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Accomplishing Consumer Selves and Relations: Analysing the
Talk-in-Interaction of Preschoolers’ Focus Groups

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Sociology)

by

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2011
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In Memorium

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother Iris Sheehy (1926-2006) and my dear friend Brian Taylor (1938-2010).
Summary

This study furthers sociological understanding of children as consumers by adopting a CA-informed discourse analytical approach to examining preschoolers’ talk-in-interaction around commercial material artefacts in a focus group setting. A concern with how much or conversely how little the ‘developing’ child consumer knows and understands about how the marketplace operates and how they fit within it as a ‘choosing subject’ has dominated thinking and debate on children as consumers. This study moves beyond the empowered-exploited dichotomy to address the ‘choosing’ child consumer through interactional lenses.

Fifteen mixed-gender activity-based focus groups comprising three and four year old children were carried out in preschool environments. The focus groups were video-recorded and the talk of participants and the researcher was transcribed using Jeffersonian transcription conventions. The bottom-up discourse analytical inquiry was multi-layered and tapped into the structural, action-oriented and performance dimensions of the talk generated.

A focus on the structure of turn-by-turn talk saw Sinclair and Coulthard’s (1975) original IRF (initiation-response-follow-up) framework modified and utilised to examine the interactional (im)possibilities evident within the focus group space. IRF analysis revealed that contrary to contributing to the restriction of children’s rights to speak, the IRF interactive framework can be stretched and manipulated by the moderator and participants for social ends. A wider focus on assessment sequences shed light on the ‘choosing’ child consumer as evaluations of commercial commodities were shown to be produced and negotiated in line with conversational conventions. Finally, a yet wider focus on topic-based interactive episodes using single case analysis provided new insights into how preschool consumers utilise the ‘stuff’ of consumer culture as a form of social currency with which to ‘do’ gender, ‘do’ age, ‘do’ health and ultimately ‘do’ expert consumer selves while engaging collaboratively or disputatiously with each other.
Addressing the language of ‘choosing’, that is, linguistic objects such as evaluations, preferences and desires as interactional objects rather than cognitive structures sheds new light on very young children’s consumer competencies and serves to bring the social dimensions of consumption to the fore and increase visibility of the ‘missing’ child consumer in a socio-cultural context.
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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

This dissertation addresses 'the child consumer' in the context of multi-party, adult-child talk-in-interaction. Children's focus groups are viewed as a type of institutional talk and one of the foci of this study is to examine the constraints and opportunities afforded to speakers within this setting. In describing and attempting to make sense of multi-party interaction at one moment in time this study aims to shed new light on the child consumer-in-interaction. The themes addressed here are returned to in the main body of the dissertation but it is intended that the provision of a general backdrop to the study serves to set the scene and map out the approach taken to this research topic.

The first section addresses the theoretical resources informing the study. It broadly situates the research at the intersection of previous work in the areas of (i) children's consumption studies, (ii) sociology of childhood and (iii) children's talk-in-interaction as social action. The second section addresses the methodological resources informing the study along with the research questions guiding this research endeavour. The methodological approach taken is presented up front to make the point that the CA-informed discourse analytic approach taken here is not something that can be neatly parcelled away in a discrete chapter, but in fact encompasses a philosophical dimension that serves as a keystone for the thesis that unfolds from this study. The third section maps out the remaining chapters of this dissertation.

1.1 Theoretical Resources

'The child consumer' has been described as 'missing' from both the fields of consumption studies and childhood studies (Cook, 2008; Martens et al., 2004) and this study aims to help heighten the visibility of the child consumer in both these fields and so meet calls for empirical consideration of 'children as consumers'. A bottom-up approach is used to explore preschool children's talk-in-interaction around the material artefacts of consumer culture. These include branded toys, character licensed television programmes, movies, and branded consumables. The 'choosing' child (Cook, 2004a) is addressed in empirical terms to examine the social significance of 'doing' consumption evaluations in the focus group setting.
This dissertation is broadly situated at the intersection of three major theoretical areas; children’s consumption studies, the sociology of childhood and talk-in-interaction as social action. This section does not attempt to provide a critical overview of these far-reaching theoretical areas but instead focuses on the constituent sub-sections deemed particularly salient to this study that together form the intersection itself. I am resisting the label ‘theoretical framework’ here, as it is suggestive of solid theoretical parameters within which the research sits, and using instead the term theoretical ‘resources’ to convey the role the theory played in informing and thus shaping the study. The next chapter addresses these intersecting literatures in greater depth, as competing theoretical perspectives on, and approaches to, ‘the child consumer’ are assimilated and critiqued.

1.1.1 Children’s Consumption Studies

Perhaps as indication of its increasing relevance the literature in the area of ‘the child consumer’ and ‘children’s consumer culture’ has grown exponentially during the course of this study¹ (Cook, 2008). The significance of the consumption aspects of children’s lives have been attended to and explored empirically and theoretically by researchers from a wide range of disciplines including marketing and management, history, geography, health sciences, anthropology, psychology, cultural studies, and media studies. The breadth and intensity of interest in the area is reflected in the mass media which routinely reports on the more vicarious² aspects of the ever-growing academic research agenda. It is thus highly remarkable that the sociology of childhood literature and the sociology of consumption literature have paid so little attention to children as consumers (Martens et al., 2004:156). Cook (2008:220) argues there has been a ‘ghettoization of the [child consumer] topic’ where all

¹Since the inception of this PhD study, there have been four biennial ‘Child and Teen Consumption’ conferences held across Europe and a proliferation of articles and books published on the broad topic of the ‘child consumer’ many of which are discussed in this dissertation.

²The findings of Dr Agnes Nairn’s research into the role of brands in children’s lives was released to the press by the University of Bath in December 2005 under the headline ‘“Babyish” Barbie under attack from little girls’. The research derived from a study co-authored by Nairn, Griffin and Wick (2006) and entitled ‘The Simpsons are cool but Barbie’s a minger’. The release included the statement; ‘The meaning of “Barbie” went beyond an expressed antipathy; actual physical violence and torture towards the doll was repeatedly reported, quite gleefully, across age, school and gender.’ The story was picked up by most of the national papers in the UK, as well as over 100 large newspapers abroad (USA, China, Australia, New Zealand, S Africa, Canada, India). Dr Nairn gave 19 interviews in one afternoon to BBC radio shows. http://www.bath.ac.uk/news/unupdates/231205#media
writings on children’s consumption tend to be bundled together and assumed to be speaking about the same subject to the same audience resulting in what he describes as ‘little in the way of a community of criticism and critique among those in this area’.

Cook (2008:221) cites the work of Martens et al. (2004) and Langer (2004) as two of the few studies that situate ‘children’s consumption and the consumer culture of childhood in relation to “consumption” in general and consumption theory specifically’. Cook (2008:219-20) observes,

Highly influential and highly regarded scholars’ including Thorstein Veblen, Pierre Bourdieu, Jean Baudrillard, Colin Campbell, Daniel Miller, George Ritzer and Don Slater, among others, have crafted social, historical, structural and cultural accounts of the nature, rise and veracity of modern consumerism with hardly a mention of children or childhood.

Three main reasons are offered for the paucity of consideration to children and childhood in general consumption theory and conversely of consumption in childhood theory. Firstly, there is an adult bias in predominant theorisations of the consumer as an adult male social actor engaged in economic activity. This conceptualisation has not been sufficiently challenged by childhood theorists, who according to Cook (2008:227) do not recognise children as social actors who enter the world engaging in meaning-making activities and expressing desire for things.

Secondly, the developmental bias in the childhood studies literature has rendered the child something of an ‘impossible subject’ as it ‘cannot stand still ontogenically’ (p.229). Cook alludes to the ‘child as social becoming’ view that has dominated most theorisations of children until very recently. This view has been particularly dominant in literature on the child consumer. John (1999:186) proposes that by integrating the stage theories of cognitive and social development a ‘clear picture’ emerges regarding the ‘changes that take place as children become socialized into their role as consumers’, a view echoed in the work of McNeal (2007). Cook (2008:229) argues that ‘variation at this fundamental level of being and knowing renders the traditional vocabulary of motives imputed to individuals untenable and makes crafting general
theory onerous'. He suggests that the more recent emphasis on children as social beings and meaning makers in their own social worlds provides an alternative direction for empirical research.

The third reason offered for the lack of linkages between consumption and childhood theorisations is a political one and follows directly from the previous argument. The 'new' paradigm of childhood studies celebrates children's voice and agency in the world and research emerging from this paradigm emphasises researching 'with' rather than 'on' or 'for' children (see Greene and Hogan, 2005). The ideas encapsulated in this 'child-centred' perspective have been embraced by marketers and advertisers who claim that the empowerment recognised in the 'new' paradigm can be found and achieved through consumer goods (Lindstrom & Seybold, 2003). According to Cook (2008:230) sociologists, anthropologists and consumer theorists coming from this perspective see children as 'active and agentive beings' and tend to present an 'agnostic' view of 'the role and place of consumption and media in children's lives'. However, many others (Linn, 2004; Mayo and Nairn, 2009; Schor, 2004) view the child as 'a manipulable being subject to exploitation by advertising and marketing'; theorists in this camp tend also to be critical of capitalism and consumer culture more generally (p. 230). Thus, a dichotomy emerges between those who view the child consumer as empowered and consumer culture as empowering, and, those who view the child consumer as exploited (Cook, 2004b). The consequence of this dichotomous mode of thinking is that research on the child consumer tends to 'focus on what children know or don't know and what children do or can't do, as if they act alone' (p.231). Cook (2008:237) calls for an 'opening up' of consumption beyond the models inherited from economics. He suggests that 'a sincere effort directed at getting to “know” children and childhood in all their manifestations and contexts will serve scholarship well as being a guidepost on the way out of this analytic cul-de-sac’ (p.237).

Martens et al. (2004:156) outline three dominant perspectives in the sociology of consumption literature including (i) the 'production of consumption' approach

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3 The 16th Annual 'Kid Power' conference was held in Florida in 2009. This conference claims 'to bring together the leading brands, agencies, media and strategists to discuss the best ways of reaching not just kids but the whole family and the “whole child”'. One of the highlights flagged includes finding 'the keys to reaching kids and what they really want'. [http://www.kidpowerx.com/](http://www.kidpowerx.com/)
associated with Featherstone (ii) the ‘mode of consumption’ approach associated with Bourdieu and (iii) ‘consumption as aesthetics’ associated with Baudrillard, Giddens, Bauman and Beck. They posit that much work on children and consumption falls within the first perspective, that is, the ‘production of consumption’ approach. This approach conceptualises consumption through ‘analysis and interpretation of the characteristics of the sphere of production’ (2004:156) and thus it fails to shed light on how children’s consumption is experienced ‘in practice’ (2004:173); a criticism reiterated by Cook (2008:226).

Martens et al. (2004) offer a framework for an empirical agenda investigating the relationship between children and consumption. Their framework encompasses theories concerning (i) consumption as a means of social reproduction and class differentiation, (ii) consumption as central to identity formation through the cultivation of lifestyle and (iii) analyses of engagement with material culture. They (2004:173) argue that investigation of children’s early encounters with the material world sheds light on how that world becomes a meaningful part of culture, and how the ‘properties of material goods and the social worlds (such as the world of the family, friends or school) in which they are put to use’ shapes meaning-making activity. This dissertation responds to the third element of the Martens et al. (2004) proposed empirical agenda, specifically the question of how young children engage with material culture, by focussing on preschoolers talk-in-interaction around commercial material artefacts. This thesis approaches consumer culture at the level of meaningful social practice; consumption is broadly defined as an engagement either physically or symbolically, for example through language, with the ‘stuff’ of culture encompassing commercial and non-commercial commodities. Children’s interaction as social action is returned to below but I will first locate the study within the sociology of childhood literature.

1.1.2 Sociology of Childhood

This study is informed by Corsaro’s (2005, orig 1997) sociology of childhood. His sociological perspective is constitutive of the ‘new paradigm’ in childhood studies (James and Prout, 1990; Qvortrup et al., 1994); a perspective from which Cook (2008:230) claims ‘comparatively few’ researchers examining children’s consumer lives are positioned. The ‘new paradigm’ resulted in a re-conceptualisation of
‘childhood’ itself, from an age-stage forward looking period of life to a structural form and social phenomenon (Qvortrup et al., 1994). Almost twenty years on from James and Prout’s (1990) ground-breaking publication, Qvortrup et al. (2009:4) reflect on the ‘new’ paradigm identifying a number of key features. The paradigm critiqued the conventional socialisation perspective previously dominant in the field of childhood studies. It emphasised the need to give voice to or acknowledge agency in children and demanded new thinking with regard to the appropriateness of existing methodological approaches for the study of children and childhood suggesting that ‘ordinary sociological or anthropological methods’ were most appropriate.

Corsaro’s (2005) contribution to the new paradigm critiques the traditional socialisation perspective which comprised a deterministic model that viewed children as passive subjects of a socialisation process that shaped them into functioning members of adult society. The constructivist model of socialisation draws on a Piagetian framework and emphasises developmental stages in the socialisation process. While an understanding and consideration of a child’s level of cognitive development is important when trying to understand how children participate in and organise their own peer worlds, this model offers an active but lonely view of children as the emphasis rests firmly on the individual internalising child (2005:17). Corsaro critiques linear age-stage models of children’s socialisation, instead arguing that development is a ‘productive-reproductive process’ which sees children ‘enter into a social nexus and, by interacting and negotiating with others, establish understandings that become fundamental social knowledge on which they continually build’ (Corsaro and Eder, 1990:217). Childhood is thus increasingly understood as a dynamic social space rather than a chronological framework.

A re-conceptualisation of children from ‘social becomings’ to ‘social beings’ has allowed researchers to shake off cognitive developmental parameters when addressing children’s competences in context. The attractiveness and usefulness of the new wave of thinking is demonstrated by the massive uptake with which it has been met in the field of childhood studies and by developments to the original model.

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4 Marketing and managerial approaches to the ‘child consumer’ provide an exception to this argument as traditional age-stage theorisations of the child consumer remain dominant in this area (see John, 1999 and McNeal, 2007).
for example, Hutchby and Moran-Ellis (1998b). That said, the ‘new social studies of childhood’ is not without criticism and has recently been revisited by Alan Prout (2005) one of its original advocates. He asserts that the ‘new’ sociology of childhood was behind the sociological times, ‘While sociology was searching for metaphors of mobility, fluidity and complexity, the sociology of childhood was raising the edifice of childhood as a permanent social structure’ (2005:62). He argues that modernity’s encounter with childhood put in place ‘a framework of meaning that constituted children as the “cultural other” of adulthood’ (2005:10). He argues further that oppositional dichotomies including; ‘Childhood:Adulthood, Private:Public, Nature:Culture, Irrational:Rational, Dependent:Independent and Play:Work’ are inadequate for understanding childhood (2005:10).

Prout suggests childhood studies must move beyond nature-culture dualisms in order to become a genuinely inter-disciplinary field. He acknowledges that the boundary between adulthood and childhood is blurring arguing; ‘This is the soil from which anxiety about the “disappearance” of childhood grows and it is the feature of contemporary childhood that demands new approaches to its understandings and analysis’ (2005:34), and he posits that the sociology of childhood must now move beyond the ‘becoming-being’ dichotomy and recognise that both ‘children and adults should be seen through a multiplicity of becomings in which all are incomplete and dependent’ (2005:67).

In a similar vein to Prout (2005); Cromdal (2009:1474) describes the ‘new social studies of childhood’ as a largely theoretical enterprise. He sums up the achievements of this enterprise arguing ‘society’s institutionalised structuring of childhood along the deficit view of children is condemned and their status as competent social agents is celebrated’ but believes this theoretical perspective has overlooked the interactional practices through which childhoods are ‘produced, lived and experienced’. Cromdal (2009:1474) suggests the challenge for sociologists is to explore young people’s routine interactions with each other and with significant adults in their lives including parents, teachers and doctors, to shed light on what he terms ‘the mundane practices that are so easily glossed as “childhood”’.
Corsaro’s (2005) ‘interpretive reproduction’ perspective was originally put forward in a paper co-authored with Donna Eder (1990) entitled ‘Children’s Peer Cultures’ and has since been incorporated into his ‘sociology of childhood’. This perspective provides a response to some of the concerns voiced by Prout (2005) and Cromdal (2009). Corsaro and Eder posited that socialisation is not only a matter of adaptation and internalisation but also a process of appropriation, reinvention and reproduction. Development is understood as a ‘productive-reproductive process’ in contrast to linear age-stage models;

The process is interpretive in the sense that children do not merely individually internalise the external adult culture. Rather children become a part of adult culture and contribute to its reproduction through their negotiations with adults and their creative production of a series of peer cultures with other children (1990:201).

Socialisation is thus viewed as a communal activity that sees children negotiate, share and create joint cultures with other children and with adults (Corsaro and Eder, 1990:217).

Broadly speaking ‘interpretive reproduction’ is made up of three types of collective action; ‘(1) children’s creative appropriation of information and knowledge from the adult world; (2) children’s production and participation in a series of peer cultures; and (3) children’s contribution to the reproduction and extension of adult culture’ (Corsaro, 2005). Corsaro stresses that these activities are not viewed as ‘historically partitioned’, in other words children do not progress stage by stage through these activities, rather, these ‘collective actions’ are seen to occur ‘both within the moment and across time’ (2005:41). In contrast to the linear view of child development which assumes children must pass through a number of key cognitive and emotional developmental stages before he or she can develop into a socially competent adult. Corsaro (2005:25-6) uses an ‘orb web model’ to conceptualise ‘interpretive reproduction’ as a spiral in which children produce and participate in a series of embedded peer cultures. The family of origin is represented at the centre of the web and the radii represent locations of institutional interaction including home, public parks, the car, rituals such as weddings and funerals, classrooms, libraries and the list
goes on. Corsaro identifies four distinct peer cultures (preschool, preadolescent, adolescent, and adult) and argues that ‘peer cultures are not left behind with maturity or individual development; rather, they remain part of their live histories as active members of a given culture’ (2005:26). The orb web model thus provides a neat metaphor to describe the interwoven nature of children’s and adult’s cultures.

The inclusion of Daniel Cook’s ‘Children as Consumers’ in Qvortrup et al.’s (2009) ‘Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies’ signals some of the earliest explicit considerations of children as consumers in the context of childhood studies. Cook (2009b:342-3) argues implicitly against distinctions between children per se and child consumers as somehow different entities instead putting forward that children ‘unfold as persons in and, in significant ways, through a consumer society’. This dissertation focuses on preschool children’s interactions around consumer commodities in an effort to catch a glimpse of the manner in which this unfolding occurs. The study therefore centres on the ‘in the moment’ aspects of Corsaro’s (2005) ‘interpretive reproduction’ model specifically moments of talk-in-interaction produced by preschool consumers. The third and final set of theoretical resources derives from literature on young children’s talk-in-interaction as social action and it is to this body of research that I now turn.

1.1.3 Children’s Talk-in-interaction as social action

It has been argued that previous sociological and cultural approaches to the child consumer have tended to focus on children through, for example, ‘documentary and pictorial evidence’ as opposed to with children by ‘talking with them’ or ‘through observation of their negotiations in commercial space’ (Martens et al., 2004:158-9). This has changed more recently however, for example, fourteen of the nineteen chapters in Ekstrom and Tufte’s (2007) edited volume entitled ‘Children, Media and Consumption’ included empirical research with children using either survey, interview or focus group methods. Very little research on the child consumer takes an interactionist perspective, however, and thus the precise intersection between

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5 Ekstrom and Tufte (2007:11) state that the idea for the book came from the 2nd International Conference on Pluridisciplinary Perspectives on Child and Teen Consumption which took place in the Copenhagen Business School 2006.
childhood studies, consumption studies and studies addressing children’s talk-in-interaction as social action is very sparsely populated. The next chapter extrapolates some of the findings of Chin (2001), Messner (2000), and Pugh (2009) as exceptional in this regard and of focal interest to me. For now I focus predominantly on the intersection between childhood studies and interactional approaches to children.

This study has been influenced and inspired by previous research on very young children’s talk-in-interaction deriving from sociolinguistics, pragmatics and more broadly the sociology of language including studies on; gendered interactions of four and five year olds (Danby 1998; Messner, 2000), rule making activities of four to six year olds (Cobb-Moore et al., 2009), children’s constructions of dramatic play (Griswold, 2007; Kyratzis, 2007), children’s negotiation of sequential understandings (Wootton, 1997, 2007) social organisation in children’s play (Butler, 2008), storytelling and narrative production in preschool interactions (Ervin-Tripp and Kuntay, 1997, Kuntay and Senay, 2003, Kyratzis, 2000), preschoolers narrative development (Nicolopoulou, 2002) and toddlers peer relationships (Katz, 2004).

Much of this work either implicitly or explicitly illustrates children’s social competence as theorised by Hutchby and Moran-Ellis (1998b) in their expansion on James and Prout’s (1990) original thinking. Hutchby and Moran-Ellis argue that children’s competencies should be studied in the ‘arenas of action’ of their everyday lives and that those arenas of action can prove both ‘enabling and constraining’ in terms of children’s ‘capacities to display social competencies’ (1998b:10). They call for empirical research that seeks to shed light on the ways children display, are required to display and are policed in the display of social competence, and, proffer that questions as to how children competently manipulate material and cultural resources within given interactional contexts are imperative to inquiries into competence (1998b:14). Cromdal (2009:1474) argues that interaction analysts typically opt for an ‘indifferent stance’ towards children’s competence instead ‘taking an interest in understanding how particular trajectories of action are designed and received in the unfolding, contextualised organisation and management of social relations’. This dissertation is concerned with how material and cultural resources made manifest through talk-in-interaction are utilised for social ends. Its focus is thus not hugely dissimilar from that celebrated by Cromdal (2009) and Danby (2009) in a
recent special issue of the Journal of Pragmatics dedicated to exploring features of childhood in practice, the core focus of which is described by Danby (2009:1596) as 'showing children’s own methods for making sense of their everyday contexts using the interactional and cultural resources they have to hand’.

Marjorie Goodwin (1990, 2006) brings talk to the fore in her highly detailed and inspirational work on children’s social organisation. Goodwin was one of the first theorists to treat children as social actors ‘actively engaged in the construction of their social worlds rather than as passive objects who are the recipients of culture’ (1990:283). She used non-participant observation to observe a group of urban black children engaging in street play whereby she discovered ‘the primary activity [ ] was not games but talk’ (1990:9). She demonstrates the fact that

structure in talk (details such as the syntactic shape of utterances, the intonation contour that begins an argumentative move, the way in which possessive forms are used in directives, transformations of another’s talk in a return move etc) provides human beings with a primary resource for the dynamic organisation of their social life (1990:4).

Goodwin (1990:39) introduces participant frameworks through which she explores conversational features such as directives, argument, ‘he-said-she-said’ devices, instigating activity and narratives. Her examination included the analysis of boy-only groups’ and girl-only groups’ self-evaluation and differentiation practices: she found differences in how competitive ranking is achieved; for example, boys partake in ‘point-scoring’ and ‘bragging’ about creative skills and successes but girls assign power through role play and alliance building and find bragging unacceptable.

More recently Goodwin (2006) documents through video, the playground interactions of a multi-ethnic group of preadolescent girls based in Southern California. She critiques traditional views of socialisation as ‘unidirectional’ (adult to child) that are traditional in psychological anthropology and argues for the importance of investigating children’s language-in-use in furthering knowledge on children’s agency. Goodwin (2006:15) analyses the ‘taken-for-granted embodied language practices through which girls construct their social groups’ (2006:15). She posits that
Language in interaction provides the principal means for them to articulate for each other what they are doing, how they expect others to participate in the activity of the moment, and how persons in their peer group are positioned and ranked vis-à-vis one another (2006:21).

Goodwin (2006: 245) focuses on actions such as disagreements, insult, comparisons, stories and assessments to bring to light the ways in which social accomplishments including hierarchy, opposition, alliances, friendship and oppression might be constructed. She (2006:189) provides one of the first accounts of the ways in which girls talk about status differentiation through, for example, their formulations about wealth including talk about private schools, clothes, cars, famous people and elite activities. The girls constitute alignment with others through the manner in which they participate in activities including description sequences and positive or negative assessments. Equally they engage in exclusionary practices through the production of ‘negative commentary, rude behaviour, ridicule, degradation, and exclusion … in line with a social group’s strong feelings of differentiation of in-group and out-group membership’ (2006:220).

It is not surprising that the majority of work on children’s interactions and social competence has focussed on peer cultures. Blum-Kulka and Snow (2004a:296-8) emphasise the collaborative, multi-party and symmetrical aspects of ‘peer talk’ describing it as something that ‘unfolds in pairs or groups of children unhindered by the inherent asymmetry of adult–child interaction’. Kyratzis (2004) also downplays adult presence in the study of peer cultures specifying one concern of children’s peer cultures is the resistance of adult culture by children, for example, in daycare and school settings, as peer group identity gains strength through the resistance of adults and adult values. However, she in line with Goodwin (1990 and 2006) disagrees that children’s peer cultures are void of disputes concerning power and hierarchy, arguing instead that they are central concerns of children’s peer groups across cultures and across ages (2004:627). Her large scale review of previous research on children’s peer cultures includes a focus on codes of inclusion through peer talk, conflict talk and children’s construction of valued identities of the peer group through peer talk.
This dissertation does not examine peer cultures or attempt to measure children's social competence per se, but it does examine 'interactional competence' (Hutchby, 2005) specifically preschooler's consumer competences. Attention to what social competence means in terms of organizing social action is according to Butler (2008:5) what the sociology of childhood has suggested needs to be understood but has not in the main yet revealed. Butler (2008:15) advocates a bottom-up approach to research; 'the practices children have for understanding or characterizing children's interactions should follow in from the analysis rather than pre-empting it'. She cites Wootton (1997) to support her argument that, to date, 'there have been very few studies of children's interactions that have focused on interactional practices themselves, and the local, public and moral nature of sequential understanding' (2008:16).

Hutchby (2005:69) notes that while work on peer group interaction is revelatory with respect to the operation of children's social worlds, it is also important to remember that children 'routinely find themselves having to manage the contingencies of adult-controlled institutions' including classrooms, medical settings, social services and the family itself. He argues adult-child interactions should be analysed in terms of indications of interactional competence and highlights the fact that, for example, 'silence' can be evoked as a very effective strategy of resistance by a child in an institutional setting and should not be mistaken for a deficiency in competence (2005:70). His view echoes that of Silverman et al. (1998:70) who treat the silence produced by children in the context of parent-teacher interviews as not a deficiency on the child's part but as a competent strategy by which the child can 'avoid implication in the moral universe being set up between the parent and teacher'.

I want to conclude this overview of the theoretical resources informing this dissertation by recalling the work of Mackay (1975). It is now more than three decades since Mackay (1975) critiqued the concept of socialisation as a 'gloss which precludes the explication of the phenomenon it glosses, that is, the interaction between adults and children' (p.181). He argues succinctly that traditional formulations of socialisation suggest communication between adults and children is impossible as they have different communicative competencies acquired as they pass from 'one ontological order to another' (p.182). Mackay's ethnomethodological
framework posited that an interpretive perspective ‘makes available ...children as beings who interpret the world as they do [and thus] transforms a theory of deficiency into a theory of competency’ (p.184). Consequentially the ‘study of adult-child interaction (formerly socialization) becomes substantively the study of cultural assimilation, and theoretically the study of meaningful social interaction’ (1975: 184).

A focus on children’s talk-in-interaction as social action clearly has methodological implications for data collection and analysis some of which have just been alluded to, I shall now turn to the methodological literature informing this research.

1.2 Methodological Resources

I label the research approach used for this study ‘CA-informed discourse analysis’. A precise explication and discussion of this methodological approach is provided in section 3.4 below but the approach is flagged here in advance for two reasons firstly, to convey the centrality of the methodological framework to the project as a whole, and secondly, to locate this study, from the start, within a specific area of the broad DA field.

It is almost thirty years since Gilbert and Mulkay (1984: 5) criticised methodological conventions around qualitative data analysis arguing that most qualitative studies emerging at that time followed four steps: (i) obtain statements by interview or by listening to or observing participants in a natural setting (ii) look for broad similarities between the statements (iii) if there are similarities which occur frequently, take these statements at face value, that is, as accurate accounts of what is really going on and (iv) construct a generalised version of participants’ accounts of what is going on and present this as one’s own analytic conclusions. This approach results in ‘univocal’ sociological reports, whereby, ‘participants are allowed to speak through the author’s text only when they appear to endorse his story’ (1984:2). Wooffitt (2005:23) builds on this argument claiming that much of what counts as sociological knowledge derives from the analysis of verbal and textual accounts and that these accounts have been considered by sociologists as ‘“good enough” representations of either an external social reality or an inner mental realm of attitudes and opinions’.
The field of discourse studies is vast with widespread roots in ethnomethodology, sociolinguistics, structuralism, speech act theory and literary criticism. It comprises top-down approaches which focus on issues of power, ideological practice and social process and bottom-up approaches which mainly focus on interpersonal interactions occurring across a range of public and private spheres. Top-down approaches typically attempt to show how conventional ways of talking and writing within a culture serve political or ideological functions in that they mould how people think and act as social beings (Fairclough, 1989; Foucault, 1977). CA-informed discourse analysis draws on bottom-up approaches from the discourse analytic field including the work of Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), Gilbert and Mulkay (1984), Potter and Wetherell (1987), Edley and Wetherell (1997), Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998), and Edley (2001). It also draws substantially from the parallel field of Conversation Analysis [CA] and is informed by the work of Sacks et al. (1974), Heritage (1984a), Pomerantz (1984), Sacks, (1995a; 1995b), Puchta and Potter (2004) and Schegloff (2007).

The frameworks and techniques developed by bottom-up discourse analysts derive from ethnomethodology. Garfinkel (1967) placed language at the centre of ethnomethodology and coined the term to refer to 'the investigation of the rational properties of indexical expressions and other practical actions as contingent ongoing accomplishments of organised artful practices of everyday life' (1967:11). Harvey Sacks (1935-1975) the co-founder with Emmanuel Schegloff of conversation analysis shared an interest with Garfinkel in the analysis of mundane activities to reveal sense-making action and social accomplishment. Schegloff has published on CA from 1968

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6 CA is described as a parallel field as some pure conversation analysts might not agree that conversation analysis be subsumed under the broad DA umbrella. The compatibility of CA and DA (including a number of varieties of DA) approaches have been discussed and debated in the literature directly and indirectly (see Schegloff, 1997; Wetherell, 1998; Schegloff, 1998; Billig, 1999; Schegloff, 1999). Other debates have taken place around the usefulness and value of various discourse analytical approaches (see Baxter, 2002a; West, 2002; Baxter, 2002b; Wowk, 2007). I do not intend to gloss over these perceived incompatibilities between the two approaches and I acknowledge that tensions exist, but, I am arguing that the concerns and techniques of a traditional CA approach including a focus on turn-taking and the identification of social action can work in a complementary fashion with the concerns of bottom-up DA including the identification of discourse structures, repertoires and positions.
to the present day. His work has expanded the scope of conversation analytic principles over a number of decades while remaining focussed on how a deep understanding of the mechanics of talk can help us drill down to the social action talk achieves. Conversation analysts share a common concern with the study of social life in situ, specifically the ‘order/organisation/orderliness of social action, particularly those social actions that are located in everyday interaction, in discursive practices, in the sayings/telling/doings of members of society’ (Psathas, 1995:2).

Potter and Wetherell (1987:35) were influenced by ethnomethodology in two main ways (i) a concern with sense-making and (ii) a concern with the constructive and constitutive properties of language. DA eschews explanations which treat linguistic behaviour as ‘a product of mental entities or processes’ whether deriving from social representations or other ‘cognitive furniture’, for example, attitudes, beliefs or wants (Potter and Wetherell, 1987:157). In broad DA terms, language is understood as a constructive phenomenon that is examined to reveal the functional and performative features exhibited in the course of its production. Potter and Wetherell (1987:157) posit that DA does not have any grandiose claims, it is concerned with language use and the way accounts are constructed and how they function.

Bottom-up discourse analytic studies and pure conversation analytic studies have examined interaction in a variety of settings. Sacks’ earliest work analysed calls to a suicide prevention centre. Schegloff’s immense catalogue of work has focussed primarily on naturally occurring conversation. Interaction arising from a number of institutional settings has also been analysed including courtrooms (Atkinson and Drew, 1979), classrooms (Baxter, 2002a; McHoul, 1978; Mehan, 1985; Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975; Sunderland, 2001) medical settings (Heritage and Maynard, 2006) and recently birth helplines (Kitzinger & Kitzinger, 2007). Interview and focus group produced discourse has also recently been examined in discourse analytic terms as the talk-in-interaction produced in research settings is addressed as both topic and resource. Recent work by Puchta and Potter (2004), Myers (1998, 1999), Macnaghten

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7 Other academics/sociologists including George Psathas, Paul Ten Have, Gene Lerner, John Heritage, Geoff Raymond and Celia Kitzinger have also pioneered developments in CA while expanding its usefulness.
and Myers (2004) and Wilkinson (2006) has been especially illuminating in the context of this study and is addressed in detail in chapter three below.

Bearing in mind Cook’s (2008) robust assessment of the ‘missing child’ in sociological accounts of consumption described above, it must be reiterated that ‘the child consumer’ construct has been examined and discussed across a range of disciplines. This dissertation is informed by, and the product of, an ethnomethodological approach to understanding children as consumers as displayed through their talk-in-interaction stimulated by branded consumer commodities in a focus group setting. Cook (2008: 229-30) argues that ‘crafting general theory’ on the child consumer is ‘onerous’ on account of the fact that children’s understanding of goods, media, value and money vary across the chronological age spectrum thus making the ‘traditional vocabulary of motives imputed to individuals untenable’. However, he suggests that the ‘new’ childhood studies offer an alternative view to that encompassed in the linear model of child development by conceptualising children as ‘active social beings living in the here and now’. The interactionist approach adopted in this study (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Puchta and Potter, 2004) renders the ‘traditional vocabulary of motives’ alluded to by Cook (2008:229) to some extent redundant as the idea that psychological constructs such as motives or attitudes are fixed entities represented through language is critiqued and instead the idea that social action is produced and thus displayed in the here and now of talk-in-interaction is advocated.

The CA-informed discourse analytic approach utilised in the research presented in this dissertation aims to respond to Hutchby and Moran-Ellis’ (1998b:22) call for empirical research which situates children’s social competence as a practical accomplishment in the ordinary circumstances of everyday life. They advocate an ‘ethnomethodological standpoint that attempts to see children’s social action for what it is, as a knowledgeable, agentic, active accomplishment of children themselves in interaction with co-present others’. Corsaro (2005:131) argues that

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8 The term ‘child consumer’ is familiar both within and outside academic circles. A search for the exact term ‘child consumer’ results in 992 hits on Google Scholar and many thousand on a general google search as of February 2011.
although studies of childhood consumer culture tell us a great deal about children’s preferences and their roles in the consumer decisions they only rarely and very narrowly explore children’s actual use, refinement and transformation of symbolic and material goods within peer cultures.

This dissertation attempts to address this gap in the literature by focussing on three main research questions which encompass the structural (Heritage, 2004; Heritage and Greatbatch, 1991; Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975) action-oriented (Myers, 1998, 1999; Pomerantz, 1984; Puchta and Potter, 2004), and performative (Edley and Wetherell, 1997; Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Psathas, 1992) dimensions of talk-in-interaction respectively:

1. How are interactional (im)possibilities and roles made available and utilised by moderator and child participants in the focus group setting?
2. How is ‘evaluation’ accomplished through talk-in-interaction by preschool consumers and for what social ends?
3. How and for what purposes are discourses around commercial material artefacts used as social currency by preschool consumers?

The bottom-up analytical inquiry is multi-layered. An initial stage of ‘unmotivated looking’ (Sacks, 1984) forms the base layer. This is followed by a layer comprising an examination of the focus group ‘fingerprint’ (Heritage and Greatbatch, 1991) which entails addressing focus group talk-in-interaction in institutional terms and exploring the interactional (im)possibilities proffered through the roles of moderator and participant within the activity-based focus group context. The IRF (Initiation-Response-Follow-up) (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975) framework developed here is utilised to provide an enriched description of the sequences of interaction analysed subsequently. The next layer comprises an examination of social action through assessment sequences (Pomerantz, 1984). The focus here is on the ‘doing’ of the talk specifically the ‘doing’ of consumption evaluations. These evaluations expressed through talk of ‘liking’, ‘disliking’, ‘preferring’ and ‘desiring’ are conceived of as interactional objects an examination of which can shed light on the ‘choosing’ child consumer-in-interaction. Finally the top layer utilises ‘single case analysis’ (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998, Psathas, 1992). Here, the analysis progresses from a focus on the
'doing' of talk to a focus on what the talk is 'doing'. Single case analysis is used to examine the social significance of doing consumption evaluations as the question as to how and for what purposes discourses around commercial material artefacts are used as social currency by preschool consumers is addressed. The term talk-in-interaction is employed throughout this dissertation to highlight that my interest is not with talk in the abstract but rather with talk in the here and now, specifically what preschool consumers do with talk socially.

1.3 Organisation of the Thesis

This chapter has positioned this research endeavour at the intersection of three bodies of literature; children’s consumption studies, the sociology of childhood and children’s talk-in-interaction. It has also provided an introductory overview to the methodological resources drawn on throughout the study. Finally, this study takes a bottom-up multi-layered approach to research, the details of which have been briefly outlined along with the three major research questions guiding this research. The next chapter addresses the intersecting theoretical resources outlined above in more depth to provide greater focus to the dissertation. The third chapter details the research design and methodological framework developed. The fourth, fifth and sixth chapters present the analytical findings. The fourth chapter examines the tasks, roles and overall framework evident and thus reveals the interactional constraints and enablers that characterise the focus groups used in this study. The fifth chapter sees the ‘choosing’ child consumer addressed in empirical terms to examine the social significance of ‘doing’ consumption evaluations in the focus group setting. The sixth chapter presents findings on how and for what purposes discourses around commercial material artefacts are used as social currency by preschool consumers. The final chapter provides the major conclusions of this research and recommendations for future directions.
CHAPTER TWO: Children as Consumers

This chapter sharpens the focus on the salient theories and concepts deriving from the inter-disciplinary assemblage of theoretical literature described in the previous chapter that has served to inform this study. The first section provides a contextual backdrop to the study by addressing the historical development of ‘the child consumer’ construct. The second section expands on that discussion by focussing on and ultimately moving beyond the main debate that has characterised literature in the area, that is, the extent to which children find themselves empowered or exploited within consumer society. The third section addresses the concept of ‘social currency’ in relation to children’s talk-in-interaction around commercial material artefacts. The fourth section revisits Corsaro’s (2005) ‘cultural routine’ theorisation. The fifth section addresses previous discourse analytical approaches to the child consumer and the final section draws together the major conceptual resources informing the development of the study in advance of the presentation of the research design and methodological framework.

2.1 Historical Development of the ‘Child Consumer’ Construct

The ‘child consumer’ construct is central to this dissertation and thus merits critical discussion here and throughout this chapter. It is a construct that has taken shape across more than a century; a trajectory that takes the child from being ‘an object of economic activity’ to being ‘a subject in and of market relations – a subject with desire’ (Cook, 2004a:12), a journey during which the child consumer has been reconceptualised from ‘the cute’ to ‘the cool’ (Cross, 2004). Social histories of childhood including Aries (1962) and Heywood (2001) offer comprehensive historical accounts of childhood in broader contexts. Dolan (2009) has documented consumer subjectivity in an Irish context from 1900 to 1980, however, the focus of my work is on children’s interactions around commercial products and for that reason this section of the literature review focuses on the twentieth century history of the ‘child consumer’ within the commercial realm. Historical analysis reveals the gradual development of the child consumer over many decades but it also draws attention to defining events, moments and artefacts that punctuated this trajectory and thus
contributed to the overall shape of the child consumer as we recognise him or her today.

2.1.1 From ‘choosing parent’ to ‘choosing child’ – 1890 to 1950

The late nineteenth century saw the introduction of compulsory education for children across many parts of the world, an event that signalled changing beliefs about the role of children within the family and wider society. Where previously children had a productive ‘useful’ role often working to contribute to the family income and by implication the wider economy, compulsory schooling heralded a shift in the way children were viewed as members of society. Children became economically and productively ‘useless’ (Cook, 2004a:7). Childhood was conceptualised as a sacred time of innocence and ‘playthings’ that were previously passed down to children from the realm of ‘adult amusement’ became the ‘possessions’ of the young (Cross, 1997). The Santa Claus myth was crystallized in the late 1880’s, and, as parents bestowed gifts of toys on their children on birthdays, Christmas and other festive days, they grappled with choosing either toys that purportedly prepared children for real world experiences, or toys that purportedly fuelled children’s imaginations and promoted escape from reality (Cross, 1997). Parents recognised children’s rights to self-expression through play and were concerned to provide the ‘right’ types of toys in their quest to meet the developmental and emotional needs of the child.

The period between 1900 and 1940 saw considerable change in the inter-relationship between parents, children and the marketplace. The ‘boys’ toybox mirrored the world of science and industrial production; the girls’ a consumerism of modern homemaking and personal vitality (Cross, 1997:51). The ‘fantasy toy’ emerged as parents bought ‘comic-strip character dolls’, ‘teddy bears’ and ‘Kewpie dolls’ particularly for preschool aged children. Cross (1997:51) documents the early marketing activities of American Boy which as far back as 1916 offered toys as incentives to boys who sold subscriptions to others, and, Ladies’ Home Journal which in 1912 offered girls a ‘Lettie Lane’ doll’s house if they encouraged three friends to subscribe to the journal. Two decades later toymakers targeted children directly through movies, radio and comic books with the production of toys like Orphan Annie and Buck Rogers. These types of marketing activities had consequences for the role of parents in children’s consumer culture as they represent the earliest attempts to
sideline parents' concerns and to target young people's imaginations directly (Cross, 1997). E. Evalyn Grumbine, assistant publisher and advertising director of Childlife, published 'Reaching Juvenile Markets' in 1938. The inner sleeve of the book is revelatory with respect to marketers' negotiation of the relationship between children and parents,

Manufacturers, advertisers, and all who "talk" to children through the press or radio will find this book full of practical methods for reaching the huge juvenile market without antagonising parents and educators.

The term 'child consumer' does not appear in the text and Grumbine (1938) is explicit in stating that adults are in control of children. Children are argued to have 'tastes and desires of their own' (p. 20) but these decision making capacities and freedoms to choose are conferred on children by adults

Progressive mothers and educators not only allow children to make their own decisions during the early years of childhood, but urge them to choose their own clothes and work out plans for their own rooms (1938: 11).

Cook (2009a: 335) argues that 'the changes that took place in the first half of the twentieth century with regard to the orienting of commercial spaces, merchandise, stock and department design in deference to the presumed perspective of the child made for a shift beyond simply naming the child as a "consumer" '. These changes 'institutionalised "the child" and, importantly, childhood in commercial terms and in business agendas and priorities to the extent that some began to build their enterprises in conversation with children's desires, choices and viewpoints, rather than ignoring or marginalizing them' (Cook, 2009a: 335). Consumer markets did not 'create pediocrularity and its impetus to invert authority relations between parent and child' but children 'become recognised, treated and even deferred to as persons by adults on something other than an episodic basis (beyond the confines of the home, playground or classroom)' through the medium of the marketplace (Cook, 2004a: 67-8).
An example of this institutionalisation was the advent of the toddler in the 1930’s (Cook, 2004a:94). Cook argues that the introduction of the ‘toddler’ (an infant aged between one and three years) as a subject and merchandising category signified a turning point in children’s consumer culture. The category ‘toddler’, he argues, is made possible by ‘the toddler,’ a social person who evolves from the crawling dependency of a basically asexual and sartorially colourless infancy in the 1920’s into a persona and fixture in the size-style commercial pantheon of children’s clothing in the 1930’s and beyond. The toddler gains its identity in contradistinction to the infant by its ability to stand and walk. The event demarcates a biological, social, and psychical transition in the lifecycle, denoting the first stage of a wilful individual capable of movement, choice and direction (Cook, 2004a:89).

The standing, talking and most importantly choosing toddler was substantiated and personified through popular culture icons such as ‘Shirley Temple’. The toddler, thus, arrived on the scene ‘already a consumer – a choosing desiring subject’ (Cook, 2004a:94). According to Cook this child as ‘choosing subject’ forms the bedrock of the consumer culture of childhood because it appeals to deeply held beliefs about subjects and subjectivity under market capitalism including ‘the sovereignty of the consumer, individualism and economic rationality’ (Cook, 2004a:69).

2.1.2 The ‘cool’ child consumer – 1950 onwards

‘Shirley Temple’ embodies the ‘wondrous innocence’ that shrouded parents ideas about children in the first half of the twentieth century, she represents ‘the cute’ an ideal that was in the early 1950’s subverted by ‘the cool’ (Cross, 2004). Television became available in the 1950’s and that provided a ‘site for coolness’ and signalled a growing distancing of parent and child and the emergence of a ‘separate culture of children’ (2004:148). The ‘Barbie’ doll emerged in 1959 and she symbolised the
'cool' in contrast to her predecessors the 'cute', 'Patsy', 'Shirley' and 'Ginny' dolls (Cross, 1997). Seiter (1993:81) argues the 1950's saw girls 'sexualised' in advertising as 'toy ads combined a number of post-war feminine ideas: the wife as expert shopper, happy keeper of a dream home, and sexually attractive woman who brought honour to her husband in all these things'. Mothers responsibilities increased at this time as the onus was placed on them to nurture children's psychological development as well as their physical development and overall wellbeing (1993:20).

Following the advent of television the next key turning point in the development of children's consumer culture occurred in 1984 when the Reagan administration deregulated children's television advertising. This event opened the floodgates to a new phase in the history of children's consumer culture characterised by 'action-figure fantasy' and programme-length commercials (PLC's) (Linn, 2004). PLCs are television shows created by toy companies solely to promote toy lines and at their inception included *He-Man and Masters of the Universe* (Mattel), *G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero* (Hasbro), *Care Bears*, and *Strawberry Shortcake* (Kenner). Cross (1997:190) argues 'Television became a vehicle for creating and managing toy fads, thus opening the door to a full integration of the toy industry and media fantasy.' Within a year of deregulation, all ten of the best-selling toys were linked to media programmes and today a few giant media conglomerates including Viacom, Disney and Time Warner are argued to 'control much of what children eat, drink, wear, read, and play with each day' (Linn, 2004:5).

The concept of character licensing toys dates back almost a century from the launch of PLCs to the 1890's, when Palmer Cox's fairy like Brownies first appeared on bowling-pin sets and puzzles (Cross, 1997). Kamen and Roy Disney fully realised the potential in turning cartoon images into 'marketable personalities' and in the 1930's 'saturated the market' with 'Mickey Mouse's' image on a multitude of products from watches to Christmas tree lights (Cross, 1997). Toy manufacturers 'Fisher-Price' and 'Ohio Art' featured 'Mickey Mouse', 'Minnie Mouse' and the 'Three Little Pigs' on infant and toddler toys including 'tea and housekeeping sets' and 'sand pails' (1997: 105). However, the difference with PLC's and 'action-figure fantasy' was that the toy and the television programme were one and the same thing. Cross argues 'Star Wars figures' which appeared in 1977 and 1978 invited the child to re-enact a scene from
the movie; ‘the story and toy were one ... consumed together’ (1997:198). The television thus provided the perfect platform for toy-makers to advertise their wares to children through cartoons.

By the 1980's toys had fallen into ‘three well-defined categories built around fashion, action and friendship designed for girls, boys and preschoolers – all had their own storylines and all invited dramas of grooming, combat and caring’ (Cross, 1997). Langer (1989) coined the term ‘commoditoy’ to define toys including generics such as ‘Lego’ and ‘Barbie’ and fads such as ‘Transformers’ which she argues were about stimulating rather than satisfying consumer desire. Fleming (1996:103) uses the terms ‘narrativisation of toys’ and ‘total marketing’ to describe the changes that took place in the toy industry as it became increasingly dependent on cinema and television for ‘play-worthy objects that could borrow the popularity of a screen character or story’. He (1996:104) is not pejorative in his accounts of mass-produced television-linked products such as G.I. Joe and argues that where adults see a ‘haphazard and worryingly “meaningless” accumulation of elements, it all makes a great deal of sense to the “knowledgeable” child.’ Langer and Farrar (2003:69) argue that what was new in the 1980’s and 1990’s was the accelerating speed of the fashion cycles to which children’s play was bound, the pervasiveness of the product universe into which children were drawn, and the magnitude of the corporate assault through which ‘childhood’ was reconstructed as something to be consumed.

This section has provided a brief historical backdrop to the material landscape in which the ‘child consumer’ is positioned. Particular attention was paid to some key changes in the marketing of toys, for example, the emergence of character licensing and subsequent role of television in the growth of this marketing phenomenon, as this provides a contextual backdrop to many of the material artefacts constituting the topics of discussion in the focus groups conducted for this study. The remainder of the chapter addresses the theory behind the ‘child consumer’ construct in a deeper fashion.
2.2 Conceptualising the ‘Choosing’ Child Consumer

Market researchers brought children ‘into’ the research process and focussed on their experiences (albeit for commercial gain) many decades before social researchers were urged to do the same. Cook (2009a:336) cites the work of marketing professors including William Wells (1965) and James McNeal (1964, 1969) who carried out interviews with young children to assess their consumer knowledge, preferences and desires, ‘Instead of simply being imputed, intuited or assumed, the child’s view and understanding was elicited from children themselves’. These activities saw children acknowledged as ‘knowing, able consumers’ (ibid.:336) a perspective that was encapsulated within consumer socialisation theory (Gunter and Furnham, 1998), and thus, as alluded to above the notion of the child consumer as ‘choosing subject’ has dominated marketing discourse towards the end of the twentieth century and continues to do so today.

2.2.1 ‘Becoming’ a child consumer

John (1999:183) merged findings from twenty-five years of research on the topic of the child consumer. She argues Ward’s (1974) definition of consumer socialisation as ‘processes by which young people acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace’ gave focus to a generation of researchers and an emerging field of study pertaining to children as consumers. John’s large-scale review, synthesis and application of previous theory, aims to provide age-related developments in consumer socialisation as an ‘organizing theme’ in the construction of a ‘conceptual framework that identifies age-related patterns across [consumer-related] areas, describes major characteristics of knowledge and reasoning at those ages, and identifies developmental mechanisms behind these changes’ (1999:184).

The framework derives from a number of theoretical models including; Piaget’s theory of childhood development which proposes four main stages of children’s cognitive development, Selman’s (1980) ‘social perspective taking’ which describes children’s ‘abilities to understand the perspectives of others as age-stage based, and finally Barenboim’s (1981) theory of impression formation which posits that children’s ability to make comparisons develops across three distinctive age-stages (1999:185-6). John (1999:186) proposes that consumer socialisation can be viewed as
a developmental process that sees the child consumer proceed through a series of three age-based stages as they mature into adulthood; (i) perceptual stage (ages three to seven), (ii) analytical stage (ages seven to eleven) and (iii) reflective stage (ages eleven to sixteen). She discusses her socialisation framework in the context of previous research undertaken under the headings of; children’s knowledge and understanding of advertising; transaction knowledge including product, brand and shopping knowledge; decision-making skills and abilities; purchase influence and negotiation strategies and finally consumption motives and values.

John (1999:187) acknowledges some limitations in the consumer socialisation perspective accepting that age ranges are ‘approximations based on general tendencies’ and admitting there will be variation within for example a seven to eleven age group, with regard to mastery of consumer concepts. She also acknowledges that developments in consumer socialisation take place in a social context including peers, family, mass media and marketing institutions and notes them as secondary to her primary focus which is age. Consumer socialisation theory as articulated by John (1999) suggests a highly individualised ‘child consumer’ with little attention paid to the social dimensions of ‘choosing’ activity, for example, children’s ‘choosing’ to watch certain television programmes to ‘acquire familiarity’ or ‘expertise’ that can be demonstrated in peer to peer conversation in the playground as suggested by Seiter (1993:187). Her highly comprehensive review elucidates the extent to which the child consumer has been conceptualised as a ‘social becoming’, most particularly in the fields of consumer research and marketing and management studies, a conceptualisation that continues to be echoed in more recent publications including McNeal (2007) but one that has also been critiqued and reworked in light of the social competence paradigm (De la Ville and Tartas, 2010).

McNeal (2007) is critical of John (1999) for reporting mainly on how advertising impacts on children’s minds and neglecting to give adequate attention to children’s behaviour patterns. He posits that consumer development, motor development and cognitive development are intertwined; ‘As newborns become social beings, they also become consumers; as newborns become consumers, they become social beings. Consumer behaviour is thus the medium of social development and its resulting social relations’ (2007:87). However, while McNeal (2007) is critical of John’s emphasis on
how advertising impacts on children across the age spectrum, he follows the same
age-stage based formula in his own theorisation of the child consumer. His focus is
quite clearly on ‘becoming’ and he coins his own stages of consumer development;
Observation (0 to 6 months), Requesting/Seeking (6 to 24 months), Selecting/Taking
(24-48 months), Co-purchase (48 to 72 months) and Independent purchase (72 to 100
months).

