Newcomers and Old-Timers: Educational Philosophies-in-Action of Parent Volunteers in a Community of Learners School

EUGENE MATUSOV
University of Delaware

BARBARA ROGOFF
University of California at Santa Cruz

Contrasting educational philosophies-in-action were used by 45 parent volunteers working with children in a school organized as a community of learners. Newcomers were more likely to employ a one-sided philosophy-in-action (with either adult-directed or child-directed organization), whereas parents with several years of experience were more likely to use a collaborative philosophy-in-action, consistent with the philosophy of a community of learners. A pedagogical implication is that adults need opportunities to learn new educational philosophies as they work with children.

Discussions of educational reform frequently argue for the importance of parental involvement, and educators expect that innovative educational institutions can be built by teachers and parents having a similar vision (Epstein 2001; Fullan 1993). However, there has been relatively little attention to parents' forms of involvement, and many efforts to create innovations in education have failed because of philosophical disagreements among parents and teachers (Firestone 1977). We observed the philosophies-in-action of new versus old-time parent volunteers in an innovative school, in order to infer developmental changes in philosophies of practice that newcomers undergo with experience participating in the school's practices. We focused on educational philosophies-in-action, with the idea that observable regularities in approaches to interaction reveal important aspects of people's philosophies of practice. Our study occurred in a public elementary school program (known as the "OC," in Salt Lake City, Utah) initiated by parents two decades previously as a community of learners. The OC requires three hours of parent participation in instruction per week and emphasizes collaboration among children and adults in learning, decision making, and guidance. Parents and teachers in this school regard it as a challenge for newcomers to learn how to participate in ways that are consistent with the conceptual shift to the underlying educational philosophy of the school, from contrasting educational philosophies with which newcomers often arrive (Rogoff et al. 2001).

The collaborative philosophy of the community of learners school

One-Sided (Adult-Child) Approaches in Education

Education at school is complex, involving a multitude of factors that influence children's learning. The collaborative philosophy emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment where children are encouraged to engage in active learning. This approach recognizes that children are active constructors of their own knowledge, and their learning is enhanced through meaningful interactions with peers and teachers. The collaborative classroom is characterized by a shared responsibility for learning, where both children and adults participate in decision-making processes. This model promotes critical thinking, problem-solving, and a deeper understanding of complex concepts.

The Collaborative Classroom Model

The collaborative classroom model involves several key components:

1. **Active Learning:** Children are active participants in their learning, engaging in discussions, problem-solving, and collaborative activities.
2. **Equitable Participation:** All students, regardless of their background or ability, are encouraged to contribute to the learning process.
3. **Teacher as Facilitator:** The teacher's role is to facilitate learning by posing questions, providing guidance, and modeling problem-solving strategies.
4. **Collaborative Groups:** Learning is facilitated through small group work, allowing children to learn from each other and develop social skills.
5. **Reflective Practice:** Children are encouraged to reflect on their learning experiences, which helps them develop self-awareness and critical thinking skills.

The collaborative classroom model is effective in promoting children's academic achievement and social development. It empowers children to take ownership of their learning, fostering a sense of responsibility and engagement. This approach aligns with the principles of the collaborative philosophy and is essential in creating a supportive learning environment.
A Study of Philosophies-in-Action of Newcomers and Old-Timers in the OC

The OC had functioned for 16 years as a public elementary school program at the time of the study (1993), when it included six mixed-grade classrooms of about 28 to 30 children each. The school was started by a group of primarily white middle-class parents who were dissatisfied with traditional public education. After several years as a private school, the parents and teachers worked with the Salt Lake City Schools superintendent to transform the program into an optional program within the Salt Lake City public schools (functioning like a magnet school that families can choose instead of their neighborhood school).

From the start, a central feature of the OC philosophy was collaboration between teachers, parents, and children, with all participants learning from each other (Rogoff et al. 2001). Parents are expected to commit to three hours per week (per child) of classroom instruction, as “co-opers.” The OC provides new co-opers with an orientation and classroom teachers help co-opers understand the program’s collaborative philosophy and practices.

