

Exploring the relationship between children's learning experiences and the agentive perception: A case study of two Hong Kong schools



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In child-centered education, child is seen as the “ultimately the agent of his own education” (Entwistle 1970, p.16)



Background

- In 2006, the latest issue of *The Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum* introduced in Hong Kong. Core Value of Pre-primary Education: Child-centredness
- The evidence suggests that many Hong Kong kindergartens' practice is still teacher-directed (Quality Assurance Inspection Annual Report, HKSAR)

Professional & Research Project

- A 12-month action research project was launched to support the evolution of an evidence-based 3Cs Early Childhood Curriculum in a kindergarten which aims to promote **c**reativity, **c**ommunication and **c**ollaboration
- During the process, a consultant and the research team worked collaboratively with the principal and teachers, and provide professional support in each stage of the project, for example, workshops, seminars and class observation

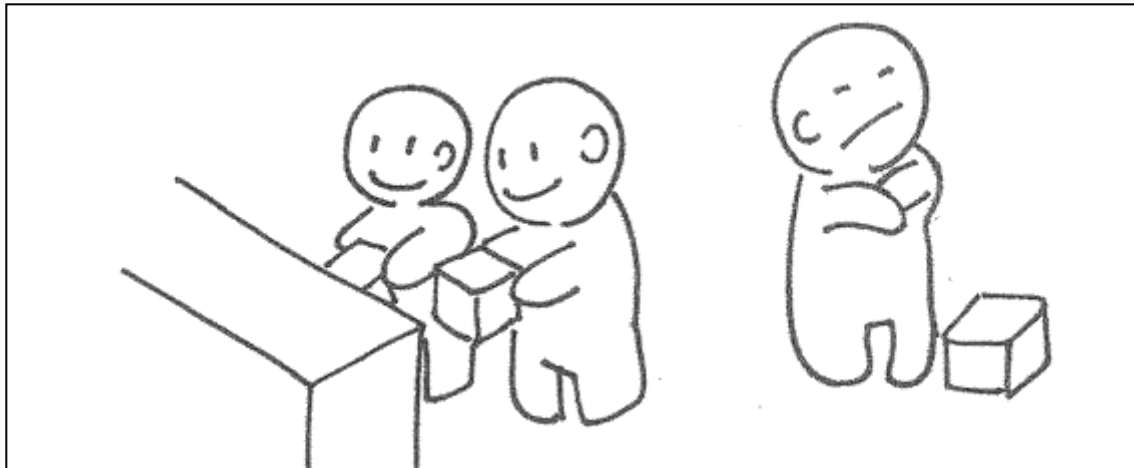
Means to evaluate the project

- Pretest-intervention–posttest control group design was used to examine the impact of the learning experiences on children's changes in 3Cs as a result of curriculum intervention
- Instruments:
 - Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R)
 - Torrance's (1981) research tool on Thinking Creatively in Action and Movement (TCAM)
 - **Reunamo's (2007) interview tool**

Reunamo's interview tool

- Interview with 16 educational situations in which they were interacting with a teacher or a peer whose views conflicted with that of the subject

Interview question



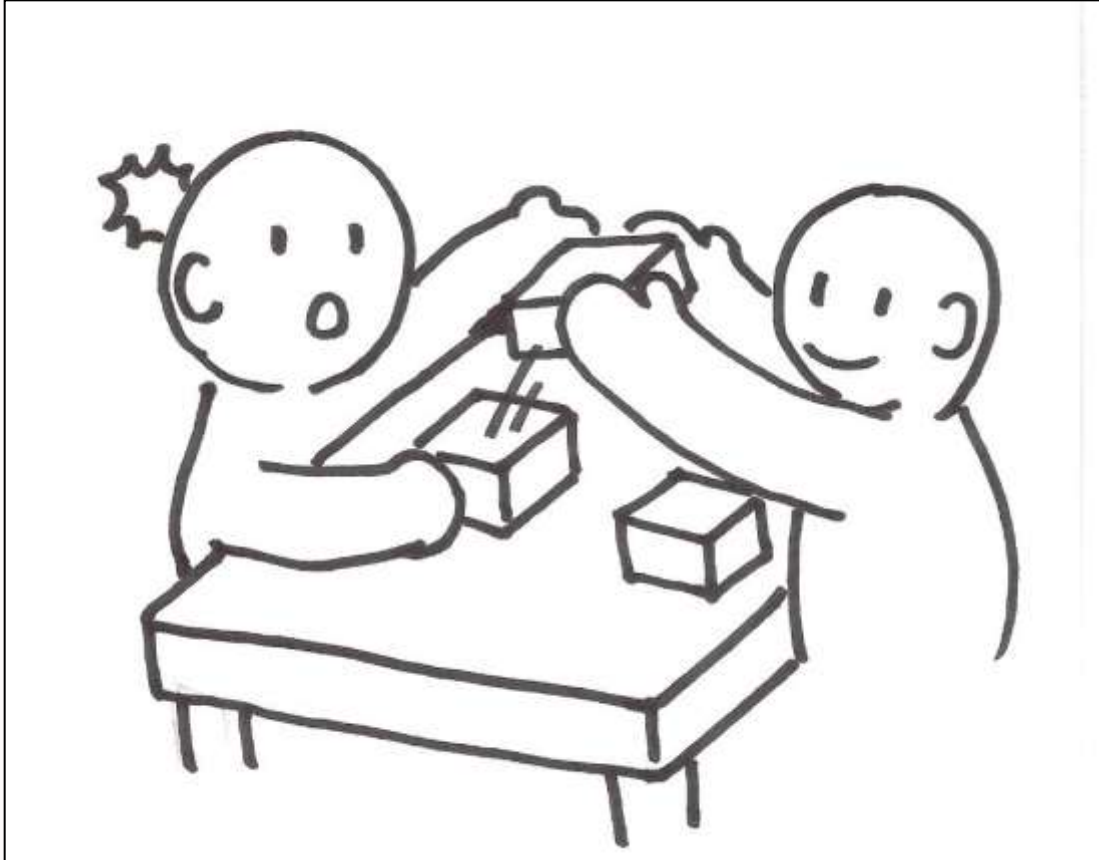
What if you don't want to tidy up when the time is up? What do you do?

