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Children's invoking of school rules in directive sequences with adults at home and school: mobilizing the teacher and school artefacts as authoritative sources

https://doi.org/10.1515/text-2023-0101
Received May 9, 2023; accepted September 6, 2024; published online September 27, 2024

Abstract: This paper illustrates a practice that children aged 6–10 years old deploy in response to adults' directives both in the classroom and during homework completion at home: invoking school rules that contradict the directive. Based on 70 h of video-recorded interactions between adults and children and adopting a conversation analytic approach, the article illustrates that children invoke school rules (i.e., obligations, habits, and expectations regarding appropriate ways of conduct at school) in two ways: by reporting teachers' claims and conduct, and/or by making relevant a school textual artefact in the environment. This practice has relevant consequences on the unfolding of the directive sequence: vis-à-vis the child's invoking of school rules, adults variously modify their directive trajectory by changing the addressee or content of the directive, by mitigating its directiveness, and/or by finally abandoning the directive sequence. It is argued that, by countering the directive with school rules, children present themselves as more knowledgeable on the specific rule than their adult interlocutor, framing themselves as the ones having the right to decide on the issue. In so doing, children locally challenge the asymmetrical authority relationship projected by the adult's directive.

Keywords: adult-child interaction; directives; authority; classroom; family; school rules

1 Introduction

Previous research has extensively illustrated that social interaction is a key site for the (re)constitution and negotiation of interactants' relative positions of authority, and, therefore, for children's socialization into social asymmetries (Howard 2012; Schegloff

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2006). Through mundane conversations with the more competent members of their community, children are introduced to hierarchical social relationships and authority asymmetries (Burdelski 2013; Clancy 1986; Ochs 1988), gradually developing the ability to discern existing asymmetries and take an active part in their local (re)constitution or negotiation in interaction. Social asymmetries particularly characterize children's interactions with their adult caregivers in the two main contexts of socialization, the family and the school, where children are steadily confronted with adults who enjoy a socially and/or institutionally sanctioned position of authority in comparison to them. These 'powerful' adults variously attempt to shape children's behavior through "practices of control" (Goodwin and Cekaite 2018) and especially directives, i.e., turns designed to get someone to do something (Craven and Potter 2010; Goodwin and Cekaite 2013). Faced with adults' directives that impinge to various degrees on their autonomy, children may deploy specific practices to counter the directives and negotiate the necessary courses of action, relying on a variety of verbal, embodied, and material resources.

Despite their relevance to the local construction of social asymmetries, children's practices to negotiate and achieve a position of authority in interactions with adults have been little investigated, with most studies focusing on peer interaction (e.g., Davidson 2022; Griswold 2007). Even though parent-child interaction and particularly directive sequences have received considerable analytic attention, these have been rarely conceptualized specifically as a site for the local negotiation of authority (but see Frick and Palola 2022; Kent 2012a, 2012b; Killmer 2023).

The present article contributes to this underexplored line of inquiry by addressing the following research questions: How do children challenge and renegotiate authority asymmetries with their adult caregivers in directive sequences? How do children mobilize locally available resources to negotiate their positions of authority vis-à-vis their adult caregivers?

Based on 70 h of video-recorded interactions between adults and children aged 6–10 years old, this cross-contextual study adopts a conversation analytic approach to analyze a practice that children deploy in response to adults' directives both in the classroom and during homework completion at home. Instead of complying with the adults' directives, children invoke school rules (which are here broadly meant as obligations, habits, and expectations regarding appropriate ways of conduct at school; Martin and Evaldsson 2012) that contradict the directive. As the analysis will show, this practice is instrumental to the interactional negotiation of children's and adults' respective positions of authority regarding a local matter of concern.

The paper is structured as follows. In Section 2, we review previous studies on the constitution and management of authority in social interaction, with a particular focus on interactions involving children with their caregivers and in peer groups. After describing the data and methodology of the study (Section 3), we analyze a

series of examples from the school and the family context to illustrate how children invoke school rules by mobilizing either the teacher's claims and conduct or the school textual artefacts available in the specific environment (Section 4). In conclusion (Section 5), we discuss the relevance of children's invocation of school rules to the interactional negotiation of social asymmetries and outline the limitations of the study, together with possible venues of future research.

2 Literature review

2.1 Authority in social interaction

Research on language and social interaction has long demonstrated that social hierarchies and individuals' authority are not simply indexed but also and ultimately constituted through the various verbal, embodied, and material resources deployed in conversation (Duranti 1997; Garfinkel 1967; Schegloff 2006). Through interactive resources such as person references (Enfield 2007), requests (Curl and Drew 2008), and (un)mitigated directives (Goodwin 1990), interactants steadily – yet mainly implicitly and incidentally – re-construct and negotiate their respective positions of knowledge and authority.

