

# 'Speech genres' and 'evaluation' in socialisation and identity: older children's language practices. <sup>i</sup>

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September 2005

## Introduction

I became interested in 'speech genres' and 'evaluation' in the context of ethnographic research into older children's use of informal language practices to construct knowledge and identity as they move from childhood into adolescence. I used a radio microphone and other small tape recorders to collect recordings of 10-12 year-old children's talk amongst themselves across the school day in two white working-class monolingual schools. Data also included observation notes, collected texts and recorded interviews with the children in friendship pairs. Focussing on this childhood/adolescence transition point threw what the participants already knew as children into relief, while also highlighting the new cultural knowledge they were acquiring, together with their changing sense of self, as they moved into their teens (Maybin 2006).

The data I collected included lots of overlapping, elliptical, highly collaborative talk. I wanted to find some kind of analytic frame which would help me make sense of this messy, dynamic meaning-making, the ongoing processes of semiosis (Kress 2000), social constructionism in action, culture as a verb (Street 1993). And I also wanted to capture the ways in which myriad intertextual referencing, especially through the children's use of reported voices (parents, teachers, other children, themselves on previous occasions as well as textbooks and pop songs), was emerging as a central part of their meaning-making.

Bakhtin defines 'speech genres' as the language forms and style, content themes and evaluative perspectives which emerge in a specific sphere of human activity: we cannot speak other than in genres. Bakhtin suggests that children learn to participate in the speech genres (including both oral and literate forms) of different spheres of human activity in the course of learning language itself. While relatively experienced in some genres, the 10-12 year-olds I recorded were also continually learning: they observed how the teacher reacted to contributions from their peers, they stood at the periphery of group conversations at break time and they listened to other children's personal anecdotes while waiting in line in the corridor.

I would argue that speech genres mediate children's socialisation into different areas of human activity, inducting them into particular kinds of culturally authorised evaluative perspectives and judgements about how to be in and act on the world. I would also argue that, through their knowledge of speech genres, children can use a snatch of reported dialogue to invoke and interpret a rich array of meanings associated with particular kinds of dialogue. Speech genres provide a kind of cultural repertoire of social-linguistic schemas which are used to semiotically amplify these brief intertextual references. A reported voice indexes stances and speech genres, which in their turn index scenarios. So speech genres (a) mediate children's induction into sociocultural processes and (b) represent sociocultural processes when indexed through children's reported speech.

Centrally important within the process of representation is the notion of evaluation, ie the way in which we can never talk about anything without making some kind of judgement reflecting an assumed evaluative framework and signalling our own position in relation to it

(Volosinov 1973, Bakhtin 1986). The Bakhtinian concept of evaluation is central to the 'ideological becoming of a human being'. Children, as I discovered, are constantly evaluating their social experience in the course of talk. This kind of evaluative activity shows how they're becoming conscious of their positioning in the world, acting on their environment and developing a sense of themselves as a person.

Children express particular moral viewpoints and presentations of themselves through taking up and representing different positions in talk and through voices in anecdotes. At the same time, they are actively taking on culturally authorised evaluative perspectives and judgements about how to be in and act on the world. I see children's ongoing identification as particular individuals (expressing and evaluating individual positions) and their continuing socialisation (drawing on social beliefs and values to do this) as two sides of the same process, with evaluation as a double-edged driving force.

So I'm bringing together the concepts of speech genre and evaluation as a way of understanding the dynamic meaning-making processes, including intertextual referencing, in children's talk, and looking at how this feeds into socialisation and identity.

### **Basic assumptions and definitions**

a. Children's *informal talk and literacy practices* among themselves are enormously important, both for their socialisation and for their construction of identity.

b. *Identity* is not a fixed set of attributes, but a set of dispositions (some more open than others) which emerge through an interactive process between how one sees and expresses one's own position and meaning in the world, and how one is 'identified' by others. This process is both social and individual. Depending on their social background and experience, individuals are predisposed towards particular perceptions, actions and ways of reading the world and themselves, but they also exercise choice in expressing and presenting themselves in local activities and interactions, drawing on the resources available.

c. *Speech genres*: 'Certain features of language (lexicological, semantic, syntactic).... take on the specific flavour of a given genre: they knit together with specific points of view, specific approaches, forms of thinking, nuances and accents characteristic of the given genre' (Bakhtin 1981 p288-289).

