From package to practice: Examining the ad hoc in a state-wide early literacy program

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Australian Commonwealth Government policies have promoted state literacy initiatives that prioritize systematic literacy instruction in the early years. This paper examines social interaction in a lesson informed by a state literacy program intended to meet national standards for early literacy. Conversation Analysis is used to develop descriptions of interaction methods used during an independent writing lesson. Descriptions encompass a question-question sequence of turns that occurred when individual students asked their teacher how to write a word. Discussion establishes that methods are compatible with the strategies mandated by the program but are not encompassed within its description of independent writing. It is argued that such programs need to acknowledge the moment-by-moment ways that teachers and students accomplish their daily literacy lessons.

Introduction

The Early Years Literacy Program (EYLP) is a state literacy program in Victoria, Australia. Initially it was developed for Grade Prep, Grade One and Grade Two. These grades constitute the first three years of schooling in the Victorian state education system. The EYLP built on the work of the Early Literacy Research Project, a collaborative research project between the University of Melbourne and the Victorian Department of Education. The Success for All program (Slavin, Madden, Karweit, Livermon, & Dolan, 1990) from the United States informed the research.

The development of the EYLP was intended to meet standards for early literacy instruction established by the Australian Commonwealth Government (DEET, 1998; Hill & Crévola, 1997). Specifically, the program represented the Victorian education systems commitment to a national goal for Australian schooling "that all students commencing school from 1998 will achieve a minimum acceptable literacy and numeracy goal within four years" (MCEETYA, cited in Hill and Crévola, 1997, p. 5). Commitment to this goal

1

by State Ministers of Education has resulted in the development of a range of literacy strategies and targeted programs for the early years of literacy instruction.

The EYLP is a whole-school approach to literacy instruction (Department of Education, Vic., 1998a) that requires "re-designing schools" (Hill & Crévola, 1999). It was informed primarily by teacher and school effectiveness studies, specifically those involving whole-school approaches. The latter establish gains in literacy attainment "within the context of a fully implemented, comprehensive program that is results-driven and involves both system- and school-wide commitment and coordination" (Crévola & Hill, 1998, p. 5). According to Hill and Crévola, the literature on effectiveness shows the following central factors:

> high expectations of student achievements; engaged learning time, and focused teaching that maximises learning within each student's 'zone of proximal development' (Hill & Crévola, 1999, p. 2)

While three decades of effectiveness studies have resulted in a huge body of work, Hill & Crévola argue that just these three factors are key, and informed their research. The incorporation of findings from effectiveness studies reflects an international trend in literacy education that has increasingly given prominence to teacher effectiveness, school effectiveness and school improvement research (Reynolds, 1998). The uptake of these studies may be differentiated from the influence of studies of effective literacy teachers (Medwell, Wray, Poulson & Fox, 1998; Pressley, Allington, Wharton-McDonald, Block, & Morrow, 2001).

Allington (2002), rather provocatively, asserts that effective teachers are more than the specific materials, programs and pedagogies they employ. Instead, he argues that:

> Our study of these exemplary teachers suggests that such teaching cannot be packaged. Exemplary teaching is not regurgitation of a common script but is responsive to children's needs. In the end it will become clearer that there are no "proven programs," just schools in which we find more expert teachers — teachers who need no script to tell them what to do.

In his consideration of effective teachers of reading, Allington highlights the importance of talk; the talk of effective teachers' could be differentiated from the talk that usually predominates in teacher-led instructional interaction. At the same time, Allington

emphasises that this aspect of effectiveness is under researched, "complicated and too little understood" (Allington, 2002).

The intention of this paper is to establish that while the EYLP mandates a highly structured and systematic approach to literacy teaching (Hill & Crévola, 1999), the daily classroom application of the program is accomplished by the ad-hoc interaction of teachers and students. The broader argument is that while mandated literacy programs like the EYLP delineate what should occur in literacy lessons, understandings of programs need to encompass the moment-by-moment social activity of teachers and students.