De la Ville and Tartas (2010:26) argue that the framework of consumer socialisation
identified by John was mainly addressed to marketing managers with a two-fold aim:
‘firstly to describe the development of consumer socialisation through three cognitive
stages, and secondly, to offer a “toolkit” to help marketing practitioners improve their
targeting to children and adolescents’. They argue that her framework is limited in
three main ways; (i) it conceives of socialisation itself as a fundamentally solitary
cognitive construction, that is, cognitive development is driven by biological or
internal factors, (ii) age is posited as a marker of cognitive skills and (iii) it overlooks
a major mode of human thought, the narrative one, in favour of a focus on logical
reasoning. An alternative perspective discussed by De la Ville and Tartas (2010:29-
30) derives from the work of Moschis and his colleagues. This framework links
cognition to social interactions and thus avoids the limitations of a strictly
individualistic cognitive development approach. Research coming from this
perspective emphasises a range of ‘socialisation agents’ including traditional (family,
peers, school), professional (marketing manager, communications agencies) and
virtual (web communications, social networking sites). De la Ville and Tartas (2010)
identify weaknesses here too however pertaining to the facts that this body of research
ignores young children in favour of pre-adolescents and adolescents, and overstates
the impact of vicarious learning while understating children’s creative capacities. The
basic unit of analysis remains the developing individual, a fundamental flaw in
perspectives purporting to be concerned with the social.

Thus, by and large marketing approaches to the child consumer while increasingly
focused on children as ‘knowing, meaning-making beings’ (Cook, 2009:b279) have
not abandoned age-stage socialisation models (John, 1999; McNeal, 2007). The
chronological model of childhood has been utilised and expanded upon by marketers
as ‘new’ age-stage conceptualisations have been added to the conceptual framework,
most notably and recently the ‘Tween’ category (Cook and Kaiser, 2004; Keller and Kalmus, 2009; Lindstrom and Seybold, 2003, Russell and Tyler, 2002, 2005; Siegal, Coffey et al. 2004). Age-grading remains a key marketing segmentation tool for toy producers. For example, the online ‘Lego’ store carves childhood into six distinctive age categories and the online ‘Toys R Us’ UK store offers seven distinctive age-based browsing categories. ‘Age’ is understood as something that is made meaningful for and by children through their utilisation of toys, media, consumables and other commercial artefacts.

Cook’s (2004a) historical perspective theorises the child consumer as a discursive construct. He refers to the child consumer as ‘it’ rather than ‘he’ or ‘she’ to emphasise that the child consumer is not a ‘sentient being with a unique biography’ but a discursive construct with a history (2004:5). In a discussion of children’s personal autonomy he argues that while the ‘term’ child refers at minimum to an age range, age-based ‘social distinctions’ are ‘historically emergent’ and ‘must be understood in relation to a host of historically embedded factors including gender, social class, race and ethnicity, and geographic region’ (2004a:13). His thinking reflects that of other theorists including James and Prout, (1990), Qvortrup et al. (1994) and Corsaro (2005, orig 1997) who have critiqued and substantially re-worked the notion of the child as ‘social becoming’ (as described above in chapter one). Cook’s (2004a) argument undermines the activities of market researchers and marketing and advertising academics who have relied on tried and trusted age-stage models of child development (see Acuff and Reiher, 1997; Chaplin and Lowrey, 2009; Gunter and Furnham, 1998; McNeal, 2007; Valkenburg and Cantor, 2001) in the formulation of ‘best practice’ in relation to marketing to children, dating back to at least the work of Grumbine in 1938.

However, recently marketers of toys and other children’s products have also moved on from developmental age-stage approaches and embraced the zeitgeist by positioning themselves more firmly within the ‘social competence paradigm’. Del Vecchio, (1997), Lindstrom and Seybold, (2003) Siegel et al., (2004) and Sutherland and Thompson’s (2003) conflate ideas about children’s competence with those of

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11 see http://shop.lego.com/ByAge/
12 see http://www.toysrus.co.uk/browse/product/toys
child empowerment in an effort to justify and celebrate the role of marketing in children’s lives (Cook, 2008). They represent one side of the empowerment-exploitation debate that has characterised much discussion of children’s experiences in consumer society over recent years. This dissertation aims to move beyond this particular debate but it is imperative to address some of the themes emerging from the empowered-exploited dichotomy and to note their relevance to this study.

2.2.2 Moving Beyond the Dichotomous Child Consumer

Cook’s examination (2007:39) of the child empowerment discourse as displayed in literature produced by those actively involved in the making of markets for children’s goods in the USA and Canada, 1995-2005, reveals a longstanding marketing practice of describing children as free market actors, that is, as consumers, which serves to make marketing to them a morally acceptable practice. The empowerment discourse is flexible and where greater levels of choice are irrelevant to, for example, a six month old consumer; the educational, developmental and security-enhancing benefits of goods are celebrated as empowering in themselves.

Thus, claims of ‘empowerment’ – of empowering goods and empowering advertising and marketing campaigns – rise to meet the moral and ethical challenges posed in the marketing to young children. ‘Empowerment’, ... renders direct marketing to children a morally defensible, ethically palatable and thus commercially actionable undertaking.

Cook (2007:44) traces the tie between empowerment and children’s popular culture back to the ‘girl power’ of the 1990’s. He conceptualises ‘kid empowerment’ as having three basic features, choice, recognition and involvement that are interwoven by an underlying narrative of liberating children from their powerless, circumscribed position in an adult dominated world. ‘Girl power’ allowed girls to escape gender stereotyping and was adopted quickly by girls and marketers. For Cook the ‘power’ experienced through girls use of popular culture in this context was ‘transitive’ in form as it potentially allowed girls to break free from ‘constraining narratives of femininity’. Twenty years later, consumer choice, recognition and involvement often translates into allowing children to ‘vote’ for favourite characters and products and in recent years for dancing, singing, ice-skating celebrities and ‘wannabe’s’ in big-
budget televised talent contests. The empowerment to be gained from these practices is what Cook calls 'intransitive'; here the 'options' and 'choices' offered to children by the marketplace refer back to themselves.

Selection among predetermined categories of intensely researched, extremely designed corporate-owned properties increasingly passes as "empowerment" and becomes the key mode of having and expressing social power. In doing so, it actively cultivates children's disempowerment by equating "choice" with pregiven alternatives which are sponsored and configured by those who would benefit from any choice made (2007:48).

Cook's arguments resonate with the thinking of Schor (2004) and Linn (2004) both members of the US based 'Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood'. They are engaged in a campaign calling for adoption of government policies that limit corporate marketers' access to children. They have both written extensively on the exploitation of children by market forces and have recently produced a film (2008) in association with the Media Education Foundation entitled 'Consuming Kids: The Commercialization of Childhood' in which they describe their mission as reclaiming 'childhood from marketers'.

Martens et al. (2004:158) posit that the majority of work on children's consumption shares 'an apparently uniform point of departure' in that it focuses on the relationship between the market and children to the neglect of other pertinent social relationships and I think part of the reason for this centres on the fact that it is difficult not to become entangled in the theoretical and conceptual quagmire that the empowerment-exploitation debate purports. Cook (2007:231) suggests that constructs of the child consumer as articulated through the exploited/empowered dichotomy result in a focusing of research on what 'children know or don't know and what children do or can't do, as if they act alone'. He argues consumption theory needs to embrace children's and mother's perspectives and practices as 'constitutive of how consumption means, and not simply as additions to the presumption of what consumption means'. To this end, he calls for a move beyond the 'either/or dichotomy' (Cook: 2004b, p149). His calls for progress in this theoretical area are reflective of Prout's (2005) views, specifically his assessment of the problem with
oppositional dichotomies in childhood sociology and childhood studies more generally. Sparrman (2009:300) has responded to both their calls situating her research on the child consumer in what she terms ‘the in-between of dichotomies’ defined as a ‘non-fixed interval where dichotomies can be negotiated through different constructions and different emphases’. The child can thus be understood to be ‘naively-competent or even naively-naive’ (2009:300).

De la Ville and Tartas (2010:32) advocate an interactionist perspective on the child consumer. They identify a perspective in which ‘the transformation of children’s consumer roles is the lens through which development transformations are understood’ (2010:32). While an emphasis on development remains apparent, age-stage conceptualisations are played down in favour of an emphasis on the observation and examination of joint activities developed in interaction between children and adults, children and more experienced children or within small groups. They (2010:32-33) argue that ‘child consumer activities constitute a social activity mediated by various cultural tools such as the language, the social standards called upon, the rhetoric evoked, and the purchased objects or products themselves’. Further, they identify methodological implications deriving from this understanding, namely that children cannot be considered as ‘mere respondents’ in the research endeavour but rather as ‘co-researchers who actively participate in the interpretation of their own experiences as apprentice consumers’ (ibid.:36).

While Cook’s critique (2004a and 2007) focuses on the empowerment discourse as articulated in documentary sources including trade literature, books and articles produced by marketers, advertisers and market researchers, he acknowledges the absence of children’s voices in his study except as they were captured by other researchers and merchants and says their absence or limited presence regarding consumption ‘serves to reinforce the thesis that their consumer personhood has been emergent and slow to be recognised by academic (non marketing) researchers until recently’ (2004a:150). This dissertation aims to tighten that observed gap in the empirical investigation of children as consumers. It thus moves away from the debate as to whether the child consumer is empowered or exploited within consumer society instead exploring consumer personhood as displayed in preschool children’s talk-in-interaction around branded commodities. Rather than posing questions about the
(dis)empowering nature of consumer choice my study focuses on how preferences and evaluations are accomplished and socially utilised in talk-in-interaction. Thus where Cook (2004a) utilises a cognitivist perspective in his conceptualisation of ‘consumer choice’, I am using an interactionist perspective and am influenced by Wootton’s (1997:191) emphasis on describing children’s ‘local understandings’ as displayed through talk-in-interaction rather than seeking to describe and account for children’s ‘store of representations and cognitive procedures’. The next section critiques literature addressing the social dimensions of children’s consumption specifically how consumer commodities are drawn on for a variety of social ends.

2.3 Material Artefacts as Social Currency

Serious engagement with children’s consumer culture as produced by children themselves necessitates an examination of what and how consumer goods mean to them. Langer’s (2002b) work on the ‘commodification’ of childhood sees her re-visit Margaret Mead’s (1928) account of child-rearing practices in the Manus village of Peri in the Admirality Islands, North of New Guinea. Langer draws a parallel between the centrality of the boat to the production of material life in Manus culture and the centrality of the shopping trolley to life in consumer societies today. Langer (2002a:64) argues that in the same way that Manus children had to learn ‘to negotiate their watery world’, children in consumer societies must ‘learn to shop’. For Langer (2002a), learning to shop involves developing the ability to make choices and be discerning in those choices. Langer’s theorisation of the child consumer emphasises the social aspects of ‘doing’ choice and thus brings into focus the ways in which the material artefacts of consumer culture represent social currency for child consumers. This ‘doing’ choice allows children to display what Bourdieu (1984:54) termed ‘cultural capital’. Knowledge of and or possession of a consumer commodity is exchanged for kudos within social environments and thus provides a social glue that facilitates relationships between group members.

Douglas and Isherwood (1996:xvi [1979 orig.]) emphasise the communicative aspects of consumer goods arguing ‘goods are neutral, their uses are social; they can be used as fences or bridges’. Extrapolating from their premise, goods are thus viewed as having the potential to link people together through shared preferences or possessions
and equally to separate people on the basis of opposing interests, preferences and possessions. The social uses of goods and advertising itself have been addressed in Bernard Cova’s (1997) work deriving from Maffesoli’s (1996) ‘The Time of the Tribes’. Cova (1997: 307) argues that the postmodern consumer values goods and services which, through their ‘linking value, permit and support social interaction of the communal type’. For Cova (1997), ‘the link’, that is the shared interest or passion for products and experiences is more important than the products and experiences themselves. Grumbine (1938) discussed ‘fads’ in terms of bridging, defining them as toys, clothing and other articles usually associated with a ‘popular movie’, ‘radio’ or ‘comic-strip hero’, and deemed to have become universal among children, including anything that children do or wear or desire to own just to be like children of their own age. Seiter (1993:223) almost fifty years later argues that promotional toys sold by the thousands at mass retailers derive their value for children from the fact that the toy will be exactly the same as someone else’s; ‘Toys that are based on or developed alongside television programmes group children as a market, but they also identify children with each other ... in powerful ways, frequently instigating conversation and even friendship’. 

Ritson and Elliott (1999) have also addressed the ‘social uses of advertising’ in their ethnographic study of teenagers use of ‘advertising talk’ as a phatic form of communication with linking value and thus the potential to build fences (exclude) or bridges (include) between members of the social environment, in their case sixth form school pupils in a Scottish school. Their findings support Seiter’s (1993:49) argument that toys and television comprise a mass culture which gives children a medium of communication ‘a lingua franca’. She argues consumer culture provides children with ‘a shared repository of images, characters, plots and themes: it provides the basis for small talk and play, and it does this on a national, even global scale’ (1993:6). Seiter (1993:9) is critical of others who judge children’s desires or toys and television programmes exclusively in terms of greed and individual hedonism, offering an alternative view that posits, ‘in wanting to have toys and see television programmes, children are also expressing a desire for a shared culture with their schoolmates and friends and a strong imagination of community’. 
Langer and Farrar (2003:117) in a similar vein describe fast food, television, computer games, ‘commoditoys’ (Langer, 1989) and brand-logo clothing as the ‘taken-for-granted currency of social exchange’ in Australian childhood. Langer and Farrar (2003: 119) found that children displayed detailed knowledge of American TV programmes including ‘The Simpsons’ and concluded that while the programmes might be globally available, the experience of watching them is highly localised and knowledge around them becomes part of the ‘shared language through which peer culture is affirmed and reproduced’.

This dissertation is influenced and inspired by previous work addressing children’s consumption in terms of social currency. Ethnographic approaches including Chin (2001) and Goodwin (2006) have shed light on the social dimensions of children’s consumer culture. Goodwin’s (2006) ‘The Hidden Life of Girls’ examines the lived embodied practices through which forms of inclusion and exclusion, in a girls’ peer group, are achieved over time in a progressive Southern Californian school characterised by mixed ethnicities and socio-economic groups. The girls she observed were aged between ten and twelve years of age and most of her observations centred on everyday interaction on the playground. Goodwin focuses on language in interaction and argues this provides the

principal means for [the girls] to articulate for each other what they are doing, how they expect others to participate in the activity of the moment, and how persons in their peer group are positioned and ranked vis-à-vis one another (2006:21).

Goodwin (2006) did not focus specifically on the consumption aspects of children’s lives but a number of her insights pertain to children’s consumer culture. She argues that access to consumer objects and experiences of value, namely shopping in high-end stores, flying on airplanes and visiting exclusive resorts are utilised by ten year old girls to differentiate themselves from others, and, ultimately build and sustain cliques. She observed that children use dramatic play to make evident ‘not only the categories of person which are important to them, and their social positionings vis-à-vis one another, but also their relationship to the larger consumer culture that
envelops them' (p.186). She observed girls describing fantasy car ownership as they engaged in a game of ‘playing house’

Through interactive games of this sort girls construct a shared vision of the world. They establish what objects and events in the world are to be considered of value, and display who has access to them. .... ... As in other more quotidian conversation they are involved in, comparisons made with respect to cars provide a way of subtly ranking one another. With each turn judgements can be made about someone’s taste and ability to make appropriate discriminations (p.188).

Goodwin (2006:186) cites Johnson (2004) who while researching in the same school found similar understandings of socio-economic distinction with respect to consumer products evidenced in the interactions of four-year-olds. They made distinctions about whose lunch box was ‘cool’ (one-of-a-kind decorated boxes purchased at exclusive stores) and whose was not, and argued that identical labels (‘cool’ or ‘not cool’) could be applied to the owners of the lunch boxes as well.

Chin’s (2001) ethnographic study focussed specifically on consumption. She documented the ways in which African-American children from Newhallville a town located in New Haven, Connecticut, engaged with consumption and used her findings to shed light on broader issues of social inequality. Chin posits that despite the fact that ‘mass produced items are on their face all alike, it is the context in which they are used and understood by particular children that makes them meaningful’ (2001:6). Engagement with the consumer world involves talking about, playing with, knowing about and possessing consumer objects and commercial jingles.

One element of Chin’s study involved her accompanying the children on a shopping trip which she funded by giving the children twenty dollars to spend. She argues the consumption process for these children was based ‘quite overtly on a complex and sometimes convoluted web of social relationships’ including family members and friends (2001:119-20). Her focus on their gifting behaviours revealed that these ten year olds used shopping as a ‘way to create connections to their family and friends, as a sphere of creative play, or a realm in which they could construct critical assessments
of the world around them' (2001:178). Consumption is thus shown to be a deeply social activity.

Knowledge of and ownership of toys provides children access to other children with similar knowledge of or ownership experiences. Prout (2005:117) cites a study by Plowman et al. (2003) which studied ‘techno toys’ as artefacts and found that children did not abandon playmates to play in isolation with the toy but rather used the toy as ‘a way of being enrolled or enrolling others’. What was important about the toy was not ‘its digital interactivity’ but ‘its capacity to give [the owners] access to a network of children’. Pugh’s (2009) sociological analysis of children’s consumer cultures in California provides one of the most recent examinations of children’s consumer choices. In a similar vein to Chin (2001), Pugh (2009) reveals some of the complexity attached to conceptualising material artefacts and experiences as social currency. She (2009:7) did not find children’s consumption desires to be based simply around competitive display and status seeking behaviour but coined the phrase ‘economy of dignity’, to describe the realms within which ‘children transform particular goods and experiences into a form of scrip, tokens of value suddenly fraught with meaning’.

Such scrips did not necessarily require actual ownership; her empirical analysis revealed that ‘what made something count as scrip was that it allowed entry into the ongoing conversations of his or her peers’, but equally what counted as scrip, was ‘fluid and dynamic’ (2009:55). This results in an exchange rate which is forever in flux and which varies across several different economies of dignity, for example, at school, in the neighbourhood or at an after-school club. Children made the most symbolic value out of ‘claiming access to popular culture’ (2009:56) and that access came in many shapes and forms from actually owning and using to knowing about various heavily advertised objects of popular appeal

Children relied on these pre-packaged symbols to establish their claims to the community based on such shared values as being cool, savvy, popular, older than their years (but not an adult), and not poor; this list captured some of the primary social anxieties of these children, who were working hard not to be mistaken for being unaware, awkward, or unable to afford what others had (2009:57).
Pugh (2009) argues that children and parents from totally different socio-economic circumstances shared similar hopes and fears in the context of commodified childhoods. Children desire to belong in peer groups and parents want them to experience belonging.

Chin (2001) presents a number of mini case analyses in her discussion of the shopping trips she took with the children in her study. The ‘story of Davy’ provides a richly textured account of the extent to which children’s consumption choices are inextricably bound up with the social currency attached to consumer commodities. Davy is described as being a ten year old boy, the sometimes carer of his three younger siblings. Chin (2001:121) observed Davy in the classroom setting and concluded he was ‘painfully eager to communicate with teachers and other children but seemed not quite to know how’ and her photographic account of him captured him ‘on the edge of things’. His visit to ‘Toys’R’Us’ with Chin was his first visit to that store. Chin describes Davy as ‘quickly settling on his choice a walkie-talkie set’ but notes that as they moved along the aisle he also found ‘Wolverine’, an X-men action figure which he had told her before they began shopping that he had planned to buy. Chin describes her familiarity with these action figures as they were popular with the boys in the classroom and most of them had two or three of them, she provides a thick description of Davy’s anguish in making a consumer choice;

Although Davy knew the walkie-talkies would cost all the money he had, he spent several minutes standing in the store aisle, holding Wolverine, the batteries, and the walkie-talkies all together, unable to decide which thing to leave behind. It seemed he was hoping if he wished hard enough the prices would magically change. Finally, he reluctantly put Wolverine back in the shelf (2001:122).

Chin (2001:123) argues that Davy’s actions and decisions while in Toys-R-Us struck her as ‘being most forcefully aimed at social goals rather than being more blatantly consumerist’. Davy who struggled to connect verbally with people around him had chosen
the perfect vehicle for allowing him to accomplish what seemed so difficult for him. The walkie-talkies were a toy that required another person in order to be enjoyed, and a toy that required him to speak in order to play with them. The walkie-talkies seemed to suit his particular dilemma perfectly: they were a vehicle that allowed him to talk to people but at the same time did not require him to be too close in order to make contact. (2001:124)

He told Chin that he planned to use the walkie-talkies with his younger brother. However, having his own ‘Wolverine’ figure would have allowed him access to the existing network of boys in the neighbourhood and to participate in play with them at a more equal level. Chin argues succinctly:

These objects were avenues through which he could attempt to forge more complex, more meaningful, and stronger relationships with his siblings and with his friends. His struggle was less about whether to buy walkie-talkies or Wolverine than it was deciding which relationships he wanted to foster and strengthen: those with his friends, or those with family (2001:124).

Chin points to the importance of understanding Davy’s consumption in the context of the circumstances that shaped his life. She (2001:122) argues the fact that he had never before visited ‘what is arguably one of the central sites of childhood experience in the United States is at once a sign of exclusion and a form of exclusion from one of the wealthiest societies now on the globe’. Finally, she describes the community from which Davy hails as ‘multiply oppressed: socially, economically, educationally, productively, and also in terms of consumption’ (ibid; 122).

All of the work discussed in this section presents children as socially competent beings and emphasises the active and interactive components of being a child consumer and ‘doing’ the consumption aspects of childhood including demonstrating ones level of access to consumer culture. The expression of tastes, desires and evaluations of and around material consumer culture is used as social currency between children; producing the context-bound ‘socially acceptable’ evaluative judgements in interaction is as if not more important than owning the material possessions themselves. I have quoted extensively from Chin’s (2001) work here in
an effort to provide some theoretical background for my empirical examination of the ‘choosing child consumer’. The ‘social currency’ concept derived from Chin (2001), Pugh (2009) and to an extent Goodwin (2006) is central to my examination of children’s talk-in-interaction around the artefacts of consumer culture. However, while I have alluded to some of Chin’s (2001) and Pugh’s (2009) macro concerns around social inequality, I have not engaged with them deeply as my work is concerned with how consumer choices are achieved and made meaningful at the micro level of turn-by-turn talk-in-interaction. Corsaro’s (2005) ‘cultural routine’ concept is useful in this regard and thus the next section revisits his theory of childhood and examines the salience of his ‘cultural routine’ concept for this dissertation.

2.4 Cultural Routines
Corsaro’s (2005 [1997]) ‘interpretive reproduction’ notion comprises two key elements as mentioned above in chapter one, (i) language and cultural routines and (ii) the reproductive nature of children’s evolving membership in their culture. His (2005:19-20) discussion of language and cultural routines is particularly significant for this study. He cites Ochs (1988) in arguing that language is central to children’s participation in their culture as a ‘symbolic system that encodes local, social and cultural structure’, and Schieffelin (1990) in arguing that language is also a ‘tool for establishing (that is, maintaining and creating) social and psychological realities’. Cultural routines are defined as ‘repetitive everyday activities collectively produced by members of a culture’ (2005:344). They serve as ‘anchors that enable social actors to deal with ambiguities, the unexpected and the problematic while remaining comfortable within the friendly confines of everyday life’ (2005:19).

Children’s participation in cultural routines begins from the moment a child is born. Adults interact with infants ‘as-if’ they are capable of social exchanges. Corsaro (2005) terms this the ‘as-if’ assumption and states it is as a result of this ‘as-if’ approach that children move from limited to full participation in cultural routines. One of the first cultural routines a child participates in is the parent-infant disappearance-reappearance game of ‘peekaboo’. The infant initially plays a responsive role but by the time they are one year old they display social competence
in initiating and directing variations of the disappearance-reappearance variety of play (2005:20). Corsaro (2005:19) argues that it is the 'habitual, taken-for-granted character of routines' that provides 'children and all social actors with the security and shared understanding of belonging to a social group'. This predictability provides a framework within which 'a wide range of sociocultural knowledge can be produced, displayed and interpreted' (ibid.:19). Corsaro’s arguments echo those of Wootton (1997:196) who posits that children become ‘social’ not by picking up standard patterns and expectations that have trans-situational relevance but through having the flexibility to attend to ‘local, sequence specific considerations’. Corsaro (2005:20) points out that shared understanding is not always achieved as children and adults engage in cultural routines but ‘interaction normally continues in an orderly fashion’ despite persisting ambiguities that are pursued over the course of children’s experiences with adults and peers.

The idea that children are the best sources of understanding childhood is described by Boocock and Scott (2005:33) as ‘Corsaro’s Rule’ [emphasis in original]. A major implication of Corsaro’s thinking is that children’s cultural ‘routines’ are the subject of analysis, in contrast to other approaches, which see individuals as the focus of analytical endeavour. This study approaches children’s talk-in-interaction as produced in the focus group context in terms of cultural routine. Pugh (2009:50) states with much finesse that

Children use talk to establish, if only momentarily, who is part of their world; their conversations are like a country pond into which they dive – sometimes entering with a nary splash, other times grabbing both ankles and launching themselves in a ‘cannonball’. They make connections to each other through the common water swirling about them, through talk about the things important to their lives, about puffballs or movies, sneakers or school.

This dissertation is concerned with capturing the moment-by-moment interaction as it takes place between child participants and me the focus group moderator. While focus group participation is not an everyday activity for the children concerned, the focus group structure has much in common with, for example, circle time activities that take place in a preschool setting. A full explication of this is provided in the next chapter,
in advance of which previous discourse analytical approaches to children as consumers are now addressed.

2.5 Discourse Analytical Approaches to Children as Consumers

Previous research on the child consumer has employed ethnographic or ethnographically-informed approaches, that is, approaches combining ethnography with focus groups or interviews (Chin, 2001; Pugh, 2009; Ritson and Elliott, 1999; Russell and Tyler, 2002, 2005). Goodwin (2006) captured naturally occurring conversations some of which centred on commercial objects through observational activities and through non-structured tape recording of playground or lunch time interactions. While the ‘child consumer’ as discursive construct has been carefully examined and articulated (Cook, 2004a; Martens, 2010) as discussed above, far less discourse analytical attention has been given to children’s talk-in-interaction in a consumer context. Of the sixty-nine ordinary papers presented at the 4th international conference on multidisciplinary perspectives on child and teen consumption, hosted by Linkoping University in June 2010, just nine papers included either an explicit focus on analysing children’s interactions with each other within the research context or a discourse analytical approach to data. This section of the chapter discusses a number of studies that have taken a discourse analytical approach to the child consumer as ultimately this dissertation is located within this sub-section of the broader field of children’s consumption studies.

Sparrman (2007) used Fairclough’s (1992) critical discourse analysis to make sense of data she gathered through interviews and visits to pre-teen children’s homes all captured on video in her exploration of children’s (girls’ and boys’) ‘own ideas and thoughts’ relating to visual displays (wall decorations) in their bedrooms. Sparrman (2007:314) argues that the children’s rooms ‘constitute bricolages of their lives’. She found ‘visuality’ observed through children’s bedroom wall displays was used by the children in the ‘process of sharing, negotiating and colluding with and dividing power amongst themselves and parents’ (p.315). Her interview interaction with pre-teen children saw childhood constructed as a time of simultaneous stability and change and she noted a major differentiation in identity construction through visual display between boys and girls; ‘the images in the rooms show how boys’ and girls’ gendered
identities are constructed at the same time as the visualities of the rooms construct childhood as gender specific’ (2007:315).

Keller and Kalmus (2009) used a discourse analytical approach to investigate the ways Estonian ‘tweens’ (twelve year olds) understand ‘cool’. They identified two main theoretical lines of argument around ‘cool’ stating the concept of ‘cool’ can be defined as a form of opposition to consumer capitalism and mainstream lifestyles or as a corporate construction of the capitalist system. They address ‘cool’ as a ‘lived phenomenon arising ‘out of the complex interplay between innumerable marketing messages and consumer’s everyday cultures’ (p.330). Their data comprised of essays written by twelve year old children, which were analysed using a discursive psychology approach (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). They found three distinctive repertoires that represented cool as appearance, as leisure and as sports and hobbies. Keller and Kalmus (2009:338) conclude their study arguing the ‘semantic field of “cool” is much wider than the dichotomy of opposing or conforming to consumer capitalism’. They observe different degrees of agency exerted by tweens while ‘constructing and “living” cool’ (p.338) ranging from a strong orientation towards consumption market-driven norms at one end of the continuum (appearance repertoire) to an orientation towards being active and creative in relation to sports and hobbies that were not so easily available (sports and hobbies repertoire). They identified ‘expert young consumers’, ‘fun-lovers’, ‘pleasure-seekers’, ‘achievers’ and ‘creators’.

While Keller and Kalmus used repertoires and explored children’s constructions of subject positions through their writing, this dissertation is concerned with children’s construction of consumer selves in interaction with others. It thus shares greater theoretical and methodological parallels with the work of Aarsand and Aronsson (2009a and 2009b). Aarsand and Aronsson (2009a) examined territorial negotiations concerning gaming, drawing on video recordings of computer gaming practices in families. They looked specifically at how private vs public gaming space was co-construed by children and parents in front of the screen as well as through conversations about games taking place away from any material game equipment. They used an ethnomethodological approach and conversation analysis and revealed among other findings that by and large, the present parents repeatedly positioned the
children as the experts in the game and themselves as less knowledgeable, thereby downplaying adult-child age hierarchies and the power differentials associated with them.

2.6 Conclusions

Much previous work on the ‘child consumer’ (John, 1999, Gunter and Furnham, 1998, McNeal, 2007) addresses the topic from a consumer socialisation perspective. This viewpoint subsumes cognitivist undertones and thus focuses on the child as an age-stage based individual information processor. A concern with how much or conversely how little the ‘developing’ child consumer knows and understands about how the marketplace operates and how they fit within it as a ‘choosing subject’ (Cook, 2009b:336), has dominated thinking and debate on children as consumers, and resulted in an inordinate amount of time and energy being devoted to the construction of the dichotomous child consumer, who is simultaneously either exploited or empowered by market forces depending on the research agenda. This dissertation moves beyond the empowered-exploited dichotomy to address the ‘choosing’ child consumer through an interactional lens and to look specifically at the language involved in doing choosing, for example, liking, disliking, desiring, preferring in interactional terms.

This research is influenced to a great extent by the ‘new’ paradigm in childhood studies (James and Prout, 1990) specifically notions of social competence (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998a). However, where the new paradigm has called for children’s voices to be brought into social research, as a means by which to gain children’s perspectives, the CA-informed discourse analytic approach developed and explicated below rejects the ‘voice-as-perspective’ model philosophically. Children’s voices are celebrated but the analysis focuses on children’s talk-in-interaction as a ‘cultural routine’ (Corsaro, 2005) of the linguistic variety. In this way children’s voices do take centre stage but claims are not made that this is in and of itself empowering for children or that any conclusions drawn from the research will have consequences for children’s empowerment in society more broadly.
Childhood is viewed as brought into being by children's negotiation and manipulation of material, linguistic and interactional resources with other children and adults. Children are thus understood to 'do' childhood and thus to play out various social roles including consumption related ones that vary across time and socio-cultural space. In line with Corsaro (2005), recognition and acknowledgement of chronological or biological age is not abandoned or deemed irrelevant. Children are viewed as 'doing' age-related levels within childhood by comparing and contrasting their level with that of younger (baby) and older (children or adults) people. This project focuses on three and four year olds a cohort labelled 'preschoolers' by marketers and educators and one that is adopted here as a convenient commonplace descriptor. However, this study is not informed by socialisation models of consumer 'becomings' but instead conceptualises preschool participants as 'competent social beings' (Hutchby, 2005) engaged in ongoing 'interpretive reproduction' (Corsaro, 2005) in consumption contexts. I shall now move on to discuss the design and methodology behind this study in greater detail.
CHAPTER THREE: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter provides a detailed and critical discussion of the research methodology employed in this dissertation. The first section situates the methodological approach taken within the broader field of discourse studies and provides a reminder of the research questions. The second section outlines the research design including ethical concerns, access and sampling issues. The third section addresses the data generation method employed, that is, focus group methodology. The fourth section discusses the theoretical underpinnings and implications of a CA-informed discourse analytic approach to examining the data.

3.1 Situating the Methodological Approach in the Discourse Studies Field

The study of children’s talk-in-interaction and indeed of language more generally spans across many disciplines. Bucholtz (2003:398) argues succinctly that ‘real language’ remains central to a wide range of disparate research traditions including sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, conversation analysis, and other socially and culturally oriented forms of discourse analysis. What is meant by real language is, she argues, for the most part ‘remarkably consistent’. Real language in contrast to scripted language is produced in authentic contexts by authentic speakers. Bucholtz (2004:492) argues further that again across sociolinguistics, social anthropology and socially oriented discourse analysis, language is viewed as a ‘primary vehicle by which cultural ideologies circulate, it is a central site of social practice, and it is a crucial means for producing sociocultural identities’.

This dissertation takes a sociological stance (Corsaro, 1997, 2005; Hutchby, 2005; Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998a; Sacks, 1995a, 1995b) in the exploration of the talk-in-interaction of child consumers. The focus of the inquiry is not the participants’ linguistic abilities, but the methods and procedures they use to create social orders, accomplish social interactions and make sense of the world around them (Pomerantz and Fehr, 1997:65). It has been inspired and influenced by work on children’s talk-in-interaction emerging from a range of disciplines including socio-linguistics, pragmatics and anthropology all of which address children’s language in socio-

This study is not ethnographically informed but it does take a bottom-up perspective to social research. I have labelled the particular methodological approach taken in this dissertation a CA-informed discourse analytic approach. The CA-informed discourse analytic approach is particularly suited to addressing the socially competent child consumer in socio-cultural context and thus addresses concerns raised by, inter alia Greene and Hogan (2005). The overall aim of this methodology is to produce a textured interpretation of the talk-in-interaction that took place in the focus groups. It is a flesh and bones approach. Utilisation of conversation analytic [CA] (Atkinson and Heritage, 1984; Puchta and Potter, 2004; Sacks, 1995a, 1995b) lenses reveal the bones of interaction by bringing specific conversational features into focus (accounts, (dis)agreements, preference structures, assessments). These features signal various and varying types of social action. Utilisation of discourse analytic [DA] lenses deriving from the Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) and Potter and Wetherell (1987) tradition, reveal the fleshiness of talk-in-interaction, and thus bring the performative features into focus.

The CA-informed discourse analytic approach developed from an engagement with a number of interaction-based theoretical traditions, namely, conversation analysis (Heritage, 1984; Heritage and Greatbatch, 1991; Pomerantz, 1984; Psathas, 1995; Sacks, 1995a, 1995b; Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, 2007; Ten Have, 2007; Wooffitt, 2005) bottom-up approaches to discourse analysis (Edley, 2001; Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Puchta and Potter, 2004; Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975; Wetherell and Edley, 1999) and work on children’s interactions from the broad realm of socio-linguistics and pragmatics.

I do not attempt to blend these approaches together and thus gloss over the points of theoretical disagreement or conflict that render them distinctive in the first place, but, I utilise aspects of all three traditions in the development of an interpretive framework that enables the generation of rich and textured interpretations of interaction between preschool consumers. The framework is informed by and draws on broader DA traditions along with conventions, techniques and lexicons derived from the much narrower field of CA. However, while the research design including the devising of a focus group methodology has been tailored around working with child participants, the theoretical underpinnings of the CA-informed discourse analytic approach can be equally applied to adult or child produced talk-in-interaction. Here it is applied to multi-party (adult-child and child-child) interaction.

A detailed account of the data-driven analytical inquiry is provided in section 3.4 below. However, I think it is useful to provide a broad overview of the CA-informed discourse analytical framework devised for this study in conjunction with a reminder of the main research objectives in advance of the later discussion. The approach consists of three distinctive layers which provide overall direction to the analytical endeavour; each layer encompasses one major research question (see Figure 3.1).
The bottom layer is labelled ‘structure’ and aims to shed light on how turn-taking is organised and thus reveal something about the potential institutionality of talk-in-interaction in the focus group setting and thus the interactional (im)possibilities evident within this interactive space. The middle layer is labelled ‘action’ and aims to build on the findings of the structural layer through an exploration of the content of sequences of interaction specifically the ways in which interaction is used for social ends. Assessment sequences form the focus of this layer of analytical inquiry as the ‘doing’ of consumer evaluation by preschoolers is investigated. Finally the top layer is labelled ‘performance’ and aims to broaden the inquiry out to explore the repertoires and positions evoked by preschool consumers as they grapple with the
stuff of commercial material culture as a currency which can be utilised for a variety of social ends.

3.2 Research Design

The overall design of this research study is discussed under the headings; ‘sampling and access’, and, ‘ethics and consent’ in an effort to flag from the outset the sensitivities involved in doing research with very young children and to convey the manner in which this study unfolded within the confines of an ethical agenda.

3.2.1 Sampling and Access

Martens et al. (2004:159) argue that accounts of children’s consumption tend to focus on ‘older children’, with limited attention paid to social context. Messner’s analysis of a ‘highly salient gendered moment of group life among four- and five-year-old children at a youth soccer opening ceremony’ (2000:765) provides an exceptional study in this regard. However, the value of including young children in research has yet to be fully acknowledged in the sociology of consumption literature and according to Martens et al. (2004:172) questions arise in relation to at which point ‘children display “enough” agency to make their participation as research subjects meaningful’. This study is not concerned with issues around the agency of the child participants but instead centres on trying to uncover their meaning-making activities in the here and now of talk-in-interaction around the ‘stuff’ of consumer culture. The very young preschool consumer was selected in part because there is a dearth of bottom-up research with children of this age cohort and also because existing theories have focussed on the individual preschool child as a ‘shopper’, one who is involved in co-purchase (McNeal, 2007) and neglected to attend to the social aspects of consumption activity for very young children. The familiar group-based preschool setting was thus deemed an appropriate place from which to recruit participants and situate the focus group interviews.

Focus group researchers do not aim for a representative sample of a population but recruit groups that are defined in relation to the conceptual resources informing the study in efforts to generate extensive talk-in-interaction on the area under investigation (Macnaghten and Myers, 2004:68). To this end a variety of research
locations\textsuperscript{13} were selected. Three of these locations were privately funded Montessori schools situated in middle class Dublin suburbs, two of which were accessed through personal contacts with the teaching staff and one of which was accessed following a telephone call between me and the principal of the school. The remaining four locations were accessed through a key gatekeeper who was involved in a National Community Playgroup Scheme and who put me in touch with teaching and/or management staff of four playgroups all located in mixed social class settings on the periphery of Dublin city centre. These community playgroups were all partly funded by the State and partly funded by parents of attending children.

A discourse analytic perspective stresses the variety and inconsistency evident in different people’s accounts of phenomena (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) and it is thus appropriate that the research sample demonstrated some breadth across social backgrounds. Some variation in social class was evident given the different locations chosen and also given the private funded / state subsidised divide between research settings. I also tried to ensure that each group included a gender mix to ensure variety although this was not always possible. The majority of the children that participated were aged three and four years although a number of children aged two and five were also included because they were part of friendship groups in the preschool settings entered.

Bloor et al. (2001) advocate that focus group members may be selected from pre-existing survey samples, or other sampling frames (such as a school register) and that where ‘pre-existing social groups are being recruited the ideal venue will be the natural social setting of the group’. The child participants joined me in an area within the classroom\textsuperscript{14} or in a room adjacent to the classroom or a gym hall within the school building. They were seated in a circle on cushions on the floor or on chairs around a table. In all cases at least two adults were present\textsuperscript{15} (myself and a research assistant

\textsuperscript{13} The precise names of locations, preschools, gatekeepers and teaching staff have been pseudonymised for reasons of confidentiality.

\textsuperscript{14} In two cases, the focus group took place in the classroom space as the respective teachers relocated the rest of the class to an outdoor play area.

\textsuperscript{15} Parents consented to the groups being video recorded and to video being replayed for academic presentations or conferences. The raw tapes are stored in the researchers home and the digital movie files are encrypted on the researchers laptop.
who video-recorded the groups). In most cases a classroom assistant\(^\text{16}\) sat in the background for the duration of the focus group.

The children were all familiar with each other. They varied in terms of their experience of the preschool setting, some had been attending for a short number of months, others were in their second year attending preschool and others still, had been in the same setting or another similarly structured childcare setting for the majority of their young lives. Precise demographic information on the children involved was not obtained as the focus of the study is on discourses produced by child consumers and is not comparative in scope. For the most part, excluding their impact on seeking variety in the samples chosen, social categories including, age, gender and social class are deemed extraneous to the aims of this research which is not interested in comparing the contributions of various participants based on researcher or otherwise imposed social labels. Where social categories are made explicit in interaction their accomplishment is subjected to analytical scrutiny but the main focus of the analysis is on the methods and procedures participants use to create social order and accomplish social interaction within the research setting (Wooffitt, 2005).

The seven locations yielded fifteen focus groups comprising a total of fifty-seven children (see Table 3.1 below). This sample may appear small but it yielded six hours of talk-in-interaction, which was transcribed using conversation analytic conventions. Discourse analytic work is never focussed on the representativeness of the sample, vis-à-vis, for example, the whole population of preschoolers in Ireland. To have included more groups would not have added to the project as the aim of a discourse analytic approach is to drill deep into small amounts of data. The amount of data gathered provided an abundance of material to work with in my attempt to further a sociological understanding of child consumers and shed light on how they accomplish social ends through talk-in-interaction around commercial material artefacts. The focus of the study it should be stressed is not on the target children in particular but

\(^{16}\) The extent to which the presence of an additional adult observer changed the dynamics of the group will not be empirically addressed. On a small number of occasions some children engaged with the classroom assistant during the focus group and these have been recorded in the transcripts. The presence of a familiar face in the background proved a support to the children and extra reassurance that if they wanted to terminate their participation in the focus group at any time they could.
on the conversations that these children shared with each other and with me. This emphasis on the talk produced as opposed to the producers of the talk is similar to the emphasis placed by other discourse analytical researchers including Aukrust and Rydland (2009) and Aarsand and Aronsson, (2009a and 2009b).

Table 3.1 Research Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
<th>Group 4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Ferns</td>
<td>Donal</td>
<td>Josh</td>
<td>Charlene</td>
<td>Chelsea</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Cian,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ciara</td>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Katie</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Kitty</td>
<td>Milly</td>
<td>Lucy</td>
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<td>The Marshes</td>
<td>Harry</td>
<td>Gillian</td>
<td>David</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Chris</td>
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<td>Ingrid</td>
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<td>Ruth</td>
<td>Michael</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>Alice</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Pines</td>
<td>Fintan</td>
<td>Gracie-Jane</td>
<td>Graham</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>Lisa</td>
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<td>Casey</td>
<td>Amy</td>
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<td>Amber</td>
<td>Kelsey</td>
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<td>Green Acres</td>
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<td>Lavender Hill</td>
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<td>The Wells</td>
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Once access was obtained a visit to each class was arranged to allow me observe the children in the preschool setting. No empirical data was gathered during these visits but they had a dual purpose; firstly, they enabled me to gain an insight into the children’s preschool lives, the types of activities they were involved in and the extent to which these activities were structured or supervised by adults, and secondly, they

17 All locations and participants names are pseudonyms, however, an effort has been made to retain the prosodic features of the participants names.
provided me with an opportunity to meet children who I would be potentially working with the following week when I was due to return to carry out the focus groups. In essence these visits provided me with an ice-breaker for the subsequent focus groups, as I could ask the children if they remembered me and I could draw on my memories of my visit to build bridges with them.

3.2.2 Ethics and Consent

This study was designed in compliance with the university guidelines\textsuperscript{18} for doing research with children. They encompass ‘beneficience’ – a commitment to children’s well-being, ‘non-maleficence’ – a commitment to doing no harm, ‘autonomy’ – having a commitment to children’s rights including the right of individuals to take responsibility for him or herself and ‘fidelity’ – being child-centred in its approach to research, listening to children, treating them in a fair and just manner’ (Whyte, 2003).

The new paradigm in childhood studies (James and Prout, 1990) has heralded a child-centred approach to data collection which views children as subjects rather than objects of research and thus calls for research \textit{with} rather than \textit{on} children. Mauthner (1997:17) argues that researching children’s lives raises a number of methodological issues to do with consent, access, privacy and confidentiality. She highlights the unequal power relationships that exist between adult researchers and children and claims that reflexivity, responsiveness and open-ended research goals and methods on the part of the researcher can work towards equalizing power relations between adults and children as it allows children to set their own agendas and talk about their daily lives and views. Her arguments point to the fact that ethical research is not achieved by ticking boxes with regard to issues of consent, confidentiality or any other measures aimed at protecting both the researcher and the researched and it should be said that while previously published guidelines helped in the formulation of research design and in the selection of an appropriate methodological approach for this study, a child-centred ethical orientation infiltrated this research from the earliest design phases through the fieldwork and analytical stages.

The three and four year olds partaking in this study cannot be argued to have set the research agenda as Mauthner (1997) suggests might be most appropriate for research

\textsuperscript{18} ‘Guidelines for Research with Children’ Department of Psychology, Trinity College Dublin, March 2003.
into children’s lives; the focus group method does however emphasise the provision of ‘equal’ opportunities to participate across focus group members. More significantly the analytical framework employed demands a high level of researcher reflexivity. The CA-informed discourse analytic approach developed here examines multi-party (researcher-researched) interaction across a range of areas (alluded to above and detailed below), including a preliminary investigation questioning the extent to which children’s participation is enabled, constrained or negotiated within the research setting. While I endeavoured to espouse a high level of ethical integrity throughout this research project particularly by adopting a ‘duty of care’ comprising the inclusivity of all children as I moderated the focus groups, subsequent analysis reveals my responsiveness towards an individual child occasionally compromised on account of my attention being diverted to other children. The presentation of carefully transcribed lengthy extracts from the data renders the interaction between researcher and child participant highly visible to, and thus subject to critique by analysts and readers alike (Davidson, 2010). That critique can and does occasionally unearth ethical questions, for example, were all children invited and encouraged to participate in conversation on an equal basis? This transparency is a strength of the methodological approach adopted here as it renders at least one aspect of research ethics (that is, a duty of care towards children) a tangibility that is often lacking from qualitative research studies.

Parental consent was sought via a letter from me along with a consent form which was distributed by the class teacher (see appendices A and B). This letter was drawn up in conjunction with guidelines for research with children produced by the university (Whyte, 2003) and included a brief description of the nature of the study, information on how the child was selected for participation, information on data storage and subsequent planned use of that data. It also invited the parent to contact me for more information if they required it. Following obtainment of parental consent the teacher then selected and invited groups of three or four children to participate in the focus groups. The number of groups conducted in each location varied depending on (i) the numbers of parents that consented to their child participating in the study and (ii) the time available on the part of the class teacher. I conducted as many groups as I was facilitated to depending on the location.

19 The number of groups conducted in each location varied depending on (i) the numbers of parents that consented to their child participating in the study and (ii) the time available on the part of the class teacher. I conducted as many groups as I was facilitated to depending on the location.
Whyte (2003) advises that children should be informed as fully as possible, given their age and competence, about the nature of a research study and the methods involved at the outset of data collection. The first stage of obtaining children’s consent to participate was achieved when the preschool teacher invited a group of three to four children to join me for an activity if they wished. On most occasions the children were then informed by me that I was going to chat to them for a short time about toys, movies and other things that they might be interested in and that we were going to play some games. I also told them that that one day I was going to write a ‘big book’ about children the same age as them and that I was hoping to get some ideas for my book during my visit. On a number of other occasions, however, I did not formally describe my presence as a researcher. The only reason I can provide for inconsistency on this issue was the social dynamics of the various groups and a desire not to overwhelm the children with my presence too soon. I used a small soft toy lion as a prop introducing him as my friend and sat him on the floor or the table as can be seen in one of the images displayed in Appendix C. The children responded well to this and it aided with ice-breaking at the beginning of each focus group. On all occasions children were invited by me to participate in the first activity and following this invited to stay for a second activity. They were made aware that if they wanted to opt out of the focus group at any stage they could. This was the closest to formal consent I believed I could achieve with children of this age group.

Children engaged in talk and activities not unlike those they may play on any given day within the same setting. Thus, it is pertinent to mention that while I conceptualise and label the context produced by our talk-in-interaction as something recognised by me and probably many others as a ‘focus group’, the children themselves probably made sense of the diversion as just another, if slightly novel, activity taking place within the preschool environment. They quite possibly made sense of my presence at least initially in educational terms, that is, they understood me as a ‘teacherly’ type. Having provided an outline of the research design and addressing the issues of

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20 On one occasion, two children opted out during the course of the focus group and they returned to their class teacher.

21 The commercial themes evident in these activities constituted the main difference between schools based activities and those the children engaged in with me.
sampling, access, ethics and consent, the next section discusses and critiques the theoretical aspects of the focus group method.

3.3 The Focus Group Method

Bloor et al. (2001) trace the founding of the focus group method back to the work of sociologists Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton who received ‘a government contract from the “Office of facts and figures” to assess audience responses to the government’s own wartime radio propaganda programmes’ through group-based interviews. Their original formulation used a structured interview guide to test and build research hypotheses (Merton and Kendall, 1946: 541).

Contemporary literature on the topic of focus groups is plentiful but fraught with contradiction and disagreement which is glossed over in most social research textbooks. A first point of disagreement concerns the status of focus groups in the methodological toolkit. Marketing research literature argues that focus groups constitute an auxiliary method used to generate data to inform quantitative stages of a project or aid interpretation of quantitative results, a kind of topping and tailing of the main research findings (Morgan 1998; Stewart et al., 2007). This study adopts a different perspective in line with Kitzinger (1994), Myers (1998), Puchta and Potter (2004) and Wilkinson (2006) and argues that focus groups constitute a stand-alone data-generation method.

A second point of disagreement on focus group methodology pertains to the unit of analysis as defined by the researcher. Focus group interviews can be understood as being synergetic; they produce more information than might be obtained through individual interviewing of each of the members of the group. While the nature of group dynamics are observed to reveal the interactive work that results in unified answers to the pre-determined questions set forth by the group moderator, the individual participants are seen as the unit of analysis. The report is then a collection of insights derived directly from the mouths of the participants (Morgan, 1998). As Myers (1998:96) suggests the content analyst who divides the transcripts up into

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22 Parts of this section have been published (Freeman, 2009a) in a chapter entitled ‘Analysing Focus Group Data’ in Hogan et al (2009).
topics is ‘mimicking the work of the participants’ but only subjects the talk to
analysis on the level of the lexical content of the talk and thus does not consider the
import of the ‘sequence and packaging of turns’. The content analyst style researcher
also questions the cost of the synergy created by group dynamics, arguing that the
greater quantity of information generated by groups, must be weighed against the
potential contamination of the views of individual members as a result of those very
group dynamics (Edmunds, 1999; Fern, 2001; Stewart et al, 2007). Group effects are
thus viewed as a constraint, rather than a resource for the researcher; ‘the only
distinctive feature of the focus group is presented as its primary strength as well as its
main weakness’ (Catterall and Maclaran’s, 2006:257). These concerns have led to the
concealment of group interaction in research publications using focus groups to
generate data (see Kitzinger, 1994 and Wilkinson, 2006 for further discussion of this
point).

An alternative perspective to the synergetic view of focus groups, and the view of
focus groups informing this study instead privileges group interaction as holding the
key to the generation of deeper insights into the phenomenon under study; the unit of
analysis is the group interaction, rather than the individuals taking part in the
discussion (Barbour and Kitzinger, 1999; Catterall and Maclaren, 1997; Kitzinger,
1994; Puchta and Potter 1999; Puchta and Potter 2004; Tonkiss, 2004a, 2004b;
Wilkinson, 2006). Indeed, Litosseliti argues that the ‘discursive turn’, with its
emphasis on language use in context and on the dynamics and politics of interaction
has contributed to the increasing importance of socially-oriented and interaction-
oriented research methods, such as focus groups (2003:9-12).

Myers (1998: 107) refers to the hundreds of pages of transcripts produced by a focus
group study as a ‘black box’ and notes the lack of engagement by researchers using
focus groups to reflect on the ‘machinery’ that produces them. He argues that in order
to further our understanding of focus group interaction the black box must be opened
and focus group discussions need to be compared with other forms of talk. His
investigation and critical reflection on how opinions are constituted and what people
do with them in focus group settings leads him to conclude that focus group talk is
comparable to talk in clinics, in news interviews, in the classroom to the extent that it
is in some ways based on the ‘expectations of conversation’ (1998:107). He posits
acknowledgement of a range of 'situations for talk' rather than a black and white distinction between the everyday and the institutional,

The apparent artificiality of the situation – the moderator’s intervention, the topic guide, the time limit, the tape recorder – stop being weaknesses for which we apologize, and start being features that we can use to begin our analysis of the talk (p.107-8).

He argues not for a simple opposition of 'the institutional and the everyday' but rather towards acknowledgement of 'a range of situations for talk' (p.107).