'Special emphasis should be placed on the extreme heterogeneity of speech genres (oral and written). In fact the category of speech genres should include the short rejoinders of everyday dialogue (and these are extremely varied depending on the subject matter, situation and participants), everyday narration, writing (in all its various forms), the brief standard military command, the elaborate and detailed order, the fairly variegated repertoire of business documents, and the diverse world of commentary (in the broad sense of the word, social, political). And we must also include here the diverse kinds of scientific statements and all literary genres (from the proverb to the multivolume novel.' (Bakhtin 1986 p60-61).

The 'stylistic aura' of a word does not belong not to it in relation to the language system, but in relation to the genres with which it is associated. 'It is an echo of the generic whole that resounds in the word'. So, in my data for instance, a single reference to a text book, or a brief snatch of song, have a very different generic taste and can invoke very different kinds of identities, relationships, social practices and evaluative perspectives.

Some genres leave more room for individual creativity eg informal conversation, and others are more rigid eg religious ceremonies. Genres change as social activity changes- they can hybridise, and simple primary genres like everyday conversation or informal notes are

absorbed in the process of the development of more complex secondary genres like speeches or novels.

#### d. *Evaluation:*

'There can be no such thing as an absolutely neutral utterance. The speaker's evaluative attitude towards the subject of his speech....also determines the choice of lexical, grammatical and compositional means of the utterance' (Bakhtin 1986 p84)

Evaluation is more explicitly discussed in Volosinov 1973, eg

'Any word in actual speech possesses not only theme and meaning in the referential, or content, sense of these words, but also value judgement. ... There is no such thing as a word without evaluative accent.' (Volosinov, 1973, p103).

For Volosinov, all language use is evaluative, because it always emerges from a situated perspective within a particular material world. Only aspects of the social environment which have social meaning and value are codified within semiotic systems and so evaluation moulds referential meaning and determines what is referred to in the first place. Thus, 'every utterance is above all *an evaluative orientation.*' (Volosinov, 1986, p. 105, italics in the original).

Because of the intersection of differently orientated interests at all levels of social life, there is always a struggle between different evaluative perspectives. This struggle is represented and played out in children's dialogues and particularly in their anecdotes.

e. While some aspects of speech genres ('lexicological, semantic, syntactic' features) are amenable to *formal textual analysis*, others ('points of view, specific approaches, forms of thinking, nuances and accents') require *ethnographic analysis*. And an analysis of dynamic evaluative activity in talk, so centrally important in on-line meaning-making and often masked in formal textual accounts, requires ethnographic understandings about both the 'cultural horizon' (Hanks 1996) and about participants' communicative practices. <sup>ii</sup>

#### **Towards a more dynamic language of description**

How can we find terms to capture the dynamic processes of socialisation and identification? I've tried using verbal forms like 'constructing', or 'developing' or 'emerging'. But these verbs raise their own awkward questions about agency, with 'constructing' suggesting too much (children constructing themselves), 'emerging' too little and 'developing' trailing connotations of individual psychological stages. 'Knowledge' and 'identity' also, of course, convey a sense of a fixed territory, with boundaries, and my data suggests that, for 10-12 year-olds at least, these have a much more emergent quality.

#### **From 'context' to 'speech genres' and 'contextualisation'**

I started out with what I'd call a tableau notion of context. I was using Hymes' conception of speech events (Hymes 1977), and the idea that we can only understand the meaning and significance of talk through an understanding of the setting, participants, their goals, cultural norms of interaction and interpretation and so on. So, in the classroom, I envisaged a kind of tableau where the teacher is bent over a desk helping a child and other children are carrying on with activities at nearby desks; we (and the participants) interpret what the teacher and children say in the context of knowledge about what happens in classrooms - their institutional rules, roles and relationships and procedures. As with Malinowski's fishermen

mending their nets on a beach in the Trobriand Islands, we can only interpret teacher-pupil dialogue if we have an understanding of its 'context of situation'.

