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Evaluation in pre-teenagers' informal language practices around texts from popular culture 8,999 words

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Introduction

Children's use of evaluative language, in other words the expression of their views and feelings towards what they are talking about (Hunston and Thompson, 2000), is significant both in terms of what it reveals about their emotions, judgements and tastes, and also in terms of what it suggests about the culturally specific criteria by which these are being shaped. Not only in interactions with adults but also among themselves, children's evaluative language indicates some of the ways in which they are exploring and appropriating cultural values and beliefs, and learning to express emotion through culturally shaped practices.

Taking a linguistic perspective, Martin (2000) suggests that affect is the most basic evaluative semiotic resource, and that this becomes institutionalised through social practice into judgement (rules and regulations concerning ethics and morality) and appreciation (social criteria organising taste and value directing the appreciation of texts, objects and performances). Painter (2003), investigating the emergence of evaluative language in children under five years old, suggests that they move developmentally from expressing emotion into judgement and appreciation. While all three evaluative elements are already evident in the initial toddler lexical repertoire (e.g. 'like' (affect), 'naughty' (judgement) and 'pretty' (appreciation)), Painter argues that the motivation to share feelings, in the context of pursuing various functional goals, is an important driver in children's early development of a semiotic system and that emotionally loaded topics are particularly important sites for cognitive development. While Painter surveyed a wide range of young children's naturalistic oral language, she also found that, even at this early age, engagements with texts were also evaluatively significant. In particular, she suggests that the shared reading of picture books provides a rich context for young children to name the emotions of third parties and express judgements about their actions and, furthermore, enables them to learn about the visual representations of affect and its construal in story-telling.

Young children's engagement with hypothetical scenarios and beings in picture books can thus be seen to contribute to their development of the 'social referencing' skills used to monitor and understand other people's affective displays, which are crucial to their social and cognitive development and continue to be important for sociability, for instance in the development of friendships (Ochs and Schieffelin 1989). Texts of various kinds continue to provide significant cultural resources for the organisation of expressions of evaluation and associated social learning, throughout childhood. For instance, the official school curriculum directs pupils' evaluation of texts in specific ways relating to national educational policy directives. In addition, school also provides the opportunity for a substantial amount of informal talk among children themselves and this is full of references to vernacular texts, songs, television and other texts from popular media (Maybin 2006, Rampton 2006). In this chapter I examine how evaluation around a number of dramatic and poetic/song texts from

popular culture emerges in talk among ten and eleven year-old pupils, drawing on ethnographic research to build up a 'thick description' (Geertz 1973) of their informal evaluative language practices and identifying some of the cultural values which are involved. These values shape children's developing sensibilities, but are also reworked and played with, in their talk.

Ten and eleven year-olds, at the transition between childhood and adolescence, are at a particularly interesting stage in terms of their evaluative practices. These children still orientate to some extent towards the world of childhood, of which they are now experienced members, but they are also anticipating and practising new kinds of evaluation, which signify a more teenager-like identity. Becoming the 'I' for a pre-teenager involves discovering a new 'we' in peers of a similar age and gender, and recognising the self through the eyes of those people who seem most similar to the child themselves (de Singly 2007 in Monnot 2010). This makes the peer social world increasingly important for pre-teenagers and friendship emerges as a significant affective domain in addition to the family. As well as orientating to the values conveyed by teachers and parents, ten and eleven year-olds are also shifting towards peer-group evaluative practices (Evaldsson 2002, 2007; Goodwin 2006), and teenage popular culture.

While Martin and Painter see affect as the most basic semiotic resource for evaluation, they acknowledge that emotions such as fear, anger, joy, sadness, surprise and disgust become culturally configured through social practice. Arguing for the importance of understanding how social practice links inner and outer states, Wetherell (2012) suggests: 'as we enter into an on-going affective practice, we begin to engage with interpersonal and collective ways of figuring situations, with the affective positions offered by conventional relational duets, and our bodies begin to respond.' (ch. 7). In the analysis below, I look closely at how children's emotional responses to the texts, as well as their judgement and appreciation, are interactionally shaped, through peer group activity. While I do not have the benefit of video-data, which would have been impossible to collect in some of the contexts which I audiorecorded, I draw on ethnographic observational and interview data to analyse children's language in context, embedded in social practices. Social practices are defined as forms of culturally shaped behaviour which involve interconnected physical and mental activities, things and their uses, understandings, evaluations and their expression, expertise and goals (Reckwitz 2002).

In the discussion below I use the description of evaluative language which has been developed within systemic functional linguistics. This brings together affect, judgement and appreciation within an appraisal system construing interpersonal meaning (Martin 2000, Martin and White 2005). More specifically,

Affect construes emotional reactions, for instance expressions of horror, happiness, sadness or disgust;

Judgement involves assessing people's behaviour according to social norms, for instance as fair or unjust, kind or cruel;

Appreciation construes the value of things, for example the aesthetic value or effectiveness of texts, processes or natural phenomena.