Within conversation analytic studies, the interactional (re)constitution of authority has been considered in relation to two different domains, namely the *epistemic* and the *deontic* orders of interaction. Specifically, the notion of 'epistemic authority' indicates expertise and entitlement to know about a specific topic (Heritage 2013; Heritage and Raymond 2005), whereas 'deontic authority' indicates the power to make decisions and determine future courses of action (Stevanovic and Peräkylä 2012). Although authorities to know and decide are not necessarily coextensive, they are deeply intertwined and often embodied by the same interactant, with knowledge frequently constituting the basis on which deontic rights are claimed and accepted (Stevanovic and Peräkylä 2012). Particularly relevant in this regard is the notion of 'epistemic access', which refers to asymmetries in depth, specificity, or completeness of interactants' knowledge (Stivers et al. 2011: 13). Typically, speakers having primary epistemic access (i.e., detailed, first-hand knowledge) to a given fact, are treated as the epistemic, and therefore deontic, authority on that matter (Heritage and Raymond 2005; Pomerantz 1980; Stivers et al. 2011).

Importantly, interactants' positions of relative epistemic and/or deontic authority are a matter of continuous elaboration. The 'structural' features of the context (such as the higher authority of the teacher in comparison to the students) are locally (re)produced and ratified, or potentially challenged and negotiated, by

participants in and through the unfolding of interaction (Caronia and Nasi 2022; Heritage and Raymond 2005). In social interaction research, this interplay between structural positions of authority and their local 'negotiation' has been rendered with the notions of *status* and *stance*: the former refers to participants' established and socially sanctioned rights and responsibilities to act as the authority in a given situation, whereas the latter concerns participants' local claims and displays of an authoritative position (Heritage 2013; Stevanovic and Peräkylä 2012). Even though speakers typically act to preserve consistency between status and stance, a variety of local motives and contingencies may result in incongruency between them.

2.2 Authority in adult-child interaction: school and family contexts

In contexts such as schools and families, the roles that participants enact in interaction (e.g., the teacher, the student, the parent, the child) are generally bound to specific authoritative statuses that are constitutive of the asymmetric character of these socio-cultural communities. Adults (e.g., teachers, parents) typically enjoy a higher authoritative status due to the institutional constraints of the setting (as in schools, Macbeth 1991) and/or due to the nurturing and supervising role that is socially ascribed to adults taking care of young children (as in families, Kent 2012b; Liu 2023).

Directives are a well-known practice whereby adults claim authority, both in classroom (He 2000) and in family interactions (Goodwin and Cekaite 2013, 2014). Directive turns typically feature different formats (e.g., declarative directives, bald imperatives, and embodied directives; Austin 1962; Cekaite 2015; Craven and Potter 2010; Goodwin 2006a; Goodwin and Cekaite 2013, 2014; Kent 2012a) and can be accompanied by other "practices of control" (Goodwin and Cekaite 2018) such as threats (Hepburn and Potter 2011) and rule statements (Wootton 1986). Through directives and control practices, teachers and parents ratify and re-produce the asymmetric relationship with students and children, indexing their superior deontic rights compared to youngsters.

Another practice that adults deploy to index authority consists in the mobilization of authoritative sources, which are invoked as co-authors of their social actions (see the concept of *ventriloquism*, Cooren 2010). For instance, parents have been shown to quote teachers (Colla 2023), mobilize material and textual artefacts (Caronia and Colla 2021; Clancy 1986) or invoke communal and divine authority (Fader 2006) to underpin their authority in interaction with children. This kind of practice is also deployed by teachers, as shown in a recent study on their mobilization of 'tradition' as an entity substantiating their authority in the classroom

(Bhattacharya and Sterponi 2020). By mobilizing such authoritative sources, adults manage to "macro-act", i.e., to display that their local actions are not only 'their own' but are supported by other authoritative entities (Benoit-Barnè and Cooren 2009).

Family and school therefore constitute sites where adults' authority is generally assumed and ratified, with children being interactively ascribed to a weaker position. However, children can and do negotiate their authority by adopting specific interactive practices whereby they claim entitlement to knowledge and power.

2.3 Children's authority in peer interaction

Previous research on children's practices for claiming authority has mainly focused on peer talk (Davidson 2022; Kyratzis and Marx 2001), particularly play activities. Children have been shown to enact privileged roles in pretend play (Cobb-Moore 2012; Griswold 2007; Sheldon 1996), use directives (Goodwin 1990), manipulate games rules (Evaldsson 2004; Goodwin 1995), claim possession of physical spaces and valued objects (Bateman 2011; Church 2009; Cobb-Moore et al. 2008; Theobald 2013), and variously assess and sanction other children's conduct (Evaldsson and Tellgren 2009; Goodwin 2006b). Another recurrent practice is the invoking of rules, which children variously deploy to control their classmates' behavior. For instance, children might explicitly formulate an institutional rule to sanction an infringement of the classroom order (Cobb-Moore et al. 2009; Nasi 2022b). In addition to these practices, children might also claim authority by mobilizing authoritative sources that give strength and legitimacy to their displayed authoritative stance – a practice they might have been socialized into by their adult caregivers (see Section 2.2 above). For instance, children have been shown to report the speech of an adult during a dispute (Maynard 1985) or use an authoritative, institutional register (Evaldsson 2007). This mobilization of authoritative entities may also concern textual artefacts available in the "contextual configuration" (Goodwin 2007), such as classroom posters (Nasi 2022a). Embodying authoritative human actants like the teacher and drawing their authority from them (Cooren 2004, 2010), these textual artefacts constitute a precious resource whereby children claim and achieve an authoritative position among their classmates (Nasi 2022a).