This dissertation adopts Litosseliti’s definition of a focus group (2003:2). She emphasises two features: (1) they are focused and thus involve some kind of collective activity around a small number of issues; and (2) they are interactive ‘in that the group forces and dynamics are of the utmost importance’. In line with Wilkinson (2006:56) taking part in social interaction is understood to involve the production of talk in order 'to do something', be it to agree, challenge, undermine, support, align with or dispute, and, these social accomplishments are the ultimate focus for analysis. The interactive integrity of the data produced is kept intact throughout the research process. I conceptualise focus group research as taking place across three overlapping phases (Freeman, 2009a) (see Figure 3.2) and thus it is not seen to begin and end with the physical gathering and dispersing of research participants. Each phase is now addressed in turn.
3.3.1 Generating talk-in-interaction in focus groups of children

The theoretical aspects of focus group research broadly apply whether focus groups are comprised of adults or children. However, the practicalities of running focus groups with children differ quite significantly from adult-comprised groups. Methodological literature dealing specifically with children’s focus groups is not in abundance and what is available tends to centre around workability issues including (i) optimum size of groups, (ii) minimal age of effective participation and (iii) incorporation of activities to aid focus groups (Hennessy and Heary, 2005; Mauthner 1997).

Some of the general rules of thumb concerning the moderation of adult groups also pertain to children’s groups. Bloor et al. (2001:49) describe the focus group facilitator as a background rather than a foreground figure, the ‘theatre manager rather than the director of the play’. They argue that the facilitator should ‘not overturn the natural features of group interaction’ but that they can try to ensure that the quieter members of a group are facilitated in making a contribution and that the group does not ‘fractionate into different simultaneous conversations’. While these criteria apply equally to children’s focus groups, the task of moderating involves many more idiosyncratic features. Mauthner (1997:21) describes the interaction between children and researcher as ‘a delicate process’ and posits that the ‘researcher’s role can take on disciplinary and maternal dimensions’.
Litosseliti (2003:40) outlines the skills required of a good moderator and these include having good personal, interpersonal, communication, listening and managing skills. In addition a good moderator must appear neutral encouraging both positive and negative comments, being careful not to communicate approval or disapproval and withholding personal opinion. Some of these skills do not hold true for focus groups with children, where for example, communicating approval and occasionally providing personal opinion proves encouraging and essential support for very young speakers. I endeavoured to ensure that all participants contributions whether on-topic or off-topic were attended to, however, close analysis reveals I was not, and perhaps could not be successful in this aim at all times.

The groups conducted for this study were smaller in size than adult groups averaging at four participants per group. They comprised a gender mix that reflected their natural classroom environment where possible and included pre-existing friendship pairs or groups. While two groups were single sex (one group of three girls and one group of four boys), this was a consequence of the fact that in some cases consent had been provided but there were insufficient numbers to have a gender mix across all groups. This study does not focus on gender differences between participants or compare and contrast the talk produced by girls with the talk produced by boys. Rather as discussed above gender is deemed as a point of analytical interest only when it is made relevant in the substance of the talk produced (Schegloff, 1999).

I drew on Eder and Fingerson’s (2003) conceptualisation of activity-based focus groups and created two stimulus activities (See Appendix C) (i) a ‘bingo’ (match and win) game, which used brand logos, some of which were specific to children’s cultures and some of which were non-specific to provide a match and win activity in which the first player to match four quadrants was declared a winner; and (ii) a creativity exercise (make and do), which involved the children choosing laminated velcro-backed cards taken from a toy catalogue with which to decorate a felt-covered cardboard Christmas tree or lunch box depending on the time of year the groups were conducted. Focus groups with children are appropriately shorter than those with

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23 The Christmas tree decoration exercise was an obvious decision given the seasonal timing of some of the groups. The rationale for including a lunch-box as something that could be ‘decorated’ was based on my observations during the preschool visits of character brands deriving from consumer
adults (Heary and Hennessy, 2002). The groups conducted for this study lasted between fifteen and forty-five minutes. The next section discusses the recording and management of the data in more detail.

3.3.2 Managing Focus Group Data – Transcription and Organisation

The second phase under discussion here deals with the management of focus group data, the first step of which involves transcribing the recorded interaction into an analysable format. Danby (2009:1597) argues researchers coming from an interactionist perspective work from fine-grained transcriptions of video-recorded children’s interactions which may at first appear ‘chaotic and unordered’. The raw data for this project consisted of video footage recorded on digital video cassettes. The use of video recording has a number of advantages over recording audio only because it captures aspects of body language and facial expression and it greatly aids the transcription process as speakers can be more easily identified than with audio alone. Body language is not the focus of my research but particular bodily gestures, for example, head movements (shaking and nodding) or pronounced gestures, for example, curling in or looking downwards are captured throughout the transcripts. Sparrman (2005) observes that six to eight year old children use different interaction strategies while being observed through classroom-based participant observation with a video camera. However, while video-recording is more obtrusive than an audio recording and can thus present a greater distraction for participants this potentiality, as can be seen from analysis of the transcripts, was not realised to any great extent during the course of my study. This was perhaps due to the fact that the video camera was hand-held by a research assistant sitting stationary a number of metres away from the focus group gathering.

The video recordings were converted to MPEG video files and transcribed with the aid of the software package ‘Transana’. Transcription has been described as a theoretical activity (Ochs, 1979), because any transcription is a representation of the culture prominently emblazoned upon schoolbags and lunch-boxes. The children were receptive to the idea of decorating either a Christmas tree or a lunch box.

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24 Transana is designed to facilitate the transcription and qualitative analysis of video and audio data. It provides a way to view video, create a transcript, and link places in the transcript to frames in the video. This software is designed by Chris Fassnacht and David Woods at the Wisconsin centre for educational research and is available free from www.transana.org.
data arranged in a particular way. Dempster and Woods (2011) in a recent publication of the online journal FQS argue for the value of Transana software as an aid to qualitative research;

Transana’s system for linking transcripts with their associated media files allowed the authors to maintain a close connection to the media at all times, while simultaneously developing first-level abstraction from the data that allowed for easier navigation and segmentation of the data, as well as allowing for more nuanced, multi-layered understanding of the visually-oriented pieces through Transana’s capacity for handling multiple simultaneous transcripts (para 62).

It has been noted that decisions relating to how one presents the data are not random. Relating to this, Bucholtz (2000:1439) comments that such decisions: ultimately respond to the contextual conditions of the transcription process itself, including the transcriber’s own expectations and beliefs about the speakers and the interaction being transcribed; the intended audience of the transcript and its purpose. Transcription has thus been described as an interpretive practice (Davidson, 2010; Thornborrow and Coates, 2005). My research is theoretically underpinned by a conversation analytic perspective and the transcription conventions associated with CA were first broadly applied during the production of a complete transcript for each group. Here talk-in-interaction is captured turn by turn and obvious overlap, pauses and intonation patterns are observed. CA was more narrowly applied to passages of talk-in-interaction selected for very close analysis thereafter. The selection of these passages is addressed in Section 3.4 below. CA is concerned with the intricacies of talk and, therefore, employs an elaborate transcription system designed to preserve the tiny details of speech, including the singular utterances, the pauses, the sighs, the inhalations and exhalations, the overlap and the whisper; and it is through this activity that a detailed interpretation is constructed. Talk is understood as a process that occurs turn by turn and as something that is characterised by delays, both within and between turns, by overlap between speakers and by repair, including re-starts and

25 An adaptation of the Jeffersonian system was employed - See Appendix D.
hesitations. These features are time-consuming to transcribe and result in ‘messy’ transcripts, but they are central to understanding the ‘how’ of interaction.

Wooffitt (2005:10) explains that everyday speech such as that generated in interviews or focus groups, does not resemble fictional depictions of talk; ‘It is not grammatically neat and tidy, but appears on the surface to be disorganised and messy’. Alldred and Burman suggest that while including such ‘messiness’ might serve to further ‘children’s otherness’ from the idealized subject, the consequence of deliberately producing the messiness of accounts in fact helps to challenge ‘normativity of this sanitized area’ (2005:181).

It has been estimated that a one hour recording takes about eight hours to transcribe (Bloor et al., 2001:59). This figure can be multiplied a number of times over when CA conventions are employed as many hours may be dedicated to transcribing just two minutes of multi-party talk-in-interaction. In practice, the transcription process for this study has been iterative. Transcribing the talk of children so young proved challenging as (i) overlap/interruption occurs frequently, (ii) whispered speech is commonplace and difficult to decipher and (iii) language development is in an early phase overall. All of these factors presented stumbling blocks to the transcription process at times. Ultimately, it was only by working my way through passages of talk that were difficult to decipher and thus transcribe, that I could gain full access to the talk produced; I remained always cognisant of the argument that closer inspection of what seems like disarray might reveal meaningful aspects of social interaction (see Kitzinger, 1994:109 and Munday, 2006).

3.3.2 Analysing Focus Group Data

The third phase of the focus group method comprises the analytical process. Myers (1998) identified this as an area that is neglected in focus group texts and almost a decade later Wilkinson (2006:51) argued that ‘the analysis of focus group data is under-discussed in the (now voluminous) literature’. Appropriate analytical methods are essential if as argued by Frankland and Bloor (1999: 144-5) systematic analysis of the data can be achieved without losing the richness of the transcribed talk.
The most appropriate methods for analysing focus group produced talk are those that are designed to explore interaction, specifically multi-party interaction. Puchta and Potter (2004) have carried out the most comprehensive study of focus group moderation available to date. They draw on the techniques of conversation analysis and discursive psychology and suggest that focus group data provides researchers with something directly observable and analysable, that is, interaction itself (2004:8). They define focus groups as a special kind of institutional interaction and consider the ways in which participants get socialised into being good focus group participants evoking a lesson from Harvey Sacks, that ‘one of the features of social organizations is that they are designed to be learnable’ (2004:28). They observe that ‘people are good at learning how to interact in new situations; and situations are designed to make that learning straightforward’ (2004:28).

This emphasis on interaction does not however sit easily with traditional conceptualisations of the purpose of focus group research. Puchta and Potter (2004) refer to the burden of the social psychological legacy still evident in theoretical and practical accounts of the focus group method. Analysis of focus group data tends to centre on the identification of members perceptions, opinions, beliefs and attitudes (recognised by the acronym POBA by many researchers) around issues or things. These psychological concepts are understood to be ‘buried in people’s heads’ (2004:8) but observable in verbal, behavioural and/or psychological reactions.

Attitudes specifically are understood to be static, heterogeneous across members and measurable by attitude scales a construct described by Puchta and Potter (2004:22) as ‘a product in the social science supermarket that is well passed its sell by date!’. Billig (1991) re-worked the attitude construct and argued that people give views in particular contexts, produce evaluations when there is at least the possibility of an argument and in justifying their own position often criticise the counter-position. Attitudes are thus understood to be inextricable from the arguments in which they occur. Potter and Wetherell (1987) previously articulated a similar position when they posited that evaluations are not ready-made cognitive objects but are worked up in ways that are suitable for what is being done. Puchta and Potter (2004:22) draw on these understandings in developing the argument that attitudes are performed not pre-formed and in so doing they serve to invalidate concerns about whether focus group
participants are ‘accurately reporting their unique, private, inner attitude’ something which for them amounts to an ‘incoherent notion’.

Potter and Puchta’s (2007:113) recent work continues their critique of the ‘mental lexicon’ used in focus group manuals and sees them posit an approach that emphasises the practical uses of terms such as those encapsulated in the POBA acronym. By addressing the ways in which psychology plays a practical and interactional role in the work of focus group moderators, for example, the use of opinion questions as non-threatening and welcoming of all views, they shed light on the way ‘psychological practices are partly constitutive of institutional practices’ (2007:115).

Macnaghten and Myers (2004:76) describe focus groups as ‘slices of modified ordinary conversation’ and argue that one task of interpretation is to ‘trace that modification, while also accounting for that sense of ordinariness’. Analytical approaches derived from the discourse analytic and conversation analytic traditions have been deemed particularly appropriate for application to focus group produced talk-in-interaction (Kitzinger, 1994; Myers, 1998; Potter and Puchta, 2007; Puchta and Potter, 1999, 2004; Tonkiss, 2004a). Wilkinson (2006:61) argues that ‘conversation analysis offers a method par excellence for analysing interaction in focus groups and deserves to be much more widely used in this methodological context’. This dissertation utilises a CA-informed discourse analytic approach to the analysis of the focus group talk-in-interaction produced. The next section provides a detailed discussion of the theoretical development and practical implications of this approach.

3.4 A CA-informed Discourse Analytic Approach to Focus Group Talk-in-interaction

Analysis was iterative and grew from an initial micro turn-by-turn examination of the focus group fingerprint, to a slightly wider focus on assessment sequences, to an even wider examination of topic-based extracts on a case by case basis. Sequences identified for close analysis were labelled and saved as individual clips and coded using ‘Transana’ functionality. In practice the clipping and coding process was
iterative and rudimentary but it facilitated in the identification of the prominent conversational features and the relationship between these features and the accomplishment of social action. While clipping and coding facilitated the analytical process it did not impose what might have been deemed too much structure or shape on that process. The CA-informed discourse analytic approach to data is multi-layered as outlined in section 3.1 above. Figure 3.3 below incorporates an additional foundational layer labelled ‘unmotivated looking’ (Sacks, 1984). Each layer of analysis is now detailed in turn.

3.4.1 ‘Unmotivated Looking’
The foundational layer of analysis is labelled ‘unmotivated looking’ a term adopted from Sacks (1984), Psathas (1995) and Butler (2008)

Treating some actual conversation in an unmotivated way, that is, giving some consideration to whatever can be found in any particular conversation we happen to have our hands on, subjecting it to investigation in any direction that can be produced from it, can have strong payoffs (lecture 2, winter 1970). (Sacks, 1984)

Figure 3.3 Bottom-up Analytical Inquiry

26 Gail Jefferson (1984) put together a chapter entitled ‘Notes on methodology’ for an edited work by Atkinson and Heritage. The chapter is attributed to the then late Harvey Sacks as it is comprised of extracts from his lectures dating from 1963 to 1971.
Psathas (1995:45) characterises the first stages of analysing recorded interaction as 'unmotivated looking'. He refers to naturally occurring interactional phenomena that would have taken place regardless of whether the researcher had 'come upon the scene' and lists conversations, news interviews, therapy sessions, telephone calls, dinner table talk and police calls as possibilities for exploration (p.45). Ten Have (2007:121) argues that a 'present-day researcher' would be 'silly' to ignore the general perspective offered by the 'conceptual apparatus' of CA built up over the last forty years but notes that a 'moderate' position on the issue of 'unmotivated looking' would see the researcher take a 'tentative, open-minded approach to the data at hand, using just a few basic concepts from the CA tradition to structure one’s “looking”'. Ten Have argues further that listening to the recordings with transcript in hand is the 'essential way to proceed' in the development of an understanding of what the participants are 'doing' in and through their talk-in-interaction (p.121).

'Unmotivated looking' is deemed an apposite descriptor for the activity dominating the foundational layer of this project, a layer often rendered invisible in the final report of bottom-up style research. This was a time during which the data was lived with for a while and tentatively analysed in a number of ways in advance of working the fully transcribed data-set. This work is similar in outlook to Butler (2008:51) who describes her approach to the study of playground interaction as 'unmotivated looking' and cites Sacks to this end stating that she knew how she was going to approach the data but she did not know what she wanted to look for. Danby (1998:181) states in a similar vein that 'sampling' was not used in her study of preschoolers use of talk and action to build and shape gendered social orders, as to employ 'predetermined categories of activity' would have privileged adult constructions of children's social orders over categorisations made pertinent through an examination of children's everyday practices.

It was the intention from the outset that this study would generate talk-in-interaction and that this talk would be viewed through a number of discourse analytic lenses. While it was also intended more specifically that the study would contribute to

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27 Appendix E provides a list of conference presentations and publications deriving from this project, the earlier ones of which were produced while the data was lived with and subjected to preliminary analytical inquiries.
sociological thinking on the consumer/consumption aspects of preschoolers talk-in-interaction, ultimately the analysis was data-led and premature theorising was actively resisted in line with CA conventions (Wooffitt, 2005). Close examination of the talk-in-interaction provided the foundations for a bottom-up analytic approach that saw the talk examined turn-by-turn, sequence-by-sequence and finally topic-based case by case. The three primary analytical layers are now addressed in turn.

3.4.2 Examining the Focus Group Fingerprint

This layer of analysis involves an investigation of the interactional (im)possibilities and roles evident in the focus group setting through a turn-by-turn examination of the structure of the transcribed talk-in-interaction. It was informed primarily by Heritage’s work on institutional talk-in-interaction (Heritage, 2004; Heritage and Greatbatch, 1991). Sacks et al. (1974) seminal account of the conversational turn-taking system also proved instructional and is returned to in chapter four below.

Heritage (2004:224) argues that it is fundamentally through interaction that context is built, invoked and managed, and it is through interaction that institutional imperatives originating from outside the interaction are evidenced and made real and enforceable for the participants. He points to three main features of institutional interaction; (i) it involves the participants in specific goal orientations which are tied to their institution-relevant identities: doctor and patient, teacher and pupil, etc. (ii) it involves special constraints on what will be treated as allowable contributions to the business at hand and (iii) it is associated with inferential frameworks and procedures that are particular to specific institutional contexts.

This study views focus groups as a ‘special kind of institutional interaction’ (Puchta and Potter, 2004:28). Heritage and Greatbatch (1991:94) cite Schegloff’s (1991) concerns that if it is to be claimed that some interaction has a specifically ‘institutional’ character, then the relevance of the institutional context in question must be shown to inhabit the details of the participants’ conduct. Schegloff (1991:51) argues that where terms describing aspects of social structure are used in researchers’ accounts of interaction, the onus is on the researcher to show that those aspects of the
scene are what the relevant parties are indeed oriented towards and thus are thereby producing through the very interaction being examined

It is a problem of analysis to be worked at: how to examine the data so as to be able to show that the parties were, with and for one another, demonstrably oriented to those aspects of who they are, and those aspects of their context, which are respectively implicated in the “social structures” which we may wish to relate to the talk. If we treat this as a problem of analytic craft, we can use it as leverage to enhance the possibility of learning something about how talk-in-interaction is done, for it requires us to return again to the details of the talk to make the demonstration (1991:51-52).

Heritage and Greatbatch (1991) are in broad agreement with Schegloff’s argument and posit that context must be treated as both ‘the project and the product of the participant’s own actions and therefore as inherently locally produced and transformable at any moment’ (p.94-95). Sacks et al’s (1974) original turn-taking system provides a kind of template to which other turn-taking systems can be compared. Heritage and Greatbatch (1991:95) argue that if it can be shown that those participating in a ‘vernacularly characterized institutional setting’ organise their turn-taking in a way that is pervasively distinctive from ordinary conversation, then it can be said that they are ‘organizing their conduct so as to display and realise its “institutional character” ’. This for them resolves Schegloff’s ‘problem of relevance’ (1991:95) described above. They argue further that where parties confine their conduct within the ‘framework of some distinctive “formal” institutional turn-taking system’ the range of options and opportunities for action that are characteristic in conversation is reduced. They describe the ensemble of ‘variations evident in each institutional form of interaction as a unique “fingerprint” ’ (1991:95-96). More recently, Heritage (2004:225) continues to argue that each kind of institutional interaction has a unique fingerprint ‘made up of specific tasks, identities, constraints on conduct and relevant inferential procedures that the participants deploy and are oriented to in their interactions with one another’. A number of institutional settings including courtrooms, medical clinics and media-based settings have been shown to exhibit distinctive forms of turn-taking which work to structure many aspects of conduct in these settings (Heritage and Greatbatch, 1991:95).
Myers (1998:87) has explored the institutionality of focus group talk-in-interaction and compared focus group discussions to other forms of talk. He argues there are three features of most focus groups that particularly affect turn-taking, firstly the moderator opens and closes topics, secondly the moderator can intervene to control turn-taking and finally the moderator elicits and acknowledges responses. Research on classroom interaction (McHoul, 1978; Mehan, 1985, 1991; Sinclair and Coulthard; 1975, Sunderland, 2001) comprises a body of literature that has proved particularly instructive in informing my research as a result of the obvious parallels between teacher and focus group moderator, and, pupils and child participants. This first primary layer of analysis uncovers the ‘fingerprint’ (Heritage and Greatbatch, 1991) of the focus groups produced for this study and thus offers conclusions on the institutionality of the interaction comprising the study as a whole. The subsequent analytical layers are thus enriched by an appreciation of the interactional (im)possibilities and roles made available and utilised by both moderator and child participants in this setting.

3.4.3 Examining Social Action

The second layer of analysis involves an exploration of social action in the focus group. By focussing on assessment sequences (Pomerantz, 1984) the question as to how ‘evaluation’ is accomplished, and, for what social ends as displayed in talk-in-interaction by preschoolers in the focus group setting, is addressed. As discussed above Potter and Puchta (2007) explicate the way phenomena that are traditionally thought of as psychological including motive, knowledge, ideas and attitudes are parts of interaction. They echo Barbour and Kitzinger (1999) in arguing that this represents a fundamental paradigm shift for focus group research and sees research now addressing ‘evaluations rather than attitudes’(2004:69). Wilkinson (2006) and Goodwin (2006) both view talk as a form of action and agree that a focus on how talk is built turn by turn provides access into how participants make sense of what the other is saying.

Wootton (1997:x) argues that the ‘central processes’ involved in the child’s entry into the world of culture are ‘those through which her conduct comes to be connected to publicly established understandings which have emerged in interaction’. His work focuses on request-making behaviour of very young children aged between two and
three years, an age cohort slightly younger than the preschoolers investigated in my study. Wootton (1997:4) states that it is through

taking account of what has taken place within the local sequence that her [the child’s] actions come to be shaped by the local culture which surrounds her; that she comes to be social by acting strategically so as to take account of what has happened in any given encounter. It is in the detailed management of encounters that the seeds of social being are laid.

He (1997:16) utilises a conversation analytic perspective and argues this allows access to an investigation of how we display to others ‘the distinctive nature of the setting and context in which our interaction is housed’. Wootton (2006:194) argues that children’s sequential understandings have three important qualities: that is they are local, public and moral; local in the sense that they are ‘tied up with the specific details of the interaction in question’, public in that the ‘child’s actions appear to be constructed with reference to understandings which have an accountable basis in overt prior events within the interaction’, and moral in that such understandings ‘form a basis for the child not just to expect something to occur but to feel entitled to do so’ (2006:194).

Wootton’s (2006:194) empirical research demonstrates the manner by which a child aged less than two years nine months aligns her conduct based on preceding interaction and that these alignments can include things such as ‘people’s wishes, desires, plans and preferences’. He argues that by the time a child is aged four she has extensive experience in organising conduct with reference to others within the interactional frame. Wootton’s argument that very young children demonstrate competence in negotiating sequential understandings with interlocutors supports my interest in researching the child consumer through an interactionist perspective. However, where his work focuses on how the sequentially based account offers an alternative kind of mechanism from which to explore developmental change in children, alternative that is to the Piagetian cognitive tradition which emphasises processes of assimilation and accommodation, my study is concerned with one main area of social action, that is, the activity of evaluation or assessment as depicted in sequences of interaction at one point in time in the context of a focus group.
encounter. This approach is philosophically similar to Wootton (1997:12) in that it is not designed to explore how the child’s mind works but rather to examine the ways in which conversational sequences work.

Pomerantz (1984:57) defines assessments as *products* of participation, ‘occasioned conversational events with sequential constraints’. Goodwin and Goodwin (1992) argue that assessment descriptions provide a principal way in which children make sense of experiences and objects on a peer to peer basis. Assessments are structured to invite particular next actions termed ‘preferred’ over other actions termed ‘dispreferred’ (Pomerantz, 1984). Schegloff (2007:59) cites his earlier work with Sacks (1973) in arguing that the alternative types of second pair part which a first pair part makes relevant are not equivalent, or equally valued. They are not ‘symmetrical alternatives’. In the context of evaluation or assessment sequences Schegloff argues that what he calls ‘plus responses’ (preferred) lend themselves to formulations as agreement, an alignment with the first pair part and ‘minus responses’ (dispreferred) lend themselves to formulations as disagreements, a distancing from the first pair part. This alignment or distancing is not with the speaker of the first part per se although it may be that as well but it mainly refers to the course of action the first pair part is designed to implement (2007:59). Kitzinger and Frith (1999:302) note that the terms ‘preferred’ and ‘dispreferred’ are not intended in any way to refer to the private desires or psychological proclivities of individual speakers; they are simply descriptive of the different ways in which social actions including acceptances and refusals, (including the acceptance of invitations the individual may actually want to reject, or the refusal of invitations s/he may wish to accept) are routinely done in ordinary talk. Thus, ‘preferred’ and ‘dispreferred’ refer to a structural relationship of sequence parts.

Pomerantz argues that conversants orient to agreeing with one another as ‘comfortable, supportive, reinforcing’ and to disagreeing with one another as ‘uncomfortable, unpleasant, difficult, risking threat, insult, or offense’ (1984:77). Dispreferred actions are often accompanied by accounts. Hence, Puchta and Potter (2004:69) argue in the context of focus group talk that ‘evaluations’ assess things and ‘accounts’ justify assessments. The term accounting is drawn from CA to refer to an
occasion in talk where an individual accounts for something, that is, provides an explanation or a justification for something.

This second primary layer of analysis relies predominantly on a CA lens to focus on assessment sequences across the full corpus of transcripts. The main guiding question asks how the social action of assessment or evaluation is displayed through the multi-party interaction evident in the focus group setting. The preference structure concept (Pomerantz, 1984) informs the analytical discussion as sequences are identified and examined in terms of social action. Accounts are also identified to shed light on how assessments are used for broader social ends. Given that much of the focus group talk generated here centres around the material artefacts and characters of children’s commercial culture, this layer of analytical inquiry sheds light on how preschool consumers accomplish ‘evaluation’ and for what social ends through talk-in-interaction in the focus group setting.

3.4.4 Single Case Analysis

The third and final primary layer of analysis involves an examination of the performative aspects of preschool consumers’ talk-in-interaction in the focus group setting. For the majority of qualitative researchers, language is conceived of as a medium through which we pass thoughts (ideas, intentions, information) between each other. Discursive approaches, however, focus on utterances as performing actions and displaying action orientations respectively.

Wooffitt (2005:18) argues

descriptions, anecdotes, stories, comments, actions- the kind of linguistic events that occur in interview data- are constructions which not only depend upon the context in which they are produced, but will also reflect the functions that they’ve been designed to perform.

28 The terms ‘assessment’ deriving from Pomerantz (1984) and ‘evaluation’ deriving from Puchta and Potter (2004) are used interchangeably in the analysis that follows.
This part of the analytical inquiry aims to develop a deeper empirical understanding of how and for what purpose children use discourses around commercial material artefacts as social currency? To this end, six topic bound extended sequences of interaction were selected for close analysis drawing on CA techniques (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998; Psathas, 1992) and DA techniques (Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

I have labelled this layer of analysis ‘single case analysis’ drawing on the term used by Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998:121) to describe the process of ‘looking at a single conversation, or section of one, in order to track in detail the various conversational strategies and devices which inform and drive its production’. Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998:120) contrast this technique with the predominant analysis of ‘collections’ characterising much CA work and argue single case analysis ‘involves tracking in detail the production of some extract of talk’. They argue further that attention to the ‘turn-by-turn organization of singular instances can lead to revealing insights into the orderliness of interaction’ (1998:130). Wootton (1997:20) also advocates ‘case analysis’ arguing that the kind of evidence required in order to make arguments about interactional processes is ‘contained within and only documentable out of, particular stretches of interaction’.

Psathas (1992) describes the structure of an extended sequence as being marked by a beginning and an ending, possibly with sections differentiated internally. He argues ‘dividing up the interaction into adjacency pairs or insertion sequences or directive-response-assessment sequences would not have told us what the activity is about, what the purposes of the collaborating parties are [...]’ (1992:119). By addressing extended sequences and thus broadening the unit of analysis to the level of the episode attention can be given to the detail of the unfolding talk and the social order of the interactional event.

Cobb-Moore et al. (2009) utilised the single case analysis technique and found that young children drew upon rules as cultural resources as they negotiated both adult constructed social order and also their own peer constructed social order. They coupled a single case analysis approach with membership categorisation analysis and found that CA and MCA fed off each other to provide a more rigorous account of members interactions (2009:1489). The present study also broadens the ‘single case
analysis’ approach out to encompass other DA (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) techniques. Topic-bound extended sequences or episodes are first selected for very close turn-by-turn analysis using conventional CA techniques, after which tools from the discourse analytic toolkit namely ‘interpretative repertoires’ (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984; Potter and Wetherell, 1987) and ‘subject positions’ are utilised to reveal something about what is being accomplished socially through talk around commercial topics.

Potter and Wetherell’s (1987:33) main tenet centres around the concept of ‘function’. They argue people use language to construct versions of the social world. This construction involves (i) a variety of pre-existing linguistic resources, (ii) the active selection of resources and (iii) the potent consequential nature of accounts. Thus, they posit that in a ‘profound sense, accounts construct reality’ (1987:34). In line with Potter and Wetherell’s (1987) conceptualisation, Alldred and Burman (2005:179) iterate that DA work

seeks neither to identify features intrinsic to children, at the expense of either differences between them or of their commonalities with adults, nor does it identify the accounts any particular child participants give as necessarily defining or entirely representing their individual ‘perspectives’. Rather, every account generated is treated as partial – both in the sense of being incomplete (for within the framework there is no complete account) and motivated or shaped by individual social agendas.

The concepts of ‘repertoires’ and positioning derive from the DA tradition and they shed light first and foremost on the performative aspects of talk-in-interaction, specifically the construction of social selves and relations in context. As people engage in talk-in-interaction with others they draw on a ‘repertoire of interpretative resources’ (Gilbert and Mulkay,1984:82). Potter and Wetherell (1987:138) define ‘interpretative repertoires’ as ‘basically a lexicon or register of terms and metaphors drawn upon to characterize and evaluate actions and events’. Edley (2001:198) describes interpretative repertoires as the ‘building blocks of conversation’ and argues they are ‘part and parcel of any community’s common sense, providing a basis for
shared social understanding'. He argues further that ‘conversations are usually made up of a patchwork of “quotations” from various interpretative repertoires’ (2001:198).

The identification of repertoires is not a prescriptive endeavour. Potter and Wetherell (1987) argue that their strand of DA is a ‘broad theoretical framework’ and not an ‘analytic method’. The analyst must develop skills in identifying patterns of consistency and variation across transcribed talk. Edley (2001:198) describes the identification of interpretative repertoires as a ‘craft skill’ and posits that the ‘trick to spotting’ them is ‘familiarity with one’s data’. Repertoires serve to position people within a specific social context and this action is referred to as ‘positioning’. Edley (2001:210) defines subject positions as ‘locations within a conversation’ and as the ‘identities made relevant by specific ways of talking’. Language is thus understood to provide ‘subject positions’ which people occupy rather than fixed perspectives (Davis and Harre, 1990). Alldred and Burman (2005:179) argue that ‘As we speak, we are positioned and position ourselves in particular ways which serve certain functions.’

The CA-informed discourse analytic approach widens the empirical focus in this final layer of analysis utilising the concepts of ‘single case analysis’ (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998), ‘interpretative repertoire’ (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) and ‘subject position’ (Edley, 2001) in order to address the question as to how and for what purposes commercial topics are used as social currency in the accomplishment of interactional consumer selves? The analytical approach does not attempt to gloss over the philosophical and methodological differences between CA and DA as outlined above. It does however aim to emphasise the similarities between the two approaches and to demonstrate that a CA-informed discourse analytic framework provides the opportunity to develop a detailed and rich interpretation of preschoolers talk-in-interaction around consumer culture, one that captures the nuanced elements of children’s talk while not losing sight of the substantive elements of their interaction. Figure 3.4 provides a summary of the theoretical, conceptual and methodological resources that have been marshalled in this and earlier chapters in order to proceed to an analysis of the data.
3.5 Conclusions

This chapter has discussed the theoretical and practical aspects of the methodology used in this study. The research design has been described and issues around consent, access, and ethics have been engaged with. Theory on the focus group method has been critically discussed and the approach has been broken down into three main phases (i) data generation, (ii) data management and (iii) data analysis. The CA-informed discourse analytical approach developed for this research study has been described along with the theoretical resources informing its design and development. Data analysis was multi-layered and iterative beginning with an initial analytical layer termed 'unmotivated looking' during which time the data was lived with and transcribed. Three primary data analysis layers have been described, the first of which examines the focus group fingerprint, the second of which examines social action as displayed through focus group talk-in-interaction and the third of which uses single case analysis to explore how and for what purpose children use discourses around commercial material artefacts as social currency. The next three chapters of the dissertation present the analytical findings.
CHAPTER FOUR: Examining the Focus Group 'Fingerprint'

This chapter presents an interrogation of the focus group 'fingerprint' (Heritage and Greatbatch, 1991:95-6) through an examination of how focus group talk is structured (see Figure 4.1 below). It examines the tasks, roles and overall framework evident and thus reveals the interactional constraints and enablers that characterise the focus groups used in this study. The purpose of this endeavour is two-fold (i) to provide a comprehensive empirical account of the research setting through an exploration of the institutionality of the focus group context and an examination of the interactional (im)possibilities available for both moderator and child participant within this setting, and, (ii) to provide a theoretical and methodological backdrop to the other analytical chapters where the focus revolves mainly around extended sequences of interaction. The analysis outlined in this chapter takes the focus group context as its "topic" (Myers, 1998, 1999; Puchta and Potter, 1999, 2004; Wilkinson, 2006). Context is defined as the actual turn-by-turn talk-in-interaction which served to produce something I recognise as and label a 'focus group'.

Figure 4.1 Bottom-up Analytical Inquiry29 - Examining the Focus Group Fingerprint

The chapter is organised as follows; the first section maps the interaction comprising the focus group across six phases and thus examines the structure in broad terms. The second

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29 The 'unmotivated looking' phase of the research is discussed in section 3.4.1. It was a phase during which the data was lived with and tentatively analysed in advance of working the fully transcribed data-set.
section examines the roles that comprise the focus group setting and investigates how these roles are manifested and what they involve. This entails a more narrow exploration of the structure and shape of the turn by turn talk-in-interaction and sheds some light on the framework resulting from role differentiation. Turn distribution is also considered here. The third section explores the interactional (im)possibilities evident in the focus group setting by focussing closely on two extended sequences of interaction. Finally a number of conclusions are drawn regarding the main features of the focus group fingerprint.

4.1 Mapping Interaction and Observing Distinctive Turn Design Features

Drew and Heritage (1992) argue that institutional interaction generally involves a reduction in the range of interactional practices deployed by participants and a specialisation and re-specification of the practices that remain. Ervin-Tripp (2000:274-279) remarks that even when children’s talk is captured taking place away from adult intervention, the setting in which talk-in-interaction takes place can never be considered neutral, ‘a new setting alters the “energy for talk” and [ ] certain settings may have strong demand characteristics or convey talk-related pressures (e.g. for silence or shouting)’. Focus group data has previously been examined in institutional terms (Myers, 1998, 1999; Puchta and Potter, 2004), however, the structure of children’s focus groups have not previously been examined using a discourse analytical approach.

The data examined here comprises fifteen transcripts of focus group interaction and thus the basic unit of analysis examined is interaction within a singular focus group. Each focus group can be conceptualised as a ‘cultural routine’, defined by Corsaro (2005:344) as a repetitive collectively produced activity. Each focus group can be further broken down into distinctive phases for which the ‘cultural routine’ conceptualisation is again employed. Thus, I break down the broad cultural routine of the focus group into six mini routines across all groups. Each mini routine is comprised of exchange sequences

30 While partaking in a ‘focus group’ was not an everyday activity for the children partaking in this research, attending preschool and engaging in ‘circle time’ style activities was, and for this reason I think it is fair to draw a parallel between the two and suggest that the ‘focus group’ experience was not to any great extent out of the ordinary for the participants.
produced between focus group members. The overall structure is depicted in Figure 4.2 below.

Figure 4.2 Overall Structure of the Focus Group

Heritage (2004:231) argues when talk is described as 'designed' we point to what the person's speech embodies, namely the action that the talk is designed to perform and the means that are selected to perform the action. When turns of talk are repeated exactly (or nearly exactly) over and over again, they are described as 'highly designed'. Lexical choice is an important component of turn design and refers to the speakers' selection of descriptive terms. Heritage (2004) posits that a lot can be told about the way in which participants orient to institutional tasks through an examination of their selection of descriptive terms. Each of the six mini routines identified here are marked in terms of distinctive turn design elements. A summary description of each cultural routine and a list of turn design features associated with each mini cultural routine is provided in Table 4.1.

The fact that each focus group can be mapped in terms of the six mini cultural routines identified here suggests that further consideration of focus group interaction in institutional terms is appropriate (Drew and Heritage, 1992). The next section proceeds

31 Any reference to focus group members refers to the moderator and the participants who together comprise the membership of the focus group.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Routine</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Turn Design Features (moderator)</th>
<th>Approx. Average Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Openings</td>
<td>Comprises welcomes, personal introductions and request to participate in the first activity.</td>
<td>Turn beginnings: 'And ...' 'Well ...'</td>
<td>4 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acknowledgement tokens: 'I see ...'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Change of knowledge state tokens: 'Oh'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 'Match &amp; Win'</td>
<td>A bingo game that replaces numbers with brand related imagery from children's consumer culture - every child is provided with a chance to complete a bingo card which contains four images. Discussion around recognition and evaluation of the various images occurs during this activity.</td>
<td>Attention Grabbing Turns: 'Ready ...' 'Everybody ready ...' 'Are you ready ...' Invitations to display knowledge: 'Do you know ...'</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evaluations and Confirmations: 'Yeah' 'Okay' 'Well done' 'Great okay'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Transition</td>
<td>The transition between one game and the next is characterised by spontaneous discussion between the moderator and the participants.</td>
<td>Continuers: 'And ...'</td>
<td>2.5 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Receipts: 'Now ...'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 'Make &amp; Do'</td>
<td>A collage activity which involves the children selecting on a turn-by-turn basis 'velcro' backed images from children's consumer culture in order to decorate a felt shaped cardboard Christmas tree or lunchbox (seasonally adjusted).</td>
<td>Attention Grabbing Turns: 'Now ...' 'Okay ...' Evaluations: 'Oh lovely' 'Oh very good'</td>
<td>5 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 'Show &amp; Tell'</td>
<td>Following completion of the previous activity, each child presents their work to the group and some discussion ensues as regards chosen imagery. The moderator photographs each person's completed collage.</td>
<td>Attention Grabbing Turns: 'Now ...' 'Okay ...' Evaluations: 'Oh lovely' 'Oh very good'</td>
<td>4 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Closings</td>
<td>Comprises parting greetings and thanks</td>
<td>Closings: 'Well thank you ...'</td>
<td>1 minute</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 Mini Cultural Routines Comprising Each Focus Group
with this line of enquiry through an examination of role distinctions within this interactive space.

4.2 Examining Turn-taking Distribution and the Interactive Framework

Heritage (2004:236) argues that while the contrast between the symmetry of ordinary conversation and the asymmetry of institutional discourse is oversimplified, there is a fundamental distinction between the symmetry of ordinary conversation and the asymmetries of institutional interaction at a general level.

The general operation of ordinary conversation is not tied to any particular set of social roles, identities or tasks. If it were, conversation would be a much less flexible and sophisticated institution. In many forms of institutional discourse, by contrast, there is a direct relationship between institutional roles and tasks on the one hand and discursive rights and obligations on the other (2004:237).

This section of the chapter examines the specific contours of the focus group fingerprint. Turn-taking distribution is first examined to provide an initial insight into role differentiation within the interactive space of the focus group. Following this the interaction is examined at the sequential level to further understanding on how the interaction is shaped and to explore task-differentiation across roles along with discursive rights and obligations on the part of focus group members.

4.2.1 Turn-Taking Distribution

A brief account of Sacks, Jefferson and Schegloff (1974) and Schegloff and Sacks' (1973) seminal work on turn-taking systems is provided in advance of the presentation of the findings as a way of locating the analytical discussion that follows in the broader literature base. Sacks et al. (1974:703) described the turn-taking system for conversation as being comprised of two components and a set of rules. This now seminal description remains at the basis of all conversation analytical work and it is therefore imperative to outline it here. The two components comprise (i) the turn-constructional component and (ii) the turn-allocation component. The turn-constructional component refers to the

Woofitt (2005:29) highlights that it is not the case that the rules themselves govern turn-taking but rather that speaker transfer is achieved as a consequence of mutually coordinated speaker sensitivity to those procedures or conventions for effecting such change.
various unit-types with which a speaker may set out to construct a turn, examples include, sentential, clausal, phrasal and lexical constructions. The first speaker is entitled to one such unit-type upon completion of which a transition-relevance place is arrived at. This brings us on to the turn-allocation component of the turn-taking system. Turn-allocational techniques are distributed into two groups (i) those in which next turn is allocated by current speaker’s selecting next speaker and (ii) those in which a next turn is allocated by self selection. So in practice the first speaker constructs a turn completion thus signalling a transition-relevance place at which point a second speaker constructs a turn on the basis that they have been nominated by the first speaker to do so or through self-selection.

The rules they outline serve to co-ordinate the transfer of turns between speakers and the minimization of gaps and of overlap. For the purposes of presentation it is easiest to replicate these directly

(1) For any turn, at the initial transition-relevance place of an initial turn-
constructional unit:

a. If the turn-so-far is so constructed as to involve the use of a ‘current
speaker selects next’ technique, then the party so selected has the right
and is obliged to take next turn to speak; no others have such rights or
obligations, and transfer occurs at that place.

b. If the turn-so-far is so constructed as not to involve the use of a
‘current-speaker-selects-next’ technique, then self-selection for next
speakership may, but need not, be instituted; first starter acquires
rights to a turn, and transfer occurs at that place.

c. If the turn-so-far is so constructed as not to involve the use of a
‘current speaker selects next’ technique, then current speaker may, but
need not continue, unless another self-selects.

(2) If, at the initial transition-relevance place of an initial turn-constructional unit,
neither 1a nor 1b has operated, and, following the provision of 1c, current
speaker has continued, then the rule-set a-c re-applies at the next transition
relevance place, and recursively at each next transition-relevance place, until
transfer is effected (1974:704).
In summary, if turn one has been constructed in such a way as to invoke the ‘current speaker selects next technique’ then only the selected party has the right to speak and in fact they are obliged to do so. If this technique has not been invoked then self-selection may be instituted and first starter wins the right to speak. If another speaker does not self-select then current speaker may continue thus re-evoking the rule set from the beginning again.

The turn-constructional component is typically the first pair part of what Sacks and Schegloff (1973:295) termed an ‘adjacency pair’ defined as consisting of sequences which have three main features (i) two utterance length, (ii) adjacent positioning of component utterances, (iii) different speakers producing each utterance. Puchta and Potter (2004:12-13) endorse the original conceptualisation of the ‘adjacency pair’ as a fundamental component of focus group interaction that serves to bind conversation together. They argue that talk is about things but it also does things and these doings or actions typically come in adjacency pairs where each part is in a turn of talk contributed to by a different speaker. Examples of paired actions include greeting/greeting, invitation/acceptance and question/answer all of which involve close collaboration between speakers. Once the first part of an adjacency pair is produced, there is a strong orientation on the part of the second speaker to provide the appropriate second part of the pair. This provides powerful machinery for the focus group moderator tasked with generating question-answer based discussion; ‘Although uttering the first part of an adjacency pair does not determine what comes next, it does set up a situation where what comes next cannot fail to be related to it’ (Puchta and Potter, 2004:47).

While Puchta and Potter (2004) argue that asking questions and producing participation is a more complex business than the two-part adjacency pair structure might suggest, for example, they identify two distinctive questioning styles (elaborate and minimal) evident in focus group interaction, the basic structure of the adjacency pair holds true as a basic descriptor for adult-based focus group interaction. Thus, even if the question is elaborate and reworked and rephrased during its production or if it encompasses candidate answers in its formulation, it leads to an answer that is followed by a new or related elaborate or minimal question and thus resembles the Q-A-Q-A structure envisaged by Sacks et al. (1974). Elaborate questions serve to counter the authority and knowledge differentials seen in medical consultations or classrooms and thus are designed to render focus group participants ‘experts’ in their own beliefs and feelings vis-a-vis the moderator (2004:64).
The extent to which this holds true for the children's focus groups examined here is addressed by analysing a number of structural components of the recorded focus group discussions including firstly turn-taking distribution patterns. The adult-children composition of these groups rendered consideration of previous theorisation of the structure of adult-child multi-party interaction pertinent and classroom studies proved highly salient in devising an appropriate analytical framework for this part of the study. Mehan (1985:121) analysed the internal structure of classroom lessons and found that academic information was not exchanged through simple adjacency pairs but rather through three-part interactional units he called 'elicitation sequences'; each sequence comprised an initiation act, a reply act and an evaluation act. Mehan conceptualises this unit as two adjacency pairs in Sacks et al.'s (1974) terms, whereby initiation-reply constitutes the first adjacency pair and when completed this pair itself becomes the first part of the second adjacency pair, the second part of which is an evaluative comment on the completion of the initiation-reply pair. This three-part alternative structure to Sacks et al's (1974) 'adjacency pair' formulation has particular relevance for the examination of children's focus groups and is returned to below in the next sub-section.

In order to examine the turn-taking system evident in the focus group talk produced here, the total data-set (fifteen groups) was transcribed in line with CA conventions using the Jeffersonian system (see Appendix D). An initial examination of the turn-taking system focussed on turn distribution across each of the focus groups (see Table 4.2). While each of the focus groups varied in terms of overall duration, a simple breakdown of turn distribution reveals a very clear distinction between the numbers of turns taken by the moderator vis-a-vis the numbers of turns taken by the participants. The moderator produced the greatest number of turns in each group conducted; an average of 42% of the total turns produced per group. There is a degree of equality in terms of the 'on average' turn distribution across child participants at 14%. The fairly even distribution of turns across participants suggests that a key aspect of the moderator's role centres on allocating opportunities to speak, to participants on a turn by turn basis and that the participants are waiting their turn to speak and are therefore playing a more passive role in the interaction. However, the existence of outliers (those participants taking a proportionately greater number of turns) suggests there is room for some children to

33 Transcription was in practice an ongoing process as passages of talk deemed salient to the various analytical foci of this project underwent many iterations of transcription in an effort to convey in as much detail as possible the content and delivery style of the talk produced.
manipulate the turn by turn framework and thus avail of an opportunity for a greater amount of interactional space.

Special turn-taking procedures are evident where the actions which we perform and the order in which we do things contain some predictability or are known in advance (Heritage, 2004). The on average *unequal* distribution of turns between the moderator and each of the participants coupled with the on average *equal* distribution of turns amongst the participants themselves suggests that the turn-taking distribution system evidenced has a distinctive and predictable shape and is therefore ‘special’. It thus supports the argument that focus group talk is an institutionalised form of interaction. The next sub-section probes this ‘institutionality’ further as the focus group fingerprint is examined further to address the question of how the moderator and participant roles are defined through interactional sequences.

### 4.2.2 Interactive Framework

The remainder of this chapter examines a subset of three focus groups selected from the original fifteen. This is in line with the numbers of transcripts examined by other researchers exploring IRF (initiation-response-follow-up) patterns, for example, Dombey (2003) examined the transcripts from three ‘Big Book’ lessons conducted with five and six year olds in an English classroom. The question as to how the interactional sequences evident in focus group talk are shaped is addressed and a coding scheme is developed to aid in this endeavour. The three groups comprise a data set of 2131 moves. The reason there are more moves than turns is that occasionally turns accomplish multiple moves and each one is recorded separately. The three groups selected for close analysis here are Green Acres #1, The Marshes #1 and The Ferns #2. I have no reason to believe that selecting any other three groups would have given largely different distribution patterns as it is clear that turn-taking distribution was similar across the fifteen groups. Schegloff (2007:3) argues that sequences of turns ‘are not haphazard but have a shape or structure and can be tracked for where they came from, what is being done through them and where they might be going’. In the same vein, Heritage (2004:230) posits that it is by means of specific actions that are organised in sequences that ‘participants initiate, develop and conclude the business they have together, and generally manage their

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34 Two of the three groups (Green Acres and The Marshes) were conducted in private Montessori school settings and one of these was a single gender group comprising boys (Green Acres). The other group (The Ferns) was conducted in a community preschool setting.
encounters'. In analysing sequences closely it is possible to observe how 'action opportunities are opened up and activated, or withheld from and occluded'.

Much conversation analytic work examining turn-taking in different contexts has focussed on Sacks and Schegloff's (1973) 'adjacency pair' structure as the foundation of interactive sequences discussed above. An initial examination of the turn by turn interaction comprising the interactive sequences identified in the focus group transcripts produced for this study did not reveal an A-B-A-B adjacency pair structure, however, instead revealing a three part structure A-B-A – A-B-A at the most basic level. This three-part structure corresponds to that found in previous discourse analytic work on classroom talk-in-interaction specifically the IRF (Initiation-Response-Feedback/Follow-up) three-part sequence conceptualised by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) and later in IRE (Initiation-Reply-Evaluation) terms by Mehan (1985). There are obvious parallels between the focus group and classroom settings; firstly both comprise adult – child dialogue, secondly they both involve multi-party interaction and thirdly as in the case of this study children's focus groups are often held in educational settings including classrooms. Previous research has explored the interactional possibilities available for children within the classroom and the IRF framework has received acknowledgement, critique and development from researchers studying classroom interaction (Cullen, 1998; Dombey, 2003; McHoul 1978; Mehan, 1985; Sunderland, 2001).

The IRF framework provided an excellent starting point for the development of a set of rules and a coding scheme that would aid more detailed examination of the turn distribution patterns found in the focus group transcripts analysed here. The aim is to provide a top level description of the action each turn of talk is designed to perform, that is, each turn is essentially labelled as performing an initiation, a response or a follow-up action. The process was iterative and thus time-consuming as each iteration of the coding scheme was applied to one of the three transcripts in an ongoing effort to increasingly tighten the scheme. Once developed the framework was employed to code every turn of interaction across the three groups selected for close analysis.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>1%</th>
<th>2%</th>
<th>3%</th>
<th>4%</th>
<th>5%</th>
<th>6%</th>
<th>7%</th>
<th>8%</th>
<th>9%</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speaker 1</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker 2</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker 3</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker 4</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker 5</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker 6</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2: Distribution of lines across moderator and child participants.

Note: The table above shows the percentage of lines attributed to each speaker across different percentage ranges. The total lines contributed by each speaker is indicated at the bottom of the table.
In line with CA conventions and previous IRF coding conventions, each turn was not examined in isolation but rather as part of an ongoing interactive sequence. In practice this means reading what comes immediately before and immediately after each turn while coding. The original model (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975) classified each move as either an *Initiation*, a *Response*, a *Follow-up* or a *Continue* and distinguished between teacher initiated moves and pupil initiated moves. Sinclair and Coulthard (1975:40) categorised initiation moves as (i) elicitation (E) (ii) inform (I) (iii) direct (D) (teacher only) and (iv) check (see Appendix F for Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) original formulation). They further categorised each IRF move into what they termed acts, however, over time the two terms have been used interchangeably. Mehan (1985) for example describes the IRF framework in terms of initiation, response and evaluative acts not moves. Sunderland (2001) uses the ‘move’ term and does not refer to ‘acts’. For the purposes of my research the term ‘move’ is utilised and it includes both verbal and gestural (nods or head shakes) contributions to the interaction.

The IRF framework developed for this study categorises every move as either a first-part initiation move (I), a second-part response move (R) or a third/final-part follow-up move (F). Initiation moves are broken down into four possible types (i) elicit (designed to obtain a verbal response), (ii) inform (the passing of information verbally, a response is not always expected), (iii) direct (a request to do something – a verbal response is not always expected) and (iv) perform (the spontaneous performance of a song or a jingle to evoke a response from other group members). Initiation moves are coded using ‘I’ (initiation) followed by the symbol denoting the subtype, for example, ‘I(i)’ represents a basic inform move and ‘I(d)’ represents a basic direct move. The elicitations are categorised further into types of questions, for example, ‘I(oq)’ represents an elicitation that initiated a sequence through an opinion question. A pre-initiation move is also identified. Response moves are categorised as belonging to one of two sub-categories (i) discursive, (ii) non-discursive. Follow-up moves are categorised as (i) non-discursive or (ii) ‘last word’.

In addition to these three main categories and in line with Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) an additional move known as a ‘bound initiation’ (Ib) is also identified and broken down

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35 Sinclair & Coulthard (1975:46) used the term pre-head but later authors including Sunderland (2001) use the term pre-initiation to refer to a move which immediately precedes an initiation and which works to alert the available respondents that an initiation is forthcoming.
into a number of sub-types. A bound initiation serves to generate a new exchange within the broader exchange sequence. Bound initiations are coded as either moderator produced (M) or child produced (C). The resulting sub-exchange is similar to Schegloff’s (1972) insertion sequence. It contains some innovation but it is tied to the pre-existing topic.