These three kinds of evaluative meanings are interrelated in various ways in the children's talk I recorded. For instance, evaluation may combine affect with

judgement in an expression of disgust at someone's behaviour, or it may combine affect with appreciation in an expression of pleasure at the line of a song. These evaluations may be graded by speakers through intensifiers, repetition and so on, and their expression can be more or less monoglossic or heteroglossic, depending on how far the speaker acknowledges other opinions and positions. While much research has focussed on the lexical and grammatical inscription of evaluation, paralinguistic and contextual cues also play a crucial role (Hunston and Thompson, 2000; Martin and White 2005). Furthermore, in addition to its sensitivity to the immediate context, evaluative language also indexes and reproduces broader cultural beliefs and values. For example, the evaluative dimensions of oral narratives (Labov 1972), and of the performed narrative fragments in my data, are part of the on-going negotiation of reflective judgement on sociocultural practice which is central to children's enculturation as well as to their storytelling (Coupland, Garrett and Williams, 2005). Similarly, while children's engagement with the words and rhythms of songs appears to be primarily emotional and appreciative, this also embodies values embedded within broader discourses of popular culture, implying children's ethical agreement, to some degree, with a particular way of making sense of the world (Frith 1996). These factors suggest a need for analytic attention to local and broader multimodal and contextual features, which can be captured by ethnographic research.

In sum, in this chapter I examine older children's evaluative responses to a number of texts from popular culture which figure in their everyday lives, and consider whether these provide a context for experiencing and talking about other people's feelings and for making ethical and moral judgements about their actions. I also consider whether children's emotional responses spark off any aesthetic appreciation of the texts themselves. I look first at children's on-going informal talk across one morning in school about a particularly dramatic episode of the UK television soap opera *EastEnders* which many pupils had viewed at home the previous evening. I then discuss children's performance of, and talk around, musical fragments from films including *Titanic* and *Mama Mia*, and a rhythm and blues song by Rihanna: 'Unfaithful'. Overall, these examples illustrate a range of evaluative responses, including acting out the parts of television characters and collaboratively performing popular music. While children's performances enact dominant cultural values and discourse, their revoicings (Bakhtin 1981, 1984, Volosinov 1973) and exchanges with peers also provide evidence of experimentation and play with a range of evaluative positions and with different degrees of commitment. Despite public anxiety concerning the influence of popular culture on children (Bailey Report 2011), the data suggests that in their informal talk and performances around texts, as in other areas of peer group talk (Kyratzis 2004), children are not passively absorbing textual messages but are actively creating meanings and at times playfully subverting dominant representations.

Methodological approach and data

My analysis draws on ongoing ethnographic research into pre-teenagers' use of informal language and literacy practices to construct knowledge and identities. The data discussed below come from recordings of ten and eleven year-old children's continuous spoken language experience across the school day over two weeks in the spring term in two Year 6 classes in a dominantly working class, multiethnic English primary school. A small voice recorder carried in a belt pouch and attached to a lapel microphone pinned to the top of the child's shirt was alternated across two girls and

two boys (one to four days recording for each child). Four talkative children of average ability were identified by the teacher and permission for the recordings obtained from their parents and from the children themselves. Permission was also obtained from all the parents and children in the two Year 6 classes for a second recorder to be moved around the classroom to collect additional data, and to capture different perspectives on the events recorded by the lapel microphone. During these two weeks I sat at the back of the classroom, or observed from the edges of the playground at break and lunchtime. Two months later I returned to the school and recorded informal semi-structured interviews with forty-seven children in friendship pairs or trios where I asked them about issues cropping up in the continuous recordings.

Overall, recordings include fifty hours of children's ongoing talk and eight hours of interviews. Linguistic analysis of these is informed by ethnographic observations of children's activities and interactions supplemented by collections of texts and photographs, by children's explanations of their activities and interests in the interviews and by contextual knowledge about the educational and local environment. This combination of the analysis of children's spoken language interactions with an ethnographic analysis of practices falls under what has been termed a 'linguistic ethnography' approach where ethnographic methods are combined with linguistic analytic procedures to describe patterns within communication (Maybin and Tusting 2011). A significant aspect of the analysis below derives from the longitudinal nature of the audio recordings I collected, via the lapel microphones worn by children. These recordings included children's talk in corridors, cloakrooms and the playground as well as in the classroom. Using these longitudinal recordings of children's continuous talk across the school day, I was able to track topics which reoccurred at different points and in different contexts, and to identify various evaluative threads which continued across their on-going conversations. Thus, I could examine cumulative and inter-linked processes of evaluation as children returned a number of times to the topics and texts in which they were most interested.

Evaluation could be explicitly expressed e.g. 'I hate Archie' and was also conveyed more indirectly through the tone of a child's voice, or projected through their stylised reproduction of the voices of media characters and singers. I use 'stylised' here to mean a voice reproduced as if it were one's own but with 'a slight shadow of objectification' (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 189). Evaluation was also signalled through prosody and paralinguistic cues, for example I have represented a sound conveying disgust as 'eu:' (see transcript conventions at the end of the chapter). I focus below on data collected via the lapel mic worn by two girls, Jess and her close friend, Mel. These girls were average ability, talkative eleven year-olds. Jess was lively, effervescent and popular while Mel had a reputation among her circle of girlfriends for being independent-minded and amusing. Both were active and athletic, taking part in the daily informal mixed-gender football games organised by children at break and lunchtime. Mel played in the school netball team which won a regional school tournament on the evening before the final day of recording. While Jess's father was from West Africa and the girls' friendship group included children from diverse ethnic backgrounds, they were all native or fluent English speakers. Mel's parents were both white British.