The main question of this study was whether parent volunteers who are new to this community of learners school show more one-sided (esp. adult-run) approaches in how they organize learning activities, and whether old-time co-opers show a more collaborative approach with the children, marked by shared responsibility and flexibility, consistent with a community of learners philosophy. We examined the relation between parents’ years of experience “co-oping” (i.e., involved in classroom instruction) and how they worked with small groups of children in the classroom.

To supplement videotaped observations of the parents’ approaches to teaching, we also asked the parents for a self-evaluation of their grasp of the “OC way of co-oping” and we asked the teachers to evaluate the co-opers’ understanding of the OC instructional approach, based on their observations of the co-opers’ everyday classroom participation. We also considered possible contributions to co-opers’ learning from co-opers’ own increasing comfort and their interactions with the children and the teachers. Finally, we considered how co-opers’ approaches to teaching relate to their supportiveness with the children and the developmental suitability of their activities for the children’s learning.

Through qualitative methods involving videotaped and direct observations and interviews, we constructed and abstracted distinct patterns of parents’ philosophies-in-action. We used quantitative graphical and statistical methods to check whether these distinct patterns of parents’ philosophies-in-action were differently distributed between novice and old-time parent volunteers.

Our questions as well as our categories for coding parents’ approaches are based not only on psychological, anthropological, and educational literatures, but also on longstanding participation as co-opers and researchers in the OC over seven years (Eugene Matusov) and 17 years (Barbara Rogoff). They were also guided by ethnographic data from a larger project focusing on how this innovative institution develops and maintains itself as new members join. The larger study includes participant-observations; interviews and discussions with parents, children, and teachers; a survey of parents; archival documents; and audio-tapes of many committee and classroom meetings over a seven-year period. Our involvement in the larger project has yielded a collaboratively written volume explicating principles of learning as a community, with articles by parents, teachers, students, and an administrator (Rogoff et al. 2001).

At the time of data collection, we had recently made the transition from being ordinary co-opers to being researchers in the program (Matusov had co-oped for his son for two years, and Rogoff had co-oped for her three children over seven years). The transition accompanied each of our families’ moves out of state, which meant that we ceased being co-opers. Becoming researchers in the program also meant that our occupations (as graduate student and professor of developmental psychology, respectively) also came to attention; as co-opers, our roles were defined in terms of whose parents we were.

The transition from being parent volunteers to being researchers in the eyes of the OC community members was rather smooth, although there was a need for us to become clear ourselves that the role of researcher did not mean becoming aloof from the everyday events of the community and to diplomatically deflect a few attempts to transform our role to that of experts. Parents, teachers, and children treated this research as valuable internally, especially to help understand the learning process for parents. They also welcomed the opportunity to make “OC ways” more publicly known.

Videotaping Parents Teaching

The participating OC families were primarily European American from a wide spread of middle-socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds (ranging from some families that qualify as low income for the school lunch program to some families with professional incomes), occupations (e.g., chefs, university professors, carpenters, small business owners, paralegal clerks, artists, computer programmers, and teachers), and a diversity of religious backgrounds (e.g., Mormon, Jewish, Protestant, Catholic, atheist). The OC’s emphasis on respect for diversity (notably, religious and economic) is cited by many parents as a reason that they chose this school for their children, rather than neighborhood or private schools. The co-opers that we observed were mostly mothers, in about the proportion of gender involvement as in the OC as a whole (37 mothers versus eight fathers, with similar distribution of genders across the years of experience in the OC; no gender differences in the parents’ approaches were noted).
Cooperative learning groups create a cooperative and collaborative environment where students work together to achieve common goals. This approach encourages peer interaction and peer teaching, leading to enhanced learning outcomes. Figure 1. A cooperative microscope, involving music photography by Cutting.

