APPROPRIATING CULTURAL CONCEPTIONS OF CHILDHOOD
Participation in conversation

MICHAEL A. FORRESTER
University of Kent

Key words:
childhood, conversation, discourse of childhood, subject-positionings

Mailing address:
Michael A. Forrester
Department of Psychology, University of Kent, Canterbury CT2 7NP, UK
[email: m.a.forrester@ukc.ac.uk]

[0907-5682(200208)9:3; 255–276; 026043]

Participating in conversation involves the co-construction of ideas, folk-beliefs and narratives concerning childhood, where young children learn to display versions of themselves in context. Using conversation analysis, this study looks in detail at several samples of talk of two British children, at ages ranging between 2 and 10 years, as they interact with other children, and their parents and grandparents. The article considers representations or discourses of childhood evident in these everyday conversations, and the ways in which children position themselves with regard to such discourses. Learning how to 'be' a child is likely to involve taking on board 'child-subject' positionings available in everyday talk. The conclusion discusses these observations in relation to contemporary accounts of the child subject-self and discourse.

Introduction

There is little doubt that at this particular time, childhoods in western cultures are associated with learning and one significant site where this occurs is the conversation, a context where children are positioned as children. Although finding an agreed definition of what exactly constitutes learning seems as elusive as ever, commentators have noted there are a number of problematic issues surrounding the presupposed relationships between learning and childhood (e.g. James et al., 1998), not least issues of control and regulation over the child's body and mind. Learning how to 'be a child' occurs outside conversation through non-verbal responses; however, as the child develops, conversation becomes particularly significant as a dynamic learning context.

Conversational learning processes can be analysed as models (e.g. of learning or of social interaction), as medium (e.g. providing information

about learning) and as criterion (e.g. one measure of learning might be performance in conversation). Within one subdiscipline of psychology, developmental social psychology, there is no contemporary theory of what it is to be inside a 'conversational context' and the study of conversation, and learning through conversation, is to be found either in pragmatics (Pea, 1993), or in social-cognitive development which currently favours Vygotskian accounts of dialogic thinking (Rogoff, 1989).

As has been noted elsewhere, developmental psychology focuses on language and conversation as the accumulation of grammar and vocabulary and fundamentally as an individualist cognitive skill (Burman, 1994; Forrester, 1999). What is overlooked is that learning how to participate in conversational contexts entails entering into the co-construction of participant folk-beliefs, accounts and narratives concerning childhood. Children are required to learn how to be 'children' as part and parcel of any other learning that might be said to be taking place. And discourses about the kind of child one is learning how to be will in part depend on the age and status of the child (infant or teenager, only child or elder sibling). Budwig (1996), for example, highlights the fact that the indexing of self and other by caregivers depends not only on the age of the child being addressed but also on the particular language he or she is learning.

The relationship between language and identity, particularly whatever it is we want to call the child's developing 'self-identity', is often viewed as relatively unproblematic in developmental psychology (e.g. Brooks-Gunn and Lewis, 1984). The subject self, as a cognizing entity, is seen as something underneath and separate from language, and when a child learns how to talk the language that is acquired is in some as yet unknown way, 'hooked-on' to the cognitive system.[1] One might note that in recent years there has been some debate over the form–function relation in early child language and an increased focus on language use by children (e.g. Slobin et al., 1996; Sperry and Smiley, 1995). A typical example is the work of Ochs (1988) on Samoan caregiver patterns, where she highlights how the organization of turn-taking procedures, the form of talk, is linked to beliefs and expectations regarding the nature of children and the function such talk is fulfilling in context.

In developmental psychoanalytic psychology, the relationship between language and cognition is much more interdependent, or to paraphrase Lacan, we are not speaking beings but 'speakings' where language 'speaks' us. While noting such divergent views, for the most part language in developmental psychology is a theoretical object (lexical, syntactic, semantic) and rarely a social practice. What is often overlooked is the fact that participation in dynamic and 'on-line' conversational contexts may be the most important social-cognitive skill that a child needs to acquire. We continue to find it difficult to remember that children learn language as accountable *sound* performance, and only later learn that these noises are described as words,

sentences and all other associated constructs which derive from the invention of writing.

During the pre-school period and beyond, in English culture the young child learns that he or she is required to display different versions of him- or herself depending on context. Presupposed in the earliest discourses we are exposed to are implicit role positions which themselves, at least in part, depend on meta-narratives regarding development, children and childhood manifested, for example, in western cultural contexts. Exposure to, and participation in, talk provides the young child with lessons in how conversational structures are (re)produced, and tutors him or her in appropriate discourses for that particular cultural niche. On the one hand, learning how to talk involves understanding the structural nature of turn-taking, pausing, introducing topics, opening and closing conversations and subsequently producing or orienting oneself towards such structures in the actual performance of talk-as-action (Ervin-Tripp, 1979; Sacks, 1992; Wootton, 1997). But at the same time, structure and content are dynamically interdependent. The versions, narratives, ideas and conceptions of the 'child' that children appropriate, and which may constitute elements of their identity, are embedded and reproduced in the talk of their peers, siblings, parents and other significant adults.

Whatever else might be involved in acquiring a concept of the self, one can note that an essential aspect of children attaining participant status in conversation is their taking up of the 'self' or the subject position made available in parent's talk addressed to them. Participating in conversation compels us to take up the positioned 'self(ves)' presupposed in talk, e.g. as observed in the use of the pronominal system (I, you, the third person and so on). And although we are able to describe the sounds people make when talking as words, and view part of the child's task as acquiring the lexicon which makes up the pronominal system, we can lose sight of the fact that the 'I' (as identity) is also a dynamic self-positioning, encoding role relationships in the ongoing talk. This self-positioning discourse may itself, depending on the context, make manifest and reflect specific subject–other positionings: infant child in relation to mother; good baby in relation to father.

