

## Chapter 7

# Co-producing Cultural Knowledge: Children Telling Tales in the School Playground

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The school playground is a place where children socially engage with peers and attain membership and participation in group activities. As young children negotiate relationships and social orders in playground settings, disputes may occur and children might ‘tell’ tales to the teacher. Children’s telling on each other is often a cause of concern for teachers and children because tellings occur within a dispute and signal the breakdown of interaction. Closely examining a video-recorded episode of girls telling on some boys highlights the practices that constitute cultural knowledge of children’s peer culture. This ethnomethodological study revealed a sequential pattern of telling with three distinct phases: (1) an announcement of telling after an antecedent event (2) going to the teacher to tell about the antecedent event and (3) post-telling events. These findings demonstrate that telling is carefully orchestrated by children showing their competence to co-produce cultural knowledge. Such understandings highlight the multiple and often overlapping dimensions of cultural knowledge as children construct, practise and manage group membership and participation in their peer cultures.

### Peer Activities in the Playground

Membership and participation in peer activities in the playground involves a demonstration of the interaction order and social competence as appropriate to the ongoing interaction and peer culture (Danby and Baker 2000; Theobald 2013, 2016). Such cultural knowledge is the knowledge that one displays as a member of

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the surrounding culture in situ; this might include adult culture, peer culture, or classroom culture (Kantor et al. 1993). Cultural knowledge draws on the expectations of the social setting, artifacts, the amount of time available, the size of the group, and the gender, culture and moral beliefs of the members according to the specific context at hand (Corsaro 2003, 2014).

Ongoing membership requires access; interpretation and demonstration of social competence appropriate to the ongoing aspects of cultural knowledge (Danby and Baker 2000; Kantor et al. 1993). Cultural knowledge can be observed as participants employ features of talk such as repair, turn taking and overlap. The Opie's research in English school playgrounds in the 1960s highlighted the ways in which children's games were created according to who was available, the amount of time and resources children had on hand (Opie and Opie 1969, p. 10). Their observations showed how children use cultural knowledge to construct their social relationships. Similarly, Theobald's (2013) research on playground games showed how authority in a game was an "achieved status" that required ongoing negotiations in order to ensure uptake by others. This research shows that playgrounds are social arenas where children co-produce cultural knowledge and being viewed as a competent member or not by peers has implications for social inclusion or exclusion (Theobald 2016). Detailing how children co-produce cultural knowledge helps adults to understand how they can best support children to interact competently in the playground.

Children's playground disputes are times when cultural knowledge is mobilized and can be observed. Disputes happen frequently among young children (Theobald and Danby 2012). A dispute involves a three-move sequence, in which there is an event or action, then an oppositional move toward that action and, finally, a counter-action aimed at the initial opposition (Cromdal 2004; Maynard 1985b). Within dispute situations, the phrase 'I'm telling' is sometimes uttered by one of the participants. A common feature of telling is that children call on an adult to intervene. Adults, including teachers may understand that children want a dispute resolved. 'Telling' (Maynard 1985b) is also described as 'tattling' (Cekaite 2012; Friman et al. 2004), 'gossiping' (Evaldsson 2002) and 'dobbing' (Rigby 2002), although there are slight differences. For example, gossiping is more likely to occur among peers, whereas telling on someone is usually a child's instigation and the telling itself told to an adult.

Despite being an interactional practice associated with children, surprisingly few studies have investigated telling. Cekaite's (2012) Swedish study of immigrant children's teacher-mediated disputes focused on the teacher's uptake of children's 'tattling'. She found that the teacher's questions implicitly confirmed the guilt of the accused. Other researchers have found that *threats* of telling happen frequently in preschool classrooms and playgrounds. For example, in an Australian preschool, the action of threatening to tell the teacher was used to gain access to play equipment and spaces, such as the block-building corner (Danby 1998; Danby and Baker 2000). In this research, girls were more likely than boys to get a hearing from the teacher, with boys often teased by peers for telling (Danby 1998). Similarly, Cromdal's (2004) analysis of children's social interactions in a Swedish school

playground found that children used the threat of telling to manage their teasing peers. Cromdal (2010) showed how children attributed the actions of telling tales as one belonging to girls, when faced with a threat of telling the teacher. When investigating how cultural knowledge is co-produced when children tell tales to the teacher, little is known about how the telling gets done moment-by-moment. The episode of telling discussed in this chapter shows how telling is carefully orchestrated as interactional events through which children co-produce cultural knowledge, and the social orders of the playground.

