

# Childhood

<http://chd.sagepub.com/>

---

## **Locking the unlockable: Children's invocation of pretence to define and manage place**

Charlotte Cobb-Moore, Susan Danby and Ann Farrell

*Childhood* 2010 17: 376

DOI: 10.1177/0907568210369317

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://chd.sagepub.com/content/17/3/376>

---

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:

Norwegian Centre for Child Research

**Additional services and information for *Childhood* can be found at:**

**Email Alerts:** <http://chd.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

**Subscriptions:** <http://chd.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

**Reprints:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

**Permissions:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

**Citations:** <http://chd.sagepub.com/content/17/3/376.refs.html>



# Locking the unlockable: Children's invocation of pretence to define and manage place

Childhood  
17(3) 376–395  
© The Author(s) 2010  
Reprints and permission: [sagepub.  
co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav](http://sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav)  
DOI: 10.1177/0907568210369317  
<http://chd.sagepub.com>

**Charlotte Cobb-Moore, Susan Danby and  
Ann Farrell**

Queensland University of Technology

## Abstract

Young children use pretence in their interactions with their peers. This article focuses on their use of pretence to establish, define and formulate places within their peer interaction. A talk-in-interaction approach is used to analyse video-recorded and transcribed interactions of children aged 4–6 years in the block area of an early childhood classroom in Australia. The complex and collaborative interactive work of the children produced shared understandings of pretence, which they used as a device to manage their use of classroom physical and social spaces.

## Keywords

children, ethnomethodology, location, peer interaction, place, pretend play, social interaction

This article examines how young children in an early childhood classroom work collaboratively to produce shared understandings of place. In this instance, the specific focus is on how a small group of preschool-aged children invoke place by reference to pretend objects. Establishing understandings of objects and places as something other than what they actually are is complex and ongoing interactive work. The episode of interaction presented in this article investigates a classroom member observed to refer to a toy wooden archway as a locked door. Problems arise when a peer tries to move a block, which he refers to as a car, through this door. Both children then engage in a complex interaction that involves the development of shared understandings of pretence, including a locked door and a flying car. Close examination of peer interactions, such as this episode, enables interactions to be seen not just as ‘children playing with objects’, but as children’s interactive work to build mutual and pretend understandings of objects and places.

---

## Corresponding author:

Charlotte Cobb-Moore, School of Early Childhood, Queensland University of Technology, Victoria Park Road, Kelvin Grove, QLD 4059, Australia.  
[email: [c.cobb@qut.edu.au](mailto:c.cobb@qut.edu.au)]

There is a large body of work that examines children's pretend play. Key contributions to understandings of children's pretend play have been made through studies by Corsaro (1985, 2005; Corsaro and Johannesen, 2007), Goldman (1998) and Sawyer (1996). In his study of preschool children in the US, Corsaro (1985) highlights aspects of children's peer culture, such as how children access and defend their play spaces. In pretend play, children appropriate features of adult worlds as they co-construct their peer culture (Evaldsson and Corsaro, 1998). Goldman and Emmison (1995) examine the pretend play among Huli children in Papua New Guinea, showing how children invoke real-life experiences and reinvent them as virtual reality in their pretend play. Goldman (1998) describes pretence as a socially mediated activity, constructed and negotiated through talk. His study highlights the need for in-depth studies of children's pretend play. Sawyer (1996) examines the improvisational nature of children's pretend play. He comments that children participate in the performance in two ways, 'on one level, as a child playing with friends, and on the dramatic level, as a fantasy character within the dramatic frame' (Sawyer, 1996: 290). His focus on the different ways that children 'voice' or enact a pretend role highlights three main types of role voicing: 'direct voicing' (where the child enacts the role as an actor on stage would); 'indirect voicing' (e.g. enacting a role through toys); and 'collective voicing' (a group speaking collectively as a single character) (Sawyer, 1996: 291). These studies contribute understandings of children's pretend play, demonstrating the need for examining children's pretend play in its own right. While such studies shed light on many aspects of children's pretend play, there have been few studies that specifically focus on how children produce shared pretend understandings of places. This article contributes to this area by examining young children engaged in pretend play to highlight how they construct and negotiate pretend places through their interactions.

A number of studies investigate how children construct knowledge of space and place, and how they use spaces designed for them (Christensen and Prout, 2003; De Coninck-Smith and Gutman, 2004; Elsley, 2004; Karsten, 2003; Rasmussen, 2004; Smith and Barker, 2000). As Christensen and Prout (2003: 152) note, 'the collective practices of children themselves are important in constructing their sense of place. . . . They make their own meanings about these localities through their own practices and discussions'. Children work together to produce shared understandings of place.

While place and space can be used interchangeably to refer to localities, Rasmussen (2004) differentiates their use. She refers to 'place' as spaces to which children have assigned personal meanings through their activities and peer interactions, while she denotes 'space' as physical locations and areas designed by adults for children. In Rasmussen's (2004) understanding of place, 'places *for* children' are made by adults for children. Home, school and recreational spaces, known as the 'institutionalized triangle' (Zeihner, 2003), dominate children's spheres of activities, with such places for children defined as 'public provisions for children' (Moss and Petrie, 2002: 23). For example, schools are public and adult-constructed places for children, where children construct their own places – places deemed important by the child. Rasmussen (2004: 165) notes that children 'show and tell where and what these' places are, take them over and use them in particular ways and within particular social orders. For example, children may draw a hop-scotch grid on a concrete foot-path. The children construct their own place

within the adult-constructed foot-path, made observable by physical markings (the grid) and by the children's actions within it. Places are constructed and defined by their uses, knowledge of the place and feelings that the place arouses (Hart, 1979; Rasmussen, 2004).

Studies of space also show that it is a resource used in everyday practices. Space and place are referred to in talk, and also the place itself is talked into being (Crabtree, 2000; Laurier, 2005). This understanding is taken up within ethnomethodological studies, where space is viewed not as a container to be filled with objects and events (Casey, 1997; Drew and Heritage, 1992; Laurier, 2005), but rather generated by the motion of bodies and talk. Benwell and Stokoe (2006: 210) note that 'space and place, though "material" and "physical", is not "real" beyond the practices that produce it'. In other words, places are contested by, and contingent upon, interactional practices: spaces are both 'resources for, and . . . products of a myriad of practices' (Laurier, 2005: 102). While ethnomethodological work has investigated spaces in public domains such as cafes (Laurier et al., 2001), mobile offices, cars (Laurier, 2001) and libraries (Crabtree, 2000), there has been little investigation of how young children create and use place in classrooms and, more particularly, the role of pretence in locating and defining shared understandings of what constitutes place in an early childhood classroom.

