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Apologizing in Elementary School Peer Conflict Mediation

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ABSTRACT

We analyze apologizing as part of the institutional agenda of school mediation in Finland. When primary school teachers intervene to mediate a dispute, the children orient to apologizing as a ritualized, expected, and recognizable action that resolves the matter. Teachers build, step by step, a sequence that, when preconditions are met, results in the parties involved in the dispute producing the uniquely explicit apology exchange "I apologize"—"apology accepted." We discuss the action of apologizing as involving an interdependence and tension between sincerity and rituality. Data are in Finnish with English translation.

Peer conflict is an inherent part of children's everyday lives. In schools, pupils turn to teachers for mediation, and the institutional responsibility of mediating—and therefore, the task of socializing pupils in the culturally expected ways of being a morally responsible person—is entrusted to teachers (e.g., Cekaite, 2013; OPH = Finnish National Curriculum, 2015). Although peer disputes are problems that call for conducting an institutional intervention in and through interaction, apologizing may be seen as the world's most basic and pervasive conflict resolution technique, and it is the desired outcome in classroom dispute mediations (e.g., Niemi, 2012).

A central challenge in the realization of an apology is that it serves two somewhat contradictory aims. On the one hand, it is important for an apology to be *sincere* and hence to be produced individualistically (e.g., Keller et al., 2003). On the other hand, an apology is first and foremost a *ritual* that needs to be performed in specific socially and culturally accepted ways (e.g., Goffman, 1971; Pirie, 2006). From the perspective of conversation analysis, sincerity and rituality require contradictory courses of action. To demonstrate sincerity, participants need to display initiative, agency, autonomy, subjectivity, and a personal inner state fit for the action (Robinson, 2004). This requires accomplishment of the action in personal, differing, and agentive ways that display remorse and facilitate forgiveness (e.g., Eaton et al., 2007). However, to play out ritualistic orthodoxy in apologizing, participants must follow a certain nonpersonal, socioculturally driven, and teacher-led protocol, which seeks to generate interpersonal equality and balance between disputants (e.g., Goffman, 1967; Lazare, 2004). In this article, we analyze how these two aims are intertwined, oriented toward, and managed in and through the sequential organization of teacher-led school mediation.

School mediation as an institutional activity

Teacher-led mediations in primary schools are an interesting combination of legal proceedings, rearing children, and familiarizing them with the institutional procedures of the school (see Heritage & Clayman, 2010). These mediations are thus a significant arena of socialization (Danby & Theobald, 2012; Theobald & Danby, 2017) through which children gain competence in culturally appropriate ways of interacting (Mead, 1962) and learn to experience empathy and manage

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relationships (Burdelski, 2013). School mediation functions as an intervention in which the teacher actively takes part in solving and minimizing pupils' conflicts but also as a frame within which pupils' relations are negotiated to strengthen or weaken their positions in the peer group (e.g., Cekaite, 2013; Evaldsson, 2007).

Teacher-led school mediation is institutional interaction with specific tasks and aims (see Drew & Heritage, 1992). It is typical that achieving institutional aims involves various activity phases realized in a specific order (Heritage & Clayman, 2010). For instance, emergency calls may result in fateful delays of aid delivery if the overall five-phase structure of the call is not followed (Zimmerman, 1984). A structure with specific phases has also been observed in the mediation context. Garcia (1991) has distinguished two phases in adults' mediation hearings: first a phase of uninterrupted storytelling and then a phase of achieving consensus on the resolution. In her study on preschool conflict settlement, Björk-Willén (2018) described the mediation process as consisting of three phases: (a) clarifying the source of the conflict, (b) highlighting the moral order, and (c) verbalizing and embodying the apology. As will be discussed in more detail later, school mediation is also conducted in a series of distinct phases.

Although mediation activities have been the focus of many conversation-analytical studies (e.g., Atkinson & Drew, 1979; Björk-Willén, 2018; Burdelski, 2013; Garcia, 2019; Garcia et al., 2002), few have considered mediation specifically in the context of schools. Therefore, there is a demand for understanding school mediation as a specific type of institutional activity. This article responds to this gap by studying school mediation as a specific type of institutional activity.

Apologizing as a cooperative social action

Apology is a universal and powerful ritual used across cultures after transgression (e.g., Pirie, 2006; Smith et al., 2010). All human action involves a risk of offense, and therefore, to maintain social harmony, a person must have a way of communicating awareness and accepting moral responsibility for offensive behavior (Goffman, 1971). Apologies do exactly this. For society to function smoothly, standard means of admitting responsibility, implicating remorse, and forgiving are essential (Norrick, 1978). According to Tavuchis (1991), the restorative potential of apologizing lies in its "capacity to transform unbearable realities through speech", which restores societal membership for offenders. Apologizing plays a central role in reestablishing the social order, and an adult has an essential role in directing this ritually framed procedure; children participate according to the conditions set by adults (e.g., an apology ritual must be carried out in a "right" way; Björk-Willén, 2018).

Since apologizing is so important, an apology needs to meet certain ritualistic preconditions to be treated as sufficient. Rituals help people learn to regulate their behaviors in interaction to save their self-presentations and self-respect in terms of face (Goffman, 1955). Rituals are part of the appropriate way of being human and suggest equality between people, inform reactions to new situations, and bring civil order to relationships that might otherwise be only instrumental (Seligman et al., 2008). Rituals reenact the ideologies of a broader social group as a performance: They provide a moral framework of right and wrong (Kádár, 2015). Thus, compared to the more generic notion of institutional interaction and its characteristic organization, the notion of ritual involves more specific constraints: It requires an audience, certain times and places, and operates with preallocated interactional resources (Kádár, 2015). Although institutional interactions involve recurrent formal characteristics, it is rituals in particular that require similar, recognizable, and nonpersonal ways of implementing action, as has been shown by Goffman (1967, 1971) and in various conversation-analytical studies on rituals (Burdelski, 2020; Katila et al., 2020; Kazemi, 2019; Rancew-Sikora & Remisiewicz, 2020; Wilton, 2019).

