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This is the author's version of a work that was submitted/accepted for publication in the following source:

[Danby, Susan J.](#)
(2016)

Foreword in "In Bateman, A. and Church, A. (ed.). (2016) Children's Knowledge-in-Interaction: Studies in Conversation Analysis".

Children's Knowledge-in-Interaction: Studies in Conversation Analysis.

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<http://www.springer.com/gp/book/9789811017018>

Foreward

By Susan Danby

In Bateman, A. and Church, A. (2016) *Children's Knowledge-in-Action*.

Singapore: Springer pages vii-viii

The exciting contribution of this book is that children's perspectives and displays of their knowledge are understood through a lens that observes their everyday practices, in situ. In the studies reported here, the children are not being invited to report or give an account to an interested researcher about their everyday learning lives. Rather, the children are observed as they go about their everyday interactions with family, peers and educators. These activities would be happening regardless of whether the researcher was present or not, and captures what participants did and how they did it, and with whom and, alongside all this, the accomplishments of knowledge underpinned through all these interactions.

In childhood studies in recent times, there has been an overwhelming awareness and recognition of the value of children's participation. Many studies set out to explore children's perspectives, with recent understandings residing within theoretical standpoints that value children's contributions, and with an emphasis on children's views being heard. Often undertaken within the paradigm known as the new studies of childhood, many of these studies have sought to ask children their perspectives on matters that are of concern to them, or that involve them in some way as participants. Some studies have explored, for example, children's views on play in educational settings, classroom rules and practices, and how children would like to be regarded. Other studies go further to seek children's views and participation in research practices that involve children as researchers exploring aspects of their own practices. In these studies, the underlying agenda is to seek children and young people's views on matters in which they are key stakeholders.

Within the field of childhood studies, an often used method is that of the interview, where children are invited to proffer their views and their stance on matters of interest to the researchers. At other times, views are elicited through analysing children's understandings displayed through artifacts, such as drawings and photographs, or through surveys or activities where children are brought into researcher-designed spaces to undertake researcher-designed activities, or to respond to interviewer questions, or to complete a diagram or task set by the researcher. These studies that ask children about their perspectives, or manipulate the everyday environment in some way, offer important insights into how children (and researchers) view the world, and how children respond to researcher agendas. What this approach does not give us, though, is insights into how children participate in their everyday lives as they unfold moment by moment, whether the researcher is present or not.

Taken together, the chapters in this book constitute a recalibration of the field of childhood studies. The research presented here is an interesting and powerful collection that builds on the early work of the 1970s, when the field of sociological studies of children and the earliest program of childhood studies were established. Particularly significant within this period was the work of early ethnomethodologists, including Matthew Speier and Robert Mackay. In many ways, the collection returns to this early project of making visible children's lives - as they are lived. This book's re-establishment of observational understandings is an exciting and provoking moment for the field of childhood studies.

Each chapter in this book presents a rigorous analysis of children's everyday lives. We want to know how children accomplish their everyday interactions as they undertake them, moment-by-moment, so we observe how their interactions unfold in real-time, and how they make meaning at that time in terms of what is happening. Although the contexts vary across home and school settings, what is constant is the close attention given to what participants say and do. An analytic focus on the sequences of interaction as

they unfold displays how participants respond to each other, as they make sense of each other and their social worlds. Using the observational method, we see first hand their displays of knowledge and interaction, and gain understandings of their perspectives. Technological advancements mean that video recordings of children's interactions are now a well-established method, making it possible to revisit the recordings to study children's practices closely. Technological and methodological advances in transcription make it possible to more accurately represent real life activity.

What this book does is show that children's knowledge construction is not only about academic concepts, such as numeracy, literacy and physics. Although individual chapters do explore these aspects of cognitive learning, this book is firmly embedded in the realisation that all knowledge work is accomplished within social contexts. Children work within contexts where social interactions and cultural understandings and practices are central to knowledge attainment. Knowledge-in-action cannot divorce the 'knowledge' aspect from the 'social' aspect as each are intricately intertwined and co-dependent.

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21 April 2016