



THE LANGUAGE OF MENTAL HEALTH

Children and Mental Health Talk Perspectives on Social Competence

Edited by

Joyce Lamerichs · Susan J. Danby
Amanda Bateman · Stuart Ekberg



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The Language of Mental Health

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We are very grateful to our expert editorial board who continue to provide support for the book series. We are especially appreciative of the feedback that they have provided on earlier drafts of this book. Their supportive comments and ideas to improve the book have been very helpful in our development of the text. They continue to provide support as we continue to edit the book series 'the language of mental health'. We acknowledge them here in alphabetical order by surname.

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Amanda Bateman · Stuart Ekberg
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The Language of Mental Health

ISBN 978-3-030-28425-1

ISBN 978-3-030-28426-8 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28426-8>

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This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Preface

This collection has arisen out of many years of shared research interests in exploring how children's social competence plays out in different institutional settings. We each have been involved in undertaking research in which a child's well-being and mental health constitute a focus of those investigations. Broadly within the contributions of this book, the authors present detailed analysis of naturally occurring social encounters based on interactions that involve children in a range of clinical, non-clinical and research settings. The focus of this book marks a watershed moment in that we attend to both the research component of understanding children's interactional competence in situ and also the role of the professional through their reflections.

This book grew out of seminars, activities and professional development programs for researchers and professionals to reflect together on research and professional insights. A seminar held at Queensland University of Technology in October 2016 titled 'Who is the expert here?' (led by Susan Danby and Stuart Ekberg) brought together researchers and professionals to share and reflect upon the research undertaken within a range of health and educational settings. The researchers discussed how their collaborations with the practitioners enriched the

research practices, and the professionals considered what this might mean for their professional practices (e.g., see Houen, 2017). This approach optimises the usefulness of bringing together researchers and professionals to share their thinking in ways that produce more explanatory power than a single approach alone can do (McWilliam, 2012).

The power of these research-practice nexus conversations challenges existing ways where research may be privileged over practice. The conversations of professional reflections are consistent with the ongoing rise of ‘applied conversation analysis’ (Antaki, 2011). While Harvey Sacks’ early work (1992) with the suicide prevention centre may be considered an example of applied conversation analysis, more recent initiatives more formally connect research with practice and, importantly, explicate the many lessons learned when working closely together with organisations (Kitzinger, 2011). There are complexities and difficulties, and possible discrepancies can exist between the language of professionals and the language of researchers using ethnomethodological and conversation analysis approaches (Peräkylä & Vehviläinen, 2003). For researchers, it is important to learn and engage with the language of professionals, to be able to communicate the findings from conversation analyses in ways that are recognisable and relevant to the organisation (Kitzinger, 2011).

Perhaps the most well-known method in the field of Conversation Analysis for using empirically based conversation analytic evidence to understand communication within organisations is the Conversation Analytic Role-play Method (CARM) (Stokoe, 2014). This approach uses audio and video recordings of actual encounters and then overlays these with a framework to discuss and understand how practitioners go about their mundane everyday work activities. This approach is a model of professional development that has produced new understandings to support practitioners and organisations to engage in effective communication practices. Building on CARM (Stokoe, 2014), others have brought together researchers and professionals with the aim to improve workplace communication. For instance, Church and Bateman have designed a method to engage in practical work with early childhood teachers (Church & Bateman, 2019). Known as the Conversation Analysis in Early Childhood (CAiEC) approach, the

CAiEC workshops (<https://www.caiecworkshops.com>) are philosophically structured within an interactional competence framework where teachers' professional knowledge is valued, and research and practice meet in collaborative and constructive ways to explore early childhood teaching strategies. As with CARM, CAiEC workshops use video footage of real-life practice as a discussion point with professionals around how particular practices support children's learning, stimulating reflection and informing both future practice and research. A similar focus on interactional strategies also is central to the Discursive Action Method (Lamerichs & te Molder, 2011), which has been used to invite adolescents and social workers to reflect on particular instances of their own talk and inspect the strategies they use. The method has since then been developed further and is currently used to guide different group of professionals to approach the communicative practices in which they engage as dialogical conversations (Aarts & Te Molder, 2017; see also <https://www.centrumvoordialoog.nl>).

What emerged from the interest in the researcher-professional connection is a series of chapters within this book that have the potential to reshape how we understand the nexus of research and professional practice. The aim of this book is to provide opportunities for complex conversations to emerge for researchers and professionals so that they can come together to genuinely access complex ways of thinking and doing around children's interactional competence. Our shared agenda formed a conceptual space where we realised that we needed to consider matters of the research and practice nexus within the current international policy and research environments to attend to the relevance of this work for organisations and to build sustainable relationships with stakeholders and organisations beyond academia. This broad range of professional reflections offers distinct perspectives of professional engagement with children. As such, their professional reflections bring a rich, holistic view of professional practices that take place in a range of settings addressed in this book.

