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# Teachers telling

## Informings in an early years classroom

**Rod Gardner and Ilana Mushin**

**ABSTRACT:** *Informings (assertions or tellings) are a fundamental action type for transferring knowledge from a knowing participant to an unknowing one in an interaction. They form a complementary pair with questions. In this study, we draw on video- and audio-taped data from a primary school in central Queensland. We investigate the distribution and sequential occurrence of informings in about 15 hours of classroom recordings. Whereas questions by teachers are very common, we found informings to be relatively infrequent. In particular, teachers were found to pass on factual information directly to students rarely. Informings were found to occur most frequently after other strategies, and in particular, questions, had been tried.*

### Introduction

The transfer of information between parties in talk is all-pervasive. Every utterance carries information of some kind, because every word—and indeed every gesture—is a bearer of information. On the other hand, only some actions in conversation are dedicated to the transfer of information or knowledge as their primary focus. Most obviously, questions seek information transfer from the recipient to the questioner, and informings impart information from the informer to the recipient. These might be seen as complementary actions, and they have indeed widely been treated as such. However, despite this apparent complementarity, in Conversation Analysis it is striking how many publications are dedicated to questions, whereas dedicated publications on informings

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(or assertions, tellings, or other synonyms for informings), are very few (but see Heritage, 1984; Robinson, 2009; and Sidnell, 2012).

It can be claimed that all conversational actions carry informational content. For example, the information that a greeting provides is that its speaker is ready to enter into a conversation (or at least a minimal interaction of two greetings), and the form of the greeting chosen carries some information about what its speaker understands the relationship between the parties to be (cf. Enfield & Stivers, 2007). It is, however, not only that all utterances carry some information, but that, as Heritage has forcefully argued, it is the epistemic imbalance between speakers—and the assumed status of the knowledge of the other parties—that drives a conversation forward. As Heritage (2012a, p. 1) puts it,

*We could not utter a phrase meaningfully unless we adjusted lexicon and prosody according to what the categoric or individual identity of our putative recipients allows us to assume they already know, and knowing this, don't mind our openly presuming on it.*

## Previous conversation analytic research

Although there appear to be very few dedicated studies of informing, there are many references to informings scattered across the Conversation Analytic literature. An important early paper was on pre-announcements (Terasaki, 1976), in which she treats announcements as a type of informing. In Extract 1, Mal tells Lyn his news, with a pre-announcement format. For transcription conventions, see this issue's Transcription Key (p. 119).

### *Extract 1 (L&MH3a:20)*

01. Mal:           \*°An'° I\* also have s'me other \*ne:ws\*.  
02. Lyn:           Wha:t.  
03.               (0.5)  
04. Mal:           Seven e'clock temorrow >morning;= I get< the  
05.               motorbike.  
06.               (0.5)  
07. Lyn:           What's happened with it.

In lines 04 and 05, Mal passes on his news, which could be seen as a canonical case of an informing. Mal is the one with the information—in so-called K+ position (cf. Heritage, 2012b)—which Lyn does not know (the evidence being in her response to this news in line 07). She is in

K– position. A point to note in passing here is that Terasaki and others do not call this an informing, but an announcement.<sup>1</sup> So one question that can be asked at this point is whether news announcements are primarily informings, or whether their primary function is to use news as part of some other action or activity type that is the primary focus of the sequence, such as making arrangements (eg, he has to leave home early the next day), or congratulating (in the case of good news), or commiserating (in the case of bad news).

One scholar who has examined informings more extensively is Heritage, for example, in his paper on 'Oh' (1984), in which a section of the paper discusses *Oh* as a response to informings, but it was not the focus of this chapter to investigate the nature of informings. Kendrick (2010) sees informings as similar to questions, in the sense that they 'also establish an asymmetrical relationship between speaker and recipient relative to the matter formulated in the turn' (p. 58), and goes on to say that '[t]he epistemics of informings thus includes (at least) two claims: (i) a claim that the speaker knows the information and (ii) a claim that the recipient does not' (p. 58). Finally, Ekberg (2011) spends considerable time discussing a type of informing that he calls prospective informings. In his data set, they are used by community home care workers calling their elderly clients to tell them that a regular visit has been changed, often when a regular care worker is unable to come. This is accomplished by an announcement informing the client who the substitute care worker is and if necessary, the changed time of the visit, for example, '...so we've got a care worker called Sue who's going to come' (Ekberg, 2011, p. 78). Much of the more recent work that alludes to informings, such as Kendrick's, is focused on epistemics, territories of knowledge (see Kamio, 1997), and knowledge status of the participants and their epistemic stance (e.g. Heritage 2012a, 2012b). CA work also continues to treat informings (or assertions or tellings) and questions as complementary actions. As Sidnell (2012) claims,