Interview question



Let's think about a situation where another child comes to tease you .What do you do?

Interview question



Let's think that you are playing a game with somebody and the other does not follow the rules . What do you do?

Setting

- The project is still on-going and the effect of the intervention will be evaluated at the end of the 12-month period
- As a “snapshot” of the action research project, the pre-test results of Reunamo’s interview tool were analyzed in this paper.
- Classroom observations and teacher interviews

Setting

- Explore the relationship between the development of agentive perception and the children's experiences in two different learning environments:
 - academic, teacher-directed approach
 - child-centered approach
- Investigate the factors that influence the development of agency by examining:
 - the socio-economic background of children
 - the actual classroom practices

Context - School A

- Academic-oriented kindergarten in which the acquisition of academic skills is stressed

The assignments of School A were not well diversified to suit the learning needs of children. Some of the assignments were copying and drilling exercises that emphasized on children's mechanical repetition.

Report of Quality Review in Pre-Primary Institution (HKSAR, 2009)



Context - School B

- A more child-centered kindergarten in which three generic skills (creativity, communication and collaboration) are emphasized

The school played an active role in realizing the core value of education as child-centredness. Also, there was sufficient time for children to engage in different self-initiative learning activities.

Report of Quality Review in Pre-Primary Institution (HKSAR, 2012)



Participants

- 60 four-to-five-year-old children in two early childhood settings in Hong Kong—School A & School B

	School A's participants	School B's participants
Gender	12 girls and 18 boys	15 girls and 15 boys
Type of Housing	Private housing	Private housing
Parents educational levels	University education	University education
Monthly household income (HKD)	30,000-39,999	40,000 - 59,999
Parents' occupations	Professionals	Managers and administrators