In response to such authoritative claims, peer interactants use various resources to ratify or resist the child's projected position of authority. For instance, in the case of directives, the interlocutor can either comply or resist (Goodwin 1990). Particularly relevant to these negotiations of relative positions of authority is the local *participation framework* (Goffman 1981): especially in inherently multiparty contexts such as the peer group in the classroom, children have been shown to form local alliances that back each other's claimed position of authority (Nasi 2022b).

3 Data and methodology

The analysis is based on two corpora of video-recordings collected in Northern Italy between 2018 and 2020, with participants being recruited through the authors' personal and work connections. The first corpus consists of 30 h of video-recorded interactions in two primary schools. The data were collected during a nine-months ethnography and through various video- and audio- recording devices, which allowed the researcher to document both teachers' and children's peer practices (see Nasi 2022a, 2022b). The second corpus was collected in 19 family residences and consists of 40 h of video-recorded homework sessions involving primary school children and their parents. The family data is part of a larger project aimed at investigating children's socialization during ordinary family activities (e.g., homework, mealtime, see Caronia and Colla 2021; Caronia et al. 2021; Colla 2023). To minimize the potential impact of the research setting in the private home space, the video-recording process was self-administered by the parents in compliance with the researcher's guidelines. For both corpora, participants' consent was obtained according to the Italian and European laws regulating the handling of personal and sensitive data.

Beyond their differences, the two corpora have significant similarities that make them comparable as for the interactive practices deployed by the participants, particularly the children. Indeed, both corpora include primary school children aged between 6 and 10 years old interacting with their adult caregivers, either parents or schoolteachers. Furthermore, both corpora are strictly linked to the school setting. While the first corpus was collected in schools, the second one focuses on an activity that – despite taking place in the home – is by definition 'school-related': homework. Indeed, as the examples below will show, homework is an everyday parent-child activity whereby the school moral system enters the family context daily (Colla 2023).

The data-collection and analytic methods adopted were also common, as both corpora were collected through research combining a video-ethnographic approach with Conversation Analysis. Indeed, the micro-analytical instruments of Conversation Analysis are particularly suited to highlighting the semiotic resources whereby participants index authority (Nasi 2022a). As regards ethnographic information, background knowledge of the contexts was key to understanding the relevance of the authoritative sources that the children mobilized in their interactions with the adults (Maynard 2006). Among the differences between the home and classroom settings, a crucial one concerns the participation frameworks: while the family homework interaction is largely dyadic (parent-child), classroom interaction is inherently multiparty. This, as we will show, influences the children's participation in directive sequences.

4 Analysis

The analysis proceeded inductively. After repeated observations of the data, we noticed that in both corpora the children happened to invoke school rules in response to adults' directives. Specifically, instead of producing the preferred response to the directive (i.e., compliance, Kent 2012a), the children invoked a school rule contradicting the adult's directive. They did that in two different ways: (a) by reporting the teacher's claims or conduct, and/or (b) by making relevant a school textual artefact in the environment. We also identified the multimodal resources used by the children in invoking school rules. When reporting teachers' claims or conduct, the children relied on reported speech (Holt 1996; Holt and Clift 2006) or brief narratives; when making relevant school textual artefacts, the children used verbal deictics and/or occurrences of "environmentally coupled gestures" (Goodwin 2007: 55).

We identified 10 occurrences of these sequences: 4 in the school corpus and 6 in the family corpus. Despite their relatively small number, these sequences are worth exploring as they constitute a key – yet underexplored (see Section 2.3) – locus for the interactional negotiation of authority and local power asymmetries between adults and children. Indeed, as the analysis will show, by mobilizing the teacher's claim or conduct and/or a school artefact, the children index their primary epistemic access to a specific school rule, thereby claiming rights to decide on the issue. These epistemic displays accomplished through the mobilization of authoritative sources like the teacher and school texts appear to be effective in variously modifying the adult's "directive trajectory" (Goodwin 2006a): they make relevant for the teachers and the parents to change the addressee or content of the directive, to mitigate its directiveness, and/or to finally abandon the directive sequence.

The identified sequences have been fully transcribed according to Conversation Analysis conventions (Jefferson 2004) enriched with notations for gaze directions, gestures, and body movements when ostensibly relevant for the participants. The transcripts are presented in two lines: the original Italian transcript is followed by an idiomatic translation in American English. For the sake of anonymity, all names have been fictionalized. The transcripts feature two different kinds of arrows pointing respectively to the adult's directive (⇒) and the child's response invoking school rules (→).

