*Disputes in Everyday Life: Social and Moral
Orders of Children and Young People*

Susan Danby and Maryanne Theobald (eds)
(Emerald Group Publishing, 2012)

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This volume shows the fruits of an international collaboration of scholars of children's interaction from Australia, Sweden, New Zealand, the UK, the USA and Turkey. They use conversation analysis (CA), ethnomethodology (EM), membership categorization analysis (MCA) and ethnography in this endeavour. The collection makes an original contribution through examining children's disputes. There are a number of reasons why this topic is of particular interest to a wide audience. Disputes disrupt the fundamental preferences for agreement and alignment in social interaction. They threaten the norms of peaceable conduct, and so can be seen as a challenge to the social and moral order. They may be central to the emergence, starting in childhood, of various types of breakdowns, and can end up, for example, as bullying or physical fights. The tendency is often to see disputes in negative terms: they are allied to disagreements that can lead to social actions such as rebukes, mockery, threats, insults, blamings or even physical attacks. Disputes are, however, also how alliances and hierarchies are built through excluding or including others, and setting up particular social and moral orders in the group. Disputes are normal.

They are as much the stuff of social life as their antonym, agreement, as can be seen in academic and political debates, heated discussions in the family or in workplaces, industrial relations negotiations and so on. So disputes can be viewed not merely as escalations of disagreements, but are also the vehicle for the establishment of alignments and alliances.

This is why this book makes such an interesting and useful contribution to the field. The studies in the book are an exploration of the emergence in childhood and adolescence of disputes in the context of social interactions: what sets them off, how they are dealt with, how they are contained, how they end. EM, MCA and CA are eminently suited to such an exploration. As a reader, I was struck in particular by the usefulness of MCA in understanding disputes. Memberships of various kinds may be omnipresent, but not omnirelevant, in social conduct; but in disputes, it seems, with the 'side-taking', alliances and oppositions, memberships tend to come to the fore, in particular as asymmetrical relational pairs, such as rebuker–resister, bully–victim, rule-enforcer–rule-breaker.

The actions associated with disputes are also in opposition to the norms of preference organization; indeed it appears that in disputes there is a suspension of 'normal' preference organization. Disagreements take on preferred turn design features. For example, social actions such as insults tend to be bald, direct, unmitigated in their turn design, and there appears to be a preference for *disagreement*. The social order is reversed, opposition is the norm, the social world is turned on its head. Disputes are where, it may perhaps be said, power comes to the surface of talk.

In this collection there are investigations that use sequential analysis, action analysis and membership category analysis. So what emerges from these studies about the structure of disputes? It seems many start quite innocently, through an instruction or a question, for example. It is the response to such innocent looking turns that makes some event ripe to evolve into a dispute. It is the location of an 'arguable' by the response to the arguable that makes a dispute, that turns the social and moral order on its head, and makes dispreference (i.e. disagreement) (CA) the norm, and oppositional relational pairs, such as bully and victim (MCA), become omnirelevant categories, as the Hesters point out in their chapter in this volume. There is in fact a similarity in this structure of disputes to the structure of repair: the source of the trouble is located by the repair initiation; the 'arguable' or 'disputable' is located by the reaction to the disputable.

The study of disputes in childhood and youth is fertile territory indeed, because even though there have been studies of disputes before – including some in the EM world – this would appear to be the first collection that investigates how young people become socialized into the world of disputation – and it is striking that disputes emerge very early in childhood. Think of two one-year-olds fighting for the possession of a toy. So what do we have in this book? We have very young children, primary-age children and pre-adolescents (Evaldsson and Svahn; Kent); we have pre-school (Björk-Willén), primary schools (Bateman), a correctional institution for adolescent offenders (Cromdal and Osvaldsson), a Saturday ‘ethnic’ school (Tarim and Kyratzis), families (Busch; Kent) and neighbourhood children (Loyd); we have monolingual, bilingual and trilingual settings; we have first language and second language (Cekaite); we have disputes that are mediated by parents or teachers (Theobald and Danby) and unmediated peer disputes (Church and Hester; Cobb-Moore); we have disputes in the context of new technologies (Davidson; Sjöblom and Aronsson); we have disputes that might be seen as negotiations; we have studies that focus on the linguistic, on social actions, on affect; we have verbal disputes, physical disputes, gossip and bullying.

Some of the findings and observations are striking, and perhaps unexpected. For example, authority figures can create disputes among children by making an incident accountable, and therefore disputable for its participants when before it was not. The parent or teacher can therefore be seen as doing work for the moral order by creating disputes in the service of socialization. The point is even made in one of the chapters that authorities can aggravate disputes, aggravate bullying, through anti-bullying policies that encourage children to report on bullying incidents (snitching), thereby heightening the bullying that had been going on before. Another revelation is that threats occur typically at the end of disputes, and bring closure to dispute, and yet another is that physicality in disputes (pushing and the like) can be used to achieve understanding and intersubjectivity, rather than disrupt it, and it is thus possible to see disputes as affiliative.

What seems to be emerging from these studies is that there are social norms predominantly for agreement, cooperation, alignment and affiliation, and that disputes are shown to emerge out of agreement and return to agreement. What also emerges is how the various actions associated with disputes (disagreeing, blaming, threatening, insulting, bullying, physical aggression) have their own structures, and are used systematically and in

orderly sequences. This is a fascinating collection of studies that should be of interest not only to sociologists and educationalists, but also to anthropologists, linguists, criminologists and indeed anyone interested in how disputes emerge in children's interactions. This volume should open our eyes to seeing disputes in a new way.