The Program

Central to the EYLP is a systematic approach to classroom instruction. Teachers determine the teaching focus for individual lessons but time allocation, classroom grouping, teaching strategies and assessment are mandated. The program requires that teachers implement a two hour daily literacy block. One hour of daily instruction is for reading, and one hour for writing. Classroom instruction within each of the hourly time slots requires that teacher conduct whole class instruction and then teacher instruction of one group while other children work in small groups or individually. Each hour concludes with sharing time when children talk about their individual activity and account for their time (Department of Education, Vic, 1998b, p. 4). Time spent on tasks is considered particularly essential to the effectiveness of instruction (Hill and Crévola, 1999). Parent helpers are an important aspect of the program because they "assist the students to remain on task and to free the teacher for small group teaching" (Hill & Crévola, 1997, p. 10).

Teaching strategies in the program were drawn from progressive approaches developed in New Zealand by Holdaway (1979; 1980) and implemented in the Victorian state during the 1980s through the Early Literacy In-service Course (ELIC). However, the EYLP requires their systematic application rather than the "ad hoc" use said to typify their previous application by state teachers (Hill & Crévola, 1999). Hill and Crévola

3

attribute the previous uptake to the absence of "the necessary organizational procedures in place to enable them to be maximally effective" (Hill and Crévola, 1997, p. 5). Accordingly, teaching strategies are mandated in the program and employed systematically. For example, teachers must employ modelling or shared reading and modelled or shared writing every day for 10 – 15 minutes.

The EYLP also incorporates pre-determined assessment strategies, drawn largely from Clay's Observation Survey (1993). Assessment is central to the effectiveness of the classroom groupings and developing the focuses for explicit teaching through the compulsory teaching strategies. As well, assessment information is forwarded annually to a state-wide database (MCEETYA, 2007). Analysis of this information is fed back into individual schools. State-wide analysis of assessment information also allows comparisons to be made between schools and provides information critical to the claims that the program will meet the state and national targets for early literacy education. Continued funding for the literacy initiative is dependent on this accountability.

Professional development is a necessary element of the EYLP. All professional development materials in the program were developed in collaboration with the Victorian Department of Education and published through a commercial publishing company. The materials and professional development were implemented in stages; reading materials were developed in Stage 1 and writing in Stage 2. The program was later extended to encompass oral language and Grades 3 and 4. Overall, the program's materials describe the classroom approach to literacy instruction as providing a balanced approach (Department of Education, Vic., 1998b). The theories of Bruner (1978) and Vygotsky (1976; 1978) are said to underpin the view of balance that informs the program. Balance is conceptualised as the provision of scaffolding within the zone of proximal development. Instructional conversations are referred to in relation to Palincsar's work (1986), however, the materials do not provide detailed examination of the features of instructional talk.

The following outline of the approach to writing illustrates the classroom implementation of the EYLP, as it is presented in the professional development materials. A balanced approach to writing instruction is provided through the use of teaching strategies that provide a range of support. The strategies are modelled writing, shared writing, language experience, interactive writing, guided writing, and independent writing. Each day, initially all students are taught in a teacher-led whole-class session using either modelled writing or shared writing. After this, the teacher instructs a small group and the rest of the students complete independent writing. Integral to small group instruction is the matching of instruction to students' assessed "stages of development" (Department of Education, Vic, 1998b, p. 4). In P-2 these stages are beginning, emergent, early or fluent writers. Beginning/emergent writers are taught using shared writing, language experience, interactive writing or guided writing. Shared, interactive or guided writing is used to instruct early/fluent writers (Department of Education, Vic., 1998a, p. 23).

While the teacher instructs a group of students using a teaching approach appropriate to their stage of development, other students complete independent writing. After the teacher finishes her instruction of the group she moves amongst students who are doing independent writing. According to the information provided for teacher in the professional development materials, the teacher may talk with individual students about the message of their text, give students time to express their own opinions, or be "explicit about the next task." (Department of Education, Vic., 1998b, p. 17). Two strategies suggested to teachers, in the professional development materials, are that students should find words and sound it out (Department of Education, Vic., 1998b, p. 17). When independent writing concludes students participate in whole class sharing. During sharing, individual students talk to the class about what they did and learnt during independent writing.

Theoretical Perspective

The study is informed by Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis (henceforth EM and CA). These related research approaches maintain an interest in the local and situated social practices of people (Goodwin & Duranti, 1992). Researchers employing EM and

CA commonly give analytic focus to ordinary events through the analysis of naturally occurring talk and interaction (Pomerantz, 1988). In this way, researchers endeavor to find and describe "interpretive practices through which interactants produce, recognize, and interpret their own and others' actions" (Pomerantz, 1988, p. 361).

