Everyday preschool talk about Christchurch earthquakes

Abstract

This article investigates young children’s interactions with their peers and teachers following the events of the Christchurch earthquakes in New Zealand on September 2010 and February 2011. Drawing on conversation analysis and psychological literature, we focus on one outdoor excursion to visit a broken water pipe caused by the earthquake to show how the teacher and children mutually accomplished trouble telling and storying. A particular feature of talk was the use of pivotal utterances to transition from talking about the damaged environment, to talking about reflections of actual earthquake events. This article shows how teachers initiate and prompt children’s informal and spontaneous story telling as an interactional resource for discussing traumatic events.

The Christchurch earthquakes

On the 4th September 2010 an earthquake of magnitude 7.1 hit Christchurch, New Zealand, occurring during the night with no deaths resulting. A continuous series of aftershocks followed during the subsequent months, which had a huge impact on the residents who lived daily with regular seismic activity. A subsequent 6.3 magnitude earthquake struck on the 22nd February 2011, which occurred during the daytime and claimed the lives of 185 people (police.gov, 2012). The majority of deceased, 115 people, were located in the Canterbury Television (CTV) building in the central city area; a number of family members from nearby New Brighton Community Preschool and Nursery Inc in Christchurch worked in the central city. As with many areas within the city of Christchurch, the New Brighton Community Preschool and Nursery building is located in an area severely affected by the large February earthquake and subsequent aftershocks (http://www.christchurchquakemap.co.nz).
During the February 2011 earthquake, the New Brighton Community Preschool and Nursery Centre Manager (Paula Robinson) constructed a plan of action to cater for the possibility of attending children’s parents not returning due to the high mortality rate involved in the earthquake. Fortunately every parent returned safely to the preschool to collect their children, but the centre director reported that many were emotionally traumatised as they had extreme concerns regarding the safety of their children.

Following the earthquake, many early childhood centres were open within the week, as there was an urgency to re-establish routines as quickly as possible (Dean, 2012). Parents and early childhood centre staff, however, were uncertain about how best to respond, and concerned for the physical and psychological welfare of children (Brown, 2012, p88). The teachers sought “information on children’s reactions and recovery, behaviour, self care and positive recovery stories and supports available to families” (Dean, 2012, p95). The Traumatic Incident (TI) unit, an external service that involves a wide range of professionals, including psychologists, speech pathologists, special education advisors, occupational therapists and physiotherapists, ran town meetings, supporting the community through what Brown (2012) identifies as three key steps for disaster recovery. Referred to as the 3 ‘R’s’, the steps are (1) Respond, involving psychological first aid to support a sense of personal safety, through gaining access to and communicating with services; (2) Recover, which involves communication, so children know that adults are available to them physically and emotionally, important for their emotional recovery; and (3) Renew, to encourage children to use games and play, and tell “stories over and over as they make sense of events” (Brown, 2012, p88). In this article, we focus on the second and third steps described by Brown (2012), which is adult availability and encouragement of children to “tell stories” about their experiences.

_Telling stories as therapeutic and communication resources_

Textbooks advising on ways to interact with children in counselling contexts frequently suggest the avoidance of questions (Hutchby, 2007; Geldard & Geldard, 1997). One reason given is that, as counsellors may be unfamiliar with the personal history of the children, asking questions might be viewed as confrontational (Hutchby, 2007). Rather,
recommended counselling sessions with young children involve cautionary approaches that seek the perspectives of the children, and engaging in the communication strategies of “active listening” and formulations of what the children have said (Antaki, 2008; Hutchby, 2007). Telling stories is a strategy used by professionals to heal trauma and promote trauma recovery with children and young people (Ertl, Pfeiffer, Schauer, Elbert & Neuner, 2012; Stokoe & Edwards, 2006). The preschool classroom is not a formal counselling context, but teachers are responsible for promoting young children’s social and emotional health, particularly in times of traumatic events.

