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Storytelling as a resource for pursuing understanding and agreement in doctoral research supervision meetings

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the function of storytelling in securing agreement in doctoral supervision from the perspectives of conversation analysis (CA), which views storytelling as an interactional resource for achieving various social actions. The function of storytelling in managing disagreement has been explored in previous CA research (Georgakopoulou, 2001; Goodwin, 1982, 1990; Kjaerbeck, 2008). However, a question left unanswered is whether storytelling works to *accomplish* disagreement or to *resolve* disagreement. This paper addresses this question by examining storytelling data taken from a research project on doctoral supervision. The data corpus consists of approximately 25 h of video-recorded interactions in an Australian university between doctoral students and their supervisors. In the transcribed data, analysis shows that storytelling works to establish a shared knowledge domain that serves to secure agreement rather than construct disagreement. In addition, through their responses, the students display their orientation to storytelling as pursuing understanding rather than securing affiliation of affective stance. The findings point to the interactive relationship between knowledge and agreement.

1. Introduction

The question about how storytelling works as an interactional resource to accomplish social actions has been well explored in conversation analysis (CA) (Mandelbaum, 2012; Stokoe and Edwards, 2006). One of these actions is the construction of disagreement (Georgakopoulou, 2001; Goodwin, 1982, 1990; Kjaerbeck, 2008). The present paper examines storytelling in interactions involving both disagreement and non-disagreement, and demonstrates how it works to pursue understanding and agreement; as an action it is thereby oriented to resolving disagreement rather than merely constructing disagreement.

The study draws on approximately 25 h of video-recorded interactions between PhD students in their first year of study and their supervisors during supervision meetings. In the data corpus, storytelling is found to be embedded in feedback activities. Feedback in this context is broadly understood as an activity that consists of one of the following actions: evaluating students' verbally-reported ideas or written work, disagreeing with students' opinions and giving recommendations on what should be done (Vehviläinen, 2009a). One form of feedback that has been widely reported in the PhD supervision literature is critical feedback or criticism (Caffarella and Barnett, 2000; Can and Walker, 2014; Carter and Kumar, 2017; Hockey, 1994; Li

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and Seale, 2007; McMichael, 1992; Stracke and Kumar, 2016; Vehviläinen, 2009a; Warner and Miller, 2015; Young, 2000). Although critical feedback may have various functions, one inherent feature is to point out problems in, and display disagreement with, certain aspects of student research work (Li and Seale, 2007; Vehviläinen, 2009b). Student disagreements about feedback are also documented (e.g., Gunnarsson et al., 2013; Knowles, 2007; Li and Seale, 2007; Warner and Miller, 2015). The above feedback practices raise a question about how disagreement between PhD students and supervisors can be managed so as to ensure the productivity of feedback while maintaining a cordial relationship (Li and Seale, 2007). Analysis in the current study has uncovered storytelling as one practice that supervisors use to manage disagreement and to pursue students' understanding of, and agreement with, supervisors' feedback.

In the subsequent sections, we first review CA research on storytelling, and the pursuit of agreement and mutual understanding. Next, we briefly describe the research design. This is followed by analysis of storytelling sequences, which focuses on what gives rises to supervisors' storytelling, and how the students orient to it.

2. Storytelling

There is a large body of narrative research that is predicated on the assumption that through telling their life stories, people share experiences, make sense of their lives and construct their identities (e.g., Bamberg, 1998, 2007; Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008; Klapproth, 2004; Labov and Waletzky, 1967; Schiffrin, 1996). In these narrative studies, stories are viewed as resources based on which the analyst interprets the social world. In contrast, from a CA perspective, storytelling is viewed as a set of interactional resources used for accomplishing various social actions (Mandelbaum, 2012). They include justifying and accounting for conduct (Mandelbaum, 1993); recounting troubles (Conroy, 1999; Edwards, 1995; Jefferson, 1980, 1988, 1993; Jefferson and Lee, 1981); displaying knowledge and seniority (Sidnell, 2000); displaying and managing complaints (Edwards, 2005; Mandelbaum, 1991); constructing and pursuing disagreement (Georgakopoulou, 2001); and in interactions with young children, creating occasions to talk about traumatic events (Bateman and Danby, 2013; Bateman et al., 2013), facilitating social inclusion and participation with peers (Theobald, 2015), and providing displays of knowledge (Filipi, 2017). The focus of the following review will be on the functions of storytelling in relation to disagreement or dispute because of the analytical interests of this paper.

2.1. Storytelling in disagreements or disputes

M. H. Goodwin's studies were seminal in laying the groundwork for CA research on storytelling and disagreement. In her research on playground talk, Goodwin (1982, 1990) found that girls used stories as resources for restructuring social alignment in the context of gossip—dispute activities. They accomplished this by informing the recipient about a third-party's offence in gossiping behind a recipient's back, by influencing the recipient's understanding of an event, and by eliciting from the recipient a promise to confront the offender. In contrast to girls' storytelling, boys told stories to construct direct confrontation and to manage on-going disputes. Goodwin (1982) also demonstrated that storytelling is a useful resource for managing disputes thanks to its turn-taking characteristics of being organised in rounds of exchange and return in which participants take turns to construct opposition moves. At the same time, the relatively equal turn-taking right is suspended when a participant launches a storytelling which is constructed of multi-unit turns (Jefferson, 1978). Therefore, Goodwin (1982) argued that storytelling involving disputes can give tellers the advantage of maintaining the floor through several turns through which they can develop their versions of the event, while other participants participate in the dispute simply by justifying whose versions are more plausible.