Determining Educational Philosophy through Action

Cooperating teachers and children from another classroom looking at a 40x-40 microscope. Our cooperative learning approach includes frequent assessments (in groups) and opportunities for explicit experience, feedback, and reflection on student performance. The approach is consistent with observations of the activities, reflecting an ongoing analysis of the effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies.
how the co-oper helped children and shared responsibility for help with the children;
who was responsible for handling problems and uncertainties during the activity;
how the co-oper ordered materials, and seating arrangements;
how progress in the activity was monitored and the goal revised if it became unrealistic given the time, materials, and other constraints at hand; and
how children were motivated to join and stay in the activity.

Using these notes to support their judgments, coders decided whether the co-oper substantially used an adult-run, children-run, or collaborative approach, or a mixed approach.¹

The adult-run approach involves a unilateral chain of decision making by the adult, who controls the activity definition and the activity, taking the role of transmitting knowledge. The adult provides closely controlled guidance requiring detailed preplanning of the activity, and preempts children's inquiries and addresses them in a unilateral way. Activity settings are designed to facilitate the adult's control over the children (e.g., removing distractions by moving objects in and out of the activity space and blocking children's movements), even at the expense of students' interest and active participation. The co-oper also assumes all responsibility for fixing problems and treats uncertainty as an obstacle to overcome (which could have been anticipated by "better" planning). The following vignette illustrates the adult-run approach:

A second-year co-oper prepared a social studies activity of "Cooking Inventions" in the first/second-grade classroom. She brought in foods that pioneers might have eaten; the children helped cook the meat, sampled the goodie, and voted on which tasted best. The co-oper seemed product-oriented, prioritizing the outcome of the cooking. She assigned the children small "hands-on" operations in the meat preparation (e.g., turning a piece of chicken in the frying pan). She lectured them about pioneers without checking what information about pioneers the children might want or need to know.

The co-oper took responsibility for all emerging problems from looking for necessary utensils to searching for something lost by one girl. The co-oper tried to control the children, positioning herself above them, often asking them to sit and not move around, and controlling all materials and books. She was fully responsible for management—when recess approached, she almost physically moved children along in the activity. She struggled to keep the children in the task, and tried to make them work by referring to the structure of her activity or simply commanding them. She was tense throughout and appeared frustrated. In the follow-up interview, the co-oper described the activity as "hands-on" and "informative."

In the children-run approach, the co-oper allows the children to control the activity definition and the activity, leaving them with minimal, reactive guidance. The co-oper might simply observe the children or follow their direction, or be uninvolved, staying available only for minor help. The co-oper provides an enriched environment, but does not otherwise contribute to the ongoing activity. This approach treats children as discoverers, with the co-oper not sharing his or her own inquiries, ideas, or interests with the children.

A ninth-year co-oper introduced "Inventing with Blocks" in the fourth/fifth-grade classroom. The co-oper oriented the children to build creative marble tracks using wooden blocks, demonstrating how some blocks could be connected. She articulated her approach in the interview after the activity. "What I want them to do is to manipulate with physical objects, create something, experiment with it, and change it."

After introducing the activity, she sat aside and let them explore, withdrawing and watching as children built with the blocks. She interacted only reactively; when the children asked for help, she provided just enough help to move them in their activity. She left responsibility for problems to the children, monitoring their conflicts often without intervening unless things escalated out of control. She was relaxed and tolerated a lot of noise, disruptions, and minor fights among kids. Motivation to be involved was left to the children; they could work on the marble track or just entertain themselves by any means available in the classroom, or physically leave the activity. There were no limitations on using the blocks or any other objects in the classroom; the children freely moved in and out of the activity (some went to play with costumes), while the co-oper sat on the periphery watching or left the classroom from time to time.

The collaborative approach involves guidance emerging from shared participation and interests, with mutuality between the co-oper and the children, who share the opportunity for learning, participating actively together, and assisting each other, with direction and anticipation provided by the co-oper. Preliminary planning by the co-oper has a general outline rather than a detailed character, anticipating the children's contributions in planning and modifying the activity. Problems and uncertainties emerging in the activity (including interpersonal conflicts, lack of materials or time, or unexpected events) are to be expected and welcomed as learning opportunities rather than seen as obstacles to be avoided or overcome.

