggests that children could well adapt to a negotiating approach if the teacher were to actively promote it.

The place of negotiated partnership in child-centredness

The idea of organizing a classroom around partnered negotiation came from our observations and experiences as teachers over a decade of working with children. We were concerned about how many children brought to the classroom interests, motivation, curiosity, somehow failed to nurture – and in many cases de-powered and devalued. The attraction of negotiated partnership grew not from the child-centred practitioners or from reading ‘progressive’ literature but from a feeling of unease and unhappiness with the conventional classroom relationship of teacher and pupil.

We realize that negotiated partnership has allies in the practices and thoughts of major educators, such as Froebel, Neil and Plowden. We also believe:

- that children can and do think – reflect – make decisions;
- that learning involves emotion and feelings, as well as perceptions and thoughts and none can be divorced from the others;
- that children are born with, and come into classrooms with, an urge to learn – with a curiosity about their environment and life;
- that children are individual, have individual interests and learning styles;
- that all children have a voice, a view about things that they can and will use if empowered to do so;
- that the best learning for the child is when he or she has ownership and investment in that learning.

While these are far from radical thoughts and are commonly attributed to the esteemed philosophers of education: Rousseau, Locke and Pestalozzi, it is interesting how they go hand in hand with a philosophy of partnership that grew from practical concern rather than from study and thought about ‘progressivism’.

Like other contemporary teachers, we also are concerned about issues of differentiation and the needs of the individual child. In the following chapters outlining our way of working with children, it should become clear that the partnership approach directly addresses these issues.

Summary.

So where do we stand on the notion of negotiation? After reviewing its application across six major areas we have taken those elements that are useful for teachers in developing a model of negotiation. We have found communication, empathy, individualization and the developmental view of skills training particularly useful. It appears that negotiation in some forms already exists in the traditional classroom, albeit as part of the hidden curriculum, and that children from their experiences outside of the classroom, particularly in the early years, are already skilled in aspects of its use. We now turn to an examination of teaching strategies used every day across the world in conventional classrooms.