This is the author version of a paper published in 2001 in the journal:

Escalating Terror: Communicative Strategies in a Preschool Classroom Dispute

Susan Danby

Centre for Applied Studies in Early Childhood

Queensland University of Queensland

and

Carolyn D. Baker

Graduate School of Education

The University of Queensland

1

Escalating Terror: Communicative Strategies in a Preschool Classroom Dispute

Abstract. This paper describes the pragmatic and strategic communicative work of some young boys in a preschool classroom as they made themselves observable and hearable as owners of block area and members of specific activities. Using a transcript of a video-recorded episode of the boys engaged in a dispute about who could play in block area, analysis shows how the boys generated and escalated images of terror until the targeted child left the area or was evicted from the group by the other boys. In the course of escalating the terror, the boys used a range of communicative resources to construct group membership affiliation and, at the same time, to assert their individual identities. The work of the boys established and displayed credentials as to who was able to play in the block area, and who was able to determine and justify why others could or could not play. This detailed analysis of how the boys formed collaborations and strategic partnerships in the course of their dispute gives us a way of appreciating the communicative competences that underpin membership in a local social order that is in a state of flux.

Disputes are a common occurrence in children's everyday play. They typically arise when children seek to control and protect their play spaces (Corsaro, 1985) or when one child attempts to influence how another child should behave (Corsaro, 1997; Danby & Baker, 1998b; Maynard, 1985). Disputes are significant interactional events in classroom settings because they accomplish the negotiation of social practices. Strategic alliances are formed as disputes unfold; an alliance can change and evolve as the issue or problem to be solved is dealt with by the participants (Maynard, 1985). As Maynard (1985) points out, conflict is a strategic interactive process that both constructs and maintains social organization.

Yet, in early childhood pedagogy (see, for example, Feeney, Christensen, & Moravcik, 1991; National Childcare Accreditation Council, 1993), the preferred teacher's role is one of stopping the dispute in order to help the children find ways to discuss their feelings and solve the conflict. This understanding of conflict as a

dysfunctional activity to be terminated is one that is at odds with how the children themselves use conflict. In this paper, analysis of some boys involved in a dispute shows how the conflict served the immediate purpose of building and realigning their social identities within the group. It was in moments of conflict that the collaborations and strategic partnerships formed by the boys were used as resources to achieve one's own ends and to align and realign social identities. In this way, disputes serve to build and maintain the local social order.

In using the analytic resources of talk-in-interaction (Goodwin, 2000; Goodwin, 1990; Psathas, 1995), not only what is said is deemed important, but also the practices or doings of the participants in the interactions. Such analysis takes into account the accompanying nonverbal gestures and other actions, and recognizes that talk is socially interactive and not a one-speaker phenomenon (Psathas, 1995; Schegloff, 1988). Thus, gestures, body movements, laughter and even silences are considered important features for analysis (Goodwin, 2000; Jacoby & Ochs, 1995). This approach examines children's talk and action itself as a topic for analysis in order to investigate the children's own methods for making sense of the social situation. In this paper, we attend to several dimensions of the talk-in-interaction of a group of boys to show the various communicative strategies that they deploy in beginning and in escalating their dispute. Their dispute is about membership of block area, and their communicative strategies are analysed in terms of claims and counterclaims about membership. The local social order is shown to be in a state of flux, with membership and social identities being negotiated moment by moment.

Goodwin (1990) points out that, "despite the wealth of literature on child language, the language that children use *with other children* has rarely been systematically investigated" (p. 12). Studies by Sheldon (1990; 1992; 1996), Goodwin (1985; 1990; 1995; 1987) and Davies (1989) are exceptions. These studies are important because they focus on peer group interactions rather than on the language development of

individual children or on adult-child communication. Their work also takes the position that the children in their studies act not only as competent members of culture, but also as gendered members. For example, Sheldon (1990; 1992; 1996) has investigated the talk of preschool-aged children in early childhood settings to show the powerful ways that young children use gendered talk to construct their play experiences and to position themselves. She shows how girls use language skillfully in their pretend play to manage conflict (Sheldon, 1992, 1996). Goodwin (1985; 1990; 1995) also has studied the talk of girls and boys aged from four to fourteen years in a predominantly black neighbourhood. She found that boys and girls share many similar procedures for engaging in the conventions of talk. Davies' (1989) study of preschool children showed the gender work that young children engaged in through their everyday play and language practices.

However as Schegloff (1997) argues, it is not enough to claim that, because the episode involves boys, the boys are engaging in the work of masculinity - the category of 'masculine' has to be shown to be oriented to by the members within the context. The boys' work of being masculine has to be examined as a situated identity, both formed by and forming the social context. In this way, doing gender is a

> situated doing, carried out in the virtual or real presence of others who are presumed to be oriented to its production. Rather than as a property of individuals, we conceive of gender as an emergent feature of social interactions: both as an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements. (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 126)

Because members are oriented to the production of gender work, gender appears to be a normal and everyday routine interaction, seemingly an invisible activity. It is only when there is some departure from the everyday gendered behavior that gender becomes a noticeable trait for its members.