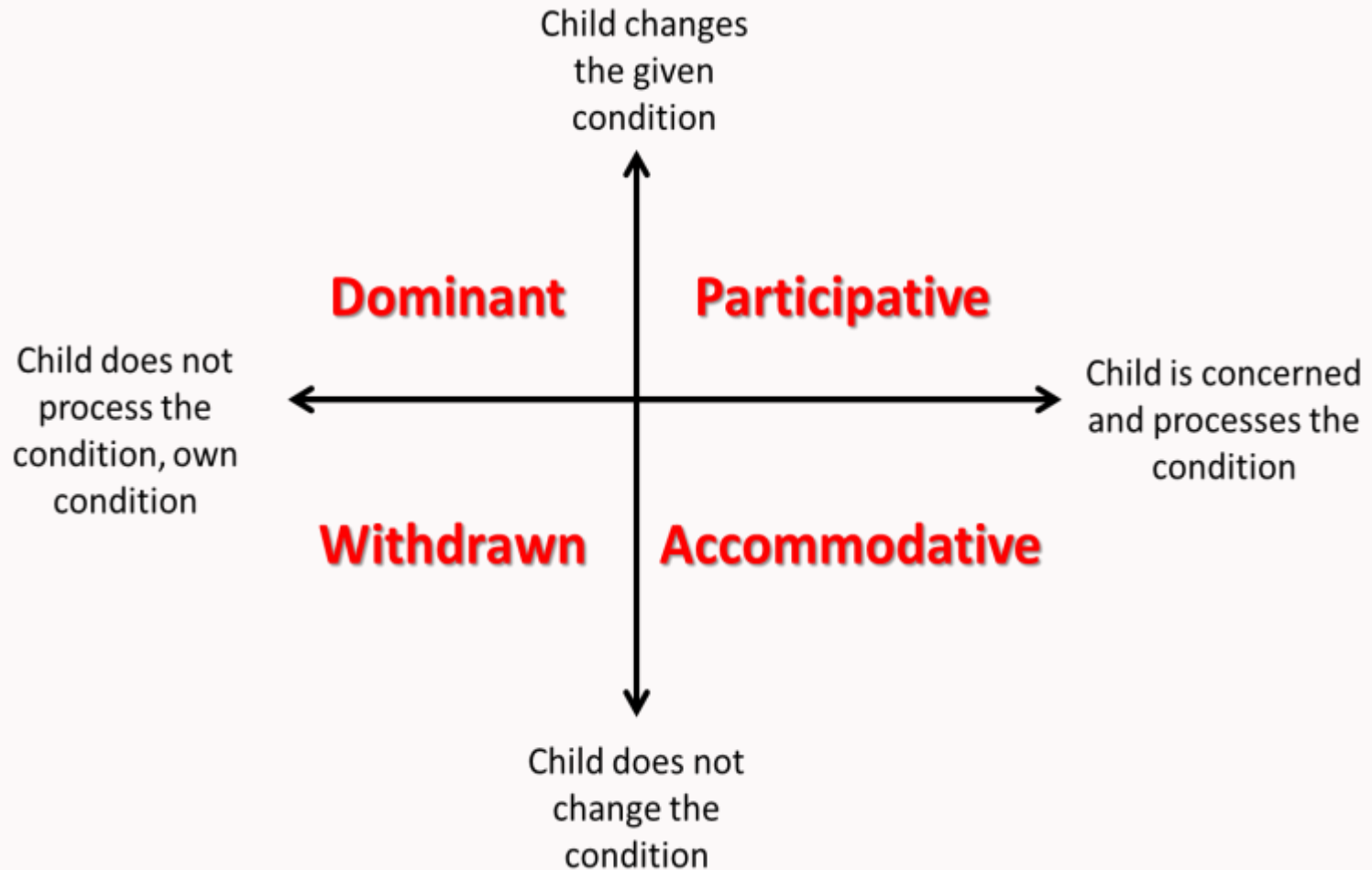
Socio-economic characteristics of School A and School B's participants