The specific focus for CA studies is the "interactional organization of social activities" (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998, p. 14). CA is used to examine people's interaction in order to understand "how conduct, practice, or praxis, in whatever form, is accomplished" (Pomerantz & Fehr, 1997, p. 65) during everyday activity. Central to understanding conduct is the description of procedures or "shared methods interactants use to produce and recognize their own and other people's conduct" (Pomerantz & Fehr, 1997, p. 69). These methods accomplish the course of social interaction and indicate how people orient to aspects of settings (Schegloff, 1992). One way to produce descriptions is through the sequential analysis of turns at talk. Typically, analysis is of naturally occurring talk and results in meticulous descriptions of features of talk such as the speech exchange system, or mechanism for turn taking (Sacks, 1995).

When applied to social interaction in classrooms, Conversation Analysis results in detailed descriptions of how talk and interaction accomplishes social activity in situ. The CA perspective on the relationship between descriptions of classroom practice and theories of classroom instruction has been formulated previously in this way:

> That classroom teaching is relentlessly ad hoc should not be understood in opposition to more tidy formulations of professional practice. Instructional plans and curricular objectives are real enough. The greater point is that they own their classroom lives to the practiced production and negotiation of the moment-to-moment possibilities that every next enactment of classroom teaching and learning assures. Thus the ad hoc, rather than an oppositional formulation of professional practice is its praxiological life. (Macbeth, 2003, p. 25)

The CA perspective enables the explication of the "praxiological life" (Macbeth, 2003, p. 25) of classroom approaches and theories that inform them. It does this through the analysis of naturally occurring talk and interaction.

A number of researchers working from this perspective have examined the social organization of teacher-led whole-class lessons and literacy activities. For example, how the cohort is accomplished in the classroom (Payne & Hustler, 1980) and what gives classrooms their feeling of "formality" (McHoul, 1978). Previous CA studies of classroom talk in literacy lessons have established ways that interaction between teachers and students accomplishes "institutionalized ways of reading and talking about texts"(Baker, 1991, p. 161). For example, question and answer sequences within whole class reading events are "foundational in the social construction of classroom literacy" (Baker, 1991, p. 180), such that "what counts as reading" is established procedurally during routine classroom talk (Heap, 1991) and literate competence assessed "on the hop" through the interaction that accomplishes talk about texts (Baker & Freebody, 1993).

Methods

The study was framed by ethnomethodological principles (Lee, 1991; Freebody *et al*., 1995) developed to enable a focus on the local, *in situ*. In this study, these principles led to a focus on participants' orientation and activities; use of recorded data to make social activity retrievable; analysis of talk and interaction that accomplished social activity; and description of interaction to establish order and the cultural know-how of people.

Data collection followed a year of "peripheral participation" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 225) in a combined Grade Prep/ Grade One classroom. Participation in the literacy teaching block showed that daily literacy instruction was informed by the EYLP: literacy was taught in a two-hour block, followed a whole class –small group/individual activity- whole class structure and the teacher employed the teaching strategies mandated in the program. Data collection consisted of audio and video recordings of ten writing lessons. The focus for analysis in the study arose from the orientations of students to others during an independent writing; numerous students sought information and help from others.

According to the program, independent writing is a time when students pursue their own writing or complete writing tasks set by the teacher. In the lesson analysed for this study,

the teacher asked some students to write individual recounts of a previous occasion when they had made peanut butter and "jelly" sandwiches in the classroom. The teacher had written about this herself prior to independent writing; in shared writing she had produced a text which was visible to students throughout independent writing. Audio and video recordings of the lesson focused on the naturally occurring talk and interactions of students seated at one table.

For analytic purposes, the recordings were reviewed later many times and a transcript developed using Jefferson notation (Atkinson & Heritage, 1999). This notation enables finer details of interaction to be recorded, including minute pauses between turns and within utterances, overlap in talk, and nuances in articulation of words. Choice of sequences for analysis was guided by the apparent orientations of students. For example, a number of children approached the teacher for help and so those sequences were selected for analysis. Sequences were analysed on a turn-by-turn basis in order to detail the methods the students and their teacher employed to accomplish this routine activity during the lesson. The analysis of those sequences has informed this paper.