In the episode under scrutiny here, the boys themselves did not explicitly name or identify their practices as masculine. However, gender was implicated through their

interactions and as a "product of social doings" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p, 129). The work of the boys in this episode was organized in familiar patterns of interactions that have been identified by other researchers as gendered behavior. For instance, boys routinely seen as participating in physical and aggressive activities are described as engaging in the gender work of masculinity (Davies, 1989; Dyson, 1994; Jordan, 1995; Jordan & Cowan, 1995).

In this classroom, there were other boys who did not play in block area and did not engage in these displays of behaviour, and only a few girls ventured occasionally into the block area. Girls tended to build on the outer edges of the block area and typically, they did not collaborate with the boys in joint constructions. The boys did not initiate threats of violence towards the girls as they did towards the younger boys. Because the girls were not included or invited by these boys to participate in this type of interaction, we suggest that the girls apparently were not observable by these boys (or by themselves) as characterising the activity-relevant identities belonging to this type of masculine membership within block area.

Elsewhere we have shown how some boys in the block area built some of these social practices into a particular 'ritual of masculinity' (Danby & Baker, 1998a). The ritual consisted of a number of escalating phases that began with one boy telling another to leave the play area, and then threats of violence and, finally, a climactic scene where either the teacher intervened or the boy left the block area. Older and more experienced boys typically initiated the ritual and the targeted boys were those younger boys less experienced in the play practices of block area. At first glance, this type of violent talk seemed to exclude the targeted boy as he left the area. But ultimately, the younger boys learned a particular way of talking and acting that demonstrated insider status in the block area group (Danby and Baker, 1998a). These activities became the 'credentials' of masculine membership, which included claims of strength and threats of terror and violence, familiar practices used by this group of boys in block area. In the analysis

presented here, we investigate another instance of this ritual being enacted, attending more particularly to how the work of alignment and re-alignment is done. Other analysis (Danby & Baker, 2000) has shown that block area also can be the site for different relations, such as master builder and apprentice.

The classroom and participants

The episode for analysis examines the conflict talk and play practices of four boys in block area in a preschool classroom in a childcare center. The boys were aged three and four years. There were two teachers and up to sixteen children in the classroom. Many children were enrolled in the center because of its location. As the classroom was close to the business district, children came from nearby areas and this meant that there was a diversity of ethnicity and socio-economic status within the group. Many children were enrolled within the center because their parents were either working or studying nearby.

Data collection involved observations of the children one morning a week over a year and then at the beginning of the new school year, video-recordings were made of the children's play interactions over a three-week period. The particular episode investigated in this paper began when David, Matt and Andrew were playing in block area. It occurred at the beginning of the school year, although all four boys had been members of the classroom the previous year. Matt was adding blocks to a block construction in the center of the carpeted area, and David and Andrew were standing nearby. Alan was standing on the periphery of block area. Figure 1.1 shows how the participants are positioned in the block area at the beginning of this episode. The teachers initially appeared unaware of the dispute that was developing, although one of the teachers appeared later and entered briefly into the dispute before departing for another area of the classroom.
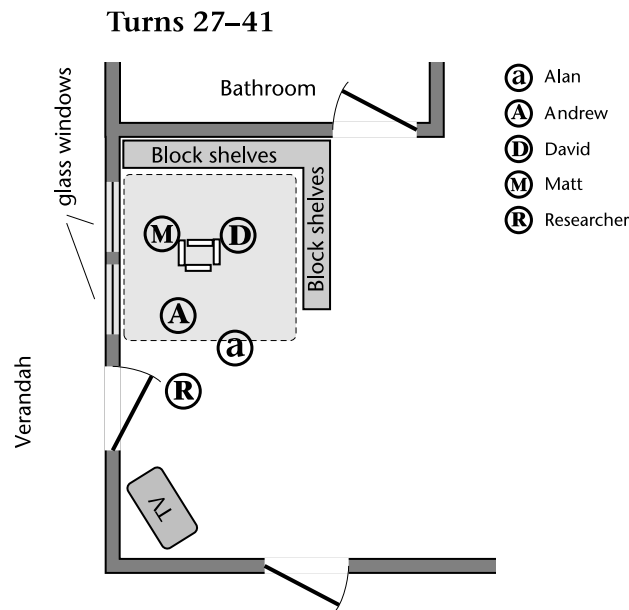
Turns 27–41

Figure 1.1. Turns 27-41.