Finally, a number of moves are labelled as extra-exchange moves and these comprise (i) attempt moves (ii) asides and (iii) unknowns. The coding scheme is included in Table 4.3 below and the coding guidelines are presented in Figure 4.3 below. The reason these are presented in text rather than as appendices is because they evolved from a first level analysis of the data produced for this project.
Table 4.3 Coding Scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exchange Part</th>
<th>Move Category</th>
<th>Move Type</th>
<th>Sub-Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Symbol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st Part</td>
<td>Initiation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A set of moves which serve to initiate an exchange. They are categorised as</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(i) Elicit (ii) Inform and (iii) Direct Moves. In addition pre-initiation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>moves are also categorised here.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Initiation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Precedes initiation</td>
<td>Produced prior to initiation to gain attention</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elicit</td>
<td></td>
<td>Display Question</td>
<td></td>
<td>A move which sees a question posed the answer to which the questioner</td>
<td>dq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>already knows but the purpose of which is to allow respondent to display</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referential Question</td>
<td>A move which sees a question posed the answer to which the questioner does not already know – its purpose is communicative</td>
<td>rq</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion Question</td>
<td>A move in which the questioner seeks out the opinion(s) of the respondent(s)</td>
<td>oq</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inform</td>
<td></td>
<td>Basic Inform</td>
<td></td>
<td>The passing on of information often a response is not expected</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bid</td>
<td></td>
<td>Produced prior to initiation to gain permission to take the floor or during</td>
<td>bid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>an exchange to gain attention</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A request which initiates an exchange which sees the moderator request the</td>
<td>d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>child(ren) to do/ not do something and following which a verbal response is</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>not always expected</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perform</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A move which is delivered through song or dramatic gesture and voice which</td>
<td>p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>serves to initiate an exchange</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Part</td>
<td>Response</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discursive</strong></td>
<td>Elaborate</td>
<td>An extended response to an initiation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Permissive</td>
<td>A response following a bid or pre-initiation which invites prior speaker to speak again</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Solicit</td>
<td>A response which seeks elaboration on the previous utterance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clarification</td>
<td>An on-topic move which aims to clarify confusion in prior utterance(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Discursive</strong></td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>A minimal response to an initiation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Verbal</td>
<td>A gesture (head or hand movement or sharp breath)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Confirmation</td>
<td>An on-topic moves which serves to confirm that stated previously</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group Response</td>
<td>Where a number of speakers respond in unison</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acknowledgement</td>
<td>A non evaluative utterance or non verbal gesture which confirms hearing but does not invite expansion on previous move</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Repeat</td>
<td>A repeat confirms (downward intonation) or seeks to confirm (upward intonation) hearing of previous utterance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>A move which uses statements and tag questions such as ‘good’ ‘interesting’ which comments on the quality of the reply or initiation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exclamation</td>
<td>A reactive move to the prior utterance e.g. ‘oh my goodness’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3rd/Final Part</strong></td>
<td><strong>Follow-Up (F)</strong></td>
<td>A move which sees the speaker close an exchange in one or more moves. It can take the same form as the non-discursive moves above or it can take the form of a last word.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Last Word</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>An on-topic move which comes after a follow up &amp; usually precedes a new initiation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Mid-Exchange</strong></th>
<th><strong>Counter Response</strong></th>
<th>A move which follows a response and does not serve to close an interactive sequence in which case it would be coded as a follow-up. It takes the same form as any of the response moves listed above.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bound Initiation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>A move which sees the speaker initiate within an ongoing exchange. It takes the same form as any of the initiations listed above or take the form of a bid, reformulation, clue, prompt or nomination and is coded accordingly. In the transcript bound initiations are differentiated as performed by either the moderator IbM or the child participant IbC.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Bid</strong></th>
<th>An on-topic or off-topic move by a speaker which interrupts or disrupts the flow between primary speakers in an exchange.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reformulation</strong></td>
<td>A move in which the speaker re-initiates that previously initiated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clue</strong></td>
<td>A move which reinforces an elicitation through provision of clues to the appropriate response.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prompt</strong></td>
<td>A move which reinforces a directive or elicitation by suggesting a demanded response.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nomination</strong></td>
<td>A moves which reinitiates a directive or elicitation by nominating a specific speaker to respond.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Continue</strong></th>
<th>A continuation of a prior move which has been interrupted.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outside Exchange</strong></td>
<td><strong>Attempt</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aside</strong></td>
<td>A move which takes place outside the current exchange- covers items difficult to deal with including thinking aloud and humming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unknown</strong></td>
<td>Where a turn is missing due to a transcription difficulty.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4.3 Coding Guidelines

First Part Exchange Moves
1) An IRF exchange sequence is initiated by the production of an Initiation move type; (i) elicit (ii) inform (iii) direct (iv) perform, by the moderator or child participant.
2) Initiation moves that fail to win a response are coded Attempt.
3) The pre-initiation move type is produced to gain attention prior to an initiation on some occasions.

Second Part Exchange Moves
4) The second move in an IRF exchange involves the production of a Response move type; (i) discursive (ii) non-discursive
   a) Where a non-discursive move is produced in the second part of an exchange the most likely next possible move is initiation of a new exchange, however, counter responses and bound initiations serve to extend the sequence until another non-discursive move (either 2nd place 'R' or 3rd place 'F') is produced.

Mid-Exchange Moves
5) The code 'continue' signals the continuation of a prior move that has been interrupted
6) Counter Responses (cR) follow second place responses and serve to keep the interactional sequence open.
7) Bound Initiations are produced within an ongoing exchange. Typical examples include a bid for the floor or an invitation from one interlocutor to another to contribute to the ongoing discussion.

Third/Final Part Exchange Moves
8) An IRF exchange is closed by the production of a non-discursive Follow-up move.
   a) Where a Follow-up move is produced in the third or later part of an exchange the only next possible move is initiation of a new exchange.
   b) The last word move type is produced immediately after a non-discursive move on some occasions.

New Exchanges: A new exchange sequence is identified as such
   a) When a previous one has been closed through the production of a non-discursive move in either the second (R) or subsequent part (F) of an exchange.
And/Or
   b) When a new topic or new angle on an existing topic is introduced through an initiation move. Continuers including 'but', ‘well’, ‘and’ are often used at the beginning of a new initiation or pre-initiation.
And/Or
   c) When following a break in conversation as signalled by a significant pause one interlocutor invites another to contribute to the ongoing discussion in such a way as to render their response the new focus of discussion.
Each transcript was coded using the scheme and rules outlined above and close examination of the coded transcripts revealed two types of IRF sequence. A 'basic IRF sequence' characterised by the typical three-part structure, that is, the sequence is bound front and back by an initiation move and a follow-up move with a response move sandwiched between (see Figure 4.4 below and Extract 4.1) is evident but not predominant.

**Figure 4.4 Basic Three-Part IRF Model**

![Basic Three-Part IRF Model](image)

**Extract 4.1 Basic IRF Sequence**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I(rq) 9.2</td>
<td>Moderator: Em: and this is Vicky and Vicky's making a film (.) has anybody ever been on a film before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(er) 10</td>
<td>Josh: Yes I know all about movies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F(ev) 11</td>
<td>Moderator: You know about movies! Do you you're gonna be a great help</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An 'extended IRF sequence', which is also bound front and back by an initiation move and a follow-up move but contains at least two responses, or at least one bound initiation and one response sandwiched between (see Figure 4.5 below and Extract 4.2) is the predominant interactional structure comprising the focus group discussion. Psathas (1992:100) described extended sequences as being more than four turns long in general

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36 Coding was originally carried out in Microsoft word, the transcripts were then transferred into excel files and from there they were exported to a database. I used the open source software programme MySQL ([www.mysql.com](http://www.mysql.com)) to create a relational database of the subset of data selected for close analysis for this layer of analytical inquiry. I utilised the ‘TOAD’ interface developed by Quest software ([www.quest.com](http://www.quest.com)) to run structured queries across this database. This allowed me to focus in on interactive sequences in an efficient manner.

37 The detail evident here can be read as follows; this sequence was initiated by the moderator with a referential question (l(rq)). One participant Josh provided an elaborate response (R(er)) and this was followed by an evaluative follow-up (F(ev)) move produced again by the moderator.
and as relating to some type of social activity. Mehan (1985:122) also discussed extended sequences in the classroom context which he identified as occurring where students provided partial or incorrect replies or where interruptions or distractions interrupted the sequential flow. Mehan argued that in these cases the completion of the extended sequence is marked in the same way as three-part sequences through the production of an evaluative move by the teacher.

Figure 4.5 Extended IRF Model

Extract 4.2 - Extended IRF Sequence

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I(dq)</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>Moderator: Okay and this one anybody know what it is? (4.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(er)</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>Harry: Em I don't know what that one is nobody [else has it]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IbC(bid)</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>Ruth: [Nancy has it]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(rep)</td>
<td>152.1</td>
<td>Moderator: Nancy has it (.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IbM(d)</td>
<td>152.2</td>
<td>Moderator: Nancy you put down a token</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(nvr)</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>Nancy: ((Places a token down))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F(ev)</td>
<td>154.1</td>
<td>Moderator: Well done</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The detail evident here can be read as follows; this sequence of the transcript was initiated by the moderator. This initiation move (I) took the form of a display question (I(dq)) and received an elaborate response (R(er)) from Harry. Ruth in overlap with Harry produces a bound initiation in the form of a bid for the floor (IbC(bid)) and her bid is repeated by the moderator (R(rep)) who then produces a bound initiation herself which takes the form of a directive (IbM(d)) towards Nancy to place a token down on her ‘match and win’ game card. Nancy responds non-verbally by placing a token down (R(nvr)) and the sequence is completed by the production of an evaluative follow-up move (F(ev)) by the moderator.
A smaller number of non-IRF shaped sequences\textsuperscript{39} were also observed. These were two-part exchanges or longer interactive sequences completed without the production of an F (follow-up) move (see Figure 4.6 for a breakdown of sequences by shape).

**Figure 4.6 Breakdown of focus group by sequence type**

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure46.png}
\caption{Breakdown of focus group by sequence type.}
\end{figure}

In classroom interaction the ‘I’ and the ‘F’ moves were typically produced by the teacher. The following subsections will provide a closer examination of the component moves that comprise the interactive sequences in order to explore the questions of how and by whom the IRF structure is being produced in the focus group context analysed here along with the interactional (im)possibilities evident within this space.

**Initiation Moves**

In furthering the exploration of sequence organisation and ultimately the interactive possibilities within them, I will now address the area of initiation patterns. Heritage (2004:237) argues that institutional representatives often ask questions that lay participants are required to answer. They therefore secure the initiative and control over when a topic is concluded, what the next topic will be and how the new topic will be shaped. They can thus direct conversation in ways not found in ordinary conversation. It is important to note that the analytical discussion that follows compares moderator (of which there was just one) with child participant (of which there were at least three in

\textsuperscript{39} Some sequences characterised by the ‘non IRF’ structure are simply two-part exchanges (IR), others comprise longer successions of IR moves that do not get closed off with a clear follow-up.
each group). I am thus comparing moderator initiations against any incidence of child produced activity. To compare moderator interaction against each individual child participant would not have been viable either statistically or practically. Essentially, the focus of this part of the research is on what is possible for any child participant vis-a-vis the moderator in interactional terms in the focus groups that took place for this study. It is not surprising that the moderator is responsible for the majority of initiating moves but there is also evidence of the possibility for children to initiate and this is especially apparent in two groups; Green Acres #1 and The Ferns #2 (see Figure 4.7) where approximately 30% of the sequences were initiated by child participants. This contrasts with Mehan’s (1985:126) school-based findings whereby the adult member, that is, the teacher has sole responsibility for the allocation of turns and the inviting of bids for the floor as well as the setting up of ‘recyclable and automatic turn-allocation procedures’. However, it shares similarities with Dombey’s (2003:55) school-based findings which as well as finding evidence of teacher controlled turn allocation, she also discovered occasions during which the children were invited and encouraged to take an initiatory role.

Figure 4.7 Numbers of sequences initiated by moderator and by child participants

![Figure 4.7](image)

This finding suggests that the focus groups conducted here were discursive spaces in which at least some children had the room and possibility to initiate sequences of interaction. A closer examination of initiation styles sheds some light on how the children accomplished this. Each initiation produced was coded as either an *elicitation*, a *directive*, an *inform* move or a *perform* move as described above. Figure 4.8 provides a breakdown of the numbers and types of initiation moves produced by the moderator and child participants.

---

40 It is important to note that while the numbers of initiations produced by child participants appears substantial particularly in ‘The Ferns #2’, where children initiated 21 sequences, this figure is a
When initiation types are compared, it is evident that the moderator produces elicitations and directives in broadly equal proportions. Thus, when the moderator initiates a new sequence, it is designed to either direct the children to do something or to open the floor by posing a question (see Extracts 4.3 and 4.4 for examples of initiations beginning with direct and elicit moves respectively).

**Extract 4.3  Moderator Initiated Sequence (Direct Move)**

\[
\begin{align*}
I(d) & \\
433.2 & \text{Moderator: And now we're back to Harry for another } \\
& \text{turn (2.0)} \\
R(rr) & \\
434 & \text{Harry: I'm gonna get this (2.0)((chooses a } \\
& \text{sticker))} \\
F(ack) & \\
435 & \text{Moderator: Okay pop it [down ]} \\
F(lw) & \\
436 & \text{Harry: [Woohoo]}
\end{align*}
\]

**Extract 4.4  Moderator Initiated Sequence (Elicit Move)**

\[
\begin{align*}
I(dq) & \\
91.2 & \text{Moderator: Are you ready then? } \text{I'm gonna start with } \\
& \text{An easy (.) easy one right REA::DY!((hold} \\
& \text{up card))} \\
R(rr) & \\
92 & \text{Nigel: } \text{> Tho:ma:s<} \\
R(rr) & \\
93 & \text{Robert: Me [I do I do ]} \\
R(ev) & \\
94 & \text{Moderator: [Very go::od]} \\
\text{Cont.} & \\
95 & \text{Nigel: Me me me}
\end{align*}
\]

This is typical of the three-part IRF structure. While it is clear that the moderator provides the follow-up closing move in line 435, Harry overlaps with his ‘woohoo’ utterance which is coded as a parallel follow-up move of the last word (lw) variety.
Children rarely produce elicitations or directives when initiating a new sequence. In contrast to moderator produced initiations the vast majority of child produced initiations are designed to state or announce something, that is, children initiate new sequences through inform moves which trigger a response move from another member of the focus group often the moderator (see Extract 4.5 for an example of a cluster of child initiated sequences each beginning with an inform move). So while children do occasionally produce a move in the first part space of an interactive exchange sequence they use that space in a different way to that of the moderator.

Extract 4.5 Cluster of Child Initiated Sequences (Inform Move)42

| Pre-init | 12 | Claire: | .hhhhh |
| R(per)   | 13 | Moderator: | and (.) yeah ((to Claire)) |
| I(i)     | 14 | Claire: | I have a Cinderella |
| R(rep)   | 15 | Moderator: | You have a Cinderella |
| R(conf)  | 16 | Claire: | Yeah DVD |
| F(ack)   | 17 | Moderator: | Wow |

| I(i)     | 18 | Millie: | °I have a doll° |
| Aside    | 19 | Josh: | ((pointing to his chest)) |
| R(ack)   | 20 | Moderator: | °You have a doll of a Cinderella° do ;you |
| F(ack)   | 21 | Millie: | ((nod)) °yeah° |

| I(i)     | 22 | Josh: | I I I've a Scooby Doo DVD |
| R(ack)   | 23 | Moderator: | Very good ; .hhhh [ ( ) ] |
| InC(bid) | 24 | Claire: | [I have] a Scooby Doo DVD but I lost it somewhere |
| InC(bid) | 25 | Millie: | I have ( ) |

42 The first sequence begins at line 12 where Claire produces a deliberate intake of breath. The moderator responds with a permissive response move which acknowledges Claire’s wish to initiate which she then does through an inform move in line 14. Millie and Josh follow her lead with two initiations of their own (lines 18 and 22).
The distribution of child initiated sequences vis-a-vis moderator initiated ones is displayed in the keyword map\textsuperscript{43} below (see Figure 4.9). Here, child initiated and moderator initiated sequences are represented across six different colour coded bars where each individual coloured block represents one sequence of talk-in-interaction. It is evident from this map that where child initiated sequences arise they tend to emerge in clusters similar to the one depicted in Extract 4.5 above and that this is a phenomenon that recurs across the three groups examined here. This finding is similar to the clustering of narratives found by Kuntay and Senay (2003) in their study of naturalistically collected talk of Turkish preschool children. They argued that the child participants attempted to ‘top other children’s stories by offering their own accounts of thematically related personal experiences in narrativized form’ (p.564) and that they conceived of the teacher as a mutual audience.

Another illustration of this clustering is displayed in the second set of maps (see Figure 4.10). Here, child initiated sequences are mapped across the mini-cultural routines comprising the larger focus group routine. The types of initiations produced include a mixture of elicitations, inform moves and the very rare performative move and when compared with the solid coloured bars below depicting all sequences produced across the focus group, it is clear that while child produced initiations are scattered across the various phases of the focus group when they do appear, they tend to be clustered.

Finally, a very distinctive pattern emerges with regard to moderator initiations across the six mini routines comprising the focus group as displayed in the third set of maps (see Figure 4.11). Here the first three coloured bars depict the type of moderator initiated sequences produced including elicitations, informs and directives and these are mapped

\textsuperscript{43} The keyword map is a function offered by Transana. The first step in creating a keyword map involves the coding of selected extracts of the transcribed interaction using keywords. The keyword map presents a visual display of where keywords have been assigned to data extracts or ‘clips’ created from selected episodes. Each coloured band in the keyword map shows the start and end points of a clip, along the horizontal timeline of the episode, where a particular keyword, along the vertical axis, has been applied. Each clip corresponds to one full sequence of interaction. Bands of the same colour with the same starting and ending points appearing in parallel indicate a single clip that has been assigned multiple keywords. A tri-colour band indicates where multiple clips have been coded with the same keyword at the same time period.
across the phases of the focus group during which they were produced. The keyword maps here reveal that the sequence exchanges produced during the first three mini routines of focus group activity are predominantly characterised by elicitations and the second three mini routines are predominantly initiated through directives. When mapped this results in a recurring shape resembling a tuning fork across the three groups. This finding is intuitive given the style of activities taking place across the focus group, for example, the fifth routine involves a show and tell activity so it makes sense that the moderator is directive in co-ordinating each child to present their collages to the rest of the group. The extent to which this particular finding impinges on the discursive possibilities for children across the various phases can only be addressed by looking closely at the other moves that make up the sequences including response moves, follow-up moves and bound initiations. It is to these categories that I now turn beginning with the bound initiation.

Bound Initiations

Bound initiations are defined by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975: 50) as re-initiations (prompts, clues, nominations) on the part of a teacher following a non-response on the part of the child to a first initiation. I am using the term here to describe moves that initiate new exchanges within ongoing interactive exchanges (for examples see lines 24, 25 and 26 in Extract 4.5 above). An examination of bound initiations is directed by the question as to what extent is it possible for children to initiate from within interactive sequences in the focus group context? When these are examined a different pattern emerges to the one described above. A count of bound initiations produced across the dataset reveal that children are in fact producing a greater number of bound initiations than the moderator (see Figure 4.12).
While cognisant of the fact that these figures represent one moderator compared with the combined contributions of four children per group, the possibilities for children to initiate sequences from within ongoing exchanges are clear. It is also possible to conclude that children are more likely to engage in new initiations from within ongoing exchanges than from outside them. While it is outside the scope of this layer of analysis to examine the content of each and every utterance produced across the focus groups, a cursory glance at child produced bound initiations, reveals a predominance of the use of first person pronouns as a mechanism with which to bid for the floor (‘I have’, ‘I like’, ‘I love’, ‘I don’t like’, ‘I know’, ‘I got’) along with but to a lesser extent the use of third person pronouns (‘you have’ and ‘we have’).

**Figure 4.12** Numbers of sequences containing bound initiations by moderator and by child participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bound Initiation (Child Participant)</th>
<th>Bound Initiation (Moderator)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Green Acres #1</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Marshes #1</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ferns #2</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bound initiation moves are coded in the same way as initiations (elicitations, directives, inform moves and perform moves) and can also be coded as either bids, reformulations, clues, prompts or nominations as explicated in the coding scheme (see Table 4.3 above). It has been shown above that the most common style of initiation by child participants is the inform move. An examination of bound initiation moves produced by children reveals that most bound initiations are designed to ‘bid’, for the floor. They are on-topic or off-topic moves which interrupt or at times disrupt the flow between primary speakers in an exchange. Bid type moves account for 93% of the total number of bound initiations produced by child participants (see Figure 4.13).
The moderator utilises a bigger variety of moves in producing bound initiations (see Figure 4.14). Direct moves and moves that are designed to nominate specific children to respond are predominant and this finding is indicative of the moderator taking a managerial or 'teacherly' role within the interaction. Questions that request the children to display an opinion or to display knowledge were also evident along with moves designed to prompt or provide clues to children in the course of interaction. Overall the variety of bound initiations produced by the moderator demonstrates the extent to which the moderator works within extended sequences to keep the floor open and to encourage interaction from the child participants. The second part of the IRF sequence (basic or extended) is the response part. Response moves follow first part initiations and bound initiations. The next section progresses the discussion of interactional (im)possibilities for focus group participants by addressing these moves.
**Response Moves**

Responses (including counter-responses) are broadly grouped into two descriptive categories (i) discursive and (ii) non-discursive. Children are most often placed in the responding position in both basic and extended IRF exchange sequences and the majority of responses children produce are of the non-discursive variety with just over half of all responses coded as minimal responses (see Figures 4.15 and 4.16 and Extract 4.6).

**Figure 4.15  Breakdowns of Response Moves Across Moderator and Child Participant**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Child Participant</th>
<th>Moderator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discursive</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Discursive</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>599</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 4.16  Breakdowns of Child Participant Response Types**

- Minimal: 53%
- Elaborate Response: 25%
- Non-verbal Response: 13%
- Repeat: 2%
- Group Response: 1%
- Exclamation: 1%
- Confirmation: 1%
- Acknowledgement: 2%

---

44 See table 4.3 for a full description of response moves
Extract 4.6  Non-discursive Response Moves

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I(oq)</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>Moderator: And what (.) do you like Thomas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→</td>
<td>R(min)</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TbM(nom)</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>Moderator: Do you like him ↑ Ruth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→</td>
<td>R(min)</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F(ack)</td>
<td>149.1</td>
<td>Moderator: ↑Yeah ((nods))</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conversely the moderator produces a mixture of discursive responses which include solicits for elaboration from the children (31% of moderator responses) and non-discursive responses which provide acknowledgements that the child’s response has been heard (41% of moderator responses) (see Figure 4.17).

Figure 4.17  Breakdowns of Moderator Response Types

Follow-up Moves

The final component of the three part IRF structure, that is, the follow-up move is now addressed in advance of a summary discussion on the IRF structured sequences

45 The minimal moves are produced by Harry and Ruth (lines 146 and 148)
comprising focus group talk. Follow-up moves take a number of forms as detailed above in Table 4.3. These include acknowledgements, a repeat of the previous utterance, evaluations and exclamations. There is an expected contrast in the proportionate production of this move which closes a sequence with the moderator producing 85% of all follow-up moves and child participants producing only 15% of follow-up moves (see Figure 4.18).

Figure 4.18  Follow-up Move Types

![Figure 4.18 Follow-up Move Types](image)

The vast majority of child produced follow-up moves occur in parallel with the moderators closing moves resulting in a double ‘F’ at the end of an exchange. They are usually designed to confirm or accept the moderator’s acknowledgement or evaluation which in turn is usually designed to close one sequence in advance of a new moderator-initiated sequence.

The final sub-section addressing turn-taking and the interactive framework consolidates the analytical findings detailed above and in doing so begins to build a picture of the specific contours comprising the focus group fingerprint.

4.2.3 Summary Discussion

At this stage an example and account of an extended IRF sequence (see Extract 4.7) is provided to illustrate more fully and allow for the provision of some summary remarks with respect to the ongoing examination of the interactive framework evident in the focus groups conducted for this study.
Extract 4.7 – “I don’t drink Coke”

The sequence of interaction depicted above follows the presentation of the coca-cola logo as a stimulus object during the match and win activity. The full on-topic sequence
lasted forty seconds. I was the moderator of this group but given that the focus of this chapter is on moderator-child interaction I refer to ‘the moderator’ for the purposes of discussion throughout the rest of this chapter. The talk that ensues demonstrates that the three year olds participating, immediately recognise this global brand and demonstrate this familiarity through the production of monosyllabic responses (lines 195, 197 and 198). The moderator produces a bound initiation in the form of an opinion question (line 199.2) designed to promote discussion. A preference game follows as the participants state their likes, dislikes and consumption habits in relation to the product. Robert produces a bid for attention (bound initiation) (line 201) when he states that he does not drink coke and on further probing from the moderator this time using a referential question (bound initiation) (line 207.2) “what do you like?”, Robert again produces a minimal response stating “water” (line 209). The sequence might have ended here with the moderators evaluative “very good” but this move is coded as a response (R(ev)) and not a follow-up closing type move because the sequence continues on topic when Nigel and Stephen both initiate through bids for the floor with their stated preference for coke (lines 211 and 212). Stephen is acknowledged by the moderator (line 213) at which point Robert enters back into the discussion providing an Irish translation for water, that is, “uisce” (pronounced ishca) (line 214). This receives an exclamatory response from the moderator (215 and 217), a repeated response from Colm (line 218) and finally an evaluative follow-up move from the moderator when she confirms the translation is correct “Water is uisce that’s right” (line 219.2) This time the evaluation closes that particular topic and sequence and it is followed immediately by a pre-initiation into the next sequence by the moderator “Okay ready for the next one” (line 219.2).

This work has conceptualised children’s focus groups as comprising mini cultural routines (six in this study) distinguishable by task and by turn design. The IRF coding scheme has proved useful in providing a description of how a sequence of interaction unfolds turn by turn and how those turns can be labelled in relation to each other particularly in terms of initiations (including bound initiations) and responses. When the focus group is examined as a whole, it becomes apparent that the majority of the sequences of interaction comprising it have a distinct three-part IRF structure similar to that found in classroom interaction by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), Mehan (1985) and Sunderland (2001). The identification of the IRF sequence as characteristic of teacher initiated interaction with pupils has provoked questions among educationalists about the extent to which the classroom is a truly interactive environment the implication being
that if all classroom talk is characterised by teacher initiated IRF sequences then students speak a lot less than teachers and that they are all always in the respondent position, thus devoid of opportunities to ask questions or make independent contributions to classroom discussions (Mehan, 1985). Cullen (1998) and Sunderland (2001) tackle the ‘bad press’ that the IRF has received in the classroom context and point to the variations on the basic pattern found in the classroom and the usefulness of these types of exchanges. Cromdal et al. (2007:204) argue that there has been a ‘collaborative turn’ in education whereby classroom activities have been reorganised from ‘teacher-fronted lessons’ to student comprised ‘project-centred work’, the idea being that children will be active in their acquisition of knowledge rather than passive recipients of teachers ‘lectures’. They posit that ‘in theory’ the role of the teacher is a resource rather than a party to which the group is responsible for its actions. While Cromdal et al. (2007) do not explicitly engage with literature on the IRF framework, their arguments suggest variations on the teacher-controlled turn-taking mechanism exist in Swedish classrooms. This variation is also evident in English primary school classrooms as argued by Dombey (2003).

The basic three part sequence is very rare in the data analysed here, and the extended sequences identified appear to promote a high degree of interaction even if it is not always successfully achieved. Extended interactive sequences such as the one depicted above (Extract 4.7) demonstrate an elasticity that is stretched by both the moderator and the participants as speakers compete for the floor and turns are both allocated by the moderator and self-selected by participants.

Heritage (2004) highlights ‘asymmetries of knowledge’ (what I know) and asymmetries in terms of ‘access to knowledge’ (what I am entitled to know) in institutional settings, the most obvious examples of these situations being those of doctor-patient encounters. To an extent this issue is almost inverted in the context of focus group work as the institution sets the participant up as ‘expert’ and the onus is on the participant to provide answers to the questions of the moderator as shown by Puchta and Potter (2004).

However, the relative turn distributions (moderator vis-à-vis child) discussed throughout this section suggest an asymmetrical relationship between the moderator and child membership in terms of floor and topic control. The moderator is the chief architect of the interactive structure as she takes most responsibility for opening and keeping open the floor through the production of initiations and bound initiations. A key part of her
role involves seeking out responses from participants. She also takes almost total responsibility for closing down sequences of interaction through follow-up moves. The moderator often combines a follow-up move with a pre-initiation and a new initiation and this serves to maintain the clear IRF structure as depicted in Extract 4.7 above.

The participant’s role revolves around responding to the moderator most often through the display of information pertaining to the consumer topic at hand, thus, even when the participant initiates a sequence this is achieved through an announcement of something (an inform) move. The role of the participant appears mainly to be that of informant and the moderator reinforces this role definition by acknowledging and often evaluating participant responses.

The results following an examination of the breakdown of turn distribution also suggests strongly that the moderator’s role involves turn allocation. There is an on average equal distribution of turns across focus groups. Evidence of this moderator controlled equitable turn-taking system goes some way to accounting for the low levels of initiation on the part of child participants as they can use the system as a resource and simply wait their turn instead of grappling for the floor. This thus serves to reinforce the IRF structure.

The recurring IRF structure and fairly high level of predictability in terms of the distribution of IRF moves and types across moderator and child participants suggest that focus group talk can be described as ‘institutional’ (Heritage, 2004). The moderator appears enabled in generating interaction (her main task) as she draws on a wide range of discursive devices across a number of phases of interaction. The participants are also enabled in their role as informants but appear somewhat hemmed into a moderator controlled interactive framework. They are thus constrained with regard to for example initiating new topics or concluding ongoing ones. The coding scheme which is based on the traditional IRF scheme devised by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) but modified for focus group talk reveals a range of interactional moves and thus interactional possibilities but while the moderator draws on a wide range of interactive devices, participants engage with a much narrower range of devices (mostly inform moves and bids for the floor). I think it is important to note that for the very young participants themselves the focus group was probably understood in school-based terms where the moderator role was akin to the teacher role, thus the rehearsed quality apparent was not based on recurring experience of focus group membership on the part of these children.
but rather based on the recurring experience of adult-led small group activities in the preschool environment. The children were not strangers to each other. In a way the institutional setting of the focus group mimicked the institutional setting of the preschool.

Heary and Hennessy (2002:51) argue that ‘most researchers conclude that focus groups are not suitable for very young children because they do not have the social or language skills to be effective participants in group discussions’. In their review of research material on focus groups with children and adolescents they found only four studies that utilised them for children younger than six years of age. The large number of interactive extended sequences coupled with the considerable numbers of child produced bound initiations evident in the analysis of the structure of focus group talk-in-interaction conducted for this study, challenges dominant thinking on ‘doing’ focus groups with very young children as reviewed by Heary and Hennessy (2002), and instead suggests that very young children are indeed capable of active participation in this setting. The quantification of turns taken and turn design reinforces this finding. However, the range of interactional devices used suggests some constraints are evident. This finding is reminiscent of Sacks (1986:342) premise that children have ‘restricted rights to talk’ with adults and it suggests further investigation into the content of the talk-in-interaction produced is necessary. The final section of this chapter works towards this end by utilising a qualitative lens to provide a discursive account of the interactional (im)possibilities of the focus group as an interactive space.

4.3 Exploring interactional (im)possibilities for moderator and participant in activity-based focus groups

A number of participants were characterised as ‘outliers’ because they produced an above or below average number of turns. Analytical attention is directed to these outliers in order to provide a coherent account of the whole of the interactions studied. Those that produced an above average number of turns deserve some further exploration as their turn-taking suggests that they are manipulating the IRF framework either through opening and closing sequences themselves through the production of initiation and follow-up moves (unusual for child participants) or through their activities within sequences. This section will provide a detailed discursive analysis of two data extracts that have been purposely selected to illustrate children’s negotiation of rights to the floor
in the focus group setting. Both are examples of extended IRF sequences as they are characterised by the three part shape but they demonstrate the malleability and stretchiness of that structure. Both extracts are taken from group four; Nancy represents a clear outlier in this group producing just 5% of all turns, Harry also represents an outlier on the other end of the spectrum producing 20% of all turns, while Chris and Ruth share an almost equal percentage of the floor\(^6\) (17% and 14% respectively).

Extract 4.8 is taken from the ‘openings’ routine. I have just introduced the research assistant and explained that she is going to film the focus group. Detailed analysis will follow the presentation of the extract\(^7\).

**Extract 4.8  “I have Finding Nemo”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clip Time: 90 seconds</th>
<th>Focus Group: The Marshes #1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I(i) 6.2 Moderator:</td>
<td>.hhh and this (\uparrow)is:: (2.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aside 7 Teacher:</td>
<td>((someone walks into the room ))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aside 8.1 Moderator:</td>
<td>ih- sorry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aside 8.1 Teacher:</td>
<td>Do you want me to pull up the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aside 8.1 Teacher:</td>
<td>blinds girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cont. 8.2 Moderator:</td>
<td>Eh no it's fine it's perfect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(rep) 9 Harry:</td>
<td>thanks a million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cont. 10.1 Moderator:</td>
<td>And this (\uparrow)Vicky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IbM(rq) 10.2 Moderator:</td>
<td>Vicky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(rr) 11 Harry:</td>
<td>An- that’s And Vicky is my helper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(nvr) 12 Ruth:</td>
<td>because she's going to make a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cR(conf) 13 Moderator:</td>
<td>video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cont. 14 Harry:</td>
<td>Have any of you ever been on a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cont. 15 Moderator:</td>
<td>video before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IbdC(i) 16 Harry:</td>
<td>[Yeah ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| R(excl) 17 Moderator: | [((nods))]
|                          | Have \(\uparrow\) [you] |
|                          | [me] |
|                          | =You \(\uparrow\)have ((to Harry)) |
| → IbdC(i) 16 Harry:    | I did(\(.\)) .hhh >I have |
| → R(excl) 17 Moderator: | Finding <Nemo> = |

\(^6\) It is essential to note that these figures refer to distributions of turns irrespective of the duration of any one turn. It is thus inconclusive regarding actual time on the floor but it is indicative of the overall breakdown of the total floor space.

\(^7\) Where quotations from the depicted extracts are included in the main text spellings are regularised and some transcription detail is occasionally removed for improved readability.
Cont. 18 Harry: = [And ] and this big fish needs to find Ne:mo .hhh and Neem and they can .hh and Nemo .hh and this .hh and this .hh guys in a boat (..)and this and Neem and the big fish .hh can't is not very fa:st (.) .hh and the boats going really fast than Nemo < when she's> <swimming in the wall> .hh but she can't jump out though (.) she can't jump any high over And does he find (.) [Nemo in the end ]

Moderator: [Yeah and] and this guy puts him into a bag .hhh and he puts him into his water bag and closes .hh and he can't get out of the water bag he can't open it 'cos there's no buttons so he can get iout

21 Moderator: And what happens in the ;end

Em:: (1.5) Em:: there's a big whale and .hh em the blue fish getted .hh em the blue fish getted the little fish out and .hh he was out of it and .hh and they got Nemo::

Harry produces an ‘inform’ move through a bound initiation in line 16. His initiation involves a number of re-starts “I did, I have seen, I have” but given the space he is successful in producing an initiation and winning a response from the moderator. The moderator produces a change of state token “Oh” (Heritage, 1984b) (line 17) which indicates surprise at Harry’s initiation. She has enquired as to who has been on a video before and Harry has responded by indicating his possession of a video – this “oh” legitimates this innovation however and allows him to proceed. Sacks (1986) argued that very young children have difficulties with starts or beginnings and need to have a good start if they are going to get further than that. Harry overcomes this difficulty through the

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48 Heritage (1984b) reported on the work accomplished by the particle “oh” in natural conversation and makes the argument that the “particle is used to propose that its producer has undergone some kind of change in his or her locally current state of knowledge, information, orientation or awareness.” (p.299)
use of the tying device. He ties his utterance that is his stated claim to ownership of ‘Finding Nemo’ to the question as to whether anyone has ever been on a video before. While the tie might be tenuous and Harry is not explicit in using the term ‘video’, his stated ownership of ‘Finding Nemo’ coupled with his account of the movie renders the movie–video link clearer.

The moderator facilitates Harry’s detailed account of a plotline from the Finding Nemo movie through a mini question – answer sequence within the exchange (lines 19-21). Harry does not provide the follow-up move in the course of this exchange, it is instead provided by the moderator (line 23.1) through the acknowledgement token “I see”. The result is an IRF sequence which is characterised by collaboration between the moderator and the participant. The moderator proceeds with a new initiation which stays on Harry’s topic with an elicitation as to whether any of the other children want to make a contribution about the ‘Finding Nemo’ movie.

Harry’s detailed account of Finding Nemo provided in the first few minutes of this focus group sheds doubt on claims in the focus group literature that children under six years of age do not have the social or language skills to be effective focus group participants. The broader aim of this research study involves an exploration of how children utilise talk around consumer culture to ‘do’ various things and how they use the artefacts of consumer culture as a form of social currency; Harry’s negotiation of the IRF structure and the moderators flexible response to his spontaneous account shows evidence of significant interactional possibilities within the focus group context.

Extract 4.9 is a multi-party exchange which emerged during the third routine (transitory space). It consists of sixty-eight on-topic lines and four clearly defined sub-exchanges which are colour-coded for improved readability. This is an example of a stretched sequence of interaction that ultimately retains the IRF shape. The moderator initiates through a direction to the participants to sit on their cushions while she tells them about the next activity. Detailed discussion will follow presentation of the extract.
Extract 4.9  Talking Lunch Boxes

Clip Time: 1 minute 35 seconds
Focus Group: The Marshes #1

Moderator: Now everybody has to sit on their cushion and I'm going to tell you about the new game that we're gonna play the other day when I was here.

Chris: Do you know what

Moderator: Yes, Chris.

Chris: ( ) stick in my hand

Moderator: the sticker is stuck to your hand is it?

Chris: No, it nearly did.

Moderator: It nearly did, okay.

Now the other day when I was here I noticed that everybody when everybody was having their lunch: ((take out stimulus materials for second game))

Chris: Are we playing a (different) game

Harry: hhhhhhhhhhh

Moderator: "Do you remember what-"

"no we're gonna play a different game now" ((to Chris))

Harry: I know that game

Moderator: Everybody was having their lunch and lots of people had (.) loads of different types of lunch boxes I think

Ruth: I my tub was (1.0) my tub was a blue

Moderator: Top was it

Ruth: (Nods) yeah

Moderator: [>and some people had a< <red lunch box> ]

Chris: ["Do you know what" (.). Do you know what]
<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>IbC(bid)</strong></td>
<td>373</td>
<td>Ruth:</td>
<td>ah ah ah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IbC(bid)</strong></td>
<td>374</td>
<td>Harry:</td>
<td>I HAD A BLUE LUNCHBOX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IbC(bid)</strong></td>
<td>375</td>
<td>Nancy:</td>
<td>&quot;I'VE (...) [a pink lunch box]&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IbC(bid)</strong></td>
<td>376</td>
<td>Chris:</td>
<td>&quot;Do you know what&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R(ack)</strong></td>
<td>377</td>
<td>Moderator:</td>
<td>((nodding at Nancy)) &quot;okay&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IbC(bid)</strong></td>
<td>378</td>
<td>Harry:</td>
<td>[I HAD A FROGGY ON MY LUNCHBOX]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IbC(bid)</strong></td>
<td>379</td>
<td>Chris:</td>
<td>&quot;Do you know what&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R(ack)</strong></td>
<td>380.1</td>
<td>Moderator:</td>
<td>Do you Harry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IbM(bid)</strong></td>
<td>380.2</td>
<td>Moderator:</td>
<td>Well &quot;do you know what&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IbC(bid)</strong></td>
<td>381</td>
<td>Chris:</td>
<td>&quot;do you know what&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IbM(nom)</strong></td>
<td>382</td>
<td>Moderator:</td>
<td>Chris do you know what we're gonna do now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IbC(bid)</strong></td>
<td>383</td>
<td>Chris:</td>
<td>(I need to speak) (...) ((moderator looks away from Chris smiling and then moves closer to Chris and leans in to listen)) Ribbit (...) Ribbit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aside</strong></td>
<td>384</td>
<td>Harry:</td>
<td>Do you know what I don't</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cont.</strong></td>
<td>385</td>
<td>Chris:</td>
<td>Today I have Mickey Mouse bag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R(sol)</strong></td>
<td>386</td>
<td>Moderator:</td>
<td>Oh do you that's great</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cR(ack)</strong></td>
<td>387</td>
<td>Chris:</td>
<td>WELL! do you know what =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>cR(ack)</strong></td>
<td>388</td>
<td>Moderator:</td>
<td>[ (...) is that co-ol] = It's (...) pardon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IbC(rq)</strong></td>
<td>389</td>
<td>Chris:</td>
<td>Is that co-ol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R(er)</strong></td>
<td>390</td>
<td>Moderator:</td>
<td>Is Mickey Mouse cool.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IbM(nom)</strong></td>
<td>391</td>
<td>Chris:</td>
<td>What do you think (to Ruth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IbM(nom)</strong></td>
<td>392.1</td>
<td>Moderator:</td>
<td>((nods))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R(nvr)</strong></td>
<td>392.2</td>
<td>Moderator:</td>
<td>We went to Disneyland and we stayed ..hh and we saw Mickey Mouse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IbM(rq)</strong></td>
<td>393</td>
<td>Ruth:</td>
<td>Oh that's what you were telling [Me all along?]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IbC(bid)</strong></td>
<td>394</td>
<td>Moderator:</td>
<td>[And]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IbM(bid)</strong></td>
<td>395</td>
<td>Ruth:</td>
<td>Do you know what &gt;Do you know what&lt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IbC(bid)</strong></td>
<td>396</td>
<td>Chris:</td>
<td>AND Minnie Mouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IbC(bid)</strong></td>
<td>397</td>
<td>Ruth:</td>
<td>Hmmm ((Verbal acknowledgement of Ruth, nonverbal gesture (eye gaze) towards Chris))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IbC(bid)</strong></td>
<td>398</td>
<td>Chris:</td>
<td>Do you know what And Pluto and and Pluto took Marcus' hat then he (1.5) =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IbC(bid)</strong></td>
<td>399</td>
<td>Ruth:</td>
<td>Do you know what = then he (1.0) then he put (1.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IbC(bid)</strong></td>
<td>400</td>
<td>Moderator:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IbC(bid)</strong></td>
<td>401</td>
<td>Chris:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IbC(bid)</strong></td>
<td>402</td>
<td>Ruth:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IbC(bid)</strong></td>
<td>403</td>
<td>Chris:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IbC(bid)</strong></td>
<td>404</td>
<td>Ruth:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line</td>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>405</td>
<td>Moderator:</td>
<td>then he (1.0) then he (.) gave it back ((lifts her hand to her head))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 406  | Ruth:      | Oh that must have [been ] 
          |          | [And he] put it on his head |
| 407  | Moderator: | Was that very funny? |
| 408  | Ruth:      | Yeah |
| 409  | Chris:     | Do you know what |
| 410  | Moderator: | Tell me (1.8) "we didn’t (.) we didn’t see Mickey Mouse before" |
| 411  | Chris:     | >You didn’t see Mickey Mouse before< |
| 412  | Moderator: | Well >wait til I tell you about this game right< (.) everybody’s going to get (.) this is a bit like a lunch box isn’t it Yeah |
| 413  | Harry:     | yeah |

The first move in this extended exchange (a moderator direct move) is typical of a first IRF move in classic classroom talk but it is followed up immediately by a bid for the floor from Chris. Chris produces the highly designed “do you know what” bidding device eight times during the course of this particular exchange. Initially it proves a successful ‘beginning’ for Chris (line 355) resulting in a short interaction which is closed by the moderator (line 360.1 and 360.2). This “okay – now” double move is designed to close one exchange and open another. The “now” is designed to begin a re-formulation of the first initiation.

In the second part of the exchange the moderator attempts to explain what the activity is going to entail (lines 360.2, 365.2, 371). Cursory responses are provided to the bound initiations from Chris (lines 361 and 363.2) and Harry (lines 364 and 365.1) and the moderator engages in a brief child-initiated interactive sequence with Ruth (lines 368 to 370).

The third part of the exchange is dominated by competing bids for the floor from Chris, Nancy and Harry as each attempts to share with the group a description of their lunch box. Ruth who has already shared this information makes a bid for the floor (line 373).

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49 This activity involved the children decorating a felt shaped lunch box with velcro backed stickers depicting toys, TV programmes etc
but does not follow this up. Nancy is successful in winning an immediate if minimal response to her initiation (lines 375 and 377). The ‘okay’ device is utilised here to provide an acknowledgement token. Harry initiates twice (lines 374 and 378) before achieving a clear acknowledgement from the moderator (line 380.1).

Sacks defined ‘second stories’ as a kind of tying mechanism which in multi-party conversations allow next speakers to self-select by ‘tying’ their utterance to a previous turn (Silverman et al., 1998). Each of Ruth’s (line 368), Harry’s (line 374), Nancy’s (line 375) and eventually Chris’ (line 387) bids for the floor through bound initiations provide a ‘second story’ in terms of which lunch boxes they own. Ervin-Tripp and Kuntay (1997:144) cites Umiker-Sebeok’s (1979) claim that the most common response to a narrative produced by a preschool aged child in ‘natural conversation’ with other children was a similar narrative. These narratives are termed ‘dangling narratives’ as they do not advance the conversation as a ‘conjoint elaboration of a topic’ (p.107) but are generally concerned with the same general topic. Wilkinson (2006) commented on how the interactional effect of second stories builds consensus. While the children in this extract appear to be differentiating on the basis of their lunch boxes, the importance of the second story device centres on their use of it as a floor grabbing mechanism. There are differences across participants in terms of what is ‘done’ with the floor once it has been gained. Nancy only takes one turn in this sequence and through a bound initiation stating the colour of her lunchbox produced within a cluster of bound initiations.

However Harry and to an even greater extent Chris and Nancy are a lot more active in their attempts to manipulate the floor. Harry’s second initiation is interesting; having provided detail on the colour of his lunch box in line with Ruth and Nancy’s descriptions, he elaborates on this and provides a further description, that is, it has a frog on it. In doing this he opens a new area of discourse from colours to other features of lunch boxes and follows up on this in line 384 with his “ribbit ribbit” move coded in IRF terms as an aside. If his “ribbit ribbit” had won a response from the moderator it would have proved a re-initiation to or a continuation of his second lunch box description but that was already acknowledged very briefly in line 380.1 and ultimately Harry was not

\[50\] Aarsand and Aronsson (2009b) cites O’Reilly’s (2005) study of vocalizations in therapy, where she noticed that children used onomatopoetic sounds and other types of what she called active noising as attempts to enter and engage in the therapeutic interaction. Instead of seeing children’s singing and sound illustrations as extraneous to the social interaction, such noising can instead be seen as ‘active sounds made by the participants to represent something specific’ (O’Reilly, 2005:745).
provided with the opportunity to elaborate further. His side move “ribbit ribbit” sees him accept in advance that his status is one of spectator to the main business going on that is the interaction between the moderator and Chris. He can be described as an animate spectator doing one of the things spectators can do. Background noises such as this one or humming or thinking aloud are fairly commonly produced by the preschoolers in my study.

Perhaps the most noteworthy element of this exchange sequence is Chris’s persistent pushing for a Q-Q-A sequence. After three bids and four “do you know what” formulations on the part of Chris, the moderator invokes an identical format once in overlap with Chris (lines 380.2 and 381) and once in the context of a fuller direction to Chris (line 382). Chris’ “do you know what” is a request for the floor as is the moderator’s “do you know what we’re going to do now” statement. However, while the demonstrable concern of the moderator is pressing on with the next activity, Chris is struggling to obtain his turn in the previous part of the ongoing sequence. Sacks (1986:343) argued that children aged around three years have an almost universal way of beginning any piece of talk they make to adults. They employ an item such as “Do you know what Mommy?” He argued that this simple device proves very powerful for children in their attempts to gain the floor mainly because it is an unusual type of question in that the appropriate answer is a further question, that is, “what?”. Sacks rules of conversational sequencing specifically the ‘chaining rule’ (1986: 343) state that a person who has asked a question has a reserved right to talk again after the one to whom he has addressed the question speaks leading to a free-flowing two-party exchange in the form Q-A-Q-A-Q-A. The ‘do you know what?’ device serves to reverse the flow suggested by the chaining rule. Thus, the form of the exchange is Q-Q-A. The child enjoys a successful ‘beginning’, that is, they are obliged to speak again during the third turn and therefore talk about the topic they wanted to talk about all along. Sacks (1986:344) also discusses ‘tickets’ defined as ‘items specially usable as first items in talk by one who has restricted rights to talk to another’. Examples of tickets are announcements of trouble or stories (Kuntay and Senay, 2003).

However, while Chris’s utterances in this interactive sequence read as perfect exemplars of what Sacks described in terms of children’s restricted rights to talk, Chris displays a greater level of competence than that suggested by Sacks through his finding of an alternative and ultimately more successful direct formulation “I need to speak” (line 383)
and his straight forward engagement in a Q-A sequence “Is that cool?” (line 391). Ultimately Chris is empowered here, the moderator is thrown off course in her attempts to get the focus group back on track, that is, getting back to the activity (introducing the ‘make and do’ activity) at hand. Ruth avails of the space provided by Chris’s disruption to produce an initiation of her own through a ‘ticket’ (Sacks, 1986), that is, a subsequent story about her trip to Disneyland. This is an example of the clustering of child produced initiations discussed in section 4.2.2 above. Doing story-telling is a feature of this group and we can see this to a small extent with Harry’s ‘Nemo’ monologue and Ruth’s ‘Disney’ monologue. While mini I-R sequences can be found within this extract the IRF framework is evident but proves flexible. Both moderator and child participants orient towards utilisation of the framework but they appear to work within it for their own ends. Each of the I-R moves are collaborative accomplishments and all parties are oriented to the achievement and completion of IRF extended sequences.

The argument that very young children have restricted rights to speak appears to be to some extent substantiated within the focus group setting. The findings above suggest that children struggle with beginnings as argued by Sacks (1986) and thus with a number of exceptions they do not own many exchanges. In parallel with their difficulties with beginnings, they appear to also struggle with endings at least endings that fit within the IRF framework, in other words they produce very few follow-up moves as evidenced in Section 4.2.2 above. However, they are very successful in their production of bound initiations and utilise tying devices including second stories to negotiate their rights to speak in this setting. Thus, focus groups can be productive interactional spaces in which very young children display varying degrees of social competence (Hutchby, 2005) in negotiating and defending their ‘rights to speak’ around topics of interest to them. Successfully negotiating their rights to speak appears to be empowering for children and can lead to the clustering of child initiations and/or contributions. Overall the interactional possibilities are evident but the extent to which all children avail of them is variable.

4.4 Conclusions

This chapter aimed to provide a comprehensive empirical account of the research setting through an exploration of the focus group ‘fingerprint’ (Heritage and Greatbatch, 1991) and the interactional (im)possibilities available for both moderator and children within
this setting. The work in this chapter has shed light on the specific contours of the focus
group fingerprint (see Figure 4.19).

The focus group is conceptualised as a ‘cultural routine’ (Corsaro, 2005), that is, a
repetitive collectively produced activity. The analytical findings presented in the first
part of this chapter reveal that the focus groups conducted for this study can be further
broken down into six distinctive ‘mini’ cultural routines including openings, closings and
the activities sandwiched between. Turn-taking distribution was examined revealing
unequal turn distribution between the adult moderator (an average of 42% of all turns in
each group) and the child participants (an average of 14% of all turns in each group) but
generally equal distribution between child participants with the exception of a few
outliers also discussed above. This finding suggests some definition around roles in the
focus group with the moderator taking responsibility for the allocation of speaking
opportunities and the child participants playing a more passive role by waiting their turn
to speak. These ‘special’ (Heritage, 2004) turn-taking arrangements point to the
‘institutionality’ of the focus group context.

Figure 4.19  Focus group Fingerprint
The analysis presented in the second part of the chapter derived from the development of an IRF coding scheme which facilitated examination and coding of the structure of interactional sequences. This IRF scheme is an elaboration of previous work on classroom interaction by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), Mehan (1985) and Sunderland (2001). Analysis revealed an interactive framework characterised predominantly by an extended version of the three-part IRF structure found in classroom studies. Very clear differences emerged with regard to the moves produced by the moderator (initiations, bound initiations and follow-ups) vis-à-vis the moves produced by the child participants (bound initiations and responses) as they interacted to ‘produce’ the focus group context. This finding also points to the ‘institutionality’ of the focus group context.