Examples

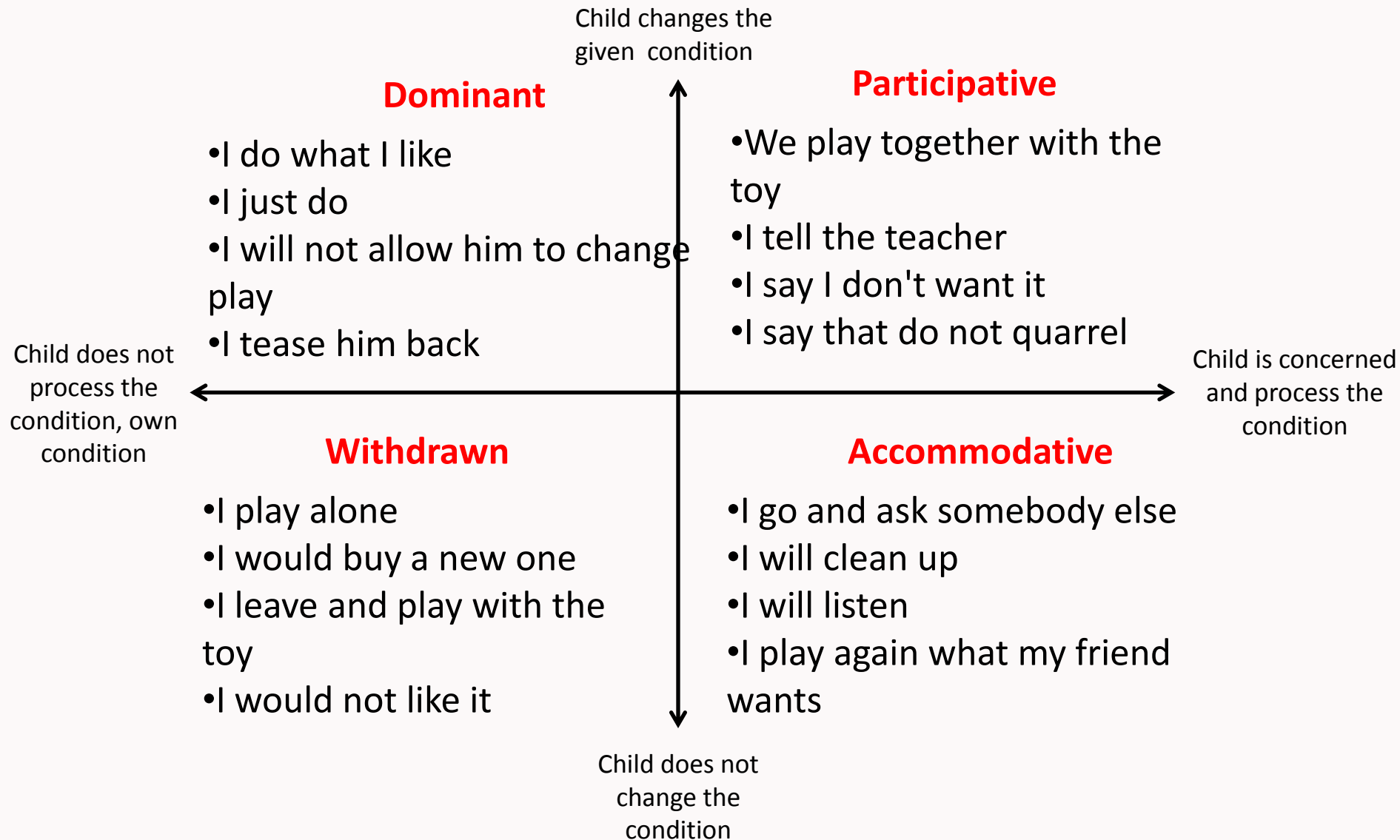
School A : Boy, five-years-old

School B : Girl, four-years-old

Classification of interview answers



Classification of interview answers



Classification of interview answers

Uncertain:

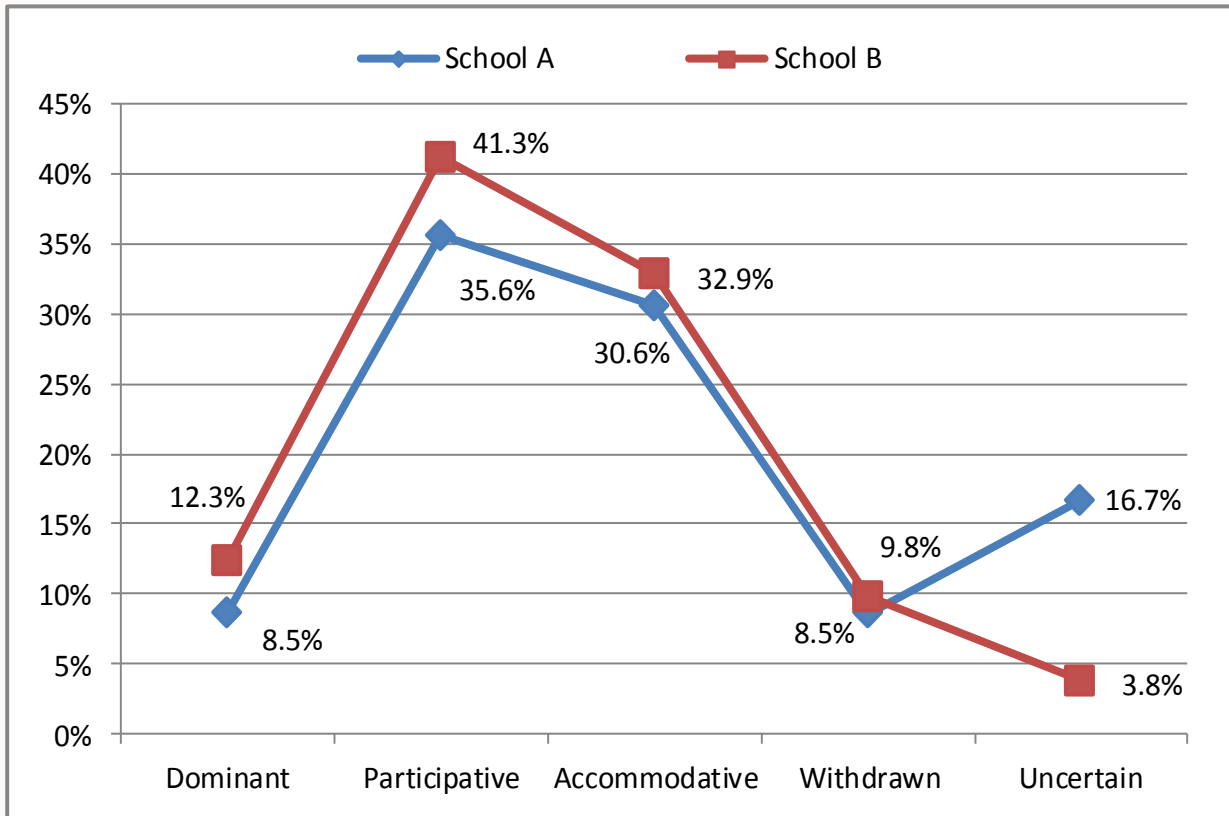
Not possible to categorise the children answers in any of the four categories

Examples:

- I don't know
- I can't think of it
- It has never happened like that. I don't know
- No response