The dispute begins

The contentious issue that began the episode selected for analysis here was Alan's possible entry into block area and David's opposition to his entry. (See Appendix A for an explanation of the transcript conventions.)

27	Andrew	he::y (1.0) he::y (1.0) he::::y ((high pitched squeal)) (1.0) loo:k (1.0) loo:k (1.0) loo:k (1.0) ((*Andrew points to John leaving the area. He then turns towards block area and speaks to David*.)) I need Alan Doyle to help.
28	David	No (0.5) he's not (0.5) help(.)ing ((*points to Alan as Alan walks past with a block in his hand, Andrew turns to look at Alan*.))
29	Matt	he can. ((*bending over block building appearing to add a block*))
30	David	he's not

31	Matt	he's helping. ((*still bending over the block building, then straightens up*))
32		(2.0)
33	Andrew	(°he's°) a friend!
34	David	((*looking at Alan*)) no

Andrew wanted Alan to play in block area with David and Matt (turn 27). As Andrew had made this request of David, we see Andrew initially assigning to David leadership status in this group, with rights to say who could and could not play. In the immediately preceding episode, David had just demonstrated forcefully his leadership position by directing some older boys, including Matt and Andrew, in a ritual of threats and violence that resulted in a successful eviction of another child (Danby & Baker, 1998). It is no surprise, then, that Andrew directs his appeal to David. David, in turn, claims the associated rights of leadership by stating who can, or cannot, play in block area. As Jordan, Cowan & Roberts (1995) point out, excluding others is one way to preserve power, and David attempts this when he denies entry to Alan. In his attempts to justify Alan's entry, Andrew even points out that Alan is a friend (turn 33), a typical response for children attempting to gain entry (Corsaro, 1985; 1997).

The Dispute Escalates

By initially refusing Andrew's request, David entered into a dispute with the other boys as they dealt with this issue of Alan's proposed entry into block area. After several attempts by Andrew to have Alan play, David provided a justification for his rejection of Alan's entry into the block area. He said that Alan could not play because Alan had punched him (turn 36).

35	Alan	[no ( )*
36	David	[he's* ((*looking at Alan*)) going a(.)w-way 'cause he punched me up (.) he::'s (.5) going (.5) a(.)way! ((*lifts his right thumb up in a gesture of agreement*))
37	Matt	(0.5) no he's not! ((*in a cross tone*))

38   David   yes he is?=

Here, at stake was Alan's entry into the membership into block area. David justified his negative response by suggesting that Alan had not behaved as a proper block member player because he had "punched" David (turn 36). It seemed that Alan, on a previous occasion, had been a "defective" (Atkinson, 1980) member and thus his previous actions constituted him no longer as a current member. In this instance, David made hearable the types of actions in which members did not engage. As Atkinson (1980) points out, members "make themselves and others observable-reportable" (p. 34) as a particular categorical designation. Actual violence was not a part of the social practice of block area, although threats of violence were (Danby & Baker, 1998a). Alan had broken the member's code of conduct. David points out that Alan's action did not fit the "categorical designation" (Atkinson, 1980) of being a masculine member of block area. In this turn (turn 36), David's utterance is supported by a gesture that suggests agreement and resolution to the topic at hand. A commonsense reading of an upright thumb raised in this manner is that it seems that the matter at hand, Alan's entry into block area, has been successfully resolved. The use of the gesture elaborates upon David's utterance to suggest that David has concluded the dispute and accomplished a resolution. Matt, however, does not agree with David's assessment, and directly disagrees with David. Children, unlike adults, do not mitigate their responses or disguise their opposition (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1987).

Andrew continues the dispute by challenging David's response and launching into a claim of strength in turn 39. In making his claim, Andrew changed his pronouns from *I* to *we*.

39   Andrew   =YES I'M A VERY STRONG AREN'T WE ((*leaning towards Matt*))

40   Matt   I'll smash it ri:ght down no:o? ((*standing and looking down at the block building*))

41   David   Yep?

42	Alan	No you're [not* ((*has walked behind David and is now on David's right; he starts building with the blocks*))
43	David	[yep* he's going away [if he goes away* I won't smash it down
44	Andrew	[we're we're strong* (((*walking over to Matt; pointing his finger at him*))
45	David	If he doesn't go away [I won't smash it*
46	Alan	[( )* you are a ( ) bash you right down ((*pointing at David*))

Up until now, each boy had been talking as an individual speaker, each referring to himself in the first person. Andrew, in turn 44, changed this use of pronouns from single use to plural use. In so doing, Andrew has introduced a group position, and he is heard as speaking for the group of boys opposed to David's turning away of Alan. The pronoun *we* described for the boys their joint opposition to David and his rejection of Alan's entry to block area (Danby & Baker, 2000). Andrew has claimed a more powerful position by speaking on behalf of the group and by pointing out that the group is strong (turn 44). Andrew's comments about strength made visible the kind of attribute that was associated with this particular masculine membership of block area.