The excerpts presented in the following sections constitute emblematic examples that illustrate the ways in which the children in our data invoked school rules in response to the adults' directives both in the classroom and during homework at home. As the analysis will show, through this practice, the children challenge local

authority asymmetries by indexing their primary epistemic access to the invoked rule and thereby claiming superior deontic rights compared to the adult on the specific issue.

4.1 Invoking rules by mobilizing the teacher's claim or conduct

The first excerpt was video-recorded during homework completion at home. Seven-year-old Gaia and her mother are catching up with the exercises the child has not done because she was absent from school. To do this, they are relying on the photocopy of the notebook page of a classmate of Gaia's. This photocopy was provided by the schoolteachers and shows the exercises done at school during Gaia's absence. Faced with a directive from her mother, Gaia invokes the school rules by reporting the teacher's conduct: through a short narrative, Gaia describes the ways in which the teacher typically asks pupils to do the specific exercise at hand.

Excerpt 1: "The teacher makes us do"

Mother; Gaia (seven years old, second grade)

⇒	1	Mother	°più piccolo° Gaia deve star dentro un quadretto.
			°smaller° Gaia it has to fit into one square.
	2		(.) deve star dentro un quadretto.
			(.) it has to fit into one square.
	3	Gaia	n-è u- è uguale,
			n-it's the s- it's the same,
⇒	4	Mother	*((shows the photocopy to Gaia))*
→	5	Gaia	*((looks at the photocopy))*
	6		ma è ↓uguale la >maestra ci fa<
			but it's ↓the same the >teacher makes us<
	7		anche fare due quadrett(i)
			do also two square(s)
	8		(1.0)
	9	Mother	(oke-) inizia però a ridurre un po'
			(oka-) start reducing a bit though
	10		(15.1) *((Gaia continues writing in the same dimension; the mother remains silent))*
	11	Gaia	okahyh. scomponi:, l'abbiam fatto.
			okahyh. decomposi:ng, we did it.
	12	Mother	le unità le hai fatte tu:tte?
			did you do a:ll the units?

The excerpt begins with a directive whereby the mother problematizes the child's writing dimension and prompts her to write *smaller* as to fit the letters into *one square* (line 1). The use of the child's first name (*Gaia*) is marked in this dyadic interaction, and therefore does more than addressing: it is oriented to prompting the child's compliance (Pauletto et al. 2017). The mother immediately repeats the directive, partly recycling her previous words (*it has to fit into one square*, line 2), which further demonstrates her orientation to getting the child's immediate compliance. However, instead of complying, Gaia downplays the relevance of the mother's directive, replying that the writing dimension does not matter (*it's the same*, line 3). Confronted with such a reply, the mother shows Gaia the photocopy without speaking (line 4). This school-provided textual artefact illustrates the ways in which the exercise has been done at school; specifically, it shows that writing has been made to fit into one square, thus supporting the mother's previous directives. From this point of view, the mother's turn in line 4 constitutes a further, embodied and artefact-mediated directive (Caronia and Colla 2021): by mobilizing this textual artefact that validates her proposed course of action, the mother indirectly re-issues her initial directives (in lines 1–2), again making relevant for Gaia to comply. Interestingly, through this gesture (line 4), the mother demonstrates her orientation to the school-provided photocopy as an authoritative source of knowledge and, therefore, of deontic rights.

Once again, instead of complying, Gaia dismisses the mother's directive (*but it's the same*, line 6) and then invokes a school rule; specifically, she reports the teacher's conduct through a brief narrative (*the teacher makes us do also two squares,* lines 6–7). The present simple and the first-person plural object pronoun (*makes us do*) convey Gaia's narrative as the description of an established habit shared within the classroom community. By reporting what she frames as a recurrent teacher's conduct, Gaia invokes her direct epistemic access to school life and rules, making relevant a source of knowledge that the mother cannot contest nor ignore. In so doing, Gaia presents herself as more knowledgeable than her mother on the specific rule, framing herself as the one having the right to decide on the issue. Importantly, the teacher's conduct invoked by Gaia contradicts the mother's directive, conveying it as inconsistent with school rules. Through this invoking of school rules, the child legitimizes her non-compliance based on both the inconsistency of the directive with the school moral system and her own position as the epistemic and deontic authority on the specific matter.

This reference to school rules appears to be effective in claiming the child's right to know and decide. Even though the mother produces a further directive (*start reducing a bit though*, line 9), this turn sounds very mitigated due to the use of the inchoative periphrasis *start reducing* and the adverb *a bit*. In this way, the

mother appears oriented to acknowledging the child's knowledge and authority on the specific matter of 'writing dimension'. The directive sequence ends with this turn: despite encountering the child's enduring non-compliance (line 10), the mother does not pursue the directive sequence further (note that the mother and the child continue completing the exercise together, lines 11–12).