Sacks (1995), working in a conversation analysis perspective, suggests that stories are always “‘about’ something and thence hopefully something about which more than a little might be said, i.e., the item offered might be generative” (Vol I, p. 230). When considering story telling in light of possible topics, Sacks suggests that “‘trouble’ …[is] not merely a good thing to provide grounds for talk in general in conversation …but also … is generative and therefore specially attractive for stories” (Sacks, 1995, Vol I, p. 230). Stories, then, are designed to produce talk for particular audiences, who may react or respond to the telling in some way. Often, one story leads to another, and these stories are known as “second stories” (Sacks, 1995). A second story is designed to display understanding and “achieve a recognizable similarity” (Arminen, 2003, p.319) to the first story, and identification with the speaker. We examine the way that stories are initiated, produced and shaped by the teachers and children during a preschool excursion where an object or event, such as a damaged pipe, sets up the conditions for first and second stories about making sense of daily lives following the earthquakes.

**The study**

The current research was initiated to explore how teachers communicated with children following the earthquake events. Discussing traumatic events is essential in the process of coming to terms with disaster events (McMahon, 2009), and it is of analytical importance to observe how these events are talked into being as part of child-teacher everyday conversation. The potential to resolve trauma through talk cannot be limited to therapy sessions as conversations about problems often happen in spontaneous everyday
interactions. This is particularly apparent in trusting relationships such as those developed between a child and their teacher (Howard, 2010).

The study involved one preschool community that had a shared interest in the investigation, and was willing to take part in the study during a difficult time. The centre, New Brighton Community Preschool and Nursery Inc, was located in one of the disaster zones in Christchurch, and the early childhood teachers and parents were keen to take part in the study as most of the children were present at the preschool on the day of the earthquake and families were working in the central city area. As the study investigated experiences of a traumatic event, the ethical issues were of paramount importance prior to, and during, the implementation of the study. Ethical consent from Waikato University was secured prior to receiving consent from the teachers, families and children at the preschool. All teachers, families and children gave their consent to be involved in the project, revealing a significant interest in research linking to the impact of the earthquake.

Participants consisted of seven early childhood teachers and fifty-two children; eleven children were aged two years, and forty-one children were aged three to four years. Three researchers were involved in the project; the project leader spent time at the preschool and collected the video data during one week in November 2011. The children’s and teachers’ interactions were video recorded for five mornings during the week, with children taking turns to wear wireless microphones. Recording was stopped when the children went to the bathroom and when they indicated that they wanted to hand over the microphone to another child. In total, eight hours and twenty-one minutes of video footage was recorded.

Although the data were collected nine months after the February 2011 earthquake, the aftershocks continued regularly, causing damage to roads, housing and water supply. Evidence of the continued disruptions is evident throughout the footage, which reveals that incidents of earthquake talk are very common. One such event is analysed here.

Method and Methodology
In this discussion and analysis, we build on existing work on teacher-child interactions (Butler, 2008; Church, 2010; Cuff & Hustler, 1981; Danby & Baker, 1998; Mackay, 1974; McInnes, Howard, Miles & Crowley, in press; Waters & Bateman, in press). The episode videorecords an excursion that involved 2 teachers and 8 children from the centre to look at a broken water pipe nearby. The entire episode is 20 minutes long, so it is not possible to reproduce the interaction in its entirety. Rather, we draw on extracts to explicate instances where the teacher and children make relevant, through their conversations, their accounts of their experiences of the earthquake.

Known as an extended sequence (Psathas, 1992) or as a single case analysis (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998), the analysis of one single extended episode in its entirety can show how the episode unfolds, with the observed events on the excursion offering conversational opportunities for the children to proffer accounts of their previous experiences. As Schegloff (1988) points out, examining a single interaction can show the “locus of social order” (p. 442), which reveals the orderly features of members’ interactional sequences. Social order is made relevant through members’ practical actions in everyday life, “produced as familiar scenes of everyday activities, treated by members as the ‘natural facts of life’” …and produced as taken-for-granted activities of daily life (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 35). At any one time, members orient to and take up particular actions that maintain and constitute particular social orders (Danby & Baker, 2000). This article’s contribution to understanding social order in a preschool setting is to show how talk between teachers and children on an excursion to look at a hole in the road reveals, on close analysis, a social order where teachers orient to engaging children in storytelling through using present experiences as a pivot to produce ‘past experience-talk’ (Barraja-Rohan, 2003, p615) of their earthquake experiences. The relevance of this collaborative and cooperative talk is that, within the psychological literature, such talk has been identified as supporting the developmental and therapeutic potential of children’s communication in their daily lives (Howard & McInnes, 2012).