This study looks at examples of everyday conversation between two young children and significant others (a parent, family friend, grandparent and other younger children) in order to better understand the ways in which children are positioned, and position themselves, in the ongoing talk, considering where appropriate, explicit and implicit discourses of the child, development and childhood. Samples were selected that highlight particular narratives of childhood, and that indicate how age and status bear upon the child's understanding and production of appropriate subject positions in context.[2]

Method

The principal data resource for this article come from four recordings of child–adult and child–child interactions. The data from the first and second extracts are taken from a longitudinal case study of a pre-school child's conversational skills (carried out by the author with his daughter during the period February 1998–August 2000 when the child was aged 1 year 1 month to 3 years 6 months). The data from the third and fourth extracts come from a study of an 8-year-old child's telephone conversation skills carried out by May (1998), where her daughter (Rosie) was recorded talking to her grandmother (aged 63 years) and one of her friends (Francesca 4.5 years). The telephone conversations were recorded a few days apart. All participants involved in these extracts are British, white, middle-class people who would be categorized as social class I or II (professional and managerial occupations). Permission to record and analyse the transcriptions were obtained from all participants, except in the case of the infant child (extract 2), whose mother granted permission. The extracts can be summarized thus:

> *Extract 1:* A video recording of a 28-month-old child with her father (the author) at mealtime in a domestic kitchen in the author's home.
> *Extract 2:* A video recording of the same child aged 41 months interacting with her father (aged 48), a family friend (female aged 33) and the daughter of this friend, an infant child aged 10 months at the time of the recording. Again this recording took place in the domestic kitchen of the author's home.
> *Extract 3:* An audio recording of an 8-year-old child (Rosie) with her grandmother (aged 63), talking on the telephone. The recording took place in the child's own home.
> *Extract 4:* An audio recording of the same 8-year-old child with a younger child (aged 4.5 and a friend of Rosie's). Again, this conversation was recorded in Rosie's home a few days after extract 3.

Employing the micro-analytic approach of conversation analysis, transcriptions of the recordings were produced using the conventions and codes outlined by Psathas (1995), and reproduced in the Appendix. The recordings took place during the period 1998–2000 and form part of a larger project investigating young children's conversation skills. The analysis employed here is conversation analytic in that the focus is on identifying procedures, techniques and devices that people use to accomplish the ongoing, and localized, business of talk. However, in this article data on specific structural procedures, such as the patterning of interruption, are sacrificed to the interpretation of discourse. Conversation analysis unpacks interaction instance by instance, and claims about interactional practices are derived from the interaction itself (Wootton, 1994). For this reason, conversation

analysis is often described as ethnomethodologically informed. The analysis which follows focuses on instances where the content of the talk highlights or points towards discourse genres, metaphors, models and associated ideas about the child; that is, occasions where there is evidence of the embedding of the developing child, children and childhood in 'talk-in-interaction'.

Data and analysis

In the first extract considered here, where Ella and her father are talking while he prepares breakfast for her, we can find suggestions that by 28 months Ella has not only taken up the subject positioning of 'not being a baby/being a big girl' made available in the discourse around her, but demonstrates considerable agitation with the suggestion that she might not belong to this 'higher status' category of the 'child-self'.

Extract 1: child Ella – 28 months old
Context: Father (F aged 48 years) preparing breakfast some distance away from the child (Ella – E) who is sitting in a high-chair next to shelf with a camera, telephone and other objects within the child's reach.

1. F: what're you doing with my camera?
2. E: he-he (.5) °mm holding it° holding it
3. F: be careful with it
4. E: ho:::o (.) why? (1.0)
5. F: you know why
6. E: why?
7. F: because it's not
[
8. E: WHA-WHA-WAH (0.5)
9. F: its not a to:::y
10. E: he (.) hey hey (laughs) wyyyyy (then sings along while continuing to touch camera)
11. F: what pictures do we take with the camera? (1.0)
12. E: I can't remember
13. F: ↑can't remember? (.) did we take pictures of ehhmm (.) when <ella was very small> (2.0)
14. E: no::o
[
15. F: !she was tiny tiny baby!
16. E: ↑NO:O
17. F: no::o=
18. E: =I'm not ↑TINY BA::BY (becoming agitated) DADDY (2.0)
19. F: I didn't say you were (.) I said when you were (1.5) don't shout at me (.) that's naughty (1.0)
20. E: ↑No I'm (.) to I'm not (.) a baby I'm (.) eh < a big girl> (3.0)
21. F: you are (.) a ↓very good big girl (5.0)
22. E: I'm °little baby° (unintelligible) (.) I'm not a little baby (.)
23. F: ↑what darling?
24. E: I'm not a little baby (.) °I'm big° (.) whee

The initial interaction involves Ella reaching from her high-chair and touching a camera, which the father (F) has left on the kitchen-top near her chair. F asks a question regarding the camera (line 11) as a diversion from the localized problem he has dealing with Ella's interruption (line 8) and defiance (line 10) of any suggestion that cameras are not toys and shouldn't be played with. F's comments in lines 13 and 15 initiate a very pronounced response by Ella (lines 14, 16 and 18) and highlights Ella's affective commitment to being categorized (by herself and others) as a 'big girl' or certainly somebody who is not a baby. Notice first how F refers to the pictures taken of Ella when she was younger.

In terms of conversational structure the comment 'very small' at the end of line 13 is spoken noticeably faster than the surrounding talk, followed then (after a negative response by Ella) with an animated, potentially derogatory, comment that at that time she was a 'tiny tiny baby'. Not only are these comments by F faster and spoken in a curiously animated baby fashion, the content is also deemed inappropriate as far as Ella's idea of herself is concerned. Her response is particularly defiant and spoken with such force that the utterance itself is deemed by F to be inappropriate, naughty, and subsequently leads to an affective interactional problem both participants then seek to rectify. In line 18, immediately following her loudly emphasized 'no' of line 16, she emphasizes that she is not a '↑TINY BA::BY DADDY', leaning forward and hitting the table in a forceful and agitated way. Being positioned in the membership category 'baby' is now perceived as some sort of threat to what we might call her 'sense of self', or certainly her self-positioning as 'a big girl'.

Ella's behaviour accompanying line 20 can be interpreted as a display of indignation which warrants a petulant display of emotion (she moves back in her chair quite noticeably, and displays what Goffman (1979) might have called a body cant alongside a facial expression indicative of being in a bad mood). Evidence for such an interpretation is forthcoming in F's response in line 21, which marks with a significant drop in intonation, the phrase 'very good big girl' spoken in a reassuring fashion. Interestingly also, when Ella then goes on to clarify that she is not a little baby (line 22), in part as a self-repair correction, she does so while returning her hand to the camera, and on hearing further reassurance that the conflicting incident is now over (evidenced in the particularly affective way F says '↑what darling?' in line 23), she goes on to assert in a now untroubled way that she is indeed 'big' (line 24 – 'whee' is spoken in a very musical and rhythmic fashion).