In a study on disagreement in informal Greek conversations between young people who were close friends, Georgakopoulou (2001) found that stories were used as an argumentative device for constructing, pursuing and negotiating disagreement. For example, in support of her argument, the teller may tell a story and highlight the similarities between the story and the recipient's experience. In response, the recipient usually does not question the argumentative point made through the story, but instead contests the validity of the analogy between the teller's story and her own experience (i.e., she may say "my situation is somewhat different"). The recipient may then proceed to tell her story from her perspective to show the differences between the two experiences.

In a different context, Kjaerbeck (2008) explored interaction between parents and care-takers at a centre for children with disability and found that stories told by care-takers functioned to account for the assessments of the children's behaviours in order to address parents' disagreement with the assessments. According to Kjaerbeck (2008), storytelling in such a context worked as a resource through which care-takers could assert their knowledge authority (regarding the past events that the parents did not have access to), and impose their interpretations on the parents.

In summary, the above studies conclude that storytelling is a useful resource for accomplishing disagreement. They also suggest that the argumentative power of storytelling takes root in its multiturn-taking characteristics, its use in constructing analogies and its capacity to assert knowledge authority. Adding to this body of work, the current study provides data to demonstrate that the power of storytelling also lies in its sequential characteristics that allow storytelling to be tightly linked to the on-going activity.

2.2. Sequence organisation in storytelling

Jefferson (1978) maintained that storytelling is "locally occasioned" (p. 220) by the interactional context in which it occurs. To be more specific, storytelling is triggered by the preceding talk or is methodically made relevant both to the prior talk and to the subsequent talk. Participants' interactional work to establish the relationship between the story and the prior or subsequent talk has implications for the sequence organisation of storytelling.

According to Sacks (1974, p. 337), storytelling involves "three serially ordered and adjacently placed types of sequences" including the preface, the telling and the response sequences. The story preface is the place where participants may establish the link to the prior talk and justify the "tellability" of the story. The telling sequence is the place where the core story is told. It often takes place in one extended turn at talk in which recipients give the floor to the teller through minimal responses, and do not take a full turn until a possible story completion is recognised through a response sequence or post-telling, preferably with no or with minimal gap and overlap. The post-telling sequence is the place where recipients may show their interpretations of and reactions to the stories (Jefferson, 1978; Stivers, 2008). These actions may also involve a negotiation of understanding.

2.3. Recipient responses to storytelling

According to Stivers (2008), recipients respond to stories in two distinctive ways: through alignment and affiliation. Alignment refers to a speaker supporting the asymmetrical turn-taking of the storytelling activity by showing an understanding that an extended turn at talk is ongoing, and therefore by refraining from launching a competing action. By contrast, affiliation is defined as a speaker endorsing and/or displaying support of a teller's affective stances towards the stories. Stivers (2008) demonstrated that a head nod was treated as being both affiliative and aligning in the middle of a telling because it showed support for the teller's affective stance while not disrupting the telling activity. However, a head nod at the end of storytelling was treated as disaffiliation and disalignment because verbal responses that showed uptake of the storytelling were expected at storytelling completion.

Recipients can produce fitted responses because during the course of the telling, tellers provide them with information about their own affective stances, thereby hinting at how recipients should react to the telling (Burdelski, 2016; Burdelski et al., 2014; Goodwin, 1984; Jefferson, 1978; Kjaerbeck and Asmuβ, 2005; Mandelbaum, 1989, 2012; Sacks, 1974; Stivers, 2008). In everyday contexts, recipients are expected to display affiliation with tellers' affective stances (Jefferson, 1978; Sacks, 1974; Stivers, 2008). However, in the context of medical interaction, Stivers and Heritage (2001) found that doctors did not display affiliation when patients told life stories in response to their questions about the history of their illness. Stivers and Heritage argued that in not doing so, doctors orient to storytelling merely as answers to their history-taking questions. This finding suggests that looking at whether recipients display or withhold affective stance can help us understand their interpretation of the action accomplished through storytelling.

3. The relationship between agreement/acceptance and understanding

Invoking a shared knowledge or mutual understanding works effectively in pursuing agreement. Asmuβ (2011) demonstrated that the practice of proposing shared knowledge (e.g., through the use of *you know*) occurred after co-participants' display of disagreement or lack of involvement. In response, participants normally acknowledged the shared knowledge instead of challenging it. Even when they disagreed with their co-participants, they started by acknowledging their shared knowledge and transitioning to disagreement in a less disaffiliative way (e.g., by using *and* instead of *but* to move from acknowledgement to disagreement). Other linguistic resources such as the *do you remember?* recognition check (Filipi, 2018; Schegloff, 1988; Shaw and Kitzinger, 2007; You, 2014) or the epistemic status check *you don't know?* (Filipi, 2018; Sert, 2013) are also used to invoke mutual understanding in managing disagreement, and in pursuing agreement and shared knowledge states.