This article contributes to understandings of how place is referred to and understood in interactions, examining how children establish mutual orientation to pretend places. It also shows how children use pretend understandings of places to organize their peer interaction. As Rendle-Short (2006: 107) comments, 'examining the way in which participants within interaction establish mutual orientation towards an object of reference within the local environment has only emerged in more recent years'. In order for children to formulate pretend places (where one object stands for another) to manage their peer interactions, they require a shared understanding of the pretence in relation to the place. This article, in examining one episode of children's situated interaction, highlights pretence as a collaborative action.

## Children's use of pretence in formulating place

Children engage collaboratively in pretend interactions as they establish shared understandings around objects and places. Whalen's (1995) ethnomethodological study of the social organization of a fantasy play encounter focused on a group of children defining the materials they were using: one child defined the structure she built as a 'brick wall house' and another child displayed his disapproval at where the structure had been placed, eventually deferring to the initial placement of the 'brick wall house' (Whalen, 1995: 326). As Whalen (1995: 322) comments in relation to her study, children 'need to arrive at a somewhat common definition of what materials actually are – or what they will represent if, during the course of fantasy play, they depart from their actual physical appearance'. During their interactions, children constructed shared understandings of how they were using the materials. In other words, they 'established a common definition' of what they were using 'by treating "what something is" and "where it goes" as fundamentally important matters for the activity at hand that must be settled interactionally' (Whalen, 1995: 326). Children carried out their interactive work with peers to produce shared understandings of objects.

Cromdal's (2001) examination of bids for entry to peer interactions in a bilingual school provides another example of children formulating place through pretence. Two boys approached a small group of three boys climbing on a jungle gym and made a bid for entry. Although there seemed to be sufficient space for the newcomers, one of the boys commented that 'this is our boat' and that it was overcrowded. In this way, the jungle gym became redefined as a boat and, more specifically, a boat for only the existing group of three participants. Cromdal (2001: 523) comments:

Who is to decide on the capacity of a boat? Certainly, it would seem a difficult task for a non-participant to argue about this matter . . . the definitional maneuver substantiates his first claim, i.e. that the place is occupied. Moreover, it implies that he, as part of the crew, is in a position to make this kind of decision.

Cromdal points out that one boy gains entry, while the other is refused, suggesting this was a result of the differing ways that the boys bid for entry. This extract shows peers reformulating a place by invoking pretence to define the place as something other than it actually is, as a boat rather than as a jungle gym. In this way, the reformulation of the gym as a boat enabled the existing participants to deny entry to the newcomers. Formulating a pretend place is complex and collaborative work. As Schegloff (1972) indicates, formulating an understandable place term in conversation is highly complex, with speakers attending to the particulars of the occasion. Children, too, attend to the particulars of the occasion and also to the added dimension of formulating pretence.

Young children protect their 'interactive space' from peers to maintain control over certain objects, spaces or ongoing activities, often excluding peers from the interaction (Corsaro, 1985). Corsaro and Schwarz (1999: 240) note 'a tendency of preschool children to claim ownership over play areas to try to protect the activity from attempts by other children to gain access'. Claiming ownership over materials and places enables children to manage the claimed items or places, thus providing them with a means of directing or controlling the interaction and their peers, even denying access to their peers. In these ways, children exclude peers from participating in the interaction, producing 'outgroups' (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 214), those who do not have access to the interactive space. A powerful resource used to exclude others is by reference to pretend matters, thus denying others access to full participation. As Sheldon (1996) showed, two girls limited a third girl's interaction by assigning her the pretend role of the unborn baby brother. By assigning her this role, they limited her participation until the pretend baby brother was eventually born, and only then did they include her in the activity.

Another example of children drawing on pretence to manage peer interaction is described by Danby (2005), who examines an interaction involving three preschool-aged girls engaged in the pretence of an imaginary car (chairs joined together). One girl, Elana, was told to remain in the car, but she moved to the home-corner. In response, the other two girls pretended that the home-corner was a jail and locked Elana inside. Elana invoked a pretend key, 'unlocking' the jail, and moved away (Danby, 2005: 176–7). The home-corner had been reformulated as a jail by the very act of naming it so. Elana's pretence of an imaginary key transformed the place into an 'unlocked jail', which enabled her to free herself from jail. Through these examples of pretence, children are seen to

construct places in ways that effectively manage each other's actions, as well as their own, within that pretend place, and to more fully participate within interactions. While Cromdal (2001), Whalen (1995) and Danby (2005) showed instances of children drawing upon place to manage peer interactions, the children's place formulations were not central to the analysis. This article specifically focuses on children's place formulation and how it impacts on peer interaction by examining an episode of peer interaction in a preschool classroom.

## The study

The study analyses video-recorded data of children's naturally occurring peer interactions in a preparatory year classroom in an elementary school in Australia. The school is located within a suburban metropolitan area of southeast Queensland and attended predominantly by children of middle-class families. The preparatory year is the first year of formal, compulsory schooling for children aged 4–6 years. The data corpus consists of approximately 20 hours of video-recorded interactions over 4 weeks. A small hand-held video camera was used to video-record the children's classroom interactions. Selected episodes were transcribed following the transcription conventions devised by Gail Jefferson (Heap, 1997; Psathas, 1995), and are explained in the Appendix. Fine-grained transcription captures as much of the complexity of the participants' talk and actions as possible.

Prior to commencing video-recording, a period of observation took place. This enabled the researcher (first author) to become familiar with the children's routines, their names and preferred playmates. Throughout the data-gathering stage, the researcher, as observer, minimized her interactions with the children. Alternative methods of acting in the field, such as being a participant observer, have been used successfully by other researchers with children (e.g. Corsaro, 1985; Mandell, 1991). However, adult participation in children's play, even as an observer, can influence the talk and interaction (Danby, 1997). As Davies (1989: 34) comments, 'there is much that goes on between children that adults often do not know about and to which it is difficult for any researcher to gain access except as a non-participating by-stander'. As an observer, the researcher only made brief responses if the children initiated interactions (Danby, 1999). By taking such a role, it was anticipated that the children were less likely to identify the researcher as an authority figure, which could have affected the children's interactions (Corsaro and Schwarz, 1999).