The contributions of these chapters speak at a very practical level to global initiatives to orient to the contributions that research can make to fields outside of academia. Internationally, there is a new emphasis on the significant contributions that research practices can make to organisations

outside academia. Researchers engaging with policy-makers, practitioners and professionals make possible the shared transfer of knowledge, methods and resources. For instance, the recently implemented national Australian Research Engagement and Impact Assessment was an initiative designed to reorient academic research agendas and practices to drive the work of businesses and to improve social and economic outcomes (Gunn & Mintrom, 2018). Within the New Zealand context, government initiatives such as the Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) offer funding to support collaborative research between teachers and university researchers (<http://www.tlri.org.nz>). The TLRI incentive emphasises the importance of strong partnerships between teachers and researchers when applying for funding to ensure that teachers are recognised as professionals who competently identify areas of their professional practice that can be supported by research evidence. Within the Dutch context, the National Science Agenda 2019–2024 by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science announced a focal area of research on children and youth (The Netherlands Initiative for Education Research (NRO), 2018). The research agenda identifies several subdomains (e.g., health care, education, psychosocial development and upbringing) in which transdisciplinary collaborations across professional organisations, scientists and policy-makers are proposed. These examples of policy initiatives are located within a national agenda.

Our intention as editors began with a different agenda. We set out to bring researcher-professional conversations closer to the everyday lives of researchers and professionals by focusing on local instances of engagement. Wishing to avoid the push and pull of national policy endeavours and associations with engagement and impact, we elected to situate this book within the foundational principles of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis by focusing on local practices and building capacity for re-shaping, at a very practical level, the kinds of relationships and interactions that can occur between researchers and professionals. What this means is that this book is intended to give genuine access to the complex ways that researchers and professionals can engage with each other, and to introduce potentially new converts to the power of rich conversations among researchers and professionals.

The overall goal of this undertaking is to embrace better opportunities to understand children and their interactional competence and, consequently, children's contributions as key players in their everyday lives.

The Focus of This Book

The book examines the complex interplay of young children's interactional practices within a range of institutional settings. We take up the challenge of building a collection of documented research and professional practices and reflections. Each chapter first presents empirical research that investigates aspects of children's interactional practices, and this is followed by a section that is best described as a practice-led reflection. These chapters contribute to an emerging body of work that presents understandings of how children employ a range of interactional competences as they interact in clinical and other health settings with professionals whose role is to support the child's mental health and well-being. The chapters in this book take up the challenges of linking practice-led reflections by having invited professionals to reflect upon the research described in the first section of the chapter. Taken together, they provide rich accounts of the nexus of research and practice.

In *Children and Mental Health Talk: Perspectives on Social Competence*, the chapters are written by internationally known and respected researchers within the fields of studies of children through the lenses of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, and many draw on the sociology of childhood and ethnomethodological understandings of social competence. An important feature of this book is that of professional reflections in response to the research reported in that chapter. This approach reflects the intention of the editors to bring to the fore the essential relationship that must exist for those who are researchers and those who are professionals within the field being researched.

This book consists of eight chapters that are book-ended by a first chapter that introduces the conceptual framing that underpins the book's philosophy and approach, and an epilogue (Chapter 8) that draws together the significance of this work. The remaining six chapters

contribute to this book focus on ‘the social arenas of action’ (Hutchby & Moran-Ellis, 1998) of child-professional encounters, which we have categorised across three arenas of action: clinical encounters, non-clinical encounters and research encounters:

- Clinical encounters: *O’Reilly, Kiyimba and Hutchby* explore child mental health assessments conducted in the UK, highlighting the ways in which children display competence about their mental health in a clinical setting. *Kawashima and Maynard* consider echolalia by children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder within a developmental disability clinic in the USA. By showing how children can use echolalia to accomplish particular social actions within clinical encounters, Kawashima and Maynard highlight some of the limitations of treating this phenomenon solely as a sign of mental health pathology.
- Non-clinical encounters: *Bateman and Danby* examine ways children discuss a potentially traumatic event in a non-clinical context. Focusing on discussions that occur within a New Zealand preschool about a recent earthquake, Bateman and Danby show how preschool teachers and children collaboratively contribute to discussions about their experiences of the earthquake, and routinely incorporated discussion of ways in which the local community was recovering from that experience. *Jol, Stommel and Spooren* explore Dutch police interrogations with children who have been the witness of a sexual offence, highlighting child interviewees’ demonstrations of competence by reporting ways in which they misled offenders.
- Research encounters: *Theobald and Danby* consider mental well-being beyond a clinical context, by exploring a video-simulated research conversation in Australia. Through their analysis, Theobald and Danby highlight the children’s competence when asked to discuss such potentially sensitive matters. *Lamerichs, Alisic and Schasfoort* consider displays of social competence in Dutch psychological research interviews about a traumatic event. Through their analysis of these encounters, Lamerichs and her colleagues show ways in which children skilfully resist attempts by the interviewing psychologist to pursue particular topical agendas.