*...both tellings (declaratives, assertions etc.) and questions can be seen to index the differential knowledge of speaker and recipient – which is to say, that these two broad types involve specifications for the distribution of knowledge.*

Sidnell's paper is one of the few CA publications that deal at length with informings, contrasting them with questions, and with how epistemic asymmetry is dealt with in conversation. There is, though, an

assumption of equivalence—because of the symmetry of considering one speaker to be a primary knower and the other lacking in knowledge—between questions and informings. But as Terasaki (1976) points out, ‘In the instance of “informings” in conversation, recipient design is manifested in an overriding preference not to report things already known to one’s recipient’ (p. 7), which may go some way to explaining why, in talk, informings are less frequently encountered than questions.

## **Informings in the classroom**

At least in the classroom data we examined, the relative occurrence of questions and informings is very strongly biased towards the former. We have found little discussion in the literature about what an informing is (ie, problematising the notion), nor is there discussion about various kinds of informings. In this paper, we present examples that differentiate some kinds of informings, using data from over 15 hours of early years classroom interactions in an Aboriginal school in Australia. The main focus, though, is on what might be seen as the archetype of informings: the passing on of factual information.<sup>2</sup>

In studies of classroom interaction, as in other studies in CA of ordinary conversation and various kinds of institutional talk, there is a considerable literature on question sequences, but we could find very little about informings, and specifically teacher informings. One of the few is Mortensen (2011), who shows how word explanations were regularly done ‘on the fly’, that is, treated in a side sequence to the ongoing question-answer based talk.

It is ‘a truth universally acknowledged’ that teachers ask lots of questions. This prompted us to ask when and how teachers use informings.<sup>3</sup> In classrooms in particular, one might imagine that informings would in some way balance questions, in part because teachers are in K+ position, and students as learners are in K– position. There is a certain logic to an assumption that knowledge is likely to flow from the K+ participant to the K– participant, but as we show here that logic does not transfer to the real world of classroom interaction.

What we found in classrooms was to us surprising. Consistent with previous studies, we found teacher questions everywhere, but, in the fifteen hours of transcribed classroom interaction that we trawled, we found only just over 100 candidate informings by the teacher. Of these, only ten were clear cases of teachers passing on factual knowledge in a base first-pair-part as something to be learnt.

The identification of informings as a type of action is a nontrivial exercise. In ordinary conversation there are many actions in talk that appear superficially to be informings, such as requests for action ('You left the door open'), complaints ('You're always nagging me'), apologies ('I'm sorry that I hurt you'), but generally it is possible to identify them as such by the responses they receive—not usually simple acknowledgements, but, for example, compliant actions (closing the door), dealing with the complainable ('I'm not nagging you'), or responding to the apology ('That's okay'). So it is sometimes difficult to be sure whether an action that looks like an informing is in fact one. As Heritage (2012a) has demonstrated, declarative syntax is clearly not enough. In most cases, though, the evidence will be in how the sequence unfolds. For example, in the following, Ann produces a series of informings.

*Extract 2 (A&BF3a:175)*

01. Ann: Ya realise Monday Suzie goes back da schoo:l.  
 02. Ben: °Mm;= I kno[:w°.  
 03. Ann: [I↑:'ll have a day alo:ne with  
 04. Luisa 'n' Carolɔ̃  
 05. (0.4)  
 06. Ann: 'n fact I'll have ↑two days ˘alone with Luisa  
 07. 'n' Carol.  
 08. Ann: [ 'cept] I ge my medic'l on Monda:y mo:rning.  
 09. Ben: [(Mm:),]

In line 01, the informing might be seen as a reminder. However, it would only take the addition of *do* at the beginning of this utterance to turn it into an interrogative that carries a large information load. Ben's response 'I know' indicates that this is something he already knows, so he addresses the epistemic content of Ann's informing with his 'I know'. She goes on to observe that she'll have a day alone with her other two children, which is then revised in lines 06 and 07, and which Ben acknowledges with an 'Mm', and then Ann provides a caveat with more information. This sequence also shows a feature that can make the identification of informings sometimes problematic, in that, regularly, informings do not mobilise a response (Stivers & Rossano, 2010), and when they do the response is often not revealing, as is the case with Ben's 'Mm's (Gardner, 2001). They can, though, be seen as informings because of Ben's minimal acknowledging responses, and a lack of evidence in Ann's talk that would suggest that she has designed them as anything else.