Talk around popular drama: the interplay between affect, judgement and appreciation

The children's talk about an incident in a recent *EastEnders* episode, which I discuss in this section, is similar in a number of ways to children and young people's oral narratives of personal experience, which are a key site for the articulation and negotiation of social judgement and evaluation (Goodwin 1990, Evaldsson 2002, Coupland, Garrett and Williams 2005, Maybin 2006). Stories invoked by children from the popular media also provide a shared reference point, where evaluation can be performed and negotiated. As in talk about personal experience, children recreate scenarios from films and television, partly through reproducing the voices of the people involved, and comment in various ways on the characters and events. Researchers analysing evaluation in narratives of personal experience have drawn on Labov (1972)'s classic account of evaluation as the significance of the events for the speaker and the whole point of narrating them in a story. Labov suggests that evaluation may be conveyed through an external aside by the narrator, a judgement embedded in the speech of a character and the use of intensifiers and comparisons. Recently there has been increasing interest in the interactional dynamics of storytelling, which were somewhat neglected in Labov's model (Koven 2002, Georgakopoulou 2007). For instance, Koven (2002) points out that oral narratives are multi-voiced and involve a more complex orchestration of different evaluative stances than Labov suggests. She examines the interweaving of the evaluative positions of interlocutor (in the current interaction where the story is told), narrator (of the story) and character (within the story) in her analysis of narratives from interview data.

In talk around film and television drama, however, rather than reflecting directly on events in their own lives, children orientate together towards the experience of imaginary third parties, in the context of their knowledge about particular genres. Films and television shows were often referred to, re-enacted and discussed by children in their conversations across the school day and evaluation is, as Koven suggests, complex and multivoiced, as children orchestrate the perspectives emanating from their interactional position in the on-going conversation, their position as narrator and the positions of the characters they revoice. In comparison with narratives about their own personal experience, there is also an additional narrative layer when children talk about a shared fictional text. A film or television soap opera is treated by children as a slice of real life containing people whom they love or hate, and whose actions they can judge. But they also treat it as a fiction created by actors and producers, who have devised the story line. Thus, talk about a story from popular culture like *EastEnders* can provide an opportunity not only to express affect and develop judgement, but also to begin to articulate aesthetic appreciation.

Rather than narrating the plot of a film or television episode, when this was assumed to be shared knowledge, children tended to focus on a climactic moment, often performing and embroidering the dialogue between characters at a crucial point in the plot. Performances of these narrative fragments are semiotically very rich, serving to simultaneously replay the climax of a story, index the relevant plotline and represent and comment on a central evaluative point. Over the Friday before the mid-term break, Mel was particularly preoccupied by the death of a teenage female character, Danielle, in an episode of *EastEnders* broadcast the previous evening. This was a pivotal episode, much publicised in the media and watched by an estimated 11.5 million people (Mail Online, 2009). Just as nineteen year-old Danielle is about to be reunited with her long lost birth mother Ronnie, she is accidentally run over by a car driven by another character, Janine. Ronnie's father Archie had previously tried to

prevent Ronnie finding out that Danielle was her daughter, as this would reveal Archie's earlier lie that Danielle had died as a baby. Ronnie initially rejected Danielle but finally believes her. The episode ends as Danielle lies dying in her mother's arms, surrounded by horrified neighbours, including Ronnie's sister Roxy. Mel first refers to this episode at around 10.00am on Friday, as the children discuss the various DVDs they have brought into school for class viewing later in the day. Mel's emotional response to another child's reference to the DVD *My Girl*, where a young boy dies after being stung by bees, prompts her reference to *EastEnders*.

Extract 1

1	Mel	[ah, that is so: sca-, and then he's next to the bumble bee hive and he goes allergic to bumble bees. Ah that was such a fab film when I watched it. (<i>exaggerated sad voice</i>) Felt like crying
2	Emily	I <u>did</u> cry the first time I watched it
3	Mel	Me too. Just like it made me cry watching EastEnders last night
4	Emily	I know
5	Mel	I actually did cry. My eyes were watering I was just like
6	Emily	D'you know what (xxx) TV video
7	Mel	=Wish you could freeze it when Danielle was just so close to it. (...) I'm going to push her out of the way he he he (.) Ronnie must be <u>very</u> upset. Archie's going to be like (<i>nonchalant voice</i>) "Sorry, I'm getting the train, bye"

Mel and Emily's recalling of tearful responses to *My Girl* (turns 1-2) cues Mel's reference to her similar emotional response to *EastEnders*, which Emily then shares (turn 4). In turn 7, Mel then imagines a deus ex machina role where she stops the action and projects herself inside the story in a last minute rescue of Danielle: 'Wish you could freeze it when Danielle was just so close to it. (...) I'm going to push her out of the way he he'. Her short laugh signals that this suggestion is a fanciful fiction, but she then goes on to refer to the feelings of Danielle's mother and grandfather, as if they were real people, adopting a serious tone for 'Ronnie must be very upset' whereas 'Archie's going to be like (*nonchalant voice*) "Sorry, I'm getting the train, bye"' (turn 7). Here, we can see Mel shifting from recalling her own emotional response, to imagining the emotions of the characters. She also conveys judgements about them: her sympathy with Ronnie comes across through the tone of her voice in the recording, the intensifier 'very', and the alignment of Ronnie's feelings with those of Mel and Emily. Mel's disapproval of Archie's lack of feeling over his granddaughter's death is conveyed through her production of his nonchalance directly after her reference to Ronnie's distress *within* the narrative and in the context of Mel and Emily's talk *about* their own responses to the episode. Thus evaluation may involve the dialogic resonance of a reproduced voice both in relation the position of other characters, and in relation to the positions of Mel and Emily as interlocuters . While evaluation in Extract 1 emerges through the interaction between Mel and Emily in their on-going conversation, through the contrast between Ronnie and Archie's reactions and through the ways in which Mel as creator reproduces and positions their voices it also emerges through links across these levels, which create a more complex dialogic web of meaning.