A talk-in-interaction approach (Psathas, 1995), drawing on ethnomethodology, conversation analysis and membership categorization analysis (Heritage, 1984; Sacks, 1992), provided detailed accounts of the children's interactional strategies. Ethnomethodology is concerned with observing everyday practices (Garfinkel, 1967). Conversation analysis closely examines talk, turn-by-turn, focusing on how speakers produce talk and orient to talk to build mutual understandings (Sacks, 1992). Membership categorization analysis focuses on descriptions that participants orient to, or use to describe others, and how this impacts on interaction and social organization (Sacks, 1992). The focus of this analysis is not the participants' linguistic abilities, but rather on their methods and procedures used to accomplish social interactions and to maintain and construct social order.

Photographs and diagrams of the block area outline the play spaces, with the first initial of each child's pseudonym and arrows in the diagrams to indicate the children's movements. To ensure confidentiality the images have been edited so that the children's faces are blurred. The images and diagrams, when used in conjunction with the transcript, map the interaction and highlight children's movements and arrangement of the play space.

The episode examines how pretend locations of a locked door and a car-park are invoked by the children. A 'micro-ecological' approach (e.g. a particular place, such as 'this room') gives insight into the 'shared ("everyman's") geography' (Schegloff, 1972: 85) or, in this case, 'every child's' geography. McHoul and Watson (1984: 297) note that 'members . . . are ceaselessly performing common sense analyses of typical objects of their world, and the typical objects of place are no exception'. The places referred to in the interactions are pretend places and, therefore, not typical 'common sense' formulations of places and objects. In examining children's invocation of pretence to define places, it becomes apparent that the children are working to manage the interaction and create a shared geography. The children draw upon publicly available reasoning to 'analyse their environment and use the products of their analysis in producing plans and actions' (Brown and Laurier, 2005: 19). The children use pretence to formulate places in ways to manage activities that occur within the place. In relation to place terms being used to formulate something other than location, Schegloff (1972: 82) notes that:

. . . the central problem is not 'which of alternative place terms' would be chosen, but rather 'which of alternative ways of formulating X (stage of life, occupation, current activity, etc.)', one of which is a place term. Here, then, although location formulations are involved, the problem of the selection of the location formulations is not the primary one.

Rather, the focus is on how the children collaboratively manage a sense of the place and, thus, 'possibilities for action' (Brown and Laurier, 2005: 29). In the interactions in this article, children work to constitute the current activity, using pretence to deal with the selection of the location formulation and how to manage it interactionally.

Schegloff (1972: 79) examines how speakers make reference to place in their talk, terming the analysis 'locational formulations'. He suggests that when reference to a place is made in talk, the speaker uses some formulation of it, and that there are sets of terms, or formulations, that are correct to use in referring to the place. He proposes several sorts of place formulations, including: geographical formulations (such as a street address) (p. 97); formulations based on 'relation to members' (p. 97), such as referring to a place as 'Jane's place', or 'the office [to which we both go]'; formulations that are in 'relation to a landmark', such as 'in the station' (p. 100); places that are identifiable by what goes on there, termed 'course of action places' (p. 100); and formulations that are 'place name[s]' (p. 101), such as a particular city (e.g. Brisbane). Schegloff (1972: 114) explains:

. . . the selection of a 'right' term and the hearing of a term as adequate, appear to involve sensitivity to the respective locations of the participants and referent . . . to the membership composition of the interaction, and the knowledge of the world seen by members to be organized by membership categories . . . and to the topic or activity being done in the conversation at that point in its course.



When selecting a formulation of a place, the speaker attends to the particulars of that occasion, for example, where the conversation is occurring in relation to the place (e.g. near, far from, 'here'); with whom they are conversing (e.g. do they have shared knowledge of the place, such as being friends of Jane and having a shared understanding of 'Jane's house?'); and the topic of the conversation (e.g. has the conversation centred on Jane's house, so that the indexical term 'there' would be understood as referring to 'Jane's house?'). Thus, the referral to a certain place or location within a conversation is context sensitive (Schegloff, 1972: 115).

## The episodes of pretence to manage place

This article identifies two main ways in which the children used pretence to formulate and manage place in the episode. First, pretend formulations of place were used to prevent peer access. In this instance, the child pretended the wooden archway was a locked door and so no one orienting to this formulation could go through it. Second, the children used pretence to manage activities within places by continuing to orient to the existing pretend place formulation. At the same time, they invoked an elaborated pretence that was used to navigate the original pretence. Here, when the child invoked the first pretence of the archway as a locked door, another child said that their wooden block could fly over the top. Thus, an elaborated pretence was invoked, enabling the child to access the place beyond the locked door while still orienting to the original place formulation of a locked door.

The following excerpts were taken from an interactive episode in the block area of the preschool classroom during a free choice session. Wooden blocks were stored on a low shelf. A small group of children were building wooden block structures and making tracks on the nearby carpet area. Some worked collaboratively, in pairs or threes, while others built separate structures. The participants in the following interactions are identified in Table 1. Image 1 is a picture of the shelves from where the children accessed the building blocks.

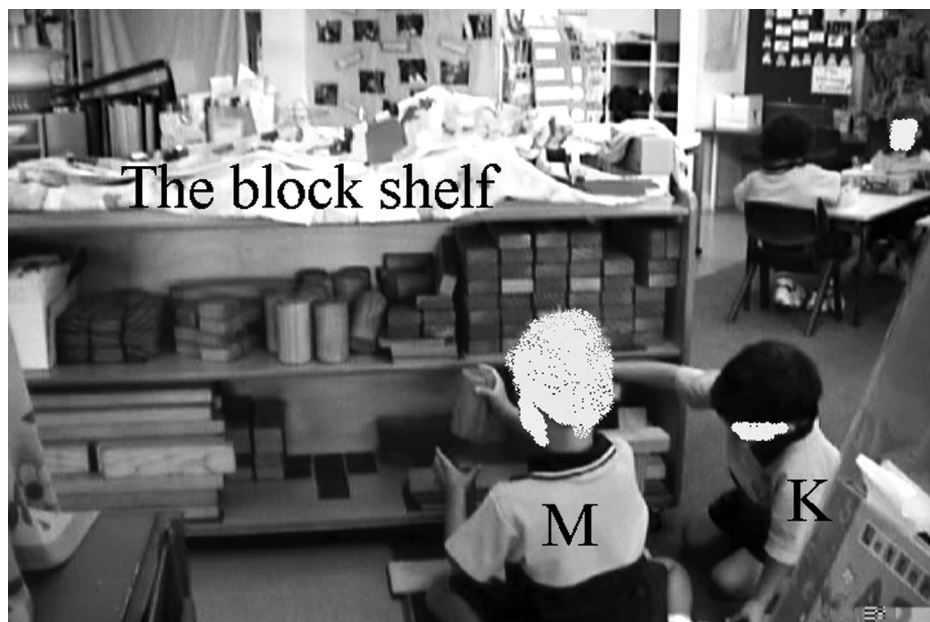
### *The first episode: the closed car-park*