The next excerpt illustrates the same practice, but within the multiparty participation framework of a 3rd grade ordinary classroom. In this class, as it is often the case in Italian primary schools, the 'main' teacher is helped by an 'assistant' teacher, who supports the class during everyday activities and takes care of children with special educational needs. These two teacher roles have different statuses at school, the main teacher being considered the highest authority in the classroom. The sequence in Excerpt 2 was recorded a few minutes before the break. The children are working individually on a task. Shortly before the excerpt shown here, the main teacher has told the children that they have a choice: they can finish the task either now or during the painting class after the break. As we join the interaction, a pupil (Laura) has been tidying up her materials for a few seconds, leaving the task unfinished. The assistant teacher tells Laura to finish the task. Instead of encountering compliance, her directive is responded to by another child (Maruk), who reports the claims of the non-present main teacher through an instance of reported speech.

Excerpt 2: "He [the main teacher] said"

Assistant teacher; Laura; Maruk (both children 8 years old, third grade)

	1	Ass. Teacher	tu hai finito Laura?
			have you finished Laura?
	2	Laura	eh? sì.=
			eh? yes.=
	3	Ass. Teacher	**=[( )** *((points to the washbasin))*
	4	Laura	**=[no!**
⇒	5	Ass. Teacher	allora fini [sci
			then fini [sh
			((points to Laura's photocopy)) [Figure 1]
	6	Laura	[no: voglio finire dopo io.
			[no: I want to finish later.
	7		(0.3)
⇒	8	Ass. Teacher	no (quello) va finito
			no (that) has to be finished
			adesso [però
	9		**now [though**
→	10	Maruk	[NO:, ha detto,
			[NO:, he*[the main teacher]*said,

(continued)

11		(.) o lo finisci dopo, (0.3) **(.) either you finish it later, (0.3)**
		per la- h. l'ora di pittura, **in the- h. the painting class,**
12		(.) o ora. **(.) or now.** [Figure 2]
13		
14	Ass. Teacher	dopo facciam pittura, ti perdi pittura **later we paint, you'll lose painting**
15	Laura	ma:: mi [sta simpatica pittura **we:ll I [like painting**
16	Yan	[maestra io lo finisco adesso **[teacher I'll finish it now**
17	Ass. Teacher	sì meglio adesso infatti **yes better now indeed** *((nods))*
18	Laura	*((tidies up her desk and goes out of the classroom))*
19	Ass. Teacher	*((approaches other children and checks what they are doing))*

At the beginning of the sequence, the assistant teacher finds out that Laura has not finished her task and issues a directive, prompting her to do so (*then finish*, line 5). Laura uses a volitive verb to resist this directive (*no: I want to finish later*, line 6). With this turn, Laura is claiming the right to decide about necessary courses of action. However, Laura's mere will is seemingly not enough to underpin her claim: the assistant teacher soon reiterates her directive in a declarative form (*no that has to be*

Figure 1: The assistant teacher issues a directive telling Laura to finish her task.

Figure 2: Maruk responds to the assistant teacher's directive by reporting the main teacher's claims through reported speech.

finished now, lines 8 and 9). At this point Maruk, who has acted as an overhearer until now, joins the conversation and aligns with Laura in her attempt to postpone the task. She first utters a high-volume, emphatically-stretched oppositive particle (*no*), and then reports the main teacher's words (*he [the main teacher] said either you finish it later in the painting class or now*, lines 10–13). This use of direct reported speech 'presentifies' the main teacher, mobilizing him as an authoritative source that co-authors Maruk's turn. Notably, the simple use of the pronoun *he* is not ambiguous for the interlocutors, a recognition that seems to point to the high authoritative status of the main teacher in this classroom. Through this reference to school rules, and particularly through the use of direct reported speech, Maruk makes relevant her first-hand access to the teacher's words, presenting herself as more knowledgeable than the assistant teacher on the issue. By countering the assistant teacher's directives based on her epistemic authority, Maruk also claims deontic rights to decide on the issue.

Faced with the children's invoking of school rules (in this case, the main teacher's reported claims), the assistant teacher further pursues the directive sequence, yet in a mitigated way. In her reply, she warns Laura of the risk of missing the painting class, which the children usually covet (*later we paint, you'll lose painting*, line 14). Laura concedes that she likes the painting class (line 15), but nevertheless she continues her course of action, not complying with the initial directive: she tidies up her stuff and goes out of the classroom for the break. The assistant teacher, standing close by, does not sanction her. Thereby, the directive sequence is finally abandoned and the previously issued directives (lines 5 and 8) are silently dismissed.

4.2 Invoking rules by mobilizing school textual artefacts

The next excerpts illustrate another way in which the children in our data invoked school rules in response to the adults' directive, i.e., by making relevant a school textual artefact in the environment, such as a school notebook or a classroom poster. This is mainly done through verbal deictics and/or occurrences of "environmentally coupled gestures" (Goodwin 2007: 55). Excerpt 3 below was recorded in the same classroom as Excerpt 2 and features again a multiparty interaction, involving the same assistant teacher and several pupils. The children have been painting on some posters and are now expected to tidy up and clean the paintbrushes. After the assistant teacher issues a directive prompting four children (Melek, Ana, Salam, and Dario) to clean the paintbrushes, a child (Elke) points to a poster indicating pupils' chores (see Figure 3), which is thus constructed as the authoritative source on the matter.