As conversations are sequential, an observable feature is participants taking turns to talk, and analyzing this language-in-use is one way to understand social organization (Lee,
1987; Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974). This analytic approach that describes and analyses the participants’ social activities and their organization uses understandings of Ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967) and Conversation Analysis (Sacks, 1995). Through recording and transcribing everyday interactions between teachers and children, a clearer understanding of the social actions as they unfold (Lee, 1987) reveals what is important to those members at that time, and how such aspects are talked into being. These findings provide insights into how traumatic events and experiences are dealt with between children and their teachers in everyday early childhood education settings.

A walk to the hole in the road

The transcript begins with the teachers and children walking along the footpath. On the day of the observation (17th Nov 2011), the preschool had no water as a vehicle has fallen through the road damaged by the earthquake, and broken the water pipe leading to the preschool. The first extract begins soon after the group set out on their walk to investigate the damaged environment.

Extract 1: The introduction

Thursday; Tape 1; 14mins 25secs > 14mins 48secs

01 Pauline: do you know (0.7) what happened this
02 morning↑ Sienna↓
03 Sienna: ↓what↑
04 Pauline: Paula rung up Pauline when I was
05 having my breakfast↑ (0.6) and she said
06 the (1.5) water pipes have broken on the
07 street and we’ve got no water at
08 pre↑school↓
09 Sienna: ↓mmm::↓
10 Myla: >we haven’t got< any water too↓
11 Pauline: at your ↑house Myla↓
12 Myla: ↓no:
13 Pauline: ↑why
14 Sienna: ↑not me/ not me either
15 Pauline: you’ve got no water at your house either
16 Sienna↓
17 Sienna: no↓
Pauline, one of the teachers, initiates talk about the reason for the outing once she is outside of the preschool and is walking down the road with the children. To begin this interaction, she asks a question ‘do you know’ (line 1) to initiate a story telling sequence (Jefferson, 1978). There is a slight pause, which offers a possible space to gain the attention of the children, and for children to respond to her question. No response is given, and Pauline pursues one ‘by checking presumed common knowledge’ (Pomerantz, 1984, p. 156) through mobilizing a problem with ‘what happened’ (Kidwell, 2011) (lines 1 and 2). Pauline aims her question at a specific child, Sienna, ending the utterance with her name to secure her attention (Wootton, 1981). This works to secure a response from Sienna who gives Pauline the go ahead to continue (line 3).

Pauline goes on to communicate her own experience of being told the news about the water (lines 4 – 8) and, in so doing, positions herself as storyteller whilst Sienna acts as recipient as she listens quietly (Jefferson, 1978). Pauline opens up the dialogue with a question, offering her own experience, proffering an interactional space for children to say what they wish. Through these actions, Pauline swaps her role from questioner and listener to storyteller, acknowledging that the children need to both tell and hear stories in order to come to terms with the events (Sunderland, 2006).

During Pauline’s storytelling there are two pauses (lines 5 & 6), marking the telling of difficult news (Silverman & Peräkylä, 1990). The concluding part of the teacher’s utterance suggests a change from her storytelling to an announcement of the current situation ‘we’ve got no water at preschool’ (lines 7 & 8). Although this announcement does not prompt any further reaction from Sienna, Myla touches off on the ‘no water’ situation by making a link to her own personal situation (line 10). In so doing, Myla pivots the conversation from being about the immediate situation in the preschool to being a reflection on her personal experience of the water shortage. The pivot from present context to personal experience is shown here as a three stage sequence that begins with Pauline’s initiation of the topic of having no water (lines 6 - 8). Myla responds to Pauline’s utterance as she extends to her own situation of having no water at home (line
Pauline then touches this off in her subsequent utterance, which orients to Myla’s mention of her house (line 11). A topic of conversation can be changed to a distinctly different topic through a pivot in conversation (Goffman, 1981) and figurative pivots create a transition between conversational issues so that topics of conversation can move from one to the next (Holt & Drew, 2005). However, as with the findings in this analysis, Larson (1995) suggests that a pivot can be used by members of a conversation to share knowledge about the same topic. Also of relevance to the current analysis, pivotal utterances are used in troubles telling in order to maintain the topic and afford opportunities for each interlocutor to contribute their own personal trouble telling, creating an affiliation between the members (Jefferson, 1984). A particular feature of the talk throughout this article is such a use of pivotal utterances to transition from talking about the immediate context, to talk about reflections of the actual earthquake event.