I could, then, represent the children's use of language in different settings across the school day in a series of such tableaux, each involving different participants, goals, norms of interaction and so on. There was the classroom tableau, the sitting-at-lunch tableau, the getting-changed-for-swimming tableau, and so on. There was plenty of evidence that the children were highly sensitive to context, and varied their language use accordingly. I was finding differences, both in the kinds of knowledge which emerged as significant in the different contexts and in the ways in which children presented themselves and negotiated relationships with others through talk. There was, however, a rather static quality to this view of the relationship between talk and setting. I was failing to capture the dynamic communicative meaning-making processes that were running through these vignette scenes, starting before and continuing after.

So I shifted from looking at context as a particular site to looking at talk as coming out of a particular speech genre, and making references to contexts away from the here and now as part of its meaning. In other words, I started to focus on the processes of contextualisation, ie the ways in which speakers make links with and invoke particular aspects of social context against which they intend their words to be interpreted (Duranti, 2001). So, I'm focussing on contextualisation in a particular instantiation of a genre, rather than talk in contexts.

This switches the focus from a more static tableau-like notion of setting (for example, a classroom), to the various different social activities, involving different kinds of speech genres, which may be going on within it. For example, there's the genre of teacher-pupil dialogue, with its initiation-response-feedback structure where the teacher questions children, they respond and she evaluates their response. The content is focused on classroom procedures and curriculum content, and the authoritative reference points for evaluating people and their actions are the 'specific approaches' and 'forms of thinking' associated with school institutional practices. Also, in the same site, there is the speech genre emerging in unsupervised peer group talk, where talk ranges over a variety of personal topics and dialogues are much more loosely structured, with many interruptions and switches of topic, and a wider range of evaluative reference points from the peer group, children's families, popular culture, and so on.

In trying to conceptualise the sociocultural ideological work in talk I first tried using a Foucauldian concept of discourse (Foucault 1981), ie the macro-level complexes of language, knowledge and power which organise how people think and act. But I couldn't find a way of moving directly from my actual talk data to the concept of a discourse with a satisfactory system of warrants. For me, the concept of 'speech genres', as the language bit of social practices, does focus on language, but is closely related to activity in a very situated and grounded way. Speech genres are instantiated in specific dialogues, and indexed through reported dialogue. A formal textual analysis is important, and Bakhtin refers to lexical and grammatical patterns in genres - nice concrete features which you get hold of and analyse. But the Bakhtinian notion of 'theme' or situated meaning, specific 'points of view, specific approaches, forms of thinking, nuances and accents' suggests the need for ethnographic as well as textual analysis, and incorporates the notion that we are not so much looking at a text as at a segment of sociocultural process.

So, I would suggest that speech genres such as teacher-student IRF dialogue in the classroom, the aggressive exchange of insults leading to a fight, flirting and gossip, both reflect and help to produce discourses (Cf Fairclough 1999). These discourses are also reflected in the social

parameters of evaluation- the cultural horizon, as Hanks terms it. Within a speech genre in action, at the micro moment-to-moment level in the course of teacher-pupil dialogue, or in informal peer group talk, I shall use Goffman's concept of 'frame' to describe the participants' sense of what's being done, and the alignments they take up in relation to themselves and others. So, 'speech genres' are useful as a 'middle level' analytic tool, applying to larger patterns than 'frames' but more specific and grounded than 'discourses'.

### Some examples

#### a. The linear intertextual construction of the present in teacher-pupil dialogue

The way in which a particular textual moment is part of an ongoing process is signalled by intertextual referencing, which connects the moment to the past and future and to other contexts away from the here and now. The ways in which these connections are made, ie the patterns of intertextual referencing, vary in different genres and are connected with different ways of constructing knowledge in those different generic contexts. Children's exposure to these, and their involvement in these communicative practices, is all part of their socialisation.