Figure 3: "Who does what … ". The poster displays pupils' appointed chores in the classroom. Different groups of children are responsible for (a) materials (subdivided into *quaderni*, "notebooks" and *matite*, "pencils"), (b) food and beverages (termed as *camerieri*, "waiters"), (c) tidying up (termed as *ordinatori*, "cleaners"), and (d) dealing with the schedule (termed as *segretari*, "secretaries").

Excerpt 3: "No ((points to the poster indicating pupils' chores))"

Assistant teacher; Ana; Elke; Selena; Jane (all children 8 years old, third grade)

	1	Ass. Teacher	chi sono: (0.2)
			who are: (0.2)
			i pennelli chi li lava?
	2		**who cleans the brushes?** [Figure 4]
	3	Ana	gli ordini
			the ones tidying up
	4	Ass. Teacher	**[h?**
			((face expression indexing troubles in understanding))
	5	Elke	[i mate [rialisti
			[the ma [terialists
	6	Ana	[ordini
			[tidying up
	7	Ass. Teacher	[ah sì
			[oh yes
			((goes to the poster indicating pupils' chores))
	8	Selena	i materiale
			the materials
	9		(3.0)
⇒	10	Ass. Teacher	allora (.) Melek Ana Salam
			so (.) Melek Ana Salam
			e Dario lavano i pennelli
⇒	11		**and Dario clean the brushes**
	12	Jane	**n[o::,**
→	13	Elke	**[no:**
			((points to the poster indicating pupils' chores)) [Figure 5]
	14	Ass. Teacher	no questa è ordine scusa.
			no this is tidying up sorry.
	15	Elke	materiali
			materials
	16	Ass. Teacher	materiale, (0.5) sia quaderni che ma- no
			material, (0.5) both notebooks and pe- no
	17		materiali e matite sono Yassin e Carlo,
			materials and pencils are Yassin and Carlo,
	18		(0.7) Jane e Mehrawi i pennelli.
			(0.7) Jane and Mehrawi the brushes.

In lines 1 and 2, the assistant teacher stands up in front of the class (Figure 4) asking the children who is responsible for cleaning the paintbrushes. Some children answer, referring to the categories into which the children are divided according to their different chores (see Figure 3): Ana states that the children who *tidy up* are responsible, whereas Elke and Selena suggest that the *materialists* are in charge of cleaning the paintbrushes (lines 3, 5, 6, 8). In response to this, the assistant teacher

Figure 4: The assistant teacher asks the class who is responsible for cleaning the brushes.

Figure 5: Elke points to the poster indicating pupils' chores.

walks toward the poster that displays children's duties, possibly to check who is assigned to which duty. Thereby, the teacher displays her orientation to the "who does what" poster as an authoritative source in deciding which children are to clean the brushes.

The assistant teacher now stands in front of the poster and consults it (outside the camera frame). Having found the children supposedly in charge of the cleaning task, she announces their names to the class and issues a directive telling them to go and clean the brushes (*so Melek, Ana, Salam, and Dario clean the brushes*, lines 10 and 11). In this case too, the adult's directive is followed by the children's non-compliance. Indeed, Jane and Elke verbally reject the directive (*no*, lines 12 and 13). Concurrently, Elke makes relevant the school rules inscribed in and displayed by a school textual artefact: by pointing to the "who does what" poster through an environmentally

coupled gesture, Elke makes relevant the information it contains, which contradicts the assistant teacher's directive, particularly as concerns the addressed pupils. By multimodally invoking school rules, Elke challenges the directive and presents herself as more knowledgeable than the assistant teacher on the specific rule that is to be applied, i.e., the rule concerning the selection of children for chores.

In the following turn, the assistant teacher repairs her previous turn (Jefferson et al. 1977): she acknowledges her own mistake, apologizes (line 14), and finally announces to the class the names of other children, framing them as the correct addressees of her previous directive (line 18). Similarly to Excerpts 1–2, the child's invoking of school rules has an impact on the unfolding of the directive sequence: vis-à-vis the child's mobilizing of the school textual artefact, the assistant teacher modifies her directive trajectory, demonstrating her orientation to taking into account the child's displayed knowledge on the specific issue at hand, i.e., who must clean the brushes. Yet, unlike Excerts 1–2, in this case the modification of the adult's directive trajectory concerns *the addressees* of the directive: the assistant teacher does not abandon the directive sequence but rather re-issues the directive by addressing other children.

In the final excerpt (4), which is drawn from the family homework corpus, the child deploys the practice of invoking school rules by both reporting the teacher's claims and making relevant a school textual artefact. We join the exchange when nine-year-old Tania and her mother are doing a math problem. After completing a calculation, Tania proposes to write down the result, but the mother disagrees with her. In response to the mother's directive, Tania reports the teacher's speech and indicates the math notebook showing the exercises done at school.