Pauline picks up on Myla’s reference to her own personal experience as she asks for clarification (line 11). By returning the focus back on to Myla, Pauline displays active listening (Danby, Butler & Emmison, 2009; Gardner, 2002; Hutchby, 2005), demonstrating to Myla that her contribution is being acknowledged and is worthy of further attention. Active listening is a key feature of effective communication as it demonstrates that the listener displays that they are listening through response tokens, such as mm and okay, and other strategies, such as asking questions (Danby, Butler & Emmison, 2009; Gardner, 2002; Hutchby, 2005). Joint attention is vital to promote the therapeutic potential of talk and storying (Geldard & Geldard, 2009). Once Myla made it clear that she is referring to her own personal circumstance, Pauline makes another bid to find out Myla’s experience of the situation by asking a why-interrogative (Bolden & Robinson, 2011), indicating her attempt to enable the children to initiate talk about their own understandings of the event.

Although Myla does not respond, Sienna takes the next turn to affiliate her position with Myla’s as she states that she too has no water. Pauline’s initial storying of her personal experience of the current earthquake-related event prompts Myla (line 10) and Sienna (line 14) to tell about their own personal situation. This troubles telling works to identify
each participant as having no water due to the earthquake event and demonstrates ‘the
predicated consequences of being a member’ (Housley, 1999, 8.2) to the group upon
whom the earthquake has had an impact. Group membership provides an opportunity for
members to offer topically relevant stories that demonstrate an affiliation with other
group members (Jefferson, 1978; Sacks, 1992). Likewise, psychological research
suggests that identification with others similarly affected by trauma serves to prevent any
sense of isolation and encourages productive communication and empathy; group based
therapies are often used to complement individual therapy for children exposed to or
affected by traumatic events (Kaduson & Schaefer, 2012).

Through initiating a conversation about immediate events in the preschool, Pauline
prompts talk about the situation with the children in a mutually accomplished co-
construction of storying. The children pivot the conversation from the immediate
conversation to their own personal circumstances, an important opportunity to discuss
their personal everyday difficulties of living with earthquake damage and its
consequence, through affiliating with a group of people who are in the same situation.
Through the turn taking sequence of verbal actions, the teacher and children co-construct
trouble telling about the immediate context and personal experience.

Extract 2: On the way

Thursday; Tape 1; 17mins 34secs > 18mins 46secs

01 Pauline: Oh↓ ↑lo::ok↑ (2.0) what’s th:a:t↑. he:re↑
02 ((looks at a broken breezeblock wall))
03 Myla: Uh::↑
04 Pauline: what↓\ (1.4) I wonder what happened there↑
05 Myla: ”↓ I dunno↑” ((looks at the wall and then
06 the teacher))
07 Pauline: ↑dunno↓
08 Sienna: oh↑ there was something there↑=
09 Pauline: °↓ something ( ) I wonder how [the\”↓
10 Myla: [I think"
11 I think it’s from the ea::rthquake
12 some{thing
13 Sienna: [Oh that is a ↓fence↓
Pauline: I wonder how it got like that.

Sienna: It was the fence of it.

Myla: no it was the earthquake (0.5) but its (0.5) ( ).

Sienna: [Our fence has got broke now=]

Pauline: =Your fence has got broke now=.

Sienna: we even [didn’t/]

Myla: [I think it broke from the]

Pauline: sea:quake ((still looking at the wall))

Myla: sea:quake ((still looking at the wall))

Pauline: mmm I [think it must of]

Sienna: [we even] don’t sleep (0.5) when I was asleep (0.4) when I was asleep (0.4) um (0.4) I noti\ (0.6) I saw the

Sienna: earth\ earthquake coming (0.6) and (0.4) I
didn’t=actually=hear< it;

Pauline: you didn’t hear it; ((sound of surprise))

Sienna: mmmm I [think it must of]

Pauline: well how did you know it was coming?