Andrew's use of the pronoun *we* was substantiated by Matt's threat of smashing down the block construction (turn 40) and Alan's interjection (turn 46), threatening to "bash [David] right down." Repeating words such as "smash" (turns 40 and 45) and "bash" (turn 46) set up a "flurry" (Sacks, 1992/95, vol. 2, p. 322) of talk. The "flurry" suggested that the words were chosen because they sounded alike and they suggested matching actions. Consequently, the flurry highlighted the collaborative effort of the boys in making "witnessable … the talk and conduct of a member of whatever social category they are intending themselves to appear as" (Atkinson, 1980, p. 34). David, despite being under challenge, participated in the "flurry" of talk, as did Alan, the one whose presence in block area was being disputed. In this sense, both were making hearable to others their claims to membership in block area. Alan's claim happens after

David, in turn 43, referred to Alan as *he,* suggesting that David was talking *about* Alan *to* Matt. By talking about Alan in his presence, but not directly to him, David showed that he was continuing to constitute Alan as less than a full member of the group (Payne & Ridge, 1985; Speier, 1982). Alan did not accept this status as turn 46 shows Alan participating as one of the members when he engaged in the "flurry" of talk.

Alan, still talking as if he is a member, escalated the threats from smashing blocks to bashing David (turn 46). This escalation was part of the practice of masculinity as performed by these boys in block area (Danby & Baker, 1998a). Alan now used the routinised talk associated with the practice of masculinity as he threatened to inflict personal injury on David. David's status as masculine member and leader of block area was under attack, caused by the combined threats of Matt and Andrew, the original members of block area at the beginning of this episode and now Alan, originally deemed an outsider.

Threats, pretence, objects of terror

The boys drew now upon objects of terror and pretence in further threats towards David. It is at this point that the boys launch into fantasy talk depicting themes of terror. Spontaneous fantasy play can reflect children's endeavours to preserve a sense of peer solidarity (Evaldsson & Corsaro, 1998). Drawing upon a theme of ferocious creatures, the boys now generated and improvised on each other's threats. In so doing, Alan, Andrew and Matt produced a cohesive and powerful unified position. Andrew launched the new theme of pretence and terror by introducing a "monster shark's shark" (turn 47) and nominating what it would do to David. Andrew laughed gleefully and danced a jig, seemingly recognizing the familiar practices of what was about to occur. As this episode illustrates, while the talk and actions of the boys may remain the same, membership may differ; the players and their roles may change from moment to moment. David was no longer the leader of the boys of block area; instead, he had become their mark.

45   David   If he doesn't go away   [I won't smash it*

46	Alan	[( )* you are a ( ) bash you right down ((*pointing at David*))

47	Andrew	YEAH (0.5) ((*points and leans towards Alan*)) I'm going to get a monster shark's shark and it will <u>ea:t him A:::::LL up</u>! ((*Andrew grins and begins a jig, turns towards the camera.*)) [hee hee hee hee* ((*laughing gleefully*))

Matt joined in Andrew's theme of pretence, adding his own object of terror, a "robot shark crocodile monster" (turn 48), to eat David. Alan (turns 51, 56) and then Matt (turns 48, possibly 52, and 57) also drew on the "dinosaur" to eat David.

46	Alan	[( )* you are a ( ) bash you right down ((*pointing at David*))
47	Andrew	YEAH (0.5) ((*points and leans towards Alan*)) I'm going to get a monster shark's shark and it will <u>ea:t him A:::::LL up</u>! ((*Andrew grins and begins a jig, turns towards the camera.*)) [hee hee hee hee* ((*laughing gleefully*))
48	Matt	[And I'll get a get a ro(.)bot* I'll get a robot shark crocodile monster and eat you °up°
49		(0.5)
50	Andrew	yea:::h=
51	Alan	=yea(hh)h(h) ((*laughs*)) ((*looking towards Matt and then glancing towards David*)) I'll get a big (plastic) dinosaur to eat him up ((*points long block at David*))
52	Matt	[( )*
53	David	[And I'll* get a big (fire) eater <u>RRRRRRRRR</u> ((*reaches out towards Alan and makes grabbing motions*)) [( )*
54	Andrew	[I'll get a* I'll get a [tractor* ((*Alan raises block above head.*))
55	Alan	[No you don't* ((*swings long block back over shoulder*))
56	Andrew	and then he'll will eat you him up won't [he ((*moving closer to Matt*))
57	Matt	[( ) I'LL GET A (.) I'LL GET A BIG ((*looking from Alan to Andrew*)) I'LL

GET A BIG (.) DINOSAUR WITH SPI:T AND AND AND
IT WILL SPIT AT HIM and he will °die::. °

The variations on the themes of "shark" and "dinosaur" ensured a synchronous
flow of talk that showed the boys orienting to each other in their conduct of this
membership activity. Even though David was now the mark, he continued to participate
in the interactions, using themes of terror, to claim continued membership. He shifted the
pretence from sharks and dinosaurs to that of a "(fire) eater" (turn 53). His new
nominated agent of terror fitted the category of objects that "eat," thus maintaining the
common theme.