The children's talk moved on to other matters, then fifteen minutes later they returned to the topic of *EastEnders* in Extract 2 below, which includes further animations of dialogue from the scene of the accident, comments about characters, and an extended argument about whether Danielle is actually dead. There is also recognition of *EastEnders* as a fictional text. As the children are finishing off their work, Mel asks 'Who watched *EastEnders* last night?' and when several children confirm that they did she exclaims 'Oh my god, I felt like crying' and repeats her wish to freeze the action and save Danielle. Other children confirm similar feelings and mention their mothers and sisters crying over the episode. Mel then recreates exaggerated plaintive voices for Danielle's and Ronnie's interaction at the death scene:

Extract 2

128	Mel	<i>(plaintive voice)</i> 'I'm your baby, aby', and then Ronnie's there and she's like turned her back on her and she's like 'baby?' She's like 'baby?' and then, I wish I just could <u>freeze</u> it when Janine was that close and then push her out of the way and then pu- play it.
129	P	=well what did you [expect
130	Mel	[I know but that is so cruel for them to do that
131	P	=(...) I recorded it and I've got to watch it (.) I'm going to watch it today (xxx)
132	Mel	how could you not watch the wedding?
134	P	I was out, it wasn't my fault
135	P	=I wish Archie wasn't in it any more, I hate Archie
136	P	exactly
137	Mel	he's evil, Danielle would still be alive if it weren't for him
138	P	do you think she's do you think she's going to survive? That's what Ann said
139	P	she ain't, she's dead you idiot
		<i>(...) sounds of pupils arguing about whether Danielle is dead or not, and a pupil humming the opening of the signature tune 'de de de' which Mel picks up:</i>
149	Mel	dum dum de de de de no she's like <i>(exasperated)</i> 'don't just stand there' and then she sits there going 'A ha ha' <i>(horrificed gasps)</i>
150	P	(... Janine ...) and they're all crying (...)
151	P	she could still be alive
152	Mel	and then she goes 'My ba::by' and then it goes dum dum de de de de <i>(signature tune)</i>
153	P	I think she's going to survive though
154	P	I think she might
155	P	Why would she shout like <i>(exaggerated high voice)</i> "she's dead!"
156	Mel	Maybe she's unconscious
157	P	Exactly
158	Mel	She might be
159	P	Maybe she's <i>unconscious</i>

160	Mel	I'm just trying to find a happy (<i>turns to the picture she is drawing</i>) he he d'you want to see? d'you want to see? HE HE HE
161	P	(xxx) then you've got to write GA (<i>her initials</i>) or something on the top
162	Mel	HE HE HE sorry he he he I'm just going to write Newforest (<i>name of school</i>)
163	P	I hate Archie
164	Mel	Danielle would still be alive if it weren't for him. I wish I could pause it
165	P	She might not be dead
166	Mel	I know that's what I said to them, I said she could be unconscious. I wish, when Janine was that close, I pulled the TV, jump into the TV, push Danielle away, come back in and play it. Don't you wish that was so sad, though. <i>Ma mia</i> (high voice) "you're my mother". Why is Archie such an idiot?
		(...) <i>Talk about netball match and how many goals individuals scored, then back to the argument about whether Danielle has died</i>
203	Mel	She could be unconscious you never know
204	P	Exactly (xxx)
205	Mel	cause, because they did that in Hollyoaks once, they said she was dead and she was actually unconscious
		<i>Argument continues</i>

The common practice of viewing *East Enders*, which makes it an important shared resource for children's evaluative talk, is confirmed by a pupil having to account for her failure to watch this pivotal episode which featured Archie's wedding as well as Danielle's fatal accident (turn 134). Here, the debate about whether Danielle is dead or only unconscious involves children drawing on evidence not only from within the episode: 'Why would she shout like (*exaggerated high voice*) "she's dead!"' (turn 155), but also from the comparison with another popular television soap opera, *Hollyoaks*: 'cause, because they did that in Hollyoaks once, they said she was dead and she was actually unconscious' (turn 205). This comparison involves recognition of generic similarity (it is valid to compare *EastEnders* and *Hollyoaks*) and of director-level decisions 'they did that'. While children know that tragedies are typical of *EastEnders*: 'well what did you expect' (turn 129), Mel still objects to the producers' decision to kill Danielle 'I know but that is so cruel for them to do that' (turn 130). (Her subsequent references to the producers in later extracts below confirm them as the referent, here). And Mel suggests her argument that Danielle could be just unconscious relates to her wish to have a happy ending (turn 160). These responses to the episode as an artful text are both emotional and judgemental (the producers are cruel) and are also appreciative of generic choices (a character who seems to be dead can turn out to be have been merely unconscious).