Results

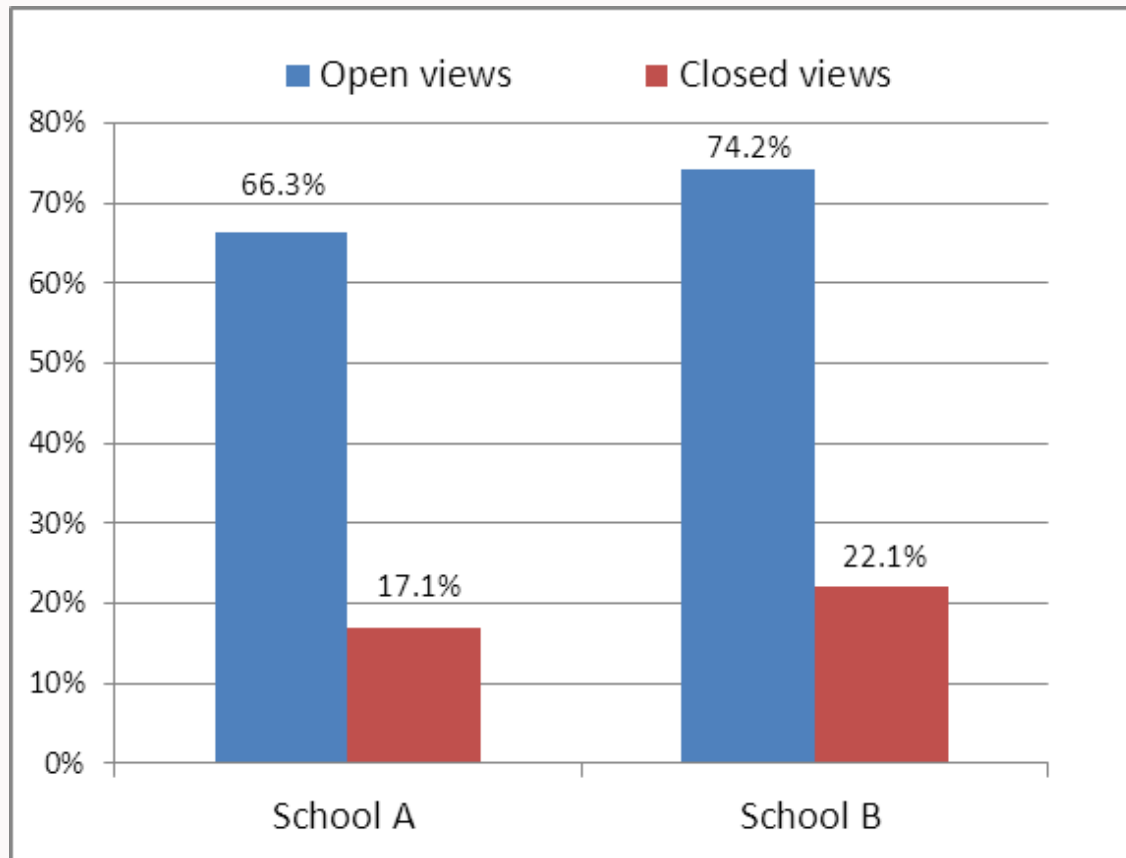
School A & B



- For both children, Participative > Accommodative > Dominant ≥ Withdrawn

Results

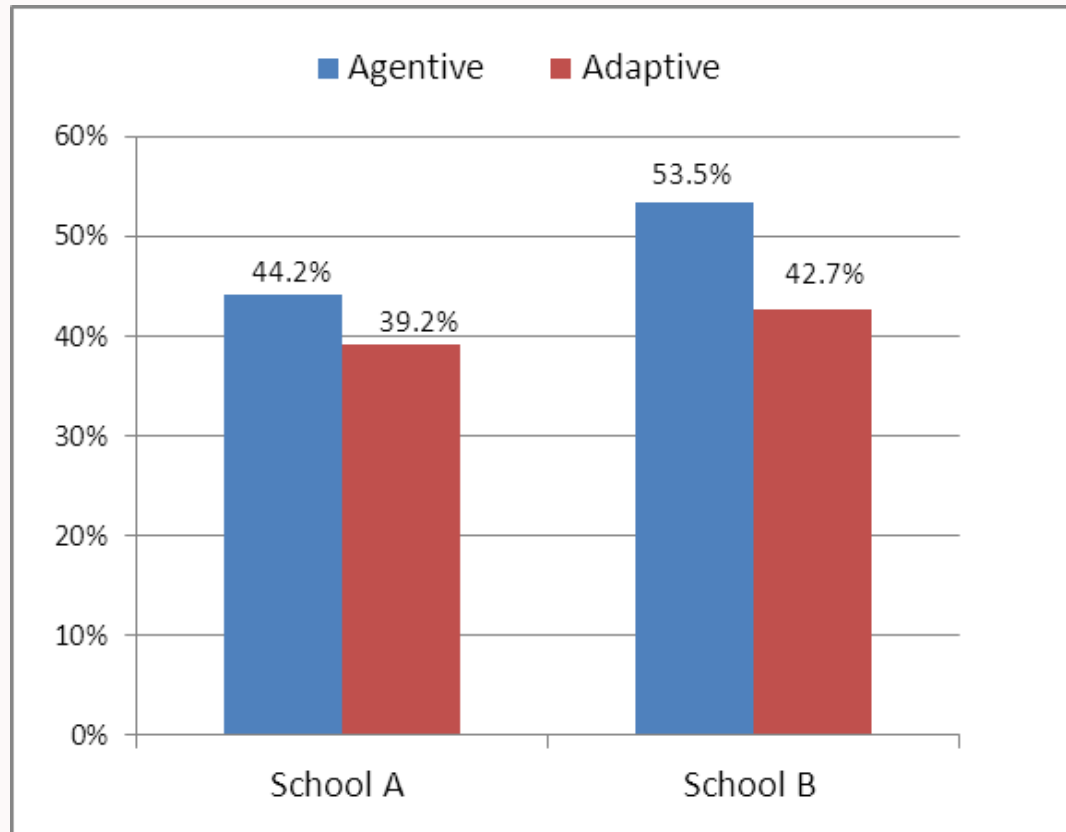
School A & B