Sienna: because=

Myla: mummy gives my Dora backpack cause I

Pauline: did you sleep in your own bed last night

Sienna: yeah

Pauline: oh

(1.2)

Pauline: well what did you hear coming Sienna==

Sienna =awgh (Sienna points to her hand and looks up at teacher))

(1.9)

Pauline: what did you hear coming when the earthquake was coming

Sienna: I don’t know=

Pauline: oh

The sequence of interaction that takes place in lines 1-9 works to prompt trouble telling and storying about the current situation in a similar way to Extract 1, but this time in a much deeper way producing longer series of story responses. Pauline stops to look at a breezeblock fence, which is broken, and draws the children’s attention to it by asking them to look (line 1). After drawing the children’s attention to the immediate environment, Pauline mobilizes a problem through her utterance ‘I wonder what
happened’ (line 4) as with the introduction to Extract 1. However, rather than prompting subsequent trouble telling, Myla responds with ‘dunno,’ which Hutchby (2002) points out can work to prevent engagement in discussion about the subject (Hutchby, 2002), but could also indicate a lack of knowledge about the situation. Pauline repeats Myla’s utterance in the next turn at talk (line 7) and, in so doing, does not move the conversation on, or bring it to a close, but rather leaves it open for further access (Tarplee, 2010). Sienna responds in her next utterance as she makes reference to there being ‘something’ noticeable, and Pauline picks up on this by prompting further telling through her use of the expression ‘I wonder’ (line 9). Pauline’s initiation and maintenance of trouble telling works to elicit responses from the children, which McMahan (2009) points out is a device designed to enable the children to make sense of, and come to terms with events.

Pauline draws attention to the immediate environment from the beginning of the interaction (line 1) and Myla responds to Pauline’s prompt for trouble telling by speculating about what could have happened to the fence, suggesting ‘I think it’s from the earthquake’ (lines 10 & 11); it is Sienna who makes specific reference to the fence (lines 13 & 15). Although two children have spoken, Pauline responds to Sienna using the prompting resource, ‘I wonder,’ once again (line 14). Myla sequentially makes reference to the earthquake again (line 16) and this is followed by Sienna pivoting the context from the present to her personal home situation as she tells about her fence being broken (line 18). Pauline touches off on Sienna’s disclosure by offering a formulation of her utterance (line 19) that acknowledges Sienna’s contribution without assessment. Sienna’s pivotal utterance (line 16) works to keep the conversation on the same topic of broken fences, but affords her the opportunity to tell her own personal story in relation to the topic (Jefferson, 1978). Sienna’s utterance ties the prior conversation (lines 1-18) to her subsequent personal trouble telling (lines 18-49).

When Sienna reveals that her fence has been broken, Pauline responds by repeating her utterance rather than offering an assessment or opinion of this situation (Tarplee, 2010).
and, in so doing, allows Sienna the opportunity to continue with her telling in a second story. Sienna, however, does not expand on her situation, and so Pauline asks her a direct question (line 21 & 22), which prompts her to elaborate (lines 27 - 31). In Sienna’s account of her experience, there are a number of brief pauses in the same way as Pauline had in Extract 1, indicating that the situation is difficult to talk about (Silverman & Peräkylä, 1990). The communication between lines 32 and 49, however, reveals Sienna’s reluctance to contribute further to the conversation and could be linked to the point where Sienna’s knowledge of the situation is questioned (line 32). Sienna’s reluctance to contribute is noted here with her response to Pauline’s questions in the form of ‘because’ (line 35) and ‘I don’t know’ (line 48) (Hutchby, 2002).

In Extract 2, direct reference was made to the immediate surroundings by the teacher introducing the subject of the recent earthquake. The teacher provoked the children’s responses about the impact of the earthquake through the immediate context of the broken fence (lines 1, 4, 9 and 14) and this subsequently led to Sienna’s telling about her own experience (line 18 onwards). Sienna transitions the situation to one removed from the immediate situation, but still relevant to the context of the earthquake topic through her pivot on the word ‘fence’. The co-construction of the conversation is evident here where members work towards the mutual accomplishment of displaying understanding of what has happened.