To address the question about why invocations of mutual knowledge can work to pursue agreement, CA researchers associate knowledge with morality issues (Asmuβ, 2011; Mondada, 2011; Stivers, 2011). To be more specific, a speaker is expected to display agreement or acceptance of the invited action when s/he has knowledge about the issues. This is the reason why no knowledge claims (e.g., by saying *I don't know*) can be used to refrain from associated moral responsibilities (Keevallik, 2011; Mondada, 2011), suggesting an interactive relationship between understanding and agreement. This study contributes to this line of research by examining the issue of how storytelling is used to establish mutual understanding, which we will show ultimately serves to secure agreement.

4. Research methodology

4.1. Conversation analysis

As has been well established, the distinctiveness of CA lies in being data-driven and in analysts adopting an emic approach to the data (Have, 2007). With respect to the former, CA researchers are advised to follow a radical inductive procedure in which they start by working with naturally occurring data and delay formulating analytical or theoretical understandings

until the very last phase of research. With respect to analyst's emic approach, researchers are required to demonstrate evidence of participants' endogenous orientations to the practice under study before making claims about the underlying social order. In addition, researchers also need to provide analytical grounds to explain why a particular interactional practice (e.g., storytelling) is adopted to perform that particular action in that particular context (Schegloff, 1996; Have, 2007). This approach, as far as we have been able to ascertain, has rarely been taken in examining PhD supervision interactions. Instead, existing research (with the exception of Etehadieh and Rendle-Short, 2016; Nguyen, 2016) has predominantly used more ethnographic approaches which draw on interview data. By using CA methods, we contend and aim to show that a different set of understandings is possible.

4.2. Participants and data collection

The participants include three principal supervisors, three associate supervisors and four PhD students in the Faculty of Education of an Australian university. Two students shared the same principal supervisor while one student did not meet her associate supervisor during the period in which the data were collected. According to the Handbook for doctoral research supervision of the university which was the site for the research, each student is required to be supervised by at least two supervisors. The principal or main supervisor and the co-supervisor are expected to have contact with their students every two weeks while associate supervisors may meet their students less frequently. Associate supervisors typically have 25% supervision responsibility while co-supervisors have 50% supervision responsibility. It is up to the two supervisors to negotiate their specific responsibilities and their availabilities to meet the student they co-supervise.

Data were collected during the first year of the students' PhD candidature during which their research work focused on more tightly formulating their research topic and preparing for the candidature milestone at the end of the first year by drafting their confirmation documents. The PhD education program adopted by the university consists of three milestones conducted every 12 months: the confirmation of candidature, a mid-candidature review and a pre-submission review. As a requirement of the confirmation milestone, PhD students have to submit a research proposal of 10,000 words and give a 20-min oral presentation to a panel consisting of a chair and two independent (academic) panel members. The two supervisors are present but are not there to speak on behalf of the student.

Video-recording was used as the major tool of data collection and audio-recording as a backup. Recordings of each supervision dyad or triad took place once every one or two months according to the frequency of their supervision meetings. At the beginning of each meeting, one audio-recorder and one video-recorder were set up in the supervisor's office where the supervisory meeting had been scheduled to take place. After the recording equipment had been set up, the researcher left the room so as to avoid distracting participants. At the beginning of the initial meetings, the participants did acknowledge the presence of the recording equipment. However, over time, recordings became routinised and the participants either no longer paid attention to the presence of the equipment or they oriented to it; for example, by joking about its presence. These orientations align with findings by other researchers (e.g., Filipi, 2009; Kendon, 1979; Tuncer, 2016).

The data corpus consists of 13 dyadic meetings, and 15 triadic meetings, which make up a total of 28 meetings (with each meeting being between 40 and 90 min long), equivalent to approximately 25 h. Video data were transcribed using Jefferson's (2004) notations with two adaptations: the use of the curly brackets to mark the beginning and ending of overlap between verbal talk and multi-modal features (e.g., gestures and facial expressions) taken from Filipi (2007) and the use of bold font to distinguish descriptions of multimodal features from verbal talk.

Ethical procedures were followed for data collection with respect to obtaining consent and protecting the identity of participants. Noteworthy is that students' consent was obtained prior to that of their supervisors to avoid the potential for coercion arising from cases where students may have found it difficult to refuse participation after their supervisors had consented. As a further note, the participants' consent, and the ethical approvals obtained from the university where data were collected, did not permit the use of visual data that could reveal the participants' identities. Therefore, in this paper, descriptions of visual data are used instead of images. For the same reason, pseudonyms are used instead of real names.

5. Analysis

5.1. What gives rise to storytelling?

In this study, storytelling sequences are identified as sequences of turns in talk-in-interaction in which speakers recount past events or describe hypothetical situations (M. H. Goodwin, 1990; Jefferson, 1978; Mandelbaum, 2012). To be noted is that in our data corpus, storytelling is found in both students' and supervisors' talk. However, in the present paper, we do not include student storytelling because we found that it functions differently from supervisor storytelling (described in Ta, 2019).

Overall, there were 65 storytelling sequences produced by the supervisors across 28 meetings. Of these, 57 storytelling sequences were produced as part of the on-going feedback sequences while eight were produced as side-sequences (Jefferson, 1972) in which the participants talked about matters that were not related to the on-going feedback activities.

In order to address the question of whether storytelling works to accomplish disagreement or to resolve disagreement, our analysis focused on the sequential environments in which storytelling emerged and the recipients' orientations to it. We discovered that supervisor storytelling occurred in the three following environments: 1) storytelling launched after supervisors' recommendations about what the students should do (33/57 samples), 2) storytelling launched after supervisors'

disagreements with students' position on the issues under discussion (7/57 samples), and 3) storytelling launched in response to students' disagreements with supervisors (17/57 samples).

