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Managing disruptive student conduct: Negative emotions and accountability in reproach–response sequences

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ABSTRACT

Building on an ethnomethodological multimodal conversation analytic approach, this paper explores the normative character and interactional embodied organization of negative emotions, in particular displays of anger, in classroom situations in which a student refuses to comply with the teachers' reproaches. We examine how embodied displays of negative affect and ascriptions of negative emotions work as procedures in teacher–student interactions for invoking issues of accountability and teacher authority for managing problematic classroom conduct. The analyses draw on a video ethnographic study in a special teaching class, tracing trajectories of reproach–response sequences in which a student repeatedly contests the moral ordering of classroom relations. It is found that non-compliant student responses are shaped as embodied affective stances through prosody, body postures and gestures that accentuate the student's unwillingness to submit. The results show the dialogical organization of reproach–response sequences and the vulnerability of teacher reproaches to escalation of non-compliant student responses, here indexing aggressive acts as unjustifiable classroom conduct.

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1. Introduction

This study focuses on the normative character and interactional embodied organization of negative emotions, in particular displays of anger, in classroom situations in which a student refuses to comply with the teacher's reproaches. As shown in prior ethnomethodological work on discipline management the local *moral order of the classroom* is reflexively oriented to in instances of problematic student conduct through the teacher's use of reproaches (e.g. criticism, remarks, address terms, irony) indexing the rules of classroom conduct (Freebody & Freiberg, 2000; Macbeth, 1990, 1991; Margutti & Piirainen-Marsh, 2011; Margutti, 2011). Teachers also express their disapprovals through embodied displays of negative emotions such as anger and moral indignation to intensify the seriousness of the reproachable actions (Freebody & Freiberg, 2000; Margutti, 2011; Tainio, 2012). While teachers may display more or less strong emotions in their reproaches a student who responds in similar ways runs the risk of being cast as responsible not only for violating the moral order at hand (cf. Macbeth, 1991) but also for not having learned how to express his/her emotions in class (Tainio, 2012). In this respect systems of accountability indexical of asymmetries in classrooms bring forward different lines of "emotion rules" (Hochschild, 1979) for what counts as justified emotions for teachers as opposed to students (Cekaite, 2013; Tainio, 2012). Yet few classroom studies have examined the role of negative emotions and their moral character in disciplining practices of classroom interactions where students openly contest the moral order of classrooms.

The selected data are from a video ethnographic study in a special teaching class populated with a group of six boys diagnosed with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). In this classroom context some students recurrently engage in aggravated forms of non-compliant moves such as answering back, screaming and talking out loud, openly challenging the teachers' attempts to regulate classroom order (Evaldsson, 2014; Velasquez, 2012). In this sense expressions of negative emotions and stance as a form of problematic student conduct is part of both teachers' and students' everyday classroom experiences. Our foci therefore lie in the in situ use of negative

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emotions as constituting social practices (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2000) whereby the participants accomplish specific social actions and stances (evaluating, criticizing, accounting and the like) toward one another as well as their actions (Goodwin, Cekaite, & Goodwin, 2012). The concerns here are with how embodied displays and ascriptions of anger and moral indignation work interactionally as procedures for doing accountability (cf. Buttny, 1993:86) in classroom activities where teachers (and students) address some forms of conduct as unacceptable, criticizable or reproachable (cf. Margutti & Piirainen-Marsh, 2011). In order to demonstrate how negative emotions are mobilized in the flow of classroom interactions we focus our analysis not only on the sequential organization of affect in (teacher's) reproaching activities (e.g. Macbeth, 1991; Margutti & Piirainen-Marsh, 2011) but also on the embodied actions and affective stances displayed in non-compliant student responses to teacher reproaches.

2. Teacher authority, student accountability and affect in reproach sequences

Although the social organization of classrooms have attracted the attention of much research only few studies have examined interactional practices related to the management of inappropriate classroom conduct that do not primarily deal with the turn-taking of instructional activities (cf. Macbeth, 1990, 1991; Margutti & Piirainen-Marsh, 2011 special issue). Even fewer have focused on the role of negative affect in invoking accountability in classroom instances where students do not comply with or openly criticize teacher authority (Cekaite, 2012; Freebody & Freiberg, 2000; Macbeth, 1990).