- For both children, open views > closed views

Results

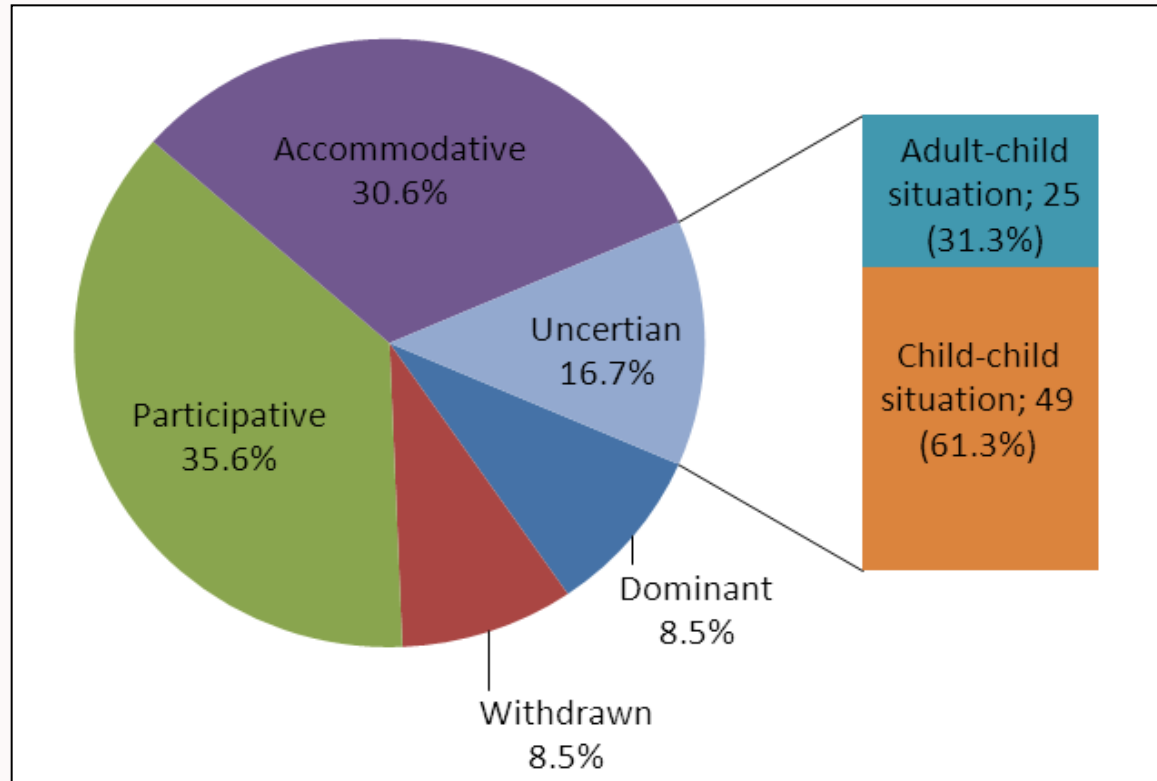
School A & B



- For both children, agentic > adaptive responses
- School B's children showed a higher tendency to initiate change