Next we turn to some examples of sequences with first pair parts that could be construed as informings, but that have other design and

sequential features that shape the action, and could mean that the utterance can be interpreted as some other action.<sup>4</sup>

### *Extract 3 (R&SB4a)*

01. Ron:            We hadn a-(0.3)ppahlling meeting  
02.                    tani:ght,  
03.                    (1.7)  
04. Sal:            So did we:.

Ron passes on the news to Sally that a meeting he had at school had been 'appalling', thus assessing the meeting negatively, but at the same time, as shown by Sally's response, this is new information for Sally. Is this then an informing or an assessment—or indeed both? Sally's aligning 'So did we' is equivocal as to whether it is an agreeing assessment, or it is aligning with Ron's turn as news.

Another case of informings doing something beyond mere transmission of factual information is the following, with noticings while driving when they've seen an animal from the car.

### *Extract 4 (I&JW4a:526)*

01. Jan:            'ma:zing how they turn arou:nd like that.  
02.                    (2.6)  
03. Jan:            Makes me wanna take a \_phohhdagrahhph\_ .  
04.                    (0.4)  
05. Jan:            †O:h;= lookeda t†ai::l.  
06.                    (0.5)  
07. Jan:            >Izn' et ama::zing.  
08.                    (2.6)

As in Extract 3, there are assessments in this sequence that also carry information. In line 1, Jan observes how an animal (a kangaroo?) turns around, assessing it initially with 'amazing'. A further—purer—assessment occurs in line 07 ('Izn' et amazing')—produced as an interrogative. Between these two utterances are two others that are candidate informings. 'Makes me wanna take a phodograph' in line 03 is informative about a response Jan has to what she has noticed about the animal's movement, while the utterance in line 05 is a noticing of the tail, done through imperative mood. A noticing may be a kind of informing, but it is done here to mobilise Ike into looking at the tail. It is, though, hard to find strong evidence whether she is telling or asking him to direct his attention to the animal, or whether she is expressing something she has just noticed, a kind of 'response cry' (Goffman, 1978), with the 'Oh' indicating the newness of the noticing (cf. Heritage, 1984).

When we turn to our classroom data, we similarly find examples of information-rich declarative sentences used in actions other than factual informings, such as ‘We’ve got visitors in our classroom’ used within the activity of classroom behaviour management, implying that when they have visitors, students should be quiet.

*Extract 5 (120221:Year1:Pt1:1’17”)*

01. Miranda: Two sleep- fuh muh birth[day a:y,=la[mmy]=  
 02. Lamont: [↑E:]=  
 03. Miranda: =[me ay:.  
 04. Lamont: =[pick- ↓duh wr[onguh one.  
 05. T-Adira: [↑I’ve got some ↓ru:de peo:ple  
 06. at thuh mo:↑ment?  
 07. Giselle: Yah Tre:lly de[:h.  
 08. T-Adira: → [Now ↑we’ve got v:isitors  
 09. → [in our cla:]:ssroo:m?  
 10. Laurence: [↑↑Kelly give-]  
 11. (0.6)  
 12. Lamont: An’ ↑Mistuh ↓Hammond ↑too:↓  
 13. T-Adira: An’ they’re see:ing- (0.6) ↑↑some peo:ple;=being  
 14. a liddle bit ru:de;=and-=talking while thuh te:acher  
 15. is ta:lking.

At the beginning of this extract, two children are talking out of turn. The teacher makes an observation in lines 05 and 06 that she has ‘some rude people at the moment’, signalling a shift to classroom behaviour management. She does this through an informing; ‘Now we’ve got visitors in our classroom’. This is something that would already be apparent to the children, so it is not telling them anything new, but rather drawing their attention to something they know, namely, that one occasion when they should not be rude is when there are visitors in the classroom. She articulates this further in lines 13 to 15. We excluded examples like this from our collection, as it is an informing being used in the service of behaviour management, rather than passing on information.

Another type of informing that we excluded from the collection is what we call ‘procedural informings’, which are, for example, actions that tell the children how to conduct a classroom activity, that is, actions akin to ‘giving instructions’. In the following, the teacher is telling her prep class students (four to five year olds) how to label a drawing.