Telling on peers has consequences. Inviting an alignment from an outside party, such as a parent or teacher, is a strategy that may not always be successful and can be 'risky business' (Danby 1998, p. 195). When a boy reported that two girls were 'mean' to him at the drawing table, the teacher's response questioned his account and worked to weaken his position rather than support his claim that he was being unfairly treated. Evaldsson and Svahn's (2012) Swedish study of school bullying and gossiping demonstrated that the school's policy of 'telling' resulted in further bullying by the perpetrators and the take up of bullying by other peers. In Church's (2009) study, tattling was used as a 'last resort' strategy for teacher intervention and attempted only when disputes were not being resolved within the peer group. Friman et al. (2004) studied 88 adolescents living in supported accommodation. They found that those who told tales about others were less popular. Weider's (1974) well-known study of residents in a halfway house showed how the inmates paid close attention to the rule of 'do not snitch' (not telling). This 'code' constructed a local social order and brought into play a moral order with consequences for those who broke the code. These studies propose that interactional outcomes are not always favorable for those doing the telling. This chapter applies fine-grained analysis to provide insight into how cultural knowledges are constructed, practiced and scripted in the interactions of telling between peers, and children and teacher.

## The Study

The video-ethnography investigated children's participation in playground interactions in an elementary school setting. There were 24 children (aged four to five years) and a teacher, in a preparatory (Prep) class in Brisbane, Australia. Prep is a play-based, full-time and voluntary preschool program for children in the year prior to compulsory schooling. In total, 26 h of video-recordings were collected.

Low risk human research QUT Ethics approval (0700000025) was gained. Appropriate education governing authority, parents or guardians were provided with an information pack and parents were asked to give written consent for their child to be involved in the study. A child-friendly letter was included in the information pack which parents or guardians were encouraged to read to their child. Recognizing children as competent participants in research, the children were able to indicate their assent to be involved.

## Data and Analysis

A single episode was selected for detailed transcription and analysis, and was transcribed using the Jefferson notation conventions of conversation analysis (Jefferson 2004). A 'single case' or 'extended sequence' (Sacks 1984; Schegloff 1987) enables detailed sequential analysis of an entire episode of interaction for the identification and explication of participants' actions (Psathas 1992, p. 99). Studying an entire episode allows the entry of participants, shifts in topic, and interconnectedness of talk, actions and context to be scrutinized revealing what is relevant for the ongoing talk (Psathas 1992).

The episode of interaction examined in this chapter occurred in the school playground. During this time, children choose from resources and equipment such as wooden building blocks and swings. The teacher and teacher assistant encourage the children to collaborate with each other and they talk with the children about what they are doing. This episode involves a group of five girls and two boys using long foam strips to build a cubby house. Participants include Maddy, Brigid, Georgia, Becky, Toby and Luke. As the episode unfolds, and a dispute arises over ownership of the play materials, Georgia and Brigid visit the teacher twice to 'tell' on the boys' behaviours.

The episode is separated into five sequential extracts at moments in time that appeared to be pivotal points for the ensuing interaction. The pivotal points included the events that occurred before the girls went to the teacher to tell (pre-telling), the events that occurred during telling the teacher, and the events that occurred after telling the teacher (post-telling). All names used in the extracts, except for the researcher's name, are pseudonyms. The extended sequence begins with an antecedent event that leads to the girls' telling in Extract 1. The antecedent event is first detailed.