In teacher-pupil dialogues, concerned with inducting children into school institutional practices and procedures, there are frequent references to past and future contexts. The teacher has the power to set the style for intertextual referencing, ie to determine which other contexts are appropriate to invoke and bring into the present. She invokes the past to establish precedent and mark significant activity and knowledge, as in *Remember how we did this last week ... what did I tell you we called this ...* and she invokes the future to set goals and direct attention: *We have to move on to another topic next week ... you're going to need to know this for the test.*

In the transcript example below, it is a few minutes before the end of the school day in Camdean and the large sunny classroom is littered with detritus from the afternoon's activities, when pupils have been recording and mounting the results of a scavenger hunt in the school grounds. In the evening, pupils' parents will be visiting the school to meet teachers and talk about their children's progress. A few children are doing some desultory tidying while the majority are sitting expectantly at their tables, waiting for the bell to signal the time to go home. Miss Potts is restlessly pacing, with increasing irritation, around the room:

#### Table 1<sup>iii</sup>

Miss P.      What are your parents going to think, coming into a mess like this? Well they're not coming into a mess like this. Tough. You sit there and I'll clear up. And when I've finished, you can go home. OK?

Some pupils      (*uncertain*) yea

no

(*pause while T moves round room*)

Miss P.      Or are you going to cooperate?

Pupils      (*a few girls' voices*) Cooperate

Miss P. I think about ten people in this room are doing clearing up. I said at the beginning that I wanted all of this work first of all put over the back. I've had five people come to me (*mimics whining voice*) 'What do we do with our work?' Which proves what?

More ps Not listening

Pupil Not listening

Miss P. You just don't bother to listen. There's buckets and things all over the place, mess around, floor's a disgrace. Now there is FIVE minutes and you're not going because you've got trays out. I suggest that you get cleaned up NOW. Anybody messing around will be in trouble.

A tableau kind of analysis helps to explain this talk in terms of participant roles, goals and norms of interpretation. For example, putting work 'over the back' is a reference not just to a place in the classroom, but also to a specific practice in this classroom ie when you're finished you put your work over the back. The participants interpret that speech act in the context of a familiar speech event (teacher haranguing class), in a speech situation (the classroom with its practices and procedures), in a speech community with particular beliefs and values about education and so on. This took me so far. But let's switch to look at some of the contextualisation processes in the talk, in particular the intertextual referencing.

The focus here seems to be on the present; the mess in the classroom. But in many ways what constitutes the present, and how it is evaluated, is constructed through intertextual referencing to various points in the past and future. Miss Potts first invokes the future. 'What are your parents going to think, coming into a mess like this?' and she uses the children's parents' perspective as an authoritative reference point to organise and galvanize their activity now in the present. In her harangue Miss Potts also refers to a context in the past. 'What do we do with our work?' (mimicking a child's whiney voice). She's reminding pupils of the exchange she had with them earlier in the afternoon, which is again used as a resource for getting her point across in the here and now. Again, in Miss Potts' question 'Which proves what?' she is also implicitly referring to similar conversations from other occasions in the past. In their rapid recognition of the answer she wants, her pupils are not just responding to Miss Pott's question now, but also to the memory of her voice and the response of 'not listening' which she has cued on previous occasions.

Most of Miss Potts' comments in Table 1 are in fact structured around temporal relationships between actions and their consequences (or lack of consequences). 'When I've finished, you can go home', 'I said at the beginning that I wanted ...' and 'Anybody messing around will be in trouble'. These references are linked to what might be termed the linear production of knowledge in school. Knowledge and procedures are built up in a planned, staged structured process over weeks, terms and years, in relation to specific short and longer term educational goals. And this conception of how knowledge is acquired is tied to a linear psychological conception of child development. The teacher talk I recorded is full of these kind of linear cause and effect connections, as children were trained to organise their behaviour and activities in terms of particular chains of inputs and outputs.