Already, by age 2 this child has learned that whatever else is involved in taking up, or rather being positioned in a particular role, it brings with it a host of associations and presuppositions, including, it would seem, the idea that babies can be spoken of in a somewhat derogatory way. Clearly some of these are already seen as undesirable and will be resisted, and correspondingly others embraced (e.g. being a big girl). Cahill (1986), reporting data

from interactions recorded in southern California and commenting on the observation that at around 3 years children begin to use alternative self-identification categories, noted that 'baby' seemed to be a despised identity and one which children typically resist. Returning to the extract, it is also evident that within-talk criteria for what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour become established (e.g. cameras are not toys) as well as being potentially contestable.

We can turn next to look at a recording of the same child approximately a year later where she is interacting with her father, a younger, unrelated child (Jennifer, aged 10 months) and this infant's mother (Louisa). Three aspects of this extract warrant consideration. First, as in the last extract, there are indications that the adults position the child as a 'child participant' in particular ways. Second, there is evidence that the child herself understands what a 'child position' might be and third, there are indications of how this child conceptualizes and orients to cultural ideas regarding the life story or the notion of development.

Extract 2: child Ella – 41 months old.
Context: Ella (E) sitting at dinner table with another child (Jennifer – not related to Ella, an infant aged 10 months – who doesn't speak in the extract) and Jennifer's mother (Louisa – L, aged 32 years) – friend of the family. Father (F) attending and preparing dinner.

1. E: (unintelligible)
2. L: just trying to keep her (.5) clothes clean (1.0)
3. L: let's see = do you think she is going to want one of ↓these
4. L: Jennifer (.) would you like one of ↑these (.) just 'fore tea (1.0)
5. L: something to chomp on d'you want one (.) Ella
6. E: 'mm ↑I had one already=
7. L: =have you would you like ↑another one=
8. E: =yea (1.5)
9. F: yes please
[
10. E: they look spicy (.)
11. L: are they ↑spicy (.)
12. E: yea
13. L: ↑are they (2.0)
14. E: I ↑like the spicy
15. L: that's why Jennifer likes them cause they're spicy (5.5)
16. E: that's not real food (spoken while looking at the infant who is chewing on a small plastic apple)
17. L she's (laughs) eating a plastic spoon isn't she
18. E: (laughs)
[
19. F: ↑wha (.) ↑what's she ↓doi::::ing
20. E: (laughs and turns away from infant and mother to look at M while laughing)
21. E: hhh (.) hhh (.) hhh (.) (laughs in a marked stacatto fashion)
22. L: what a funny thing

[
23. F: ↓th::::::at
24. L: what a funny thing to ↑do::o
[
25. M wh' ↑why is she doing tha:::t
26. E: I don't know (.) I think hers thinks it is a real food (1.0)
27. F: m (1.0) well maybe your I mean people like jimby and jimbo they think it's real don't they (1.0) (jimby and jimbo are soft toys Ella plays with in an imaginary way – talking to them and so on)
28. E: ↑no them don't (2.0)
29. L: they're far more sophisticated than that come on (laughs)
30. F: no (.) no them don't (imitating the way Ella spoke in line 28)
31. L: actually I (.) jimby's been very quiet today (.) hasn't he
32. F: has he
33. L: yea (.) I haven't heard jimby all ↑day (2.0) now that Jennifer's got the right (unintelligible) (5.0)
34. L: it's hard for her 'cause she hasn't got as many teeth as ↓you (.) It's really hard work trying to bite into it (.) can you see ::, she's having a ↑real struggle (2.0)
35. E: haven't got (.) many ↑teeth like me look (puts both of her hands into and opens her mouth wide on saying 'look')
36. L: I k::now↓ (.) you've got ↑heaps (3.0)
37. L: you've got a mouthful of teeth (2.0)
38. E: why ↑'ai I got ↓teeth
39. L: 'cause you're older (.) the older you ↑are the more teeth you have until you get to a certain age and then it's the (.) ↓reverse (laughs)
[
40. F: wah (unintelligible) 'cause you're older
[
41. E: (unintelligible) ↑s:::o big I that will have ↑lots of ↓teeth:(2.0)
41. F: bother
[
42. L: well, it gives more ↑time for more little teeth to ↑pop up, doesn't it (.) then you 'll get to a certain age and they ↑all drop out again
42. F: ↓oo::oh ↑don't ↓say that
43. L: (laughs)
44. E: and ↑the:::n (.) you're a baby
[
45. L: and you talk like this (.) and ↑then you're the ↑baby again °yea° something like that
[
45. F: (laughs)
[
46: E: and ↑you're the baby again like that=
[
47. F: and so it goes on
46. L: =a bit ↓like that a bit like a baby coz you have no teeth <br br br> (.) you have to wear false teeth
[
47. E: you have a ↑toddler fi:::rst (2.5)

48. L: yea (3.0) (spoken in flat monotone fashion)
49. E: ↑I know (.) how to click but ↑I kinda click (.) just click like this (shakes head to indicate no) and it doesn't make a clicking no:::ise (1.5)
50. L: your nails to click
51. E: yea
52. L: yea °'at right° is that ↑right (1.0)
53. L: is that ↑how the princess calls for the servants maybe (5.0)
54. F: we (.)
[
55. L: bring me my fo::od
[
56. F: we were talking about princesses yesterday Ella weren't we (.) because Eva said they were

This short extract includes at least two examples of adult–child positioning. First, there is a noteworthy contrast in the way L (Louisa, the infant Jennifer's mother) addresses the two children in lines 4–6. Throughout, and particularly towards the end of line 4, L speaks in a noticeably soft and staccato fashion described often as 'baby talk' or 'motherese' (Snow and Ferguson, 1977) and typically used in European-American families when addressing an infant. The talk is accompanied with a rising intonation on the word 'these' and the tone quickly changes when she then moves from addressing Jennifer (her infant) towards Ella in line 5, who is asked in a much more 'grown-up' way whether she would like a biscuit (note in passing the very specific mini-lesson in politeness which then follows, with a typical adult-like interjection by F in line 9). In this one utterance (line 5) we see the speaker adjusting the tone of her speech as she moves from one addressee to another, reflecting the different ages of the children she is speaking to.