### *Antecedent Event*

Toby invites others to make a house using an invitation, *guys how about we make a house for everyone?* While Toby's turn was inclusive of the girls, Luke's next turn is not, as he names only himself and Toby. The omission of the girls' names indicates his exclusion of the girls in the planned play. The design of his turn is such that Georgia, Brigid and the other girls present are excluded from the talk, and thus marginalized from the episode underway. Luke further reinforces this stance by taking two building strips and shifting them to a new location two metres away. Georgia complains about the building strips being taken away. Complaints are one member's account of events and an indication of trouble (Drew and Holt 1988). Receipting this, Toby now offers to share and Luke shows his alliance with Toby by bringing two building strips to Georgia and Brigid.

After Luke returns the strips, Georgia offers a new complaint, saying that the strips are gross. Luke uses a loud, growly and comic voice to refute this claim, saying that they are not gross. Georgia restates her complaint, pointing out the dirty marks on the strips as justification for her continued disagreement. In response, Luke spits. This action of spitting and the earlier action of not sharing are treated as a reportable offence or transgression (Drew 1998). This provides the immediate stimulus for Georgia to announce her plan to ‘tell’ the teacher.

Extract 1 picks up the dispute from the moment when Luke spits.

### Extract 1:

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113 Luke: ((walks away looking over his shoulder at girls,
114         makes spitting action on the ground))
115 Georgia: No let's just tell on Mrs Nolan 'cause(.) because-I'll tell
116         you why because (0.5)°Lu:ke actually'=
117         [(2)
118         [((Georgia comes over close to Brigid and makes a
119         spitting action and sound, with hands on hips))
120 Georgia: =°spit°. (( nods looks at Brigid, throws hands up, shakes head
121         and moves away. Luke turns his head and watches Georgia as he
122         walks back to Toby))
123         (3)
124 Brigid: Then te=
125 Georgia: =we need to tell on them 'cause he didn't listen to us.
126 Brigid: What about we tell Maryanne ((researcher))
127         ((Georgia runs up the hill, Brigid follows to tell teacher))

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Georgia activates the telling of two reportable offences. The first is when Georgia announces her intention to tell on Luke for spitting (lines 115–116), which she says in Luke’s presence. This design of her announcement shows that Georgia hearably identifies his spitting behaviour as an action that the teacher needs to be told about. With her hands on her hips, Georgia reenacts the spitting action (line 118–119). At the same time, Georgia looks at Brigid, raises her hands in the air and shakes her head (lines 120–122), indicating her disapproval of Luke’s action. Georgia’s reference to Luke’s spitting action is designed to legitimize and display her rationale for telling. Luke walks away looking back at the girls as he does so.

The second reportable offence is activated when Georgia upgrades her reason for telling by adding another rule infringement that Luke did not listen (lines 125). The stressed first sounds of the word ‘listen’ add an emotive component to her reason for telling that might be interpreted as indignation (Selting 2010). This second reportable offence provides the stimulus for action, perhaps because this aspect of the infringement is most likely to provoke the teacher. Her use of the pronouns ‘we’ and ‘us’ is designed to create a unified and, thus, a stronger social position and stance (Sacks 1995) that work to publically emphasize the divide: ‘we’ (Georgia and Brigid) versus ‘them’ (Luke and Toby). In dispute situations, talking about someone in his or her presence is an adversarial act that makes relevant a response by the one being talked about (Evaldsson 2002; Maynard 1985a). The third party (the one being talked about, in this case Luke) can respond to what is being said, thus advancing or dissolving the dispute (Maynard 1986).

In line 126, Brigid suggests telling Maryanne, the researcher, who is also a witness as she is video-recording the interaction, and hearing and seeing what had just happened. Not responding to Brigid, Georgia runs up the hill toward the teacher (lines 127–129). In taking this action, Georgia shows that Maryanne is not to be the recipient of this news. Involving the teacher as a powerful figure and as an arbitrator who invokes authority (Maynard 1985b) can be viewed as a strategic move on Georgia's part to seek support and a display of her knowledge of the playground interaction order. As Goodwin (1990) pointed out, 'when the actions of another are construed as a violation, the offended party can take action to remedy the affront' (p. 142). Luke's spitting and then not listening to their earlier rule enforcement is the girls' justification for telling the teacher about a violation of the playground social order. Extract 2 shows the interaction with the teacher that follows.