## Extract 6 (101013:Prep:886)

01. T-Pauline: ↑I'm goinda gedda pencil;=an' <↑sho:w you:u  
02. s:omething: (0.3) el:se: th't we c'n do:.>  
03. (1.3)  
04. Aram: A::h.  
05. Jara: <En ↑ah:ll bring duh ↑pee::c↓yeh-.>  
06. (0.3)  
07. Jara: (°en' sho::w you ↑en l[o:ve)  
08. T-Pauline: [↑H:ave a look-h.  
09. (0.3)  
10. T-Pauline: → ·hhh I want you duh pud a liddle ↑a:rro:w?:  
11. → (0.4) from thuh ↑wo:rd wi:ng? (0.6) an' make  
12. → it ↑p:oint to thuh wing;=c'n you do ↑that?  
13. (0.7)  
14. T-Pauline: → 'Cos that's what labels do:.

The teacher begins by announcing what she is going to do next (lines 01–02) and directing their attention to what she's doing (line 08). She then, in lines 10 to 12, launches into her instruction, saying what she wants them to do ('I want you to put a little arrow...'), followed by a request for them to start.<sup>5</sup> These instructions carry a great deal of information for the children to grasp—'little arrows' and their positioning 'from the word *wing*' pointing to the wing of the bird in the picture. But rather than being factual informings, we argue that these have a procedural focus of what to do and how to do it.<sup>6</sup> The last utterance in the sequence is of particular interest. It is a coda to the informing sequence that tells the children factual information about labels. Apart from the relative rarity of informings such as this in the large classroom data set, it is notable where this one is placed. As so often in the classroom informings that we found, the informing is not produced as a base first pair part, as the focal action in a sequence, but as something that is almost incidental. The instructions could have marked the end of the sequence, and finished with the request for action at the end of line 12. Many of the informings that we present in this paper have similarities to this one: they are produced in the service of some other actions or activity sequences, and are found in post-expansions sequences of various kinds.

So, our collection consists of informings as information that a speaker *proffers*, that is, information presented as a first pair part, and one that appears to be dedicated to the transfer of information or knowledge from teacher to learner as a learning object, what we are calling 'factual informings'. That is, some information or knowledge is being imparted to the children *as information* or *as knowledge*, whether as a base first-pair-part, or as a first-pair-part in an expansion sequence. So, why is it that—counter-intuitively, but perhaps not counter-experientially—such factual informings are so rare in our data when the teacher has

most of the information that they wish to impart to the students? In this paper, as a first task in the broader exploration of informings in the classroom, we focus on where in sequences of classroom talk informings occur, and what they are designed to achieve within the broader classroom lessons.

### *A. Factual informings as base first-pair-parts*

It has already been stated that factual informings as base first-pair-parts are rare in the data. What we find more frequently in this position are procedural informings (particularly instructions), but also directing of children's attention, as when a teacher, talking about the letter 't', says 'Look, they've got a cross across the top, haven't they'.<sup>7</sup> We also commonly found examples of informings in teacher's multi-unit turns that had informings as prefaces to an eliciting action such as a question, or a designedly incomplete utterance such as 'Eye starts with...' (cf. Koshik, 2002). We found only ten unequivocal examples of first-pair-part factual informings. The following is one of these ten. The teacher, Leanne, begins a new activity with a group of five children by saying 'Now, a five sided shape is called a pen-ta-gon'.

#### *Extract 7 (120223:Yr2:Part4:0'02")*

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| 01. T-Leanne: | ↑No:w.=a ↑fi:ve <u>si</u> ded shape is called a (0.4) ↑=pen     |
| 02.           | (0.2) <u>t</u> a (0.2) gon.                                     |
| 03.           | (0.7)   |
| 04. Jara:     | ↑ <u>Pen</u> (.) [ <u>t</u> a:↓go:n:.                           |
| 05. Jeremy:   | [↑ <u>He</u> - (0.3) <u>h</u> e-i (0.2) ↓ <u>hexagon</u> :[(s). |
| 06. T-Leanne: | [↑ <u>Pen</u> -   |
| 07.           | (0.2) ↓ <u>tago</u> :n.<which one d'you                         |
| 08.           | [think says;=↑p]en:tago:n.                                      |
| 09. Jeremy:   | [ <u>H e x a g o</u> :n-]                                       |
| 10. Jara:     | <u>This</u> ↓one:.  |

The focus of the activity is on shapes. If the teacher had said, 'A pentagon is a shape that has five sides', this could have been a definition of the word *pentagon*, but with the design of her turn topicalising 'five-sided shape', she is imparting factual information, as pure a case of an informing as we have in the data set. Jara's response is to repeat the word, a fitting response to a first-time informing, in which she also mimics the teacher's slow delivery of the word. Jeremy, however, does not repeat the word, but says a word that is part of the shape set to which *pentagon* belongs, namely *hexagon*. This demonstrates that, for Jeremy at least, this is not an entirely new concept. There is a chance that the teacher's utterance in lines 01 to

02 is a reminder, rather than a first-time informing, though we have no evidence for this. However, one point to make is that even in such a near-canonical example of an informing, it may be the case that it is in fact a reminding, or alternatively, it might be seen as an action that is topicalising some information to prepare for the upcoming activity. What can be claimed, however, is that this utterance focuses on a learning object; a fact for the children to come to know. We turn now to further examples of first-pair-part factual informings.