The first episode highlights children using pretence to formulate places to deny their peers access to the play area. By formulating a structure made of building blocks as a

**Table 1.** Participants' names, ages and representational symbol

Name	Age (in years)	Symbol
Hayley	5.5	H
Sheridan	5.2	S
Steve	5.6	St
Oliver	5.5	O
Jared	5.4	J
Bradley	5.10	B
Hamilton	5.7	Hn





**Image 1.** The block shelf

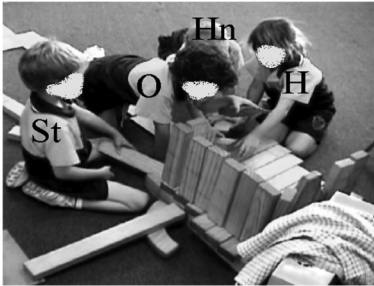
‘closed car-park’, Hayley prevented her peers from accessing it. The episode starts with Oliver, Hamilton and Bradley pushing blocks, to which they refer to as ‘cars’, along a track made by Oliver, who has connected long planks of wood on the carpet. The track loops around the carpet area with some planks, positioned as ramps, leading to and from the structures that other children are building.

In the following extract, Oliver pushes his block along the track and reaches the point where the planks lead up as a ramp. At the top of the ramp is a building of blocks that Hayley, Sheridan and Steve have constructed. As Oliver pushes his block towards the building, he meets with opposition from Hayley.

Oliver pushes his block up the plank towards the building, saying that he needs ‘to get up’ (turn 836). He uses the term ‘up’, referred to by Schegloff (1972: 88) as a ‘relational term’, which can be used alone and applied to any structure. The use of relational terms involves the ‘parties in finding the objects, never explicitly formulated, to which these relational terms were to be applied’ (Schegloff, 1972: 88). Hayley turns her attention to Oliver, telling him: ‘it’s closed car-park↑ (. ) sorry↑ (. ) you can’t come up↓’. She then places a block on the building in front of the block that Oliver is pushing (turn 838–840). Hayley, in orienting to the pretend play framework of cars, names the building as a car-park. This type of place formulation is referred to as a ‘place name’ (Schegloff, 1972: 101). The formulation of a place in a certain way can make particular types of rules relevant. Rules are ‘cultural resources to which members orient in order to make sense of their social worlds’ (Cobb-Moore et al., 2009: 1478). While rules are sensitive to abstractions,

## Extract 1a

836 *Oliver:* =I need to get up ((pushes his block up the track  
 837 to the second building))=



838 *Hayley:* =it's closed car-park↑ (. sorry↑ (. you can't  
 839 come up↓ ((places a block on the building in  
 840 front of the block Oliver is pushing))

they are dependent upon context. By formulating the place as a car-park, Hayley constructs a context where certain types of rules can be made relevant. For example, one possible rule for a car-park is that when closed, entry is not permitted. Hayley tells Oliver the car-park is closed. She does this by using the relational term 'come up', in combination with the place term 'car-park'. If Oliver orients to this pretence, then his 'car' is not allowed into the car-park. Hayley invokes a pretence to attempt to manage Oliver's action within the place of the pretend car-park.

Hayley speaks with authority. Her register is that of someone officially in charge, accomplished through the directive 'you can't come up' (turn 838). This conveys a sense of finality. She emphasizes this by placing an obstructing block in front of Oliver's block, thus 'blocking' his access to the car-park and 'closing' it. At first, Oliver does not orient to the pretence, as he lifts his block up and continues to attempt to move it into the structure. He places his block on the building, dislodging a plank (see Extract 1b).

Figure 1 shows Oliver moving away from the building, followed by Hamilton, as described in Extract 1b. Sheridan and Hayley continue to sit by the second building.

Hayley again reinforces the formulation of the block building as a closed car-park and justifies her stance. She turns to Oliver, telling him: 'you can't park on there (.) the track park is closed↓' (turn 852–854). Hayley uses the 'locational pro-term' (Schegloff, 1972: 87) 'there', in reference to the place where Oliver has positioned his block. Locational pro-terms are used after 'some referent is named' (Schegloff, 1972: 87). Terms such as 'here', 'this' or 'there' are 'deictic reference terms', but 'simply saying the deictic reference term is not enough to ensure the audience knows what is being referred to' (Rendle-Short, 2006: 107). Participants need contextual information to 'establish mutual orientation towards an object of reference' (Rendle-Short, 2006: 107). In this case, Hayley has already named the car-park and, therefore, Oliver has access to the shared understanding of what the pro-term or deictic reference term 'there' refers to. Hayley

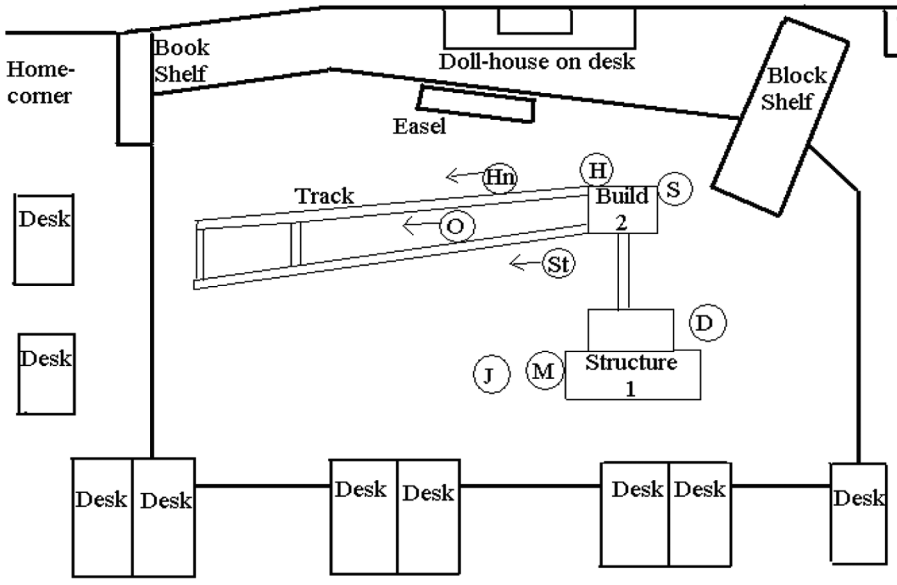
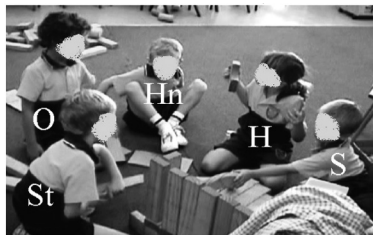