Analysis

The sequences all begin with a student asking the teacher how to record a specific word. Interactions with the teacher usually began with a direct question such as "how do you write *something*" or "how do you spell *something*". All sequences of this kind were analysed and a description developed that took account of every sequence. Excerpts cited here are representative of those analysed and illustrate how the teacher interacted with students to bring about two actions that she required of students: that they sound the word out by starting with its first sound or that they find the word in the room.

What does it start with?

In this first sequence of interaction Wayne initiates talk with the teacher by asking her a question (1). The teacher avoids providing an answer by asking a question (3). The question requires that Wayne work out and name the first letter of 'like' for himself.

Example 1

1	→	Wayne:	how do you write (0.4) like?
2			((Mckiela begins to write 'e'))
3	→	Teacher:	like ((leans over Wayne)) what does like start with?
4			((Mckiela looks at Dominic's work/teacher notices Mckiela)
5	→	Wayne:	(0.8) um (0.4) a ['c'* (looking at the teacher))
6		Dominic:	[ca*n I write (eleven) sentences
7	→	Teacher:	(0.2) yeah write me another sentence! (0.8) that's what that's
8			what I expect from a grade one but you're nearly grade two
9			now ((begins to walk away))
10	→		((Wayne staring in the direction of Dominic))

Wayne's response is hesitant and overlapped by Dominic who directs a question at the teacher (6). The teacher does not respond to Wayne's utterance although it was "hearable" as tentative and requiring confirmation from her. Instead she replies to Dominic's question (7). Wayne watches the interaction but does not speak to the teacher again.

The second example occurs between another student and the teacher. The interaction begins when Dominic says the word 'very' (1). Although his opening utterance does not verbally summons the teacher by name, he is looking in her direction (1).

Example 2

1	→	Dominic:	very ((looking at the teacher))
2		Cathlyn:	'b':: ((writing))
3			(0.8)
4	→	Teacher:	it was [↑very (0.6) ↓very*
5		Cathlyn:	['u' ((writing))* (0.4) 't' (0.2) 't' [(0.2) 'e' (0.4)
6		Teacher:	yes
7		Student:	's'
8			(0.5)
9		Cathlyn:	'r'

The teacher's response (4) indicates that she hears Dominic's utterance as directed at her. Her reply places the word in the sentence that Dominic has written so far. The rising intonation on 'very' accompanied by a pause (4) appears to require a response from Dominic. When there isn't one, she repeats the word with falling intonation. The teacher's responses indicate that she heard Dominic's initial utterance as a question. The teacher shifts her attention from Dominic to Cathlyn (6), and there is no reply from Dominic. So, he does not appear to offer up an answer to the teacher for evaluation.

Dominic resumes his talk with the teacher (12). This time he asks a question in full (12). In this way Dominic indicates to the teacher that he still needs to know the word and perhaps works to query her previous response (4).

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10                      (0.5)
11                      ((Mckiela looking in Dominic's direction))
12   →   Dominic:   how do you spell very?
13   →   Teacher:   (0.4) what does very start ↑with (0.2) veah (1.0)
14                      ((Mckiela writes 'a'))
15   →   Dominic:   'v' ((begins to write))
16                      (1.0)
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The teacher replies to Dominic's question with a question (13). Her utterance is now more specific, just as Dominic's question has been. She requires that he tell her the first letter of the word. She asks a question and makes a sound. Then she waits for a response. The teacher's response, like Dominic's question, is a more filled out version of her first utterance in response to Dominic. So both the teacher and Dominic have elaborated on their previous talk, and accounted for it. The teacher does not tell Dominic the answer however and she does not evaluate the answer (15) that he gives to her question.

The analysis of interaction in Examples 1 and 2 suggests that the teacher is teaching a method for working out how to record words. In this way her turns work as a "vehicle for instruction" (Lerner, 1995, p. 122). Her initiation act functions to make students "work it out" for themselves by listening to the sounds she makes or by making the sounds themselves, and then naming the letter. This focuses student listening on a particular letter. Her question and the sounds 'point' to a letter. The teacher doesn't say "work it out for yourself" or "this is how you do it". Instead these questions oblige students to use a certain method to arrive at the correct answer (Baker & Freebody, 1993; Psathas, 1992).