We find another example of adult positioning employing an older/younger child contrast in line 34, where L discusses how difficult it is for the infant to eat because she has few teeth while Ella has many. It is not just hard for Jennifer (with the emphasis on hard), but so difficult that she is having a 'real struggle', and thus she not only positions Ella as an older child, but emphasizes her status by contrasting her with Jennifer, the infant who has to struggle so hard.

Turning to evidence that the child herself demonstrates an awareness of her position relative to the younger infant, consider the talk that occurs between lines 16 and 30. The topic begins after a 5-second pause with Ella looking towards the infant, commenting that what Jennifer is eating (a plastic piece of fruit from a doll's house) is 'not real food'. The manner in which Ella makes this comment is both matter of fact and ends with an emphasis on the word food. Subsequently, the two adults begin to produce a humorous commentary on the infant's action, accompanied by increasing laughter from Ella, with the infant's mother highlighting how funny it is that she is

eating some plastic food, and F asking in an amused high-pitched voice 'what, what's she doing?' F then asks Ella specifically why she is carrying out such a 'silly' action, highlighting the event as funny and odd ('what a funny thing to do'). Ella then produces an interesting utterance in line 26, which begins with yet another matter of fact statement that she has no idea, followed quickly by an explanation that articulates something of how she understands the infant. Ella recognizes that in contrast to her own knowledge that toys are simply plastic objects, Jennifer, being younger, thinks that the toy is real food (where interestingly, the intonational emphasis is now placed on the misunderstood 'realness' of the supposed food). Ella also objects (line 28) to the suggestion that her favourite monkey toys might think, again reminding us of her understanding of what it means to ascribe thinking to somebody (i.e. not permissible when discussing a soft toy).

Further evidence of Ella's own self-positioning is evident (in line 35) in her response to L's discussion about teeth, and the showing of her teeth to L, following Ella's recognition that Jennifer has few teeth. She then specifically asks why she has teeth, initiating a discussion which highlights a third significant aspect of this extract – Ella's orientation to a culturally held view or narrative about development or the life-cycle.

Some background information about the participants will help inform the following interpretation. First, L is a guest at the house, a friend of the family, and is sitting with the two children while F prepares dinner, primarily so that L can feed the younger infant (Jennifer is L's own child and she wished to feed her before the main meal was served). Ella's father (F) is playing host to L, preparing food for dinner, and supervising Ella. Second, in order to understand Ella's talk in this extract, over the preceding few months prior to the recording, and in response to Ella's questioning and anxiety over mortality (e.g. what happens when you die, Daddy?), F and Ella's mother, who is not present during these recordings, have often talked with Ella about different stages of life, explaining that people move from one to another, but avoiding discussion of death.[3] During such discussion, Ella would often spontaneously position herself at the appropriate point in this 'life-story' (as an 'annexe' child – see note 3), overcoming her fears of mortality by stating that at the end of life you 'become a baby again'. The guest in this extract (L) knows nothing about this family narrative as becomes apparent in the nature of her response in line 48, followed then by a response (lines 50–53) which can be understood as an attempt by L to make sense out of Ella's discussion in line 49.

Notice first, in the extract, in answer to Ella's question in line 38, L responds by explaining that she has more teeth because she is older (line 39) and then makes a joke (addressed to F) about the fact that when one becomes quite elderly it is likely that you will have lost many of your teeth. Ella responds to this by initiating the topic of the 'life-cycle' (line 44 and line 46) with an interjection by L, which draws attention to the fact that she

does not orient to the significance of this topic (line 45 – 'yea, something like that'). Then in line 47 Ella describes the next stage in the cycle (you have a 'toddler'), followed then by a noteworthy flat 'yea' response by L and a 3-second pause. Ella then begins, in line 49, to explain that she knows how to click her fingers, but cannot quite make the right noise (the clicking sound). The significance of this statement can be understood with respect to the fact that her older sister can perform this particular action, indicative of her older status or position in the life-stage cycle, and here Ella is spontaneously discussing or indicating that she recognizes she cannot quite do this yet. Interestingly, L, who has no prior knowledge of this 'life-cycle' discourse, then attempts to make sense out of Ella's statements by asking in a playful and encouraging way (line 53) whether princesses click their fingers when asking for things from their servants (she does know that Ella is very interested in princesses, fairies and so on).

This latter part of the extract shows how children may discourse using cultural ideas. Such observations resonate with the work of Chao (1995) and her analysis of distinctions regarding the self and ideas of development found in the attitudes and discourses about parenting reported by European/American and Chinese mothers.

The third extract, taken from a telephone conversation between an 8-year-old child and her grandmother, illustrates a child's self-perceptions of what is deemed appropriate in interactions with adults. Conversation analytic work on telephone talk has highlighted the particular devices employed by people to establish openings and closings, introduce topics, resolve ambiguities and so on (Hopper, 1972; Sacks, 1992; Schegloff, 1986; Sifianou, 1989). Notice first in extract 3 what surrounds the child being able to move from the conventions for an introductory preamble to the reason for the call. Consider how Rosie tentatively explains she simply wishes to talk to her grandmother (i.e. something which another adult would probably not have to establish given that they are already talking when the phone call ensues), but when pressed to actually talk (line 17), can only reply (line 18) 'em', a good example of the implicit orientation these participants have to asymmetric power relations between adult and child. Realizing the interactional trouble her granddaughter is having, the grandmother then quickly reminds Rosie that she forgot something on her last visit, which provides the opportunity for Rosie to produce and insert herself into the 'subject position', somebody who is a bit silly.

Extract 3: child – Rosie 8 years 10 months – talking with her grandmother (grandmother 63 years)
Context: telephone conversation conducted from Rosie's (R) house. Grandmother (G) lives in the country some considerable distance away from Rosie's family.