Figure 1. Oliver and Hamilton move away from the building

Extract 1b

850 *Oliver:*        [*((places his block on the building, bumping a*  
 851                        *plank as he does so, which falls))*



852 *Hayley:*        [*((turns back to face Oliver)) you can't park on*  
 853                        *there (. ) ((gestures with her hands, lifting them*  
 854                        *palms up)) the track park is closed↓*  
 855 *Oliver:*        [*((lifts up his block and shifts back))*  
 856 *Sheridan:*       [*((leans forward, replaces the fallen plank that*  
 857                        *Oliver had dislodged))*  
 858 *Oliver:*        [*((turns and takes his block and moves away from*  
 859                        *33.14 the building and back down the track which leads*  
 860                        *away from the second building))*  
 861 *Hamilton:*       [*((follows Oliver))*

again invokes the pretence that, because the car-park is closed, Oliver cannot park there, once again drawing upon a possible rule relating to car-parks, that when they are closed, entry is not permitted. Oliver seems to orient to this, as he lifts his block up off the building and shifts backwards. Sheridan leans forward to restore the fallen plank and Oliver turns around and moves back down the track, away from the building. By continuing to invoke the pretence of a closed car-park and drawing upon rules that this formulation enabled, Hayley has prevented Oliver from further entering the building.

Hayley used a number of strategies to keep Oliver out of the place. She drew upon physical means to try to prevent Oliver from entering the building by placing a block in front of his way; Oliver, however, did not orient to this. She continued by formulating the place as a car-park, invoking the pretence that it was closed. Oliver eventually oriented to this pretend formulation and Hayley successfully prevented Oliver from pushing his car into the car-park.

As an established member of the car-park and one of its builders, Hayley had certain 'ownership' rights, including the right to prevent peer access and perhaps the right to invoke pretence to define the place. Hayley, as co-builder and foundational member, worked from a position of an established member, refusing access to newcomers. Hayley used her authority to define the place as a car-park and then draw upon the rule of a closed car-park to prevent access. The group acted in ways that collaboratively produced this place formulation while, in turn, their actions also were managed by this very construction of place.

### *The second episode: the locked door*

The second episode is a continuation of the first, occurring a little later in the interaction. This extract shows how the use of elaborations enables the children to carry out actions within places formulated in ways that otherwise may have restricted their actions. By invoking an elaborated pretence, the children navigate the restriction imposed by the original pretence. An elaborated pretence is one where a second pretence is invoked by children, while already orienting to the original and existing pretence. Here, the first pretence is that a block archway is a locked door. The second, and more elaborate, pretence is that the block car became a flying car that flew above the locked door. This second pretence transforms the interaction from that of cars, roads and locked doors (with its set of rules and restrictions) to that of superheroes, providing the children with a new set of capabilities that can navigate rules relating to cars and locked doors. Different layers of pretence are invoked, as original pretences continue to be oriented to and to coexist alongside new layers of pretence.

In Extract 2a, Sheridan sits beside a ramp that links two buildings made of blocks. At one end, Sheridan has placed a wooden archway and another block inside the open arch. As Oliver and Bradley push blocks along the wooden track and ramps, Oliver pushes his block towards the archway at the other end of the ramp. He is prevented by Sheridan from going through the archway (see Extract 2a).

Figure 2 depicts Sheridan on one side of the ramp and Oliver squatting opposite him. The wooden archway sits over the base of the ramp which connects to the first structure.

Here, we see two different agendas. Oliver's agenda is to continue along the track, which leads through the archway and beyond into the first structure. Sheridan's agenda

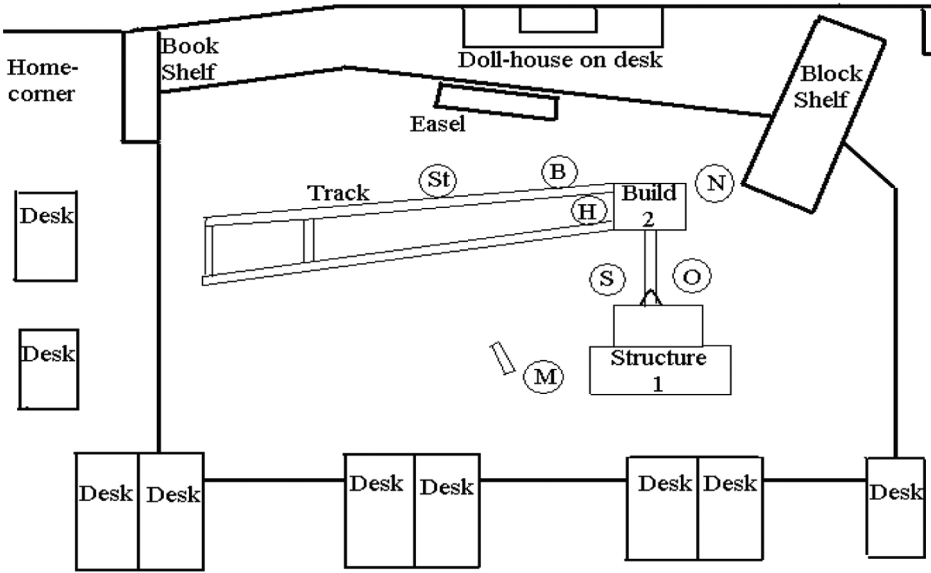
## Extract 2a

- 461 *Sheridan:* ((adjusts the ramp, which has fallen, joining the  
 462 first structure to the second building by Nancy))  
 463 this is broken↓  
 464 *Hayley:* ((tries to push her long plank up onto this ramp))  
 465 *Sheridan:* ((places his hands against her block)) no  
 466 *Hayley:* ((leans back and frowns))  
 467 *Bradley:* ((moving his block along the track towards the  
 468 second building))  
 469 *Oliver:* ((walks around the second building and sits on the  
 470 other side of the ramp, opposite Sheridan, and helps  
 471 him to fix it. He then moves his block down along  
 472 the ramp towards to blocked arch at the end))  
 473 *Sheridan:* ((grabs Oliver's block and tries to lift it over the  
 474 18.42 arch)) na now let me jump it  
 475 *Oliver:* [((takes the block back from Sheridan)) na na na no:oooo  
 476 (.) I can do it I can (0.3) >why can't we go though  
 477 the door↑< ((holds the block back down on the ramp))  
 478 *Bradley:* [((sits behind Sheridan, holding his block at  
 479 the top end of the ramp))