In particular Macbeth (1990, 1991) demonstrates how we gain access to basic structures of teacher authority and classroom order through the interactional and collaborative work by teachers and students engaged in reproaches. Macbeth (1991) identifies different forms of classroom reproaches ranging from quiet reproaches (gestures and bodily configurations), named address and remarks in the shape of assessments that establish immediate links to the reproachable, to more explicit structures of if/then-contingencies where the talk itself becomes the "relevant field for producing and reproducing structures of authority and obligation" (Macbeth, 1991:299). In a more recent study Margutti (2011) examines how teachers in their management of classroom order use a conditional-formatted type of reproach that both refers to students' ongoing conduct as inappropriate and as associated with certain undesirable consequences, thus constituting an account for the reproach itself (Margutti, 2011:318). Freebody and Freiberg document a variety of ways in which students' participation is regulated and morally evaluated in classroom exchanges that are "structured interactively as pedagogy" (2000:152). Such regulatory practices constitute students as collectively accountable in respect to the categorical attributes of Teacher and Student that are indexical of the asymmetrical moral ordering of the classroom. Freebody and Freiberg (2000) also found that teachers' regulations of students' problematic conduct were notable by their emotional intensity displayed through a very high volume of voice (see also Margutti, 2011:318). In contrast, Tainio (2012:565) shows the subtle ways in which students and teachers deal with emotional and normative elements in their expressions of criticism. By focusing on prosodic imitations as a form of critical stance she found that teachers and students collaboratively handle criticism in ways that do not violate classroom order or the rules of emotions in the specific setting. Piirainen-Marsh (2011) also shows in her study of high school students how both teachers and students use irony to convey disapproval of disruptive classroom behavior and renegotiate the boundaries of acceptable conduct for teachers and students. In addition, Cekaite's (2012, 2013) work on affective and moral socialization in a first grade classroom highlights the agency demonstrated in children's actions and affectively charged responses to (teacher) talk about emotions.

Two other studies are particularly relevant to our purpose in that they examine the role of negative emotions and stance in invoking accountability and negotiating participation status in instances where the moral order is at stake. These are the works by Buttny (1993) and by Goodwin et al. (2012). Although these studies do not examine classroom interaction, they share with the present study the aim to investigate the ways in which negative affect (displays, ascriptions and avowals) and stance are sequentially organized, displayed, and managed as part of social accountability practices. Our focus on how negative affect and stance is produced in *reproach-response sequences* derives from Buttny's (1993:85–104) classic work on how affect works interactionally as procedures for invoking social accountability and making relevant an event as problematic or blameworthy. In addition, we draw on M.H. Goodwin, Cekaite and C. Goodwin's multimodal analysis of emotion as a situated practice "entailed in a speaker's performance of affective stance" (2012:16), that brings forward the evaluative and embodied aspects of affect in the constitution of everyday family life (see also Goodwin & Goodwin, 2000).

The review of literature on reproaches mainly demonstrates how teachers deal with children's problematic conduct through the use of verbal actions such as named address, quiet reproach, conditionally formatted reproaches, assessments and the like. However, little research is yet available on the role of embodied displays of negative affect in classroom interactions where students do not comply. Drawing on the given outline of literature on reproaches and related analytic frameworks on affect and accountability, this study aims to add knowledge on how expressions of negative affect are multimodally organized through assembling resources such as language, the body and the material environment in reproach-response sequences. Our work contributes to prior research on reproaches by detailing the agency demonstrated in non-compliant student responses within which issues concerning student accountability and teacher authority are at stake (cf. Macbeth, 1991; Margutti, 2011).

3. Method and analytical procedures

3.1. Data, setting and participants

The selected data are drawn from video recordings of classroom interactions (60h) and other forms of documentations of teacher-student-parent interaction collected during a one-year video ethnographic study in special teaching classes located in a multiethnic school setting (Velasquez, 2012). The special teaching classroom in focus in this study was populated mainly with male students, in all six students between 10 and 16 years old. They all had ADHD diagnoses and were excluded from regular classes due to long-term

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