**Extract 3: The hole in the road**

Thursday; Tape 1; 21mins 20secs >

71 Pauline: come here have a look so you can see↓
72 (1.6)
73 Myla: I can’t see
74 Pauline: look↑ k (0.6) look at that ↑huge hole↑
75 Sandra: look what happened from the ↑earthquake
76 Pauline: it’s part of the ↑road isn’t it
77 children: yeah
78 (3.8)
79 Pauline: I think (1.4)
Sienna:  [(Myla can’t go that way)]
Pauline:  [last night] the water pipes broke under there and then the water came up and it made the road break↓
Myla:  what↑
Pauline:  all the water↑ in the pipe/ the pipes broke↓
Myla:  oh
Pauline:  they (0.5) got loose in the earthquake (3.1) and then it all come flooding up and it’s broken the road
Lucy:  that was the truck we saw ((points to a passing vehicle))
Pauline:  you can stay there (0.3) stay there ((walks towards the edge of the hole)) ((3 children have a brief conversation nearby))
(19.2)
Pauline:  Cayden↑ (0.3) have they fixed all the road in your street↑
Cayden:  ((looks at Pauline and nods his head to indicate ‘yes’))
Pauline:  was your hole as big as that↑
Cayden:  ((looks at the hole and then back at Pauline. Shakes his head to indicate ‘no’)) My hole was deeper than that↓
Pauline:  your hole was deeper than that↓
Cayden:  u::m with their shovels
Pauline:  yeah↑ (0.3) I wonder how they’re gonna fix this↑
Baxter:  I think they might use the digger↓

As with the prior extracts, the teacher and children continue to mutually accomplish the earthquake conversation in this extract. Pauline again draws the children’s attention to an aspect of the immediate environment; in this instance it is a large hole in the road (line 71). This verbal orientation to an aspect of the immediate environment indicates its importance for the members during this interaction (Bateman, 2011). Pauline’s turn is followed by a long pause, which provides an opportunity for a member of the group to
develop a conversation about the hole in the road, but this is not taken up by any of the children. Pauline continues by summoning the children’s attention to the road in her second utterance where she asks them to ‘look’ and, this time, another teacher, Sandra, also summons the children to ‘look’. The children, however, do not take up the conversation. Following a considerable pause of 3.8 seconds (line 78), Pauline begins talking about the situation, presenting an account of what has happened. Mila asks for clarification (line 84), suggesting a breakdown in intersubjectivity (Schegloff, 1992a) and Pauline responds with a more straightforward telling of what has happened. Mila marks this response as news (line 87) as demonstrated by a change in her state of knowledge token (Heritage, 1984). Pauline next elaborates her telling and moves closer to the hole.

Pauline makes reference to the road being broken (lines 83 & 90) but this observation is not picked up by any of the children in the subsequent turns, so Pauline directly asks one child, Cayden, about his own personal experience regarding the effect of the earthquake. Pauline achieves a flow from the immediate situation to an inquiry into the personal experience of one child by maintaining the topic of broken roads. Her question is designed to display to Cayden and the overhearing members of the group that the teacher already has some knowledge of the earthquake damage in Cayden’s street, marking her knowledge of the local area and also of Cayden’s personal situation. Pauline’s initial reference to the words ‘break’, ‘broken’ and ‘road’ are used in the pivotal utterance where she talks more specifically to Cayden about his ‘road’ needing fixing (line 98). As with the prior pivotal utterances in this event, this pivot shifts the conversation from the immediate context to personal experiences of earthquake events. Initially Cayden does not speak, but communicates non-verbally as he nods his head to indicate ‘yes’. When asked about the size of the hole in his road, Cayden upgrades his personal circumstances in relation to the immediate situation as he tells about his hole being ‘deeper’ than the present one (line 105). Pauline repeats Cayden’s utterance to indicate that she is listening to him (Geldard & Geldard, 2009). There is a brief pause where further elaboration could possibly have taken place but, as this does not happen, Pauline prompts further trouble telling by asking a question about what they did to his road (line 108). This question prompts an answer from Cayden as he tells that they ‘fixed’ it (line 109). Pauline uses a
further pivotal utterance as she subsequently reuses the word ‘fix’ to return the conversation away from Cayden’s personal experience, back to the immediate environment (lines 112 & 113). Through a pivot on the word ‘fix’ Pauline maintains the topic of fixing the broken road through a smooth transition from the present context to the personal. Pauline achieves this by using Cayden’s word ‘fixed,’ which he used to explain what had happened to his road and using it in the current context as she ponders on how they will ‘fix’ the present road. In this extract, evident is how the teacher draws upon her knowledge of the local conditions of the community in which the children live, the local community surrounding the preschool, and the details of the personal situations faced by the children in the community. She has drawn upon this knowledge to encourage talk about the present hole in the road they are viewing and then uses that experience as a pivot to talk about personal situations. In line with Brown’s (2012) principles, she has collaboratively produced an interactional context for children to talk about their experiences.