Where can you find it?
During independent writing, the teacher's use of questioning enabled her to project students towards particular trajectories or actions, rather than merely telling them how to spell words. Sometimes the teacher's questions required that students "find" words.

Example 3
In this example, the question-question sequence of turns is again apparent. However, the teacher's turn is designed (Austin, *et al*., 2003) to withhold information requested and to make apparent a way to find the information that Dina needs.

→	Dina:	how do you write peanut butter?
→	Teacher:	where are you going to find peanut butter?,
	Ivan:	the supermarket ( )
→		((teacher turns to walk away/ Dina watches the teacher, turns and pauses and then returns to her table))

The use of a question withholds the answer that the student's question powerfully requires (Sacks, 1995). At the same time, by asking where the word can be found the teacher is heard to *make apparent* that the word *is* "findable" somewhere in the room. Ivan, who is an over-hearing party (Sacks, 1995) to the conversation, "make strange" talk of finding 'peanut butter' in the classroom by providing the 'real-world' answer to the teacher's question: peanut butter is found in the supermarket.

In the final example, the interaction between Ivan and the teacher also involves an utterance that is hearable as a question (1), and a question in response that involves finding the word (7). Yet again, the teacher does not decline to answer the student's question – she simply treats it as though he isn't asking to be told and avoids telling through the use of her own question.

Example 4

1	→	Ivan:	peanut butter
2			((Mckiela begins to write 'l'))
3		Wayne:	(0.2) p[eanut butter*
4		Dominic:	[cos if you *didn't like them we could go ((points at
5			page))
6			((Mckiela looks at Dominic's book))
7	→	Teacher:	where you gonna find [it?*
8		Dominic:	[↑I* (0.5)
9	→	Teacher:	peanut butter
10		Dominic:	[/d/ (0.2) /i/ ((looks to teacher))
11			[((Melodie points to words on her page))

The teacher's answer consists of the question and, after a pause, a repetition of the words that Ivan has asked her to spell (9). The repetition works to require an answer from Ivan, because it indicates that the teacher is replying to his question. However, Ivan does not reply to the teacher's question.

The teacher's next turn is directed at Lincoln who is sitting beside Ivan (12). Her use of "where else" (14) suggests that some action has occurred as a response to her previous question about finding "peanut butter". The talk requires an answer from Lincoln, and that he names somewhere else that peanut butter can be found.

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12   →   Teacher:   Linc[oln?
13        Dominic:        [/dn't/ (1.0) didn't [(1.0) like* (1.0)
14   →   Teacher:                            [where else can you find peanut butter
15                       though ((walking away))*
16        Dominic:   the (0.4) peanut (0.2) butter (0.2) sandwich
17                       ((Mckiela writes bottom of 'i'/ Cathlyn glances at Jamie's
18                       book))
19   →   Ivan:      in the ↑supermar- !ket (0.4) ((laughs))
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Here the teacher's talk indicates to the student that the words 'peanut butter' are "findable" somewhere else in the room and works to require him to find it. The teacher's utterance, through the use of 'though', acknowledges one source for finding the words that Lincoln may have physically indicated to her. However she does not accept this source as the one to be used. Nor does she stay to hear a response.

Overall, the analysis of a number of sequences provided robust descriptions of all the sequences of this type. Descriptions then informed considerations of the social activity of the students and teacher during the independent writing lesson.

Discussion

This paper establishes some of the ways in which one teacher and her students accomplished independent writing activity during a literacy lesson. Since two strategies mandated within the EYLP are that students should sound words out and find words in the room, the teacher's actions during the independent writing lesson were consistent with this. That is, the teacher regularly required that students find words or sound them out. However, the analysis reveals details of activity that are not encompassed within the program's "tidy formulations" (Macbeth, 2003) of systematic instruction.

In order to get students to find words or sound them out, the teacher regularly withheld the provision of the specific information requested by students: their questions were

answered with questions. The teacher also withheld responses to students if they answered her questions. Since teachers regularly comment on the "suitability" of students' answers during whole-class instruction (Mehan, 1979), the "noticeable absence" (Sacks, 1995, p. 35) of this turn during independent writing suggests that the teacher required independent action by students rather than further interaction with her.