1. R: Hi=
2. G: =how's things in your neck of the woods (5.0) it's lovely down here

3. R: yea
4. G: going to rain again in a minute
[ ]
5. R: very bright (.)
6. G: ↑eh=
7. R: =it's very bright down here(1.0)
8. G: I can't hear you=
9. R: =IT (.) IS(.) VERY(.) BRIGHT
10. G: it is very bright (.) it's called a ↑watery sun
11. R: a ↑watery sun?= (with slight laughter)
12. G: a ↑watery ↓sun (.) yes (2.0) it's very very very very bright
13. R: °is it° ours is bright yellow
[ ]
14. G: what?
15. G: what can I do for you? (1.0)
16. R: nothing (.) I just wanted to ta::lk to you=
17. G: =oh (.) go on then (.) talk to me (.)
18. R: em (.) em
[
19. G: listen you you forgot your ↑orchid
20. R: oh (.) OH <u>silly</u> me (1.0) ↑silly ↓me (1.0) silly me
[ ]
21. G: (unintelligible)
22. G: silly you (.) yes that's true (.) you take after Dad
23. R: ha-ha (1.0) well (1.5) ↑I'll tell you about my homewo::rk
24. G: good
25. R: ehm (.) >are we doing such (unintelligible) (.) ↑Weekend's homework that's to be handed in on Monday> (.) write a poem or short description about ↓baby joe (.) and
[
26. G: about who?
27. R: baby joe (.)
28. G: ↑baby <u>jane</u>?
29. R: <u>baby</u> (.) JOE (1.0)
30. G: baby joe?
31. R: yea (.)he's eh eh a baby called joe=
32. G: =I see
33. R: that's coming 'cause miss tomlin's friends >have a baby <(.) and
[ ]
34. G: I <u>wish</u> you'd keep your mouth next to the phone so that I could hear you (.)
35. R: miss ↑tomlin's friend's have a ba:by (.) and we were watching em (1.3) her (.) em (1.0) the baby (.) like from the ↑<u>tu:</u>mmy and from a toddler and we were watching it's slow'
[ ]
36. G: no no it's lovely (.) what's its name (.) ↑joe?
37. R: yea
38. G: yea lovely (.) go on
39. R: and (1.0) <u>he</u> gained the same weight as his sister (.) and his sister is <u>three</u> (.) and a half (.) and he's 18 months old (.) and they both
[
40. G: and what's his

(1.0)
41. R: pardon?
42. G: what's his sister ca::lled
43. R: ella
44. G: ella (.) very nice yes >go on< (1.5)
45. R: em (1.0) ae::hh (1.0) em (.) and we've been (.) and she she's very like worried about (1.0) like sickness (0.5) shsh:::::sh something °I don't know something° I don't know (1.0) two ↑stone (1.0) yea
[
46. G: what?
47. R: .hh (.) they both weigh two stone

From this quite acceptable childhood position, Rosie then goes on to discuss an appropriate topic (homework), but by line 33, the evident trouble the grandmother has in hearing the child's talk leads to a long and quite strongly expressed interruption at line 34. The next utterance warrants closer analysis as here we find evidence of Rosie's uncertainty over the appropriateness of what she is talking about. While explaining that part of her homework preparation involved watching a video of a child being born, she begins to falter (six pauses or stretches in her talk before the rise in intonation on the word 'tummy'), which might indicate she is uncertain about the appropriateness of talking about this topic. Evidence in support of such an interpretation can be found in the grandmother's quick uptake of line 36, where her talk acts to reassure Rosie ('no, no, it's lovely') and where she fills out her speech by asking the baby's name, possibly as a diversion away from the touchy topic of birth.

Notice also the asymmetric nature of the grandmother's interruption, which causes Rosie some considerable trouble and is a well-known feature of adult–child conversation (Bedrosian et al., 1988). The frequent interruption on the grandmother's part contributes to the breakdown of the child's narrative in lines 39–45, a typical example of what Youniss (1980) would term asymmetrical positioning. In line 40, the grandmother interrupts in a noticeable way because she truncates her own utterance ('and what's his'). The grandmother herself orientates to the subsequent breakdown (line 44 – 'yes, go on') and following this encouragement, Rosie then extends her narrative concluding with the observation that the problem Miss Tomlin's friend has is that the three-and-half-year-old child is not gaining sufficient weight. What seems clear here is that this 8-year-old child, despite the interaction difficulties she is experiencing with her grandmother, nevertheless manages to convey something of her understanding of the problems surrounding child sickness and does so in a sophisticated fashion. Note, for example, that when she is discussing the fact that the baby has gained weight in line 39, she emphasizes the fact that his sister is not just three and a half, but <u>three</u> marking out her understanding of developmental norms. Supportive evidence for this interpretation is borne out later in line 45, where Rosie emphasizes what

weight both children are (↑stone) and further clarifies this when she spells out to her grandmother her observation that they both weigh the same when, it is presupposed, they should not (in line 47). One might surmise that by 8 years children's narrative skills are not only well developed (Miller et al., 1992; Mintz, 1995) but that they have a vested interest in their successful performance despite interactional problems which might arise (e.g. the grandmother's interruptions).

By way of contrast, compare the same child's talk with a younger friend, recorded a few days after Rosie's discussion with her grandmother. At the outset, Rosie orients towards what she considers appropriate when talking to a younger child, very much in line with reports on the modifications older children make to their speech when talking to younger children (Dunn and Kendrick, 1982; Shatz and Gelman, 1973). She begins (in line 2), by simulating the way Francesca speaks to her, followed immediately, as if by way of a short lesson, what you do when you talk on the telephone. In other words, when Francesca answers the telephone she speaks very quietly and tentatively with a noticeable stretching on 'wh::o', which Rosie then mimics by also speaking very tentatively, stretching her name 'Ro::sie', followed significantly however, with a pause and then a very pronounced, clear and distinct 'Hello'. Note also, Rosie's laugh at the beginning of line 9 which follows immediately on from the younger child's unabashed response to 'pardon' with a very definitive and resounding 'yes'. This amusement is repeated in line 34 again pointing towards Rosie's understanding of telephone talk conventions (and in line with age-related development of this skills, see Bordeaux and Willbrand, 1987).

Extract 4: child Rosie – 8 years 10 months talking with younger friend (Francesca – Fr 4 years 6 months)
Context: Rosie (R) is recorded telephoning her friend Francesca (Fr) from her own house. The recording takes place a few days after the conversation described in extract 3.