While illustrating the children's responsive engagement with the production of the episode, Extract 2, like Extract 1, shows children expressing their own feelings towards the characters, which can then prompt judgements of their actions. For instance, when a child comments: 'I wish Archie wasn't in it any more, I hate Archie' (135), Mel responds 'he's evil, Danielle would still be alive if it weren't for him' (137). This exchange is partially echoed in turns 163-4. Mel's judgement emerges in turn 137 partly in response to a previous comment in the current on-going

conversation. Evaluation is also conveyed, as in Extract 1, both through Mel's recreation of characters' evaluative positions and through her representation of these, as narrator. Here, she seems to enter into the poignant intensity of Danielle's death scene (with a hint of objectification) through her enactment of Danielle's final exchange with her mother: "I'm your baby, aby", and then Ronnie's there and she's like turned her back on her and she's like "baby?" She's like "baby?" (turn 128). In fact, in the original extract, Ronnie calls 'Baby' to Danielle, who doesn't speak but runs towards her and is then knocked down by the car. Mel's refashioned dialogue, however, with the double meaning of baby as a term of endearment and also a reference to Danielle's original separation from Ronnie, is indexically rich. 'Baby' brings together the beginning of Danielle's story, when she was removed as a baby from Ronnie, with their eventual loving reunion just seconds before she dies. The poignancy is increased by viewers' experience of the long lead-up to Danielle revealing her true identity to her mother, despite Archie's efforts to prevent her from doing this, and Ronnie's initial rejection. Mel repeats fragments of this exchange in turns 149 and 152, adding Ronnie's outburst at her sister Roxy "Don't just stand there!" and the snatch of the soap opera's signature tune (turn 149). Emphasising its significance to her through this repetition, Mel provides a further echo in turn 166 which also creates a link with a film popular among the children, *Mama Mia* (which is also about seeking for a long lost parent) "Ma mia (high voice) "you're my mother". She seems to taste and retaste Ronnie and Danielle's emotions, momentarily experiencing their anguish and the tension of their final interaction heightened by the distinctive rhythmic beats of the signature tune, but also slightly distancing herself through her stylisation of their voices.

So far, while recognising that *EastEnders* is a constructed fiction, the children have also appeared very involved in the characters' feelings, caring strongly about whether Danielle is alive or dead, hating Archie, and wishing for a happy ending. Emotional responses to characters and events drive comments about narrative direction, e.g. 'I wish Archie wasn't in it any more' (turn 135), 'she could be unconscious' (turn 203). Five minutes later, however, Mel and Jess go into the girls' toilets on their way to morning break and produce a much more playful, parodic re-enactment of Ronnie's distress (turns 242-3) and her sister Roxy's horrified reaction, which Jess embellishes with high-pitched screams:

Extract 3

242	Mel	"don't just stand there" I need go toilet
243	Jess	"don't just stand there" go "AH:" (<i>screams</i>) he he
244	Mel	he he
245	Jess	and then when she when she closes her eyes yea, Roxy goes over to her and she's like "AH:::"
246	Mel	I know [<i>he he he</i>
247	Jess	["AH:::, AH:::"
248	Mel	AH:: <i>he he he</i> go toilet (<i>sound of running</i>) <i>he he he</i> She's lying on the floor, (<i>to Jess</i>) pretend to be Roxy <i>he he</i>

249	Jess	"AH:::"
250	Mel	<i>he he he</i> I know, but that's how she really said. Why can't she be unconscious, they only just found out o::: I hate the bloody producers
251	Jess	eu: there's pee on the toilet seat
252	Mel	<i>he he</i> It's so annoying though, oh my go:d

Here, there is a sense of mockery as well as mimicry (Sutton-Smith, 2001), in what Blum-Kulka et al (2004) term a 'mocking-subversive keying' of Ronnie and Roxy's interaction. The more exaggerated, hyper-stylisation of their voices suggests that Mel and Jess are further distancing themselves from the raw emotions that they are re-enacting, in exaggerated form. The child-like playacting and high hilarity appear to offer a release from the heavy emotional tone of their earlier discussion. Mel, however, also repeats her frustration at the producer's decision to kill Danielle at this point, when Ronnie has only just 'found out' (turn 250): 'I hate the bloody producers' (turn 250), 'It's so annoying though, oh my go:d' (turn 252). Following this interaction, Mel does not raise the subject of Danielle's death again until around an hour later as she sits colouring with Jess while they watch *Home Alone 2*, when the girls again comment on the producers' decision, adding speculation about the motives of the actor who plays Danielle. Mel remarks 'I can't wait to watch East Enders tomorrow. I hope Danielle's not dead', Jess complains 'They only just found out' and Mel responds 'Exactly, the producers are well mean'. Jess then suggests 'She might want to leave and she might want to make it good before she left' but Mel replies 'Stupid producer. Come in like a month or two and then go just away like that (*exaggerated sad voice*) and make me cry'.

The children's emotional responses to Danielle's death are an important driver across the various, linked conversations about *EastEnders*. Children identify the emotions of characters ('Ronnie must be very upset') and express their own emotional response to characters as if they were real people (eg 'I hate Archie'). In replaying and voicing these responses, children appear to vicariously experience the emotions almost as if they were their own, but with a hint of distancing in the stylisation which is increased in the toilet conversation. They also signal their evaluation of the characters' positions, through the ways in which they recreate and frame their voices (Volosinov 1973). For instance, Mel in narrator position uses the emotional force of reconstructed dialogue to convey the tragedy of Danielle's death (Extract 2 turn 128), and in interlocutor position a pupil revoices a character to prove a point: 'Why would she shout like (*exaggerated high voice*) "she's dead!"' (turn 155). There is also an evaluative shift from Mel's relatively sympathetic reproduction of Ronnie and Danielle's emotions in Extract 2 turn 128, to Mel and Jess's playful parody of Ronnie and Roxy in Extract 3. Affect and judgement are closely intertwined, here, as in children's reactions to the producers (eg well what did you expect, I hate the bloody producers, that is so cruel, the producers are well mean, why can't she be unconscious). These comments about the producers, and about the actor playing Danielle, ('She might want to leave and she might want to make it good before she left'), also point to emergent appreciation of *EastEnders* as dramatic television, which, it might be argued, is also signalled through the children's savouring, and subsequent parodying of the dialogue at the climax of the episode, and their

reproduction of the signature tune. In addition to the children's own position as narrator when they reproduce characters voices and replay their interactions, they are also here responding to the producers and actors as the original 'narrators' of the episode.