An apology will not facilitate forgiveness and healing unless the victim perceives it not only as ritually correct but also as sincere (e.g., Davidow, 2013). Indeed, genuine apologies have considerable interpersonal potential and power, precisely due to their sincerity. They signal that a transgressor has suffered the painful emotion of remorse (e.g., Lazare, 2004)—even though, due to its ritualistic nature,

the apology is at the same time recognizable and the same for all (e.g., Pirie, 2006). Hence, the way in which apologies are prepared is important. Since apologies index offenses and apologizing conveys personal responsibility for the offense (Goffman, 1971), sufficient preconditions for apologizing are achieved by recognizing the problematics of an event and the responsibilities interconnected to it. Young children are often socialized in apologizing by adults' prompts to deliver apologies, which may not in itself teach children to connect apologizing to feelings of remorse (Smith et al., 2010). However, it has been shown that even 4- and 5-year-olds are aware of the emotional effects of an apology (e.g., makes a victim feel better, Smith et al., 2010).

Earlier research on naturally occurring apology sequences (see, e.g., Drew et al., 2016; Heritage et al., 2019; Koshik, 2014; Owen, 1983; Robinson, 2004; Schegloff, 2005) has shed light on the ways in which apologies serve the interactional functions of politeness and repair. However, less attention has been paid to apologies in those institutional settings in which ritually correct and sincere apologies may be specifically relevant and where their sequential position may shape their institutional function as social actions (Robinson, 2004). In discussing the specific functions of apologies as part of conflict resolution during teacher-led school mediations, this article contributes to understanding of this phenomenon. More specifically, we examine how an apology should be constructed and situated within the activity to be treated as sincere and ritually correct and thus fulfill its role in mediation.

Data and method

The data comprise naturally occurring teacher-led mediations in eight Finnish elementary schools located in five regions during 2019, containing interactions between 17 teachers and pupils 7–12 years old. The total duration of the recordings is 14 hours, and they contain 19 episodes of naturally occurring teacher-led mediations. The mediations took place during the school day and were initiated because a pupil reported a conflict, which the mediation attempted to resolve. Although some of the data have been video recorded, in this article, we focus on mediations that took place spontaneously during the breaks, immediately after a pupil approached the teacher. For both practical and ethical reasons, these episodes could only be audio recorded. The analysis was based on the original audio recordings. All the participants were informed of the study beforehand and had the opportunity to reject video and/or audio recording of the mediation. The procedure for data collection was approved by the University of Helsinki advisory committee of ethical review in human sciences.

The method used in the study was conversation analysis (see Sidnell & Stivers, 2013), and the data were transcribed using the Jefferson notation system (see Hepburn & Bolden, 2017). In this article, we analyzed teacher-led mediation with specific respect to apology. The 19 mediation episodes in our data contain 42 adjacency pairs with the explicit apology terms *anteeksi—saat anteeksi* ("I apologize—apology accepted"). In our analysis, we show how the projection of a sincere and ritually correct apology organizes the entire mediation activity.

Analysis

Through the extracts presented in this article, we demonstrate the structure of the mediation activity, with its specific phases that prepare and pave the way for the sincere and ritualistic apology sequence. We first analyze the sequential structure of mediation, demonstrating the participants' normative orientation to apologizing, the importance of the apology sequence as the aim of the institutional activity, and how the apology is projected throughout the mediation activity. Second, we analyze how problems in achieving the status of the relevance of apologizing (see Robinson, 2004) were projected and how apologies insufficient in sincerity and rituality were dealt with. Overall, we demonstrate that apologizing is dependent on its preparatory activities and that all the parties involved in mediations orient to apologizing throughout the interaction.

Sequential organization of mediation interaction

Extract 1 illustrates the sequential organization of the mediation activity as it typically unfolds. In this case, the institutional agenda is achieved without difficulty. Such mediation typically involves three phases, which are: (a) reporting the incident phase (Extract 1a), (b) confession phase (Extracts 1b–c), and (c) apology phase (Extracts 1d–e). Subsequently, we consider each of these three phases separately.

Report

The participants initiate the mediation activity by reporting their observation of an event as problematic. Just before Extract 1, a pupil (Eki) made a confession and apologized to another pupil (Aki) for his own problematic behavior. As the interaction continues, the teacher (Tea) moves on to resolve another conflict between the same pupils.