Excerpt 4: "Look here ((shows a page in the math notebook))"

Mother; Tania (nine years old, fourth grade)

	1	Tania	>allora scrivo<=	
			>then I'll write<=	
⇒	2	Mother	=però no. [aspetta.]	
			=but no. [wait.]	
	3	Tania	[consumati] in,	
			[consumed] in,	
⇒	4	Mother	non importa che lo scrivi perché la	[domanda]=
			you don't need to write it because the	**[question]=**
	5	Tania		[sì:::::]
				[ye::::s]
	6	Mother	=↑non ti chiede quello.	
			=↑doesn't ask you that.	
	7		ti chiede gli etto:litri	
			it asks about the hecto:liters	

(continued)

→	8	Tania	eh ma a m:e, la maestra mi dice sempre
			eh but to m:e, the teacher always says
	9		di ^far così (.) guarda
			to ^do it like this (.) look
	10		*^((starts leafing through the math notebook))*
	11		10 seconds omitted: Tania leafs through the math notebook looking for a problem done at school.
→	12	Tania	guarda (0.8) qui::,
			look (0.8) he::re,
			((showing a math notebook page to the mother))
	13	Mother	**[eh]** *((looking at the page))*
	14	Tania	[qu]esto proble:ma, noi gli scriviamo
			[th]is problem, we write on it
	15		cos'è que:sto, cos'è que:st,
			what thi:s is, what thi:s is
			((pointing to a line on the page))
	16	Mother	va bene. allora scrivi
			ok. then write

In line 2, the mother issues a directive telling Tania not to write down the partial result of the calculation (*but no. wait.*, line 2). However, Tania continues her interactive trajectory by proposing the text to be written (*consumed in*, line 3). Vis-à-vis the child's non-compliance, the mother issues a further, declarative directive (*you don't need to write it*, line 4) and accounts for the directives by explaining why there is no need to write down the result (lines 4 and 6–7). Through the account, the mother pursues her directive trajectory, urging the child to comply. Yet, instead of complying, Tania repeatedly invokes school rules. Right after the mother's directive, Tania reports the teacher's words through an instance of indirect reported speech (*eh but to me, the teacher always says to do it like this*, lines 8–9). It is also worth noting that Tania reinforces her claim by presenting the teacher's statement as recurrent (*always*) and addressed to her specifically (*to me*). Similarly to Excerpt 2, reported speech allows the child to make relevant her first-hand knowledge of the teacher's claims, which the mother cannot have access to and therefore cannot contest. Through this instance of reported speech, Tania constructs herself as more knowledgeable than her mother on the issue. Furthermore, she presents the mother's directive as inconsistent with school rules, thus legitimizing her non-compliance.

Immediately after this, Tania makes relevant a locally available and inspectable school artefact: the math notebook. By drawing the mother's attention (*look*, line 9) and leafing through the math notebook (line 10), the child projects the display of evidence for her report. After 10 seconds of research (line 11), Tania finally finds a

problem done at school and shows it to her mother (line 12). Through the verbal deictic (*here*) and the environmentally coupled gesture, the child makes relevant the math notebook and its inscriptions as visible demonstrations of the school rules that she has been verbalizing (see lines 8–9 and 14–15). By referring to the class group as *we*, Tania conveys her membership to the classroom community, thus further emphasizing her own first-hand knowledge and authority deriving from direct experience of school life. Similarly to the previous examples, the invoking of teacher's speech and school textual artefacts allows the child to present the adult's directive as inconsistent with the school moral system. Vis-à-vis the child's invoking of school rules that contradict her directive, the mother finally accepts the child's non-compliance (*va bene*, line 16) and issues a further directive prompting Tania to do what she initially argued for, i.e., writing down the partial result (*allora scrivi*, line 16). Therefore, in this excerpt too, the child's invoking of school rules impacts on the directive sequence, prompting the mother to modify the object of her directive: the mother now urges the child to write the partial result (line 16), rather than not to write it (lines 2 and 4).

5 Discussion and conclusions

Focusing on adult-child interactions both in the classroom and during homework completion at home, the analysis has illustrated a practice that children aged 6–10 years old may deploy in response to teachers' and parents' directives: invoking school rules that contradict the directive. In our data, the children invoked school rules in two different ways: (a) through the report of the teacher's claims (Excerpts 2 and 4) or conduct (Excerpt 1), and/or (b) through reference to a school textual artefact available in the environment (Excerpts 3 and 4). In both cases, the school rules contradicting the directive are made available to the adult who issued the directive: by resorting to reported speech (Excerpts 2 and 3) and narratives (Excerpt 1), the children craft their own claims as accurate and reliable renditions of the teacher's speech and conduct; through the use of environmentally coupled gestures (Excerpts 3 and 4), the children make the school rule inscribed in textual artefacts visible and inspectable to the adult. As the analysis has shown, the children's invoking of school rules has a relevant impact on the unfolding of the directive sequence: after this practice, the parents and the teachers variously modify their directive trajectory, for example by mitigating their subsequent directives and finally abandoning the directive sequence (Excerpts 1 and 2), or by modifying the directive addressee (Excerpt 3) or its content (Excerpt 4). From this point of view, the discursive mobilization of school rules that contradict the adults' directives appears to make a

difference in the local distribution of authority, allowing the children to interactionally establish their right to counter and negotiate the adults' directive.