The following example is more complex, and is perhaps indicative of what can go wrong with pure factual informings. The teacher is introducing a new literacy topic to the year 1 class. Prior to this sequence, she had introduced the word ‘alliteration’, and in the extract below, she attempts to provide a definition of the word—in other words, she is informing them of its meaning. She does this by saying, starting in line 03, ‘that means—it’s a very long word, and what it means is that there are words that are nex- are near each other that start with the same sound’—and this ends in line 20. As she is producing this utterance, several of the children are still repeating this new word (lines 04 to 12), and some continue even after she has finished, in lines 19 to 26.

*Extract 8 (120604:Yr1:Part8:2’39”)*

- 01. T-Adira: ↓That’s right,=[ Now ]=
- 02. Karolina: [°Ah ]=
- 03. T-Adira: → =[li[stening u:p;] (0.4) [that mea[:nsɛ]
- 04. Karolina: =[°↑ lit- e:r,] r : [:ay shen: ° ]
- 05. Albert: [li- tle:] : : [la:y shi[n:. ]
- 06. Noella: [A:h li[t- ]=
- 07. Virginia: [I n ]=
- 08. Noella: =[e : r r[ay she:n.
- 09. Virginia: =[duh ↑ca:h]
- 10. Saxton: [°li ↑tɔo::
- 11. Karolina: [°↓ u:h ↑ li-[ (0.4) [ t e : : h ]r a : : y°]=
- 12. Stewart: [°l i t t l [e a y [ s h u n ° ]
- 13. T-Adira: → [’s a ver[y long: wɔ:rd;]=an’ whadit=
- 14. → =mea:ns [i:s, ·hhh <that there are w]o:rds,=
- 15. Karolina: [°lit- e:r ra:y sh-° ]
- 16. T-Adira: → =[that are [nex- (0.2) are nea:r each other that=
- 17. Karolina: [°en
- 18. T-Adira: → =[sta:rt] with thuh sa:me [s o u : n d .] (0.7)]
- 19. Saxton: =[ (dun-)] [
- 20. Albert: [° ↑ tōe ↑ tōe::] ↑ tōe°=
- 21. Albert: =[↑tō- ]
- 22. T-Adira: [ ↓ 0: ↑kayɛ ·hh [so you know when we]=
- 23. Saxton: [Ö:h- [a y : : s h : e -]
- 24. T-Adira: =[ (did)-
- 25. Albert: [A : : : [ : : : :gh

26. Saxton:            =[u : : h ]  
 27. T-Adira:            [↑I'm j's genna ↓wai:t-h.

This is a clear case of the teacher passing on factual information to the children about a word that they are going to focus on in the lesson. However, she runs into behaviour management problems, and has to abandon her definition in line 24 because of the noise and lack of focus of the children, and in the end says in line 27, 'I'm just gonna wait'. So why did she run into difficulties in this sequence? One observation is that it is unusual for new topics or information to be introduced through informings in these classes, so the children have had little experience of this way of presenting information. However, several of them are also still repeating the new word, so it could be argued that the teacher has not given them sufficient time to complete the previous sequence. Be that as it may, telling the children something very directly (but also something that is quite abstract) fails. What she does following this extract is to try to introduce the word again, but this time she provides them with examples of alliteration. Sequence initial informings may be rare, but this one demonstrates a possible reason: if a teacher begins with a question, this strongly mobilises an answer. If she begins with an informing, a response is less strongly mobilised, and thus she is less likely to have evidence that the children have understood what she is attempting to teach them.

***B. Informings as prefaces to eliciting turns***

As has already been noted, informings can occur in base first-pair-parts not as simple factual informings, but as a preface to an elicitation. Extract 9 is such a case, in which the letter 'f' is being practised.

*Extract 9 (101013:Prep:1224)*

01. T-Pauline: → Now bo:th ev these: start with: (0.2) föh  
 02.            → föh föh, like Fred's fishing ro:dž  
 03.            (0.8)  
 04. T-Pauline: → ↑One uh th'm is f:ee:t-hž  
 05.            (0.5)  
 06. Edeline:    ((Points to 'feet' cutout word))  
 07. T-Pauline: → an' one uh th'm is feathers:.=now ↑which one is  
 08.            fee:t.=it's thuh ↑sho:rt ↓wo:rd.  
 09.            (0.5)  
 10. T-Pauline: So ↑which one is thuh sho:rt  
 11.            wo:r[d.  
 12. Edeline:    [Du[h ↑tohp ↓one:.=  
 13. Aram:        [Dis one.  
 14. T-Pauline:  =↑Ex:ce↓llent-h.