Extract 1a

```
92 Eki:    >↑Ja   sitteh [Aki ö↑<-      ]
             and  then   [1nameM]
             and then Aki
93 Tea:                 [Oliko        m]uutah?
                         be-pst.3sg-q else
                         anything else
94         (0.4)
95 Eki:    >#E- se      joo# (0.2) Aki     vielä (0.3) öö potki
                dem3.sg yes       [1nameM] prt            kick-pst.3sg
            he yes Aki kicked
96         mua     tuol         sisälläki<.
           1sg.par dem2.loc-ade in-loc-ade-cli
           me indoors too
97         (1.3)
98 Aki:    <En     potk[assu>.]
           neg.1sg kick-ppc
           I didn't kick [you]
99 Eki:                [Pot   ]kasit tohon        noin     mua     jalalla  ku
                        kick-pst.2sg dem2.loc-ill dem3.man 1sg.par foot-ade when
                        you kicked me there like that with your foot when
100        mä  olin       pukemassa.
           1sg be-pst.1sg dress-3inf-ine
           I was getting dressed
101        (0.5)
```

At the beginning of Extract 1, Eki reports a problematic incident (line 92). However, the teacher treats his self-selection as illegitimate: She begins a turn in overlap with Eki's turn to reallocate the turn to him (line 93). As the new legitimate mediation phase is initiated by the teacher, Eki reinitiates the reporting activity (lines 95–96), which is followed by Aki denying the accusation (line 98). In doing so, Aki follows the interactional pattern of responding to an accusation with a denial (Atkinson & Drew, 1979; Pomerantz, 1978). This sequence reflects the children's tendency to suspend the normal rules of preference organization to emphasize the severity of the transgression (Hepburn, 2020). Following Aki's rejection, Eki recycles the accusation, providing more details—and hence more evidential value—to his story (lines 99–100). The details (about where, how, when) that Eki provides respond to Aki's claim that kicking never happened. Eki's behavior can be accounted for by Pomerantz's (1978) notion that the person making an accusation must be able to offer a warrant for it.

As the extract displays, the mediation activity is initiated by the teacher's management (line 93). During the reporting of the incident phase, the pupil reports a problematic event by accusing his fellow pupil to have made an offense. This activates the participants to morally evaluate their actions and prepares the accused for exercising the expected remorse and sincerity in the expected apology. Based on the reports, the teacher evaluates and manages the disputants' culpabilities to lay the groundwork

for the necessary confession(s). These findings are consistent with what has been observed in preschools, where all the children involved in a conflict are given the opportunity to verbalize their own version of the events to unravel what has happened (Cekaite, 2012), which is a primary activity in reestablishing the social order (Björk-Willén, 2018).

Confession

After the accusation has been made, the teacher's next institutional goal is to pursue a confession from the alleged offender. In this case, the teacher does this by asking Aki whether his kicking was intentional (lines 102–103).

Extract 1b

```
102 Tea:   ↑Ootko    potkassu=oliko        vahinko= oliko
           be.2sg-q kick-pcc be-pst.3sg-q accident be-pst.3sg-q
           did you kick was it an accident was it
103        tahalla[an?]
           intention-man-pos3
           intentional
104 Eki:          [Ta ]hallaa.=
                   intention-man-pos3
                   intentional
105 Aki:   =Mistä    sinä voit    tietää    o[nko se,  ]
            comp-ela 2sg  can.2sg know-1inf be-q  dem3.sg
            how do you know if it is
106 Tea                                       [No  kerro]ppa        sinä Aki.
                                               prt tell-imp.2sg-cli 2sg [1nameM]
                                               well Aki tell [us]
107        (0.2)
108 Aki:   ↑Mum    mielestä .hhh kun  toi .hh (0.2) Eki
           1sg.gen mind-ela      when dem2.sg       [1nameM]
           I think because Eki
109        (0.2) nihhh (0.2) yleensä eh- se      alkaa
                 prt         usual-man   dem3.sg start-1inf
           so usually he starts
110        ihan sisält asti .hhhh kun  Eki      niinkunhh
           prt  in-abl until      when [1nameM] comp
           already inside when Eki just like
111        (0.4) se al- ↓°esh ä-°↓ se      alkaa (0.7)
                 dem3.sg           dem3.sg start-1inf
           he starts
112        väittelemään   jutuista m-   mistä    se      ei      ite
           argue-3inf-ill issue-pl-ela  comp-ela dem3.sg neg.3sg self
           arguing about things he doesn't
113        edes alun perin itekkää  tiedä sit  se      alkaa
           prt  initially  self-cli know  then dem3.sg begin.3sg
           even know about then he starts
114        (0.2) .hhh niinku jankuttamaan  siitä (0.3)
                       comp   harp-3inf-ill dem3.sg-ela
           just like harping on about it
115        #ä- ää# kaikkee        ja  mä  tiedän   ettei        saa
                  everything-par and 1sg know-1sg comp-neg.3sg get.1inf
           about everything and I know that
116        p[otka         ]sta↑ [mut silti mut     ]tah .hhh,=
           kick-pas             but still but
           kicking is not allowed but still but
117 Eki:    [>Meil   oli<,]
             1pl-ade be-pst
             we had
118 Tea:                      [↑Hei shh shh shh↑,]
                               prt
                               hey shh shh shh
119 Aki:    =en      jaksa   vaan sitä       [ettäh,]
             neg.1sg can.3sg just dem3.sg-par that
             I'm just fed up with it
```

The teacher pursues a fact related confession "did you kick" (line 102), subsequently presenting two alternatives: "was it an accident" or "was it intentional" (lines 102–103). In making relevant a response containing a repeat of one of these alternatives (Drake, 2021), the teacher focuses on the notion of intentionality as a key criterion for establishing whether or not the incident was an actual moral offense. If the incident was just a misfortune then no moral fault should be attributed to it, but if it was intentional then it could be assessed as blameworthy and apology-relevant. Eki answers the question addressed to Aki, claiming to know that Aki's action of kicking was intentional. In doing so, Eki intensifies the blameworthiness of Aki's action (line 104). Aki instantly problematizes Eki's claimed knowledge about his intentions (line 105) with a challenging counterquestion (Jenks et al., 2012), thus defending himself against the accusation. Such denying of intentionality and culpability appears as a key part of what Robinson (2004) described as a dispreference for apologizing when there is "nothing" to apologize for.