The analysis presented in the final part of the chapter shed light on how the moderator and children manipulate the framework to their own ends. Children were shown to produce bound initiations to gain entry into ongoing exchanges and ‘piggyback’ on each other’s entries as revealed through clustering in child produced initiations. They also utilise tried and tested reversal of the Q-A sequencing rule, format tying and second stories and these techniques will be revisited in the next two analytical chapters. Moderator devices highlighted in Extracts 4.8 and 4.9 including acknowledgement tokens, such as, “I see” and “Okay” and opening pre-initiation devices, such as, “Now” which work to get the attention of the participants contribute to the overall structuring of the talk-in-interaction in terms of IRF patterns. This structure appears to facilitate group management and works to ‘keep the show on the road’ so to speak for the moderator. In line with what Sunderland (2001) has argued in relation to classroom talk, this is not necessarily a ‘bad’ thing. Contrary to contributing to the restriction of children’s rights to speak, utilisation of the IRF structure can facilitate fair allocation of turns across speakers by the moderator and flexibility in the three-part structure can allow for more collaborative exchanges while maintaining some direction to the proceedings. Knowledge concerning how the focus groups are structured and how the roles of moderator and child participant are defined informed the subsequent layers of analytical inquiry and thus the IRF coding developed here is carried through into the next two analysis chapters which address the full data set.
CHAPTER FIVE: Exploring the 'Choosing' Child Consumer through Assessment Sequences in Interaction

This chapter explores the question as to how 'evaluation' is accomplished in the focus group interaction of very young children and for what social ends. The 'choosing' child consumer is addressed in empirical terms to examine the social significance of 'doing' consumption evaluations in the focus group setting. The evaluation of consumer products is explored as social action and hence the substance of the evaluations themselves is not of particular interest but rather the analytical focus rests on the accomplishment of evaluations by preschool consumers in the focus group setting (see Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1  Bottom-up Analytical Inquiry – Focus on Assessment Sequences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Single Case Analysis</th>
<th>Assessment Sequences</th>
<th>Examining the Focus Group Fingerprint</th>
<th>Unmotivated Looking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Performance:</em> examining social accomplishments through single case analysis</td>
<td><em>Action:</em> examining social action as evidenced in assessment sequences</td>
<td><em>Structure:</em> examining interactional (in)possibilities and roles as evidenced in the focus group fingerprint</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This chapter is organised as follows; the first section provides a reminder and elaboration of the analytical approach taken in this chapter, the second section presents the analytical findings pertaining to the most straightforward types of assessment sequences, that is, those comprised of positive product evaluations and agreement within the group. The third section presents the analytical findings pertaining to assessment sequences involving a higher level of interactive work, that is, those comprised of negative product evaluations and occasional disagreement within the group. These sections serve to lay down the groundwork and to illustrate key analytical terminology in advance of the fourth section which presents the analytical findings pertaining to assessment sequences.
comprising elaborate product evaluations. The fourth section is sub-divided across three thematic areas (i) age, (ii) gender and (iii) health. Each extract is first analysed at a fairly descriptive level to provide a synopsis of the interaction as it unfolds. A deeper level of analysis is presented at the end of each sub-section. Finally, a concluding section draws the chapter to a close by re-visiting the question as to how consumer evaluations are accomplished and utilised for social ends by preschool consumers in a focus group setting.

5.1 Examining Product Evaluations as Social Action

A CA informed discourse analytical framework is applied to the full corpus (fifteen groups) of transcribed talk-in-interaction. The ‘stuff’ of consumer culture, a realm which Seiter (1993:6) argues provides the ‘lingua franca’ of young children comprises the putty of interaction as characters and products derived from commercial culture are discussed and evaluated through interactive sequences recognisable as ‘assessment sequences’ (Pomerantz, 1984). This interactive putty includes talk around characters from children’s television, fast food and drink products, toys and movies. ‘Doing’ evaluation is defined broadly in social action terms and encompasses stated likes, dislikes, preferences, and descriptions. Goodwin (2007:370) argues assessments provide ‘an important window into understanding the process through which peers come to construe events and objects of value and thus lies at the heart of processes of achieving intersubjectivity’. Her (2006:183) analysis of assessment sequences in her work on girls’ social worlds, revealed that the activity of assessment provides a resource, with which speakers can display to one another ‘a congruent or divergent view of the events they encounter in their phenomenal world’.

The analytical approach taken here is informed by critical theorisations of focus group methodology (Myers and MacNaughten, 1999; Puchta and Potter, 2004; Wilkinson, 2006). Language is not understood to be a window through which we can access the inner workings of the mind. Myers and MacNaughten (1999:185) argue that ‘opinions and attitudes’ should be treated as ‘utterances produced in specific situations, rather than as attributes of subjects’. In the same vein, Wilkinson (2006:55) argues that taking part

51 In each of the extracts analysed here I have included my own name instead of ‘moderator’. Where the previous chapter focussed primarily on the structure of the talk-in-interaction and compared the contributions of the adult moderator with those of child participants, this and the next chapter are concerned with the substance as well as the structure of the talk and each individual comes more to the forefront of the analytical discussion including the now named moderator.
in any social interaction ‘entails producing talk in order to do something: to corroborate, to challenge, to boast, to tease, to emphasise our suffering (or to downplay it), and so on’. Where cognitive states are made relevant through talk-in-interaction, these are understood as social actions which are employed to ‘do’ interactional work and as argued by Wooffitt\(^2\) (2005:116) are ‘oriented to interaction and inferential concerns’. By looking at what kinds of action turns at talk are designed to accomplish, and at how they are ‘fitted’ to their sequential context, that is, what kinds of action they initiate or are responsive to, conversation analysis helps us understand why someone may have said that particular thing, in that particular way, at that particular point in the interaction (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973).

This chapter focuses on the requesting of product evaluations (predominantly moderator work) and the provision of product evaluations (predominantly participant work). Antaki (2002:7) has argued that one of the ‘liberating things’ CA has achieved is to show how ‘commonsense descriptions of words (like “adjectives” and “evaluations”) are not only unspecific about what words do in interaction, but [are] sometimes wholly misleading’. Here product evaluations are understood to be fluid and shifting social constructs produced through talk-in-interaction and not inner mental states revealed through language. Evaluations are thus understood as ‘interactional expressions’ and not “private” motivational states’ (Schegloff, 2007).

This layer of analysis preserves the IRF framework established in the first layer of analysis and so IRF coding is evidenced and utilised in the analytical discussion that follows, but in focussing on ‘doing’ evaluation as social action the unit of analysis shifts from the level of the IRF sequence (basic or extended) to the level of the ‘assessment sequence’ (Pomerantz, 1984) or in some cases multiple assessment sequences. The ‘doing’ of evaluations has received a considerable amount of attention both in the field of conversation analysis generally and in the context of focus group research as discussed above in section 3.4.3. A brief reminder of the analytical concepts employed here is provided in Table 5.1 below in advance of the presentation of the findings. An examination of in some cases quite lengthy assessment sequences aims to provide a rich and textured analysis of the social activity of ‘doing evaluation’ and thus reveal the ways

\(^2\) ‘Discursive Psychology is a thorough reworking of the subject matter of psychology – it seeks to analyse reports of mental states and discourse in which mental states become relevant, as social actions oriented to interactional and inferential concerns’ Wooffitt (2005: 113).
in which the child participants and the moderator utilise consumer products discursively through expressions of ‘choosing’ for social ends. An insight into how children make sense of or derive meaning from particular products also emerges as a corollary to the primary examination undertaken here.

Table 5.1  Main Analytical Concepts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation*</td>
<td>In the context of focus group talk “evaluations” assess things</td>
<td>Puchta and Potter (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Occasioned conversational events with sequential constraints - in proffering an assessment a speaker “claims knowledge of that which he or she is assessing”.</td>
<td>Pomerantz (1984)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preference Structure</td>
<td>Interactional projects and courses of action are implemented in sequence organisation in such a way that plus responses are <em>preferred</em> and minus responses are <em>dispreferred</em>.</td>
<td>Schegloff (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferred Action Turn-Shape</td>
<td>Actions which are characteristically performed straightforwardly and without delay</td>
<td>Pomerantz (1984)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(acceptance, granting, agreement)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispreferred Action Turn-Shape</td>
<td>Actions which are delayed, qualified and accounted for.</td>
<td>Pomerantz (1984)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(rejection, declination, disagreement)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>An occasion of talk where an individual accounts for something, that is, provides an explanation or a justification for something.</td>
<td>Heritage (1984a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-Grade Assessment</td>
<td>Markedly positive assessments such as ‘brilliant’, ‘smashing’, ‘lovely’, ‘great’, ‘excellent’. They claim closure on segments of talk and signal that whatever the answer provided to the previous question it’s time to move forward.</td>
<td>Antaki et al. (2000)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The terms evaluation and assessment are used interchangeably to a large extent but evaluations are understood to emerge within sequences of interaction referred to as ‘assessment sequences’
5.2 Doing Positive Product Evaluations

Invitations to make assessments are structured to invite particular next actions termed 'preferred' over other actions termed 'dispreferred' (Pomerantz, 1984). Theory on preference structures as outlined here suggests that where a negative assessment is provided, an account is then required or demanded by the moderator but where a positive assessment is provided an account is not expected (Kitzinger and Frith, 1999). This section subsumes assessment sequences that are characterised by unanimous positive product evaluations by focus group participants. All of the extracts discussed in this section occurred during the second mini cultural routine comprising the focus group; the 'match and win' activity. While I am focussing on assessment sequences for the purposes of the current discussion, the sequences analysed in this section have all been preceded by one or more recognition sequences. There are thus two 'games' at play here, a competitive one (the 'match and win' activity) and a conversational one (stimulated by the materials being used for the 'match and win' activity). This section focuses mainly on the conversational game. Each extract is analysed in turn in advance of a summary discussion at the end of each section.

Extract 5.1 below is taken from a group comprising four participants Jack, Amber, Fintan and Casey.

Extract 5.1 'I like Thomas'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clip Time: 50 Seconds</th>
<th>Focus Group: The Pines #1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I(oq) 105.2 Olivia: And tell me about Thomas? (.) do you like Thomas?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(min) 106 Jack: [I like Thomas]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cR(min) 107 Fintan: [Yeah] ((raises his hand))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(ack) 108 Olivia: Yeah ((to Fintan))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I(bC(bid)) 109 Amber: °I like Thomas°</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I(bC(bid)) 110 Jack: I like Thomas ((raises his hand))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I(bM(oq)) 111 Olivia: °And what about you Casey°</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(nvr) 112 Casey: ((Nods strongly smiling))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F(ack) 113.1 Olivia: °Yeah(.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I(rq) 113.2 Olivia: Tell me about him does he (.) what does Thomas do(3.5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(min) 114 Amber: °He's a toy°</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cR(sol) 115 Olivia: He's a toy is he</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CR(er)</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IbC(bid)</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(per)</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CR(ack)</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CR(sol)</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CR(nvr)</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CR(nvr)</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→</td>
<td>IbM(rq)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IbM(cl)</td>
<td>123.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(min)</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(nvr)</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(nvr)</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→</td>
<td>F(ack)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-ini</td>
<td>127.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The assessment sequence presented here followed recognition of ‘Thomas the Tank Engine’ stimulus material by the participants during a ‘match and win’ activity. The full on-topic assessment sequence is initiated by me (line 105.2) and comprises two IRF shaped sequences of interaction. My initial open-ended question “Tell me about Thomas” does not provoke an immediate response resulting very quickly in a reformulated and close-ended question “Do you like Thomas”. This reformulation provokes positive responses from Jack, Fintan and Amber closely followed by Casey’s non-verbal positive response. Their responses are typical of ‘preferred responses’ (Pomerantz, 1984); they are prompt and are not accompanied by accounts. The first IRF sequence thus closes with an acknowledgement of the preferred response by me, “yeah” (line 113.1). I then initiate a new sequence by returning to my initial open-ended request that the children “Tell me about him” (line 113.2). Some basic descriptors are provided but overall discussion is limited as demonstrated by the long silence following my bound initiation eliciting the names of “Thomas the Tank Engine’s friends” (line 123.1) and eventually the sequence is closed by me (line 127.1).
Extract 5.2 is taken from a group comprising four participants Heather, Peter, Jake and Emily.

**Extract 5.2 ‘I goed once’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clip Time: 20 Seconds</th>
<th>Focus Group: Green Acres #2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>→ I(oq) 43.2 Olivia</td>
<td>Do you like McDonalds. (2.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ R(er) 44 Peter:</td>
<td>(Nods)) I goed once</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ cR(sol) 45 Olivia:</td>
<td>You went once(.) did you? what did you have.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cR(min) 46 Peter:</td>
<td>Em <a href="">Bur:ger</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F(ev) 47.1 Olivia:</td>
<td>;Love,ly (.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ I(rq) 47.2 Olivia:</td>
<td>Have you ever been to McDonalds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(min) 48 Emily:</td>
<td>Yeah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cR(sol) 49 Olivia:</td>
<td>And do you like it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cR(min) 50 Emily:</td>
<td>Yeah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ F(ack) 51.1 Olivia:</td>
<td>Okay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-ini 51.2 Olivia:</td>
<td>Are you ready for the next one?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This assessment sequence centres on ‘McDonalds’ and comprises two IRF shaped interactive sequences. Again an opinion question is used by me to elicit an assessment from the participants (line 43.2). Peter provides an elaborate response indicating through his nodding gesture that he likes ‘McDonalds’ and supporting this through claimed experience of ‘McDonalds’ through his “I goed once” (line 44). In producing this elaborate response to a closed ended question, Peter succeeds in keeping the conversational channels open. He receives acknowledgement from me followed by a solicitation for further elaboration on his experience (line 45) which he provides stating he had a “burger”. This results in a positive follow-up evaluative response from me which closes this particular IRF sequence.

This closing is coded as an ‘evaluation’ in IRF terms but this “lovely” utterance can be understood in social action terms not as a comment on ‘McDonalds’ burgers per se but as a commentary on the focus group interaction itself. Antaki et al. (2000) described marked positive assessments such as ‘brilliant’, ‘smashing’, ‘lovely’, ‘great’ and
‘excellent’ as ‘high-grade assessments’. They examined the occurrences of high-grade assessments in questionnaire-based interview talk about ‘quality of life’ taking place between clinical psychologists and people with learning disabilities, and found that high-grade assessments work differently from news receipts in that they do not orient to the informational content of the previous turn. They found them to be produced by the interviewer in ‘transition sequences’ and argue that they work differently from ‘conventionally “positive” topic-transition tokens like “right”, “ok” or “right/ok then”’ as they claim closure on the previous material as having been successfully completed ‘as a section in a segmented whole’ (p. 236). Antaki (2002) discussing the same phenomenon puts it succinctly when he says

Rather than being heard as a commentary on what the respondent said, putting brilliant just there [immediately preceding a next question] was to be heard, crudely speaking, as a commentary on the fact that they had managed to say it at all.

Having sought and received elaboration from Peter on his experience with McDonalds (line 45) my high-grade assessment is a commentary on his participation rather than a commentary on the burger and it signals strong completion of that particular IRF shaped assessment sequence as displayed through my next turn which initiates a new interaction with Emily. The significance of this is that my ‘evaluation’ work as a focus group moderator discussing commercial topics is distinctive from that of the participants. I am on the one hand seeking evaluations by asking the participants about their experiences with or knowledge of commercial objects, and on the other am engaged in evaluating the ongoing flow of the interaction. My high-grade assessment at least in Antaki et al.’s (2000) terms is not a statement of my ‘liking’ McDonalds ‘burgers’ but rather signals my satisfaction with an extended IRF-shaped assessment sequence.

In contrast to my interaction with Peter, Emily provides monosyllabic responses to my follow-on attempt to bring her into the discussion through a new initiation (line 47.2) and in line with the regular low conversational demands following a preferred response she is not pushed to elaborate resulting in a closing move “Okay” (line 51.1) from me followed by a pre-initiation into a new topic. This “okay” falls into Antaki et al.’s (2000:245) category of a ‘neutral topic-transition token’. A high-grade assessment appears to be unwarranted here.
Extract 5.3 is a sequence taken from another focus group comprising four participants, Ciaran, Dali, Carol and Abbie.

Extract 5.3 ‘I like Noddy’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clip Time: 12 Seconds</th>
<th>Focus Group: The Lakes#1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pre-ini 464.1 Olivia: OK:::ay are you ready for (. ) lets see &lt;who’s gonna win&lt; (2.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I(dq) 464.2 Olivia: Who has this one?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(nvr) 465 Ciaran</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&amp; Dali: ((Raise hands in air))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(clar) 466.1 Olivia: You don't have it Ciaran do you . hhhh Dali has it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Ib(dq) 466.2 Olivia: Anyone know what it is (3.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(min) 467 Ciaran: Noddy ((raises his hand))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(min) 468 Dali: [NODDY]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(min) 469 Carol: [Noddy]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ IbC(i) 470 Dali: I HAVE A NODDY VID;EO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ R(ack) 471 Olivia: Do: ;you:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ F(conf) 472 Dali: Yeah cos I like NODdy ((jumping around the mat))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aside: 473 Carol: Aghh ((jumping up and down on her mat))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F(lw) 474 Olivia: O:Kay?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-ini 474.1 Olivia: Are we ready for the next one ready:::</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This assessment sequence is somewhat atypical of those occurring across the corpus of focus group interaction as it consists of an unsolicited product evaluation from a participant. This IRF shaped interactive sequence involves a recognition task; I use a display question to elicit a response from the participants (line 466.2). Ciaran, Dali and Carol all recognise the ‘Noddy’ stimulus material, however, before I can acknowledge their ‘correct’ identification skills, Dali takes the floor announcing his ownership of a ‘Noddy’ video (line 470). Dali’s bound initiation turns the typical moderator controlled IRF sequence around placing me in the response position and winning an acknowledgement from me (line 471). This response is formulated as a question “do
you” but the downward intonation signals it is an encouraging acknowledgement rather than a strong request for elaboration.

Dali, however, responds to my response with the follow-up positive confirmation and an account for his ownership, that is, that he “likes Noddy” (line 472). To return to Antaki et al. (2000:245) momentarily the downward intonation seen here is ‘encouraging’ in contrast to an upward intonation which is strongly terminating. However, while the assessment unusually arises towards the end of the sequence as a very indirect and unsolicited account for ownership of Noddy, the positive product evaluation as demonstrated in the examples discussed above serves to close down rather than open up discussion.

The final extract included here is a more lengthy passage of interaction involving Peter, Heather and Emily. The fourth member of this focus group Jake did not contribute to this interactive sequence.

**Extract 5.4 ‘Once I watched it’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clip Time: 54 Seconds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group: Green Acres #2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Pre-ini   | 75.2 | Olivia: | >are you ready for the next one<{1.0} |
|---------------------|
| I(dq)                | 75.3 | Olivia: | <Let me see> it is |
| R(min)               | 76   | Peter:  | Spiderman! |
| → IbC(rq)            | 77   | Emily:  | Is that your ?favourite Heather ((Heather is wearing a Spiderman emblazoned top)) |
| R(nvr)               | 78   | Heather: | ((Nods)) |
| → IbC(i)             | 79   | Peter:  | She(.).em Emily has it((points to Emily’s bingo card)) |
| R(ev)                | 80.1 | Olivia: | That’s right! |
| → IbM(d)             | 80.2 | Olivia: | Emily you put a counter ;down(.) ;yeah put one down |
| R(nvr)               | 81   | Emily:  | ((Takes a counter and puts it on her game card)) (2.0) |
| → F(ev)              | 82.1 | Olivia: | Well done |
| I(oq)                | 82.2 | Olivia: | And Heather you’ve got Spiderman on your top do you like Spiderman a |
lot?

Heather: ((Nods her head fast))

Olivia: [(Why-) ]

Peter: [I LIKE IT]

Olivia: >Do you<

Peter: Once I watched it with my brother Jeremy

Olivia: Oh right.

Peter: Sometimes I watch it on my own

Olivia: And do you like watching it every day Heather.

Peter: Yes

Olivia: Are there spiders in it?

Heather: ((Nods again))

Olivia: And are the spiders a bit scary.

Peter: No

Olivia: Is there not oh right okay

Pre-ini

Olivia: Are we ready for the next one?

Ready:::
This passage of interaction contains two IRF shaped sequences; the first is dominated by the competitive game, the second is dominated by the conversational game and comprises an assessment sequence centring on ‘Spiderman’. The assessment continues into a third interactive sequence which is not resolved in IRF terms.

The passage begins with an atypical move from Emily whereby following the presentation of the stimulus card ‘Spiderman’ she initiates an interaction with Heather on the topic asking her if ‘Spiderman’ is her “favourite” (line 77). In so doing she is distracted from the competitive game and is reminded by Peter that she is holding up the game as she is the winner of the current move (line 79). Emily demonstrates competence in manipulating the action of evaluation for social ends. She extends her own role in order to ‘do asking about’ preferences and favourites a task typically associated with the moderator and in so doing demonstrates co-operative relations with Heather, relations that are amplified as selfless when placed in the context that she is also delaying taking her winning move in the game. I support Peter and bring Emily back into the game instructing her to take her move before closing that mini sequence with an evaluative follow-up move “well done” (lines 80.2 and 82.1).

The second IRF sequence provides another illustration of how the production of preferred responses can serve to close down discussion. Heather is monosyllabic in her production of positive evaluations of ‘Spiderman’ (lines 83 and 93) and my elicitations facilitate this as they are somewhat closed-ended, for example, “Do you like watching it every day” (line 92). Peter finds an opportunity in Heather’s non-discursive responses and offers his own narrative about his familial experiences of watching ‘Spiderman’ either with or without his brother (lines 87 and 94). Heather and Peter do not engage with each other here, instead engaging in a dyadic fashion with me. They are in disagreement about the finer details of ‘Spiderman’ namely, whether ‘Spiderman’ is a “cartoon” (lines 89 and 91). This presents a difficult situation for me, which I overcome by ignoring the disagreement and allocating the next turn to Heather through an explicit nomination (line 92).

\textsuperscript{53}In quantitative terms (number of turns taken) Heather takes 12\% of the total number of turns which is close to the average for any participant across the wider corpus of data (14\%). It is evident from this passage of interaction that her turn-taking is restricted to that of responding and while I am not going to speculate qualitatively about her turn-taking outside of this particular passage, Emily’s attempts at drawing Heather into the interaction from the outset of this passage, serve to mark Heather as a participant in need of encouragement.
Finally, another difference of opinion between Peter and Heather about whether or not there are spiders in ‘Spiderman’ emerges towards the end of the sequence, when following Heather’s confirmation that there are spiders in ‘Spiderman’, Peter claims innovatively “there’s no spiders in my one” (line 108). Pomerantz (1984:77) argues that conversants orient to disagreeing with one another as uncomfortable, unpleasant, difficult, risking threat, insult, or offense. Peter does not challenge Heather directly, his account reveals that for him a universal phenomenon can be consumed in an individual way54. I provide a second part acknowledgement to Peter’s claim and immediately move on to a new topic (110.1) thus leaving the sequence unresolved in terms of the provision of a follow-up move. In conversational terms Peter’s move allows me to move on without having to find a resolution to the disagreement. In producing his “my one” he is also contributing to closing down the discursive space as he is not seeking that I as moderator resolve a difference between himself and Heather.

The lack of direct interaction between Heather and Peter also limits the extent to which either of them use ‘Spiderman’ as an assessment topic with which to achieve social ends. Peter utilises it to facilitate interaction between me and him and as a way to share other information about his home life with me. Emily uses it to try and relate to Heather in a kind and selfless way and I also use it to try and reach out to Heather and engage in discussion with her. However, Heather’s reluctance55 to become more discursive here results in her preferences remaining literally ‘on her sleeve’ (Seiter, 1993).

**Summary Discussion on Positive Product Evaluations**

The analysis above reveals a number of interactive features produced by the moderator and the participants. My involvement centres on requesting product evaluations from participants and providing a response to those evaluations. The search for evaluations is achieved through a mixture of open ended (referential) and closed ended (opinion style) questions. On receipt of a preferred response (that is a positive evaluation or statement of agreement) from a participant I tend to produce a follow-up move which closes down

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54The individuality displayed here by Peter along with his earlier reference to local familial consumption contexts is evocative of findings from Langer and Farrar’s (2003) work on Australian childhood consumer cultures. She argues that while children’s television programmes may be global phenomena the experience of watching them is ‘local’, one of the things that defines ‘being at home’ (2003: 118). This argument is tangential to the focus of this chapter but it would be remiss not to acknowledge this clear parallel with Langer’s work which took place in an Australian context.

55This passage of interaction exhibits a case where a child’s in this case Heather’s right to speak is acknowledged, facilitated and encouraged by the moderator and by the other participants but the right is exercised in a very limited way.
discussion. Preferred responses do not have to be accounted for and there is a clear orientation to that rule by me although the bound initiation formulation “tell me about” is used in an attempt to broaden out discussion.

The participants demonstrate a range of orientations. In some cases participants produce prompt, monosyllabic, minimal preferred responses, playing the role of passive respondent and thus utilising the conventions around preferred responses (as unaccountable) to provoke me (the moderator) into the third place follow-up position in IRF terms (see Casey (line 112) Extract 5.1, Emily’s interactions in 5.2 and Heather’s interactions in 5.4). In other cases participants work outside of conversational conventions in an effort to keep the discursive floor open. Peter (Extract 5.2) provides an unnecessary account (in CA terms) of his preferred response pertaining to a question about liking ‘McDonalds’ with his elaboration that he has been there – ‘I goed once’. While Peter is successful in avoiding the conversation stopper, that is, a minimal preferred response move, his follow up claim of having had a ‘burger’ in McDonalds ultimately results in a closing evaluative follow-up from me through the production of a high-grade assessment (Antaki et al., 2002) as explicated above.

Dali (Extract 5.3) engages in a similar type of activity to Peter. His statement of ownership of a Noddy video and his subsequent positive evaluation of Noddy is preemptive of the conversational game that typically follows the ‘recognition’ component of the competitive ongoing ‘match and win’ activity from which the discursive materials are arising. His actions demonstrate a competence on his part to manipulate moderator (questioner) and participant (respondent) roles. He is successful in single-handedly producing the ‘I’ (initiation) and ‘F’ (follow-up) components of the IRF structure as he essentially rolls the competitive and conversational ‘games’ into one. In this case I produce a weak “okay”, ‘last word’ style follow-up to Dali’s follow-up move before immediately initiating a new sequence. In both cases I appear to resort to the IRF structure to control the interaction and engage in a topic change through a new initiation.

Where product evaluations are positive and shared among group members the extent to which they can be used socially is limited. However, some evidence of camaraderie through shared positive evaluations is evident in Extract 5.1 as the children engage in
‘me too’ statements or ‘same evaluations’ \(^{56}\) (Pomerantz, 1984) of ‘liking’ Thomas. Emily uses ‘Spiderman’ as a resource in trying to engage with Heather and this is echoed by me in Extract 5.4.

Preferred responses can be used to ‘please’ the moderator resulting in straightforward acceptances from me and thus the construction of neat and tidy IRE structures (Extracts 5.1 and 5.2). However, in order to use positive product evaluations for more discursive ends conversational conventions need to be challenged or stretched. Dali and Peter demonstrate proficiency in this regard, however, a proficiency that is not met with the same gusto by me on the occasions depicted here. The next section addresses the ‘doing’ of negative product evaluations along with the emergence of conflicting evaluations within the focus group setting.

5.3 Doing Negative and Conflicted Product Evaluations

This category subsumes assessment sequences that are characterised by negative product evaluations or mixed product evaluations from the focus group participants. As above the extracts are first analysed in turn following which a summary discussion is provided. The first two extracts below are taken from two groups, one comprising Donal, Tom, Kitty and Ciara (Extract 5.5) and the second comprising just three participants Charlene, Adam and Lucy (Extract 5.6). Both sequences comprised part of the ‘match and win’ routine and both are examples of assessment talk that was tangential to the competitive game in hand. I will present the two sequences together in advance of discussing the notable features occurring within them both.

Extract 5.5 ‘No I like Spiderman’

```
Clip Time: 11 seconds
Focus Group: The Ferns #2

I(oq) 113.2 Olivia: And do? you like Cinderella Donal
→ R(er) 114 Donal: No ;I like Spiderman
→ F(ack) 115.1 Olivia: You just like Spiderman
I(oq) 115.2 Olivia: ;what about you Tom.
```

\(^{56}\) To assert the same evaluation, a recipient may repeat the prior evaluative terms, marking it as a second in a like series with, for example, “too”. Pomerantz, A. (1984). Agreeing and disagreeing with assessments: some features of preferred and dispreferred turn shapes. In J. M. Atkinson & J. Heritage (Eds.), *Structures of Social Action: Studies in Conversation Analysis* (pp. 57-101). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Extract 5.6 ‘Do you like Dora?’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clip Time: 9 seconds</th>
<th>Focus Group: The Ferns #3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I(oq) 213.2 Olivia:</td>
<td>Do you like Dora =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(min) 214 Lucy:</td>
<td>Yeah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cont. 215 Olivia:</td>
<td>= Adam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(er) 216 Adam:</td>
<td>&lt; No I I like spiderman:n &gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cR(sol) 217 Olivia:</td>
<td>You don't watch Dora!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(min) 218 Adam:</td>
<td>&lt; No spiderman:n &gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F(ack) 219.1 Olivia:</td>
<td>&lt;Okay&gt; (.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both assessment sequences are shaped in IRF terms and both serve to illustrate innovation on the part of participants in handling the provision of the ‘dispreferred response’ (Pomerantz, 1984). Dispreferred responses comprise negative responses to questions (rejections, declinations) or disagreements between speakers. They are typically delayed and accountable. In the first extract I ask Donal if he likes ‘Cinderella’ to which he provides the dispreferred response along with an immediate indirect account (line 114). His indirect account is achieved through his evoking an alternative character from consumer culture ‘Spiderman’. I accept the third position follow-up and support his claim with my “just spiderman” utterance (line 115.1) before initiating a new sequence with Tom. Here another alternative character ‘Bob the Builder’ is evoked as an indirect account for not liking ‘Cinderella’ (line 116) and again I close this sequence with an exclamatory follow-up echoing move.

In the second extract Adam offers ‘Spiderman’ as an alternative ‘liked’ product from consumer culture in opposition to his stated dislike of ‘Dora’ (line 216). In this case I attempt to open up the discussion enquiring as to whether Adam has ever watched ‘Dora’ (line 217) but he resists this opening up move and effectively brings the sequence to a close with his minimum repeat “No Spiderman” (line 218) to which he receives my topic transition token (Antaki et al., 2000) “okay”.

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R(min)</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>Tom: Bob</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F(excl)</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>Olivia: Bob (1.0) Bob the? Builder!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F(lw)</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>Tom: (Nods))</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Extract 5.7 is taken from a group comprising Harry, Chris, Ruth and Nancy. This interaction occurred during the ‘make and do’ routine.

Extract 5.7 ‘I don’t like Noddy’

The assessment considered here is Harry’s voluntary evaluation of ‘Noddy’ following my suggestion that he might choose a ‘Noddy’ image in the construction of his ‘make and do’ activity. Harry declines my offer of a Noddy sticker stating “I don’t like Noddy” (line 494). His negative evaluation is a type of dispreferred response and is therefore accountable as demonstrated by my “why not” (line 495). Harry, however, does not produce an account that pertains to ‘Noddy’ per se, instead stating that he likes ‘Thomas’, another character derived from consumer culture. This is a similar action to those demonstrated in Extracts 5.5 and 5.6 above if less stream-lined. It is evident that a declaration of liking one object can be used as an indirect account for a stated dislike of another object. Ultimately the conversational work achieved is a stated preference. I appear satisfied with his account as displayed by my high-grade assessment “Great” (line 498).
Extract 5.8 is taken from a group comprising Ewen, Luke, Cathy and Anna. The interaction occurred during the 'match and win' routine.

**Extract 5.8  Dora vs Superheroes**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Clip Time: 1 minute 15 seconds</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group: Lavender Hill #1</td>
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</table>


2. **R(er) 220** Luke: No I? only like Spiderman

3. **IbM(oq) 221** Olivia: Do you? like her Ewen.

4. **R(nvr) 222** Ewen: ((Shakes his head))

5. **cR(sol) 223** Olivia: Why not?

6. **IbC(bid) 224** Cathy: Oh I've I've I've I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I }
This assessment sequence provides further illumination of the conversational demands attached to the provision of a dispreferred response to questions around consumption tastes. The sequence is initiated by me when I invite Luke to tell the group if he likes ‘Dora’. He provides the dispreferred response “No” and immediately provides an indirect account for his response using the emphatic “I only like Spiderman” (line 220). His response and account are not acknowledged by me and I instead move on to ask Ewen if he likes ‘Dora’ to which he also produces the accountable, dispreferred response. His account is a little delayed and interrupted by Cathy who is bidding for the floor, but he eventually uses the same tactic as Luke finding an alternative character from consumer culture and stating that he likes ‘Batman’ (line 227). On this occasion the account does not prove satisfactory and I push for a ‘Dora’ related account (lines 228 and 231). Eventually Anna intercepts in an effort to aid Ewen in answering me and perhaps move the conversation on. She ties with Luke’s use of the intensifier “only” (line 220) and provides an echo of Ewen’s “Ss” and “Sp” prior to his “Batman” (line 227) producing an extreme formulation “you only like Superman and Spiderman and Batman don’t you” (line 233). Ewen does not accept her interjection but reiterates that he likes ‘Batman’ (line 234). The sequence is thus extended as I push for a ‘Dora’ related account (line 235) but it is not forthcoming from either Luke or Ewen and eventually Cathy and Anna modify the sequence into one of preferred responses as Anna states she “likes” Dora and Cathy “upgrades” (Pomerantz, 1984) this assessment stating she “loves” her in whispered tones (lines 237, 242, 244). The sequence does not culminate in an ‘F’

57 An upgraded agreement is an assessment of the referent assessed in the prior that incorporates upgraded evaluation terms relative to the prior.
(follow-up) move exposing the unresolved interaction between me and Ewen and between me and Luke.

**Extract 5.9 ‘I like Bob the Builder’**

In Extract 5.9 we meet Donal, Tom, Kitty and Ciara again. This interaction as with extract 5.5 also occurred during the ‘match and win’ routine.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clip Time: 21 seconds</th>
<th>Focus Group: The Ferns #1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I(oq) 305 Olivia: And what about Tom do you like Noddy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aside 306 Ciara: [((Claps twice))]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(nvr) 307 Tom: ((Nods head down once followed immediately by shaking head))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cR(clar) 308 Olivia: No?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cR(nvr) 309 Tom: ((Shakes head))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cR(sol) 310 Olivia: No why? [not ]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IbC(bid) 311 Ciara: [I do ]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(min) 312 Tom: 'Cos I don't</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IbC(bid) 313 Ciara: [I have it on TV]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(ack) 314 Olivia: [you don't ]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cR(conf) 315 Tom: ((Shakes head))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cR(sol)) 316 Olivia: Did you eh- did you</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IbC(p) 317 Donal: I like Bob the Builder. can we fix it Bob the Builder yes we can</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(ev) 318.1 Olivia: Very good</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IbM(oq) 318.2 Olivia: &gt;Do you like Bob (. ) the Builder Tom&lt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(nvr) 319 Tom: ((Nods))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F(ack) 320.1 Olivia: &gt;You do okay</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-ini 320.2 Olivia: Are we ready for the next one then?&lt;</td>
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Dispreferred responses typically demand greater levels of interactive work. The response is often delayed and unease is sometimes evident through head movements. This assessment sequence illustrates some of these demands. Tom’s initial response to my question about liking ‘Noddy’ is a preferred one (he nods once) but this is quickly converted into a head shake to produce a negative dispreferred response (line 307). I clarify that he has provided the dispreferred response before searching for an account
(lines 308 and 310). At this point in the interaction Tom provides a tautological response "'cos I don't" (line 312) but he is saved from further demands for elaboration from me when Donal claims the floor with his short sung rendition of the 'Bob the Builder' theme song (line 317) thereby evoking an alternative character from consumer culture and serving to provide a distraction from the Noddy topic. I respond to Donal's performative initiation with a positive endorsement (line 318.1) and utilise his topic change to initiate a new interaction with Tom concerning whether he likes 'Bob the Builder' (line 318.2). Here the preferred response is provided non-verbally, an account is not demanded as is typically the case with preferred responses and finally the sequence comes to a swift completion with my token receipt "you do okay" (line 320.1) which serves to close the conversational game in advance of re-opening the competitive game.

**Summary Discussion on Negative and Conflicted Assessment Sequences**

The first three assessment sequences examined above (Extracts 5.5, 5.6 and 5.7) are illustrative of the ways participants negotiate the 'doing' of negative product evaluations in an innovative way. Dispreferred responses are typically delayed and accountable (Kitzinger and Frith, 1999:302); accounts might be provided voluntarily or requested following the production of a dispreferred response. However, the responses provided here work around these conventions, there is no delay between the elicitation and the response which is very unusual in the context of dispreferred responses and an immediate account is provided.

The provision of an account is not unusual and in fact is expected (in CA terms) but the accounts provided here are marked as they do not pertain directly to the topic being explored by the moderator. Alternative positively evaluated characters, from consumer culture, are essentially drawn on to provide an account for 'not liking' others. This production of alternative characters proves to be a non-discursive activity that closes down rather than opens up further discussion and thus sees me manoeuvred into the 'F' position culminating in snappy IRF sequences similar to those observed in Extracts 5.1 and 5.2 above.

Again, a degree of flexibility is demonstrated as participants circumvent the onus to produce accounts through the provision of 'liked' alternatives from the broader product constellation. These 'alternative' formulations prove very successful for preschool consumers as they serve to postpone indefinitely the need for a more robust account for
the provision of a dispreferred response through the provocation of a follow-up move from the moderator and a subsequent topic change or progression of the competitive activity. The evocation of alternative characters from consumer culture by preschoolers also supports Seiter’s (1993) argument derived from the thinking of anthropologist Grant McCracken, that the meaning of a good is best communicated when this good is surrounded by a complement of goods that carry the same significance ‘...the symbolic properties of material culture are such that things must mean together if they are to mean at all’ (1993: 204).

In Extract 5.8 my orientation towards obtaining an account following the provision of a dispreferred response comes more clearly into focus. On this occasion the provision of alternative characters including ‘Spiderman’ and ‘Batman’ by Luke and Ewen as accounts for their shared dislike of ‘Dora’ is resisted by me. The sequence is thus extended as I push for a ‘Dora’ related account but it is not forthcoming from either Luke or Ewen and eventually Cathy and Anna modify the sequence into one of providing preferred responses as they produce positive, and therefore non-accountable, product evaluations. A number of oppositions become apparent here, firstly ‘Spiderman’ and ‘Batman’ are placed in opposition to ‘Dora the Explorer’ by Ewen and Luke. Secondly Ewen and Luke are allied together in their claimed ‘dislike’ of Dora in opposition to Cathy and Anna who are allied together in their claimed liking of Dora. In social currency terms ‘Dora’ is used as both a divisive and a unitary resource. The social currency theme is returned to in chapter six below.

A more typical handling of a dispreferred response is displayed in Extract 5.9. Tom is delayed in eventually producing the dispreferred negative product evaluation through gesture not speech. He then struggles to account for his evaluation. He does not however adopt the technique of finding an alternative character to claim allegiance to instead providing minimal and non-verbal responses to my questioning. Ultimately Donal provides a distraction from my persistence with his short musical rendition of the ‘Bob the Builder’ theme tune, a variation on the ‘finding an alternative character’ technique. In doing this he evokes a topic change and I move the assessment on to ‘Bob the Builder’, Tom provides the preferred response here nodding in response to my question as to whether he likes him and this sees the sequence resolved with my follow-up move “you do okay”.
The first two sections of this chapter demonstrate the extent to which ‘evaluative’ work in the focus group setting as moderated by me appears to conform quite closely to conversational conventions around preference structures as set out originally by Pomerantz (1984) and elaborated upon by others since including Schegloff (2007). These conventions render expanded discussion much more likely following the provision of dispreferred responses, in these cases stated ‘dislikes’ of consumer objects than in the case of stated ‘likes’ related to consumer objects. While the preschoolers participating in this group display an orientation towards the conventions related to preference structures, they are innovative in their use of those structures as well as competent in their manipulation of the IRF structure in either opening up or closing down sequences of interaction. These two issues (i) compliance with the conventions of preference structures and (ii) preschoolers negotiation of preference structures will be teased out further in the next section and returned to in the concluding part of this chapter.

5.4 ‘Doing’ Elaborate Product Evaluations

This final category subsumes assessment sequences that are characterised by product evaluations that demonstrate a higher level of complexity in interactive terms than those discussed above and that prove revelatory with regard to the way children make sense of the objects of consumer culture as well as how they understand themselves and each other. Elaborate product evaluations are sometimes provided spontaneously, in other words, they are not provoked by the moderator and are shaped in terms of bids for the floor or ‘inform’ moves. Other elaborate product evaluations arise as children are either asked to account for or they voluntarily account for their negative product evaluations. An examination of the ways in which children produce elaborate product evaluations reveals three predominant discursive repertoires (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) (i) age, (ii) gender and (iii) health. It is important to note that discursive repertoires are analogous to threads which weave through each focus group transcript, at times become more prominent and thus serving to provide particular colour and texture to a particular sequence of talk-in-interaction, and, at other times fading completely from the ongoing interaction. The extracts provided below have been selected to allow an explication of how these discursive themes are employed for social ends. Each category is addressed in turn. Summary remarks of the collection of elaborate product evaluations are provided at the end of the chapter.
5.4.1 Age

Whether age is evoked in the context of a spontaneous evaluation or whether it is utilised as an accounting device, it has a number of interactional consequences. Firstly, it sees the speaker comply with regular conversational conventions, that is, provide an account (age-based) of or ‘reason for’ a stated negative response (disagreement, negative evaluation) to a prior utterance of another speaker and thus pass the interactional floor back to the first speaker or allow room for another speaker to enter. Secondly, it sees the speaker position themselves and/or others in age-based terms in relation to the consumer object under discussion. Thirdly, it provides evidence of the ways children make sense of products in age-based terms in the social context of the focus group.

Three extracts have been selected that serve to illustrate how age is evoked in the ‘doing’ of product evaluations. As above each extract is presented in advance of the analytical discussion. The first extract addressed here (Extract 5.10) derives from a group comprising five children Kim, Cormac, Jonah, Andy and Mary-Jane. It occurs during the ‘match and win’ routine following the presentation of the ‘Noddy’ character.

Extract 5.10 ‘I hate Noddy’

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<th>Clip Time: 9 seconds</th>
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<td>Focus Group: The Wells #1</td>
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> I(oq) 251 Olivia: >And tell me about Noddy do you like Noddy<  
→ R(min) 252 Kim: Yeah  
→ Ibc(bid) 253 Cormac: I hate Noddy! =  
→ Ibc(bid) 254 Kim: I love Noddy! =  
→ Ibc(bid) 255 Andy: I hate Noddy! =  
→ Ibc(bid) 256 Mary-Jane: I love Noddy! =  
→ Ibc(oq) 257 Olivia: And what about you Jonah  
→ R(min) 258 Jonah: Eh (points to the Noddy card))  
→ cR(sol) 259 Olivia: You have it there but do you like it?  
→ cR(min) 260 Jonah: Yeah  
→ Ibc(nom) 261 Olivia: And wh- why do you not like it Anody  
→ R(er) 262 Andy: Cos I (.). cos I (.). cos I don't have it at home.  
→ F(rep) 263 Olivia: You don't have it at home.  
→ F(lw) 264 Andy: No
This assessment sequence begins with an open two-part directive question from me to the group “Tell me about Noddy do you like Noddy” (line 251). Kim provides a minimal preferred response “yeah” (line 252) after which a playful game of preferences occurs. Cormac states he hates ‘Noddy’ with an emphasis on “hate” (line 253). Kim upgrades her previous “yeah” in response to my question now stating that she “loves Noddy” (line 254). Andy then takes the floor allying with Cormac with “hate” (line 255) and finally Mary-Jane allies with Kim stating “I love Noddy” (line 256). The interaction is continuous as each utterance immediately follows the previous one. Pomerantz (1984: 66) argues that upgraded agreements often occur as clusters of agreements, or agreement series. Here upgraded agreements and disagreements are clustered conveying a sense of fun and games. Jonah, however, does not partake in this interaction and is brought in by me (lines 257 and 259). He points to the Noddy image on his bingo card and provides a minimal response “yeah” to my elicitation (line 260). Having at that point received an opinion from every member of the group, I then go in search of accounts for the dispreferred responses beginning with Andy (line 261).
Andy provides an elaborate response and accounts for his not liking Noddy on ownership terms “because I don’t have it at home” (line 262). I accept this account and move on to ask Cormac to account for his dispreferred response, he first offers a tautological account “Because I don’t like it”, however, I don’t accept this and push for elaboration from Cormac through my bound initiation move (line 269). This is the point in the interaction in which the age-based accounting device is used. Cormac uses the extreme formulation “only liked it when I was two” (line 270) and thus positions (Edley, 2001) himself as too old for ‘Noddy’. I accept his account with a confirmatory closing response and the follow-up move is provided by Cormac’s nodding gesture. Finally, I move on to Kim. She has earlier provided the preferred response on two occasions (lines 252 and 254) so it would be unwarranted for me in CA terms to request an account from her. However, my utterance is formulated as an indirect opinion question, it seeks to confirm the preferred response that Kim provided earlier in the first IRF sequence of this triple IRF shaped assessment sequence. Kim confirms her earlier response stating she likes “all of it” (line 278).

This first exemplar of the use of age as an accounting device demonstrates how it is used at a basic level. Cormac negotiates conversational conventions by providing a substantive account for his stated “hate” for Noddy. His account does not alter Kim’s evaluation which remains the same. The examples that follow build on this first exemplar to illustrate how the age-based account can have more far-reaching social consequences.

Extract 5.11 is taken from a group comprising two boys Chris and Harry and two girls Ruth and Nancy. The interaction depicted here occurred during the ‘make and do’ routine.

Extract 5.11  ‘Barney’s for babies’

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<th>Clip Time: 42 seconds</th>
<th>Focus Group: The Marshes #1</th>
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<tr>
<th>I(d)</th>
<th>459</th>
<th>Olivia:</th>
<th>Okay? (. ) now Chris again (. ) quick quick (1.5) would you + like this + one ((Barney sticker))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R(nvr)</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>Chris:</td>
<td>((Shakes his head))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibc(bid)</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>Harry:</td>
<td>&gt;Bar-ney’s&lt; for ba-bies!</td>
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</table>
This assessment sequence begins with my direction to Chris to take his turn in this activity by selecting an image for his collage. Chris refuses the offer of a ‘Barney’ card non-verbally (shaking his head) and without delay (line 460). In CA terms this is a non-verbal dispreferred response. Harry orients himself to this missing account for refusal and employs an emphatic tone to make the evaluation that ‘Barney’ is “for babies” (line 461). Chris does not respond to this assessment of ‘Barney’ but does state that he wants to get another ‘Tigger one’ which is a late account for his refusal of my offer. Ruth then takes the floor, format tying through her repeated ‘Tigger’ following Chris’ ‘Tigger’
and stating her private ownership ("at home") of 'Barney', 'Tigger' and 'Winnie the Pooh' (line 463).

When asked whether she likes 'Barney', Ruth provides a non-verbal response (slight nod) after which follows a long pause which is eventually broken by an inaudible utterance from Chris (lines 465 and 466). Harry then format ties with the 'Tigger' references announcing his possession of "two Tigger cards" (line 469), while Ruth overlaps with him stating "No I don't" (line 468), a very delayed and alternative verbal response to my question as to whether she "likes Barney". I respond to her utterance with a bound initiation eliciting an account for her new dispreferred response (line 470) but Ruth responds unconventionally with a reference to having watched 'Barney' "before" (in the past) (line 471). A recycling of my earlier question followed by another unaccounted non-verbal dispreferred response then ensues and following my direct search for an account (line 474), Ruth whispers a re-iteration of her dislike of 'Barney' (line 475). Her body language displays discomfort as she adopts a curled in position and looks down to the ground, I respond to this with a token of acceptance and reassurance that I am not going to push for an account "you just don't" (line 476.1) and this serves to close the assessment sequence.

'Barney' is an icon of children's culture and is clearly a recognisable and familiar character for the children in this group. Ruth utilises her possession of a 'Barney toy' and her experience of watching the television programme to take the floor. Declarations of possession of and experience of material artefacts by the focus group participants typically lead to requests for elaboration on these topics from me. However, Ruth appears stifled in her freedom to provide elaboration. While she is initially affirmative in 'liking' 'Barney', she engages in a u-turn mid-way through the interaction and remains emphatic about 'not liking' 'Barney' throughout the rest of the interaction. While the concept of age appropriateness is not alluded to by Ruth, Harry has very clearly provided the frame within which meanings around 'Barney' are to be understood at the beginning of the interaction. His emphatic "Barney's for babies" provided earlier in the interaction contrasts sharply with Ruth's whispered "No I don't" provided at the completion of this interaction.

Ultimately Harry's evaluation of 'Barney' presents Ruth with what Billig (2001) refers to as an 'ideological dilemma'. It is impossible for her to marry her ownership and
experience and apparent ‘liking’ for Barney in this forum, without falling into Harry’s categorisation of being ‘a baby’\(^{60}\). Ruth is not innovative in negotiating this dilemma instead allowing her statements of ownership, experience and initial liking sit uncomfortably alongside later statements of unaccounted dislikes. However, her discomfort is apparent through her body language and whispered tones and ultimately her refusal to comply with conversational conventions is accepted by me.

In terms of social ends, Harry uses his evaluation of Barney to exert some leadership in this interaction. His assessment is not challenged by Chris or Ruth or indeed Nancy who does not participate at all, nor is it challenged by me. Harry does not actually state explicitly whether he likes Barney at any point in this sequence but his emphatic and animated evaluation provided early on in the interaction serves to set the scene for the interaction that follows and to construct ‘Barney’ as a low value product in social exchange terms.

The final extract depicting ‘age’ as an accounting device (Extract 5.12), derives from a group comprising Josh, Millie, Cian and Claire. This sequence occurs during the ‘show and tell’ routine. I ask Josh if I may take a photograph of his completed collage to which he responds that he has to talk me through his choices first. This signals the beginning of the assessment sequence which centres on the topic of ‘Teletubbies’\(^{61}\).

**Extract 5.12**\(^{62}\) ‘I do like them but I don’t watch them’

| Clip Time: 1 minute 2 seconds |
| Focus Group: The Ferns #2 |

| I(d) | 686.2 Olivia: | Josh >can I take a picture of your one now< |
| R(er) | 687 Josh: | No- I have to tell you first |

\(^{60}\) Being described as a ‘baby’ or ‘babyish’ is a pejorative label for preschool aged children.

\(^{61}\) Teletubbies is a BBC TV series aimed at preschool viewers. It includes four colourful main characters who live in Tellytubbyland and a sun who has a baby’s face and makes baby noises during the show. Linn (2004:41) in a critical discussion of the manner in which the product was marketed to babies in the US cites figures from itsy bitsy Entertainment the programmes distributor for North and South America which estimated that the programme was reaching 1 billion toddlers worldwide in 2001.

\(^{62}\) This data extract and a version of the discussion that follows forms part of a conference paper entitled ‘I do like them but I don’t watch them’ – Preschoolers’ Use of Age as an Accounting Device in Consumption Desires, Preferences and Evaluations’, presented at Child and Teen Consumption, Linkoping June 2010.
The evaluation sequence depicted here begins at line 690.2, when, following Josh's presentation of his completed collage, I ask him if he *likes* Teletubbies. Josh is careful when producing the required response to this question and hesitates thus buying some time with his "well em" (line 691). He then produces a 'preferred response' to the question of 'liking' when he affirms that he does like them, however, he sandwiches his affirmation between a repeated claim that serves to distance him from the product, that is, that he does not “watch them”. His affirmation of 'liking' does not require an account and I do not seek one. His distancing move, however, is deemed accountable by me as demonstrated through my question “why do you not watch them” (line 692) to which Josh produces a confidently delivered age-based account “Cos I’m a big boy now” (line 693). I provide a minimal response to his account in the form of an acknowledgement
token “oh” (line 694) at which point Josh elaborates on his account. Here, he produces an extreme formulation through “only babies watch them”, followed by an immediate re-affirmation that he likes them, followed finally by a downgraded distancing (Pomerantz, 1984) “I don’t really watch them” (line 695). ‘Liking’ is again sandwiched between ‘watching’, but this time the distancing work achieved through the age-based elaboration “only babies” is compromised by the less solid footing of not “really” watching them. His “don’t really watch them” opens up the possibilities of a “maybe sometimes” scenario, and this plays out, as I nominate Millie to participate in the ongoing sequence (line 697).

Millie is hesitant to affirm that she likes ‘Teletubbies’ but she replies positively to my question (line 697 and 698). Hesitations are not usually associated with the provision of a preferred response and her hesitation here demonstrates the considered nature of that response. Having received the preferred response I do not ask for an account of it, instead tying with Josh’s distinction between liking and watching and asking Millie if she watches it ‘sometimes’? Again she provides a non-accountable preferred response. Both of her responses are produced in whispered tones as were many of her contributions across the course of the focus group interaction.