You can also look at the speech genre of teacher-pupil talk, more generally, in terms of lexical, grammatical and compositional features- the more formal respectful use of language by pupils, the shifting of them towards more literate academic terms by their teacher, the IRF structure. When we get to the more evaluative components of the speech genre, however- the

orientation towards the authority of the textbook and institutional rules, the particular points of view, approaches and forms of thinking which are encoded in this kind of dialogue, I'd suggest that this is where intertextual referencing becomes highly revealing, because these evaluative processes involve making references backwards and forwards in time and to other contexts away from the here and now. And you need ethnographic knowledge to understand these references and their significance.

### **b. Horizontal intertextual referencing and frame-switching in talk among children**

In the teacher-pupil dialogues I recorded, the reference points for evaluation tended to remain fairly constant, knitted into the school processes and procedures. There was little frame-switching within the IRF genre. This was not so much the case in talk among children themselves.

Table 2

Martie	I said that to a real man and he went, he went 'dick head' [ <i>and I went</i> ] 'of course I am!' ( <i>laughter</i> ) And he goes 'erm!' ( <i>growling and laughter</i> )
Darren	This man called me a fucking bastard, right, I go 'back to you', he goes 'come here', I go 'come on, then' and he's got about size ten trainers and he chased me, right, and then when he got, he caught me, right, like that, and he goes 'who's fucking saying?' And I goes 'fuck off', I says 'fuck off' and he goes, he goes, 'Do you want a fight?' I go ( <i>falsetto voice</i> ) 'not tonight, darling' and he goes 'piss off!'

Like Miss Potts, Darren also refers to a context away from the here using reported dialogue, in his case a more extended exchange. I would suggest that this works as an anecdote, it's a successful performance (judging by the reactions of other children), because it indexes a familiar speech genre, the stances, the verbal idiom and the interactive pattern which in their turn index an aggressive standoff<sup>v</sup>. And, within this anecdote, Darren uses another, nested intertextual reference, 'Not tonight, darling' which in its turn indexes a different kind of interaction, stance and evaluative reference point. This switches the frame, transforming 'starting a fight' into 'having a joke' and altering his alignment towards the man. In doing all of this, Darren also positions himself more favourably in the children's ongoing talk, through capping Martie's turn with a more arresting anecdote. And he represents himself as tough and canny, aspects of what emerged as a desirable masculine identity for many of the socially dominant boys in my data. So, there are different kinds of knowledge, evaluation and identity here, from in the dialogue between Miss Potts and the class.

Again, when Karen explained to me how she first met her boyfriend when she was at the swimming pool with her friend Helen, she did this through reproducing their dialogue:

Table 3

Janet	And how did you get to know him, then?
Karen	Swimming, we went swimming at the leisure centre, me and Helen
Helen	And I said I'd walked from Scotland

Karen Because he started talking to us and she stood still and I stood still and didn't move and he goes 'Do you two ever move?' and she goes 'Well we've just walked all the way from Scotland to get down here, so we've got to walk all the way back, now'. He goes 'God, why, don't you like swimming up there? Oh yeh, the water's dirty, isn't it, so you come down here'.

Helen He's a right prat.

The humorous stance and sparring, inventive banter Karen uses to invoke the interaction index the speech genre associated with boy-girl playful flirtation in group contexts.

In talk among themselves, the children were less orientated to the longer term processes of input and output which dominated teacher-pupil talk. In contrast to the linear referencing across time and stable framing within teacher-pupil talk, in talk among themselves children frequently switched between frames at a microlevel in order to rekey what was going on, reaccent the evaluative meaning of a previous utterance, and reposition themselves more favourably within an interaction. ('Not tonight, darling', 'he's a right prat'). The informal talk among children was not so much orientated towards cause and effect relationships between the past, present and future, as towards what might be termed more horizontal connections made through frame switches and metaphorical links across different events (switching in the anecdote, links across Martie's and Darren's anecdotes)<sup>v</sup>.