### Extract 2:

128 Georgia: Luke spit at us ((standing in front of teacher))  
 129 Mrs N: Did you say something to him?(0.2)  
 130 Georgia: Yes we said (0.5) don't- we said please don't do it  
 131 but he didn't listen to us  
 132 Mrs N: Well How about you try saying Luke-(0.2) he mightn't know-  
 133 he mightn't know what you don't want him to do=  
 134 =Say Luke please don't spit. (0.5)  
 135 Try that, saying his na:me  
 136 and try saying please don't spit.  
 137 ((Georgia and Brigid run back down hill to boys))

Georgia follows through with her announcement of telling the teacher. She and Brigid approach the teacher and Georgia 'tells' on Luke. The teacher's next turn (line 129) asks Georgia and Brigid if they said something to him. The teacher's action here seems to work to gain more information about their 'telling' and it also provides an action for the girls if they have not already done this. Georgia uses direct reported speech saying that yes she told Luke 'please don't do it' (spit) (line 130). Georgia's justification for telling, that Luke did not listen to them, despite their attempt to speak to Luke, is presented as a collective stance of joint actions through the use of 'we' (Watson 1987). Her use of directed reported speech 'makes the telling more vivid' (Haakana 2007, p. 158), reveals the climax of her complaint narrative (Drew 1998), and provides a sense of authenticity (Clift and Holt 2007a, b; Holt 1996). What the readers of the Extract 2 transcript know, and the teacher does not, is that what Georgia purportedly said is somewhat modified from what she actually said to Luke. While Luke did spit on the ground, the girls did not ask him 'please don't do it' as they now claim. This gives credibility to the notion that the girls wanted to tell on him, rather than to seek a solution to his action of spitting.

Georgia's account of what she had already said to the boys is a necessary local condition for gaining a hearing from the teacher. Such an action is evidence that the teacher's preference is that students first try to work out interpersonal differences among themselves before coming to her. Georgia appears to have heard the teacher's question in this way and her swift move into the teacher's frame of reference shows an understanding of the teacher's agenda. Although Georgia has not actually

followed the teacher's expected rules of behaviour, her interaction with the teacher reveals her knowledge about the expected behaviour in relation to calling on the teacher for help. The formulation highlights her cultural knowledge of individual responsibility as a class member as she constructs a particular version of herself: a class member who has followed the teacher's expected rules of behaviour.

Georgia's case to the teacher is that neither she nor Brigid are at fault. She depicts Luke at fault and as conducting an offence. Georgia gives an account of her own 'ongoing conversational conduct' and 'the prejudicial moral implications that might (otherwise) be attached to that conduct by the recipients' (Drew 1998, p. 302). Using an explicit formulation and expressions of indignation Georgia overtly displays her disapproval of Luke's behavior. She does this also through her use of the politeness marker 'please', which pays attention to the correctness of her own interaction with Luke. Georgia's turn is designed to meet the teacher's criteria that the children first try to resolve the problem themselves before telling her and is evidence of how knowledge is co-produced for an interactional purpose. Showing her understanding that the teacher expects them to try a solution first is a display of cultural knowledge. In particular, the girls anticipate the teacher's response of what constitutes a reportable offence and what constitutes appropriate actions prior to telling the teacher. This formulation demonstrates the girls' orientation to knowledge of the teacher's expectations and her local playground rules.