Claire contributes to the assessment sequence invoking a ‘same evaluation’ (Pomerantz, 1984) “me too” and thus building an alliance with Millie when she bids for the floor (line 702). She format ties with me with a reiteration of my “sometimes” and thus does not overplay her connection to the potentially sensitive topic that is ‘Teletubbies’. Having received a preferred response from Millie and Claire, I produce a high-grade assessment (Antaki et al., 2000) “great” (line 703) which is delivered through hushed tones and serves to begin to close down the sequence. It stands in contrast to the freestanding “oh” news receipt provided to Josh earlier. Cian’s bid for the floor and potential topic change “I love Scooby Doo” (line 704) is produced after my high-grade assessment and does not win a response from me as I close this particular assessment sequence and take charge of the topic transition “okay” (line 705).

Josh’s age-based account for why he does not watch ‘Teletubbies’ is illustrative of the fact that preschool consumers categorise the artefacts of consumer culture in terms of age (in)appropriateness. In distancing himself from the ‘Teletubbies’ programme, he uses/produces an age-based ‘repertoire’ (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) that weaves
through the consumer culture discourse produced by the focus group members and me, the moderator. Josh, thus accomplishes an ‘aged’ consumer self through talk-in-interaction. He is not explicit in mentioning his age in years but he contrasts his persona, “a big boy” who likes but does not watch ‘Teletubbies’, with that of a ‘baby’ persona, who likes, and as implied by Josh also watches ‘Teletubbies’. His initial assessment is met with very limited support from me, and silence from the other members of the focus group, with the exception of Cian who produces spontaneous parallel and separate preferences related to other consumer products namely ‘Care Bears’ and ‘Scooby Doo’ (lines 696 and 704). This lack of support might explain Josh’s subsequent downgrading from “don’t watch” to “don’t really watch” across just two turns (line 695).

Josh’s very clear distinction between liking and watching potentially allows other members namely Millie and Claire, to position themselves, like him as ‘liking’ but not ‘watching’ Teletubbies, without compromising their status as ‘big girls’ and ‘not babies’. However, they do not ratify his account, instead affirming that they “watch it sometimes”. While this might see them positioned in Josh’s “only babies watch it” category, his preceding downgraded claim, to “not really” watching it as opposed to ‘never’ watching it himself, muddies the waters with regard to exactly what level of liking and watching is socially acceptable. What is more noteworthy at the latter part of the sequence, however, is the interaction taking place between Millie and Claire. Goodwin (2006:195) argues in the context of assessment sequences that one way of ‘constituting and displaying alliances is through affirming similar perspectives with respect to an event’. Claire is active in supporting Millie’s claims in respect to liking and watching ‘Teletubbies’ as demonstrated in her spontaneous use of a ‘same evaluation’ ‘me too’ utterance.

By the end of the sequence, Josh has successfully utilised an age-based account in his evaluation of ‘Teletubbies’. No member of the group has explicitly challenged his account and he has, thus, firmly asserted a ‘big boy’ consumer self in opposition to that of a ‘baby’. To this end, he has successfully utilised this material resource to make sense of his own place on the chronological ladder. Claire and Millie have used the opportunity to reinforce their own alliance. Meanings around ‘Teletubbies’ however, specifically the age at which it is acceptable to like and or watch it remain unresolved, and thus its social kudos as an age-defining product is somewhat in flux.
The findings emerging with regard to the age-based repertoire are summarised at the end of this section. The next sub-section addresses how gender is utilised in the production of elaborate product evaluations.

5.4.2 Gender

Gender is the second discursive repertoire emerging across the data set in the context of ‘doing’ consumption evaluations. Stokoe and Weatherall (2002:708) cite Schegloff in arguing that gender is relevant to talk only when participants in an interactional episode are demonstrably oriented to it. Gender is understood as something that people ‘do’ rather than something that people ‘have’. This is in line with West and Zimmerman’s (1987:126) argument that gender is ‘not a set of traits, nor a variable,nor a role, but the product of social doings of some sort’. As above in the analytical discussion on age, gender is made relevant in two main ways either as a spontaneous evaluation or as an accounting device and it also has interactional consequences. It offers a gender-based account for a stated response of a speaker or in some cases of another speaker. It sees the speaker position themselves in gendered terms in relation to the consumer object and thus provides some insight into ‘doing gender’ as an element of the focus group as cultural routine. It also provides evidence of the ways children make sense of products in gendered terms either individually or collaboratively in the social context of the focus groups setting. Gender is a category that has received attention in previous work on children’s talk-in-interaction (Danby, 1998; Ervin-Tripp, 2001; Goodwin, 2006; Kyratzis 2001, 2007; Kyratzis and Guo, 2001, West and Zimmerman, 1987) as well as in studies of children’s consumption (Chin, 2001; Langer, 2002a; Messner, 2000; Russell and Tyler, 2002, 2005).

Three extracts have been selected that serve to illustrate how gender is evoked in the ‘doing’ of product evaluations. As above each extract is presented in advance of the analytical discussion and a summary discussion is provided in the final part of this section.

Extract 5.13 derives from a group comprising Jack, Fintan, Casey and Amber. This evaluation sequence occurred during the ‘show and tell’ routine. Both Casey and Amber
have chosen a ‘Sylvanians’ image with which to create their collage and I enquire as to whether Fintan and Jack ‘like’ the Sylvanians’.

**Extract 5.13  ‘I’m not a girl’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clip Time: Twenty-three Seconds</th>
<th>Focus Group: The Pines #1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I(oq)</td>
<td>492 Olivia: Do you like Sylvanians Fintan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(min)</td>
<td>493 Fintan: What</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| I(bm(re))                       | 494 Olivia: Do you like the Sylvanian families.((point to Casey's choice))
|                                 | [>Do you know them< ] |
| R(nvr)                          | 495 Fintan: [((Nods)) ] |
| I(bm(nom))                      | 496 Olivia: Do you like Jack |
| R(min)                          | 497 Jack: No |
| I(bm(clar))                     | 498 Olivia: You don't like them |
| R(min)                          | 499 Jack: No |
| I(bm(sol))                      | 500 Olivia: Why not |
| R(er)                           | 501 Jack: I’m not a girl |
| C(r(rep))                        | 502 Olivia: “You're not a girl” |
| I(bc(bid))                      | 503 Fintan: I'm not too |
| R(er)                           | 504 Olivia: >You’re not too well they’re good fun aren’t they.< |
| F(ack)                          | 505 Fintan: [((Nods)) ] |
| F(lw)                           | 506.1 Olivia: And that looks like a nice car that they have there (1.0) |
| I(oq)                           | 506.2 Olivia: And what about Barney do you like Barney |

This assessment sequence begins with my question and reformulation (lines 492 and 494) as to whether Fintan likes the ‘Sylvanians’? Fintan provides a delayed response more characteristic of the provision of the dispreferred response but eventually provides the preferred response through his nodding gesture (line 495). Having received the preferred response I then ask Jack if he likes the ‘Sylvanians’ to which he states “No” on two occasions without delay (lines 497 and 499). Having received the dispreferred

response I then search for an account and Jack offers a gender-based one, “I’m not a girl” (line 501) and thus implies that ‘Sylvanians’ are not for boys. Fintan then bids for the floor through his bound initiation “I’m not too” (line 503) but his utterance is left hanging. This appears to constitute a problem for me in terms of resolving the IRF sequence and moving on with the next play in the activity.

There is a conflict between Fintan’s earlier indication of ‘liking’ ‘Sylvanians’ and Jack’s inference that ‘Sylvanians’ are not for boys. I attempt to account for Fintan’s ‘liking’ of Sylvanians on his behalf and on two counts, firstly I repeat and hedge his “not too”, that is, he like Jack is not a girl, to provide something of an excuse for Fintan liking a girls toy, “well they’re good fun aren’t they” (line 504). Fintan agrees (nodding) with this assessment and thus provides the first move in the closing down of the sequence (line 505). Secondly I evoke a toy more typical of boys play “a car” stating “and that looks like a nice car that they have there” (line 506.1). This proves the last word on the topic at which point I move swiftly on to a new topic ‘Barney’.

Jack’s evocation of a gender-based repertoire as an accounting device proves very effective in this sequence. It is not met with a request for elaboration or justification from me and in fact immediately presents a problem for Fintan who has previously evaluated ‘Sylvanians’ in positive terms. His “I’m not too” could have been picked up by me and used to question Jack’s evaluation but instead I appear to endorse Jack’s view by offering excuses for why a boy might like them namely “fun” a quality that can be shared by boys and girls and evidence of a “car” in the stimulus image of the ‘Sylvanians’ an object I use in an attempt to masculinise the product. Ultimately, my contribution serves to provide a resolution albeit a weak resolution to the interactive sequence in hand.

The second extract evoking the gender-based repertoire (Extract 5.14) derives from a group comprising two girls Claire and Millie and two boys Josh and Cian. This interactive sequence occurred during the ‘make and do’ routine as Josh selected the character ‘Fifi’ from the popular TV programme ‘Fifi and the Flowertots’ for his collage activity.

Fifi and the Flowertots is a stop-motion animated children’s television series represented by Hit entertainment. The programme content revolves around Fifi and her ‘lovable little group of Flowertot friends as they go about their lives in Flowertot garden. http://www.hitentertainment.com/corporate/fifi.html
Extract 5.14 ‘Fifi is a girl’

This sequence does not constitute an assessment sequence as defined above, however, I have included it here as it illustrates the subtlety with which the gender construct is made relevant and manipulated in the context of commercial products. Josh makes a straightforward choice of a ‘Fifi’ card (line 598) when his turn to select something for his collage activity comes round. I do not seek an account for his choice instead providing an acknowledgement token “right” (line 599). Claire interjects with the observation that “Fifi is a girl” (line 600). In so doing she is tentatively challenging Josh’s choice on gender grounds but she does not receive a response from me or from Josh. Eventually after a relatively long pause of two and a half seconds during which time Josh carefully affixes his Velcro backed card to his felt covered Christmas tree, Millie responds by giving Claire a gentle nudge and providing a delayed response to her observation whispering “It’s okay” (line 601). Claire then retreats on her earlier problematisation of Josh’s choice and falls into line with Millie through her declared agreement “Yeah it’s alright” (line 602). I do not respond to this whispered exchange between Claire and Millie. My “Okay now Millie” (line 603.1) demonstrates a concern with progressing with the activity at hand that is allocating turns.

Overall Josh appears to hold his own in this interaction but Millie’s support is important in this regard. Claire remains closely aligned with Millie. Kyratzis (2000) cites Blount (1972) in arguing that whispering implies that a special relationship holds among participants. Ultimately Claire’s alliance with Millie takes precedence over her attempt to undermine Josh. In terms of meaning-making the inference is made by Claire that
‘Fifi’ is a girls toy and therefore an inappropriate choice for Josh but my silence coupled with Millie’s countering “it’s okay” renders the gender-appropriateness of the ‘Fifi’ product unresolved.

The final extract (Extract 5.15) chosen for discussion that sees the gender construct evoked derives from a group comprising three boys Cillian, Alan and Michael and one girl Alice. It occurred during the ‘match and win’ routine.

**Extract 5.15 ‘Care Bear Bombs’**

| Clip Time: 1 minute 9 seconds |
| Focus Group: The Marshes #2 |

| F(ev) | 240.1 Olivia: | That's right (.) |
| → | I(oq) | 240.2 Olivia: | Do you like? Care Bears Michael. |
| R(min) | 241 Michael: | Yeah |
| IbM(oq) | 242 Olivia: | Do you ((to another member of the group)) |
| → | IbM(bid) | 243 Michael: | I don’t watch it any more |
| R(sol) | 244 Olivia: | Oh is it is it a cartoon? |
| → | cR(er) | 245 Michael: | >Yeah but I don't watch it< |
| IbM(nom) | 246 Olivia: | Do you [(like)it Alice?] |
| Cont. | 247 Michael: | [I watch ] |
| R(nvr) | 248 Alice: | <Disney Channels> |
| R(clar) | 249 Olivia: | You watch Disney channels but it's not on that is it not? |
| cR(conf) | 250 Michael: | It is |
| F(ack) | 251.1 Olivia: | >Oh it is< |
| → | I(rq) | 251.2 Olivia: | And can? you get a toy of Care Bears as well |
| R(nvr) | 252 Alice: | ((Nods)) |
| → | IbM(rq) | 253 Olivia: | Does anyone have them? |
| R(nvr) | 254 Alice: | ((Shakes her head)) |
| → | IbC(bid) | 255 Cillian: | I don't (.) they're for girls |
| R(sol) | 256 Olivia: | Are they |
| F(conf) | 257 Cillian: | Yeah (3.0) |
| I(oq) | 258 Olivia: | Mmmm do ;you think that Alice |
| R(nvr) | 259 Alice: | ((Shrugs her shoulders)) |
The multi-party talk-in-interaction captured here followed the correct identification by Michael of a ‘Care Bears’ card in a bingo game. I engage Michael with an opinion question on Care Bears (line 240.2) to which he provides a prompt preferred response. However, immediately following this he begins distancing himself from the product stating twice that he “doesn’t watch it” (lines 243 and 245) and ultimately bringing the first assessment sequence to a close with my news receipt “Oh it is” (line 251.1) to Michael’s informing me that ‘Care Bears’ is on the Disney channel.

I then initiate a new assessment sequence, this time employing a referential question about the existence of ‘toy’ ‘Care Bears’ as distinct from the animated production followed by a question about whether any of the children possess a ‘Care Bear’ (lines

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65 Care Bears are a set of characters created by American Greetings in 1981 for use on greeting cards. Each bear comes in a different colour and has a specialized insignia on its belly that represents its duty and personality. The Care Bears appeared in a television series from 1985 to 1988 and were reintroduced in 2002 and relaunched in 2007 for their 25th anniversary http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Care_Bears. Many preschoolers are familiar with the television cartoon and the array of spin-off products that accompany it including soft toys.
251.2 and 253). Gillian responds quickly with a statement that he does not like them and supports this with a gender-based account, “they’re for girls” (line 255). While Alan the third boy in the group struggles with the question from me as to whether he thinks boys “can have Care Bears” (lines 264 and 265), Gillian then engages in an interesting u-turn overlapping with Alan stating loudly that he has watched it once and thus softening his earlier “they’re for girls” assessment (line 267). At this point I invite Michael back into the discussion and he gives some careful consideration to his response to me; a long “eh” followed by a two second pause and finally a bold claim that “he got one today” (line 268). Michael proceeds to describe Care Bears “powers” specifically the “fire bombs” they shoot from their “tummies” (line 270). I do not provide a full endorsement of Michael’s reference to “fire bombs” instead tying to his “powers” and providing a non-discursive neutral transitory repeat of his “powers in their tummies” follow-up to close the sequence and move on to the next one (lines 271.1 and 271.2).

The interactive work carried out by Michael in this one minute passage of interaction is revealing in terms of the care and precision with which the meanings of children’s commercial products are negotiated and refined through assessment sequences. Michael’s initial preferred response ‘liking’ followed by his claim of not watching is similar to Josh’s liking but not watching of ‘Teletubbies’ above (Extract 5.12) but this time gender rather than age is at stake and this is made clear by Cillian. I reinforce the potentially gendered status of ‘Care Bears’ by seeking the opinions of Alice and Alan and essentially asking them if they agree with Cillian’s assessment. All of this interaction presents Michael with a dilemma. He needs to resolve his earlier positive evaluation of Care Bears with Cillian’s evaluation that ‘Care Bears’ are “for girls” in order to avoid being positioned by himself or others as a girl. He re-develops his narrative to vividly masculinise Care Bears and thus continues to endorse them and ‘please’ me while producing a hyper masculine narrative that pleases his peers. While his contribution does not address gender explicitly, his use of “fire” and “bombs” and “powers” is evocative of a masculine domain and sits in opposition to Cillian’s unelaborated “they’re for girls”. By the end of the extract Michael has defended his initial positive response to the product and protected his masculine identity in the process. Cillian’s late claim that he had experienced the cartoon (line 267) was key in providing the permissive space in which Michael produced his late face-saving contribution.
The findings emerging with regard to the gender-based repertoire are summarised at the end of this section. The final sub-section addresses how health is utilised in the production of elaborate product evaluations.

5.4.3 Health

The majority of the stimulus materials utilised for this study comprised toy and media related products (sampled using toy catalogues as described above), only two food and drink products ‘McDonalds’ and ‘Coca-Cola’ were included in the sample. The ‘Coca-Cola’ topic promoted a lot of discussion amongst many of the groups and the major discursive thread to emerge in this context was a health themed one. This health-based repertoire was evoked spontaneously in the course of discussing ‘Coca-Cola’ or drawn on as an accounting device in discussions around ‘Coca-Cola’ (Extracts 5.16 and 5.17). I have also included one additional extract which sees ‘age’ evoked in the context of discussion on ‘Coca-Cola’.

This extract derives from a group comprising Cathy, Anna, Ewen and Luke. It occurred during the ‘match and win’ routine and begins with some negotiation around identification of the ‘Coca-Cola’ logo.

Extract 5.16 ‘It makes me mad’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clip Time: 58 Seconds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group: Lavender Hill #1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I(dq)</th>
<th>62</th>
<th>Olivia:</th>
<th>&lt;Does anyone&gt; know what &lt;this one is called.&gt; (.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R(min)</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Ewen:</td>
<td>Em:::</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(min)</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>Anna:</td>
<td>A Bar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IbM(pr)</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Olivia:</td>
<td>A Bar is it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(er)</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>Cathy:</td>
<td>[No it's COKE ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(er)</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Ewen:</td>
<td>[No it's Coca ]Cola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IbC(bid)</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>Anna:</td>
<td>Coke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IbM(dq)</td>
<td>69.1</td>
<td>Olivia:</td>
<td>Who's got it (1.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IbM(d)</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>Olivia:</td>
<td>&quot;Cathy you can put it on yours&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ IbM(oq)</td>
<td>69.3</td>
<td>Olivia:</td>
<td>Tell me do you [like Coke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(min)</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Ewen:</td>
<td>&lt;I like [Coke as well]&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IbC(bid)</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>Cathy:</td>
<td>[ I ]I DO like Coke(.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ IbC(bid)</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Anna:</td>
<td>I don't like Coke [(em em) ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The assessment sequence begins with my bound initiation where I ask the group if they “like Coke” (line 69.3). Both Ewen and Cathy provide the preferred response but Anna opposes them providing the dispreferred “I don’t like Coke” (line 72). The talk is animated here as evidenced by the production of speedy utterances and overlap between speakers. Luke follows Cathy stating loudly that his mother “gave him coke” (line 73) after which Anna provides an unsolicited account for her dispreferred response. The
account “it makes me sick” (line 74) unleashes a health-based discursive thread which weaves through the ongoing lively sequence of talk.

Cathy aligns herself with Anna through an almost identical repeat of Anna’s turn but softens the emphasis with her “I think it makes me sick” (line 76). Ewen provides a variation on the same theme format tying with Cathy’s “I think” but moving from a first person emphasis ‘me’ to the more general ‘you’ and upgrading from sickness to madness stating “I think it makes you mad” (line 77). Luke aligns with Ewen stating it makes him mad too (line 81). A failed attempt at shifting topic back to taste evaluation provokes further elaboration on the theme of madness by Ewen, this time incorporating a violent dimension to Coke consumption into the broader discursive repertoire (line 83). Having at this point obtained everyone’s evaluations, I do not seek further elaboration from Ewen and instead close the sequence with an exclamatory follow-up move “Oh my goodness wow!” (line 84.1).

I then initiate a new angle on the same topic moving from evaluations of ‘Coca Cola’ to actual consumption of the product. Here I also utilise the health repertoire albeit with a little more subtlety. Luke had previously used the verb “take” with reference to Coca-Cola (line 75) a term more usually associated with medical products. I format tie with Luke’s “take” asking Ewen “Do you take it sometimes” (line 84.2) and in response he also engages in format tying “I just take it wo- one time” (line 85). This description of “taking” ‘Coca-Cola’ contributes to the construction of the health repertoire. An alternative treat-based repertoire is also introduced by me for the discussion of ‘Coke’ (line 86) but this is not utilised by the participants and the interactive sequence winds down quickly from this point.

Anna uses evaluations of ‘Coca-Cola’ to distinguish herself from the other participants and in so doing she asserts some leadership as Cathy allies herself to Anna with a similar claim around sickness. Ewen provides an independent but related evaluation and his claim around madness is supported by Luke. Thus, two alliances emerge, one comprising Ewen and Luke and one comprising Anna and Cathy. These alliances are gendered and they reoccur later in the focus group discussion (as shown in Extract 6.2.3 below).

The second extract evoking the health construct is derived from a group comprising Michael, Alan, Cillian and Alice. This assessment sequence occurred during the 'match
and win’ routine. It comprises two extended IRF sequences with a mini basic three-part one sandwiched between.

**Extract 5.17 ‘It’s not good for you’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clip Time: Twenty-five seconds</th>
<th>Focus Group: The Marshes #2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I(oq) 293.2 Olivia: And do you like coke</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(gr) 294 Alan &amp;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>295 Michael: [Yeah]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ IbC(bid) 296 Cillian: [I don't drink coke(.).cos it's not =</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IbC(bid) 297 Michael: [I dwink (.). I dwink</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Cont. 298 Cillian: = good for you.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cont. 299 Michael: = eh coca-cola chocolate.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ R(sol) 300 Olivia: Oh and ;why do you not- drink it?[(to Cillian)]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ cR(er) 301 Cillian: 'Cos it's not good for me</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F(ack) 302 Olivia: Is it not. is coke not good for you.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F(lw) 303 Michael: °No°</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I(rq) 304 Olivia: Are you do you drink it Alice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(nvr) 305 Alice: ((Shakes her head))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F(ack) 306.1 Olivia: No (.).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I(rq) 306.2 Olivia: Alan?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ R(min) 307 Alan: Yeah</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ cR(sol) 308 Olivia: Just sometimes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ cR(er) 309 Alan: Never I don't drink it anymore.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ cR(ack) 310 Olivia: You don't drink it anymore.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IbC(bid) 311 Michael: &gt;I do&lt; [(.]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(er) 312 Olivia: [you]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Cont. 313 Michael: Only at cinemas.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ R(er) 314 Olivia: Only at ;cinemas so it's a treat is it?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cR(min) 315 Michael: Yeah</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IbM(rq) 316 Olivia: Are you allowed have it as a treat.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(min) 317 Michael: Yeah</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IbM(rq) 318 Olivia: And the other children were telling me you sometimes can get it in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The assessment sequence begins with my elicitation through a group directed question on ‘Coca-Cola’. Initial responses from Michael and Alan are positive but disagreement between speakers almost immediately ensues. Cillian disagrees with Michael and Alan’s positive evaluation and accounts for his own negative evaluation on the basis that ‘coke’ is “not good for you” (line 296 and 298). There is some overlapping talk here and I appear not to hear Cillian’s initial account and go in search for one (line 300). Cillian reiterates his initial account although he downgrades it slightly from the generalising “not good for you” to the individualising “not good for me” (line 301). The account is a health-based one.

I move the focus from ‘liking’ ‘Coca-Cola’ to actual consumption beginning with a basic three part IRF sequence with Alice where she states she does not drink it. Routinely this dispreferred response is accountable but I do not seek an account from Alice instead accepting her response and moving on to question Alan and Michael about their consumption habits. Alan states he does drink it (line 307) but I suggest a downgrading of his statement with my “just sometimes” (line 308) to which Alan engages in a complete u-turn stating he “never” drinks it (line 309). Michael accounts for his consumption as being limited to cinema visits (line 313) and thus does the downgrading I suggested to Alan without engaging in a u-turn. I attempt to prolong the discussion of ‘Coca-Cola’ by making asking if you can get ‘Coke’ in McDonalds but this is unsuccessful as Cillian provides the dispreferred negative response, “No” to my question. At this stage I am struggling to find an appropriate follow-up move and thus resolve the current IRF sequence; I produce a pre-initiation into the next sequence (line 320) and am saved by Alan who confirms my suggestion about McDonalds providing the preferred “yeah it is” and so provides me with the interactive space to close the sequence “it is okay” (line 322) and finally move on.

The health-based discursive repertoire which colours this interactive sequence originates from Cillian’s account for his dispreferred response. The substance of his account proves
powerful as it appears to almost change the rules of the conversational game. As the focus shifts from 'liking' to 'consuming' Alice's distancing from the product is not held accountable by me, and I in fact contribute to the downplaying of claimed consumption of the product on the parts of both Michael and Alan (lines 308, 310 and 314). By the end of the assessment sequence a consensus is achieved which sees 'Coca-Cola' constructed as a product which is 'bad' for us but which we occasionally consume. 'Coca-Cola' is used as a conversational resource with which to 'do' or position ourselves as sensible healthy selves.

The final extract addressed here derives from a group comprising three girls Chelsea, Emma and Clio. It occurred during the 'match and win' routine following recognition of the 'Coca-Cola' logo which was presented as stimulus material.

**Extract 5.18 ‘You’re too small for coke’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I(dq)</th>
<th>159</th>
<th>Olivia:</th>
<th>There you go (.) now what's this one anyone know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R(min)</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>Chelsea:</td>
<td>Coca-Cola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(min)</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>Emma:</td>
<td>Coke (.) Coke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(min)</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>Chelsea:</td>
<td>Coca-Cola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→</td>
<td>IbM(oq)</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>Olivia:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(min)</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>Clio:</td>
<td>Coke (.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(min)</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>Emma:</td>
<td>Yeah eh [yeah]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→</td>
<td>Cont.</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>Clio:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→</td>
<td>IbC(bid)</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>Chelsea:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(sol)</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>Olivia:</td>
<td>Is she</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cR(nvr)</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>Chelsea:</td>
<td>((Nods))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cR(sol)</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>Olivia:</td>
<td>And what about (.) you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→</td>
<td>cR(er)</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>Chelsea:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IbM(nom)</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>Olivia:</td>
<td>And what about you Emma:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(er)</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>Emma:</td>
<td>&quot;Em (.) I'm a good girl for gettin' Coke&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→</td>
<td>IbC(bid)</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>Chelsea:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The assessment sequence begins following initial recognition of the logo when I throw an opinion question into the floor (line 163). Emma provides the preferred response and overlaps with Clio who is still responding to the recognition part of the ‘match and win’ activity (lines 164 and 166). Before Clio has a chance to respond to the question of ‘liking’ ‘Coca-Cola’, Chelsea bids for the floor with the announcement that Clio “is too small for coke” (line 167) in contrast to her own aged status “I’m big” (line 171). Clio does not provide a counter-response to those claims. When I nominate Emma to contribute to the discussion she evokes a different discursive thread stating “I’m a good girl for gettin’ coke”. Chelsea allies with her on this by tying with her “good girl” and broadening the response evoking the idea that ‘Coke’ is a permission-based product stating that her mother “always lets me have some Coke” (line 174). I try to evoke a ‘health-based’ discursive repertoire enquiring into the ‘goodness’ of the product but Chelsea’s preferred response “Yeah” effectively closes down the sequence provoking my follow-up move “Yeah okay” (line 177).

While this sequence is fairly brief and is not characterised by elaborate exchanges it packs a lot of discursive content and my analysis suggests that these co-discussants make sense out of ‘Coca-Cola’ through ideas around age-appropriateness and parental permission. It’s an aspirational product for well-behaved (“good”) and aged (“big”) girls.

Summary Discussion on Elaborate Product Evaluations

The analysis above broadens out the enquiry by addressing lengthier assessment sequences than those examined in the first two sub-sections. ‘Doing’ evaluations can provide the discursive space to accomplish a range of social ends. Three dominant themes are identified above and the manner in which they are formulated within assessment sequences is examined. The themes ‘age’, ‘gender’ and ‘health’ present themselves as discursive repertoires which colour the ongoing talk. Across the three categories, these constructs emerged as a spontaneous part of the discussion or in the form of an accounting device, that is, an account for a particular (negative) assessment of a consumer object. The social action displayed is two-fold. Firstly, the preference
structures discussed above provide the interactive space for participants to produce age/gender/health based accounts for dispreferred responses and in doing so conversational conventions around participation are upheld and secondly an opportunity is taken to construct oneself and or a range of consumer objects in age/gender/health based terms.

A focus on ‘age’ revealed that consumer objects are made sense of in terms of age (in)appropriateness, some popular characters from consumer culture including, ‘Noddy’, ‘Barney’ and ‘Telletubbies’ were variously constructed as being ‘babyish’. In Extract 5.11 above Harry’s spontaneous age-based assessment of ‘Barney’ appeared to impact on the interaction that followed as ‘Barney’ was constructed as a low value product in social exchange terms. Ruth’s change of mind from a stated like of Barney to a dislike and her subsequent discomfort with being pressed for an account for her negative evaluation demonstrates the extent to which assessments are subject to scrutiny by other group members. Goodwin (2007:371) argues ‘providing a next move to an assessment entails important interactional competence, as the appropriateness of one’s move is itself subject to evaluation by interlocutors to the present interaction.’ Josh’s similar construction of ‘Telletubbies’ as babyish had less social impact as Millie and Claire were allied in their claims of watching this television programme ‘sometimes’, leaving the extent to which the ‘Telletubbies’ might be viewed as an age-defining product unresolved.

A focus on ‘gender’ sees consumer objects also made sense of in terms of gender (in)appropriateness. Danby (1998:175) argues ‘each child must get its gender right, not only for itself to be seen as normal and acceptable within the terms of the culture, but it must get it right for others who will be interpreting it themselves in relation to it as other’. Her work examined gender as a social practice as displayed in children’s play in a preschool classroom. The findings emerging in my study also provide a glimpse into the activities of ‘competent’ preschool children engaged in the construction of a gendered world. The particular extracts above provide exemplars where consumer objects including ‘Sylvanians’, ‘Fifi and the Flowertots’ and ‘Care Bears’ are all deemed problematic on gendered grounds, that is, they are ‘for girls’. In Extract 5.14 Claire’s spontaneous evaluation that ‘Fifi’ is a ‘girls’ toy works to infer that Josh’s choice is inappropriate on gendered grounds. However, her attempts to undermine Josh are weak
as she does not receive support from me and is very gently but effectively challenged by Millie.

The other two extracts under this category reveal greater complexity, however, as in these cases the pejorative ‘for girls’ evaluation emerges following previous positive assessments of the respective consumer objects, ‘Sylvanians’ and ‘Care Bears’ by other male members of the group. In one of these cases (Extract 5.13) I intervene in an attempt to aid in the justification of Fintan’s earlier positive evaluation of ‘Sylvanians’ by drawing on gender neutral qualities of the product, that is, ‘fun’, and masculine aspects of the product, ‘cars’ and thus succeed in achieving a weak resolution to that particular interactive sequence. In the second case (Extract 5.15) Michael demonstrates social competence in resolving the dilemma of how his positive evaluation of ‘Care Bears’ can sit alongside Cillian’s assessment that ‘Care Bears’ are ‘for girls’ by re-developing his narrative to vividly masculinise ‘Care Bears’ through his evocation of ‘fire bombs’ and ‘shooting’ thus continuing to endorse them and ‘please’ me while producing a hyper masculine narrative that pleases his peers and provides an indirect counter-assault to Cillian’s ‘for girls’ assessment.

A focus on ‘health’ emerged in talk around ‘Coca-Cola’. Here a negative assessment of the product is accounted for on health-based grounds. If we contrast these elaborate assessment sequences with the positive assessment sequences described in section 5.2 above, it is clear that spontaneous negative responses coupled with volunteered accounts such as Cathy’s “I don’t like Coke ... it makes me sick” in Extract 5.16 above provides for more playful ways to engage with each other within the interactive space than do positive unaccountable preferred responses. This particular sequence sees alliances emerge between Anna and Cathy through ‘sickness’ and between Ewen and Luke through ‘madness’. Evidence of my collaboration in constructing ‘Coca-Cola’ as a product which is ‘bad’ for us but which we occasionally consume emerges in Extract 5.17. And finally the age-based repertoire is considered again in Extract 5.18 as we see ‘Coca-Cola’ made sense of in age-based terms and in the context of parental permission. I will now turn to the final part of this chapter and draw some broad conclusions on the analysis contained within it.
5.5 Conclusions

The analysis presented here addresses children as consumers through an interactional lens. It demonstrates: (i) how ‘doing evaluation’ of a consumer object can be understood as a social action that takes place through interaction and has social consequences, (ii) the way conversational conventions are manipulated by moderator and child participants in the focus group setting for social ends and (iii) that the notion of the ‘choosing’ child consumer is a complex one, a fuller understanding of which must encompass children’s competence as interactive social beings.

The development of consumer preferences and desires has received much attention from marketing academics (Gunter and Furnham, 1998; John, 1999; McNeal, 2007) and critics of children’s consumer culture have argued that the pressure on children to consume in order to maintain social links with their peers is relentless and exploitative (Linn 2004; Mayo and Nairn; 2009, Schor 2004). Conversation analysts have examined preferences along with desires as captured through non-participant ethnographic means (Butler, 2008; Goodwin, 2006; Pugh, 2009) but a close examination of the ‘doing’ of evaluations by preschool consumers in interaction within a focus group setting had not been previously carried out.

Puchta and Potter (2004:15) studied adult interaction in focus groups and argue that evaluations and assessments may be constructed and organised in particular ways to fit the interaction, for example a delay can signal caution in making an assessment. They also note the variation evident in people’s evaluations because ‘the people doing the talking are doing different things with the evaluations’ (p.26) depending on the context. It is important to reiterate that the methodological perspective employed here is not concerned with seeking the truth or ascribing ‘true’ inner states to individuals but rather argues that truths are constructed in the here and now of interaction, fluid in structure and serve differing functions across contexts. The ‘choosing child’ (Cook, 2004) is addressed in empirical terms to reveal the social significance of ‘doing’ consumption related evaluations in the focus group setting. The CA-informed discourse analytical perspective allowed a focus to be gained on the ‘how’ of this activity. The CA lens shed light on how ‘doing’ evaluations is shaped and patterned (examination of preference structure organisation and the accounting mechanism). The DA lens shed light on the form and substance of social accomplishments arising from evaluations, focussing in on age, gender and health as discursive repertoires. A close examination of the interaction
between participants also revealed that shared evaluations are used to build alliances as well as foster disputes between members.

I used the theory of ‘preference structures’ (Pomerantz, 1984) to provide analytical direction to this exploration and preserved the IRF framework within which the assessment sequences examined were found. A strong orientation emerged on the part of both moderator and child towards conventions around preference structures. The provision of positive evaluations formulated as preferred responses to my initiations questioning children’s ‘likes’ with respect to consumer objects resulted in acceptances from me and swift closing down of those sequences. The extent to which positive evaluations are used for social ends seemed limited to displays of camaraderie. Negative evaluations alternatively comprised dispreferred responses and were therefore deemed accountable by me and thus served to open up the interactive space for further discussion. In both cases stated evaluations appeared to invite other members of the group to agree or differ and in doing so seize opportunities to build allegiances or to foster disputes.

Seiter (1993:205) argues that children’s desire for toys signals a mastery of the principles of consumer culture, that is, ‘the accurate perception by the child of a system of meaningful social categories embodied in commodities and sets of commodities’. The perceptiveness she describes is displayed through the talk-in-interaction depicted above. One consumer object often provoked discussion of another from the broader constellation of consumer objects preschoolers have access to. Oppositional consumer characters included ‘Dora the Explorer’ who was liked/disliked in opposition to superheroes including ‘Spiderman’, ‘Batman’ and ‘Superman’; ‘Noddy’ was positioned against ‘Thomas the Tank Engine’ and separately against ‘Bob the Builder’.

To return momentarily to one of the issues discussed in chapter four above, providing dispreferred responses, engaging in disagreement and holding opposing views proved strategic as ways with which to negotiate any restrictions around the interactive space. Goodwin (2006:108) found that in the conversations of working class African American Maple Street children that she studied; they more typically displayed a preference for disagreement than agreement thus refuting the universal claims of some conversation analysts. She cites Goffman (1967:254) and argues that the children sought opportunities to create miniature versions of ‘character contests’. Corsaro and Maynard (1996:171)
also argue that there is a tendency to display rather than put off the expression of opposition in children’s peer culture. They (1996:167) observe format tying as central to participation in competitive talk and posit that the children ‘Listen carefully to the surface structure of what is said, repeat elements of it, and propose permutations in line with personal experiences and interests.’ Format tying can be used to aggravate disputes and to display individual knowledge and skills within disputes and thus renders ‘disputes mutually shareable events in the course of their production’ (p. 171). The data I have discussed above supports the classic theory on preference structures to a large extent, although Extracts 5.15, 5.16 and 5.17 see playful disagreements and oppositions between child participants suggesting perhaps that in the formality of adult-child talk conversational conventions are adhered to but as Goodwin (2006) suggests when children are engaging peer-to-peer conventions are stretched and challenged.

The assessment sequences were by and large shaped in ‘IRF’ terms and most of the sequences considered here emerged from the ‘match and win’ routine. I demonstrated an orientation towards the ‘IRF’ shape through for example my production of high grade assessments (Antaki et al, 2000) which served to efficiently close-down assessment sequences. The participants were also oriented to the IRF shape and having initially created interactive work through the production of dispreferred responses and the search and provision of subsequent accounts, a spontaneous unproblematic positive assessment was occasionally proffered that led smoothly into the production of a ‘follow-up’ closing move and thus the initiation of a new sequence. The ebb and flow of assessment sequences some charged with momentum (short and snappy positive assessments) and others produced in a more leisurely discursive frame for the most part contain the same broad IRF shape and fit closely into Corsaro’s (2005:19) notion of a ‘cultural routine’, that is a repetitive activity collectively produced by members of a culture.

Having explored in depth the prevalence of ‘evaluation’ work in the context of the focus group setting, it is evident that competence in recognising and making assessments of the commodities of consumer culture is key to being an ‘effective’ focus group participant. It is also evident that the products of consumer culture provide the conversational currency of this interactive space, the next chapter focuses on the performative (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) aspects of ‘doing’ commodity talk.
CHAPTER SIX: Examining Children’s Use of Commercial Discourse as Social Currency

The analysis presented above in chapter five suggests that having previous experience of, possession of and/ or knowledge of commercial products provides very young children with a store of capital which can be exploited during the course of focus group participation. This chapter presents findings from the top layer of analytical inquiry and focuses using single case analysis (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998) on the question of how and for what purposes discourses around commercial material artefacts are used as social currency by preschool consumers? As before, the IRF framework and coding scheme is preserved but this question demands a wide angle approach to the data and thus the unit of analysis broadens out (see Figure 6.1) to interaction at the level of the episode (comprising lengthy or multiple sequences of on-topic interaction).

Figure 6.1 Bottom-up Analytical Inquiry – Focus on Single Case Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Single Case Analysis</th>
<th><em>Performance</em>: examining social accomplishments through single case analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Sequences</td>
<td><em>Action</em>: examining social action as evidenced in assessment sequences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examining the Focus Group Fingerprint</td>
<td><em>Structure</em>: examining interactional (in)possibilities and roles as evidenced in the focus group fingerprint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmotivated Looking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This chapter is structured as follows; firstly an overview of the interaction at the level of the episode is presented. This paves the way for the core analytical discussion which is presented across two main sections. The first of these (Section 6.2) is a CA-informed discourse analytical discussion of each of six episodes on a case by case basis focussing on how the objects from consumer culture are used as linguistic resources in the focus group setting. The headings utilised in this section refer to the ‘topic’ under discussion in the episode of interaction (see Figure 6.2 for an extract map); this is intentional as it
brings commercial material culture to the forefront of the analytical exercise and serves to best preserve the philosophical and practical underpinnings of the analytical approach adopted here. The second core section (Section 6.3) considers the main findings from the case by case analysis together and conclusions are formulated concerning how and to what social effect these resources are harnessed. The headings used in this section ‘interpretative repertoires’, ‘positioning’ and ‘social accomplishments’ bring the analytical categories and constructs to the forefront of the discussion. Finally some concluding remarks are made in advance of the final chapter of the thesis.

6.1 Examining Interaction at the Episodic Level

Each transcript was clipped, coded and filed by topic-bound sequence utilising the data manager facility on the ‘Transana’ programme. A number of episodes of multi-party interaction were identified as rich exemplars in shedding light on the question of how consumer discourse is used for social ends. This ‘single case analysis’ approach (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998) is discussed above in Section 3.4.4. This approach allows attention to be given to the detail of the unfolding talk and, in examining a single episode, the social order of the interactional event can be made apparent (Psathas, 1992). The cases selected below display extended periods of multi-party topic-bound talk-in-interaction. The discourse produced is organised around specific material objects derived from children’s consumer culture. These objects provide discussion topics that are debated and negotiated as the children collaborate or compete discursively in their provisions of descriptions and accounts of them.

I am not suggesting that these interactions do or do not typify either the interactions of a particular assemblage in the focus group context or of the data-set more broadly. The six cases presented here comprise just over ten minutes of interaction out of a data-set totalling six hours of talk. The cases are not argued to be representative of the data set as a whole but instead stand out for their richness in terms of highly charged, multi-party, extended social interactions around consumer topics. All of the topics featured here with the exception of ‘Madagascar’ which occurred as an isolated topic across the data-set, recurrent in some shape or form across the focus groups. Indeed some of the topics have appeared in extracts discussed above in chapters four and five. The specific cases

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66 This is a manual process which aids data management, however, the complete data-set is always visible, thus, while the sequences of interaction are analysed in detail as stand-alone data extracts, their place in the fuller transcript remains important for the broader analytical endeavour.
selected for discussion here, however, are particularly telling examples in terms of the focus of this chapter, that is, an examination of how and for what purposes discourses around commercial material artefacts are used as social currency by preschool consumers. For accessibility and presentation purposes the extracts have been ordered to facilitate an ongoing augmented discussion that allows for ease of comparison and contrast across episodes of interaction.

Figure 6.2 Extract Map

6.2 Analytical Discussion I - Case by Case

For presentation purposes each episode is preceded with a short contextualisation of the interaction taking place. This is followed by the presentation of the data and finally detailed analysis of the extract.

6.2.1 Noddy

This extract derives from a group comprising four participants, two boys Josh (4) and Cian (3) and two girls Claire (4) and Millie (3). This is a long episode spanning almost

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67 This chapter includes self-reported age in years in parentheses after the child's name where available. It is important to reiterate, however, that age is only deemed analytically relevant where made demonstrably so by the speakers during the specific sequences of talk-in-interaction analysed.
two and a half minutes on-topic. The topic under discussion here is ‘Noddy’, a character who has appeared as a stimulus object during the ‘match and win’ routine. The ‘match and win’ activity involves the presentation of a card by the moderator usually followed by instantaneous recognition by the participants. Those who have a matching quadrant on their play card win a token to place on that quadrant. The participant who fills all four quadrants first is declared the winner. This episode comprises one extended IRF sequence (lines 273.2 to 315) and a second non-IRF sequence (lines 316 to 345). The first part of the IRF sequence involves some competitive activity. Millie and Claire both have a ‘Noddy’ image on their play cards and are invited to take tokens and fill the relevant quadrant. A discourse analytical examination of this episode reveals the ways in which the ‘Noddy’ topic is used to accomplish social ends.

Extract 6.1  Noddy

| Clip Time: 2 minutes 21 seconds |
| Focus Group: The Ferns #2 |

Olivia: Are we ready for the next one?

Josh: Yes!

Olivia: >Oh this is a hard one now we have to see if does anyone know this one<

Josh: NODDY::

Millie: :Me:.............:

Olivia: ;Oh you've got it (. ) Millie yeah

Claire: >;And who else does anyone else have it on their board<

Josh: [I haven't got him (. ) I haven't got him!]

Millie: [( )] ((Claire and Millie whisper to each other as they place

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68 ‘Noddy’ is a little boy who lives in the magical world of Toyland and was created by the children’s author Enid Blyton sixty years ago and continues to live on as a children’s favourite series of books and television executions. According to the official ‘Noddy’ website, ‘Although he always tries his best to do what’s right and be brave, sometimes he’s unsure of himself or makes a mistake. Just like your young child, ‘Noddy’ experiences a range of feelings. Through his adventures and friendships, ‘Noddy’ learns about himself, the surrounding world and other people’ http://www.noddy.com/uk/about_noddyandchild/.
 tokens on their game cards))

Olivia: No

Millie: (>I take this one <)

Olivia: [And (.) do you like ]=

Claire: [(I want that on my ( )]

Olivia: = Noddy Millie.

Millie: Yeah

Olivia: Tell me about Noddy.

Claire: [I want that on my ( )]

Olivia: = Noddy Millie.

Millie: Ah[:::hhhh]

Josh: [ME THREE!]

Millie: He drives >a car<

Olivia: He drives a :car

Josh: An an[(an what abou- I know all- what about =

Cian: I don't have Coke(.)I don't have Coke (.)

Josh: [=the goblin guh- Big Ears]=

Cian: [=I don't have coke ]

Josh: = and guh- the guh Sly and Gobbo and .hh (.) Mr Plod do you know all about them!

Olivia: I don't tell me about Mr Plod

Josh: Well(.)Mr Plod's a policeman

Olivia: And he li- is he in ?Noddy

Josh: Yeah but and the goblins they're names are Sly and Gobbo(.) they're very (.) very (.) naughty((hand actions for emphasis))

Olivia: <Are they [really]>

Josh: [Yes ] and he mm puh

(.) Mr Mr em (.) Mr Plod puts them in jail and but em Big? Ears is Noddy's Grandad.

Josh: >Noddy's Grandad<

Olivia: Is it his friend?

Josh: No he's his Grandad

Olivia: Oh it is his Grandad.

Josh: Yes
Olivia: And Claire do you like Noddy.
Claire: Yeah

Olivia: What's your favourite part of it (1.0)
Claire: Em: he has Turvey the monkey

Olivia: "Turvey the monkey"
Claire: Yeah and he plays a and she plays a trick on him

Olivia: "What does she do"
Claire: She plays a trick on [him and]

Josh: [No no ] her name is Martha the monkey! (.)
her name is Martha the [monkey]

Olivia: [Martha ]

Cian: [I got Spiderman ]

Josh: And what about Tossie Bear! (. the girl Tossie Bear and the boy Tossie Bear (. you know all about them)

Olivia: [No:

Josh: Well they're .hh they're two big [bay:ars (. they're two little] [I got spiderman]

Cian: [I got Spiderman]

Josh: = be:ars an they they live very far away th- th- they're not the same age as .hh as Noddy.

Olivia: Are they not they're [not] =

Josh: = the same age as Noddy (. are they older or younger.

Josh: [Young]

Claire: [But ]

Olivia: Younger

Claire: <I I watched (. the mickey mouse in my Nanny's>

Millie: (do) ((pointing upwards))

Josh: Ah postman Pat I saw postman Pat [there he is!]
Following some initial recognition work immediately following the presentation of the ‘Noddy’ logo, I launch an assessment sequence when I ask Millie if she likes ‘Noddy’ (line 289) to which she responds that she does, followed by Claire with “me too” (line 294) and Josh with a voluble “me three” (line 296). A semblance of alliance between Claire, Josh and Millie is established here, however, it is short-lived. Millie responds to my prompt for elaboration “Tell me about Noddy” (line 293), by initiating a sequence of descriptive facts about him, beginning with “He drives a car” (line 297). I acknowledge Millie with a news receipt (Heritage, 1984b) and my upward intonation on my repeat of “car” serves to keep the floor open and invite additions to a potential list of facts about ‘Noddy’.

Josh orients to his role as focus group participant when on two occasions he checks as to whether he is offering me new knowledge (lines 303 and 331). This is also a clever strategy for gaining the floor and is a variation of Sacks’ (1986) argument that children reverse the Q-A chaining rule when sharing the floor with more powerful interactants, that is, they exploit the idea that a person who has asked a question has a reserved right to talk again after the one to whom he has addressed the question speaks leading to a free-flowing two-party exchange in the form Q-A-Q-A-Q-A. Josh’s “Do you know all about them” (line 303) serves as an opportunity for me to invite him to tell me more and thus in a similar manner to the “Do you know what?” device discussed by Sacks serves to reverse the flow suggested by the chaining rule, thus the form of the exchange becomes QQA\(^*\) (lines 303-305). In substance Josh recalls four characters from the ‘Noddy’ programme which is also very effective as it virtually guarantees that I will ask him to elaborate on at least one of them. I invite him through my permissive response move to tell me about ‘Mr Plod’ (line 304). He provides an elaborate narrative which introduces ‘Mr Plod’ as a policeman from the ‘Noddy’ programme. He also invokes ‘Mr Plod’s’ treatment of the goblins; “he puts them in jail” (line 309). Josh does not leave space for an endorsement of this narrative from me as he immediately launches into an

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\(^{69}\) Josh’s query as to whether he is offering new knowledge may also be an orientation to another tenet of conversation offered by Sacks (1995b:438-43) that one should not tell someone something they already know.
account of ‘Big Ears’ another character from the programme. His various contributions to the ongoing interaction see him weave a repertoire of expertise through the discourse and thus utilise the ‘Noddy’ topic to position himself as an expert consumer.

However, the focus group space is not without its challenges for Josh as is evident from the clarification sequence (lines 309 to 314) that follows his description of ‘Big Ears’. Josh states “Big Ears is Noddy’s Grandad” (line 309) and I follow with a discursive response and tag question stating “Big Ears is not his Grandad is he not” (line 310). The preferred counter response here as discussed in the previous chapter is agreement with me and a confirmatory ‘no’ but this is not forthcoming. Instead, Josh is placed in the position of having to correct what appears to have been a mishearing on my part. He provides a clarifying response through rushed and whispered tones ‘Noddy’s Grandad’ (line 311). I search for further clarification with a counter-response and suggest a possible alternative relationship between ‘Big Ears’ and ‘Noddy’, ‘Is it his friend?’ (line 312). Josh produces a more confident response on this occasion producing another clarification and the displeased ‘No it’s his Gran:dad’ (line 313); he separates the two syllables of the word ‘Grandad’. Bilmes (1992) argues that a prefatory ‘no’ serves as a mishearing marker. Josh’s prefatory ‘no’ provides a response to my question as to whether ‘Big Ears’ is Noddy’s friend but it could also be a delayed mishearing marker.

Finally, I produce a change of state token (Heritage, 1984b) ‘oh’ with my follow-up utterance ‘oh it is his Grandad’ (line 314), with an emphasis on ‘is’. Turns 312 to 314 can be read as a (question) – (answer) – (oh receipt) a common occurrence in ordinary conversation according to Heritage (1984b). The ‘oh’ here demonstrates a ‘grasp of the state of affairs’ (1984b:321). This turn coupled with Josh’s confirmatory ‘yes’ (line 315) serves to close this particular sequence down. The ‘F’ move sees the interaction resolved and Josh’s account endorsed by me. While he appears somewhat disempowered interactionally, he is persistent in holding his own ground and solid in positioning
himself as an ‘expert’. Ultimately Josh’s interpretation is accepted and his expertise is not overtly challenged, he has the final word in this mini clarification sequence.

I initiate the second sequence of this episode inviting Claire to offer her opinion on ‘Noddy’, she like Josh weaves a repertoire of expertise through her talk-in-interaction around the ‘Noddy’ topic. Following my request for her to tell me about her “favourite part” of Noddy she begins to develop an elaborate narrative but is interrupted by Josh (line 324) when he disputes a detail (the monkey’s name). She accepts his correction and completes her narrative (lines 326 to 330), however, she does not receive endorsement for her account from me as Josh regains the floor and initiates with an offer of an account of two bear characters from the programme. His “you know all about them” (line 331) again proves successful in winning a permissive response from me and thus an invitation to take the floor. His account is detailed comprising a description of the ages of the bears relative to ‘Noddy’ along with the fact that they live “very far away” (line 335). He receives discursive responses from me which serve to keep the interaction open but also provide space for Claire to regain the floor and introduce a topic shift with a reference to ‘Mickey Mouse’ (line 342). Josh appears distracted following this and begins to focus again on the competitive game at hand (the ‘match and win’ activity) rather than the conversational activity. The episode closes with what proves a pre-initiation by me into the next move in the game, “Okay I think we’re probably ready for the next one” (line 345).

In social currency terms the ‘Noddy’ topic initially appears to provide the ‘stuff of collaborative social relations; Josh, Claire and Millie all share a positive affiliation for the product. However, the resource is ultimately used in a competitive manner by Josh and Claire in their quest to win endorsement from me of their demonstrated expertise on the subject. Josh succeeds in undermining Claire’s expertise in the first IRF sequence although Claire appears to bounce back from the challenge. Claire succeeds in cutting short Josh’s ongoing narrative on the bear characters from ‘Noddy’ with her topic switch to ‘Mickey Mouse’ in the second sequence. Millie remains integrated by proxy even if she is not an active participant throughout the sequence. Cian, however, does not become involved in the ‘Noddy’ topic. He mentions ‘Coke’ and ‘Spiderman’ in relation to his own play card but remains outside the group for the course of the interaction, an occurrence that neither I nor any of the other participants attempt to rectify. The topic
appears to be of no value to him in terms of gaining any social ground. The themes identified here will be returned to in Section 6.3 below.