A fifth-year co-oper engaged the children in "Inventing Words" in the fifth/sixth-grade classroom—children invented their own words with definitions. The purpose of the activity, according to the co-oper, was "to experience creative language." She supported the activity with a book full of fanciful words and with dictionaries. Her instruction was embedded in children's inquiry with flexible planning. The co-oper was not satisfied with shallow contributions from the children; she helped them to elaborate and extend ideas and the activity (e.g., asking for pronunciation of the invented words, their possible origin, context of use). She was supportive of students' contributions.
Evidence of Friends Learning of the Collaborative Educational Philosophy

To integrate these findings into a narrative that supports and enhances understanding, the collaborative approach is illustrated in another example:

The collaborative approach has had a significant impact on the students' learning. By working together, they are able to solve complex problems and develop a deeper understanding of the subject. This approach fosters a sense of community and encourages students to actively participate in the learning process. It also promotes critical thinking and creativity, as students are encouraged to share their ideas and perspectives.

With the collaborative approach, teachers and students work together to create a supportive and inclusive learning environment. Through discussions, debates, and collaborative problem-solving, students are able to develop their critical thinking skills and become more confident in their abilities. This approach is particularly effective for students who struggle with traditional teaching methods, as it provides them with a more engaging and interactive learning experience.

In conclusion, the collaborative approach is a powerful tool for enhancing student learning and fostering a sense of community in the classroom. By integrating this approach into their teaching practices, educators can help students develop the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in today's rapidly changing world.
Table 1. Number (and percent) of newcomers and old-timers judged to demonstrate adult-run, children-run, and collaborative teaching approaches.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching approaches</th>
<th>Newcomers (N = 21)</th>
<th>Old-Timers (N = 24)</th>
<th>Chi²</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult-run</td>
<td>7(33%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>&lt; .01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed adult-run and children-run</td>
<td>2(10%)</td>
<td>4(17%)</td>
<td>.1</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children-run</td>
<td>7(33%)</td>
<td>4(17%)</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed one-sided and collaborative</td>
<td>3(14%)</td>
<td>5(21%)</td>
<td>.0</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td>2(10%)</td>
<td>11(46%)</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>&lt; .01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As expected, use of the collaborative approach was judged more common among more-experienced co-ops than among less-experienced co-ops (see Table 1). The collaborative approach was coded for only ten percent of the newcomers compared with 46 percent of the old-timers. Figure 2 suggests that the increase in the collaborative approach jumps with co-ops’ third year of experience in the OC.

One-sided approaches were more common among new co-ops than old-timers. A one-sided philosophy (adult-run, children-run, or both) was coded for 76 percent of the newcomers but only 34 percent of the old-timers. The difference was mostly because of the extent of adult-run approaches, which were coded for 33 percent of the newcomers but none of the old-timers (see Table 1 and Figure 2; Fisher’s Exact test was significant at the 0.005 level). The other types of one-sided approaches (the children-run and mixed categories) did not differ significantly with extent of co-ops’ experience.5

Specific activities seemed not to determine the teaching approaches. We examined the approaches of ten co-ops who engaged in the “same” activity—helping children fill out “patent” forms for the Invention Convention (a “fair” culminating the six-week all-program study). Four used the collaborative approach, two mainly used the adult-run approach, three used the children-run approach, and one used a mixture of all three. For example, in a collaborative approach, one co-oper discussed with the children what other people might want to know about their inventions and how to make the description of the inventions more comprehensible and attractive. In an adult-run approach, another co- oper was mainly concerned with filling in the form correctly, with proper spelling. In a children-run approach, another co- oper treated the activity as a “free” activity where the children wrote or drew whatever they wanted while the co- oper was available to answer questions.

We interpret the differences in the teaching approaches of the new and old-time co-ops as indicating a shift toward collaborative teaching as co-oping experience in the OC increases. Of course, our observations of old-timers and newcomers involved different individuals, not a longitudinal study of the same individuals, so the idea that the variations across experience groups represent co-ops’ learning is an inference. We cannot rule out selection effects, such as the possibility that parents with one-sided approaches who are dissatisfied with the program might simply leave it. (But only one parent out of the 45 withdrew from the OC the next year because of disagreement with the OC teaching philosophy.) We also cannot rule out the possibility that different numbers of parents with one-sided or collaborative approaches might have joined the OC in different years, creating different distributions in different cohorts.