This small reading group in a prep class is practising word recognition and learning the letters of the alphabet. She leads up to the question

in lines 07 and 08 by telling them the sound of the letter ('föh') and using the alliterative phrase, 'Fred's fishing rod', and then telling them what the two words are that they have to choose from. She helps them further by telling them that the one they are looking for is the short word. In other words, she is using informings to provide some scaffolding before asking the question. In the data set, questions were regularly prefaced by such informings, what we might call informings in the service of another action.

### ***C. Informings following incorrect answers***

Informings are also regularly used after a problematic response to a question. In Extract 10, in a numeracy class, the teacher asks a strongly scaffolded alternative question in lines 01 and 02, aimed to elicit the number of sides that a rectangle has. Camille provides the wrong answer.

#### *Extract 10 (120223:Yr2:Part4:3'50")*

01. T-Leanne: So:;=↑dz a r:ectangle have three si:des?=↓or dz i'  
 02. have fou:r si:des.  
 03. Camille: Thr<sup>f</sup>ee:..  
 04. (0.7)  
 05. T-Leanne: → ↓A:w,=↑not- qui:te-.↑=a- tih- tih- tri:angle has  
 06. → three si:des.  
 07. (1.4)  
 08. Jeremy: Fou::r.  
 09. (2.0)  
 10. Camille: °O:ne:: (0.6) two three:° (0.3) fou:r.  
 11. T-Leanne: (Waw) So c'n you glue it (l)on for me?↑Ca:rmie?

The teacher follows up Camille's wrong answer by (gently) rejecting the answer ('Aw, not quite'), and then telling the children that a triangle has three sides, implying that a rectangle does not. This informing further narrows the choices, and she is successful now in eliciting the correct answer from two children. It is in this kind of environment that we found informings to be relatively frequently used, that is, after failing to elicit a correct answer.

### ***D. Informings following no answer***

In a similar way, informings can follow a lack of an answer by students. In Extract 11, the teacher asks a question, 'Do you know what a baby sheep is called?', waits 2.8 seconds, then in the face of no response, she reformulates the question, again receiving no response except some laughter from one of the two children, after which the teacher herself provides the answer.

*Extract 11 (120221:Year1:Pt3A:0'14")*

01. T-Adira: Do you know whadduh ba:by sheep is ca:lled?  
02. (2.8)  
03. T-Adira: D'you know thuh na:me of a ba:by ↑sheep?  
04. (1.0)  
05. Sabina: eh >heh heh heh<  
06. (1.8)  
07. T-Adira: → <It's: called a la::mb.>  
08. (0.8)  
09. T-Adira: >C'n yih say< la::mb?  
10. Sabina: [U:la:mb?  
11. Zamora: [↓La::mb.  
12. T-Adira: Very ↑goo:d.

The environment for the informing here is after failure to elicit an answer, which is a similar environment to the previous example, in which the failure was to elicit a correct response.

***E. Sequence closing informings***

In the next extract, the teacher is asking Michelle to name a shape, and Benjamin, who hasn't been selected, provides a wrong answer.

*Extract 12 (120223:Yr2:Part4:5'17")*

01. T-Leanne: >Wha's that one.<  
02. ((To Chantelle, points to a hexagon))  
03. (0.3)  
04. Benjamin: °R:ec-tangle.°  
05. (2.2)  
06. T-Leanne: How many si:des dz i' have;=↑Mi:chelle?  
07. (1.5)  
08. Michelle: °wun two thr:ee° [fou:r.  
09. T-Leanne: [↑DAN:IEL:.  
10. Michelle: FI:VE; five five fi:ve.  
11. (0.8)  
12. T-Leanne: >Dz i' have ↑fi::ve? le['s count again.  
13. Michelle: [Yea:h.  
14. (0.5)  
15. Michelle: °↑wun:↑ two: three° ·hh °°( )°° (0.8) sigz.  
16. (0.5)  
17. T-Leanne: Six::.  
18. (0.2)  
19. T-Joanne: → So it's uh (.) ↑Hex::A:-↓GO:N:.  
20. (0.2)  
21. Michelle: Hex::

In the absence of an answer from Michelle after her question in line 01, the teacher this time does not provide the answer herself, but shifts her question to ask her how many sides the shape has. Michelle's answer is wrong. The teacher pursues the correct answer through another

question, and an invitation to count again (line 12). This time Michelle counts correctly. The teacher then provides the answer to her original question by naming the shape as a hexagon, thereby informing Michelle. What we have here is the teacher providing a question and an answer to her own question, but inserted inside this question-plus self-answer sequence is another, related sequence directed not at naming the sequence, but at counting how many sides the shape has. Once again, we have an informing in the environment of problematic question-answer sequences.