In the data more generally, I found that these 'horizontal connections' were made through brief pieces of reported dialogue which could invoke a rich array of associations and were used to represent people, relationships and whole scenarios. I'm suggesting that the children's accumulating social experience of different speech genres provides a set of mediating schemas through which they can connect a piece of reported speech with the particular content themes, interactive patterns and evaluative positions which are generically associated with this way of talking. So this is where speech genres are important in representing the sociocultural in talk. A reported voice, or voices, is an economical way of invoking relationships, scenarios, social practice. In a similar way, children's knowledge about speech genres enables them to predict information about the themes, interaction and evaluative stances indexed by a brief reported dialogue. Like 'What do we do with our work?' 'What are your parents going to think?'

In suggesting a speech genre can act as a mediating schema, there is a significant difference for me from the more cognitive notions of schemas and scripts. This is the emphasis on evaluation: evaluative positions are central to the point of invoking a voice at all. As well as communicating an evaluative perspective, children's use of contextualisation is always connected with presenting themselves (and others) as a particular kind of person. Thus Darren's aggressive swearing is presented as justified and admirable in the context of the fight, he presents himself as tough and courageous and Karen presents her friend Helen and boyfriend as quick-witted and humorous (although Helen contests this- 'He's a right prat' - typical frame-switching). In this way, contextualisation, and the evaluative positioning it involves, is closely tied up with children's interactive performance of identity.

### **c. The dialogical production of evaluation**

Evaluation in talk is essentially a collaborative process: it emerges dialogically, through the competition between Darren and Martie, through Helen's comment on Karen's account. It's also somewhat unsettled, in contrast to the more steadily held evaluative framework within teacher-pupil dialogue. Here, for instance, are Julie, Kirsty and Sharon, who have been anxiously discussing the amount of swearing on the tapes I was collecting. The girls are

sitting together while they finish off some work in the classroom (this conversation occurred within the same physical site as the teacher-pupil dialogue in Table 1):

Table 4

Julie Children aren't meant to swear

Kirsty If people swear at them, they can swear back

*(brief pause)*

Julie I swore at my mum the other day because she started, she hit me

Kirsty What did you do?

Julie I swore at my mum, I says 'I'm packing my cases and I don't care what you say' and she goes 'Ooh?' and (*I go*) 'Yea!' I'm really cheeky to my mother.

In the children's anecdotes, the narrators frame the events and orchestrate the voices from a particular evaluative perspective. Just a few words here are enough to conjure up the familiar experience, for Kirsty and Sharon, of the genre of 'argument with parents', where the adults are usually more powerful but where some children are beginning to resist their authority. In this context, accounts of standing up to a parent or foiling them have a particular appeal. So 'Ooh?' and 'Yea!', and particularly their juxtaposition, their dialogic relationship, have an appealing 'stylistic aura' (with the echo of the generic whole resounding in the exchange).

Like the two previous examples above, the evaluation is not fixed and steady:

Julie and Kirsty's initial positions are as follows:

Julie: Children aren't meant to swear

Kirsty: If people swear at them, they can swear back

At first, Julie's anecdote seems to suggest that she is shifting from her own first position and aligning herself with Kirsty in providing an example where, perhaps, because 'she hit me', Julie is justified in 'swearing' (she avoids the actual reproduction of swear words themselves - you don't have to if you index the genre and the girls were worried about the swearing on my tapes). This is followed immediately, however, by Julie's comment 'I'm really cheeky to my mother', which seems to undercut this initial agreement and shift back towards her original statement 'Children aren't meant to swear'.

Listening to the tape a number of times, I still found it impossible to decide whether 'I'm really cheeky' should be interpreted as the appropriation of an adult negative evaluation, or as a defiant boasting which is part of the positive feisty image Julie is creating, or as a mixture of both. The defiant interpretation is not exactly in line with either of Julie or Kirsty's original positions, but more of a moving on in Julie's presentation of herself. Both compliant and defiant interpretations, however, in commenting on what happened in the anecdote, also provide a response to Julie's own original comment 'Children shouldn't swear'. We can represent the two evaluative positions which are explored in this exchange, and the possible third position (depending on the interpretation of 'I'm really cheeky'), as follows:

Table 5

Evaluative position (1): compliance	Evaluative position (2): reasoned response	Evaluative position (3): defiance
Children aren't meant to swear	If people swear at them, then they can swear back	
I'm really cheeky to my mother (interpreted as compliant)	I swore at my Mum...because she..hit me	I'm really cheeky to my mother (interpreted as defiant)

The meaning and significance of Kirsty and Julie's initial comments are 'dialogised' as the evaluative positions they suggest are set against each other and move around within the course of the anecdote.