Thus we see the category-based logic of threats invented by the boys. The
following is a sketch of the turns in which these threats appear and are repeated, and
where shifts occur between one object and another.

Chain of terror #1

40   Matt   I'll smash it <u>ri:ght</u> down no:o? ((*standing and looking down at
                        the block building*))

43   David   [yep* he's going away   [if he goes away* I
                        won't smash it down

45   David   If he doesn't go away   [I won't smash it*

46   Alan   [(   )* you are a (   ) bash you right
                        down ((*pointing at David*))

The links in this chain are shown in a simplified format:

40   Matt   I'll smash it <u>ri:ght</u> down

43   David   I won't smash it down

45   David   [I won't smash it*

46   Alan   bash you right down ((*pointing at David*))

Smash (activity), it (object of smashing: the building), right down (in what way) is
the first violence proposal. Alan substitutes "bash" for "smash" as a category of activity,
he substitutes "you" for "it" as the object of the violence, and repeats the activity "right

down". The idea of smashing the building has been transformed almost seamlessly into bashing David.

Chain of terror #2

The links in this chain begins with Andrew at 47 and then are shown in a simplified format:

47	Andrew	YEAH (0.5) ((*points and leans towards Alan*)) I'm going to get a monster shark's shark and it will ea:t him A:::::LL up! ((*Andrew grins and begins a jig, turns towards the camera.*)) [hee hee hee hee* ((*laughing gleefully*))
47	Andrew	a monster shark's shark and it will ea:t him A:::::LL up!
48	Matt	a robot shark crocodile monster and eat you °up°
51	Alan	a big (plastic) dinosaur to eat him up
53	David	a big (fire) eater RRRRRRRRR
54/6	Andrew	a tractor ...and then he'll will eat you him up

Andrew makes a major transition from "bash him [David] up" to calling on a ferocious creature to "eat" David "all up." This appears to work as an incitement for the other boys to find other items for the category we might call "ferocious creature that eats someone all up." Matt and Alan model Andrew's turn perfectly; David works the activity of eating into the creature category "fire eater". We observe in Andrew's turns that he *made* the tractor (not conventionally something that eats people) consistent with the previous items in the list "ferocious creatures that eat". This evident in turns 54 and 56:

54	Andrew	[I'll get a* I'll get a [tractor* ((*Alan raises block above head.*))
55	Alan	[No you don't* ((*swings long block back over shoulder*))
56	Andrew	and then he'll will eat you him up won't [he ((*moving closer to Matt*))

There seems to be no question that the boys were oriented to the work involved in generating their list of creatures, and that participation in the production of the chain was

understood by them as a member competence to be displayed. The production of a chain of terrifying objects worked to produce a chain of members of block area. Each boy makes himself a link in the chain of terror, adding strength to the chain and taking strength from it.

Chain of terror #3.

Matt produced the next major transition. He retained the ferocious creature element of the preceding chain, but substituted spitting for eating, and added the certainty of death. Unfortunately for our analysis, the teacher appeared at this point, so we do not see how the boys might have developed this variation.

57 Matt   A BIG (.) DINOSAUR WITH SPI:T AND AND AND IT WILL SPIT AT HIM and he will °die::. °58   Alan   (   )

59   ((*The teacher is leaning over the block shelves.*))

60 David   I DON'T WANT HIM DOWN HERE ((*to teacher*))

61 Teacher   ((*leaning over block shelf*)) Well can you find a space to build [away* ( )

Getting Heard Through Recycled Turn Beginnings

As discussed by Danby and Baker (2000), the boys drew upon recycled turn beginnings (Schegloff, 1987) to get their entire message heard by the others. The study of how these boys used recycled turn beginnings as a communicative strategy shows in a different but complementary way just how finely ordered and highly attuned their talk is both to claiming identity and to being heard as a member of the group. For example, Andrew, in turn 54, repeats "I'll get a*." This served two purposes. First, it allowed Andrew to take the floor before David finished his turn. Second, Andrew's repetition of "I'll get a" ensured that his turn was heard without David's previous talk interfering with Andrew's message. Thus, Andrew had an advantage "in the fight for the floor" (Schegloff, 1987, p. 76).