However, these explanations are rendered less plausible by converging evidence that the differences between newcomers and old-timers are a function of learning with experience. Our interpretation that the results suggest learning by the co-ops is supported by self-reports in an earlier survey of most of the co-ops in the OC (Rogoff et al. 1996; see also Rogoff et al. 2001). In response to a written question, “Did you feel like you didn’t know what you were doing at first?” most co-ops answered “yes.” They referred to difficulties in understanding the structure and processes of the OC classrooms, their own role, and how to organize collaborative guidance with the children. One-sixth of them reported beginning to feel like they knew what they were doing in their first year, one-third reported the transition in their second or third years, and one-sixth said it occurred after their third year in the OC. (For some newcomers and old-timers the transition had not yet happened.) These self-reports are consistent with the suggestion from our data of a difference around the second and third year, and the observation that not all of the old-timers were coded as using collaborative approaches. They are also consistent with our follow-up questionnaires of co-ops and teachers.

Co-Opers’ and Teachers’ Judgments of Co-Opers’ Understanding of OC Co-Oping

In follow-up questionnaires, both the teachers and the co-ops themselves judged most of the co-ops to be OK or model co-ops. Teachers judged only seven of the 45 co-ops to be having difficulty; only eight of the 39 co-ops responding judged themselves to be having difficulty.

The judgments of which parents were having difficulty lend support to the idea that co-ops develop understanding of the OC philosophy of practice with greater experience (although, of course, these are not longitudinal data). Newcomers were more likely than old-timers to represent themselves as not having a clue about the OC way of co-oping, struggling to understand it, or just beginning to grasp it (38 percent versus 9 percent). Old-timers were more likely than newcomers to represent themselves as seasoned co-ops who understand the OC way and can fill various roles in the structure (65 percent versus 12 percent).4

Similarly, the teachers reported that there were more model co-ops among old-timers than among newcomers (54 percent versus 24 percent). They also reported that more newcomers than old-timers were
Possible Contributions of Co-Operative Tension

Come more closely to understanding the development of theory—put the group's expanded and deepened understanding of the group's relationship with the group's cooperation and its development. The group's contribution to the development of the group's cooperation within a group of children is the group's contribution and the group's contribution to the development of children's cooperation. The group's contribution to the development of children's cooperation is the group's contribution to the development of children's cooperation within a group of children. The group's contribution to the development of children's cooperation within a group of children is the group's contribution to the development of children's cooperation within a group of children.
children's communication intensified, she switched her role to acting as a "filter" that unilaterally defined which of the children's suggestions were acceptable without providing the rationale of her decisions to the children.

In addition to being sensitive to particular co-opers' comfortable group size, often the teachers provide tried-and-true activities that allow newcomers to engage in effective instruction without needing to devise the activity. The teachers observe the co-opers' activities over time, giving co-opers opportunities to try new things and encouraging greater responsibility when they judge that a particular co-op is ready. The teachers thus ensure that the children benefit from the contributions of newcomers as well as old-timers, and support the co-opers in their own learning.

The teachers assist co-opers' development by consulting with them collaboratively. Their assistance does not preclude one approach, but builds from the co-opers' perspective. Leslie Bartlett, a seasoned OC teacher, reported that she uses the co-opers' point of view and philosophical model when she helps a co-op—asking how the co-op perceives the problem, how to solve it, and how the teacher might help (personal communication July 20, 1994; see Tharp and Gallimore [1988] for a similar description of how one seasoned educator collaborates with a new teacher to improve her teaching). By helping the co-op collaboratively from the co-op's own teaching approach, the teacher opens a channel of communication and learning, which paradoxically may lead co-opers into the collaborative approach of a community of learners. The teacher involves the co-op in a collaborative process of thinking about why, for example, there was "a disciplinary problem" (from the co-op's adult-run perspective), and through this collaboration with the teacher, the co-op had the chance to participate in a collaborative model of teaching and learning that may extend eventually to their work with the children.