6.2.2 Spiderman

This two-minute extract is taken from a group comprising two boys Ciaran (4) and Dali (4) and two girls Carol (4) and Abbie (4). The topic of discussion is ‘Spiderman’ and this episode also occurred during the ‘match and win’ routine. The episode comprises two extended IRF sequences. The first one stretches across forty three turns (lines 239 to 282.1) and the second one extends across thirty turns (lines 282.2 to 312.2).

Extract 6.2 Spiderman

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clip Time: 2 minutes 3 seconds</th>
<th>Focus Group: The Lakes #1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-init 239 Olivia: Ok are we ready for the next one</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(min) 240 Ciaran: Yeah (2.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I(dq) 241 Olivia: Let me see (3.0) ((hold up Spiderman card))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(nvr) 242 Abbie: ((Raises her arm))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cR(excl) 243.1 Olivia: .hhhhhh &quot;you have it Abbie&quot; (.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IbM(dq) 243.2 Olivia: Does anyone else have it (. ) no just Abbie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(min) 244 Dali: Em no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IbM(dq) 245 Olivia: And what is it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(gr) 246 Ciaran &amp; Dali &amp; Abbie: Spider-man!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(min) 247 Carol: Spiderman!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cR(sol) 248 Olivia: Tell me about him.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cR(er) 249 Dali: He</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cR(er) 250 Ciaran: goes like a spider</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cont. 251 Dali: Hhh Hhhhh Hhhhh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cR(ack) 252 Olivia: Does he?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cont. 253 Dali: He climbs a tree ( . ) and crawls( . ) around of a building</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(excl) 254 Olivia: Wow.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Spiderman is one of the most popular and commercially successful superheroes. As Marvel Comics flagship character first appearing in the 1960’s, he has appeared in many forms of media, including several animated and live-action television shows, syndicated newspaper comic strips, and a successful series of films starring actor Tobey Maguire as the ‘friendly neighborhood’hero in the first three movies. 
Ciaran: He can stick on to = buildings

Abbie: And he makes a spider web

Olivia: And is he *scary at all

Dali: N:::o

Dali: But he's a man (1.0) with a costume on

Carol & Abbie: [( No he doesn't )]

Dali: [No he doesn't have] a costume on

Dali: Hhhhh Hhhhh Hhhhh

Olivia: He doesn't have a costume on Ciaran

Dali: No((folds his arms and shakes his head))(.)

Olivia: Is it a cartoon? as well

Dali: [Cartoon yeah]

Ciaran: [Mmmm mmmm ] ((shakes his head))

Olivia: It's a cartoon

Ciaran: [No it's a movie ]

Dali: [But sometimes it's] a video too.

Olivia: Oh I see

Ciaran: It's a movie

Olivia: And do [][]

Ciaran: [It's] not a cartoon it's a movie

Olivia: I think maybe there is a car- there's a cartoon of it and a movie is there?

Dali: And a cassette in it

Olivia: Pardon

Dali: A cassette

Olivia: A cassette as well I see?

Olivia: And does anybody (.). have a Spiderman costume at home

Na- I don't

I don't

I don't ((shrugs his shoulders))

'Cos you are a girl and girls don't
like Spiderman [cartoons] ((to Abbie))

Carol: [I do ] (.). I do (.)

Cont. 288  Dali: Ahh

Cont. 289  Carol: I do like Spiderman Hhhhh

R(ack) 290  Olivia: Do you?

R(nvr) 291  Carol: Mmm (nods)

IbM(nom) 292  Olivia: Why do you think girls don't like it Dali.

R(er) 293  Dali: 'Cos (2.0) [I ss I think Carol] =

IbC(bid) 294  Carol: (but my my bro my )

Cont. 295  Dali: =likes (.). she likes it but she don't have a costume of it

R(ev) 296  Olivia: That's true.

IbC(i) 297  Carol: But even Colm when he was five .h hh he di- he didn't like it 'cos he was still a boy but now he does 'cos he's six.

R(sol) 298  Olivia: And who is Conor is that(.) your bro[ther]

cR(conf) 299  Carol: [My brother ]

cR(clar) 300  Olivia: >But he he didn't like it when he was five but he likes it now.<

IbM(nom) 301  Carol: ( (Nods))

IbM(rq) 302  Olivia: >And what about you Abbie do you like Spiderman.<

R(nvr) 303  Abbie: No (()shakes her head))

cR(sol) 304  Olivia: Why not

cR(er) 305  Abbie: 'Cos (1.0) em (1.0) I (.)

[r its (too) boys ]

IbC(i) 306  Dali: [ you like princesses]

Cont. 307  Abbie: It's too boys

IbM(rq) 308  Olivia: Ah and what do you like (2.0)

R(min) 309  Abbie: °Em°

IbC(i) 310  Dali: You like princesses ((to Abbie))

R(min) 311  Abbie: Yes

F(ack) 312.1  Olivia: Do you (1.0) we'll talk about that in a bit okay

pre-ini 312.2  Olivia: Are you ready for the next one?
Recognition work is quickly achieved by all participants in this group and interactive descriptions around ‘Spiderman’ ensue collaboratively for the first part of this sequence (lines 249 to 262). Disagreement and a lack of consensus around how to define ‘Spiderman’ follows Dali’s utterance that ‘Spiderman’ is a “man with a costume on” (line 262). Ciaran disagrees with Dali and is supported in his disagreement by Abbie and Carol. The interaction sees me attempt to find common ground between Dali’s and Ciaran’s versions of ‘Spiderman’. I suggest and Dali agrees that ‘Spiderman’ is a cartoon (lines 268 to 271) but Ciaran disagrees with this evaluation (line 270) stating it is a movie. Dali shows some willingness to compromise suggesting the possibility of multiple definitions; “it’s a video too.” (line 273). Ciaran is however resistant to this suggestion, stating on three further occasions “it’s a movie” (lines 272, 275 and 277). I struggle to bring the sequence to a close as demonstrated in IRF terms by the absence of a follow-up move. I cannot find a resolution to the dispute. Finally, I suggest tentatively and in the form of a clarifying response to both Dali and Ciaran that perhaps there is a cartoon and a movie (line 278). This does not receive a counter-response from Ciaran but it is responded to by Dali who adds to my suggestion with his “and a cassette” (line 279) and ultimately provides me with the interactive space to produce a follow-up acknowledgement “I see” (line 282.1) before initiating a new sequence on the related topic of ‘Spiderman’ costumes (line 282.2).

Here, I ask the open referential question “Does anybody have a Spiderman costume?” and am met with a turn by turn series of negative responses from Dali, Abbie and Ciaran. Dali engages with Abbie directly through an elaborate counter-response where he provides a gender-based account for her not possessing a costume stating “Cos you are a girl and girls don’t like Spiderman” (line 286). In so doing he introduces a gendered repertoire to the ongoing interaction, a theme which Carol picks up on. She problematises Dali’s gender-based account of preferences on two grounds, firstly on her own (female) positive affiliation towards it (line 289) and secondly on her brothers (male) past dislike of it stating her brother did not like ‘Spiderman’ when he was five years old and adding “he was still a boy” to emphasise her challenge of Dali’s universalising gender-based assessment. She introduces an alternative age-based repertoire to account for preferences stating he does now “cos he’s six” (line 297). In holding her ground Carol is also successful in positioning herself as an expert consumer.
She does not understand ‘Spiderman’ in gendered terms but suggests instead that age-appropriateness might be a factor in making sense of this consumption phenomenon.

Following Carol’s contribution, I nominate Abbie to declare her preferences asking her if in fact she likes ‘Spiderman’. She confirms Dali’s earlier assessment with the dispreferred response “No” (line 303) and reinforces his claim using the gender-based repertoire to account for her dislike stating twice (once in overlap with Dali) “it’s too boys” (read: too boyish) (lines 305 and 307). Her first account overlaps with Dali’s assessment “you like princesses” (line 306) and he reiterates this claim later (line 310) following her hesitancy in responding to an open question from me as to what she does like. She confirms his response and eventually receives a follow-up acknowledgement from me through a tag question “Do you” (line 312.1) which serves to close this final sequence comprising the ‘Spiderman’ episode.

In terms of social relations, Dali dominates the floor but Ciaran and Carol equally voice their preferences receiving minimal acknowledgement from me. All three of them are united in their liking of ‘Spiderman’ and disagreements do not become heightened. In contrast, Abbie plays a passive role in this interaction allowing Dali to speak on her behalf. She utilises the gender-based repertoire he evoked to account for her dislike of ‘Spiderman’ and to endorse his suggested alternative preference “princesses”. Where Carol challenges Dali’s sense-making strategy Abbie in effect endorses it.

Social relations between Ciaran and Dali are fraught around the ‘Spiderman’ topic but the disagreement is largely channelled through my moderation. Dali attempts to weave a repertoire of expertise through the discourse as he offers an array of ‘Spiderman’ versions. This expertise is questioned and challenged by Ciaran but I support Dali’s positioning of himself as expert through my series of acknowledgements. Ciaran uses repetition in his ‘expert’ positioning but fails to win my endorsement after which he makes only one contribution to the second exchange comprising the episode. This could be interpreted as a silent protest by him a theme among others raised here that will be revisited in section 6.3 below.

Carol is actually four years of age. While this poses some questions around her suggestions of age-appropriateness in relation to Spiderman it is not of analytical relevance as it is not made explicit in her talk or in the talk of the other participants.
6.2.3 Bob the Builder

This extract derives from a group comprising two girls Cathy and Anna and two boys Luke and Ewen. This ninety second episode was the last episode of interaction to occur during the ‘match and win’ routine. The episode depicted here is comprised of three consecutive IRF shaped sequences followed by a non-IRF shaped sequence. The episode centres around the popular children’s character ‘Bob the Builder’.

Extract 6.3 Bob the Builder

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clip Time: 1 minute 28 seconds</th>
<th>Focus Group: Lavender Hill #1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-ini 312.1 Olivia:</td>
<td>Okay and the last one. (1.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I(dq) 312.2 Olivia:</td>
<td>‘What is it’ ((I hold up Bob the Builder card)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(min) 313 Cathy:</td>
<td>(.hhh) Mih (. ) I CAN HAVE IT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cR(excl) 314 Olivia:</td>
<td>&gt;You? have it!&lt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IbC(i) 315 Luke:</td>
<td>You’ve to put that blue () down ()</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>((leans body inwards and points to token demonstrating that Cathy needs to put a token on her bingo card))</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

→ F(ev) 316.1 Olivia: Well done.

| I(dq) 316.2 Olivia:            | And Hh Who? is this guy. |
| R(min) 317 Anna:              | [Bob the builder] |
| R(min) 318 Ewen:              | [Bob the builder] |
| R(min) 319 Cathy:             | Bob the builder |

→ cR(sol) 320 Olivia: Do you like him?

| R(min) 321 Anna:              | [Yeah ] |
| R(min) 322 Cathy:             | [I HAVE IT !] |
| IbM(nom) 323 Olivia:          | Do you like it Ewen? |
| IbM(p) 324 Anna:              | Eh he sings (1.0) Bo:::b the build::der [can you fix it] |

→ R(er) 325 Cathy:             | [ oo fix it] |
| Cont. 326 Anna:               | = Bo:::B THE BUILD::DER |

73 Bob the Builder is a children’s television clay character. Bob appears as a construction contractor in a stop motion animated programme with his colleague Wendy, various neighbours and friends, and their gang of anthropomorphised work-vehicles and equipment (all made of clay). In each episode, Bob and his gang help with renovations, construction, and repairs and with other projects as needed. The show emphasises conflict resolution, co-operation, socialization and various learning skills. Bob’s catchphrase is “Can we fix it?” The programme is shown in thirty countries and is owned by HIT Productions.
Cathy: = "Bob the builder"

Anna: = YES YOU [CAN] =

Cont. 330 Cathy: = Scoop Muck and
[Dom and Ro?ly too.]=

Cont. 331 Cathy: = Dizzy (2.0) too

Cont. 332 Anna: = Lof:ty and Wen:dy.< and joi:n.

Cont. 333 Cathy: = [queue]=

Cont. 334 Anna: = [Bob and his g:ang.] and so much?= 

Cont. 335 Cathy: = [mmm mmm ang ]

Cont. 336 Anna: = (.):fun. working toge:ther. = to get
the job. done.[BO:::B THE BUIL:jDER=

Cont. 337 Cathy: = [can he fix it BO:::B THE =

Cont. 338 Anna: = [can he fix it "Bo:::b the bul:jder=

Cont. 339 Cathy: = [BUIL:jDER YES HE CAN] =
((hammers))

Cont. 340 Anna = [bul:jder yes he can] =

F(ev) 342.1 Olivia: = We:ll. done(.)

I(rq) 342.2 Olivia: = Do you not know that song Luke do
you know? it

R(min) 343 Luke: = N:::o

IbM(nom) 344 Olivia: = Ewen

IbC(bid) 345 Cathy: = I did ((hands in the air))

R(nvr) 346 Ewen: = ((Shakes head))

F(ack) 347 Olivia: = No? well give yourselves a big clap
for an excellent game((all clap

hands))

I(i) 348 Anna: = They're on:ly new children ((points
in the direction of Luke and Ewen)

R(ack) 349 Olivia: = They're new children are they. I
see

cR(er) 350 Anna: = And I'm not a new ( )

cR(sol) 351 Olivia: = You were here last year were you
Anna.

cR(er) 352 Anna: = Yeah No I was only a little baby
(.) when I used to go to the creche

cR(sol) 353 Olivia: = And what are you now
The first IRF sequence centres on a play of the ‘match and win activity’. Cathy wins the move and is encouraged by Luke to claim her winning token (lines 312.1 to 316.1). I provide an evaluative “well done” follow up move to close this short sequence (line 316.1). The second IRF sequence (316.2 - 342.1) comprises conversation around recognition and assessment of the stimulus object ‘Bob the Builder’. I ask Ewen if he likes ‘Bob the Builder’ following his correct identification of the character (line 320). However, he does not respond as Anna takes the floor and begins to sing the theme tune from this popular children’s programme (lines 324 to 338). She is joined by Cathy, who plays a supporting role in singing the song, coming in with certain phrases (lines 325, 327, 329, 331, 333, 335). The two boys remain completely silent throughout this rendition. I close the sequence with another evaluative follow-up move “well done” (line 342.1). I then initiate a third IRF sequence by asking the boys if they are familiar with the theme tune to which they each respond that they are not (lines 343 and 346). Their non-discursive responses bring the sequence to a close. I acknowledge them and suggest “a big clap” for everybody and thus signal the completion of the ‘match and win’ activity and hence that particular mini routine. This follow-up move does not detract from my making salient the silence of the boys as a feature of the group interaction and this silence is picked up on by Anna who initiates the final sequence of this episode (line 348).

Anna initiates with an inform move that serves to account for Ewen and Luke’s lack of participation, drawing a distinction between ‘new’ and ‘old’ members of the wider social group (that is the child-care facility). Her use of the intensifier ‘only’ preceding her description of the boys as ‘new’ (line 348) accounts for their lack of participation while emphasising their lower status. Anna engages in insider-outsider positioning. She
positions the boys as outsiders (line 348) and contrasts this with her own position of an experienced insider (line 352). She has been attending this childcare centre since she was a “little baby” being cared for in the creche. This positioning is not endorsed by me and thus the sequence is not resolved through a follow-up move. Ewen bids for the floor following my dyadic interaction with Anna with an utterance unrelated to either ‘Bob the Builder’ or insiders and outsiders and I seize the opportunity to close with an acknowledging second position response move followed by a pre-initiation into the next activity.

The discourse stimulated by the ‘Bob the Builder’ topic is coloured by a repertoire of expertise. Anna and Cathy utilise an expressive thread to collaboratively position themselves as experts. Anna leads a confident rhythmic and lyrical performance of the ‘Bob the Builder’ theme song and Cathy is competent in following her lead. Their ‘expert’ positioning receives support and praise from me and I contrast their lively performance with the silence of the boys. My endorsement of their ‘expert’ positioning appears to aid Anna in positioning the boys as outsiders or ‘newbies’. Her account for their lack of participation sees insider and outsider positions within the group made explicit. These thematic threads will be addressed in more depth in section 6.3 below.

6.2.4 Fifi and the Flowertots

This extract is taken from a group comprising two boys Donal (3) and Tom (3) and two girls Ciara (3) and Kitty (3). The episode depicted here comprises one IRF sequence (lines 593.1 to 602.1) and a second lengthier non-IRF sequence (lines 602.2 to 626.2). It occurred during the ‘make and do’ routine at which time the children were engaged in selecting images for their collage on a turn by turn basis. The focal point of this episode is a spontaneous performance of the theme tune from a popular children’s television programme ‘Fifi and the Flower Tots’ delivered by Donal and Ciara.

74 ‘Fifi and the Flowertots’ is described on its official website www.fifiandtheflowertots.com as an animated children’s televisions show aimed at two to six year olds aired on Five’s milkshake and Nick Junior. The programme follows the life of Fifi a Forget-Me-Not flower who lives in a secret magical world called Flowertot Garden. Designed to inspire, entertain and amuse, Fifi and her friends go about their everyday lives covering themes such as friendship, the environment, healthy eating, creativity, music and imagination.
Extract 6.4  Fifi and the Flowertots

Clip Time: 1 minute 33 Seconds  
Focus Group: The Ferns #1

→ F(ack)  593.1 Olivia:  Oh Thomas okay "grand"

I(d)  593.2 Olivia:  and? Donal (4.0)
R(min)  594 Donal:  "Em::" >I want Fifi.< ((leans in  
And takes sticker))
IbC(bid)  595 Ciara:  I've got [Fifi ] ((attempts to make  
eye contact with Donal))
IbC(p)  596 Donal:  n[Fifi:::] in the<  
flow:er Tots [Fifi:::]n
R(er)  597 Ciara:  [I have ]that too Doh-

→ cR(er)  598 Donal:  Oh! you !do! n Fifi::: >in the<  
((meets eye gaze with Ciara and  
taps his foot along while singing))
[Flower tots Fi fii::: to get nee  
not]=

cR(er)  599 Ciara:  [Flower tots Fi fii::: to get me  
not]=
Cont.  600 Donal:  =f[Fi fii::: it's a (.).lo-
<day>] n  
Cont.  601 Ciara:  =[Fi fii::: it's a:::  
lovely<day>] n

→ F(ev)  602.1 Olivia:  That's a lovely song

I(rq)  602.2 Olivia:  !Where did you her- hear !that  
R(er)  603 Ciara:  On my telly?
IbM(nom)  604 Olivia:  Do !you like that Fifi Tom.
R(min)  605 Tom:  ((Nods))
cR(sol)  606 Olivia:  Yeah !do you watch it  
R(min)  607 Tom:  ((Nods))
IbC(i)  608 Donal:  I like it (.) I watch her as well  
in my Nanny's every day
R(ack)  609 Olivia:  !Do ya  
IbC(bid)  610 Ciara:  >I watch this< ((points to  
something on her tree))

→ IbM(nom)  611 Olivia:  And !what does she do (.) Donal  
'cos I've never seen her before  
what does Fifi do(1.5)
The IRF sequence is initiated through my directing Donal to take his turn and choose a sticker for his collage. Donal chooses a ‘Fifi’ image and Ciara draws his attention to the fact that she made the same choice to which he provides the acknowledgement token “Oh you do” (line 598) and gestures to her to join in his rendition of the ‘Fifi’ theme song. She complyes and I reward them with an evaluative follow-up “That’s a lovely song” (line 602.1). The ‘expertise’ repertoire is evident here as both Ciara and Donal demonstrate a high level of familiarity with the product through their competent and fluent performance of the theme tune from the show. I am supportive of this display through my positive evaluation.

The non-IRF sequence follows immediately on from this. I attempt to bring Tom into the ‘Fifi’ discussion but he provides only non-verbal responses to my questions, after which I attempt to widen the discussion of the ‘Fifi’ character by nominating Donal to tell me what she does (line 611). Ciara responds here with a reference to planting “flowers” (line
an assessment that is confirmed by Donal (line 615). I then nominate Kitty to contribute to the discussion and she elaborates on ‘Fifi’s’ activities stating “She em (.) does a band” (line 617). This claim provokes a disagreement between Kitty and Ciara, “No No” (line 620) and expertise around ‘Fifi and the Flowertots’ is thus contested. Kitty accounts for her assessment saying she saw Fifi and the band “on telly” (line 623). This second sequence of interaction is closed down in the same way that it was opened by Donal who interrupts the minor disagreement taking place between Kitty and Ciara and loudly begins singing the theme tune for a second time (lines 622 to 624). Ciara appears to retreat on the disagreement later pointing to something on her image and making a reference to Fifi’s “band” (line 625). This provides me with a cue to introduce a topic change and this is achieved through the characteristic closing “okay” (line 626.1).

This sequence contains a number of bound initiations, responses and counter-responses but is not resolved with a final ‘follow-up’ move. The first half is predominantly organised in terms of adjacency pairs where I am the first speaker and one of the children is the respondent, the second half is problematic for me as moderator. I have initiated the request that the children tell me about ‘Fifi’ but I have received rival responses from Ciara and Kitty concerning Fifi and the band and thus fail to deliver a resolving ‘F’ which might see me take sides with one or other participants. I instead close with “Oh right” (line 626.1) in the second place respondent position following Ciara’s somewhat ambiguous bound initiation (line 625).

Ciara and Kitty’s ‘expert’ repertoire draws from a factual basis and ultimately they fail to win support from me, Donal’s ‘expert’ repertoire draws from an expressive basis and his competent rendition of the theme song (accompanied by Ciara on the first round) is successful in receiving a positive evaluation from me. In terms of social currency Donal is empowered in the interaction through his utilisation of ‘Fifi’ as a resource and positions himself as something of an expert on this particular consumer phenomenon.

Ciara is also successful in this regard although she compromises her expert status when she gets involved in a disagreement with Kitty. Ultimately Kitty’s reliance on the factual repertoire proves more work in interactional terms for her as she engages in accounting for her description of Fifi. While her claims do not receive endorsement from me, Ciara’s apparent climb down from the disagreement saves face for Kitty ultimately.
Collaboration between participants is evident between Ciara and Donal who initially use the resource to ‘perform’ for me and thus win my endorsement. However, all three of these participants become more individualistic in their contributions in the second half of this episode and thus make it more difficult for me to endorse their positioning as experts as to do so to one member of the group would undermine others.

6.2.5 Madagascar

This ninety second extract is taken from a focus group comprising two boys Cormac (4) and Andy (4) and two girls Kim (4) and Mary-Jane (4). The interaction depicted here took place during the ‘show and tell’ routine. The children had completed their collage activities and were presenting them to me and the other group members. Kim introduces the topic of ‘Madagascar’ (an animated movie) in response to a question from me about cinema visits. I initiate a new sequence of interaction through an elicitation of Cormac’s opinion on the film. The ‘Madagascar’ topic sparks a co-ordinated rendition of a chant from the movie. This episode does not display the IRF structure and as is discussed below provides an illustration of how the structural constraints of the focus group can be occasionally usurped if only temporarily.

**Extract 6.5 Madagascar**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clip Time: 1 minute 30 Seconds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group: The Wells #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IbM(rq) 545.1 Olivia: You said you go to the cinema</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cont. 545.2 Olivia: What did you see in the cinema.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R(min) 546 Kim: Em Madagasca::r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F(ack) 547.1 Olivia: &quot;Madagascar&quot; (.).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

75 A third boy, Jonah, opted out of participation after a few minutes and was not present when this interaction took place.

76 ‘Madagascar’ is an animated movie released in 2005 by Dreamworks studios. The movie focuses on four residents and "stars" of the Central Park Zoo in New York City who are also best friends: a lion (Stiller), a zebra (Rock), a giraffe (Schwimmer) and a pregnant hippo (Smith). When one of them goes missing, the other three break out of the zoo looking for him, and eventually all four are captured and put in boxes to ship them back to the continent their species are originally from: Africa. An accident at sea, however, strands them on the shore of Madagascar. Having had humans take care of them their entire life, the four know nothing of surviving in the wild, or that one of them, the lion, is genetically predisposed to eat his three best friends. Exploring their surroundings, the four friends soon meet the Malagasy locals (a type of lemur given to having loud "rave-like" dance parties) and their carnivorous enemies, the fousas. As the two sides try to use these four new, strange (and large) friends to their benefit, our heroes are also confronted with the reality of their predestined roles in nature. [http://movies.yahoo.com/movie/1808405011/details](http://movies.yahoo.com/movie/1808405011/details)
I(oq)  547.2 Olivia: Did you see that Cormac? (1.5)any good?

Unknown  548 ( ) : [ (... yeah ... ... ) ]

R(er)  549 Mary-Jane: [( ) have Madagascar on DVD]

R(sol)  550 Olivia: >What is it about:<

C Cormac: Yeah it's about (2.0) it's about tigers An

R(sol)  552 Olivia: Tigers? (2.0)

C Cormac: Yeah(...) [and he says Is Every]body ready::

IbC(bid)  554 Cormac: ["I'd like to move it"]

C Cormac: >Who[says that.< ((to Kim))

IbC(bid)  556 Cormac: [I'd like to< move it-move it- =

IbC(bid)  557 Andy: [I'd like to move it- move it- =

Cont.  558 Cormac: = [I'd like to move it- move it- =

Cont.  559 Andy: = [.h I'd like to move it-move it-

Cont.  560 Cormac: = [.h I'd like to move it-move it-

Cont.  561 Andy: = [I'd like to move it- move it- =

Cont.  562 Cormac: = [I'd like to move it- move it- =

Cont.  563 Andy: = [.h I'd like to mov- move it-

Cont.  564 Cormac: = [.h I'd like to move it-move it-

Cont.  565 Andy: = I'd like to [1.0)]

Cont.  566 Cormac: = I'd like to [1.0)]

Cont.  567 All: MOVE it

Cont.  568 Mary-Jane: (Jumps forward towards the group hands out stretched holding soft toy lion))

IbM(rq)  569 Olivia: [Is that a song from the movie.]

Cont.  570 Andy: [I'd like to move it- move it- =

Cont.  571 Cormac: [I'd like to move it- move it- =

Cont.  572 Andy: = [I'd like to move it- move it- =

Cont.  573 Cormac: = [I'd like to move it- move it- =

Cont.  574 Andy: = [I'd like to move it-[move it-]=

Cont.  575 Cormac: = [I'd like to move it- [move it-=

R(er)  576 Kim: [move it-] =

IbM(rq)  577 Olivia: [Is that a song from Madagascar Kim.

Cont.  578 Andy: = [I'd like to- (. ) MOVE it- =

Cont.  579 Cormac: = [I'd like to- (. ) MOVE it- =
This topic-bound episode begins with my opening question in relation to the movie ‘Madagascar’; “What is it about” (line 550) which is met with a ‘factual’ style response from Cormac who states “it’s about tigers” (line 551). Kim provides a counter-response to my solicit for elaboration on Cormac’s “tiger” utterance and begins to recount some direct speech from the movie “He says is everybody ready:::” (line 553) but she is overlapped by Cormac who tentatively initiates “I’d like to move it” (line 554) what becomes a very animated and energetic group performance of a song from the movie. Andy chants alongside Cormac for the duration of the performance which comprises four rounds. Mary-Jane does not join the chant but makes dancing movements with a small soft toy lion remaining involved throughout. She also contributes to the last phrase of the first and third rounds of the chant (lines 567 and 590). Kim contributes to the last phrase of the first round (line 567) becomes more involved in the second delivery of the chant (lines 576 and 580) and finally drops out for the third round.

As mentioned above this lengthy sequence does not display the IRF structure that typifies interactive sequences across much of this data-set, no follow-up move is provided across the fifty moves depicted here. Adult-child hierarchy is evident at the
beginning of this extract as I attempt to elicit answers to my questions (lines 545.2, 547.2, 550). However, that hierarchy is challenged and subverted when a question I pose to Kim remains unanswered and unacknowledged (line 555). I again attempt to gain access to the floor with another question about the movie (line 569); this too remains unacknowledged and overlaps with the ongoing chant. A third attempt to gain the floor is made by me this time nominating Kim again and asking the question as to whether this chant is from the movie ‘Madagascar’ (line 577). She responds to me by nodding while remaining focussed on the chant (line 580). I then attempt another general question about other songs from the movie (line 581) and this again remains unacknowledged. The IRF framework is usurped as the children take the initiating role and place me in the respondent position early on. My attempts to initiate from within the exchange are met with very limited success and the children do not produce a follow-up move to their own initiations; the chant runs on and on. Finally, when Cormac and Andy begin a fourth delivery of the chant I attempt a fifth question, this time directed to Andy. However, on this occasion I employ an authoritative tone (denoted on the transcript as loud). This brings an immediate halt to the proceedings (line 593.1). I thus re-construct the adult-child hierarchy which has been successfully subverted by this group of children in their own construction of collaborative relations.

Shared recognition and a positive orientation towards the movie ‘Madagascar’ thus provides a cultural resource from which these children build collaborative social relations through chant. The chant is reminiscent of the ‘cantilena’ a sing-song chant performed by Italian children and documented by Corsaro and Rizzo (1990). There are leaders (Cormac and Andy) and followers (Mary-Jane and Kim) but the overall outcome is a display of solidarity. The participants are empowered in their possession of the floor and they utilise the resource to build a sense of togetherness. I did not demonstrate possession of any knowledge around this film and I did not become involved either actually or in an embodied fashion as in the case of Mary-Jane. Essentially the participants broke through what has been shown to be the typical focus group structure and appear to have had fun in doing this as the role of the moderator is rendered ultimately as one of law-enforcer. The episode itself is analogous to a protest against the constraints of the focus group structure, a rare event across the data-set. The analytical features identified here will be further discussed in section 6.3 below.
6.2.6 Dora the Explorer

The final episode examined here is drawn from the same group as 6.2.1 above and comprises two boys Josh (4) and Cian (3) and two girls Claire (4) and Millie (3). The stimulus object ‘Dora the Explorer’ is presented during the course of the ‘match and win’ routine and a lively passage of talk-in-interaction ensues. This episode comprises three sequences of interaction. The first very short sequence (lines 387 to 391) comprises a three-part IRF-shaped dialogue between Claire and Millie, where, they compare bingo cards and note that they both have a ‘Dora the Explorer’ quadrant. The second (lines 390 to 403) revolves around the recognition part of the ‘match and win’ activity. This sequence is also IRF shaped culminating in my acknowledgements of Millie and Claire (lines 399 and 402). The third sequence extends across more than fifty turns (lines 404 to 460). This sequence is highly discursive comprising multiple exchanges between me and individual participants as well as between the participants themselves. The multiplicity of active speakers results in a series of bound-initiations, responses and counter-responses and the discussion is finally brought to a close when a minimal response from Millie provides the space for a follow-up closing move from me (lines 455 and 456). Claire follows with an on-topic ‘last word’ and this receives a closing acknowledgement from me immediately followed by a pre-initiation into a new move in the game.

Extract 6.6 Dora the Explorer

| => I(i) 387 Claire: ["I have Dora"] ((whispers to Millie referring to image on Bingo card)) | Clip Time: 1 minute 9 seconds | Focus Group: The Ferns #2 |
| => F(ack) 388 Olivia: You do love it [do you Cian ?] ((to Cian in completion of previous overlapping exchange)) |
| => R(er) 389 Millie: ["I have it"] too ((whispers to Claire )) |
| => pre-ini 390 Olivia: [Okay are we >ready for the next? one<] |
| => F(ack) 391 Claire: ["the two of us have it"] |

Dora the Explorer is an American animated television series for preschool children, that is, broadcast on Nickelodeon in the United States. It first aired in 2000. In every episode seven year old Dora goes on a quest, usually to help someone in trouble or otherwise do a good deed for someone. Dora also enjoys sports as she is on a baseball team with her best friend Boots and her other friends and coached by her father. She loves soccer and is very good at it.
R(ack) 392 Josh: YEAH:::

Cont. 393 Millie: ((Claps in response to Claire))

Cont. 394 Claire: ((Claps in response to Millie))

I{dq} 395 Olivia: OKAY everybody read:::y ((I hold up 'Dora the Explorer card)) (1.0) (Josh) raises his hand followed by Millie and Claire)

R(min) 396 Josh: [Do::ra]

R(min) 397 Claire: [Dora ]

R(min) 398 Millie: [Me:::] (.I have it

F(ack) 399 Olivia: You have it great

IbC(bid) 400 Claire: I [I have it too]

IbC(bid) 401 Josh: [Do::ra (.that's Dora ]

F(lw) 402 Olivia: Okay

Aside 403 Cian: ( . . )

→ I{rq} 404 Olivia: Cian tell me about Dora (.)

Aside 405 Claire: <Me Too>

R(min) 406 Cian: What?

→ IbM(re) 407 Olivia: [Tell me about Dora]

→ IbC(bid) 408 Josh: [DO? YOU KNOW ALL ] ABOUT Dora? (1.5) ((to Olivia))

R(per) 409 Olivia: I IDon't ((shakes head))

cR(er) 410 Josh: Well (.she's [she's an]=

IbC(i) 411 Millie: [I like it]

→ Cont. 412 Josh: = Explo:::wa.(.hhh)sh and the- >she has a little monkey< and his name is Boots but the [they call him Boots because]=

→ R(er) 413 Claire: [NO NO NO ]=

Cont. 414 Josh: = [he wears boots on his feet]

→ Cont. 415 Claire: = [NO (. ) her ]

monkey's name is Fro:gee(.)

→ cR(clar) 416 Olivia: Her monkey's name is Fro-gee.

cR(min) 417 Claire: Yeah

→ cR(er) 418 Josh: No no <it's not Frogee(.)it's Boots 'cos he's > called Boots because he wears boots on his feet < ((Millie and Claire are focussed on Josh, Cian has risen from his place in the circle and is walking behind Josh))
He wears boots
And Millie y' you said you like
Dora do you?

Yeah

I [I like Dora ]

[Muh me too I] LOVE HIM too I
love her too ((pointing to
himself))

Mmm hmmm

And Cian? do you like Dora the
Explorer?

No (.)

You don't.

(Spiderman)

YES! her name is Dora the Explorer
(.hh)'cos (.hh) her name is Dora
the explorer 'cos she explores and
his name is =

[I love Spiderman]

= [Boots 'cos he ] wears boots on
his feet

And can you get a doll of her
[Yeah!]

[YES ] YOU CA::N (.) I've the doll
of her.

>You 'have the doll; of her< do
you.

Yes

But she's only for gi;rls (.)
Sh She's for boys ,too:
Is she? ((to Claire))
I've got a doll (.) of her((points
to himself))
[I (.) I]=

[Sh she ] has no clothes on her
[she's in her ] swimmin' suit
=[I I have (hhh)]
Is she

Yeah I have two dolls of her too?:
((points to herself))

Really
| IbC(i) 445 | Millie: | "I don't" |
| R(ack) 446 | Olivia: | You don't Millie |
| → IbC(bid) 447 | Josh: | Well I I I HAVEN'T got [two dolls( I I I ) ] |
| Aside 448 | Olivia: | [Do you want a bit of help with your] shoe there ((to Cian)) |
| → Cont. 449 | Josh: | I no .hh I haven't got two dolls I have only got one and she's at- in the beach (. ) she's at the beach |
| R(ack) 450 | Olivia: | She's at the beach! is she. |
| cR(er) 451 | Josh: | But she has no clothes on her |
| cR(ack) 452 | Olivia: | Right ((I am putting Cian's shoe back on him)) |
| → Cont. 453 | Josh: | Only her swim:in suit (. ) only her bathin' suit |
| → IbM(nom) 454 | Olivia: | And would you like? to ge- get a Dora Millie |
| → R(min) 455 | Millie: | Yeah |
| → F(ack) 456 | Olivia: | You would |
| → F(Iw) 457 | Claire: | <And (. )but I already have two> |
| → F(Iw) 458.1 Olivia: | Well lucky you! |
| Pre-ini 458.2 Olivia: | Are we ready for the next one? |
| R(min) 459 | Josh: | Yeah |
| R(min) 460 | Claire: | Yeah |

This analytical discussion focuses on the third sequence from this episode. Josh dominates the floor throughout demonstrating vociferous interruption/overlap patterns. He weaves an expertise-based repertoire through the discourse in an attempt to position himself as an expert on ‘Dora the Explorer’. However, his attempts are met with limited success, primarily as a result of my demonstrable overarching concern with my role as ‘all-inclusive’ moderator. I twice invite Cian, the only member of the group who has not responded to the presentation of the card, to tell me about this character (lines 404 and 407). My questioning style is open, the question is referential unlike the display or exam questions found in the classroom or found here in the context of the competitive activity play. Following Cian’s minimal response and my second unsuccessful attempt to get him involved, Josh takes the floor by turning the conventional QA sequence around and invoking a special turn design “do you know all about” to ask a question of me concerning knowledge of the character Dora (line 408). This is the same strategy evoked...
by him in the ‘Noddy’ discussion (Extract 6.2.1 above) and it proves highly effective in
floor gaining and maintaining terms.

The talk-in-interaction depicted here is characterised by disagreement and general
discord and Josh’s expertise and dominance is challenged on a number of occasions.
Claire challenges him on his description of Dora’s monkey as being named ‘Boots’ (lines
413 and 415). I support her to some extent by searching for clarification through a
questioning repeat of her claim (line 416). Josh then substantiates his claimed accuracy
on the name of the monkey when he reiterates that the monkey is named ‘Boots’ because
he “wears boots on his feet” (line 418). I provide a cursory acknowledgement of his
description through my reiteration of the statement “he wears boots”, but immediately
attempt to bring Millie into the discussion (line 419.2). In so doing, I fail to provide a
follow-up move that might resolve the dispute and the sequence continues in the mode of
response-counter-response-bound initiation. Millie and Claire demonstrate positive
affiliation for the character (lines 420 and 421) and Josh responds declaring his own
positive affiliation for ‘Dora’ “I love him too, I love her too” (line 422). Interestingly,
Josh refers to ‘Dora’ as male here but quickly provides the repair “her too”. This is the
first time gender is made salient in the course of this interactive episode but it is a theme
that recurs a number of turns later as discussed below. Again, Josh receives little support
or acknowledgement from me as I am not directing questions at him despite his
demonstrable expertise. I invite Cian to share his evaluation and for the first time in the
passage I use Dora’s full title ‘Dora the Explorer’ (line 423.2). Cian responds negatively,
instead favouring ‘Spiderman’ (lines 424 and 426). Josh immediately interrupts Cian
tyling with my use of the full term ‘Dora the Explorer’ and launching a new initiative to
again reiterate his logical argument that “YES! her name is “Dora the Explorer” (.hh)
’cos (.hh) her name is “Dora the explorer” ‘cos she explores and his name is “Boots”
because he wears boots on his feet” (lines 427 and 429). I fail to provide ratification of
Josh’s account, instead invoking a topic change and inquiring as to whether ‘Dora’ exists
in the form of a doll (line 430).

78 Kyratzis (2000) argues drawing on her ethnography of preschoolers talk that when children invoke
strategies to build solidarity and they are not ‘ratified’. It occasions distress and retries – it seems this is the
case with Josh who can’t win support for his logical explanation and thus a win against Claire in their
disagreement over the name of the monkey.
Josh affirms that a Dora doll exists and substantiates this by claiming he possesses one (line 432) and by providing a description of her (line 440). At this point in the interaction, Claire introduces a competing gender-based repertoire and challenges the appropriateness of Josh’s ownership of this doll when she states that the doll is “only for girls” (line 435), to which Josh responds “she is for boys too” (line 436). I do not offer a resolving follow-up move here instead seeking confirmation from Claire on her assessment through a bound initiation. Claire bids for the floor (line 439 and 441) and finally wins it again attempting one-upmanship on Josh by stating she owns two of these dolls (lines 443). Some mirroring activity is evident here in terms of gesture and language. Firstly Claire mirrors Josh’s gesture; he points to himself when he restates that he possesses a ‘Dora’ doll (line 438) and she points to herself when she states she has two dolls (line 443). More tentatively, Claire states “I have two dolls of her too” (line 443) which appears to be a tie to Josh’s previous utterance “she’s for boys too” (line 436). While her use of “too” does not make sense in the context of the ongoing discussion as no-one else has stated they have two dolls, it demonstrates Claire’s competitive orientation towards Josh. Josh does not challenge her claim of owning two dolls, reiterating that he only has one (lines 447 and 449), and ultimately Claire wins the final word on the topic the second time she claims that she possesses two ‘Dora’ dolls (line 457) along with positive affirmation from me (line 458.1).

This passage of talk-in-interaction is complex in terms of social organisation. Josh takes the greatest proportion of participant turns and attempts to position himself as an expert on ‘Dora the Explorer’. He provides qualified descriptions, for example, in his repeated attempts to prove that Dora’s monkey is called ‘Boots’ because they are a feature of his appearance. However, his construction of himself as an expert and his search for ratification receives no support from the other children and very limited support from me. Analysis of my talk in this passage demonstrates a concern or quest for the inclusion of Cian and Millie, the two children who are saying the least (lines 404, 407, 419.2, 423.2, 454). I do not address Claire or Josh directly at any point, despite Josh providing all the answers to my general questions about ‘Dora’. Interaction between the children themselves is confined mainly to disagreement, the first between Josh and Claire, in relation to the name of Dora’s monkey, and the second which is again between Josh and Claire, in relation to the gender-based nature of ownership of the Dora doll. Josh negotiates gender in a complex manner. He disagrees with Claire and argues the universal appeal of ‘Dora’ when he states that she’s for “boys too” (line 436) and he
supports this argument stating personal possession of the doll. He proceeds with a detailed description of the doll, placing her in a seaside context dressed in a swimsuit (line 453). Dora is a seven year old character in the TV programme, so it is possible that Josh is making a strong distinction here between the ‘Dora’ doll he owns and a baby doll, the possession of which is more clearly associated with girls. Ultimately it is Claire’s claimed possession of “two” dolls that allows her to win one-upmanship over Josh who remains steadfast in his claim as to only possessing one Dora doll (lines 447 and 449).

An overarching concern with inclusion of all children by me sees a hierarchical structure emerge, which is led by Claire, closely followed by Josh who is placed somewhat at the periphery of the group despite his demonstrated expertise on the topic of conversation, that is, ‘Dora the Explorer’. His frustration with this is displayed by his repetition of the same description and account concerning the monkey three times between lines 412 and 429. Millie, remains interested and is positively oriented towards the topic, ‘Dora’, and, finally, Cian, disassociates himself from the topic and affiliates himself firmly with ‘Spiderman’ instead.

An CA-informed discourse analysis of the six cases examined here supports the proposition that the ‘stuff’ of consumer culture amounts to a form of social currency. This currency can be employed in a number of ways within the focus group context. At the most basic level it provides access to the conversational floor as an ability to recognise the objects of consumer culture is necessary for active participation in the two activities that comprised the majority of the focus group time. The next section examines the notion of ‘social currency’ in greater detail as the various analytical threads uncovered here are teased out and the findings from each of the cases are addressed together.

6.3 Analytical Discussion II – Exploring the Bigger Picture

Previous research has posited the social significance of the commodities that comprise children’s consumer culture (Butler, 2008; Corsaro, 2005; Goodwin, 2006; Langer and Farrar; 2003; Pugh, 2009; Seiter, 1993). Possessing desirable objects and/or having knowledge of popular toys, television programmes and licensed characters provides the child with a store of capital which is drawn on as social currency in the interactive space of the focus group. While brand preferences can be and are displayed through physical
objects in the school setting (for example, character embellished clothing, lunch boxes, school bags) the social currency gained through experience of consumer commodities is primarily exchanged through talk-in-interaction.

The CA-informed discourse analysis conducted here revealed three main findings in relation to the question of how social currency is manifested and utilised during the course of the focus group interaction. Firstly, a repertoire of ‘expertise’ characterises much of the interaction examined. This repertoire emerges in two guises (i) a factual guise and (ii) an expressive guise. Age and gender comprise two other minor repertoires and these have been introduced above in chapter five. Secondly, these repertoires are used to position oneself and others in particular roles within the social context. Thirdly, it is evident that the resources of consumer culture are used collaboratively to accomplish a display of solidarity between participants and conversely that they are also used disputatiously in the accomplishment of competitive ends. These activities are not mutually exclusive across the course of an episode of interaction and involve social complexities which are explored and discussed below.

6.3.1 Interpretative Repertoires – ‘Doing Expertise’

Detailed analysis of these six highly charged episodes of social interaction reveals that the prevailing interpretative repertoire (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) running through the talk-in-interaction produced is a repertoire of ‘expertise’. To ‘talk children’s consumer culture’ is to ‘know’ the product constellations within it, to have competence in making evaluations or judgements about those products and ultimately to make sense of them through language.

One way in which expertise is achieved is through recognition of the products of consumer culture. Both of the activities devised for the groups (i) ‘match and win’ and (ii) ‘make and do’, offered the participants the opportunity to identify stimulus objects derived from consumer culture. In the case of the ‘match and win’ activity, recognition formed part of the game as the participants were invited to identify (shout out) the branded material displayed by the moderator. In the case of the ‘make and do’ activity the children were presented with a large array of stimulus materials from which to choose a selection of stickers with which to make a collage. Here, recognition of objects and characters from consumer culture was integrated into the making of choices and tangential conversation related to these objects arose as each participant made their
selections. A second way in which expertise is ‘done’ is through the sharing of relevant product information either through the provision of descriptions, narratives, or accounts of experiences of the products. A third and more innovative way in which expertise is displayed is through the performance of a jingle, a theme tune or another musical entity or emotional outburst related to a character or product from consumer culture.

The first and second strands describe cases whereby the ‘doing’ of expertise is an explicit activity revolving substantively around (dis)agreed facts. ‘Noddy’ (Extract 6.1), ‘Spiderman’ (Extract 6.2) and ‘Dora the Explorer’ (Extract 6.6) all feature the ‘factual’ strand of the expertise repertoire most predominantly. The third strand describes cases whereby the ‘doing’ of expertise is an expressive activity. The ‘Madagascar’ episode (Extract 6.5) sees the expressive strand of the expertise repertoire come into full effect. The musical interludes that occur in ‘Bob the Builder (Extract 6.3) and ‘Fifi and the Flowertots’ (Extract 6.4), also provide clear examples of ‘expressive’ expertise.

While being an expert or having expertise in a specific area is in everyday terms an individualistic quality that is developed over time, here, it is understood as a discursive construct. In some cases a considerable amount of interactive work is required in order to successfully position oneself as an expert in the focus groups considered here. That work involves having and winning arguments with other focus group participants particularly around defining products and ultimately winning an endorsement of one’s contribution from the moderator. The endeavour proves easier to achieve through the expressive strand of the expertise repertoire than through the factual one and an explanation as to why this is the case emerges when the interactions are explored in the context of the IRF framework.

The expertise repertoire is usually evoked following an elicitation from the moderator requesting the participants to either share opinions of, evaluate or more broadly provide information about a particular product or character from children’s consumer culture. These initiating ‘I’ moves (requests for knowledge) are foundational to the construction of the ‘expertise’ repertoire. The participants ‘expertise’ is usually displayed in the response ‘R’ position of a potential IRF shaped discourse structure. In cases where that expertise is displayed in an animated manner, for example, through a musical rendition of a theme song, the performance tends to provoke an evaluative ‘F’ follow-up move from the moderator. This move ratifies the contribution and facilitates movement into a
next on-topic or new-topic sequence of talk. For example, in the ‘Bob the Builder’ episode above (Extract 6.3), I initiated a sequence asking “Who is this guy” (line 316.2) in relation to this popular character. Following some minimal responses, Anna took the floor and began to perform the theme tune from this children’s programme. She was accompanied by Cathy and held the floor across one full verse and a chorus. On completion, I immediately produced the evaluative follow up move “Well done” which served to endorse their display of expertise.

In a similar vein we see Donal respond to my initiation (direction that he choose a sticker for his collage) with a performance of the theme tune from ‘Fifi and the Flowertots’ (see Extract 6.4) which is his selected choice. He is accompanied by Ciara and their performance also fits broadly into the second position of an IRF structure and provokes an evaluative ‘F’ follow-up move from me. I endorse their display of expertise stating “That’s a lovely song” and initiate a new on-topic sequence by offering them the floor “Where did you hear that” (line 602.2).

In contrast to the ease with which the expressive strand of the expertise repertoire can be evoked to win moderator endorsement, utilisation of the factual strand of the expertise repertoire can prove problematic, particularly if the participants disagree on the product-related descriptions, narratives and accounts under discussion. A close examination of IRF moves in this regard reveals that the moderator is reluctant to arbitrate participant disputes and thus sequences can push on and on without being resolved through an ‘F’ move resulting in frustration and even distress for participants.

Examples of this frustration are most pronounced in two of the episodes outlined above. Firstly, the ‘Spiderman’ episode (6.2.2) comprises a lot of disagreement between various participants across the interaction. Ciaran is steadfast in his description of ‘Spiderman’ as being a ‘movie’, he reiterates this four times but does not receive an endorsement from me in the form of a follow-up move or any other acknowledgement. Dali the other disputant instead offers the possibility that ‘Spiderman’ exists in various guises and this assessment ultimately wins my endorsement with an acknowledging ‘I see’ (line 282.1). Ciaran does not partake in the follow-on sequence in this episode. He shrugs his shoulders in response to a question about ‘Spiderman’ costumes and essentially conducts a silent protest until the next topic change.
Secondly, the ‘Dora the Explorer’ episode (6.2.6) is coloured by ongoing disagreement and argument between Josh and Claire. Josh reiterates his argument about the ‘correct’ name of the monkey three times. On the second occasion he receives an acknowledgement from me in the response position “He wears boots” (line 419.1) but later he orients to the fact that I have not endorsed his logical account and he thus reiterates for a third time that Dora is called ‘Dora the Explorer’ because she explore things and the monkey is called ‘Boots’ because he wears boots “on his feet” (lines 427 and 429). Even after three attempts however, an endorsement is not forthcoming and the majority of the remainder of the interaction is shaped in two-part or multi-party exchanges that do not provoke evaluative ‘F’ moves from me.

The findings outlined here are similar to those of Aarsand and Aronsson’s (2009a:512) study which looked at family interaction in the gaming space where the children were seen to ‘act as the experts while the father enters an apprentice-like position’. Similar to my study which created commodity talk without the presence of actual commodities, their construction of gaming space was occasionally accomplished through talk without the presence of any material game equipment as they recorded family interactions taking place throughout the house.

The positioning of oneself and others as expert is discussed in the next section but it is first pertinent to identify two other discursive repertoires namely age and gender, that are also evident from the six cases analysed here. These two repertoires are separate to the expertise strands but they are typically evoked in the course of disputes around expert positioning. The constructs of age and gender along with health have been identified in the context of consumer evaluations in chapter five above. By focussing the discourse analytic lens on these devices we reveal something about the way these repertoires position speakers in social context. The extracts analysed above support the argument that age and gender are used as accounting devices, that is, they are used to account for stated preferences. The analytical focus of this chapter rests on how these repertoires are also evoked as the participants along with the moderator grapple with making sense of the various products and characters under discussion. Sense-making demands or allows participants to ‘do’ other things in building expertise including ‘doing gender’ and ‘doing age’.
The ‘Spiderman’ episode (Extract 6.2) is illustrative in this regard. Dali makes sense of ‘Spiderman’ through the utilisation of a gendered repertoire “Girls don’t like Spiderman” (line 286) and Abbie supports him utilising the same discursive thread “It’s too boys” (lines 305 and 307). Carol opposes Dali and offers ‘age’ as an alternative repertoire with which to make sense of Spiderman when she states her brother likes ‘Spiderman’ because he is six years old, “Now he does ‘cos he’s six” (line 297). This ‘age-based’ repertoire is not however utilised by the other participants in the course of that particular episode.

The gendered repertoire is also evoked during the course of a discussion of ‘Dora the Explorer’ (see Extract 6.6) when Claire states “She’s only for girls” (line 435) in relation to ‘Dora’ while engaged in competitive dialogue with Josh around the finer factual details of ‘Dora the Explorer’. Josh opposes her stating “she’s for boys too” (line 436) but the gendered repertoire ripples through the remainder of the interaction as ownership of dolls (a typically female gendered toy) becomes the focal point of the interaction and Josh is seen to downplay his ownership of the ‘Dora’ doll “I haven’t got two dolls I have only got one” (line 449). Having identified the repertoires weaving through the interaction the question as to how these repertoires are utilised for social ends is pertinent, the next section addresses this question by focussing attention on the notion of positioning and roles.

6.3.2 Positioning

In discourse analytical terms repertoires position people socially. Edley (2001:210) defines subject positions as ‘locations within a conversation’ and as the ‘identities made relevant by specific ways of talking’. The predominant positioning tactic for active participants is that of ‘expert consumer’. Seiter (1993:187) posits that ‘choices are socially learned ... to watch a certain show is to acquire familiarity, even expertise, which may be demonstrated in conversation on the playground’. Most of the participants featuring in any of the cases analysed here succeed in positioning themselves as an ‘expert’ at some point in the interactive episodes either through receiving an endorsement or at least an acknowledgement of their contribution from the moderator (most explicitly Josh in episode 6.2.1, Dali in episode 6.2.2, Cathy and Anna in episode 6.2.3, Donal and Ciara in episode 6.2.4, and Claire in episode 6.2.5). The most straightforward way to position oneself as an expert within the group is through the display of knowledge of the topic under discussion either explicitly through inform style
response moves or through an animated performance as described above. Expert positioning is less straightforward when knowledge about the product or character is disputed and this issue is discussed further below (see section 6.3.4).