53	David	[And I'll* get a big (fire) eater <u>RRRRRRRRR</u> ((*reaches out towards Alan and makes grabbing motions*)) [( )*
54	Andrew	[I'll get a* I'll get a [tractor* ((*Alan raises block above head.*))
55	Alan	[No you don't* ((*swings long block back over shoulder*))

The "pre-placed appositional" (Schegloff, 1987, p. 74), such as *well*, *yeah*, and *so*, is used often in recycled turn beginnings. The boys' use of either "yep" (turn 43) or "and" (turns 48 and 53) declared a starting point to their new turn without lessening the intent of their main message. It built also an intensifying motif of terror and violence.

The overlapping of the boys' turns, using recycled turn beginnings, required a perfect sense of timing and collaboration among the participants. Andrew (turns 47 and 54), Matt (turns 48 and 57), Alan (turn 51) and David (turn 53) then engaged in other collaborative action. Each used "I'm going to get a" (turn 47) or "I'll get a" (turns 48, 51, 53, 54 and 57) as they began their descriptions of the type of terrible things that they would get to eat David.

47	Andrew	<u>YEAH</u> (0.5) ((*points and leans towards Alan*)) I'm going to get a monster shark's shark and it will <u>ea:t him A:::::LL up</u>! ((*Andrew grins and begins a jig, turns towards the camera.*)) [hee hee hee hee* ((*laughing gleefully*))
48	Matt	[And I'll get a get a ro(.)bot* I'll get a robot shark crocodile monster and eat you °up°
51	Alan	=yea(hh)h(h) ((*laughs*)) ((*looking towards Matt and then glancing towards David*)) I'll get a big (plastic) dinosaur to eat him up ((*points long block at David*))
53	David	[And I'll* get a big (fire) eater <u>RRRRRRRRR</u> ((*reaches out towards Alan and makes grabbing motions*)) [( )*
54	Andrew	[I'll get a* I'll get a [tractor* ((*Alan raises block above head.*))
57	Matt	[( ) I'LL GET A (.) I'LL GET A BIG ((*looking from Alan to Andrew*)) I'LL GET A BIG (.) DINOSAUR

WITH SPI:T AND AND AND IT WILL SPIT AT HIM and
he will °die::. °

The rephrasing and repetition by Matt, Andrew and Alan of the phase "I'll get a"
became a powerful way of showing David their combined and coordinated efforts. It
marked the boys' collaborative membership. But David, while most often the target, also
used this type of talk. In so doing, it seems that he was marking his continued
membership in this group of boys. Despite the conflict, he was using the same
collaborative structure of talk that the others used.

At the same time that the boys used the phase "I'll get a" to show their
collaborative effort, they completed the utterance by calling upon different objects of
terror. These utterances looked like: "I'll get a x," "I'll get a y," and "I'll get a z", as
discussed in detail above. Each response by the boys was different, yet fell within the
linguistic framework identified and used by its members. References were made to
different creatures of terror: "a monster shark's shark" (turn 47), "a robot shark crocodile
monster" (turn 48), "a big (plastic) dinosaur" (turn 51), a big (fire) eater" (turn 53), "a
tractor" (turn 54) and "a big dinosaur with spit" (turn 57). This type of talk, while
marking the collaborative nature of their talk, also distinguished each boy's own activity
as different from the others. Such collaboration shows group solidarity and membership,
while at the same time, individual identities remained separate. The boys' concerted
efforts showed that while they were talking as members of the same group, they were
showing also that they were all "individual characters with very different things to say"
(Baker & Freebody, 1987, p. 66).

Communicative Strategies on the Arrival of the Teacher

The talk and action of the boys escalated so that by turn 57, the boys were talking
very loudly and the activity appears chaotic and out of control. The teacher entered and
David immediately told her that he did not "want him down here" (turn 60). Presumably,
David was referring to the original source of this conflict, which was Alan's contested
entry into block area. The teacher responded by pointing out that the boys had other

physical classroom space available (turn 61). The boys picked up on this agenda of sharing resources. They discontinued their work consisting of threats of terror and instead, talked of building and working together. It was in this instance that we could see how the boys very competently recognized that the teacher was operating from a different agenda and they moved swiftly to talk within the teacher's frame.

57   Matt   [(   ) I'LL GET A (.) I'LL GET A BIG ((*looking from Alan to Andrew*)) I'LL GET A BIG (.) DINOSAUR WITH SPI:T AND AND AND IT WILL SPIT AT HIM and he will °die::. °

58   Alan   (   )

59   ((*The teacher is leaning over the block shelves*.))