In what follows, we will analyse three samples representative of the three identified environments where storytelling is launched.

5.1.1. Supervisor recommendation + storytelling

The first extract is taken from the eighth meeting between Dave and his two supervisors, Mark and Lucy. The participants are discussing Dave's research proposal. We take up analysis as Lucy is giving Dave feedback about data collection methods.

Extract 1a: Dave 8A – Field notes *(Setting: Lucy, Dave and Mark are sitting at a corner of a big oval table in a meeting room. Lucy is in the middle with Mark on her right, and Dave on her left.)*

1		LUCY:	>I don't think you mentioned yet< that you
2			would keep a journal, field notes,
3		DAVE:	yeah.
4		LUCY:	{field notes, {reflec[tions,
			{((nods)) {((nods))
5		MARK:	[mm.
6		DAVE:	[yeah.
7	→	LUCY:	{it is {an important part of=
			{((shifts her gaze to Mark))
8		MARK:	{((produces multiple nods))
9	→	LUCY:	={action [research reflection.
			{((shifts her gaze back to Dave))
10		DAVE:	[{yeah yeah.
			{((nods))
11		DAVE:	yeah.
12	→	LUCY:	en I kno:w I've just been (.) um a week ago
13			finishing (.) final draft of one of my
14			students, [who did eh <action research>,
15		DAVE:	[mm,
16		LUCY:	[and case study.]
17		DAVE:	[yeah yeh yeh.]
18		LUCY:	a:nd actually his field notes were
19			{just (.) such [rich data.
			{((gazes at Mark, and puts her left hand in
			fanned position and slightly moves it))
20		MARK:	[mm,
21		DAVE:	yeah.
22		LUCY:	{on the learning that he [achie:ved.
			{((shifts her gazes back to Dave))
23		DAVE:	[yeah I understand.

Between lines 1–9, Lucy recommends that Dave use field notes as a data collection instrument. First, she makes a claim about the absence of *journal* and *field notes* in his research proposal (lines 1–2). Next, she repeats the terms *field notes,* and adds a related word *reflections,* produced with emphatic intonation and accompanied by head nods (line 4). These features in the design of her turn serve to emphasise the importance of field notes, which is also evident in her assessment in line 7. In this context, her assessment functions to suggest a course of action (i.e., using field notes), therefore it is an advice-implicative assessment (Shaw et al., 2015). Her gaze in lines 7 and 9 serves to secure Mark's and Dave's affiliation, which is delivered non-verbally by Mark through his multiple nods in line 8, and both non-verbally and verbally by Dave through his double *yeah* accompanied by nods.

Subsequently, Lucy launches a storytelling which is prefaced with the knowledge marker *I know* (line 11). The use of the knowledge marker in this case serves to establish Lucy's knowledge status, thereby arguably having influence on Dave's understanding of the point being made. (This is one of the ten samples where supervisors' story prefaces display their knowledge authority.) Between lines 11 and 16, Lucy introduces the protagonist of the story, one of her past PhD students whose research design was similar to Dave's (i.e., action research and case study). Next, she evaluates the protagonist's field notes (lines 18,19), and the story ends in line 22. (Dave's responses to Lucy's storytelling will be analysed in a later section).

5.1.2. Supervisor disagreement + storytelling

In the second extract, the storytelling is launched immediately after the supervisor displays disagreement with the student. This extract is taken from meeting nine between the student, Cath, and supervisor, Lisa. Cath brings to the meeting the hard copies of Lisa's written feedback on her research proposal. Prior to this extract, she had drawn Lisa's attention to a page in her document. We take up analysis just as Lisa locates the page number and Cath starts talking about her data collection tools.

Extract 2a: Cath 9 – Reflective Diary *(Setting: Cath and Lisa are sitting in Lisa's office, facing each other. They are sitting by a desk, which is against the wall, to the left of Cath, and to the right of Lisa.)*

1		CATH:	**yeah I know interview is the main too:l,**
2			**um I want to focus on di{ary reflec[tive-**
3		LISA:	{((nods & gazes at Cath))**
4	→	LISA:	**[>yeh**
5			**{I know that.**
			{((turns her body to face Cath directly))**
6		LISA:	**I (don't)<- LOOK.**
7		CATH:	**{yes.**
			{((nods))**
8	→	LISA:	**{I::am very sceptica:l of people who do that=**
			{((turns to face Cath directly))**
9	→	LISA:	**=because my experience's against it.**
10			**when I asked students to wr- people to write:**
11		CATH:	**[yes,**
12		LISA:	**[in resea:rch. they've bee:n (.) um highly um**
13			**reluctant to do so.**
14			**>I remember I asked- did a little bit of**
15			**research I did on international student**
16			**identi{ties here**
			{((points down)).**
17		CATH:	**{mm hm,**
			{((nods))**
18		LISA:	**the one about the relationships people have**
			with each other.=
19			**(.)** {((Cath nods))**
20		LISA:	**={.hh and I a:sked- {think I asked-=**
21			{((gazes away from Cath))**
22		LISA:	**=wro{te to sixteen students en I asked=**
			{((gazes at Cath))**
23		LISA:	**=them to write something.**
24			**>I might even have written to you,=**
25			**={I can't remember<=**
			{((headshake))**
26		LISA:	**=but I wrote to a whole lot of students.**
27			**{<and one student actually wrote something>.**
			{((gazes at Cath with index finger pointing up))**
28		CATH:	**{ahh**
			{((head raising up and down like a nod))**

Cath makes a knowledge claim regarding the main data collection tool in her research (line 1) before stating that she wants to focus on her reflective diary (line 2). Here she is actually moving from establishing a shared knowledge state and agreement regarding the interview, to disagreement regarding the reflective diary. This action design is shown to be conducive to social solidarity because it allows maximisation of agreement and minimisation of disagreement (Pomerantz, 1984).