### ***F. Informings in extended problematic question-answer sequences***

The final example demonstrates how persistent teachers (and students) can be in pursuit of an answer, and how resistant they can be to using informings. In this one-on-one interaction, the teacher is trying to get Albert to identify and name the first sound (letter) in 'goat'.

#### *Extract 13 (120221:Year1:Pt5:8'47")*

01. T-Adira:     O:ka:y.  
02.                 (0.5)  
03. T-Adira:     Let's: sit do:wn.  
04.                 (0.4)  
05. Albert:        (I'm g'na sit).  
06. T-Adira:     (E:H) ↓now.  
07.                 (1.5)  
08. T-Adira:     GOA:T. whad is thuh f*ɪ*:rs' sou:nd yih hear in (0.5)  
09.                 GOA:T-H.  
10.                 (2.0)  
11. T-Adira:     What's thuh fi:rs' sou:ɪ:nd-tɪ=you hear in thuh  
12.                 wo:rd (0.3) goa:t-h.  
13.                 (1.6)  
14. T-Adira:     Li:†stɛnɛ  
15.                 (0.9)  
16. T-Adira:     Goa:t-h.  
17.                 (1.1)  
18. T-Adira:     → Geh-  
19.                 (0.3)  
20. Albert:        u-Dee.  
21.                 (0.6)  
22. T-Adira:     → Geh. (0.5) oa:::t-h,  
23.                 (0.6)  
24. T-Adira:     S:trɛtʃ it o:t-.  
25.                 (0.6)  
26. T-Adira:     <Go:a:::t-h.>  
27.                 (1.0)  
28. Albert:        ih hhih  
29.                 (1.2)  
30. Albert:        Dchee::ɪ  
31. T-Adira:     Djee:.  
32.                 (0.4)

33. T-Adira: → Thuh firs' sou:nd is (0.3) ↑geh.  
 34. (0.5)  
 35. T-Adira: ·hh Which ledduh: says: geh.  
 36. (0.6)  
 37. Albert: No:; <↑this: too bi:g ↓dah one:ɔ̃  
 38. T-Adira: Yea:h, =Al:bertɔ̃ (0.4) <which lettuh hee::uhɔ̃> (0.5)  
 39. <say:s (0.3) geh:.>  
 40. (1.3)  
 41. Albert: Dah one.  
 42. (0.4)  
 43. T-Edira: Goo:d. (0.2) djee:.

In line 08, the teacher begins by focusing Albert's attention on the word 'goat', and then asking him what the first sound is. There is no answer forthcoming, so the teacher asks the question again, slightly expanded. She refocuses his attention, and then repeats the word, and then she tells him the sound 'geh' in line 18. So, similar to Extract 12, in the absence of an answer she provides it herself. However, Albert now names the letter, but wrongly, though he comes close with his 'dee' (line 20).

In the face of Albert's incorrect answer, the teacher extends the sequence by repeating and stretching out the word, with the effect that the first sound, 'geh', is isolated, thereby for a second time telling him. She then instructs him to stretch it out, which he doesn't do, before repeating it again. This time, after some laughter and delay, Albert names the word with try-marking (rising intonation), which the teacher accepts by repeating the answer.

However, she still persists, presumably to reinforce his learning, first by re-answering her initial question ('the first sound is geh' in line 33), and then asking him to point to the letter that says 'geh', which—with some prompting and directing of attention by the teacher—he does successfully. What is notable about this sequence is that the teaching is constructed around question-answer sequences, with informings interspersed to overcome difficulties such as lack of answers or incorrect answers.

## Conclusion

Informings and questions are regularly treated as complementary actions associated with the management of knowledge asymmetry: informings are said to occur when a K+ participant provides information to a K- recipient, while questions occur when a K- participant elicits information from a K+ recipient. However, while questions and responses to questions have received considerable attention in the



CA literature, we are only beginning to study the nature and use of informings and their responses.