The teacher, not privy to what happened with Luke, works from Georgia's account of events. Her response is oriented to Georgia's second reason for telling the teacher, that Luke didn't listen which Georgia had pre-empted in her earlier exchange with Brigid (line 125). She offers a partial explanation for Luke not listening to the girls, to suggest that he might not know what they expect of him. This construction of Luke presents him as one possibly not knowing the local social order rather than a construction of one who knowingly broke the rules. Such a positive characterization of Luke puts the girls in a difficult situation. They have a candidate explanation from the teacher about Luke's action but no clear response from the teacher regarding his rule breaking. At this point, their telling has not resulted in any sanctioning of Luke's actions.

The teacher engages in advice giving that might be expected in her role, drawing upon her 'professional stock of knowledge' (Peräkylä and Vehviläinen 2003). The teacher offers a solution to the problem of Luke not listening by suggesting the girls first say his name, Luke, along with a script of what they can say on their return. A script can work as a way to propose to someone what they could possibly say, and constructs them as capable agents able to carry out this course of action (Emmison et al. 2011). As well as proposing what could be said to Luke, the teacher follows teaching guidelines that suggests children 'come up with their own 'fair' solutions' to social problems encountered and 'explain their actions' to others (MacNaughton and Williams 2004, p. 313). The teacher repeats this script telling the girls to say his name and direct him not to spit (lines 146–147).

The girls do not make a verbal response, but run back down the hill. At this point it appears that the girls are intending to talk to Luke as proposed by the teacher. Extract 3 shows the post telling events, that is what happens when the girls run back down the hill after telling.

**Extract 3:**

138 Georgia: *But I don't think (0.2)((running))*  
 139 but I don't think that will work  
 140 [(1.00)  
 141 [(Brigid moves ahead and calls to Luke who is  
 142 using strips to make an arch for the house;  
 143 Georgia waits with girls))  
 144 Brigid: *LU:KE PLEASE DON'T SP:IT ((hands on her hips))*  
 145 (2.00)  
 146 Luke: What?  
 147 Brigid: Can you please don't spit.  
 148 Toby: hum? Luke ((Luke keeps building with strip, Brigid  
 149 joins Georgia who is waiting with Maddy and Becky))  
 150 Luke: [(I don't say that ...)]  
 151 Georgia: [Yeah he didn't listen.] <That's what he did?>  
 152 ((to Maddy and Becky as Brigid approaches them))  
 153 ((Brigid runs toward teacher;  
 154 Georgia slumps her shoulders;  
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Following their telling and receipt of a proposed course of action from the teacher, Georgia comments on the effectiveness of the teacher's suggestion (lines 138–139). Her talk here indicates a resistance to, and doubts regarding the usefulness of the teacher's suggestion. When they reach Luke and Toby, it is Brigid, and not Georgia, who delivers the teacher's words as a direct script, with a raised voice and action of hands on hips (line 144). The girls seamlessly cross the lead roles in the telling (initiated by Georgia) and the delivery of the teacher's script (delivered by Brigid), showing the co-production of the action. The girls have carried through their earlier actions of announcing that they will tell the teacher, and then going to the teacher. Now, Brigid delivers the teacher's proposed script, the hands on hips and raised voice suggests an adversarial stance.

After Brigid names Luke and tells him not to spit, there is a long pause of two seconds (line 145) when Luke does not respond, which could be that he is 'not listening' or that he has not heard her. Then Luke responds with 'What?' (line 146) which indicates that he heard something but perhaps that he did not hear clearly. Luke's turn is a question and is not a second pair part for Brigid's first turn, a reprimand. Brigid treats Luke's response as an other-initiated repair (Schegloff 2007) and rephrases her turn to a closed question format, with a falling tone (line 147). The fall in intonation works as a directive but the closed-question format makes relevant some form of response from Luke in the next turn. Luke's ambiguous response (line 150) suggests that Georgia's earlier comment that the strategy would not work appears to be the case.

Without stopping to discuss the matter further, Brigid runs past Georgia on her way again to the teacher (line 155). Georgia throws her hands up in the air, a display of the hopelessness of the situation, and follows. Although there is no announcement to the boys that they are going again to tell the teacher, the girls' actions show that the matter is not accountably resolved. Luke's lack of acknowledgement of what the girls said gives the girls a warrant to return to the teacher. Extract 4 presents the interaction that occurs as the girls tell the teacher again.