1. Fr: (6.0) wh::o is it?
2. R: °it's ↑R::sie° (2.0) ↑Hello
   (5.0)
3. R: are you excited about the holidays?
4. Fr: °yes° (2.0)
5. R: yea (.) ↑hahmf (2.0) we've got to get you a life jacket (.) haven't we
6. Fr: °yea°
   (2.0)
7. R: >pardon?<
8. Fr: yes
9. R: ha-ha mmf (.) that's better I could he::ar you now (1.5) what d'you wanna do at a' on holiday (.) do you want to go on the boat?
10. Fr: (unintelligible)
11. R: pardon?
12. Fr: °have loads of fu::n°
13. R: ye::a (.) have loads of ↓fun

(3.0)
14. R: ↑what you doing at Easter (.) oh eh (.) emm (1.5) ↑are you having a nice (.5) time at <u>home?</u>
15. Fr: °yes but I've just been to a party and I°
[
16. R: <u>pardon</u>?
17. Fr: 'I 'I I've just been to a party and I had >my face painted< but now I'm washing it
18. R: ↑<u>have</u> you?
19. Fr: yea
20. R: what were you (.) wha' what did you have it painted of (.) what were you painted (.) as that person
21. Fr: yea (.) as a baby ↑ti:ger
22. R: ↑OHA::↓HH (.) that's ↑SWe::et (.) who's party did you go to?
23. Fr: yes
24. R: <u>whose party</u>?
25. Fr: Gemma's
26. R: ↑Gemma's?
27. Fr: yes
(3.0)
28. R: did you like our <u>assembly</u> we did the other day for you?
29. Fr: yes
30. R: di' did you like the ↓song
31. Fr: yes
32. R: I can't hear you
33. Fr: YES
34. R: ha-ha (.) that's better (2.0) ↑maybe after school one day we could go and get a life jacket (.) with you couldn't we=
35. Fr: ye::aa
36. R: we have to get you a special size one (.) don't you
[
37. Fr: yes (.) my ↑<u>size</u>
38. R: your size (.) because you're very special (.) ↓aren't you=
39. Fr: =yes
40. R: you ne:ed a very (.) ↑Sma::ll one (.) don't you
41. Fr: yes
42. R: because (.) the big ones (2.0) Ha-ha-he-he
[
43. Fr: 'cause the (unintelligible)
44. R: pardon?
45. Fr: 'cause the big ones go and all the way down from my knees
46. R: oh ye::aa (.) this eh if
47. Fr: (unintelligible) and down from over my ↑cheeks
48. R: if and if you fall out of the wa::ter the life (.) jacket will just go off you won't it and you'll be there drowning (.) wouldn't you?
49. Fr: ye::a
50. R: you don't want to drown (.) ↑do ↓you
51. Fr: (unintelligible)
52. R: and ↑jesskay?
53. Fr: yes?
54. R: did you know that there were lots of swa::ns and ducks there?
55. Fr: jus said (.) they might pec' (.) they might peck me on the ↑head

56. R: no they ↓won't (.) I think you're a bit too tall (.) they probably won't be able to re::ach ↓you (3.0) ehm (.) 'cause em you're also you're also allowed to go and feed them as well.

This short extract includes two passages that illustrate discourses about and of the child. In line 14 Rosie begins by introducing the topic 'what might you being doing at Easter', and then immediately realizes or believes that the younger child cannot deal with such a question (about the future) and quickly rephrases her question to one dealing with the younger child's immediate surroundings. Following this, in line 22, in response to Francesca's answer to her question about face-painting, Rosie employs a very marked affective tone about Francesca being a baby tiger ('↑OHA::↓HH (.) that's ↑SWe::et'), again displaying an indication of her perception of what she thinks a young child can understand and relate to. This is borne out again in line 38 where she emphasizes that her young friend is a 'very special' person who needs a life jacket that is a small size. There may also be some evidence (line 42) that she finds the image of her friend clothed in an oversized jacket highly amusing – notice that the laughter comes after a noteworthy 2-second silence in the conversation.

In contrast to extract 3, it is also noteworthy that gaps between turns are quite pronounced, interruptions few and dealt with in an apparently unproblematic way (for example, Rosie's interruption of Jessica in line 52). There is little evidence throughout this conversation that what would normally be perceived as problematic and noticeable silences between adults (Sacks, 1992) are in any way troubling for the children (lines 27–28; 34; and 42). This is in line with earlier work on young children's telephone conversation skills (e.g. Ervin-Tripp, 1979) and marks an important difference between adult–adult and child–child talk. Furthermore, the response to the problem of not being able to hear properly is markedly different. When talking to her grandmother there are a number of occasions where it is clear the grandmother is somewhat annoyed at Rosie speaking quietly. This is not the case when the two children are talking: here instead they display an amused orientation to the hearing problem (lines 7–9 and lines 32–34). Finally, we might note that there may also be some evidence of subject positioning by Rosie's friend Francesca. In line 55 she comments that if she goes to see the ducks and swans they might 'peck her on the head', and the way in which she uses this phrase with a noticeable pitch rise and an accompanying rhythmic pattern serves to indicate her attempt at being amusing (i.e. presupposes her own knowledge that she is much taller than a duck). Rosie both responds to this humorous image by laughing and stating that the ducks won't peck her, and further contributes to an ongoing co-construction of subject positioning by reminding her friend she is too tall, and ducks cannot reach such tall children.

Concluding comments

The child's earliest experiences are of a narratological world. The regular patterning and arranging of social practices provide a rich layer of institutional life: actions and events, not necessarily determined by narratives of social practice, but certainly reproduced and co-constructed with regard to such narratives. One can suggest that entry into, and participation in conversational contexts provides one of the key domains of narratological experience. What is important about exposure to social practices within the conversational context is the invitation (by virtue of one's humanness) to participate in the co-production of appropriate narratives, including those that surround what it is to be an infant, child, a self and most significantly what it might mean to be an accountable entity. Budwig and Wiley (1995) note that all human languages provide speakers with an array of devices to contrast degrees of agency and responsibility, reporting data that maps out the development of children's categories of personhood during the second year. They comment that over time, between the second and fourth year, children not only attempt to demarcate the linguistically varied perspectives on how the self is grounded in discourse, but interdependently, locate the self in a moral realm of rights and responsibilities, including those associated with narratives of the child and childhood.