Other recordings in my data suggest that this anecdote falls into a recognisable genre of picaresque stories that Julie tells about herself and her mother. The theme of Julie's relationship with her mother is related to the more general issue for these older children of their changing relationships with adults who get in the way of what they want to do and are no longer seen as unquestionable authorities. In terms of this intergenerational struggle, the anecdote invokes links with other stories Julie has told her friends, both about her mother and about standing up to adults generally. The two themes, relationships with adults and when it is appropriate to swear (which adults are allowed to do but children may not be), are brought together in an anecdote which Kirsty and Sharon will hear and interpret not just as a turn in their current conversation, but also in terms of the links it invokes with other anecdotes with similar themes. The capacity of a few seconds of reported dialogue for discursive work around issues and identity is enormously amplified through its dialogic linkages with the ongoing conversation, and through its resonances with other conversations and stories.

The phrase 'I'm packing my cases', like 'not tonight, darling' (Table 2), also accomplishes a further layer of indexical work, both within Julie's account to Kirsty and, if it was used, within the original exchange. Invoking a recognisable formulaic phrase associated with social breakdown and leaving home highlights the extreme provocation which resulted in Julie 'swearing'.

#### **d. Indexing a general category of social practice**

I've looked at reported speech invoking specific events- being chased by a man, meeting a boyfriend, having a row with your mother. The evocative power of reported dialogue is such that it can be also used to invoke a more general category of event or social practice (Tannen, 1989; Myers, 2004).

For instance, Terry described to me in his interview how a neighbourhood fight had started outside his house the previous night. He explained 'They come round and started effing and blinding and all that lot'. 'All that lot' refers to an exchange of insults and profanities which Terry expects he can leave to my imagination, and would probably feel uncomfortable repeating more explicitly in my presence. In the children's talk, this invoked category is then often used to contextualise a specific incident. It is as if the speaker starts by saying *This is the kind of thing I'm going to tell you about*; and then proceeds with their specific account, contextualised within this genre. They may assume that their audience will only need quite

minimal cues to recognise the genre of the dialogue. This brief indication of a particular kind of exchange is enough to enable me to imagine the sort of hostile, aggressive, provocative verbal behaviour Terry witnessed, which quickly escalated into physical violence. Then he goes on with the rest of his account. These general references to a genre to set the scene also have an evaluative dimension. Terry did not, for instance, say '*They came round and complained that my sister had stolen their walkman*', which could have been an alternative way of representing what happened.

In describing a rather different kind of social interaction, Julie explained to me how she learned to swap pens, small toys and make-up with other children when she first came to Camdean. Julie uses fragments of dialogue to invoke the essential characteristics of a swapping transaction.

#### Table 6

Julie            'You swap that for what' an and they go 'nayee' or whatever. They go 'great' and get it out, and go 'Oh dear - forgot this' and I say 'I'll give it to you tomorrow, and I'll give you this stuff now and you give me that and I'll give you whatever tomorrow'. So they go 'uh'.

As Terry used fragments of reported speech to index a speech genre, which in its turn indexed a neighbourhood fight, Julie does the same to index swapping practices.

Although her account seems fairly detached, it also has an evaluative dimension. She followed it by explaining about her own initial naivety when she first came to the school (just giving away all her stuff) and her subsequent recognition of different kinds of value, for instance cost, newness, oldness and sentimental value (in relation to a pen her grandmother had given her). Her account above of how transactions are done is therefore given as evidence of the knowledge and experience she now has as a practised swapper.