In overlap with Aki's turn, the teacher reallocates the response to Aki (line 106), shifting the course of interaction: She does not continue the discussion about Eki's knowledge with conditions imposed by Aki but continues to determine Aki's culpability. Aki's response (lines 108–116, 119) is both a counteraccusation citing the provocation that he was subject to and an excuse for the action he is accused of, and it contains evidence of his culpability. His offense-related action (acceptance of the blame) can be concluded from the turn: "I know that kicking is not allowed but still" (lines 115–116). This could be construed as an implicit confession, and his use of excuse may be to reduce personal responsibility. However, the teacher does not treat it as sufficient in the sense of confessing. As the following extract illustrates, she prompts an explicit confession by producing a pre-expansion for the confession turn, which we refer to as "the confession prompt" (line 120).

Extract 1c

```
120 Tea:                                    [Pot   ]kasiks  sä  siis?
                                             kick-pst.2sg-q 2sg prt
                                             so did you kick him
121         (0.3)
122 Aki:    Väh- (0.3) jo[oo.    ]
            little     yes
            a litt- yes
123 Tea:                [>No m-<] <VÄHÄn:>?
                         prt      little
                         a little
124         (0.6)
125 Aki:    J[ooo.]
            prt
            yes
```

The teacher's confession prompt (line 120) is designed to display the evidential value of an offense-related action. The particle *siis* ("so") indicates that the teacher concludes from the previous turn that Aki has committed an offense, and the shift to the confession prompt is consequential to the interactionally provided evidence. Next follows Aki's turn, in which he first minimizes his culpability *väh-* ("a litt-"), which is cut short (line 122). After a minimal pause, his explicit confession follows. Even though already "a little" can be interpreted as a confession, the teacher intervenes with high volume and rising prosody, producing a first pair-part of a postexpansion sequence that treats the action of minimizing culpability as problematic (line 123). The teacher's turn makes the confession-related response relevant, and Aki indeed produces a second pair-part (line 125). In that, he displays his agreement with the teacher treating his earlier action as problematic. As Aki's action of minimizing his culpability illustrates, the level to which culpability is confessed has consequences for the forthcoming apology. Therefore, we can conclude that during the confession phase, Aki orients toward the expected apology, trying to modulate the offense that the forthcoming apologizing concerns. However, he abandons this course of action and self-corrects it (line 122), producing the explicit confession,

which is a clearly stated and ritually correct confession. Regardless of his self-correction, the teacher intervenes, which displays the significance of a ritually correct confession that covers culpability to its full extent.

The confession phase and its aim of establishing the explicit confession, by which the offender eventually recognizes the offense in its entirety, is crucial for the relevance of the forthcoming apology. Following the same logic, by minimizing the fault of the offense, the offender actually prepares a nonapology, in which the nature of the offense is blurred, the reference to the apology is uncertain, and apologizing concerns a specific component rather than the entirety of the offense (Kampf, 2009). Since apologizing is implemented through the confession phase, the teacher recycles the confession prompt, pursuing an explicit confession before treating the pupil's action as sufficient for preparing the forthcoming apology sequence and initiating the ritualized shift to the apology phase. The explicit confession turn marks how offenses are made relevant to the participants for apologizing, which communicates awareness and acceptance of moral responsibility for offensive behavior. In doing so, the action of confessing prepares and projects the expected sincerity of the apologizing, while at the same time marking the ritualized shift to the apology phase. Here the nature of school mediation differs from what has been observed in preschool (Björk-Willén, 2018), where reestablishing the social order does not involve a preference for explicit confessions. In the elementary school, then again, explicit confessions enable the teacher to shift unproblematically to a pre-extension for the apology sequence, which we refer to as "the apology prompt" (line 126).

Apology

As the pupil has produced an explicit confession, the status of the relevance of apologizing is achieved, and the teacher moves on to the apology prompt (line 126).

Extract 1d

```
126 Tea:     [Jos ] potkasee  se      on    ↑aina   vää[rin=mi       ]tä teeth,
              if    kick.3sg  dem3.sg be-3sg always wrong   what         do.2sg
              if you kick it's always wrong what do you do
127 Eki:                                                  [↑Meil   oli↑,]
                                                           1pl-ade be-pst
                                                           we had
128          (0.3)
130 Eki:     meil    oli    yks m[uu:?]
             1pl-ade be-pst one else
             we had one more
131 Tea:                         [Odo ]ta      vielä (0.3) Ak↓i    mitä sanot.
                                  wait-imp.2sg still      [1nameM] what say.2sg
                                  wait a moment Aki what do you say
132          (0.4)
133 Aki:     Aa↓nt:eeksih,
             apology
             I apologize
134          (0.5)
135 Eki:     >Saat    a↓nte°.ek°<
              get.2sg apology
              apology accepted
```

The teacher completes the confession phase with norm setting that verifies the confessed action as wrong. Without a delay, the teacher produces an apology prompt (line 126, "what do you do"). The prompt reflects "the preference for self-direction" (Hepburn, 2020) in which an adult socializes a child by launching an open question, thereby giving the child room to come up with a morally relevant response. This prompt only presupposes that something has to be done, without explicitly verbalizing the need to apologize. Also, the formulation has features of solution-focused questions that do not readily generate solutions, which are the preferred question type in adult mediations (Stokoe &

Sikveland, 2016). However, to react to the teacher's apology prompt in the expected way, the pupils must have shared knowledge about the expected action trajectory. As the following conversation (lines 127 and 130) shows, this is not the case.