Lisa interrupts in lines 4–5 by acknowledging that she knows Cath's intention of using the reflective diary, and then she displays her disagreement with its use as a potential tool (lines 6 and 8). Here Lisa's turn design is similar to Cath's earlier turn: she starts by establishing a shared knowledge state (through the knowledge marker *I know*), and then displays her disagreement. This turn design is a pervasive feature in this study and is comparable to the practice of step-wise negotiation found by Park (2014) in the context of undergraduate academic advice where participants' negotiations start with acknowledging a co-participant's position before displaying disagreement with it.

Lisa also self-repairs from *I don't* (line 6) to *I am very sceptical* (line 8). This denotes a change from a negative construction to a positive construction, and together with the change in word choice, may suggest a cautious approach in her turn design. Also noteworthy is that Lisa designs her talk about people in general rather than referring directly to Cath's use of the reflective journal. This practice of depersonalising or "going general" has been found to be a common feature of mentors' advice to pre-service teachers after classroom observations (Waring, 2017). For example, instead of saying "your direction giving lacks specificity", mentors might describe the problem in general terms such as "we tend to gloss over the specifics when it comes to direction giving" (Waring, 2017, p. 21). Waring (2017) argues that this practice facilitates achievement of collaborative understanding, and cancels any defensive response as a relevant next action because it avoids judgement, which current practice in mentor feedback suggests is to be avoided (City et al., 2009).

After displaying her disagreement, Lisa then starts to account for it in line 9. Here, she displays her knowledge authority through a claim about her personal experience, and immediately tells a story (lines 10–27) about her experience of asking her research participants to keep a reflective diary. Here, the display of knowledge authority together with storytelling is targeted

at changing the student's understanding about the feasibility of using the reflective diary, and is working to convince the student to change her position.

Subsequently, she briefly tells a story between lines 10–13. The story is elaborated between lines 14 and 26, moving from background information to the story (lines 14–18). In line 20, she displays her forgetfulness through the repetition of *I asked* and her gaze away from Cath. A display of forgetfulness in storytelling may function to make an issue salient, and it normally marks the transition from the background segment to the story climax (Goodwin, 1984, 1987).

After the display of forgetfulness, Lisa continues by giving information about the number of participants she invited to contribute to her research through writing something (lines 21–22). Next, she makes a claim about her forgetfulness (lines 23–25) and then gets back to the number of participants invited (line 26). Between lines 26 and 27, she produces a storytelling climax, with emphatic intonation, which serves to contrast the great number of participants invited with the small number of participants who actually replied to her invitation.

Analysis of Cath's response will be provided later in this paper. For now, we would like to draw attention to the absence of gaps as a common feature of the students' responses to storytelling in our data. This is in contrast to Etehadieh and Rendle-Short's (2016) findings of frequent gaps in supervisory interactions between supervisors and doctoral students of Engineering.

5.1.3. Student disagreement + supervisor storytelling

In the third sample, the supervisor launches a storytelling after the student displays his disagreement. It involves Dave and his two supervisors who are discussing his fieldwork plan. In brief, at the beginning of this meeting, Dave reported that there would be no involvement of the student-led activities as they had expected in the school in which he was planning to collect data. Responding to this news, Lucy expressed her concern about whether he would have sufficient data for his research, and advised him not to book a return ticket for his fieldtrip in case he needed to extend it. In response to his resistance, Lucy advised him to contact the Ministry of Education to find another school where he would be able to collect the required data. We take up analysis as Dave responds to this advice in lines 51–57.

Extract 3a: Dave 10 – It's not enough *(Setting: Dave, Lucy and Mark are sitting at the end of a big oval table. Lucy is in the middle, Mark on the left, Dave on the right of the screen.)*

51	→	DAVE:	=yeah yeah that's- that's good idea, (.)
52			but it it's currently uh I cannot uh
53			communicate with [school=
54		LUCY:	[{NO no
			{((shakes head twice))
55		DAVE:	=but the idea is good particularly if this
56			school will <not cooperate I can (persuade)
57			many time-=
58	→	LUCY:	=look I'll give you an example,
59		DAVE:	yeah,
60		LUCY:	I had a stude:nt in- doing a PhD
61		DAVE:	yeah,
62		LUCY:	completed it a couple of years ago.
63		DAVE:	[mm,
64		LUCY:	[it was in Kuala Lumpur,
65			it was on student attitudes,
66		DAVE:	yeah,
67		LUCY:	to I: C: T: u:se,
68		DAVE:	yeah,
69		LUCY:	{in and out of school.
			{((shifts her gaze to Mark then back to Dave))
			{((right hands moving in and out))
70		DAVE:	yeah,
71		LUCY:	{and I was brought i:n,
			{((two hands moving inward))
			{((gazes away from Dave & Mark until line 74))
72		LUCY:	when {er a colleague left,
			{((headshakes))
73		DAVE:	yeah.
74		LUCY:	>and I looked at it all there, en I sat down
75			and I said {I don't think this is a {PhD yet,
			{((shakes head)) {((gazes at Dave))
76		DAVE:	{yeah.
			{((nods))
77		LUCY:	this is- >your {data is too {thin.
			{((hand moving forward and down))
			{((gazes at Dave))
78		LUCY:	{it's not enough for you=
			{((left hand moving forward and then down))