- 480 *Sheridan:* ((gestures towards the archway)) because it's  
 481 18.52 locked↓ ((points at the block in the archway)) (.)  
 482 because it go over there ((gestures over the archway))

is to prevent access through the wooden arch. When Oliver pushes his block along the ramp towards the archway, Sheridan takes it from him, saying 'now let me jump it' (turn 474). Sheridan attempts to lift Oliver's block over the archway, seemingly to prevent him from going through the archway. This does not work, as Oliver takes the block back from Sheridan, telling him that he 'can do it', and asking 'why can't we go through the door [the archway]' (turn 476–477). The formulation of the archway as a door is, as Schegloff (1972: 100) notes, a 'landmark, whereby "landmark" is . . . any object recognizable from



**Figure 2.** Sheridan and Oliver sit either side of the ramp

description'. Recognizing the locational formulation without further elaboration means that there is no dispute, question or challenge about the archway being a door. Schegloff (1972: 101) also refers to 'course of action' places, places identifiable by the action that occurs there. This formulation is apt here, with Oliver referring to the archway as a door, in relation to the action of 'going through' it. This formulation is both temporary and in situ – it holds only for as long as the participants orient to it in this way. When they leave the area or no longer orient to the archway as a door, this formulation ceases to be.

Sheridan says to Oliver he can't go through the door because 'it's locked' (turn 480). He points to the block that he has placed in the gap in the arch, indicating that the arch is closed or locked. Bradley, who has been sitting behind Sheridan and watching, now denies that the door is locked (see Extract 2b).

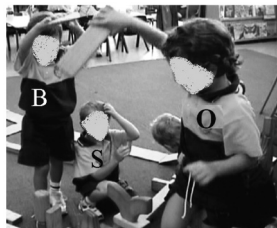
Bradley, orienting to the archway as a door, challenges the pretence that the door is locked (turn 483). The issue is of pretence, how place is made locally relevant, and about

*Extract 2b*

- 483 *Bradley:* ((kneels behind Sheridan)) no its not lock [ed↓  
 484 *Oliver:* ((looks at Bradley)) [I can I  
 485 can make it open=  
 486 *Sheridan:* =no! you [coa↑:an't↓  
 487 *Steve:* [((moves around the first building and  
 488 sits beside Oliver and places his block on the ramp))

## Extract 2c

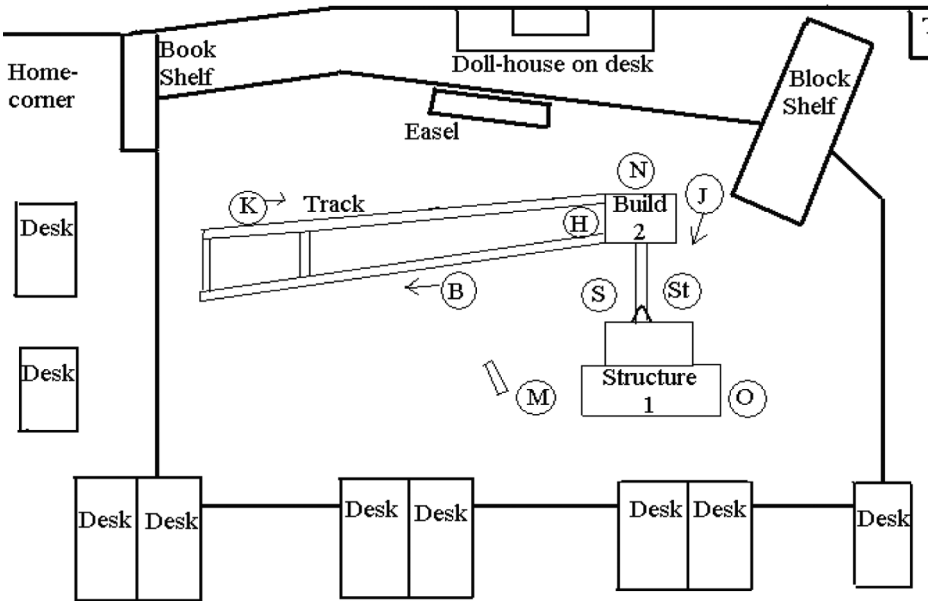
- 489 *Bradley*: ((stands up holding his block in the air)) pshoowa  
 490 (.) mine can fly:y↓ ((stands, looking at Oliver))  
 491 *Oliver*: ((stands up and lifts his block above his head))  
 492 [neeeeeer! °batman° neer! ((stands, moving the  
 493 block above himself))



- 494 *Sheridan*: [[(looks up at Oliver, puts his hands up above his  
 495 head and then puts them down, looks at Steve, sitting  
 496 opposite him))  
 497 *Bradley &* ((walk over to the first structure, holding their  
 498 *Oliver*: blocks in the air))  
 499 *Steve*: ((pushes his block down the ramp, towards the arch))  
 500 19.18 pshooww! ((lifts his block up above his head, moves  
 501 it over the arch and holds it over the first structure))  
 502 *Jared*: ((pushes his block along the top of the second building,  
 503 leaves it and stands to walk to the other side of it))  
 504 *Sheridan*: ((places his hand on the block Jared had and  
 505 pushes it along the building to the ramp))  
 506 *Jared*: that's mi↑ne↓!  
 507 *Sheridan*: ((releases it and points to the arch at the end))  
 508 you can't (go through here)  
 509 *Jared*: ((takes the block from Sheridan and pushes it down the  
 510 ramp, looks at Steve, and then follows him, lifting  
 511 his block over the arch and into the first structure))

whether the pretend place is recognized as such. If not, trouble is likely to occur. Schegloff (1972: 93) notes that moments of 'trouble' arise when 'the use of a place formulation produces a question or second question about the location of the initial place formulation'. As Benwell and Stokoe (2006: 214) comment, 'places can be sites of contestation over the rights to use the space'. Oliver points out that he 'can make it open' (turn 485). This causes Sheridan to latch on to Oliver's words, saying '=no! you [coa↑:an't↓]' (turn 486). Neither Oliver nor Bradley attempt to remove the block placed in the archway, effectively 'locking' it, and so Sheridan successfully denies access through the archway. Oliver and Bradley, however, manage to continue along the track, as seen in Extract 2c. Figure 3 depicts the children's movements as described in Extract 2c.