While the analysis reveals the methodical aspects of teacher activity that fitted with the mandated program, it also shows the way in which the teacher's direction of students took account of the particular context. That is, the teacher's response to individual requests varied. While some students were required to find a word, others were directed to sound a word out. This differentiation illustrates aspects of teachers' activity that are overlooked in the EYLP and is possibly illustrative of the work that many teachers do in literacy lessons informed by mandated programs. Some students were directed to sound out or find words according to their teacher's assessment on-the-go of what individual students *could do* to write the word they needed. Students were required to search for a word only if it was "findable" somewhere in the classroom.

While the EYLP provides detailed directions for teachers as to the conduct of independent writing, it does not take account of student initiated talk with the teacher. Independent writing is described solely in terms of what teachers should do when they interact with students. Teachers may give specific directions before independent writing (Department of Education, Vic, 1998a, p. 39) and may instruct individuals during it (Department of Education, Vic., 1998a, p. 64). Clearly, according to the program it is the teacher who initiates interaction and determines consequence activity. The analysis of sequences in this study shows that during independent writing, students pursue their own activity and frequently initiate talk with others, including with the teacher. Interaction that requires information from the teacher, however, is short-lived (Davidson, in press).

The analysis illustrates that students and teachers together negotiate the "moment-to-moment possibilities" that accomplish teaching and learning in the classroom (Macbeth, 2003). Teaching strategies can be seen to be mutually accomplished rather than the

individual achievement of the teacher. Therefore, effective teaching must also be understood as the joint accomplishment of teachers and students, and effectiveness seen as an on-going negotiated activity that draws on students' social competence.

Conclusions

The strategies of sounding out and finding a word are well documented as strategies used by young writers long before they are able to record the spelling of words accurately (Geekie, Cambourne & Fitzsimmons, 1999; Cambourne & Turbill, 1987; Cambourne 1988). The development of these strategies has been related to interactions with teachers, and shown to develop over time in process writing classrooms where teachers interact with students to develop their knowledge of how to record the spelling of unknown words independently (Geekie, Cambourne & Fitzsimmons, 1999). This paper contributes understandings of how a teacher and students orient to these strategies, and to independent activity, within an early literacy program, that intends systematic instruction. This knowledge is overlooked in "packaged" literacy programs that attribute successful instruction to broad "steps" and instructional activities that all teachers are required to follow.

While broad notions of instructional conversation inform programs like the EYLP, too little is known about how teachers and students negotiate and accomplish instruction through their interaction in such programs. In the case of independent writing in the EYLP, this study implies that there is much to examined and understood about how independent writing is promoted and accomplished. Professional development materials need to encompass greater understandings of the intersection between talk and interaction and the instructional goals determined by teachers within mandated literacy programs.

The application of EM and CA to the analysis of the social accomplishment of independent writing illustrates ways that detailed studies of everyday activity in the classroom can inform how we understand the institutional activity of lessons (Heap, 1997; Macbeth, 2003). Although programs like the EYLP seek to control variation across

classrooms, this study reminds that lessons are social encounters negotiated by talk and interaction.

Transcription Symbols

[[	Utterances that begin at the same time
[	Overlap in speakers' talk
*	Indicates point where simultaneous talk finishes
=	Talk between speakers that latches or follows without a break between
( )	Used to indicate length of silences, pauses and gaps e.g. (0.2)
(.)	Indicates micro intervals
:::	Indicates that a prior sound is prolonged e.g. li::ke
-	Word is cut off e.g. ta-
?	Rising intonation
?,	Rising intonation that is weaker than ?
↑	Marked rising intonation
↓	Marked falling intonation
!	An animated tone
un	Emphasis with capitals indicating greater emphasis e.g. NO
::::::	Emphasis and prolongation indicate pitch change e.g. stra:::p indicates stress on word but no change in pitch; stra::p pitch rise
NO	Upper case indicates loudness
°	Indicates softness e.g. It's a ° secret °
.hhh	Indicates in-breath
(it)	Indicates that word within parentheses is uncertain
( )	Empty parentheses indicate that word/s could not be worked out
(( ))	These are used to indicate verbal descriptions e.g. ((sits down))

Notation adapted from Jefferson notation (Atkinson & Heritage, 1999).

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