### **Concluding discussion**

Children learn speech genres at the same time as they learn language. Speech genres, through their patterning of themes, language use and evaluative frames of reference, shape the ways in which particular aspects of the current context are assumed by speakers, marked, made relevant and then intricately involved in meaning-making. 'The forms of language and the typical forms of utterances, that is, speech genres, enter our experience and our consciousness together, and in close connection with each other' (Bakhtin 1986 p78). Through their social background and experience, their repeated exposure to, and positioning within, particular kinds of speech genres, children become predisposed towards particular perceptions, actions and ways of reading the world and themselves. They draw on a range of socially authoritative evaluative frameworks for making judgements about people and events. As the linguistic anthropologist William Hanks (1996) points out, genres are a key part of habitus, that is, individual dispositions to 'evaluate and act on the world in typical ways'<sup>vi</sup>.

In terms of the two speech genres I've been looking at (teacher-pupil IRF dialogue and the informal conversation among children), I've suggested contrasts between patterns of contextualisation/intertextual referencing which are associated with different kinds of knowledge construction. In the hierarchically-structured, linearly acquired knowledge in teacher-pupil dialogues, evaluation and framing are fairly constant. The more horizontally-structured knowledge in children's informal conversation among themselves involves frequent frame switches, varying evaluative reference points and metaphorical links across

contexts. In children's accounts and anecdotes they exercised choice in expressing and presenting themselves in the scenarios which they invoke with these scraps of reported dialogue. They constructed representations of their social world and of their own place within it. As children move from childhood into adolescence they don't simply take on a coherent body of values and beliefs from the older generation, but struggle to understand the inconsistent and conflicting experiences, accounts and evaluations around them, comparing their experiences and reflections with others, appropriating and contesting perspectives and judgements. While the linear educational discourse was orientated towards inducting children into hierarchically-structured academic knowledge and the discourses of academic disciplines, the dynamic, multi-voiced nature of conversations among children served them well in representing and exploring the more dynamic and often conflictual practices which made up their broader social world.

Reported voices like 'What do we do with our work?' or 'I goes 'fuck off!', are enormously evocative details which index stances, relationships and scenarios because of our knowledge of speech genres and their associated linguistic composition, themes and evaluative perspectives. The use of reported voices is always evaluative, involving some kind of judgement on the people, relationships and events which are being represented. I have argued that evaluation is a particularly significant aspect of children's meaning-making. Through evaluation they appropriate and reproduce the beliefs and values of their social world, inserting themselves into practices and genres. But evaluation also expresses and reflects a child's individual experience and positioning, and their personal efforts to understand other people and themselves. In this sense the evaluative functions of reported voices in intertextual referencing play an important role within the processes of both socialisation and identification.

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<sup>i</sup> This paper draws on discussion in Maybin 2006.

<sup>ii</sup> See Rampton et al 2004 on combining linguistic and ethnographic approaches.

<sup>iii</sup> Transcription conventions:

In order to make the transcripts more readable, I have added some written punctuation. The names of people and places have been changed, to protect anonymity.

Comments in italics and parentheses clarify what's happening, or indicate non-verbal features eg (*pause while T. moves around the room*).

(...) indicates words on the tape which I can't make out,

/ indicates where another speaker interrupts or cuts in,

          indicates simultaneous talk. The overlapping talk is also lined up vertically on the page.

<sup>iv</sup> See Ochs 1992 on chained indexical linkages.

<sup>v</sup> This echoes Bernstein's description (1996, p. 171) of the language of schooling as a 'vertical discourse', which is 'coherent, explicit, systematically principled structure, hierarchically organised' and associated with similarly organised

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forms of knowledge. In contrast, within everyday 'horizontal discourse', he suggests that knowledge is local, context dependent and multi-layered. I found that the 'vertical discourse' of teacher-pupil dialogue was also very linear in terms of its constant referencing forwards and backwards in time. And 'horizontal discourse' has its own intricate complexity and semiotic richness.

<sup>vi</sup> See Bourdieu, P. and Waquant, J.D. (1992) on how habitus includes both social habituation and individual agency.