79 LUCY: =to {really analyse here,
{((two hands moving up and then down strongly))
80 (.) ((Dave leans backward on his chair))
81 LUCY: =>{are you going back to Kuala Lumpur.
{((turns her head to face Dave directly))
82 LUCY: =en he {looked (so) I am [n(h)ow hih hih hih
{((turns to face Mark, re-enacting
facial expressions))
83 MARK: [hih hih hih
84 LUCY: and he wasn't ()
85 DAVE: yeah [()
86 LUCY: [{<he went back>,
{((left hand moving up and backward))
87 DAVE: yeah,
88 LUCY: he went in to add eh
89 {follow-up interviews with the <students>,
{((two hands moving up and then down))
90 DAVE: yeah.
91 LUCY: {<six months after>
{((left hand moving to the left))
92 (.) ((Dave nods))
93 LUCY: {the <last data>,
{((left hand clicking on air))
94 DAVE: yeh.
95 LUCY: where he did interviews with them about <lots
96 of things>,
97 DAVE: yeah,
98 LUCY: >and then he went into <another school>,
99 DAVE: yeah,
100 LUCY: and looked and added a {chapter,
{((hands moving inward))
101 DAVE: mm.
102 LUCY: on teachers known as {champions,
{((hands moving up like
making a quotation mark))
103 DAVE: yeah.
104 LUCY: of ICT use in school,
105 DAVE: yeah.
106 LUCY: to {build um an analysis of what's possible.
{((hands moving inward and then chopping on
the air on each stressed syllable))
107 (.) ((Lucy gazes at Dave))
108 LUCY: =in a school {where there's more=
{((gazes at Mark))
109 LUCY: =open-mindedness {to ICT use.
{(gazes back to Dave))
110 DAVE: yeah.

In lines 51–52, Dave acknowledges Lucy's advice, and then accounts for why he cannot perform the recommended action. This turn design adopts a dispreferred-action format (Pomerantz, 1984), which serves to minimise his disagreement with the advice. Between lines 55–57, he attempts to give a solution other than looking for another school (that is, communicating and persuading the present school), which provides further evidence that he does not agree with Lucy's advice. At this point, she interrupts and produces a story preface (line 58) that projects that she is going to tell a story, and thus functions to hold the floor for the forthcoming extended turn. Prefacing a storytelling by stating a claim about giving an example is commonly found in the data (other similar prefaces include *let me give you an example*, and *for example*). The preface projects that the forthcoming story will serve to clarify or exemplify the point that the supervisor is trying to make. In response to the story preface, Dave aligns as a story recipient through his continuer *mm* in line 59 (Gardner, 2001).

The main story is developed between lines 60 and 109 where Lucy recounts her experience of a former PhD student. Between lines 60 and 72, she provides background information regarding how she came to supervise the student. Between lines 72–82, she directly reports her conversation with him regarding the inadequacy of his research data, and her suggestion about going back to his home country for a second fieldtrip, and then she describes his reaction to her advice (line 82). Here, though her utterance is not fully articulated, her facial expression shows that she is re-enacting (Sidnell, 2006) the student's facial expression from the past. At this point, both the co-supervisor, Mark, through his reciprocal laughter (line 83) and Dave through his *yeah* (line 85), offer a display of understanding.

After the re-enactment segment, Lucy gets back to the telling, and reports the student's second field experience (lines 86–109). Between lines 111 and 120 of the following extract, she reports the outcome of the fieldtrip.

Extract 3b: Dave 10 – It's not enough *(Setting: same as extract 3a)*

111		LUCY:	so then he had {a very good critical=
			{((right hand moving to the right))
112		LUCY:	=comparative [chapter,=
113		MARK:	[mm.
114		DAVE:	[yeah.
115		LUCY:	=to say:{what's going on in this other school,
			{((knocks on the desk on every word she says))
116		DAVE:	yeah,
117		LUCY:	that wasn't going {o:n in the {school where=
			{((knocks)) {((knocks)) {((briefly gazes away from Dave))
118		LUCY:	={the initial data collection took {place.
			{((gazes at Dave throughout this TCU)) {((knocks)) {((knocks))
119		DAVE:	yeah,
120		LUCY:	that makes it {possible in a {way.
			{((knocks)) {((gazes at Mark))
121		MARK:	mm.
122	→	LUCY:	so you've got to- I mean part of it is
123		DAVE:	yeah,
124		LUCY:	that <data collection>, en the evolution of a
125			PhD,
126		DAVE:	yeah.
127		LUCY:	is highly dependent upon what happens when
128			you're there.
129		DAVE:	yeah.
			((111 lines omitted))
240		LUCY:	>yeah that's why [I wondered=
241		DAVE:	[yeah,
242		LUCY:	=if it's enough time.
243	→	DAVE:	yeah and {I:'ll book- I'll book=
			{((right arm moving forward))
244		DAVE:	={my ticket but if I-=
			{((right hand moving around))
245		DAVE:	=if there's {any problem,
			{((right hand pointing up))
246		DAVE:	I can {write you
			{((right hand pointing to Lucy))
247		DAVE:	or I can {change my date to:-
			{((left hand moving down, right hand moving up, and then to the left))
248		DAVE:	{maybe I need some fi{nance=
			{((two hands moving down} {((right hand moving forward strongly))
249		DAVE:	{but it doesn't matter,
			{((two hands moving outward strongly in fannned position))
250		DAVE:	{I'll change my ticket.
			{((left hand waving strongly to the left))