The examples of conversation between adult and children reported in this article provide suggestive evidence that subject positionings do indeed exist and are produced or 'worked up' by participants in a dynamic and online fashion. Furthermore, these subject positionings are interdependent elements of narrative production or more precisely narrative co-construction between the children and those around them. The first extract highlights the possibility that such child positionings are introduced and oriented to early on in a child's life, and that the child invests these positionings with some significance. Ella's response to the somewhat derogatory suggestion that she might be a 'tiny, tiny baby' is particularly marked, as are the demands for recognition of her status as 'a big girl'. This child has not only appropriated one of the earliest membership categories of personhood but appears motivated to defending her status within that category where her position is called to account.

In the second extract we noted that a year later, Ella is again being exposed to a number of specific subject positionings, e.g. being a big girl with lots of teeth, watching and overhearing how the adults talk to and about the infant Jennifer, and so on. Furthermore, she now spontaneously produces appropriate subject positions for the younger infant (e.g. pointing out the curious fact that the baby is trying to eat a toy), and produces elaborate discourse that can be understood with reference to cultural narratives specific to the developmental life-cycle.

The comparisons that can be drawn out with respect to Rosie's conver-

sations with her grandmother and friend (extracts 3 and 4) indicate the subtle nuances of subject positioning at work during social interaction. The contrast between her defining herself as 'silly me' or older helpful friend ('we've got to get you a life jacket haven't we') mark out elements of what is involved in learning to produce and participate in the childhood subject positionings of a particular culture. The child works up an appropriate child positioning specific to her understanding of her relationship with her grandmother. Notice, in extract 3, that the child's production of such a positioning (a somewhat silly child) follows on from a quite specific and potentially troubling demand that she 'get on with talking' (extract 3, line 17). The grandmother then provides a culturally specific attribute associated with childhood and being a child (Rosie taking after her Dad), which Rosie agrees with in humorous way and then turns into a conversational topic. Rosie herself displays an understanding and orientation to models and metaphors of childhood when she carefully selects the kinds of topics to discuss with her young friend, and in addition does so with particular sensitivity to the less developed conversational skills of the younger child (e.g. her reformulation of her question in extract 4, line 14.)

It would seem then that children during the pre-school years and beyond are adept at positioning themselves and others in the co-construction of everyday talk. They appear to do so in at least two ways. First, through brief dialogic exchanges they recognize and produce appropriate positions relative to whatever ongoing models or ideas of the child presupposed in the discourse. Typical examples might be those associated with age and gender, as Cahill (1986) has observed in his work, the 'big girl/not a baby' observed in extract 1 (Ella), or the 'I'm small and might get pecked by the ducks' from extract 4 (Francesca). Correspondingly, the adults also indicate and mark such positionings (e.g. in extract 2 where the adults co-produce the humour associated with the infant's actions), or in extract 3 where the grandmother aligns herself with Rosie's positioning as a silly child. Second, child self-positioning works at the level of the cultural narrative, for example the motivation on the part of Ella in extract 2 to describe and position herself in a narrative of the life-cycle, or Rosie's explanation to her grandmother about what one would normally expect regarding the weight of children given their developmental age. The adults also provide examples of ongoing narratives germane to the child's life, for instance in what infant children can and cannot do (in extract 2) or observations on the things that children might inherit from their parents (extract 3).

Overall, these examples provide indications of what children during the early years are appropriating. Needless to say, noting that children learn how to talk about themselves and others through conversation runs the risk of appearing to state the obvious. A great deal however, depends on the particular view one holds of language, social practice and active participation in the co-production of discourse. Traditionally, developmental psychology has

viewed language more as a formal object and less as a social activity, and for the most part language tends to be viewed as a window 'into the mind'. When we begin to examine in detail, not the acquisition of language, but entry and participation in 'talk-in-interaction' we gain some insight into what it means to acquire ideas of childhood, being a person, having a self and numerous other discourses germane to early experience, including what it is to think and have a mind. Such ideas will necessarily be culturally specific. Understanding the phrase 'I don't know (.) I think hers thinks it is a real food (1.0)' (extract 2: Ella commenting on the infant), has as much to do with the speaker being asked to provide a culturally appropriate explanation for what is being seen as a curious action, as it has evidence that this child now possesses a theory of mind (the ability to impute mental states to others).[4] We are also reminded in that extract, when the infant's mother swiftly and subtly changes her tone of voice depending on which child she is addressing, that the narratives adults initiate in child-directed speech will depend in part on the age and gender of the child, the purpose of the exchange, the social situation and a whole range of culturally specific influences bearing on any interaction.

One significant site of analysis for considering narratives of childhood is the conversation. These examples indicate what can be achieved through using a methodology such as conversation analysis. Given the conversation analytic emphasis on identifying a participant-oriented interpretation it may yet provide a realizable methodology for understanding how we (adults, children, researchers) produce and (re)produce metaphors and models of the self, the child and childhood. It will also be possible to study changes in constructions of childhood. Presupposed in the earliest discourses we are exposed to are implicit role positions that are interdependently embedded within the meta-narratives of our particular culture(s). As Kerby (1991: 12) reminds us, 'we are always already caught up in narratives [and] . . . we are primarily story-telling animals'. We need to understand how children learn about, produce and reproduce, the narratives of the child, children and childhood in particular cultural contexts.