**Figure 3.** Bradley and Oliver move away and Jared approaches the arch

Bradley responds to the obstacle of the pretend locked door by invoking an elaborated pretence. He holds up his block in the air, using a prosodic sound of a flying machine ('pshwooa'), saying 'mine can fly:y' (turn 489–490). His pretend car can fly over the locked archway. Bradley engages in the work described by Brown and Laurier (2005: 19), where participants 'analyse their environment and use the products of their analysis in producing plans and actions'. His plan involves elaborating further on the pretence. The block that had been a car now becomes a flying machine, a plane. Oliver orients to this action and also invokes the pretence by lifting his block above him, adding to it by drawing upon the concept of 'batman' (turn 492), a superhero who is able to fly. At this point, interactions involving cars, roads and doors (and the rules relating to these) are transformed to interactions involving superheroes, providing another set of possibilities for the boys to draw on to negotiate the locked door. Sheridan watches this happen without protest. Steve, who is nearby and pushing a block along the ramp towards the arch, also sees this. As he reaches the arch, he 'flies' his block over it. Jared, following Steve then comes to the archway. Sheridan tells Jared that he 'can't go through here' (turn 507–508), using the locational pro-term 'here' to refer to the archway. Jared responds by following Steve's example, and lifts his block over the archway (turn 509–511).

The archway was formulated by participants as a 'landmark', a recognizable door. The pretence of locking the door was used originally by Sheridan to deny access to the arch. Locking the door also reformulated the location, as the 'course of action' of 'going through' the door was no longer valid, and the activities within that place were changed. Bradley and Oliver oriented to the formulation of the arch as a door, and also eventually

oriented to it as locked, seen in their not going through the arch. However, to pursue their intention of continuing along the track beyond the arch, they invoked the pretence of 'batman' to 'fly' their cars over the arch. By invoking this new pretence, the boys engage in a strategic move to bring a new set of relevancies into play. Children often draw upon themes in popular culture, such as superheroes, in ways that enable them to negotiate and construct new identities in their pretend play (Dyson, 1997). Dyson (1994, 1997) highlights the transformative power of popular stories, enabling children to negotiate power in their peer interactions. In this instance, Bradley and Oliver drew upon the pretence of superheroes to successfully negotiate the formulation of the locked door, while still orienting to it as locked.

Both instances of pretence by Bradley and Oliver are oriented to by other nearby participants. Rather than trying to negotiate a 'locked door' (Sheridan's pretence), they display their understanding of the place formulation as members of the interaction by orienting to the concept of 'flying cars'. They lift their blocks over the archway and continue. Thus, an elaborated pretence was invoked to enable access to a place (the track) beyond the denied location (the locked archway). In this way, while Sheridan accomplished his agenda of denying access through the archway, Oliver and Bradley were able also to achieve their agenda of continuing past the arch into the structure. Though the boys had different problems to face to prevent and to gain access to a place, they were able to construct location formulations through pretence in ways that constituted their activities. This illustrates the collaborative nature of pretence. In developing shared understandings of pretence and acting in ways that oriented to pretence, the boys' instances of pretence enabled them to achieve their differing agendas.

## Conclusion

This article shows how pretence is invoked by children in formulating places and managing the activities that occur within these interactions. In managing specific places, the children invoked two main types of pretence. First, the children used pretence to define places as something 'other' than what they were. The children defined a wooden archway as a locked door and a structure built of wooden blocks as a closed car-park. In formulating places in these ways, pretence offered something 'other' for the children to manage their activities. Pretend place formulation requires both recognition and co-construction by the members of the interaction.

Second, the children invoked elaborated pretences as resources to navigate restrictions and rules already based on pretence. This involved the complex activity of orienting to an existing pretend scenario, while creating another pretend scenario that coexisted with the original pretence. The group oriented to the pretend formulation of a locked door, a wooden archway, by pretending that the wooden blocks (cars) they held could fly. This pretence gained them access beyond the 'locked door'. Their pretence afforded access to a place otherwise banned. For the pretence to define places and scenarios, the peer group collaborates to co-construct the pretence. Only when the pretence is oriented to by others can it be used as a resource for effectively managing places, enabling the children to monitor the activities of others within the place, and even denying others access. The use of pretence to define places then becomes a powerful resource for managing the social order of the classroom.

When formulating a pretend place, the place is relevant only in that particular formulation while the participants are making it so. The episode presented here demonstrates the transient nature of these types of places. Real places exist whether or not we are present. For example, when we go to a car-park to park our car, it is a car-park, a place of action. When we walk past it, we recognize the car-park as a landmark. We may even talk about it to others, referring to 'the car-park' as a place name. However, when not present at that car-park, it still remains a car-park. In contrast, the place formulated a car-park in this episode involving pretence was only a car-park as long as the children continued to orient to it as one. When they moved away from the structure, it was no longer a car-park. Even while they remained, if they did not continue to work to formulate the structure as a car-park, by referring to it as one, or engaging in appropriately relevant actions, the structure could be formulated as something else. Formulations of pretend places are temporary, and constructed in situ, and only remain as long as the participants orient to them. Thus, the formulation of a pretend place requires participants to constantly work to formulate the place as such. This article, in showing how young children use pretence to engage in the work of place formulation, demonstrates children's competence in using this as a resource for managing peer interaction and social organization.

### Appendix: Transcription system

The system used to transcribe the interactional data was based on the system developed by Gail Jefferson and described in Psathas (1995). The following features were used in the transcript.

(        )	word(s) spoken, but not audible
(car)	transcriber's best guess for talk
°you°	talk has a noticeably lower volume than surrounding talk
<u>but</u>	emphasis
<b><u>BUT</u></b>	greater emphasis
.h	audible in-breath
h.	audible out-breath
[both	a single bracket marks the point when an overlap of talk begins
[[so	double brackets mark multiple overlaps
and-	indicates an abrupt cut-off of the prior word
((moving))	transcribers description of the talk-in-interaction
(.)	pause timed in micro-tenths of a second
(2.0)	pause timed in seconds
me↑	an upward arrow indicates rising intonation
him↓	a downward arrow indicates falling intonation
>faster<	indicates speech is faster than surrounding speech
=	indicates latching between utterances

Punctuation marks used in the transcription are not conventions of grammar, but depict characteristics of speech, as explained below.

hey! an exclamation mark indicates an animated tone  
 no:o sound is prolonged – multiple colons display a more prolonged sound