60   David   I DON'T WANT HIM DOWN HERE ((*to teacher*))

61   Teacher   ((*leaning over block shelf*)) Well can you find a space to build [away* (   )

62   Andrew   ((*to teacher*)) YEAH (.) AND HE AND HE W- WANTS TO BUILD SOMETHING (.) A- A- AND HE ((*reaches towards teacher and brushes David's arm, Alan is building with the blocks*.)) DAVID WON'T LET HIM BUILD WITH US

63   David   And Alan

64   Matt   (police   )

65   David   (   ) knock down this building ((*walks away from teacher and Andrew; David bends over as if to start building with the blocks*.))

Matt, in turn 57, continued with his talk of terror, seemingly unaware that the teacher was now present. It was Andrew's utterance (turn 62) that showed clearly how he oriented to the teacher's perspective, focusing on the collaborative theme of building together. The episode continued with the boys creating a "jamming of the airwaves" (Danby & Baker, 2000, p. 113) as all the boys talked at once. The teacher soon left the

area, after she had told the boys to sort it out themselves. Switching into (and out of) the teacher's frame of relevances, indexed by the 'building together' vocabulary, and the jamming of the airwaves, are communicative strategies used with the teacher, and which seem effectively to have organized her retreat from block area. Eventually, there was physical tussle between Andrew and David. The final outcome was that David left the area and Matt became the new leader, with an agenda of building to which Andrew and Alan oriented.

Conclusion

The investigation of the dispute talk of the boys showed that it was not disorderly and chaotic, as it first may have appeared, but highly socially organized, moment by moment. As Marjorie Goodwin (1990) found in her analysis of the Maple Street children's disputes, disputes are effective in realigning and maintaining social identities and constructing social practices. In this paper, we have identified and discussed a number of communicative resources that the boys used in the conduct of their disputes, which showed the collaborative nature of their work as well as the individual social identities being co-constructed. First, the boys made strategic use of pronouns and pronoun shifts. They used "he" to distance themselves from the person spoken about, and they used the plural pronoun *we* to encourage alignments and to show that they were acting in unison. They used "I" to individuate themselves when engaged in cumulative and partly overlapping talk such as occurred in generating and escalating terror. We have shown in the analysis where these pronoun uses and shifts occurred, and what appears to have been at stake at each point.

Second, the boys engaged in 'chains' of talk that linked them together. In one chain, the boys used a "flurry" of talk to present a united position by their use of similar sounding words that suggested synchronous activity. In another, they improvised on the theme of "ferocious creature that eats someone all up." In the third chain, the boys moved the category from "ferocious creatures" to the "creature of death." Each chain introduced

a new variation that had been built seamlessly upon the previous one. This form of interaction depends entirely upon careful orientation to each other's talk and action, and is both an individual and group accomplishment. It requires fast talking and careful listening from every member so that each turn smoothly builds on the previous one. The threats of terror moved swiftly, one to the next, with no pauses, suggesting the accomplishment of these boys as communicators and as generators of chains of terror. When the boys launched their threats of terror – whenever one boy began a new chain - it seemed that the others knew exactly what to do, which was to add something different to the list.

The third communicative strategy that we attended to in this analysis is the recycled turn beginnings, rephrasing and repetitions that highlighted the boys' complex and sophisticated use of language. Commencing a new utterance while another boy was talking meant that this insertion of talk advantaged this speaker in gaining the next turn to talk and be heard. Once having gained the space, each boy's repetition of the initial parts of the utterance ensured that others heard the entire main message. Such a verbal strategy illustrates the powerful communicative resources upon which young children routinely draw in their everyday social situations.

Analysis showed that the boys observed in block area drew upon complex patterns of talk and interaction. Some of these have been discussed here, but the data could be examined for other strategic interactive practices. The boys used their communicative resources very competently to make clear their membership affiliation as well as to align their individual identities within block area. We have seen that the local social order was always in the process of being negotiated. Social order was in a state of flux, being generated and maintained in the moment-by-moment interactions among the boys. Uncovering such accomplishments illustrates new ways for appreciating both the language practices and social practices used by young boys in dispute.

 Transcript notation

Data are transcribed using a system created by Jefferson and described in Psathas (1995). The following are the features used in these transcripts.

( )   word(s) spoken but not audible

(was)   best guess for word(s) spoken

((*points*))   transcriber's description

but   emphasis

BUT   greater emphasis

[no*   the point at which an overlap occurs

[[no*   the point at which multiple overlaps occur

=   no interval between turns

not   rising inflection

°up°   talk that has a noticeably lower volume than the surrounding talk

do:on't sound extended

(h)   in-breath as in laughter, crying

(2.0)   pause timed in seconds

 Punctuation marks describe characteristics of speech production. They do not refer to grammatical units.

 him-   a dash indicates a cut-off of the prior word

 four.   a period indicates a stopping fall in tone

 please?   a question mark indicates a rising intonation

 away! an exclamation mark indicates an animated tone

References

Atkinson, M. A. (1980). Some practical uses of "a natural lifetime". *Human Studies, 3*, 33-46.