Gender-based positioning is also evident in some of the interaction depicted in the cases considered here and thus offer support to Danby’s (1998:175) contention that ‘gender is not an established social identity but a dynamic practice that is ongoing, built by relational encounters and shaped by the collective performances of the participants’. Dali positions Abbie in gendered terms when he provides an account for her not possessing a spiderman costume claiming she does not own one because she is a girl and she endorses his viewpoint distancing herself from the product stating explicitly “It’s too boys” (read boyish) and agreeing with his suggestion that she likes “princesses”. She thus uses the gendered repertoire to position herself as a ‘girl’. While Carol opposes the idea that ‘Spiderman’ is just for boys she does not re-enter the interaction following Abbie’s endorsement of Dali’s assessment and is therefore positioned inadvertently by them as something of an ‘outsider’, a girl who likes ‘boys toys’.

The gendered positioning evident in the case of ‘Dora the Explorer’ is achieved with a much greater level of subtlety. Claire’s suggestion that ‘Dora the Explorer’ is “only for girls” (line 435) undermines Josh’s contributions to the discussion. He has hitherto demonstrated a great quantity of knowledge on the ‘Dora’ phenomenon and has also claimed to possess a ‘Dora’ doll, so Claire’s utterance challenges his knowledge on gendered grounds; how can a boy have so much knowledge about a girls toy? Josh opposes her view and suggests that ‘Dora’ is for ‘boys too’ (line 436) a product that crosses gendered categories. However, Claire’s utterance appears to have induced some level of self-doubt in Josh who plays down his doll ownership during the remainder of the interaction. The disputatious dialogue characterising interaction between Josh and Claire will be returned to in section 6.3.4 below.

Positioning is thus a two-way phenomenon, one can attempt to position oneself in a particular guise in interaction but that positioning is likely to be challenged as well as potentially endorsed as group members attempt to position each other in various ways (Allred and Burman, 2005). Where a teacher initiates interaction in the classroom through a series of display questions, she is positioning herself as the expert as she adjudicates the quality of the responses she receives through evaluative follow-up
moves, that is, assuming the traditional IRF structure exists. This situation also arises occasionally in the course of the focus groups conducted for this study, particularly during the course of the ‘match and win’ cultural routine as the ‘match and win’ activity incorporates an element of product recognition which was adjudicated by the moderator. It does not however occur in any of the cases selected for discussion here, as recognition is responded to with bound initiations or counter response moves in which the discursive floor is kept open through referential questions. The moderator is thus positioned as the ‘researcher’ the seeker of knowledge and simultaneously positions the participants as ‘potential’ experts. As they contribute to the discussion their contributions are acknowledged or endorsed through knowledge receipts or other acknowledgement tokens and this complementary positioning activity carries on. The next two sub-sections advance the ongoing discussion of how consumer products are used for social ends by focussing on social accomplishments in organisational terms.

6.3.3 Social Accomplishments – Collaboration

This section addresses the way in which the resources of consumer culture can be employed to create a sense of togetherness by the focus group members. This activity is most apparent in cases where the ‘expressive’ thread of the expertise repertoire is evoked. For example, the ‘Madagascar’ episode (Extract 6.5) sees all four group members join forces in a collaborative performance of a chant from the animated ‘Madagascar’ movie. Lerner (2002:226) defines ‘choral co-production’ of a turn or turn component as ‘voicing the same words in the same way at the same time’ as another speaker. He (2002:249) argues that a turn at talk is ‘an interactionally constituted social structure of conversation’ and not merely an ‘analytic template’. The ‘Madagascar’ chant is an example of choral co-production in the focus group setting and it is used in Lerner’s (2002:250) terms to broaden the unit of participation in conversation from ‘individual participants to broader social entities’. The participants display solidarity through shared knowledge and competence in re-enacting or improvising a scene from the animated cartoon. There are leaders and followers within the interaction as described in Section 6.2.5 above but the overall effect is one of collaboration. Ultimately the interactive force created here breaks through the typical focus group conventions described in IRF terms in chapter four above and the moderator struggles to gain control of the group members and thus brings this display of solidarity to an abrupt end.

79 A move which sees a question posed the answer to which the questioner does not already know – its purpose is communicative
Other performances evoking Lerner’s (2002) choral co-production including Anna and Cathy’s rendition of the ‘Bob the Builder’ theme song (Extract 6.3) and Ciara and Donal’s rendition of the ‘Fifi and the Flowertots’ theme song (Extract 6.4) provide further colourful exemplars of how consumer culture topics can be used for collaborative ends in the context of social interaction. In both of these cases, however, while collaborative activity is evident between two members of the group, this collaboration can be used to position other members of the group as ‘outsiders’ a theme that will be revisited in the next sub-section.

Other less vivid examples of the resources of consumer culture being used for collaborative ends are evidenced during the initial assessment sequences depicted in some of the cases above. For example, positive evaluations of ‘Noddy’ are shared by Millie, Josh and Claire and a sense of togetherness if only temporary is evident from the ‘me too - me three’ multi-party interaction described above (Section 6.2.1). In contrast Cian does not contribute to the discussion on ‘Noddy’ and sits on the peripheries of group engagement.

In a slightly different vein, Dali, Ciaran and Abbie co-construct descriptions of ‘Spiderman’ (Extract 6.2) in a collaborative fashion (lines 245 to 258) during the first part of the first sequence comprising that episode of interaction. Finally, close examination of the talk-in-interaction taking place between Claire and Millie at the beginning of the ‘Dora the Explorer’ episode (Extract 6.6) sees them compare bingo quadrants and discover that they each have ‘Dora the Explorer’. Claire whispers to Millie “the two of us have it” (line 391) in overlap with my pre-initiation into the next move of the game and they both clap hands in a subtle display of solidarity.

The extent to which the moderator’s role is instrumental to the formation of collaborative social arrangements appears to be very slight. While encouraging the turn by turn sharing of opinions or views might result in co-operative relations or even apparent solidarity around topics of consumer culture, the displays identified here emerged organically and the moderator took on the role of bystander or audience member while the participants

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80 Goodwin (2007:355) argues that ‘a members position in the group is in part defined by the forms of contributions he or she can make with respect to events or parties being talked about’. She argues further, ‘participants who have no standing to talk about certain types of events ... because they have no knowledge about them ... often remain silent in the midst of talk that involves specialized knowledge either because no one selects them as next speaker or because they choose not to enter into talk.’
engaged with each other. In the case of two of the performances mentioned here (‘Bob the Builder’ and ‘Fifi and the Flowertots’) praise in the form of evaluative follow-ups was provided by the moderator and these perhaps served to reinforce the display but in all cases the collaborative displays were participant (child) initiated. The final subsection addresses the ways in which the ‘stuff’ of consumer culture is used for competitive social ends.

6.3.4 Social Accomplishments – Competition and Dispute

Much of the consumer discourse produced across the six episodes addressed here is characterised by disputes between focus group participants. I have argued that the expertise repertoire is predominant across episodes but successful utilisation of that repertoire and subsequent successful positioning of oneself as a product or character expert often demands a high level of interactive work. A CA-informed discourse analytic approach reveals that much of participant ‘expertise’ talk is produced in direct response to questions from the moderator and thus requires an acknowledgement or evaluative follow-up from the moderator to endorse its value. This is not highly problematic when the talk-in-interaction is dyadic (moderator and participant), for example, while a certain amount of confusion ensued during the course of the interaction between Josh and myself on the topic of ‘Noddy’ (Episode 6.2.1) I eventually provided a follow-up to Josh’s account (line 314) thus sanctioning his contribution as worthwhile to the conversational activity at hand and supporting his positioning as a ‘Noddy’ expert.

This becomes a more complex endeavour however when two members vie for moderator endorsement while disputing facts about products or characters. Josh and Claire compete vociferously over the details and meanings surrounding ‘Dora the Explorer’ (Extract 6.6). Their first dispute centres on the name of Dora’s monkey where Claire claims it’s named ‘Frogee’ and Josh claims it’s named ‘Boots’. While Claire does not prolong the dispute (she provides one turn of disagreement – line 415 and receives a mild endorsement through a repeat of her statement – line 416), I fail to provide an ‘F’ follow-up move in resolution of this dispute in spite of the fact that Josh reiterates his logical arguments three times. At a later point in this episode Josh and Claire share another dispute in relation to ‘Dora’ and gender-appropriateness. Claire states she is “only for girls” and Josh disagrees (lines 435 and 436). On this occasion I again appear reluctant to intervene and do not offer support to either Josh or Claire and thus leave the dispute
hanging unresolved. Competition between Josh and Claire is ongoing throughout this episode and ultimately it moves from stated facts or meanings around ‘Dora’ to claimed possessions. Josh shares with the group that he owns a ‘Dora’ doll (line 438) in support of his claim that “she’s for boys too” (line 436) but he finds himself on precarious ground with regard to gender positioning here and he proceeds to describe the dolls attire which is beachwear “she has no clothes on her ... only her bathin’ suit” (lines 451 to 453). Ultimately Claire gains one-upmanship stating she has ‘two dolls’ a claim Josh does not try to beat “I have only got one” (line 449), Claire reiterates her claim in the closing turns of this episode finally winning endorsement from me “well lucky you” (line 458.1).

In a broadly similar vein Ciaran and Dali engage in a dispute centring on the topic of ‘Spiderman’, (Episode 6.2.2) however, in that particular case I do intervene in search of a resolution suggesting that ‘Spiderman’ is perhaps available in different formats (line 268) a suggestion Ciaran does not agree with. He subsequently drops out of the interaction while Dali’s ‘Spiderman’ accounts are ultimately endorsed by me. Competitive relations are also evident between Ciara and Kitty in the course of their discussion of ‘Fifi and the Flowertots’ (Episode 6.2.4); they disagree about whether Fifi is a member of a band a dispute I do not become involved in. Ultimately Ciara seems to concede indirectly to Kitty’s account in an indirect way stating ‘... that’s off the band’ (line 625). Her utterance provides me with a cue to introduce a topic change and this is achieved through the characteristic closing ‘okay’ (line 626).

The ‘Bob the Builder’ episode provides another case in point in this regard (Extract 6.3). Here, Anna and Cathy weave a repertoire of animated expertise through their attention grabbing performance of the ‘Bob the Builder’ theme song. I provide an evaluative follow-up after which I ask the other members of the group (Luke and Ewen) if they are familiar with the song. In so doing I contrast Anna and Cathy’s ‘expertise’ with Luke and Ewen’s silence and thus inadvertently question their expertise. Anna exploits this opportunity to position Luke and Ewen as ‘outsiders’ when she states “they’re only new children” (line 348) in contrast to her own ‘insider’ status; she also shares with the group the fact that she has been attending the day care centre since she was a baby. Her joint performance with Anna has won my endorsement and she thus uses this to gain one-upmanship over the boys.
In all of the cases identified here, (Claire versus Josh, Ciaran versus Dali, Ciara versus Kitty, Anna and Cathy versus Luke and Ewen) their disagreements are largely channelled through my moderation. This is reminiscent of Kuntay and Senay’s (2003:581) argument that when preschoolers engaged in rounds of stories they were not addressing one another as their main target audience but ‘a mutual audience the co-present adult’.

6.4 Conclusions

The analytical enquiry, in this chapter, into how preschool consumers use the objects of consumer culture as a source of social currency or ‘scrip’ (Pugh, 2009) reveals that having and sharing knowledge of and/or experience of commercial commodities provides first and foremost access to the conversational floor in the focus group setting. In a sense the focus group setting itself forms a miniature replica of the ‘real world’ and the battles for social ground that take place there – consumers must make choices and those choices have social consequences that can be empowering if they are the ‘right’ social choices but disempowering if they are not.

The analysis presented in this chapter shows how preschool children utilise the language of consumer culture namely discourses around material artefacts to build, reinforce and challenge both collaborative and disputational social arrangements. These arrangements are fluid in shape. A successful demonstration of solidarity between preschoolers involves negotiation through talk-in-interaction, disputatious relationships between focus group members collapse into temporary displays of solidarity only to be re-constructed in an ongoing process of meaning-making. This echoes Goodwin’s (2007:373) finding in relation to gossip based talk-in-interaction between eleven year olds, where she found that ‘competition and collaborative action co-inhabit the interaction order’. It also ties in with Aukrust and Rydland (2009:1550) who examined the ways preschoolers make ethnicity interactionally relevant in everyday situations, namely teacher-led circle-time gatherings, mealtime conversations and peer play which took place in various Norwegian classrooms. Their study revealed ethnic diversity to be a topic almost exclusively introduced by the children and they argue that ‘Ascribing ethnicity to self and others

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81 I acknowledge Bourdieu’s (1984) argument that what comes to be seen as ‘right’ is of course subject to contestation.
served functions of alliance building, mocking and joking, sometimes as simultaneous processes, and at other times as distinct processes.

The analysis here exposes how demonstrating expertise becomes the main aim of the game – either implicitly or explicitly. While these repertoires give some clue into sense-making around brands the main revelation concerns how these meanings can be used to win one-upmanship in a social context; a fundamental aspect of ‘social currency’. Gaining the endorsement of the moderator for one’s contributions to the ongoing talk is of key importance to successfully demonstrating expertise.

The children examined in this study (three and four year olds) fall into John’s (1999) perceptual stage (three to seven years) of consumer socialisation. While I do not subscribe to this framework, it is pertinent to outline here the features argued to be characteristic of this age group in consumer socialisation terms, as the perspective and findings emergent from my study are offered as an alternative to this view. John posits that children in the perceptual stage ‘exhibit familiarities with concepts in the market-place, such as brands or retail stores, but rarely understand them beyond a surface level’ (1999:187). She argues children in this stage display an orientation to decision-making that ‘can best be described as simple, expedient and egocentric’; children make choices on the basis of very limited knowledge and singular ‘perceptually salient attributes such as size’ (p.187). The decision-making strategy is not adapted based on different choice tasks or situations. In terms of purchase influence and negotiation strategies she posits that although children may be aware that parents or friends have different views, they have ‘difficulty thinking about their own perspective and that of another person[s] simultaneously’ (p.185). She argues children in the perceptual stage ‘value possessions based on surface features such as ‘having more’ of something’ (1999:204).

In contrast to John (1999) the analysis here of the talk-in-interaction produced in this setting sees preschool consumers demonstrate a greater breadth and depth of social competence than she credits them with. The findings emerging here support previous research (Goodwin, 2006; Langer, 2004; Pugh, 2009; Seiter, 1992) that emphasises the active and interactive aspects of being a child consumer including demonstrating one’s level of access to consumer culture. On the debate around whether children are exploited or empowered within consumer society, this research moves beyond the ‘either-or’ dichotomy and instead sheds light on the ‘choosing child’ by demonstrating the ways in
which the expression of tastes, preferences, desires and evaluations in relation to the characters and artefacts of material consumer culture is used as social currency between children; producing the 'socially acceptable' evaluative judgements in interaction is as if not more important than owning the material possessions themselves. The next chapter aims to draw some conclusions from the analytical findings presented in this chapter and above.
CHAPTER SEVEN: Conclusions

This study took a bottom-up approach to exploring children's talk-in-interaction around the 'stuff' or material artefacts of consumer culture, including but not exclusively, branded toys, character licensed television programmes, movies and branded consumables. The aim of this research has not been to bring the child consumer into existing macro level theories of consumption per se but rather, to reconceptualise the child consumer as a competent social being rather than a social becoming and to shed light on the question as to what it means to be a child consumer using micro sociological techniques. The interactional approach taken here has allowed insights to be gained into the 'how' of being a child consumer. Cook (2004) pointed to 'choosing' as a central characteristic of the contemporary child consumer and this study has argued that 'choosing' is a social activity with social consequences, a social action displayed through talk-in-interaction.

The study was guided by three main research questions the first focussed on the structural aspects of children's talk-in-interaction in the focus group setting, the second focussed on the action-oriented aspects of talk-in-interaction, specifically addressing how evaluations are accomplished by preschool consumers and for what social ends, and the third focussed on the performative aspects of preschool consumers talk-in-interaction, namely how and for what purposes are discourses around material artefacts used as social currency by preschool consumers. The main argument emerging from this work is that preschool children in collaboration with an adult moderator utilise the social context of the focus group to accomplish interactive consumer selves and relations through the linguistic manipulation of the objects of material culture.

The first three sections of this final chapter draw conclusions on each of the three main analytical areas, that is, structure, social action and performance. The fourth section addresses the theoretical and methodological contributions of this study more broadly. The fifth section describes some limitations of the study and provides recommendations for future research. Finally some closing words are provided to conclude this thesis.
7.1 Structure: Examining the Focus Group Fingerprint

An interrogation of the structure of the talk produced in the focus groups conducted for this study proved insightful and ultimately has implications for the overall interpretations of the data discussed here and indeed for similarly constructed data more generally. A detailed analysis of turn distribution across the entire data-set, followed by a close analysis of structure and sequence organisation, sequence composition and turn design across a sub-set of three groups revealed that the activity-based focus groups analysed are institutional in composition and that this ‘institutionality’ (Heritage, 2004) is most pronounced in terms of role definition (moderator vis-a-vis child participant). The development of a modified version of Sinclair and Coulthard’s (1975) IRF framework allowed for the quantitative and qualitative study of the interactional possibilities made evident turn by turn. Very clear differences emerged with regard to the moves produced by the moderator vis-à-vis the moves produced by children as they interacted to ‘produce’ the activity-based focus group.

Close examination of the focus group ‘fingerprint’ (Heritage and Greatbatch, 1991) reveals each group to be characterised by six mini ‘cultural routines’ (W.A. Corsaro, 2005) distinguishable by task and by turn design elements which broadly map onto the activities devised for use in the focus group setting. A complete turn-by-turn examination of the talk-in-interaction produced in the focus group setting revealed broad similarities between the structure of classroom talk (Mehan, 1985; Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975) and the structure of focus group talk. The majority of sequences of interaction comprising the focus group as an ‘arena of action’ (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998b) have a distinct three-part (adult initiation - child response - adult follow-up) structure, however, the basic three-part exchange sequence is rare and most of the sequences comprise extended exchanges which while maintaining the mostly adult produced initiation and follow-up moves see a lot of interaction sandwiched between in the form of counter-responses and bound initiations.

These extended sequences of interaction have also been found in recent studies on classroom talk (Cullen, 1998; Sunderland, 2001). Given the evidence of the IRF structure, it is not surprising that turns are distributed on average unequally across moderator and children with the moderator taking an average of 42% of turns in each group vis-a-vis an on average turn distribution of 14% across child participants. An examination of turn types further confirms the similarity between classroom talk and the
focus groups conducted here as it is evident that the moderator produces the majority of initiation and follow-up moves, while the children produce the majority of response and bound initiation moves.

However, while the IRF sequence that typifies classroom interaction was evident, the basic three-part (non-interactive) sequence was very rare and the focus group discussions were not as dominated by the moderator as the raw counts might suggest. The moderator's role proved a managerial one for the most part as initiation and follow-up moves were utilised to manage the flow and distribution of interaction. The moderator initiated a large number of extended IRF sequences within which much room remained for discursive encounters with multiple participants. Thus, while on first inspection low rates of participation and narrow utilisation of available moves on the part of the child participants adds weight to Sacks (1986) argument that very young children have 'restricted rights to talk' when interacting with adults, closer analysis reveals that the children are innovative with regard to their utilisation of the IRF shaped framework. They produce 'bound initiations' to gain entry to ongoing exchanges and 'piggyback' on each other's entries as revealed through clustered initiations. They also utilise tried and tested reversal of the Q-A sequencing rule (Sacks, 1986), format tying (Corsaro & Maynard, 1996) and second stories (Sacks, 1986) to gain interactional space.

The findings of this part of the study suggest that the IRF structure is much more prevalent than previously assumed, and is to be found in settings other than the classroom. It is a highly flexible structure which can shape a tiny exchange of turns or can shape a long stretch of talk, panning out. Some further discussion of this element of the results is returned to below in Section 7.4.

7.2 Action: Examining Evaluations in Interactive Terms

The second layer of analysis focussed on an examination of the 'choosing child' (Cook, 2004) in empirical terms to reveal the social significance of 'doing' consumption related evaluations in the focus group as an arena of action (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998). The CA-informed discourse analytical perspective allowed a focus to be gained on the 'how' of this activity. The CA lens shed light on how 'doing' evaluations is shaped and patterned (examination of preference structure organisation and the accounting mechanism). The DA lens shed light on the form and substance of social
accomplishments arising from evaluations, focussing in on age, gender and health as emergent discursive repertoires. A close examination of the interaction between participants also revealed that shared evaluations are used to build alliances as well as foster disputes between members.

Seiter (1993:6) argues that most children share knowledge around the stuff of commercial culture, ‘By wearing their media preferences on their sleeves and carrying their most prized possessions everywhere they go, children make visible their identifications with those more ephemeral objects of consumer culture – namely, films, videos and television programmes.’ More recent research for example by Pugh (2009) supports her argument. This dissertation, however, renders the notion of ‘preferences’ problematic as children’s stated desires, preferences and evaluations are understood in interactional terms, that is, as dynamic ‘interactional objects’ (Wootton, 2007) or ‘interactional expressions’ (Schegloff, 2007) rather than as static cognitive objects.

I used the theory of ‘preference structures’ and broadened the interaction being analysed out from the turn-by-turn level discussed above to the level of the sequence, specifically assessment sequences (Pomerantz, 1984). This provided analytical direction into the enquiry as to how evaluations are socially accomplished in the focus group setting and revealed their production to be an interactive phenomenon, as a strong orientation emerged on the part of both moderator and child towards conventions around preference structures. Positive evaluations are shown to require low levels of interactive work on the part of the participants and the moderator as they are found neatly packaged in snappy IRF sequences. It appears there is little room for discursive elaboration of why ‘we’ like things. Negative evaluations on the other hand were shown to demand higher levels of interactive work as dispreferred responses were accountable and thus saw those assessment sequences stretched and expanded discursively. In both cases stated evaluations appear to invite other members of the group to agree or differ and in doing so seize opportunities to build allegiances or to foster disputes.

Preference games emerged where stated likes and dislikes were stated baldly occasionally in opposition to others stated likes and dislikes. In a similar vein one consumer object often provoked discussion of another from the broader constellation of consumer objects preschoolers have access to. Engaging in disagreement and holding opposing views proved strategic as ways with which to negotiate any restrictions around
the interactive space and a parallel was drawn with Goodwin’s (2006) finding that African American Maple Street children typically displayed a preference for disagreement over agreement, as while much of the interaction between myself and each participant supported CA claims around conventions with regard to preference structures, when the children engaged peer to peer, playful disagreements ensued. This provides an area for future research and serves to question claims by some CA analysts about the universality of conversational conventions.

7.3 Performativity: Commercial Material Artefacts as Social Currency

The final layer of analysis utilised a ‘single case analysis’ approach (Psathas, 1992; Wootton, 1997) and broadened the interaction being analysed out further again to the level of ‘the episode’ (topic bound). This approach allowed attention to be given to the detail of the unfolding talk, and, in examining a single episode it was possible to explore the social order of the interactional event, specifically how preschoolers use commercial products as social currency. This layer of analysis thus focuses on the ‘in the moment’ aspects of Corsaro’s (2005) ‘interpretive reproduction’ model specifically moments of talk-in-interaction produced by preschool consumers.

Analysis of six episodes revealed three distinctive interpretative repertoires (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) namely ‘age’, ‘gender’ and ‘health’ and these were evoked in the context of making sense of the various consumer objects that arose in the course of the focus group discussions. In evoking these discursive threads the children in collaboration with each other and the moderator worked to position (Edley, 2001) themselves and each other in age-based, gender-based and health-oriented ways. The most predominant repertoire evident here however was one of ‘expertise’, the ‘doing’ of which was accomplished with varying degrees of explicitness. Basic recognition of the stimulus objects (all deriving from consumer culture) allowed participants to accomplish some degree of overt expertise within the focus group setting. The episodes analysed in the final analytical chapter reveal lengthy disagreements and arguments pertaining to the factual details of various commercial products and winning these arguments particularly through winning moderator endorsement also facilitated participants in the successful ‘doing’ of expertise. An expressive thread also emerged here whereby expertise was accomplished through the performance of a jingle, a theme tune or another musical entity or emotional outburst related to a character or product from consumer culture. These
musical entities were positively received by the moderator who thus endorsed the production of 'expert' participant selves. Thus consumer objects are manipulated linguistically as a form of social currency (Chin, 2001; Pugh, 2009) with which various social selves (aged, gendered, health-based, expert) can be accomplished.

In addition social order is manipulated as consumer objects are utilised as a form of social currency as evidenced by varying levels of collaboration, competition and dispute characterising the episodes analysed above. As participants produce conflicting descriptions, accounts of, and assessments of various commodities arising from consumer culture they evoke the repertoires described above in competitive efforts to gain one-upmanship on each other. On other occasions agreement and consensus characterise the interactions taking place and here objects are used for collaborative ends to unite all the participants or on some occasions to unite two group participants in opposition to other group participants.

A focus on the structural, action-oriented and performative aspects of children's talk-in-interaction around consumer objects reveals a different picture to that painted by John (1999) or McNeal (2007) of the individual social becoming, or, of the free and empowered consumer articulated by Lindstrom and Seybold (2003), Siegel et al. (2004) and Sutherland and Thompson (2003). This thesis demonstrates empirically the active and interactive components of 'being' a child consumer and 'doing' the consumption aspects of childhood including demonstrating ones level of access to consumer culture and the ways that access can be harnessed for social ends. Having provided a summary and reminder of the three main analytical foci of the thesis, namely structure, action and performance I will now turn to the overall contributions of this work to the broader theoretical and methodological fields.

7.4 Implications for Theory and Methodology
This dissertation is located at the intersection of four broad fields of literature (i) sociology of childhood, (ii) children's consumption studies, (iii) children's talk-in-interaction and (iv) discourse studies. Literature from each of these fields has informed the design and subsequent development of this bottom-up study but the prevailing theme has been that of furthering our understanding of children as consumers from a sociological perspective through the use of techniques deriving from micro sociology. It
is thus the primary function of this part of the concluding chapter to bring together the analytical findings presented above and thus formulate a coherent account of how this study contributes to existing knowledge on the child consumer.

Methodological resources deriving from the field of discourse studies, namely discourse analytical and conversation analytical methods and techniques were drawn on from the inception of this research project and thus do not constitute a discrete instructive element of the dissertation but rather serve to frame the study as a whole. I took the decision to utilise some of the principles and practices of both CA and DA and termed my approach a CA-informed discourse analytic approach. This thesis shows the productivity of this approach in analysing focus group data as it allowed for a dual focus on structure and substance and resulted in a textured interpretation of how the forum was on one level produced through talk-in-interaction and then how that talk functioned for the participants in more localised ways. This discussion of the overall contribution is therefore driven by the CA-informed discourse analytical approach I adopted and it revolves around three central arguments; (i) that preschool consumers display competence and creativity in negotiating the focus group as an interactive social space, (ii) preschool consumers are active in evaluating commercial commodities; they ‘do’ evaluations within the parameters of conversational conventions but also use “evaluations” for a variety of social ends and (iii) that preschool consumers use the artefacts of material culture in the accomplishment of social selves and the manipulation of social order in the focus group space. Each of these arguments is now addressed in turn.

*Preschool consumers display competence and creativity in negotiating the focus group as an interactive social space.*

One of the major aspects of methodology that I think sets this research apart from other studies in the area of children’s consumer culture or perhaps childhood studies more broadly is the extent to which I engaged in and thus make analysable the issue of researcher reflexivity. This action responds to requests from Hutchby and Moran-Ellis (1998), Greene and Hogan (2005) and Boocock and Scott (2005) that researchers consider themselves as active participants in the production of research itself. While researcher reflexivity is evident in a lot of work it often stops and starts with a paragraph acknowledging possible biases that the researcher may hold or the ways in which the researcher may have unintentionally ‘contaminated’ the research by pointing participants
in a particular direction through leading questions for example. This work does not acknowledge any concerns in this regard nor does it contain any disclaimers, the reason being, that from the outset the presence of the researcher is acknowledged as analytically relevant. My talk is transcribed and subjected to the analytical lens alongside that of the participants.

This focus on all talk including researcher talk facilitated an examination of Sacks’ (1986) undeveloped work on children’s interactions, and, analysis of the turn-taking system evident across the data-set examined for this study supports Sacks’ (1986) premise that children have restricted rights to talk when involved in adult-child interaction. Sinclair and Coulthard’s (1975) IRF framework and coding scheme was modified to facilitate turn-by-turn analysis of focus group talk and child participants were found to be positioned fairly consistently in the respondent position of the framework, while the moderator was responsible for opening up (initiation) and closing down (follow-up) sequences of interaction. This supports Sacks (1986) premise that very young children have problems with ‘beginnings’, that is, obtaining the conversational floor to initiate interaction. Sacks (1986) suggested that reversal of the Q-A (question-answer) chaining rule presented one strategy used by children to obtain the floor, a strategy that was evidenced in my study. In addition the focus group participants demonstrated competence in manipulating and stretching this framework for their own social ends particularly through the production of bound initiations, that is, claims for the floor for example through the provision of information (inform moves) within the basic IRF discourse structure.

My research expands the scope of the IRF framework as a method from which to examine classroom talk and demonstrates its usefulness as a tool with which to explore other types of adult-child interaction, in the case of this study – focus group. Where earlier classroom theorists (Mehan, 1985; Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975) found the IRF discourse structure to be rigid with regard to turn-type allocation (teacher-initiation, pupil-response, teacher-follow-up) later theorists (Sunderland, 2001) found greater levels of flexibility including extended IRF structures and pupil-initiated IRF structures. My research findings suggest something of a parallel between the broad shape (IRF) of adult-child focus group talk-in-interaction and teacher-pupil classroom interaction (Dombey, 2003; Sunderland, 2001), however, narrower analysis of the move types

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82 Harvey Sacks died prematurely in a car accident in 1975.
employed present clear differences at least between focus group moderators and teachers utilising traditional teaching methods. A key difference is that teacher talk is characterised by display (examination) type questions where the teacher already knows the answer to the questions being posed and focus group moderator talk is characterised by referential (open-ended) type questions where the participant is positioned as having the answers. This sees child participants in the focus group setting as potentially experiencing a greater sense of empowerment from the experience than those in the classroom setting.

Hutchby and Moran-Ellis (1998b:14) called for empirical research that seeks to shed light on the ways children display, are required to display and are policed in the display of social competence, and, proffer that questions as to how children competently manipulate material and cultural resources within given interactional contexts are imperative to inquiries into competence. While this study did not set out to examine children’s social competence per se the findings that emerged from the IRF analysis demonstrate very young children’s competence in negotiating the parameters of the focus group as an interactive space. Demonstrated competence in manipulating and stretching the conversational constraints of the IRF framework is empowering for children as displayed through the gaining of conversational floor space and thus the possibility of imposing some direction on proceedings. Working within the more rigid three-part structure can also be empowering for children as winning moderator endorsement through the receipt of acknowledgment and evaluative follow-up moves is also empowering. Preschool children’s manipulation of the IRF structure demonstrates the analytical import of Danby’s (2009) premise that children make sense of everyday contexts using the interactional and cultural resources they have to hand.

*Preschool consumers are active in evaluating commercial commodities; they ‘do’ evaluations within the parameters of conversational conventions and also use evaluations for a variety of social ends.*

This thesis furthers understanding on very young children as consumers and posits that the ‘choosing’ child consumer uses evaluations or assessments, stated preferences and choices as interactional objects that can be manipulated within a given social context. My research supports Wootton’s (2006) contention that very young children demonstrate competence in negotiating sequential understandings with interlocutors. A detailed examination of how evaluations were accomplished in the focus group setting showed
conformity on the part of the moderator and the child participants with conversational conventions and preference structures as set out originally by Pomerantz (1984) and elaborated upon since by Schegloff (2007). As in the case of the IRF discourse structure discussed immediately above, these conversational conventions were also met with a degree of innovation on the part of preschoolers as, for example, the provision of dispreferred (negative) responses was dodged through the provision of alternative (positive) stated preferences.

My work supports Puchta and Potter’s (2004) and Wilkinson’s (2006) view that an understanding of the interactional nature of the focus group is important in analysing what a focus group can tell us. My examination of the focus group ‘fingerprint’ (Heritage and Greatbatch, 1991) revealed children’s focus groups to be a ‘special kind of institutional interaction’ (Puchta and Potter, 2004). Puchta and Potter (2004:28) observed ‘people are good at learning how to interact in new situations; and situations are designed to make that learning straightforward’. Their empirical research was based on adult-comprised focus groups but my research furthers their argument by suggesting the same mechanism applies to the participation of very young children in focus group activity. While my findings derive from the particular data presented there is no reason not to suspect such a fingerprint being present in focus groups with similar children and perhaps an altered fingerprint being relevant in all focus groups.

The interactionist perspective on the very young child consumer I am espousing here challenges the consumer socialisation perspective espoused by theorists including Gunter and Furnham, (1998) John, (1999) and McNeal (2007) who use a primarily age-stage cognitivist approach which focuses in on the ways the child develops consumer competencies across childhood. John (1999:187) describes children in the ‘perceptual stage’ (aged three to seven years) as possessing a ‘simple, expedient and egocentric’ orientation to decision-making and as valuing possessions based on ‘surface features such as having more of something’. John’s (1999) arguments and indeed those of the many researchers she draws together in her comprehensive review of twenty-five years of child-related consumer research view consumer acts such as ‘brand recognition’, ‘decision-making’, ‘evaluating’, ‘appraising’ ‘valuing’ and indeed ‘choosing’ as cognitive objects. In contrast my CA-informed discourse analytical approach views these social acts as ‘interactional’ objects. This alternative perspective posits that children as young as three and four years of age utilise these interactional objects in a social context.
The interactive child consumer was shown to manipulate ‘interactional’ objects (the main focus rested on evaluations) in line with conversational conventions (Antaki, 2002; Pomerantz, 1984; Sacks, 1986, 1995a, 1995b; Schegloff, 2007) for a variety of social ends including the evocation of a range of age-based, gender-based, health-based and expertise-based interpretative repertoires, and, the accomplishment of collaborative and disputatious social relations within the context of the focus group setting. Thus, while those coming from the consumer socialisation perspective view very young children as having ‘restricted capabilities’ as consumers, the interactionist perspective emphasises the wide ranging social competencies preschool consumers share when engaging in talk-in-interaction around consumption related topics. My work therefore shows the continuing relevance and value of Mackay’s (1975:184) contention that an ethnomethodological framework ‘makes available ... children as beings who interpret the world as they do [and thus] transforms a theory of deficiency into a theory of competency’ to current thinking on children as consumers.

Preschool consumers use the artefacts of material culture in the accomplishment of social selves and the manipulation of social order in the focus group space.

Children’s engagement with material culture has received very little empirical attention (Cook, 2008; Corsaro, 2005; Martens et al. 2004). My research has aimed to contribute to closing the gap on the ‘missing child’ in consumption studies and the ‘missing consumer’ in childhood studies. De la Ville and Tartas (2010:32) advocate an interactionist perspective on the child consumer and argue that child consumer activities are mediated by various cultural tools including language. The CA-informed discourse analytical approach is flexible in that interaction can be analysed at a very micro level, that is, turn-by-turn such is the case with the focus on the IRF structure, but that focus can also be widened to view interaction at a slightly broader level episode by episode using ‘single case analysis’ (Psathas, 1992; Wootton, 1997).

My research findings support Douglas and Isherwood’s (1996:xvi) premise that ‘goods are neutral, their uses are social; they can be used as fences or bridges’. By addressing empirically preschool children’s negotiation of material objects as linguistic resources, the meaning-making and self-construction components that are recognised as integral parts of the consumption process are made evident. The material objects around which much of the interaction produced here revolves are made meaningful through the social actions of recognition, evaluation and preference as discussed immediately above. The
meanings around the ‘stuff’ of contemporary children’s consumer culture are fluid and malleable and ultimately constructed in context. Cross (1997:237) argues that parents have sent messages of love and learning to children through mass-produced toys for nearly a century. While consumer culture may be ‘ephemeral’, it ‘produces objects that give fleeting time concrete meaning’. He argues further though that goods also divide us and stand in the way of our communicating with others and with ourselves stating we live in a fleeting culture divided into age and lifestyle groups and toys throw this fact into sharp relief with their relentless celebration of novelty and appeal to gender divisions. Analysis of children’s talk-in-interaction around toys and other consumer commodities supports Cross’ contentions although I would contend that product meanings are fluid and negotiable as demonstrated by three and four year old consumers.

My research contributes to the notion that talk around commercial products can be employed as a form of social currency (Chin, 2001; Goodwin, 2006) or ‘scrip’ (Pugh, 2009). Preschool consumers utilise evaluations, descriptions and accounts related to consumer objects, and in doing so demonstrate sense-making activity which utilises gender, age, health and expertise based interpretative repertoires or discursive threads which serve to position themselves and others in terms of these social categories. In addition preschool consumers draw on interactional objects and discursive threads to manipulate social order and in doing so engage in the creation of dynamic collaborative and disputatious social relations within the focus group context.

Having presented the three central arguments of this thesis I shall now provide an account of the limitations of this study and make a number of recommendations regarding future research.

7.5 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Conducting focus groups with very young children does present a number of limitations. Heary and Hennessy (2002:51) contend that most researchers conclude that focus groups are ‘not suitable for children under six years of age because they do not have the social or language skills to be effective participants in group discussions’. Their review revealed only four studies that utilised focus groups with children under six. I reject this assertion and believe my research demonstrates that focus groups can be utilised with children as young as three years of age if they are designed and executed bearing the
cognitive, social, physical and emotional parameters associated with very young children in mind. However, focus groups with preschoolers do have limitations and I will address these here in the context of the broader limitations of this study.

The focus group formula proved successful for my research as I wanted to capture and later interpret preschool children's interactions and I was equally as concerned with the structure as I was with the substance of the talk (Freeman, 2009b). However, children aged between three and four years of age have limited attention spans particularly shared (group-based) attention spans so this presents a time constraint in terms of how long the focus group can be. It was thus essential to devise age-appropriate activities that helped in the generation of consumption-related tangential conversation, and aided in keeping the children focussed on the tasks at hand and each other while making the best of the sometimes limited time available. There was thus something of a balance to be struck between utilising the activities to keep the focus while also encouraging tangential conversation as ultimately this would be the main subject of analysis. Focus groups work best with children who are well acquainted with each other and who are within the same age group. My study focussed on preschool aged children but consideration of children from older age groups (from five years upwards) would allow for an expansion on and further consideration of my findings on the interactive child consumer across the childhood age spectrum.

This study was also limited by socio-cultural constraints which meant the focus was on preschool children residing in fairly close proximity to Dublin city. Future research could focus on children coming from rural backgrounds who may have less access to or place less social value on commodities deriving from consumer culture. I did not obtain background information on the socio-economic status or racial or ethnic background of individual participants but instead focussed on social categories only when they were made relevant in talk-in-interaction. While my sample included a mixture of children from higher and lower socio-economic strata I did not observe differences in the ways children engaged with 'choosing' language (evaluations, preferences, desires) across strata, nor did I observe differences in how consumer commodities were used in the accomplishment of selves and relations. One child across the entire sample was of African origin and while he demonstrated competence in the English language he was not engaged by the brand-related games and was the only child from the sample who asked to terminate his participation after a short while choosing instead to join
classmates in the playground. Given the social weight placed on having access to commodity knowledge irrespective of material ownership made evident by this study as well as others by Chin (2001), Goodwin (2006) and Pugh (2009), further research on how children from immigrant families living in Ireland make sense of consumer culture is warranted.

The final limitation addressed here pertains to the research setting itself. I was restricted to talk in one setting, that is, the focus group. While this allowed me to investigate asymmetrical interaction and the area of children’s restricted rights to talk I could not look at how consumer objects were made sense of at home (with siblings and or parents), in lone play or in the context of peer-to-peer playground talk (outside of adult earshot). The setting imposed additional roles and tasks on me including practical ones such as ‘fixing’ things, for example, crumpled name badges or untied laces and also more importantly pastoral roles such as actively supporting and including members of the group who appeared to lack confidence or competence in participating. These additional roles distracted from the main moderating role at times but this interaction was also of analytical import and was captured through the IRF framework which provided a range of descriptors for the turn-by-turn actions of the moderator and participants.

Examination of the focus group fingerprint revealed the rigidity of the focus group as an institutional structure along with the challenges it presented with regard to breaking down asymmetries between adult and child, a feat that was only occasionally met. While future research might approach the child consumer in a variety of settings this study demonstrates the centrality in observing structural constraints when conducting and analysing any research involving adults and children (focus groups, interviews or participant observation). While current methodological thinking calls for children to be considered co-researchers, a lot less emphasis is placed on how the implications of asymmetrical relations established in the research setting might be rigorously dealt with in the analysis stages of research. My modified IRF framework serves to resurrect Sinclair and Coulthard’s (1975) original analytical tool and offers guidelines for the analysis of any talk-in-interaction but particularly talk suspected to exhibit asymmetrical power relations between researcher and participants or between participants themselves.

While doing focus groups with preschool children does have limitations, I think the potential benefits outweigh the potential difficulties and ultimately they prove a useful
and efficient method with which to generate talk-in-interaction on specific topics of interest. Activity-based focus groups with children of preschool age could potentially be used in a range of settings including schools, childcare facilities, recreational settings and medical settings, and combined with an interactional approach to analysis of the talk produced, may shed light on children’s sense-making strategies and practices pertaining to research topics in these areas.

7.6 Conclusion
The CA-informed discourse analytical approach adopted in this study has allowed for the talk-in-interaction generated in focus groups of preschoolers to be subjected to a range of analytical lenses enabling a variety of research angles to be obtained. A focus on the structure of turn-by-turn talk examined the interactional (im)possibilities evident within the focus group space and revealed that contrary to contributing to the restriction of children’s rights to speak, utilisation of the IRF structure can facilitate fair allocation of turns across speakers by the moderator, while flexibility in the three-part structure allows for creativity on the part of participants and the moderator to manipulate the interactive frame for their own social ends without losing too much direction with regard to the activities at hand. A wider focus on sequences of interaction shed light on the ‘choosing’ child consumer as evaluations were shown to be produced in line with conversational conventions around ‘doing assessments’. Addressing the language of ‘choosing’, that is, linguistic objects such as evaluations, preferences and desires as interactional objects rather than cognitive structures sheds new light on very young children’s consumer competencies and serves to bring the social dimensions of consumption to the fore. Finally, a yet wider focus on topic-based interactive episodes using single case analysis provided new insights into how preschool consumers utilise the ‘stuff’ of consumer culture as a form of social currency with which to ‘do’ gender, ‘do’ age, ‘do’ health and ultimately ‘do’ expert consumer selves while engaging collaboratively or disputatiously with each other. Interactive preschool consumers are competent social beings who make sense of the consumption aspects of their lives in relation to social categories and relationships that make up their wider social worlds.
Appendix A: Letter of Introduction

Date
Dear Parent,

My name is Olivia Freeman. I am a lecturer of consumer behaviour at Dublin Institute of Technology and am currently studying for a Ph D at the Sociology Department, Trinity College Dublin.

My research area of interest is ‘children and consumption within a branded world’ and following a detailed discussion with Ms XXX, I am hoping to conduct some research at the XXX childcare centre in the coming days. The research I am conducting is social research. The research will comprise of small (three to four children) focus group sessions. These group sessions will last approximately half an hour during which time I will chat with the children about their likes and dislikes concerning toys, cartoons etc. The sessions will be activity based and will include a ‘bingo’ game using branded logos etc and a collage style activity. The materials will include images of toys, cartoons and other products that young children would be familiar with. The aim of the research is not to explore what brands children recognise or what they know about them but rather how they use this knowledge to construct identities and engage with each other. The sessions will take place during the school day and they will be recorded using a video recorder. The data generated (including video footage or stills) may be included in the final Ph D report or publications or presentations that result from it, copies of which will be provided to any of the schools participating in the research project.

In accordance with the guidelines for research with children from the Department of Sociology, Trinity College Dublin the records of the study will be confidential. In any written report that may result from the study all identifying details including the name of the centre and the names of the children will be changed. The focus groups will be held in accordance with the ethical guidelines set out by the Department of Psychology, Trinity College Dublin and only following written parental consent and verbal child consent.

I would be grateful if you would consent to your child’s participation in the study and I have attached a consent form to this letter which I would appreciate if you could return over the coming days. If you would like any additional information on the study please feel free to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

Olivia

Olivia Freeman
Assistant Lecturer
Dublin Institute of Technology
Aungier Street
Dublin 2
Phone: XXX Mobile: XXX
Appendix B: Statement of Consent

Statement of Consent:

I consent to the participation of my child in the study as described in the letter attached should they be asked to and only if they themselves wish to. I also consent to the data generated (including video footage or stills) being included in the final Ph D report or publications or presentations that result from it, copies of which will be provided to any of the schools or centres participating in the research project.

Childs Name:

Signature of Parent: 

Date:
Appendix C: Video Stills from the Activity-Based Focus Groups

Match & Win Activity

Make & Do Activity (lunch boxes)

Make & Do Activity (Xmas trees)

Make & Do Activity Joined by Leo the Lion! (lunch boxes)

Show and Tell Activity

Decorated Xmas tree & lunch box
## Appendix D: Jefferson-Style Transcription Notation

### Transcription Conventions

The glossary of symbols provided below has been adapted from those provided by Psathas (1995) and Ten Have (1999). The majority of these symbols were first developed by Gail Jefferson.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[</td>
<td>A <em>single left bracket</em> indicates the point of overlap onset.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>]</td>
<td>A <em>single right bracket</em> indicates the point of at which overlapping stops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=</td>
<td><em>Equal signs</em> indicate <em>latching</em> that is there is no interval between the end of a prior and the start of a next part of talk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.0)</td>
<td>The <em>number in parentheses</em> indicates the elapsed time in tenths of seconds of a pause in speech.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(.)</td>
<td>A <em>dot in parentheses</em> indicates a very brief pause within or between utterances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word</td>
<td><em>Underscoring</em> indicates some form of stress, via pitch and/or amplitude.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:</td>
<td><em>Colons</em> indicate a prolongation of the immediately prior sound. Multiple colons indicate a more prolonged sound.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>A <em>dash</em> indicates a cut-off of the prior word or sound.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>, , ? , !</td>
<td><em>Punctuation marks</em> are used to indicate characteristics of speech production; they do not refer to grammatical units.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.</td>
<td>A <em>period</em> indicates a stopping fall in tone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.</td>
<td>A <em>comma</em> indicates a continuing intonation, the kind of falling-rising contour produced when reading items from a list.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>A <em>question mark</em> indicates a rising intonation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>!</td>
<td>An <em>exclamation point</em> indicates an animated tone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↓ ↑</td>
<td><em>Arrows</em> indicate marked shifts into higher or lower pitch in the utterance-part immediately following the arrow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORD</td>
<td><em>Upper case</em> indicates especially loud sounds relative to the surrounding talk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>°word °</td>
<td>Utterances or utterance parts bracketed by <em>degree signs</em> are relatively quieter than the surrounding talk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;text&lt;</td>
<td><em>Right/left carets</em> bracketing an utterance indicate the enclosed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
speech was delivered more rapidly than usual for the speaker.

| <text> | Left/right carets bracketing an utterance indicate the enclosed speech was delivered more slowly than usual for the speaker. |
| .hhhh | A dot-prefixed row of hs indicates an inbreath. Without the dot they indicate an outbreath. |
| W(h)ord | A parenthesised h, or row of hs within a word indicates breathiness, as in laughter, crying, etc. |
| ♫word♫ | Utterances or utterance parts bracketed by musical symbols are produced through song. |

IV -
Transcribers
Doubts &
Comments

( ) | Empty parentheses indicates the transcribers inability to hear what was said and/or to identify the speaker. |
bb | Parenthesized words indicates dubious hearings or speaker identifications. |
(( )) | Double parentheses contain transcriber’s descriptions rather than, or in addition to, transcriptions. |
→ | Left margin arrows indicate specific parts of an extract discussed in the text. |

83 I have invented this transcription notation to allow for ease in transcribing utterances that are sung or chanted.
Appendix E: List of Associated Presentations and Publications


### Appendix F: Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) Original IRF Coding Scheme

Reproduced from Sinclair and Coulthard (1975: 40-43)

#### Summary of IRF Moves

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ref. No.</th>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Realisation</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IV. 1.</td>
<td>marker</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>Closed class of items – ‘well, ok, now, good alright'</td>
<td>Marks boundaries in the discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. 2</td>
<td>starter</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>Statement, question or command</td>
<td>Provide info to make a correct response to the initiation more likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. 3.1.</td>
<td>elicitation</td>
<td>el</td>
<td>By question</td>
<td>To request a linguistic response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. 3.2</td>
<td>check</td>
<td>ch</td>
<td>Real questions – closed class of polar ?’s concerned with ‘being finished’ ‘having problems’ etc</td>
<td>To enable teacher to ascertain whether there are any problems preventing successful progression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV3.3</td>
<td>directive</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>By Imperative</td>
<td>Request a non-linguistic response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV3.4</td>
<td>informative</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>By Statement</td>
<td>Sole function is to provide info. The only response is an acknowledgement of attention &amp; understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV 4.1</td>
<td>prompt</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>Closed class of items – ‘go on’, ‘come on’, ‘quickly’, ‘have a guess’</td>
<td>Reinforce a directive or elicitation by suggesting a demanded response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV 4.2</td>
<td>clue</td>
<td>cl</td>
<td>Statement, question, command or moodless item</td>
<td>Subordinate to the head of the initiation – provides additional info</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV 5.1</td>
<td>cue</td>
<td>cu</td>
<td>Closed class of only 3 components ‘hands up’, ‘don’t call out’, ‘Is John the only one’</td>
<td>To evoke an appropriate bid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV5.2</td>
<td>bid</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>Closed class of verbal and non-verbal items ‘sir’, ‘miss’, ‘teacher’s name’, raised hand, heavy breathing, finger clicking</td>
<td>Signal a desire to contribute to the discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV 5.3</td>
<td>nomination</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>Closed class consisting of the names of all the pupils, ‘you’, ‘anybody’ ‘yes’, ‘who hasn’t said anything yet’</td>
<td>To call or give permission to a pupil to contribute to the discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV 6</td>
<td>acknowledge</td>
<td>ack</td>
<td>By ‘yes’, ‘O.K.’, ‘cor’, ‘mm’, ‘wow’, and certain non-verbal gestures and expressions</td>
<td>Show that initiation has been understood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. 7.1</td>
<td>reply</td>
<td>rep</td>
<td>Statement, question, moodless and non-verbal surrogates such as nods</td>
<td>Provide a linguistic response which is appropriate to the elicitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV 7.2</td>
<td>react</td>
<td>rea</td>
<td>Non-linguistic action</td>
<td>Provide the appropriate non-linguistic response defined by the preceding directive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. 8</td>
<td>comment</td>
<td>com</td>
<td>By statement and tag question</td>
<td>To exemplify, expand, justify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. 9</td>
<td>accept</td>
<td>acc</td>
<td>Closed class of items – ‘yes’, ‘no’, ‘good’, ‘fine’ and repetition of pupil’s reply all with neutral low fall intonation</td>
<td>Indicate that the teacher has heard or seen and that the informative, reply or react was appropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. 10</td>
<td>evaluate</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>By statements &amp; tag questions incl. words such as 'good', 'interesting', 'team point', commenting on the quality of the reply, react or initiation, also by 'yes', 'no', 'good', 'fine', with a high fall intonation, and repetition of the pupil's reply with either high fall, (positive), or a rise of any kind, (negative evaluation)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. 11</td>
<td>silent stress</td>
<td>By a pause, of the duration of one or more beats following a marker.</td>
<td>Highlights the marker when it is serving as the head of a boundary exchange indicating a transaction boundary.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. 12.1</td>
<td>meta-statement</td>
<td>ms</td>
<td>Statement which refers to some future time when what is described will occur</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. 12.2</td>
<td>conclusion</td>
<td>con</td>
<td>Anaphoric statement, sometimes marked by slowing of speech rate and usually the lexical items 'so' or 'then'. Help with understanding by summarizing what preceding chunk of discourse was about.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. 13</td>
<td>loop</td>
<td>l</td>
<td>Closed class of items – 'pardon', 'you what' 'eh' 'again' with rising intonation and 'did you say', 'do you mean' To return the discourse to the stage it was at before the pupil spoke, from where it can proceed normally.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. 14</td>
<td>aside</td>
<td>z</td>
<td>By statement, question, command, moodless, usually marked by lowering the tone of the voice, and not really addressed to the class Covers items we have difficulty dealing with, teacher talking to himself.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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