Proposed as a series of researcher-professional conversations, the editors of this book aimed to bring to the fore the usefulness of conversations in terms of transdisciplinary knowledge translation.

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Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our gratitude to several people who have supported us during the development of this edited volume. We want to thank Michelle O'Reilly and Jessica Nina Lester, editors of the book series *The Language of Mental Health*, for considering this edited volume on Children and Mental health Talk as part of the series. We would also like to acknowledge Palgrave for supporting us throughout this process, particularly Joanna O'Neill for her help throughout.

This edited volume could not have been put together without the professionals, families and children who were involved in the studies included in this book. We thank all contributing authors for the time and energy they have put into writing up their work as well as all reviewers who helped us to improve and develop the chapters and the professional reflections prior to inclusion. Their participation has been vital and so has been the encouragement and support we received from of our partners, our families and our colleagues.

A Note on the Transcription System

In accordance with the standard approach taken in Conversation Analysis, the contributions to this volume report fragments of data that have been transcribed according to transcription conventions developed by Jefferson (2004), which record productional and distributional features of vocal conduct that have been found to be procedurally relevant to participants in interaction (Hepburn & Bolden, 2013). Sometimes, additional conventions developed by Mondada (2018) have been used to transcribe non-vocal embodied conduct. Readers who are not familiar with these conventions may wish to consult the following transcription key.

Temporal Dimensions

Wo[rd]	Square brackets mark speaker overlap, with left square brackets indicating overlap onset and right square brackets indicating overlap offset.
[Wo]rd	
Word=word	An equal sign indicates the absence of discernible silence between two utterances or actions, which can occur within a single person's turn or between the turns of two people.

Word (0.4) word A number within parentheses refers to silence, which is measured to the nearest tenth of a second and can occur either as a pause within a current speaker's turn or as a gap between two speakers' turns.

Vocal Conduct

Word (.) word A period within parentheses indicates a micropause of less than two-tenths of a second.

Word. A period indicates falling intonation at the end of a unit of talk.

Word, A comma indicates slightly rising intonation.

Word; An inverted question mark indicates moderately rising intonation.

Word; Alternatively a semicolon also indicates moderately rising intonation.

Word? A question mark indicates rising intonation.

Word_ An underscore following a word indicates level intonation.

Word Underlining indicates emphasis being placed on the underlined sounds.

Wo:::rd Colons indicate the stretching of the immediately preceding sound, with multiple colons representing prolonged stretching.

Wo:::rd Underlining followed by one or more colons indicates a shift in pitch during the pronunciation of a sound, with rising pitch on the underlined component followed by falling pitch on the colon component that is not underlined.

Wo:::rd An underlined colon indicates the converse of the above, with rising pitch on the underlined colon component.

↑Word↑ Upward arrows mark a sharp increased pitch shift, which begins in the syllable following the arrow. An utterance encased with upward arrows indicates that the talk is produced at a higher pitch than surrounding talk.

↓Word↓	Downward arrows mark a sharp decreased pitch shift, which begins in the syllable following the arrow. An utterance encased with downward arrows indicates that the talk is produced at a lower pitch than surrounding talk.
WORD	Upper case indicates talk produced at a louder volume than surrounding utterances by the same speaker.
°Word°	Words encased in degree signs indicate utterances produced at a lower volume than surrounding talk. Double degree signs indicate utterances produced at an every lower volume than surrounding talk.
>Word<	Words encased with greater-than followed by less-than symbols indicate talk produced at a faster pace than surrounding talk.
<Word>	Words encased with less-than followed by greater-than symbols indicate talk produced at a slower pace than surrounding talk.
Wor-	A hyphen indicates an abrupt termination in the pronunciation of the preceding sound.
£Word£	Pound signs encase utterances produced with smile voice.
#Word#	Hash signs encase utterances produced with creaky voice.
~Word~	Tilde signs encase utterances produced with tremulous voice.
hhh	The letter 'h' indicates audible exhalation, with more letters indicating longer exhalation.
.hhh	A period followed by the letter 'h' indicates audible inhalation.
→	Right arrows are used to highlight phenomena of interest.

- ((Description)) Words encased in double parentheses indicate aspects of conduct for which there is no established transcription convention. In many—but not all—chapters of this book, this convention is employed to transcribe embodied conduct. It is also used to convey issues that come up for researchers working with languages other than English. Alternatively, the below conventions are used to transcribe embodied conduct.

Embodied Conduct

- % % Percentage signs indicate the beginning and end of embodied actions of a particular participant.
- * * Asterisks are used to encase descriptions of embodied actions of another participant.
- %---> An arrow indicates an action continues across subsequent lines,
- >% Until a corresponding arrow is reached.

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