Classrooms offer a particularly rich environment for the investigation of knowledge management. In such environments, teachers are usually the knowing participants, with students often treated as unknowing recipients of the objects of learning. In cases where the resolution of this knowledge asymmetry is so integrated into the institutional arrangements, as teachers work to deliver the content of the curriculum to their students, we might expect that informings would play a significant part in how this is achieved. We observed, however, that in contrast to questions, teacher informings are rare in our early years classroom data, particularly informings in first position that pass on factual knowledge. Where they are used somewhat more frequently, they are used to deal with problems of uptake of information or problems with supplying answers to teachers' questions. Factual informings in these classes thus appear mostly to be a strategy of last resort in the provision of information by the teacher to the student.

The Socratic tradition in Western education systems has led to the wide use of questions as a teaching strategy and this historically grounded practice may go some way to account for the prevalence of questions in our data. However, there are some good reasons for the prevalence of questions: they mobilise students to provide more than just a claim of understanding, but also on most occasions to display what has been understood or not understood through the design of the answer. Indeed, they may even provide insight into how a student has arrived at an answer, which may provide the teacher with an insight into how to deal with an 'incorrect' answer. The teacher is thus provided with important information on what students know, formative information on which they can decide how to proceed: move on if the students have understood; do remedial work if they haven't. Factual informings, in contrast, mobilise a weaker response, often minimal or non-existent, representing a claim to have understood, but providing little guidance for the teacher as to what has been understood. In this sense, questions and their responses can be seen, in a Socratic, Western teaching tradition, to be of more use to a teacher than strategies of information-giving that simply provide the information. Basic provision of information in the form of factual informings is mostly provided when attempts to elicit displays of understanding from students have failed.

Our findings so far suggest that factual informings are largely avoided by these teachers as a way of transferring knowledge-for-learning,

deferring instead to strategies such as question-answer-follow-up sequences—or Initiation-Response-Follow-up (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975; Mehan, 1979), but this would need to be investigated further. There is a need to develop a deeper understanding of how teachers use informings in classrooms, and in particular how students respond to and use teacher informings. There is also a need to broaden the study to examine whether the use of informings that we have identified here is a particular feature of early years schooling, or whether it is generalisable to other kinds of education settings. Even in books that focus on the whole range of interactional practices in the classroom such as Wong and Waring (2010), one finds little or no reference to informings. We also need to understand better the place of informings as one set of strategies among the larger set of ways that teachers attempt knowledge transfer from teacher to student. These strategies include questions, as has been noted here, but also procedural informings (or instructions), where the knowledge being transferred is about how to do things (such as reading or adding), rather than factual knowledge (like naming shapes or poetic devices). To those who have experience of classrooms—and that is most of us—the findings of this paper are in some respects perhaps not surprising. What surprised us was the degree to which informings are avoided in these early school classrooms.

#### Notes

1. It is interesting to note that ‘informing’ as a noun is not a word with a great deal of currency in English. For example, in *The New Shorter Oxford Dictionary*, there is no entry for it. This can be contrasted with ‘question’, which is a word that very young children, or other early learners of English, are familiar with. Synonyms for ‘informings’, such as ‘assertions’ or ‘statements’ have greater currency, but they do not have quite the same sense of passing on information from speaker to listener.
2. As a reviewer pointed out, it may be that questions seeking factual information and nothing else may themselves be relatively rare. This question awaits investigation.
3. Koole (2010) discusses teacher explanations (what we are calling procedural informings, below), with a focus on a format of instruction-informing-understanding check. He is concerned with the ways in which students demonstrate their understanding by the kind of response they give to a question or an understanding check (what he calls how understandings), or on the basis of claimed understandings that are about whether or not something

check (what he calls how understandings), or on the basis of claimed understandings that are about whether or not something is understood. A difference in the work we are presenting is that our concern is with where teachers produce informings.

4. Answers are of course a kind of informing—responding to a request for information, a second-pair-part informing. For example, below Lyn is in K– position, and requests information by asking a question, which Mal—in K+ position—provides with his answer:

(L&MH3a:49)

01. Lyn:                   Right-. so 're they doing any of it?  
02.                       (0.3)  
03. Mal:               → The've done what's: the've done: up-ta da:te.

5. We argue that this is a request for action because of the lack of a verbal response from the children (i.e. the lack of an answer). As the video shows, they in fact promptly begin to work on their labelling. Sometimes in these kinds of sequential positions, children will answer 'Yes', which perhaps underlines the blurring of boundaries between some action types.
6. We concede, though, that these instructions or procedural informings could be understood as sub-types of informings.
7. This, of course, has a tag question format. However, it is presented not as a question, but as a telling and bringing the children to notice something, and the tag is mobilising them to confirm that they have noticed.

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