Lucy's hand movement (lines 111) and her knocking (lines 115,117, 118, 120) add emphasis to her telling, which is also displayed through her emphatic intonation. Dave does not show his uptake of the story, but his *yeah*, which is produced with continuing intonation, works as an acknowledgement. In line 120, she produces an increment which does not add new information but recaps what she has just said. Line 122 to line 128 is a post-telling segment where Lucy glosses the general meaning of the story. It is noted that here Lucy's post-telling is also marked with *so*, which suggests a transition to a summary of the prior extended mono-talk (Rendle-Short, 2003). In addition, the shifts from the past tense to the present, and from *he* (referring to the specific protagonist) to a generic *you*, also suggest a transition from particularity to generality. This practice of glossing the general meaning of the story works to pursue Dave's understanding, and acceptance of her feedback and advice.

Dave minimally responds to Lucy's storytelling and post-telling. Therefore, Lucy's pursuit of a proper response continues, and in the 111 lines omitted, Lucy continues to explain why he would not have sufficient data. Between lines 240 and 242, she

gets back to her concern about the duration of his fieldtrip. Responding to this, Dave accepts the advice she has put forward so far that he should change his flight schedule (lines 244–250), and the sequence ends here.

The above analyses have shown that storytelling is launched as part of PhD supervisory feedback activities and works to account for supervisors' disagreeing positions, to support supervisors' recommendations, and to pursue students' agreement with and acceptance of the supervisor's advice regarding what future actions the student should take. In the next section we turn to the analysis of how students react to the storytelling.

5.2. How do recipients orient to storytelling?

A pervasively common feature in our data is that at story completion, recipients never display affective stance, such as mood, attitude or emotion. However, the extracts presented so far do illustrate that the students regularly either simply claim or display understanding in response to the supervisors' storytelling.

In this section, we re-analyse two extracts with a focus on the sequential positions in which the students' claims or displays of understanding are made. The first, extract 2b, is a continuation of the interaction in extract 2a where Lisa disagrees with Cath's intention of using the reflective diary as an instrument. As shown in line 27 of the following extract, Cath responds to Lisa's story by saying *ahh*, thereby displaying her understanding in which emotion, mood or attitude are absent.

Extract 2b: Cath 9 – Reflective Diary *(Setting: same as extract 2a)*

```
26      LISA:  =but I wrote to a whole lot of students.
27             {<and one student actually wrote something>.
               {((gazes at Cath with index finger pointing
               up))
28  →   CATH:  {ahh
               {((head raising up and down like a nod))
29      LISA:  the fact is <people are busy:>,
30      CATH:  yes.
31      LISA:  with familie:s (.) and jo:bs.
32             (0.3)((Cath nods))
33      LISA:  {to ask them to sit down and keep a diary
34             for somebody else's PhD:,
35             (.)((Cath nods))
36      LISA:  <it's {a stress>.
                    {((gazes at Cath with eyebrow flash))
37      CATH:  yes.
38      LISA:  so: {try it if you like.
                  {((headshake))
39      CATH:  {ok(h)ay.
               {((smile))
40      LISA:  {but my guess is you may not find that=
41      CATH:  {((smiles and produces multiple nods))
42      LISA:  ={they are forthcoming=
43      CATH:  [{hhh hh hh hhh
               {((multiple nods))
44      LISA:  =with the data.=
45      CATH:  ={thanks yes [yes.
               {((nods))
46      LISA:               [yeh.
```

In lines 26–27, Lisa describes the outcome of the story where she asked her research participants to keep a reflective diary. Here her talk is produced with emphatic intonation, which serves to contrast the great number of participants invited and the small number of participants who actually replied to her invitation. The story is told in a dramatic way; nevertheless, Cath's response is not oriented to such drama (e.g., by offering an assessment such as *that was disappointing*). She simply displays her understanding through her change-of-state token *ah* (Heritage, 1984, 2017), which is produced with emphatic intonation and is accompanied by a head nod (line 27).

Next, Lisa provides a generalised account about what happened in her story, an action that mobilises Cath's agreeing responses as indicated through head nodding (lines 32, 35) and the falling *yes* (lines 30 and 37) (Heritage and Raymond, 2005). In line 38, Lisa produces a concession by claiming that Cath can try using the reflective diary; however, her headshake suggests that she does not completely support the idea. Her disagreement with the use of this as a research instrument is also evident through her subsequent claim about the possible negative outcome of her choice of diary (lines 40, 42 and 44). Here, she is conceding to Cath's right to make her own decision. Cath subsequently orients to Lisa's concession as signifying a sequence closing through her acceptance token *okay* (line 39) and appreciation token *thanks* (line 44).

The second extract, 1b, is a continuation of extract 1a where the student, Dave, claims understanding at the end of the storytelling.