Film and popular music: the entrainment of emotions among friends

While I focussed in the last section mainly on children's emotional engagement, judgements and appreciation of the *EastEnders* characters and plot, children's responses were also being calibrated in important ways through their interactions with each other, which confirmed individual tearful reactions, sympathy with Ronnie, hatred of Archie and so as generally shared, producing judgements of particular kinds of actions as ethically acceptable or despicable. This kind of calibration and mutual alignment of evaluative reactions contributes to children's moral and aesthetic development, and also simultaneously expresses and confirms social relations. Friends may be drawn to each other because of similar values, and they may also, at this impressionable stage of early adolescence, moderate their own judgements as part of affiliation with another child or peer group. In this current section I examine more closely how emotional, judgemental and aesthetic responses to texts are mediated through children's interactions and sociability.

The way in which children use the *EastEnders* signature tune to simultaneously index emotional suspense and a narrative device is one example of the semiotically rich functions which music performs in the children's talk. Across their conversations in general they reproduced a wide variety of musical references, particularly in connection with film. While earlier research (e.g. Livingstone, 2002, Rampton, 2006) suggested that children watch less film than television, their increasing access to the web (Livingstone and Bober 2005), may account for the frequency of references in my data to feature films along with their sound tracks, and to the videos produced by popular singers as well as to their songs. All except one of the forty-seven children I interviewed had access to the internet at home. Almost all homes also had a DVD player, and over two thirds of the children mentioned having a personal DVD player in their bedroom. Many children seemed very familiar indeed with the films produced for class viewing on the final day before the school break, often indicating that they had already watched them a number of times, comparing their preferences of sequels and prequels and recalling favourite sequences.

As in the talk around *EastEnders*, children frequently expressed strong emotional reactions to films and they often aligned their emotions with each other, repeating or rephrasing other children's utterances (as Mel and Emily did in turns 2-5 in Extract 1). This tendency towards mutual alignment was particularly the case among close friends, even if they initially expressed rather different positions. In Extract 4 below, Mel and Jess are talking together in their literacy class on Wednesday afternoon while making up puzzles for the younger children who will visit on Thursday. The two girls are looking at an old picture of Leonardo di Caprio in a magazine and Mel says 'He is so he he but he's quite old now, he's quite old and disgusting but I loved him then. Ahh, if this was his knee, I'd be like (*sound of panting*)'. She starts humming and announces 'I've got that song stuck in my head, you know the Titanic one' and she sings the line 'I see you, I hear you, I need you'. Three minutes later, as the children are preparing to leave the classroom at the end of the session, she starts singing again:

Extract 4

9	Mel	(xxx) <i>My heart will go on</i> Ah: I love The Titanic, it's becoming one of my favourite films now. I just <u>love it so much</u> , now
10	Jess	I don't really <u>watch</u> it very much
11	Mel	Me neither but I just love it
12	Jess	I like it when it's flooding the room's flooding
13	Mel	=Yea
14	Jess	=And big (xxx) that's one of my favourite bits of all
15	Mel	=my favourite bit is when Jack's holding Rose against, that bit, and then they're like and then they kiss. Hm: that was me!

Mel's recalling of *Titanic* through a musical link, then expressing strong, intensified, emotional appreciation 'I just love it so much, now' (turn 9) and the girls' identification of favourite scenes (the flooding rooms, turn 12; the kiss, turn 15), is a typical sequence of moves in their talk about films. As in the discussion of Danielle's death, Mel imaginatively inserts herself into the experiences and emotions of a character, identifying with Rose as she kisses Leonardo di Caprio 'Hm: that was me!' (turn 15). Rather than confirm an immediate shared reaction, however, as Mel and Emily did when talking about *My Girl* and *EastEnders* in Extract 1, in Extract 4 Mel and Jess negotiate a mutual alignment over turns 10-12, moving from Jess's initial lack of enthusiasm in turn 10 ('I don't really watch it very much') through Mel's realignment ('me neither') but subsequent repetition of her own position ('but I just love it') in turn 11 to Jess's shift to acknowledging 'liking' a specific sequence (turn 12), then intensifying her response 'that's one of my favourite bits of all' (turn 14). Mel then starts the next turn by echoing Jess's phrase 'my favourite bit...'. This kind of negotiated shared positioning, where children check and calibrate expressions of affect and appreciation among themselves, consolidates friendships and at the same time produces an entrainment of emotions and appreciation around particular value positions and ways of feeling expressed in texts.

A similar kind of entrainment appeared when children synchronised rhythm, pitch, body stance and movement in their shared singing of popular songs. As Mel and Jess are queuing up at the end of break to return to class, they produce a conflation of the first lines of two Abba songs 'Honey, honey' and 'Money, money, money' from the film *Mama Mia*. Here, their rhythmic passing backwards and forwards of the line 'Honey, honey honey', sung to the tune of 'Money, money, money' (turns 2-6), perfectly expresses their alignment as close friends.