Results

School A

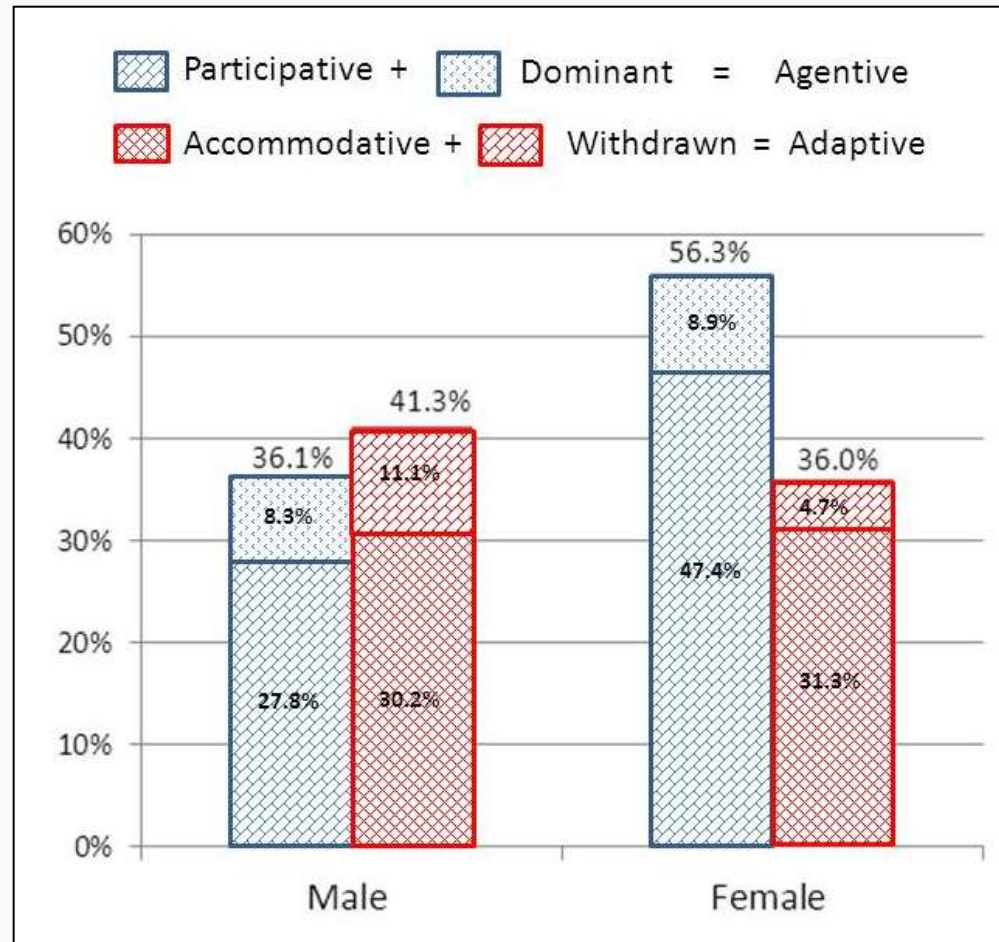


- Uncertain answer for School A: 16.7% (vs 3.8% for School B)
- Uncertain responses were more common for child-child situations

Results

School A

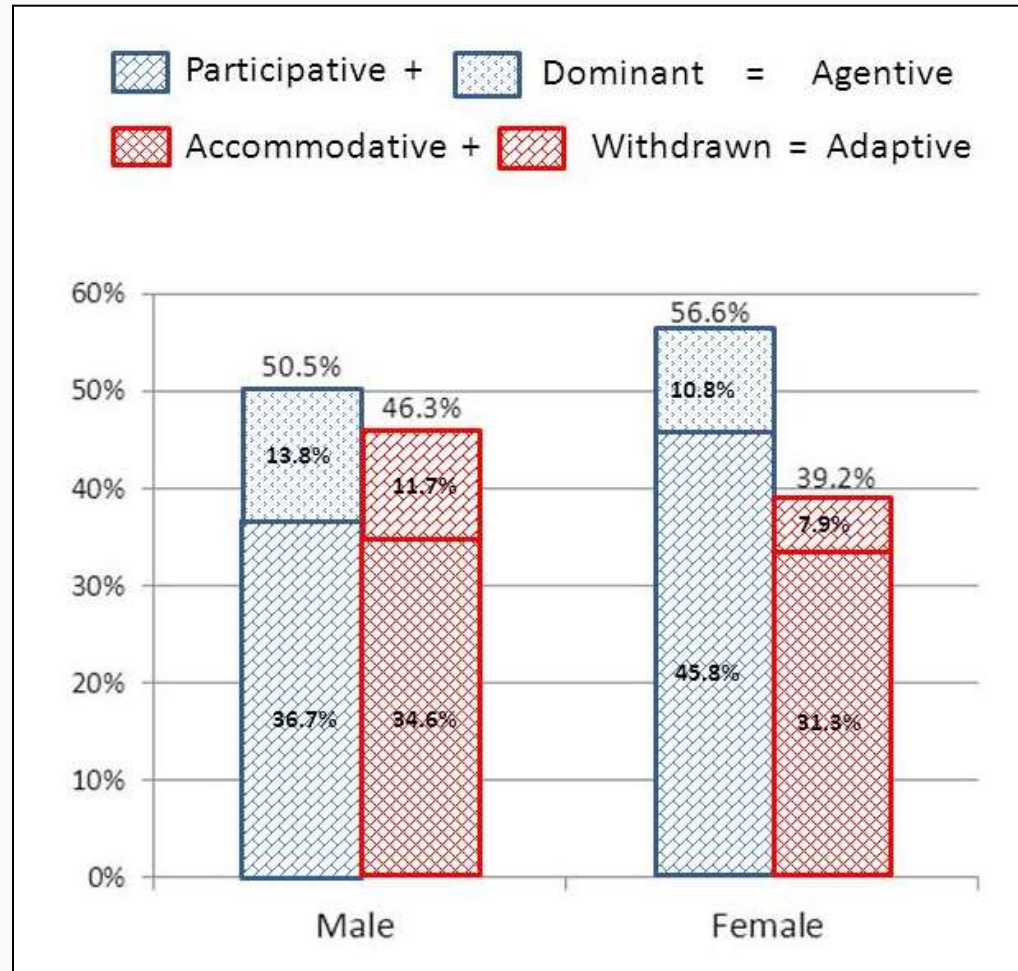
- Pearson's chi-square test: $\chi^2 (1, 30) = 33.14, p = .000$
- Male children:
Adaptive > Agentic
vs
- Female children:
Agentic > Adaptive