Eki does not comply with the teacher's action trajectory and tries to initiate a new reporting of the incident (lines 127–130), which the teacher interrupts by recycling the apology prompt, which is elaborated from "what do you do" to "what do you say" (line 131). This prompt is followed by the pupils producing a mutual apology sequence (lines 133 and 135). With her implicitly fine-tuned apology prompt (line 126), the teacher lets the pupils realize the ritualistic place for the apology sequence, as if they intentionally took the initiative to perform it. This reflects a sincere state for apologizing. This implicit turn-design is associated with two tendencies in child-rearing that have been observed in Western cultural settings: (a) parents employ indirect discursive strategies to invoke a child's accounts of their actions and to position them as a moral agent (Sterponi, 2004), and (b) parents secure a child's compliance through "self-regulation" using initial question formats (Goodwin & Cekaite, 2018).

Aki's first pair-part of the apology sequence ("I apologize," line 133) makes relevant the second pair-part of the sequence as a response, and—after a slight delay—it follows ("apology accepted," line 135). Apologizing projects an apology-relevant response by establishing a normative constraint that the response has to be provided and positioned in the first transition-relevance place within the apology (Robinson, 2004). The "I apologize—apology accepted" format shows that the apology was expected and relevant, thus acknowledging the apologizer's responsibility for the forbidden action. Furthermore, the apology opens a dedicated space for its claim to have caused offense and for the acceptance of the apology ("apology accepted"). In our data from the school setting, the expected response indicates forgiveness only formally without mitigating the nature, type, or level of action. Thus, unlike in the study by Robinson (2004), in which a preferred response to an apology mitigates or undermines the apology's claim to have caused offense, in our data, the second pair-part of the apology sequences ("apology accepted") lacks these informal features, actually endorsing and highlighting the apology's claim to have caused offense.

As shown in Extract 1, the participants of a teacher-led school mediation treat apologizing as a central measure for achieving the aim of mediation, the conflict resolution. As our analysis shows, the mediation activity proceeds, as the teacher orients increasingly to the expected apology. Also, the pupils' actions prepare for and modulate (e.g., in terms of to which extent the culpability is confessed) the forthcoming apology. The expectation of the forthcoming apology sequence, as embedded in school mediation, is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Accountable progression of mediation activity.

In mediations, the first necessary phase is the reporting the incident phase (Extract 1a) in which the participants' actions of making offenses relevant pave the way for the apology. In the confession phase (Extracts 1b–c), the teacher pursues the confession turn(s) in relation to the earlier reports, which prepares for the apology by the person admitting moral responsibility for offensive behavior. This is to project remorse, moral agency, and sincerity into the forthcoming apology. The apology phase is initiated by the teacher's apology prompt (Extract 1d). The conflict is treated as settled, as the apology sequence is complete.

The critical nature of confession

As the previous extract indicated, if the institutional agenda of the mediation is to be achieved, it has to be done cooperatively. Achieving a sufficient confession enables an unproblematic shift to the apology phase. As further evidence of the normative nature of the aforementioned three-phase structure, we

next consider a case in which the phases do not proceed in the ways expected. The following example illustrates a problematic case, in which the actual events and culpabilities remain unexplored due to the pupil's resistance to confessing. Extract 2 demonstrates the consequences of not having achieved the status of the relevance of apologizing.

Missing confession

Extract 2 has three participants: a teacher (Tea) and two pupils (Zia and Kalle), who are the stakeholders of the conflict. Before the extract, Kalle has confessed that he has called Zia stupid and hit her. Kalle has accused Zia of gossiping about him, laughing at him, hitting, kicking, and following him. Reporting the incident phase has been generally prolonged, as Zia resists any sort of confession she should make, repeatedly. In the following, the teacher is reproducing confession prompts.

Extract 2a

```
182 Tea:    Oletko   lyönyt   [tai] potki[nu?]
            be.2sg-q punch-ppc or   kick-ppc
            have you hit or kicked him
183 Zia:                      [E:n]      [En?]
                               neg.1sg    neg.1sg
                               I haven't  I haven't
184 Zia:    K[u     se-]
            because dem3.sg
            because he
185 Tea:     [Seur     ]annut[h?]
              follow-ppc
              followed
186 Zia:                     [E ]nhh koska   mä   en-     en     leiki    edes hänen  ka-
                             neg.1sg because 1sg neg.1sg neg.1sg play.3sg prt 3sg.gen prt
                             I haven't because I don't even play with him
187 Zia:    [>Mä oon    aina   mun     kaverin<,]
             1sg be.1sg always 1sg.gen friend-gen
             I'm always with my friend
188 Tea:    [Joo: mut ootko                     ] menny peräs[sä. ]
             yes  but be.2sg-q                    go-ppc after-ine
             yes but have you followed
189 Zia:                                                      [M- m]m
                                                              prt
                                                              no
190         (0.6)
191 Zia:    Mä  oon   aina .hhh m- veljen     kaa  ja kavereitten    kaa  aina
            1sg be.1sg always      brother-gen prt and friend-pl-gen prt  always
            I'm always with my brother and with my friends always
192         mennään k↑otiin  ja  tullaan   koulu↓un   kahe[°staan°.   ]
            go-pas  home-ill and come-pas  school-ill two-ela-man-pos3
            we go home and come to school together
```

Based on the earlier accusations that Kalle has made, the teacher reformulates the confession prompts for Zia (lines 182, 185, 188). Nevertheless, Zia does not implement the expected action trajectory of confessing (lines 183, 184, 186, 187, 189, 191, 192) and even tries to offer evidence for her innocence (lines 186–187). The teacher deals with this using minimal postexpansion and recycles the question based on another accusation (line 188). Again, Zia denies blame (line 189) and recycles the same evidence. The problematic character of initiating the action of apologizing makes accounting practice relevant, which provides participants with resources for moral evaluation and for "doing blaming" in that they manage the ascription of responsibility (Pomerantz, 1978). Doing blaming is a complex project, which is negotiated in and through establishing the status of the relevance of apologizing (see Atkinson & Drew, 1979).