## References

- Benwell, B. and E. Stokoe (2006) *Discourse and Identity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Brown, B. and E. Laurier (2005) 'Maps and Journeys: An Ethnomethodological Investigation', *Cartographica* 4(3): 17–33.
- Casey, E.S. (1997) *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Christensen, P. and A. Prout (2003) 'Children, Places, Spaces and Generation', in B. Mayall and H. Zeiher (eds) *Childhood in Generational Perspective*, pp. 133–54. London: Institute of Education, University of London.
- Cobb-Moore, C., S. Danby and A. Farrell (2009) 'Young Children as Rule Makers', *Journal of Pragmatics* 41(8): 1477–92.
- Corsaro, W.A. (1985) *Friendship and Peer Culture in the Early Years*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- Corsaro, W.A. (2005) 'Collective Action and Agency in Young Children's Peer Cultures', in J. Qvortrup (ed.) *Studies in Modern Childhood: Society, Agency, Culture*, pp. 231–47. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Corsaro, W.A. and B.O. Johannesen (2007) 'The Creation of New Cultures in Peer Interaction', in J. Valsiner and R. Alberto (eds) *The Cambridge Handbook of Sociocultural Psychology*, pp. 444–59. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Corsaro, W.A. and K. Schwarz (1999) 'Peer Play and Socialization in Two Cultures: Implications for Research and Practices', in B. Scales, M. Almy, A. Nicolopoulou and S. Ervin-Tripp (eds) *Play and the Social Context of Development in Early Care and Education*, pp. 234–54. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Crabtree, A. (2000) 'Remarks on the Social Organisation of Space and Place', *Journal of Mundane Behaviour* 1(1): 25–44.
- Cromdal, J. (2001) 'Can I be with?: Negotiating Play Entry in a Bilingual School', *Journal of Pragmatics* 33(4): 515–43.
- Danby, S. (1997) 'The Observer Observed, the Researcher Researched: The Reflexive Nature of Phenomena', paper presented at Australian Association for Researching Education (AARE) Annual Conference 'Researching Education in New Times', Brisbane, 30 November–4 December.
- Danby, S. (1999) 'The Serious Business of Play', in J. Mason and M. Wilkinson (eds) *Taking Children Seriously*, proceedings of a National Workshop 12–13 July. Macarthur: Childhood and Youth Policy Research Unit, University of Western Sydney.
- Danby, S. (2005) 'Preschool Girls, Conflict and Repair', in J. Mason and T. Fattore (eds) *Children Taken Seriously in Theory, Policy and Practice*, pp. 172–81. London and Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley.
- Davies, B. (1989) *Frogs and Snails and Feminist Tales: Preschool Children and Gender*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- De Coninck-Smith, N. and M. Gutman (2004) 'Children and Youth in Public: Making Places, Learning Lessons, Claiming Territories', *Childhood* 11(2): 131–41.

- Drew, P. and J. Heritage (1992) 'Analysing Talk at Work', in P. Drew and J. Heritage (eds) *Talk at Work: Interaction in Institutional Settings*, pp. 3–65. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dyson, A.H. (1994) 'The Ninjas, the X-Men and the Ladies: Playing with Power and Identity in an Urban Primary School', *Teachers College Record* 96(2): 219–39.
- Dyson, A.H. (1997) *Writing Superheroes: Contemporary Childhood, Popular Culture, and Classroom Literacy*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Elsely, S. (2004) 'Children's Experience of Public Space', *Children and Society* 18(2): 155–64.
- Evaldsson, A.C. and W.A. Corsaro (1998) 'Play and Games in the Peer Cultures of Preschool and Preadolescent Children: An Interpretative Approach', *Childhood* 5(4): 377–402.
- Garfinkel, H. (1967) *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Goldman, L.R. (1998) *Child's Play: Myth, Mimesis and Make-Believe*. New York: Berg.
- Goldman, L.R. and M. Emmison (1995) 'Make-Believe Play among Huli Children: Performance, Myth, and Imagination', *Ethnography* 34(4): 225–56.
- Hart, R. (1979) *Children's Experience of Place*. New York: Irvington Publishers.
- Heap, J.L. (1997) 'Conversation Analysis Methods in Researching Language and Education', in N.H. Hornberger and D. Corson (eds) *Encyclopedia of Language and Education, Volume 8: Research Methods in Language and Education*, pp. 217–25. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Heritage, J. (1984) *Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Karsten, L. (2003) 'Children's Use of Public Space: The Gendered World of the Playground', *Childhood* 10(4): 457–73.
- Laurier, E. (2001) 'The Region as a Socio-Technical Accomplishment of Mobile Workers', in B. Brown and R. Harper (eds) *Wireless World*, pp. 46–60. London: Springer.
- Laurier, E. (2005) 'Searching for a Parking Space', *Intellectica* 41–42 (Special issue: 'Espace, Inter/Action and Cognition'): 101–15.
- Laurier, E., A. Whyte and K. Buckner (2001) 'An Ethnography of a Neighbourhood Cafe: Informality, Table Arrangements and Background Noise', *Journal of Mundane Behavior* 2(2): 195–232.
- McHoul, A.W. and D.R. Watson (1984) 'Two Axes for the Analysis of "Commonsense" and "Formal" Geographical Knowledge in Classroom Talk', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 5(3): 281–302.
- Mandell, N. (1991) 'The Least Adult-Role in Studying Children', in F.C. Waksler (ed.) *Studying the Social Worlds of Children: Sociological Readings*, pp. 38–59. London: Falmer Press.
- Moss, P. and P. Petrie (2002) *From Children's Services to Children's Spaces: Public Policy, Children and Childhood*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Psathas, G. (1995) *Conversation Analysis: The Study of Talk-in-Interaction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rasmussen, K. (2004) 'Places for Children: Children's Places', *Childhood* 11(2): 155–73.
- Rendle-Short, J. (2006) *The Academic Presentation: Situated Talk in Action*, Direction in Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis series. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Sacks, H. (1992) *Lectures on Conversation*, Vol. 1, ed. G. Jefferson. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Sawyer, K. (1996) *Pretend Play as Improvisation: Conversation in the Preschool Classroom*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Schegloff, E.A. (1972) 'Notes on a Conversational Practice: Formulating Place', in D. Sudnow (ed.) *Studies in Social Interaction*, pp. 75–119, 432–33. New York: The Free Press.

- Sheldon, A. (1996) 'You Can Be the Baby Brother, But You Aren't Born Yet: Preschool Girls' Negotiation of Power and Access in Pretend Play', *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 29(1): 57–80.
- Smith, F. and J. Barker (2000) 'Contested Spaces: Children's Experiences of Out of School Care in England and Wales', *Childhood* 7(3): 315–33.
- Whalen, M.R. (1995) 'Working toward Play: Complexity in Children's Fantasy Activities', *Language in Society* 24(3): 315–48.
- Zeihner, H. (2003) 'Shaping Daily Life in Urban Environments', in P. Christensen and M. O'Brien (eds) *Children in the City: Home, Neighbourhood and Community*, pp. 66–81. London and New York: Routledge/Falmer.