Indeed, through this practice, the children challenge the legitimacy of the directive, constructing it as inconsistent with the invoked institutional rule of the school. By responding to the directives with school rules, the children claim their primary epistemic access to the specific rule, a kind of knowledge which is precluded to their adult interlocutor. In this way, the children manage to present themselves rather than the adult as the ones knowing best and therefore having the right to decide on the issue. That is, the children lay epistemic claims based on their primary epistemic access, which are in turn instrumental to upholding their deontic stance. In this way, the children aptly strengthen their claims regarding necessary lines of action, challenging the asymmetrical authority relationship projected by the adults' directives, and temporarily re-distributing adult-child asymmetries in relation to the deontic authority.

Importantly, the efficacy of this practice relies on the authority that both the children and the adults confer on school rules, and more specifically to the teachers and the school artefacts invoked. The adults' acknowledgement of the authority of school rules appears evident not only from the way they modify their directive trajectories according to the invoked school rules, but also from their conduct in issuing directives. For example, Gaia's mother is clearly oriented to a school-provided textual artefact like the photocopy when telling the child what to do (Excerpt 1). Similarly, the assistant teacher treats the "who does what" classroom poster as an authoritative source on which to base the decision on who must clean the brushes (Excerpt 3). Orienting to and multimodally invoking school rules to authorize claims in interaction therefore appears to be a practice used by the teachers and the parents as well (see Colla 2023), which suggests that the children may have been socialized into this practice by their adult caregivers.

The findings of this study contribute to our understanding of children's strategies to counter adults' directives and challenge power asymmetries. Integrating previous studies on children's non-compliant responses to adults' directives (Kent 2012a, 2012b), this article illustrates a practice that has been previously documented only in children's peer interaction (Cobb-Moore et al. 2009; Nasi 2022b). Moreover, the study adds to these previous studies by showing how children's invoking of rules is bound to a local mobilization of the authoritative source in which the rule originates or is inscribed, i.e., the teacher and/or the school textual artefact. In our study, the children do not simply state school rules, rather they invoke them by reporting the teacher's claims or conduct, and/or by mobilizing a school textual artefact available in the environment, like a school book or a classroom poster. Notably, the study also illustrates that this practice is cross-contextual, emerging both in the school context and at home during homework. In both contexts the practice of

invoking school rules, particularly the teacher's speech or conduct, is made possible by the presence of more than one adult figure in the social constellation that might be made relevant in that specific occasion: in the classroom, children might draw from various teachers (the main teachers, the assistant teachers), whereas at home the task of homework completion is bound to the adult figures who are more or less directly involved in the activity (the teacher who assigned the exercises and the parent who assists the child during their completion). In this regard, the children seem aware of the fact that the figures whose voice or conduct is reported must be perceived as *more authoritative* than their current interlocutor issuing the directive. In the classroom, this amounts to presentifying the main teacher in front of the assistant teacher (Excerpt 2), while during homework the children evoked the teacher's voice and conduct in front of the parent (Excerpts 1 and 4). Apart from this similarity, a difference between the two contexts concerns the local participation framework (Goffman 1981). At school, the teacher often issues directives in front of several children, who might intervene even though they are not the ratified addressee of the directives (see Excerpt 2). Thus, two or more children might form local 'alliances' to counter the adult's directives (Excerpts 2 and 3). In the context of homework completion at home, these kinds of shifts in the participation framework are rarer as the homework activity is typically one-on-one, involving one parent and one child at a time.

The main contribution of this study consists in shedding light on how children invoke school rules vis-à-vis adults' directives, and showing how this practice impacts the unfolding of the directive sequence in the classroom and during homework completion at home. Clearly enough, the sequences analyzed in the study are not representative of all possible adult-child interactions that may develop in the contexts of family and school. For instance, there can be one-on-one interactions in the classroom, even though they are rather seldom without overhearing children. At home, parental directives might also be targeted at two or more children at the same time, for example in the case of siblings. More broadly, the study findings are based on a few sequences in a relatively small corpus, which cannot be generalized beyond the specific classes, families, and specific activities under scrutiny. Therefore, further research on adult-child interaction is needed to investigate if and how children deploy the practice of invoking school rules in different contexts other than classroom and family homework as well as in other interactive environments apart from directive sequences. These future studies could offer a more nuanced understanding of the set of practices whereby children challenge authority asymmetries, potentially adopting a longitudinal approach to account for children's developing ability to use this and similar practices to support their epistemic and deontic claims.

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