In mediations, this kind of resistance to comply with the teacher's directing action is common to some extent, but this kind of perseverance is rare. However, it does not prove that the accused is innocent. This leaves the mediation in a stalemate, in which the status of the relevance of apologizing and the institutional agenda of mediation remain unachieved. Hence, confessions play a major role in clarifying the nature of the offense, recognizing the offense in its entirety, achieving the status of the relevance of apologizing, and resolving the conflict. Problems arise if pupils do not comply with the teacher's directing action (i.e., do not confess), and this problematic nature is reflected in the apology phase, as seen in the following. Previous research has observed that children have various resources to resist the teacher's explicit socialization practices and exploit them for their own purposes (Cekaite, 2020; Danby & Theobald, 2012; Evaldsson & Karlsson, forthcoming; Theobald & Danby, 2017). However, as Extract 1 displayed, the teacher's socialization practices also offer pupils an arena to show one's socialization to the school's rules.

Resistance to the action of apologizing

Failures to proceed along the expected action trajectory within the confession phase projects problems into the following interaction, especially for achieving the expected apology sequence. Despite the missing confession, in Extract 2, the teacher moves forward to the apology prompt (lines 193–194).

Extract 2b

```
193 Tea:                                                    [No  yks rat]kasu
                                                           prt one solution
                                                           well one solution
194         on     tähän       se      et ↑sinä pyydät  a↓nteeksi Kalleh?
            be.3sg dem1.sg-ill dem3.sg that 2sg ask.2sg apology  [1nameM]
            to this is that you apologize Kalle
195         (1.2)
196 Tea:    ↑NYTh,
             prt
             now
200         (0.8)
```

As the teacher is unable to prove Zia's culpability, she states that one solution is that Kalle apologizes (lines 193–194). Since the preceding problematic confession phase (Extract 2a) prevents implicit fine-tuning of the apology prompt (Extract 1d, lines 126, 131), the teacher deals openly with the pupils' resistance and explicitly requests one of them to apologize. This in turn leads to an imbalance between the disputants—currently, only Kalle has been requested to apologize, as he is the only one that has confessed to any accusations. Moreover, the teacher's way formulating the solution as "one" optional solution displays preference for "self-direction" (Hepburn, 2020) in that the child apparently has the opportunity to choose between this solution and other possible solutions that they might come up with. In this way, initiative and sincerity can become part of the expected apology. A subsequent long delay (line 195) indicates that the allocated speaker treats the course of action as problematic. The teacher recycles the apology prompt (line 196), demanding that Kalle apologize and using the time reference "now" as a directive (Craven & Potter, 2010). The directive is produced with a loud voice, which reflects on a progressive loosening of orientation to the pupil's self-direction and freedom of choice. This turn design indicates that the teacher's previous turn (lines 193–194), which had a suggestion-like character, implying that the pupils could choose between various alternative ways of proceeding, was actually a demand. Again, a relatively long pause follows (line 200). However, by remaining silent, the teacher exerts pressure on Kalle to produce the expected apology, and subsequently, the apology sequence follows.

Extract 2c

```
201 Kalle:  °↑A↓n↑teeks°,=
              apology
              I apologize
202 Zia:    =°↑Saat    a↓n↑teeks° [mut-],
              get.2sg apology     but
              apology accepted but
203 Tea:                         [#SÄ ] ET     Enää °m-° ha:uku tai
                                  2sg   neg.2sg adv      diss   or
                                  no more dissing or
204         nimittele  ketään  etkä        se:uraa#?
            call names anybody neg.2sg-cli follow
            name-calling or following
205         (1.0)
206 Zia:    Jo  kun     se ö[öö-]
            yes because dem3.sg
            yes because he
```

Despite his earlier resistance, Kalle complies with the teacher's directing action and in a soft voice produces the apology (line 201), which is treated as ritually correct, as the second pair-part follows instantly (line 202). The problematic nature of the situation becomes apparent when, immediately after producing the apology's second pair-part, Zia tries to initiate a new report, indicating that she does not treat the conflict as being resolved. The following *mut* ("but") (line 202) indicates that not everything in the earlier communication went as expected (Sorjonen, 1989). Furthermore, it indicates that not only teachers monitor and intervene in apologizing actions; pupils also do. This highlights how Zia persistently uses a range of resources to indicate Kalle's culpability and her own innocence. Nevertheless, the teacher produces an overlapping norm setting turn (lines 203–204), in which she sets prohibitions for Kalle concerning the issues he apologized for. Therefore, the action of norm setting as a postexpansion for an apology sequence can be seen as highlighting the nature of apologizing: As the wrongdoings are apologized for, those should not be carried on anymore. In such a way, the teacher produces the closure of the first apology sequence. Once again, after the teacher's postexpansion, Zia tries to recycle a new reporting the incident phase (line 206), but as illustrated in the following extract, the teacher produces a new apology prompt addressed to Zia.