**Extract 4:**

157 Brigid: He didn't listen ((standing in front of the teacher))  
 158 Mrs N: What's that?  
 159 Brigid: He didn't listen ((hands on hips))  
 160 Mrs N: He didn't listen sti:11.  
 161 Brigid: No, ((looks at teacher))  
 162 (1.2)((both girls look at teacher))  
 163 Mrs N: Okay then say can try saying um Luke did you  
 164 hear what we said. (0.4) and see if he answers you then (0.2)  
 165 and say Luke please answer us  
 166 ((Georgia slumps shoulders, turns from teacher))

The girls' next actions, that of returning to the teacher, show that Luke's minimal response in extract 3 is not accepted and that the dispute has not been accountably resolved. The focus of the telling this time is that Luke didn't listen to them (line 157). The teacher appears to have not heard what Brigid says (line 158), and Brigid repeats that Luke didn't listen (line 159). The teacher repeats Brigid's utterance and adds emphasis, 'sti:11.' (line 160). Emphasis suggests trouble of some kind, such as accepting what is being told or what is being alluded to (Robinson and Kevoe-Feldman 2010). Georgia and Brigid's problem is not yet resolved and so this matter is now also a problem for the teacher.

The teacher's use of 'okay' (line 163) works at a transition-relevant place to show her responsiveness to the prior talk and shapes her next turn. The 'Okay + [fuller turn]' occurrence (Beach 1993) shows a sensitivity and a shift to next-positioned matters. The teacher's initial response is to suggest a script formulation for the girls to use, and this time she suggests a script calibrated to Luke's responses (lines 163–165). Georgia slumps her shoulders in an exaggerated way and with a sense of performance. This display indicates her dissatisfaction with the teacher's response to the telling. Extract 5 details the events that occur post telling-the-teacher as she and Brigid run back towards Luke and Toby.

**Extract 5:**

167 ((Georgia follows Brigid downhill to Luke))  
 168 Georgia: I don't think Lu:ke will actually li:sten.  
 169 ((to Brigid walking within earshot of Luke))  
 170 ((Brigid walks to boys who are spreading out a sheet  
 171 for the house; Georgia hangs back))  
 172 Brigid: Luke [did you listen]to [[what we said?]  
 173 Luke: [[Yep]  
 174 Toby: [[Hey guys?]  
 175 look what we're doing  
 176 we're making a bed for you two guys?  
 177 Luke: No: we're making a bed to be wa:rm  
 178 (1.00)  
 179 Toby: No we're making a bed for them?  
 180 Luke: No:o  
 181 (0.2)  
 182 Toby: °Yeah° ((Boys continue talk about whose bed))  
 183 ((Georgia and Brigid join Maddy in house))

When the girls return to the boys, possibly within the boys' earshot, Georgia again comments on the effectiveness of the teacher's response (line 168). She maintains that Luke will not listen. Brigid does not comment but in close proximity to the boys calls out to Luke (line 172). After his name is called, Luke replies in overlap with '[yep]' (line 173). Luke's response is not conciliatory but it does suggest that he is 'listening'. Also in overlap with Luke and Brigid, Toby gains the conversational floor by making an announcement directly to the girls that he and Luke were making a bed for them (lines 174–176). Toby's actions display a conciliatory stance towards the girls and also preempt any further turns about the telling. The girls are now offered access and inclusion into the activity by Toby. Toby's action demonstrates his cultural knowledge, in this case the need to avoid possible sanction from the teacher by making amends with the girls.

Luke, though, rejects Toby's suggestion of their joint activity (line 177). Direct opposition, without any delaying tactics to lessen the disagreement, is how children engage in disputes (Goodwin and Goodwin 1987). The one-second pause between Luke's disagreement and Toby's response highlights their differing stances. Toby re-phrases his original suggestion (line 179), his utterance now delivered with an upward intonation that suggests an uncertainty in its uptake. Luke again rejects this suggestion (line 180). Unequivocal utterances such as an outright 'no' can indicate the authority and the right to state who can and cannot be members of a group without a justification proffered (Bateman 2015; Danby and Baker 2000).