Appendix: Conversation analysis transcription conventions (after Psathas, 1995)

Code	*Transcription conventions employed*
↑ or (↓)	Marked rise (or fall) in intonation
Underlining	Used for emphasis (parts of the utterance that are stressed)
Upper-case letters	Indicate increased volume (note this can be combined with underlining where appropriate)
:::	Sounds that are stretched or drawn out (number of :: provides a measure of the length of stretching)
([ ])	Overlaps, cases of simultaneous speech or interruptions. Where appropriate, the spacing and placing of the overlap markers indicate the point at which simultaneous speech occurred
(.)	Small pauses
(1.4)	Silences with the time given in seconds
°	Shown when a passage of talk is noticeably quieter than the surrounding talk
=	When there is nearly no gap at all between one utterance and another
.hhh	A row of hs with a dot in front of it indicates an inbreath. Without the dot an outbreath

Notes

1. Contemporary poststructuralist debate in the social sciences over the relative status or significance of cognition and language often turns to language acquisition as a source of evidence (e.g. Burman, 1994; Zeedyk, 1996). Historically, developmental psychologists have for the most part emphasized the dominant status of cognition in this area (i.e. cognitive processes taking precedence over language practices).
2. Needless to say, it remains unclear whether a random selection of child talk would highlight numerous instances of self-positioning preoccupation. The ongoing longitudinal study of the child in extracts 1 and 2 indicates that this may very well be the case.
3. The stages co-constructed between Ella and her parents prior to the recording of this extract were baby/toddler/biggies/annexe girl (the last three representing classifications used in her nursery to separate pre-school children of different ages)/schoolgirl and or sister/teenage/adult. As noted in the text, schoolgirl/sister is in part defined by being able to do certain things (i.e. things her older sister can do such as being able to 'click' your fingers together to make a sound).
4. Contemporary developmental psychology expends considerable research effort into the question of when a pre-school child possesses a 'theory of mind' (e.g. Mitchell, 1997) reflecting the cognitive-developmental orientation of the discipline.

References

Bedrosian, J.L., S.K. Wanska, K.M. Sykes, A.J. Smith and B.M. Dalton (1988) 'Conversational Turn-Taking Violations in Mother–Child Interaction', *Journal of Speech and Hearing Research* 31(1): 81–6.

Bordeaux, M.A. and M.L. Willbrand (1987) 'Pragmatic Development in Children's Telephone Discourse', *Discourse Processes* 10: 253–66.

Brooks-Gunn, J. and M. Lewis (1984) 'The Development of Early Visual Self-Recognition', *Developmental Review* 4: 215–39.

Budwig, N. (1996) 'What Influences Children's Patterning of Forms and Functions in Early Child Language?', in D. Slobin, J. Gerhardt, A. Kyratzis and J. Guo (eds) *Social Interaction, Social Context and Language: Essays in Honor of Susan Ervin-Tripp*, pp. 195–212. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Budwig, N. and A. Wiley (1995) 'What Language Reveals about Children's Categories of Personhood', in L. Sperry and P. Smiley (eds) *Exploring Young Children's Concepts of Self and Other Through Conversation: New Directions for Child Development, Number 69*, pp. 143–65. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Burman, E. (1994) *Deconstructing Development Psychology*. London: Routledge.

Cahill, S.E. (1986) 'Language Practices and Self Definition: The Case of Gender Identity Acquisition', *Sociological Quarterly* 27: 295–311.

Chao, R.K. (1995) 'Chinese and European American Cultural Models of the Self Reflected in Mother's Childrearing Beliefs', *Ethos* 23: 328–54.

Dunn, J. and C. Kendrick (1982) 'The Speech of Two and Three-Year Olds to Infant Siblings', *Journal of Child Language* 9: 579–95.

Ervin-Tripp, S. (1979) 'Children's Verbal Turn-Taking Skills', in E. Ochs and B. Schiefflein (eds) *Developmental Pragmatics*, pp. 134–59. London: Academic Press.

Forrester, M.A. (1999) 'Conversation Analysis: A Reflexive Methodology for Critical Psychology', *Annual Review of Critical Psychology* 1: 35–56.

Goffman, E. (1979) *Gender Advertisements*. London: Macmillan.

Hopper, R. (1972) *Telephone Conversation.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

James, A., C. Jenks and A. Prout (1998) *Theorizing Childhood.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Kerby, A.P. (1991) *Narrative and the Self.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

May, L. (1998) 'An Ethnomethodological Analysis of Children's Telephone Conversation', final year undergraduate project, Department of Psychology, University of Kent.

Miller, P.J., J. Mintz, L. Hoogstra, H. Fung and R. Potts (1992) 'The Narrated Self: Young Children's Construction of Self in Relation to Others in Conversational Stories of Personal Experience', *Merril-Palmer Quarterly* 38: 45–67.

Mintz, J. (1995) 'Self in Relation to Other: Preschoolers Verbal Social Comparisons within Narrative Discourse', in L. Sperry and P. Smiley (eds) *Exploring Young Children's Concepts of Self and Other Through Conversation: New Directions for Child Development, Number 69*, pp. 87–102. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Mitchell, P. (1997) *Introduction to Theory of Mind.* London: Arnold.

Ochs, E. (1988) 'Talking to Children in Western Samoa', *Language in Society* 11: 77–105.

Pea, R. (1993) 'Learning Scientific Concepts Through Material and Social Activities: Conversational Analysis Meets Conceptual Change', *Educational Psychologist* 28: 265–77.

Psathas, G. (1995) *Conversational Analysis*. London: Sage.

Rogoff, B. (1989) *Apprenticeship in Thinking: Cognitive Development in Social Context.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sacks, H. (1992) *Lectures on Conversation.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Schegloff, E.A. (1986) 'The Routine as an Achievement', *Human Studies* 9: 111–51.

Shatz, M. and R. Gelman (1973) 'The Development of Communication Skills: Modifications in the Speech of Young Children as a Function of the Listener', *Monographs of the Society of Research in Child Development* No. 38.

Sifianou, M. (1989) 'On the Telephone Again! Differences in Telephone Behaviour: England Versus Greece', *Language in Society* 18: 527–44.

Slobin, D., J. Gerhardt, A. Kyratzis and J. Guo (eds) (1996) *Social Interaction, Social Context and Language. Essays in Honor of Susan Ervin-Tripp*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Snow, C. and M. Ferguson (1977) *Talking to Children: From Input to Acquisition.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sperry, L.L. and D.E. Sperry (1995) 'Young Children's Presentations of Self in Conversational Narration', in L. Sperry and P. Smiley (eds) *Exploring Young Children's Concepts of Self and Other Through Conversation: New Directions for Child Development, Number 69*, pp. 143–65. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Wootton, A. (1994) 'Object Transfer, Intersubjectivity and 3rd Position Repair – Early Developmental Observations of One Child', *Journal of Child Language* 21: 543–64.

Wootton, A. (1997) *Interaction and the Development of Mind.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Youniss, J. (1980) *Parents and Peers in Social Development.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Zeedyk, M.S. (1996) 'Developmental Accounts of Intentionality: Toward Integration', *Developmental Review* 16: 416–61.