Extract 5

1	Mel	Emily's got that word stuck in my head. <i>Honey, honey, honey, hon</i> (xxx) I don't know if she's saying 'Honey, honey, honey' or 'hooley, hooley, hooley'
2	Jess	It's 'honey' (<i>American accent</i>) <i>Honey, honey, honey</i>

3	Mel	(American accent) <i>Honey, honey, honey (xxx) he he (xxx) as long as you don't say it like 'hoo hoo:'</i>
4	Jess	<i>Honey, honey, honey</i>
5	Mel	<i>Honey, honey, honey</i>
6	Jess	<i>Honey, honey, honey</i>
7	Mel	<i>Stuck on (xxx) medal he he I got this in silver and gold now (pointing to her netball medal)</i>
8	Jess	<i>Honey, honey, honey, you are very funny (xxx)</i>
9	Mel	<i>he he I got this in silver and gold now</i>
10	Jess	[Ah:: (kissing sound) (xxx)]
11	Mel	[Except that's the time (xxx)]
		(...)
18	Jess	(xxx) When we leave school I'm definitely (...) >I'm not going to let go of you I'll be like that superglue
19	Mel	=I'm going to be like um::: I'll never let go
20	Jess	=Every five seconds I'll be like
21	Mel	=I'll be like, I'll be like holding onto you every day. [I'll be like, get superglue
22	Jess	[I'll be like yea
23	Mel	Ah I'm going to so have to come to Highton with you now<

In Extract 5, Mel and Jess echo back each other's words and phrases: *Honey, honey, honey*, 'I'll be like' (in turns 18-22), 'superglue' (turns 18 and 21). Their additional close rhythmic alignment in turns 4-6 is echoed in turns 18-23 where the girls mirror each other's rapid rate of speech, as well as declarations of mutual attachment, in anticipation of their imminent separation when they have to move on to different secondary schools. They then go on to compare their hands and arms, each claiming that theirs are the most hairy. As they move into class, Mel echoes the tune of *Honey, honey, honey*, in a playful reversioning as *Hairy, hairy, hairy*:

Extract 6

33	Mel	Look at <u>my</u> arms
34	Jess	They're not that hairy
35	Mel	(.) Hairymania. <i>Hairy, hairy, hairy</i>
36	Jess	Are you saying they're hairier than this? Not really (.) [he he
37	Mel	[he he
38	Jess	we're two gorillas he he (<i>they move into class</i>)

Here, the girls' friendship, expressed partly through the pleasurable repetition and echoing of musical phrases, provides a safe context for sharing anxieties, mutual reassurance and the transformation of a commonly negatively marked feminine body feature into a symbol of togetherness 'we're two gorillas he he', turn 38. In Extracts 5 and 6, their rhythmic, synchronised singing plays an important part in Mel and Jess's expressions of mutual attachment. A number of scholars have noted the holistic nature of musical experience, where sensation and emotion take precedence over symbolic meaning as people 'absorb songs into ... lives and rhythm into ... bodies' (Frith 1996 p121). Turino (2008) suggests that the power of music to invoke sensual perception, feeling and movement in combination with symbolic thought produces a pleasurable

integration of the physical, emotional and rational self. In what Turino terms participatory music, as when Mel and her friends sing together, he suggests that this holistic individual experience is combined with a sense of deep connection with others, making the girls' shared reproduction of popular song a particularly powerful site for aligning emotions, appreciation and judgment.

During Friday, interspersed with their discussions of *East Enders*, Mel and her friends also repeatedly hummed or sang snatches from Rhythm and Blues singer Rihanna's 'Unfaithful', a song focussing on the singer's ambivalent feelings about her sexual infidelity. The most sustained performance of the song occurs in the literacy class as the girls finish off their written work. The teacher is tolerating quite a high level of noise and their singing merges with the general clatter.

Extract 7

1	Mel	<i>(Nasal singing voice) And I know that he knows that, and I killed him inside da da da da happy with somebody else. I can see Which one is she</i>
2	ps	<i>=The story of my life, searching for the right, but it keeps avoiding me</i>
3	Emily	<i>Sorrow in my soul</i>
4	Mel	<i>(Nasal singing voice) Something something wrong (xxx) me</i>
5	Ps	<i>(xxx) and this is more than love, and this is why the sky is blue</i>
6	Mel	<i>He he (humming)</i>
7	ps	<i>And he knows I'm unfaithful and it kills him inside, to know that I am happy with some other guy.</i>
8	Mel	<i>I can see him dying</i>
9	ps	<i>I don't wanna do this anymore I don't wanna be the reason why Everytime I walk out the door I see him die a little more inside I don't wanna hurt him anymore I don't wanna take away his life I don't wanna be... A murderer:: I feel it in the air, When I'm doing my hair, (xxx)</i>
10	Emily	<i>I like it where em (singing) I said I won't be long,</i>
11	ps	<i>=just hanging with my girls</i>
12	Emily	<i>that's my favourite bit, I love that bit</i>
		<i>(...)</i>
17	Mel	<i>(nasal singing voice) the sky is blue he he (Mel continues to hum)</i>

While Mel starts out distancing herself from the song through the nasal quality of her rendition, as it catches on and spreads among her group of friends she takes on the voice of the singer with them more directly (by turn 7). The alternation of turns 1-8 between Mel, Emily and the three or four girls is clearly unplanned but they don't miss a beat. This kind of improvised interactional synchrony (Sawyer 2005) enhances social bonding (Turino 2008). By turn 9, the girls' chorus has become a fully fledged performance, where they appear to have entered unreservedly into the singer's feelings. So closely attuned are they that, when Emily identifies her favourite place

(turn 10), the other girls rhythmically link directly with her in singing the next line (turn 11). After merging her voice more or less completely with the evaluative expression of the song in the middle section, Mel's resumption of her nasal voice at the end, and her short laugh (turn 17) suggests a withdrawal to a more self-conscious stance.