Extract 2d

```
207 Tea:                    [Ja ] SIn[ä? ]
                             and  2sg
                             and you
208 Zia:                             [>Jo]o mä  pyy↑dän  an↓teeks siitä       koska
                                       yes  1sg ask.1sg  apology  dem3.sg-ela because
                                       yes I apologize because
209         hän ymmärs                mun    väärin että mä °pupuin      [hänestä°<.]
            3sg misunderstand-pst.3sg 1sg-gen wrong that 1sg talk-pst.1sg 3sg-ela
            he misunderstood that I had talked about him
210 Tea:                                                                  [No py     ]ydä
                                                                          prt ask-imp.2sg
                                                                          well apologize
211         anteeks[i häneltä.]
            apology   3sg-abl
            to him
212 Zia:           [°<↑A↓n↑tee]k[si>°?]
                    apology
                    I apologize
213 Tea:                        [#Ka  ]tso   <si:l[miin>#. ]
                                 look-imp.2sg eye-pl-ill
                                 look [him] in the eye
```

The teacher's apology prompt's design is implicit (line 207). She uses high volume and rising intonation to indicate that Zia should context-dependently know what to do. Instead of producing the conventional first pair-part of the apology sequence "I apologize," Zia provides a less ritualistic turn. She apologizes "because Kalle had misunderstood her" (lines 208–209). With this framing, she actually produces a nonapology in which the design of the apology turn reduces or minimizes the speaker's fault, blame, or responsibility; in this case, she attributes it to the other party (Kampf, 2009). Zia uses the tactic of blurring the nature of the offense, which is consistent with her earlier actions regarding the teacher's confession prompts. The teacher does not treat Zia's conduct as a ritually correct apology. Instead (lines 210–211), she recycles the apology prompt. Thereafter Zia produces another apparent attempt at an apology (line 212), but the teacher does not treat it as ritually correct either: In overlap with Zia, the teacher commands her to gaze at the offendee ("look him in the eye," line 213). As the extract demonstrates, there are a range of conditions that must be met in order for an apology to be deemed sincere or at least adequate. Despite multiple conditions, even 4-year-old children have been shown to know when an apology can be considered "properly" done (Church, 2009).

Extract 2e

```
214 Zia:                                              [°↑A↓n↑te]ek[sih°?]
                                                       apology
                                                       I apologize
215 Kalle:                                                       [°↑Sa ]at
                                                                 get.2sg
                                                                 apology
216          >an↓tee[ks°<.]
             apology
             accepted
217 Tea:            [Jo   ]o ja  MÄ  en      haluu  kuulla    enää
                     yes     and 1sg neg.1sg want   hear-1inf adv
                     yes and I don't want to hear anything again
218          mitään uutta   tämmöstä että olis            kiusattu .hhhh
             adv    new-par dem1.sg  that be-pst-pas-cond bully-pppc
             about any bullying
219          POTkittu  tai lyöty     ONKO     Tämä    Selvä
             kick-pppc or  punc-pppc be.3sg-q dem1.sg clear
             kicking or punching is this clear
220          Kalle.
             [1nameM]
             Kalle
```

In overlap with the teacher, Zia reproduces the apology's first pair-part (line 214), and in the first transition-relevance place, Kalle's second pair-part follows (lines 215–216). The teacher's third position turn closes the mediation interaction by admonishing the pupils not to let her hear anything like this again, thereafter immediately allocating the next turn to Kalle (lines 217–220). In and through her admonishment, the teacher seems to orient to having had to force the pupils to apologize, treating the participants as lacking the willingness to display initiative and personal inner state fit for apologizing. Even if the two pair-parts of the apology sequence had been technically correctly produced, the pupils' earlier denials of culpability seemed to have had the effect of undermining the basis for a sincere apology. Thus, what happens during the earlier phases of the mediation interaction is highly critical for a successful accomplishment of the apology sequence as the climax of the institutional activity.

As the extract illustrates, the fact that the apology is the result of suspected but not sufficiently proven culpability resonates with the blurred nature of apologizing in which the offense's reference to the apology remains uncertain. In addition, the disputants display no signs of initiative or willingness to comply with the mediation's institutional interaction order, so the teacher has to force them to do so. However, the pupils' forced actions need correction, and from time to time, the pupils orient to the interactionally incorrect direction (e.g., during the apology phase to reporting). As the interaction that

is supposed to prepare for apologizing fails to do so, the problems in the subsequent progress of the interaction display an embedded tension between the requirements for sincerity and ritualistic orthodoxy. In focusing on the ritualistic orthodoxy of preparing for the apology and apologizing at the expense of sincerity, the disputants display no initiative, agency, or personal inner state fit for the action. Therefore, the interaction fails in displaying remorse and the status of the relevance of apologizing. Subsequently, the interaction lacks in facilitating forgiveness.

Discussion

In this article, we have examined the significance of apologizing on the institutional agenda of school mediation. What characterized the apologies in this specific setting was their function as an obligatory part of mediation and their uniquely explicit adjacency-pair format "I apologize—apology accepted." Through the extracts presented in this article, we demonstrated that pupils treat confessing and apologizing as recognizable actions. This was most evident when the teacher produced an implicit apology prompt, without specifying the subsequent action (e.g., Extract 1d, "what do you say"), and the pupils proceeded to the apology sequence. In addition, the teacher's orientation to the expected apology sequence could be seen in and through the mediation activity, as paving the way for the apology—for example, raising issues that were relevant with regard to it and preparing the grounds for it to be sincere and ritually correct. Our study shows how instantiating a legitimate apology sequence is based on the pupils' cooperation with the teacher. In and through interaction, the pupils mirror the teacher's orientations and proceed to the apology when its preconditions are met and when the teacher has launched an open question for the pupils to answer in a "self-directed" manner (Hepburn, 2020). The apologies in this context are therefore in a second position after the teacher's apology prompts, but at the same time they function as first pair-parts in the apology sequence to be responded to by another pupil.