A Coherent Philosophy-in-Action, and the Role of Heterogeneity

To fill out our understanding of the coherence of an OC philosophy-in-action, we considered the emotional supportiveness of the co-opers with the children and the developmental suitability of their activities for fostering children's involvement in learning. We also were interested in examining these aspects of co-oping to see whether co-opers unfamiliar with the collaborative approach may yet make important contributions to instruction. Using the videotapes, we examined the prevalence of these aspects of co-oping for the 24 co-opers who used one-sided approaches (adult-run, children-run, and their mixture) and the 21 co-opers who used collaborative approaches (collaborative or a mixture of collaborative and one-sided).

Supportiveness of Relations with the Children

Most of the co-opers demonstrated supportive relations; only one session was judged as involving adversarial relations and only a few were judged as involving unilateral relations. In supportive relations, the co-op promoted respect, used compromise to solve interpersonal problems, and often prevented problems from becoming overwhelming by changing the emotional climate or the topic or tempo of the activity; the co-op appeared nurturing and secure, acknowledged his or her own mistakes, and made suggestions with justifications and openness. In unilateral relations, the co-op was strictly task oriented, constantly reminding the children of rules, physically moving objects or children to solve problems, and directing children without providing rationales.

Supportive relations with children occurred in all of the sessions using collaborative approaches, suggesting that they are part of the definition of the collaborative approach in the OC. Supportive relations were also used by 79 percent of the co-opers using one-sided approaches, not significantly less than for the co-opers judged as using collaborative approaches. An example of a co-op using the adult-run approach and engaging in warm, friendly relations was one who thanked each child at the end of the activity for the child's willingness to "work for" her.

However, compared with co-opers using collaborative approaches, co-opers using one-sided approaches were more likely to use unilateral relations. In the five sessions (25 percent) with mainly unilateral relations, all involved co-opers whose teaching was judged as one-sided (see Figure 3).

Although the results indicate that supportive interpersonal relations always occurred when the co-op's approach was collaborative, relations of the co-opers and children were almost never adversarial, and co-opers using one-sided approaches were usually also in supportive relations with the children.

Developmental Suitability of the Activity

This was a judgment of how effective the co-op's activity was for children's engagement in learning. (To make sure that coders' preconceptions did not link developmental suitability with the teaching approaches, developmental suitability was checked in an independent coding of 22 sessions by an assistant unfamiliar with the study's focus on teaching approaches and the co-opers' experience in the program. Reliability Kappa coefficients of this blind coder with the original coders were .65 for low developmental suitability and .64 for high developmental suitability—which reflect good levels of agreement—suggesting that coders' knowledge of co-opers' teaching approaches or experience did not affect their judgments of developmental suitability.)

We distinguished low and high suitability: Low suitability involves insufficient challenge or support, with expectations that are too high or
Figure 3.
Distribution of co-ops with unilateral and supportive interpersonal relations in the different teaching approaches.

Figure 4.
Distribution of co-ops with low and high developmentally suitable activities in the different teaching approaches.
low. The activity could be too familiar for the children or the co-oper could fail to communicate the challenge of the activity (see Lave 1990). The co-oper might “feed” the children factual nonproblematic information that requires only simple decoding, with shallow participation by the children. Alternatively, the co-oper might withdraw from active guidance, not providing elaboration and support. For example, one co-oper asked children to mix primary colors without any reflection on the process or a system; some children treated the activity as entertainment whereas others seemed to feel lost without clear direction. High suitability involves activities that are in the children’s “zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky 1978:86). They are challenging yet approachable for the children, encouraging them to elaborate ideas or themes or make links between ideas. For example, the co-oper in the Inventing Words activity (above) presented ways for the children to take the activity deeper, including how to make the definition sound more dictionary-like, possibly language origins of the word on the basis of phonetic analysis, and possible contexts of usage of the invented word.