At this moment, the oppositional talk between Luke and Toby shows a break in their partnership. As Maynard (1985b) pointed out, such conflict can lead to a changed organization of the group. Toby responds, "°Yeah°" (line 182), in a quieter tone, highlighting his awareness that his conciliatory offer to make amends with the girls has now jeopardized his social relationship with his ally Luke. The social order between the boys is now dependent on Luke's next turn. Unfortunately, the video-recording stops at this point, so it is not possible to know how the interaction between the two boys is resolved and whether the girls were included or not.

## Discussion

Close analysis of this episode showed that telling involved a sequential pattern of distinct phases. Three phases of telling can be identified: Phase (1) An announcement of telling that occurred after an antecedent event; Phase (2) Going to the teacher to tell; and Phase (3) Post-telling events. Table 1 outlines the local sequence observed and detailed in the analysis. In the extended sequence, Phases (2) and (3) were repeated in extracts 4 and 5.

The first phase of the telling sequence involved the first announcement of telling that follows an antecedent event. During the antecedent event children might 'see' the offences of other children. Such activities provided for the 'tellability' by one child about the actions of another. In this episode, seeing an action such as 'spitting' gave leverage and provoked an announcement of telling. Cultural knowledge

**Table 1** Sequential phases of the telling episode

| Phase and associated extract |                        | Event                        | Actions observed  |
|------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| Phase 1                      | Extract 1              | Announcement of telling      | Announcement of telling after an antecedent event   |
| Phase 2                      | Extract 2<br>Extract 4 | Going to the teacher to tell | Telling the teacher about the offences of others<br>Reporting that an appropriate prior action took place<br>Teacher’s response |
| Phase 3                      | Extract 3<br>Extract 5 | Post-telling events          | A possible space for the teacher to intervene<br>Following what the teacher said  |

regarding what counts as ‘serious’ enough to tell the teacher is apparent at this point. Luke’s first reportable offence of not sharing the resources was not taken up as a telling opportunity but the following transgressions of spitting and not listening were. In other words, these actions justified moving the interactional sequence to the next phase of telling a tale to the teacher.

Phase two involved the actual act of going to the teacher to tell. In this phase a report of the offences of others was presented to the teacher. This phase included the teacher’s receipt of the telling. The teacher checked what had occurred or any action that may have been taken by the girls. A report of appropriate prior action such as ‘we said please stop spitting’ was elicited and this provided justification for the telling and highlighted Georgia’s cultural knowledge. This report of prior action built a case that freed the tellers from any transgression on their part. The teacher offered a script to manage the situation. In the extended sequence the girls went to the teacher to tell on the boys two times, in extracts 2 and 4.

The third phase of the telling episode involved post-telling events. In this phase, the teacher’s response could be followed or not followed. This phase also provided a possible space for the teacher to intervene in the interaction. The post-telling events involved the girls displaying to the boys that they had told on them. They enjoined the teacher in the accomplishment of telling but her stance of not physically intervening provided a platform for the girls to take an account back to the boys of what the teacher had said. Going back to the boys also displayed to the teacher that the girls had followed her suggestion and further demonstrated the girls’ cultural knowledge. A repeated post-telling phase was evident in extract 5, after the second telling in extract 4.

The boys also actively drew on cultural knowledge about the teacher’s expectations and stance and used this to support their ongoing participation in the interaction. For example, Luke perhaps worked from the knowledge that it was unlikely that the teacher would walk down the hill to where they were playing. Toby’s response of including the girls in the play highlighted the possible success of the girls’ telling actions. The girls’ anticipation of the teacher’s response, their

displayed knowledge of what constituted a reportable offence and Georgia's claim 'I don't think that will work' (line 139) is the perfect antidote to claims that adults can be authentic participants in early learning environments (see Mandell 1991).