Earlier conversation-analytical literature has discussed the range of responses invoked by apologies. The preferred responses to an apology are typically of the kind that undermine the apology's claimed offense and in doing so, promote social solidarity (Robinson, 2004). A typical response to an apology in school mediation—"apology accepted"—is different in this respect: It does not mitigate the offense. This difference may be related to the educational context of our data in which an adult socializes a child in the practices of the school community (Danby & Theobald, 2012; Theobald & Danby, 2017). Since children have been reported to prefer disagreement in their peer conflicts (Cromdal, 2004; Goodwin, 2002), introducing the offense and its relevance for an apology in more detail may help children to understand each other's points of view. Compared to the typical ways of resolving conflicts in preschool (Björk-Willén, 2018), participants in elementary schools display a clearer mutual orientation to explicit confessions as a way to proceed to the apology sequence. Also, compared to adults' mutual apologies (Robinson, 2004), our data suggested that the offense and its relevance for an apology needs to be introduced in more detail, arguably, to socialize pupils in apologizing and settling conflicts.

Apologizing plays a central role in reestablishing the social order (Björk-Willén, 2018), and the teachers' and pupils' orientations to the apology may be accounted for by the notion of "ritual." As has been demonstrated in this article, the overall organization of mediation episodes contributes to the legitimacy of the apology ritual, which in turn must be constructed in specific ways to avoid ritual failure (Goffman, 1967, 1971). As pointed out with reference to the work by Kádár (2015), a ritual involves a range of features, which separate it from sequences that are more generally characteristic of certain institutional interactions. First, a ritual involves preallocated interactional resources. In the context of school mediation, such resources include specific, explicit apology formats. Other resources, which have not been discussed in this article, may include specific intonation contours, with reference to which both teachers and pupils expect ritual orthodoxy (Korpela et al., in preparation). Second, a ritual is bound to certain times and places. By extension, this may be taken to mean the sequential location of the apology within the course of the mediation activity. The correct performance of the

apology ritual requires the teacher's lead in initiating new interactional phases like the new report on the incident phase (Extract 1a) and the apology phase (Extract 1d) by which the teachers indicate that they regard the preparing activities such as confessions to be sufficient. Finally, a ritual necessitates an audience. In the context of school mediation, such an audience consists of other pupils and school personnel for whom a pupil may display membership in the school community by demonstrating socialization to the school's rules and practices. Thus, rituals operate both within and beyond the boundaries of institutional interaction (Kádár, 2015), affecting children's everyday lives, socialization, and moral evaluation more profoundly than institutional practices alone would be able to do.

The three phases of mediation play a crucial role in constructing the action of apologizing not only as ritually correct but also as sincere. The first necessary phase (reporting the incident) established the mutual identification of an event as problematic. The pupils negotiated their observations of problems, their parts, intentions, and culpabilities, while the teacher managed the progress of negotiation (e.g., for the teacher's turn allocation, see Extract 1a). If remorse cannot be observed, pupils may display a wide range of accusations and evidence to make offenses relevant to the participants for apologizing. This phase activates the participants' moral evaluation of actions, which is to evoke remorse in the offenders for their incorrect actions. In this way, this phase plays a crucial part in constructing the potentially upcoming apology as "sincere." During the reporting the incident phase, some pupils may unintentionally and implicitly provide evidence of their own culpability. However, this is not treated as sufficient for constructing sincerity (Extract 1b). Instead, an explicit confession is needed. Hence, both the phases of reporting on the incident and confession serve to establish the relevance of apologizing and hence have functions comparable to Robinson's (2004) concept of pre-apology, in which participants seek to determine whether an offense has been committed. The importance of explicit confession as an indication of sincerity can be seen most clearly in cases in which no confession is forthcoming, and the teacher pursues it (Extract 2). By confessing, the culpable party establishes a clear reference to the offense, without which no performance of the apology ritual would make sense.

To conclude, to play a major role in conflict resolution, apologizing needs to fulfill its institutional expectations. Both teachers and pupils monitor and orient to these expectations. The action of apologizing is an intriguing paradox of interdependence and tension between sincerity and rituality. During the interaction, sincerity and rituality may be inherently problematic and contradictory in terms of the expectations projected on apologizing. To demonstrate sincerity, participants need to display initiative, agency, and subjectivity, which requires accomplishing the action in one's own way. To play out ritualistic orthodoxy, participants must follow a certain nonpersonal socioculturally driven and teacher-led protocol, which is recognizable, qualified, and the same for all the participants, regardless of the transgressor. Sincerity seeks to display personal expression of remorse, and therefore, it facilitates forgiveness. Rituality seeks to generate interpersonal equality and balance between disputants, and therefore, to fix the interpersonal consequences of the harm done. To achieve the aforementioned interpersonal aims, the preparation of the apology involves tension and requires effort. However, the structure of mediation is designed to project sincerity into the ritual performance of the apology adjacency pair: In this way, the apology is prepared throughout the mediation activity.

Untangling the paradoxical nature of the apology demonstrates its significant role in realizing complex interpersonal achievements in teacher-led mediations at school. As Tavuchis (1991) noted: "An apology, no matter how sincere or effective, does not and cannot undo what has been done. And yet, in a mysterious way and according to its own logic, this is precisely what it manages to do." To realize such a dilemma of "undoing something that cannot be undone" requires equally dilemmatic actions. The sequential organization of the mediation, along with all its nuances, makes it possible to talk these dilemmatic actions into being.

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