Baker, C. D., & Freebody, P. (1987). 'Constituting the child' in beginning school reading books. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 8*(1), 55-76.Corsaro, W. A. (1985). *Friendship and peer culture in the early years*. Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex.

Corsaro, W. A. (1997). *The sociology of childhood*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.

Danby, S., & Baker, C. (1998a). How to be masculine in the block area. *Childhood, 5*(2), 151-175.

Danby, S., & Baker, C. D. (1998b). "What's the problem?"—Restoring social order in the preschool classroom. In I. Hutchby & J. Moran-Ellis (Eds.), *Children and social competence: Arenas of action* (pp. 157-186). London: Falmer Press.

Danby, S., & Baker, C. D. (2000). Unravelling the fabric of social order in block area. In S. Hester & D. Francis (Eds.), *Local educational order: Ethnomethodological studies of knowledge in action* (pp. 91-140). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Davies, B. (1989). *Frogs and snails and feminist tales: Preschool children and gender*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Dyson, A. H. (1994). The Ninjas, the X-men, and the ladies: Playing with power and identity in an urban primary school. *Teachers College Record, 96*(2), 219-239.

Evaldsson, A.-C., & Corsaro, W. A. (1998). Play and games in the peer cultures of preschool and preadolescent children: An interpretative approach. *Childhood, 5*(4), 377-402.

Feeney, S., Christensen, D., & Moravcik, E. (1991). *Who am I in the lives of children?* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Goodwin, C. (2000). Action and embodiment within situated human interaction. *Journal of Pragmatics, 32*, 1489-1522.

Goodwin, M. H. (1985). The serious side of jump rope: Conversational practices and social organization in the frame of play. *Journal of American Folklore, 98*(389), 315-330.

Goodwin, M. H. (1990). *He-said-she-said: Talk as social organization among black children*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Goodwin, M. H. (1995). Co-construction in girls' hopscotch. *Research on Language and Social Interaction, 28*(3), 261-281.

Goodwin, M. H., & Goodwin, C. (1987). Children's arguing. In S. U. Philips & S. Steele & C. Tanz (Eds.), *Language, gender and sex in comparative perspective.* (pp. 200-248). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hester, S., & Eglin, P. (1997). Membership categorization analysis: An introduction. In S. Hester & P. Eglin (Eds.), *Culture in action: Studies in membership categorization analysis*.

Jacoby, S., & Ochs, E. (1995). Co-construction: An introduction. *Research on Language and Social Interaction, 28*(3), 171-183.

Jordan, E. (1995). Fighting boys and fantasy play: The construction of masculinity in the early years of school. *Gender and Education, 7*(1), 69-86.

Jordan, E., & Cowan, A. (1995). Warrior narratives in the kindergarten classroom. *Gender & Society, 9*(6), 727-743.

Maynard, D. W. (1985). On the functions of social conflict among children. *American Sociological Review, 50*(April), 207-223.

National Childcare Accreditation Council. (1993). *Putting children first: Quality improvement and accreditation system handbook*. Sydney: National Childcare Accreditation Council.

Payne, G., & Ridge, E. (1985). "Let them talk" — An alternative approach to language development in the infant school. In E. C. Cuff & G. C. F. Payne (Eds.), *Crisis in the curriculum* (pp. 11-32). London: Croom Helm.

Psathas, G. (1995). *Conversation analysis: The study of talk-in-interaction* (Vol. 35). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Sacks, H. (1992/95). *Lectures on conversation* (G. Jefferson, Trans. Vol. I and II). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Schegloff, E. A. (1988). Description in the social sciences I: Talk-in-interaction. *IPrA Papers in Pragmatics, 2*(1/2), 1-24.

Schegloff, E. A. (1997). Whose text? Whose context? *Discourse & Society, 8*(2), 165-187.

Sheldon, A. (1990). Pickle fights: Gendered talk in preschool disputes. *Discourse Processes, 13*, 5-31.

Sheldon, A. (1992). Preschool girls' discourse competence: Managing conflict. In K. Hall & M. Bucholtz & B. Moonwomon (Eds.), *Locating power: Proceedings of the Second Berkeley Women and Language Conference.* (Vol. 2, pp. 528-539). Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Women and Language Group.

Sheldon, A. (1996). You can be the baby brother, but you aren't born yet: Preschool girls' negotiation for power and access in pretend play. *Research on Language and Social Interaction, 29*(1), 57-80.

Speier, M. (1982). The everyday world of the child. In C. Jenks (Ed.), *The sociology of childhood: Essential readings* (pp. 181-188). Aldershot: Gregg Revivals.

West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987). Doing gender. *Gender and Society, 1*(2), 125-151.