**Conclusion**

How young children collaboratively construct and produce accounts of ‘tellable’ disaster events is relatively unknown. This article has shown how teachers initiate and work up stories around focused events, such as a broken water pipe or a damaged wall or road, to prompt children to situate themselves within these events and to touch off second stories. Close examination of these mundane interactions highlight how informal and spontaneous story telling provides an interactional resource for discussing traumatic events with children.

In examining in fine detail the mutually accomplished conversations during the excursion to see the broken water pipe, informal conversational opportunities were presented for traumatic events to be talked about in everyday conversations between the teachers and children. During this excursion, the teacher prompted trouble telling through drawing children’s attention to a present situation that included the preschool being without water, and a local community where there was a broken environment. The teacher’s prompts through the use of ‘I wonder’ and ‘what happened’ worked to mobilize problems and
prompt speculation. The teacher’s prompts were then taken up, or not, by the children in their subsequent talk. When taken up, the children pivoted the conversation from being about an immediate situation to their own personal experience. These conversations provided opportunities for talk about a devastating situation with members of the group in the same situation as themselves, providing a supportive network. Through engaging in conversations about earthquake experiences, the teachers and children mutually co-constructed membership to the people who have been effected through their ‘past experience-talk’ (Barraja-Rohan, 2003, p615). Although prior literature discussing the benefits of talking about trauma acknowledges how important conversations are in the development of coming to terms with distressing experiences (for example Howard & McInnes, 2012), there is little regarding practical suggestions of how teachers and other professionals working with young children can achieved this strategy in everyday interactions. This article, through presenting and analysing the mundane, ordinary story telling strategies initiated by teachers in their everyday activities such as preschool excursions and conversations with each other, shows how teachers notice, recognise and respond to children’s experiences through story telling, touched off second responses and pivotal transitions.

Early childhood teachers need to be prepared for troubles telling in whatever context it might arise. While teachers are not therapists, they are able to initiate and sustain communicative techniques to support children in the natural environment of play, stories and everyday talk. Through listening to children’s tellings, teachers can follow the child’s lead and further understand the issues affecting each child specifically. Children are most often referred to therapy when problems are no longer manageable. This referral can sometimes be a considerable time after a traumatic event, enabling anxieties and behavioural consequences to grow. In addition, before effective therapy can begin, the child and therapist must get to know one another to develop a sense of trust. The teachers in this article have established secure relationships with the children through the supportive care and education they provide, and their knowledge of the local community and family circumstances provide opportunities to initiate conversations in ways related to everyday activity. These relationships maximise the developmental and therapeutic
potential of children’s communication in their everyday activities. Talk in children’s activity is useful for remedial work in addressing trauma but perhaps most importantly it is a valuable preventative resource that promotes resiliency and children’s own self-healing (Howard & McInnes, 2012). In this excursion to see the broken water pipe, what at first glance appeared to be an everyday conversation between teachers and children also shows the teachers’ attention to therapeutic communication in a social context where children had multiple opportunities to share their experiences of the earthquake and to make sense of them.

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References
http://www.christchurchquakemap.co.nz


**CA transcription conventions**

The conversation analysis symbols used to transcribe the data are adapted from Jefferson’s conventions described in Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974).

- [ ] the beginning of an overlap
- ] the end of an overlap
- = the equals sign at the end of one utterance and the beginning of the next utterance marks the latching of speech between the speakers. When used in-between words it marks the latching of the words spoken in an utterance with no break.
- (0.4) the time of a pause in seconds
- :: lengthening of the prior sound. More or less colons are used to represent the longer or shorter lengthening.
- ↑ a rising intonation in speech
- ↓ a falling intonation in speech
- Underscore marks an emphasis placed on the underscored sound
- **Bold** words which are underscored and bold indicate heavy emphasis or shouting
- °degree sign° either side of a word indicates that it is spoken in a quiet, soft tone
- (brackets) utterance could not be deciphered
- ((brackets)) double brackets with words in italics indicate unspoken actions
- .hhh audible in-breath
- hhh audible out-breath
>arrows<
utterance spoken quickly