Almost all (95 percent) of the co-operators who used collaborative approaches organized their activity with high developmental suitability, whereas only about half (54 percent) of the co-operators who used one-sided approaches provided activities with high developmental suitability, a significant difference (see Figure 4). The nearly 100 percent association of the collaborative approach with both high developmental suitability and supportive relations seems to provide a profile of the philosophy-in-action corresponding with the OC’s philosophy-of-practice—a coherent unity that many co-operators may come to use as they become more seasoned members of this community of practice.

In support of the idea that the philosophy-in-action forms a coherent unity is the finding that co-operators’ provision of activities that were developmentally suitable for children’s learning was associated with the co-operators’ teaching approach but not with their extent of co-oping experience (although teaching approaches varied with years of experience). Almost the same numbers of newcomers and old-timers organized activities with high, mixed, and low suitability. The close association of the collaborative approach with high developmental suitability, and lack of association of years of schooling with developmental suitability, suggests that working within the OC philosophy-in-action—rather than simply number of years co-oping—is central to development as an OC co-operator.

At the same time, it is important to note that the collaborative approach was not the only approach in which co-operators were supportive with children and provided developmentally suitable learning activities. Most of the co-operators who employed one-sided approaches also used supportive relations with the children (and adversarial relations almost never occurred); about half provided activities of high developmental suitability during at least part of their sessions. (In addition, teachers judged only a few of the co-operators as just beginning to understand the OC way or struggling with the dark; they judged 71 percent of the newcomers and 96 percent of the old-timers as OK or model OC co-operators.) Compatibility of a co-operators’ approach with the community’s practices is based on a synergy of mutual tolerance and adjustment, multiplicity of community practices and values, and open-endedness in the processes of doing things (Matusov 1999). Members of a community that is built on a collaborative philosophy might find an ecological niche where they can be supported by and contribute to the community while practicing different teaching approaches, including one-sided ones (as was the case for 34 percent of the old-timers in our study). Other characteristics of the co-operators such as open-mindedness, comfort with children, willingness to risk and experiment, and helpfulness might contribute to being valued and effective OC co-operators. Despite the need for many newcomers to learn to function within a new philosophy-of-action, there is room for heterogeneity in the overall profile of such a school community.

Ecology of Educational Philosophies-in-Action

Our findings suggest that OC parents may learn a collaborative approach to teaching as they participate in this community of learners, perhaps involving a transformation from their own schooling experience, which was likely to have involved an adult-run model of instruction. Among old-time co-operators, there was greater use of the collaborative philosophy-in-action, in which learning activities and guidance are based on mutual effort between the adult and the children, and use of one-sided approaches controlled by the adult or by the children. Most old-time parents—67 percent—were judged to be using a collaborative approach to teaching (46 percent) or collaborative mixed with one-sided approach (21 percent). In contrast, most newcomer parents—76 percent—were judged to be using a one-sided educational philosophy-in-action.

In this concluding section, we argue that the particular teaching approaches that we studied need to be understood in the context of the overall ecology of the school and its surroundings (Fein 1971). For some newcomers to a school like the OC, the collaborative approach may not require a philosophical shift from one-sided approaches. In societies such as Japan where a community of learners model of education may be common in elementary schooling (Chikako Toma, personal communication, November 12, 1994), a collaborative philosophy-in-action would presumably be congruent with many participants’ prior educational experience. This seems also to be the case for a few newcomers who join the OC already familiar with a community of learners model from their own schooling experience or from volunteering in some cooperative preschools.
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Thesis

Notes

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Matusov and Rogoff

Newcomers and Old-Timers

Heath, Shirley Brice

Johnston, Marilyn

Lave, Jean

Lave, Jean, and Etienne Wenger

Leont'ev, Alexey N.

Lipka, Jerry

Macías, José

Marsick, Victoria J.

Matusov, Eugene

Matusov, Eugene, Nancy Bell, and Barbara Rogoff

McDermott, Ray P.

McDermott, Ray P., Kenneth Gaspodinoff, and Jeffrey Aron

McRobbie, Campbell J., and Kenneth Tobin

Mehan, Hugh

Nell, Alexander Sutherland

Osborne, John