Acknowledgements

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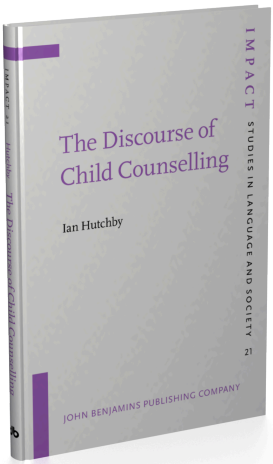

Pages vii–viii of
The Discourse of Child Counselling
Ian Hutchby
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Acknowledgements

This book addresses the nature of talk and social interaction in one form of child counselling: non-clinical 'helping' talk designed specifically for young children whose parents are in the process of separation or divorce. In order to analyse this child counselling discourse, it was necessary for me to record naturally-occurring sessions which were then transcribed. The whole project thus hung on the thread of children's (and their parents') consent to their counselling sessions being recorded. I am immeasurably grateful to those individuals who granted such consent—even though they must, for reasons of confidentiality, remain anonymous. Without them this book simply would not exist.

I am enormously grateful too to the child counsellors whose work, in that it represents the 'other half' of the child counselling dialogue, inevitably comes under scrutiny in these pages. My aim is not, and never has been, to assess, evaluate or criticise the techniques of the individual counsellors who agreed to allow my recording equipment into their offices. The book is not about finding out what is 'wrong' or 'right' with child counselling: it is about describing and analysing how it is done on the ground, as it were. There are many books available that purport to demonstrate to counsellors how it should be done. This book's sole aim is to reveal how it is done; how the complex work of counselling young children is accomplished amid the practical contingencies of talk-in-interaction.

The research on which the book is based was supported by the UK's major funder of social science research, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). When I started work on collecting the data, I had no idea what the outcomes of the research might be; nor, indeed, was I at all certain that there would turn out to be a research project at all, given that I was entirely reliant on the agreement of young children and their (usually) estranged parents before any data could be gathered. It is gratifying, therefore, that a body as large-scale and apparently outcomes-oriented as the ESRC could demonstrate a willingness still to fund radical and 'blue sky' projects such as this one. For me, this acts as a welcome indication that those of us who work in the field of conversation analysis can still produce research that is valued by the mainstream social science organisations. This is important, for I believe that while it is easy to see this kind of research as necessarily on the margins of—or even incommensurate with—'conventional' sociology, in fact it is vital that conversation analysts convey the relevance of their studies for the range of interests at the core of the discipline.

There is one caveat that must be mentioned. This book does not aim to provide a comprehensive account of all possible types of child counselling. Like any conversation analyst, I am restricted by the data I have before me, and these were drawn from particular, and specialised, sources. Child counselling itself is a highly specialised practice currently only available in selected locations (unlike, say, psychotherapy, marriage counselling or family therapy, all of which are related yet very different concerns). The small but growing professional literature on child counselling techniques also attests to the inevitability that there exists a wide range of different ways of going about doing the work. Therefore, this book should not be read as a generic account but as a description and analysis of the nuanced practices of child counselling as observed in one particular type of setting.

Nevertheless, the issues from which I start in the following chapters—such as the incitement to communicate about feelings in situations where children are not receiving counselling at their own volition; the problem of drawing out therapeutic concerns from children's often tangential talk; or the means of responding to children's resistance to discussing therapeutic matters—are themselves generic to child counselling practice (and perhaps to counselling more generally). It is to be hoped, therefore, that my observations provide insights and resources that are useful for the varying audiences who may decide to read this book: from child counsellors themselves, to other social scientists interested in the nature of counselling discourse, to, perhaps, parents and others who may simply be interested in what kinds of things actually go on inside the child counselling office.

Ian Hutchby