Extract 1b: Dave 8A – Field notes *(Setting: same as extract 1a)*

19		LUCY:	a:nd actually his field notes were
20			{just (.) such [rich data.
			{((gazes at Mark, and puts her left hand in fanned position and slightly moves it))
21		MARK:	[mm,
22	→	DAVE:	yeah.
23		LUCY:	{on the learning that he [achie:ved.
			{((shifts her gazes back to Dave))
24	→	DAVE:	[yeah I understand.
25		LUCY:	and if you get into the habit every time you
26			go into a class, {you sit down,
			{((nods))
27		DAVE:	yeah,
28		LUCY:	{and idea:lly, you actually type it in,
			{((two hands moving like typing))
29		DAVE:	yeah.

In lines 19–20, Lucy produces an assessment of the protagonist's field notes, showing her affective stance towards it. According to Pomerantz (1984) first assessments normally invite second assessments. However, Dave does not produce a second assessment (in other words his affective stance is not displayed) at this point. After Lucy produces an increment (line 23), which does not add new information to the story, Dave makes a claim of understanding (line 24) indicating his orientation to the storytelling as a pursuit of understanding rather than a pursuit of affiliation through an affective stance. At this point, Lucy returns to the on-going feedback activity: she produces specific recommendations regarding how and when he should take notes (lines 25, 26 and 29). This shows that she treats his claim of understanding as evidence of his agreement with the idea of adopting field notes as a data collection tool.

In summary, the above two analyses show that the students orient to the supervisor's storytelling as a means of pursuing understanding and agreement/acceptance rather than of merely displaying mood, emotion or attitude towards what is being narrated. It also demonstrates that students' displays or claims of understanding lead to achievement of resolution at sequence closing, which suggests an interactive relationship between mutual knowledge and agreement.

6. General discussion and conclusion

Our research findings on storytelling in doctoral supervision align with previous findings in CA that stories are told to serve the interactional business that participants are taking part in.

In analysing the PhD supervisory feedback environments where storytelling is launched, we found that storytelling generally functions to support the on-going feedback activity; that is, clarifying supervisor recommendations, accounting for disagreeing positions, and pursuing understanding and agreement/acceptance. In addition, our analysis has demonstrated that through storytelling, the supervisors provide examples to clarify their feedback and assert their knowledge authority, thus pursuing their students' understanding and acceptance/agreement. The supervisors' pursuit of student responses, and securement of acceptance/agreement is especially evident in post-telling segments. Finally, our analysis of the students' responses to storytelling also shows that the students orient to supervisor storytelling as a pursuit of understanding, and agreement with and acceptance of feedback given. In particular, students routinely display understanding through minimal responses tokens such *ah* (or *oh),* and produce understanding claims (e.g., *yeah I understand*). This practice of responding to storytelling is different when compared to responses in everyday contexts where recipients are found to regularly display their emotion, mood and attitude (Arminen, 2004; Bercelli et al., 2008; Burdelski, 2016; Burdelski et al., 2014; Jefferson, 1978; Muntigl et al., 2014; Stivers, 2008).

As stated above, the function of storytelling in constructing disagreement has been explored in previous research (Georgakopoulou, 2001; Kjaerbeck, 2008). However, our study has uncovered a more general function of storytelling which is to establish a shared knowledge domain, which in turn serves to secure agreement/acceptance. The relationship between establishing mutual knowledge and pursuing agreement/acceptance has been explored in a number studies that focus on explicating the functions of the discourse marker *you know* (Asmuβ, 2011), the recognition check *do you remember?* (Filipi, 2018; Schegloff, 1988; Shaw and Kitzinger, 2007; You, 2014), and the epistemic status check *you don't know?* (Filipi, 2018; Sert, 2013). Our paper contributes to these lines of research by illuminating how mutual knowledge can be established through storytelling, and how establishment of mutual knowledge has consequences for securing agreement or acceptance of advice in PhD supervisory feedback activities.

The research findings presented above have implications for doctoral research supervision. Supervisory feedback is more likely to be productive when disagreement between students and supervisors is well-managed and resolved. Managing or resolving disagreement requires the use of various conversational tools, among which, storytelling has emerged as a useful one. However, this is not to say that storytelling works in the same way in all doctoral research supervision contexts. Given that storytelling is heavily dependent on the specific contexts in which it occurs, further research on supervisory interaction in other doctoral education contexts is required to see whether storytelling is widely used, and what social functions it may

accomplish. As well, power distribution between students and supervisors is often cited as an important contextual factor that shapes the functions of supervision (Grant and Graham, 1999; Knowles, 2007). It would therefore be worthwhile for future studies to examine whether and how doctoral students' storytelling functions in distributing power relations. Finally, attention to the multi-modal features in supervision interactions, which was only just touched on in this paper, suggests a fruitful area for further research. Understanding how multi-modal devices are incorporated into storytelling, and how they work to accomplish particular social actions, will enrich our understanding of supervision practices.

Taken together, the findings uncovered about the function of storytelling as well as the need for further research in the areas just outlined, point to the importance of research that describes the micro details in supervisory talk to elucidate effective practice. Evidence-based understandings emerging from such research can be used to effectively inform and impact the professional development of doctoral supervisors, which is increasingly becoming an area of attention in universities as the numbers of doctoral students continue to grow.

Data availability statement

Permission to make the data publicly available through recordings has not been given by the participants.

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