Mel continues to hum snatches of *Unfaithful* throughout the day, and has a short discussion at break time about which is the boyfriend, and which the man she is cheating him with, in Rihanna's video performance of the song. This video includes highly sexualised stances and gestures and it has been argued that pre-teen girls' fascination with popular singers inducts them into a precocious sexuality linked with submission to dominant heterosexual visual and aesthetic codes of consumption (e.g. Monnot 2010). However, while Mel and her friends often appeared to take on and enjoy the emotional tenor of songs they reproduced, there was also evidence of them distancing themselves from their content, or appropriating the tune for their own purposes. For example Mel's nasal voice at the beginning and end of 'Unfaithful' suggests a lack of complete commitment, and her playful reversioning of 'Honey, honey, honey' as 'Hairy, hairy, hairy' transforms a rather anodyne phrase indexing heterosexual romance into an ironic, perhaps even oppositional, expression of female solidarity. Furthermore, role models available in popular culture are no longer so monolithically heterosexual. Over the three days she was being recorded, as well as referring to Leonardo di Capri's attractions, Mel also played 'lesbian nurses' at lunchtime with friends (possibly prompted by a popular Catherine Tate television sketch), talked about a character in *Hollyoaks* who might be lesbian, and said her sister was a lesbian. Lesbianism appeared to be a target for play and humour, rather than explicitly negatively evaluated by Mel and her friends, as they explored and tried out various sexual identities from the popular media. The borrowing of singers' voices, as in children's re-enactments of characters from *East Enders*, enables them to momentarily experience, empathise with and inhabit possible future selves while retaining the option to also play with and distance themselves from the emotions and judgements involved.

Conclusion

Children expressed evaluation within highly heteroglossic exchanges which involved, in the case of *EastEnders*, dialogic relations within and across different layers of narrative, and their simultaneous treatment of the episode as a slice of life and an artful text. While they expressed and identified with the emotions of the characters, they made judgements about their actions, as if they were real people, either directly or through the ways in which they reproduced and framed their voices. They also expressed their feelings about the producers who had devised the story line and make comments which could be construed as aesthetic appreciation when they compared plotlines with another soap opera, criticised producer and actor decisions and echoed the signature tune cutting in at the crucial point of an episode. Children also reacted to each other's responses and comments, sometimes moving from emotional reaction to judgement, confirming shared evaluations of characters' actions. As Koven (2002) suggests, evaluation in oral narrative shifts between character, narrator and interlocutor positions, although, in comparison with Koven's interview data, these positions tend to be more dialogised in the fragments of narrative in children's ongoing conversations about *EastEnders*. Evaluation in narrative retellings, captured by the longitudinal recordings, was expressed mainly through the orchestration of voices.

Children also orientated towards the additional layer of a fictional text with its own narrator positions, i.e. that of the producers and actors, and expressed emergent of aesthetic judgements.

There seems to be a distinctive difference between the explicit expression of affect and judgment around *EastEnders*, and children's interactive, performative responses to poetry and song where appreciation is expressed by entry into and appropriation of rhythmic and melodic forms, often strongly emotionally imbued. The children's sensitivity to and appreciation of form is conveyed in the interactionally synchronised performance of song which confirms and intensifies social bonding. Judgement here is implicit in the sense that children are drawn into evaluative alliances with the singers whose voices and stances they are reproducing. However, it is important to note that on occasion they distance themselves from these stances, for example through using a nasal, mocking voices, exaggerated emotional display or playful transformation of word to musical phrases.

Children negotiated their responses to these texts within peer group interaction, for example in the 'relational duets' (Wetherell 2012) between Mel and Jess. Children's shared appreciation of popular song appeared to be the most intensely holistic interactive practice, where the mixing of voices, words, tunes, rhythms and body movement melded together personal experience, a deep shared connection between friends and the social and expressive values of popular culture (cf Rampton 2006). However, I have suggested that children do not unreservedly enter into the positions provided by popular songs, and that popular media itself offers a range of alternative identities for children to explore. Alongside the frequent interactive entrainment of evaluation among friends, individual differences, as well as similarities, were logged within the ongoing talk, providing the seeds for individual judgements and appreciation which might be revisited and further developed in the future.

Transcription conventions

Names have been changed. Some punctuation, relating to intonation patterns, has been inserted to aid comprehension. Speaking turns are numbered within stretches of talk relating to a particular text from popular culture.

P unidentified pupil

= latching

[Overlap

Italics laughter in the voice

so annoying Emphasis

li::fe stretched sound

Honey, honey, honey singing or rhythmic, musical expression

CAPS Louder than surrounding talk

(.) Pause of under a second

Comments in italics and parentheses clarify prosodic or paralinguistic features e.g. (*exaggerated sad voice*) (*short laugh*) or provide additional notes e.g. (*Mel continues to hum*)

(xxx) unable to transcribe

> < quicker pace than surrounding talk

He indicates laughter (number of tokens indicates duration)

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