Results

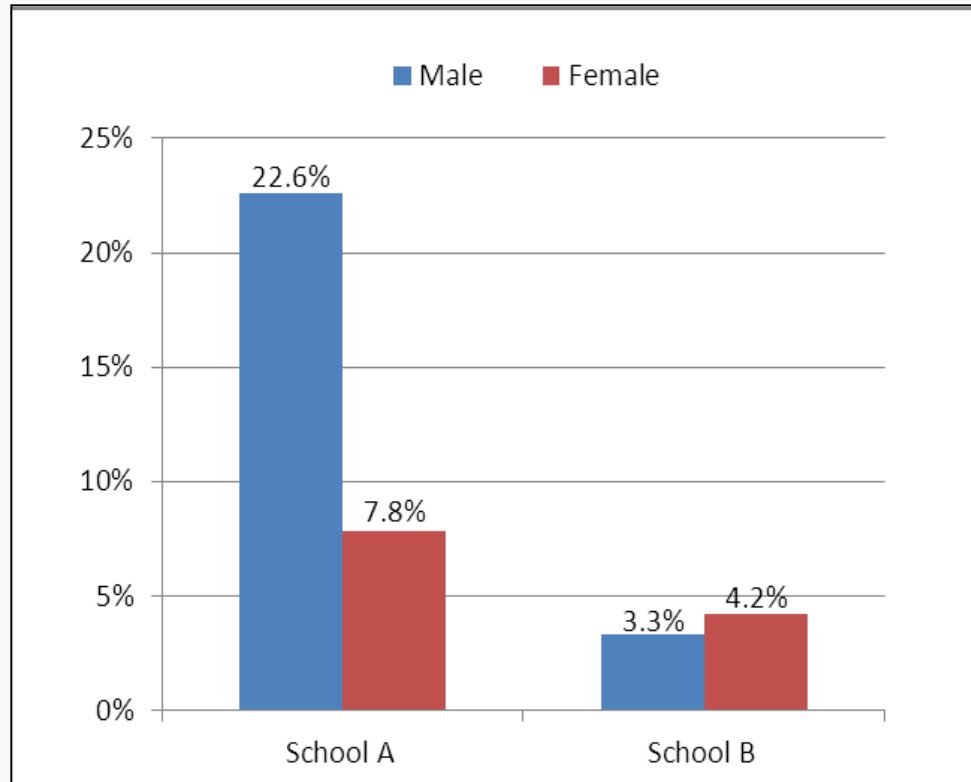
School B

- Pearson's chi-square test: $\chi^2 (1, 30) = 5.63, p = 0.229$
- Both male and female children:
Agentive > Adaptive



Results

Proportion of uncertain answers by school and gender



- For School A, high proportion of uncertain answers for male children (22.6%)

From Classroom Practices & Teacher Interview

School A :

- Free-play activity < 15 minutes per day
- Teachers expect children to sit down, be quiet, listen and answer questions
- Teacher controls classroom conversation in all of the day e.g. in snack time



From Classroom Practices & Teacher Interview

School B :

- Thematic time is integrated with free choice activities. Different activities are designed to accommodate the learning theme of the week
- The class has another free-play in the afternoon. Children can bring their toys and share with other children



Discussion & Conclusion

More uncertain and
adaptive views



Weaker and more
uncertain relationships
with teachers and peers

- Children exposed in academic-oriented kindergarten

More agentive and
open views



More harmonic
interaction with
teachers and peers

- Children exposed in child-centered kindergarten:

Discussion & Conclusion

- A major gender effect in academic-orientated classroom: male children had more adaptive and uncertain views than female children
- The negative impact of early academic experiences is more problematic for the male children.



Discussion & Conclusion

- Classroom practices can help to foster the development of children's agency in many respects:
 - ✓ Children can be involved in certain decision e.g. choices of activities
 - ✓ Teachers should play an active role in peer interaction e.g. provision of activities that engender children's desire to interact

Thank you for your patience!

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