The social means and ends of any interactional activity, such as telling, are uncertain and dependent upon a locally assembled set of adult-child and child-child social orders. While adults and children hold 'separate versions' of childhood (Waksler 1991), children's culture is continually 'in contact with' and 'related to' adult culture (Speier 1976, p. 99). It is the work of children to identify the shared understandings currently in play in the ongoing interaction (Bateman 2015). Teachers' interactional work attends largely to matters of 'child management' (Speier 1976, p. 99). Soliciting the teacher's involvement may result in adult intervention, which can be risky for those involved as the teacher's input may weaken their social positions within the peer activity underway (Danby 1998). The teacher, in her authoritative role, can rule on classroom matters and perhaps overturn decisions that have occurred within peer interactions up until that point. Children must navigate the teacher's agendas as they carry out their activities in the playground.

## **Conclusion: Knowledge-in-Action**

This investigation of one telling episode showed the playground as a social arena where normative practices are co-produced and relationship dependent. Telling the teacher was carefully orchestrated by the girls for managing interactional trouble with peers initiated over access to play materials in the playground. The children used both the threat of calling in the teacher, and the action of telling the teacher, to report offences. Their sequence of telling on the boys to the teacher is shown to be an interactional and cultural phenomenon that may at first appear unruly but actually involved events that were orderly and managed by the girls and the boys. In a nuanced way, we showed how children's interactive competence constitutes the *co*-production of social order and cultural knowledge. Close attention to how the children designed their talk and actions highlighted how cultural knowledge was drawn upon and co-produced in order to negotiate the different teacher and child social orders at play in the interaction.

School playgrounds are frequently constructed as dangerous and as sites for bullying and accidents. An increased emphasis on danger or negative social behaviours and increased regulations for children has implications for the amount of time available to children to engage in activities of their own choice (Bateman 2011a). Minimal supervision in school playgrounds means that, for children to participate in their peer culture, they must be socially competent and have cultural knowledge, particularly for times of dispute. Children pay close attention to group membership and participation and the local situation in which these matters play out (Theobald 2016; Björk-Willén 2007). Identifying the organization and design of turns in playground interaction shows how children participate and construct the

local peer culture and highlights the always-uncertain possibilities of social order when a teacher is called in to intercede (see Bateman 2011b).

While we started out looking at cultural knowledge more broadly, our fine-grained analysis showed that the children oriented to multiple and sometimes overlapping types of local knowledge, including knowledge of individual responsibility, knowledge of local rules, knowledge of teacher expectations and what constitutes a reportable offence. Our analysis provides a reading of how children display and co-produce cultural knowledge through negotiating teacher agendas and peer interactions. Identifying sequential patterns of interaction highlights how ongoing interactions form “a social history” and frame future interactions according to the “expectations that individuals hold for each other” (Kantor et al. 1993, p. 144). Cicourel (1970b) claims that children work from a sense of normative rules in their dealings with adults. This requires children to have some sense of understanding of the normative social rules and the local order. It is this ‘interaction of compliance and performance that is essential for understanding local activities’ (Cicourel 1970a, p. 138). For this reason, participation is conditional on a member enacting the cultural knowledge of the group (Butler 2008; Kantor et al. 1993). Cultural knowledge belongs to, or is best understood by, members of that culture. In a similar way, Sharrock (1974) shows how knowledge is owned by a collective of members. This local knowledge may be made visible to others but in some way belongs to and is owned by the members of that culture.

**Acknowledgements** Preparation of this chapter was supported by the Excellence in Research in Early Years Education Collaborative Research Network, an initiative funded through the Australian Government’s Collaborative Research Networks (CRN) program. An earlier version of this chapter was awarded a Graduate Student Paper Award from the American Sociological Association’s Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis Section (2008).

We thank the teachers, students and families of the Department of Education Queensland. We thank Jakob Cromdal, Ann-Carita Evaldsson, Polly Björk-Willén and anonymous reviewers for comments on this work.

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