Tracing unique trajectories of participation for a ‘girl with ADHD’: from ‘unwilling student’ to ‘agentive learner’

Ann-Carita Evaldsson & Johanna Svahn

To cite this article: Ann-Carita Evaldsson & Johanna Svahn (2019) Tracing unique trajectories of participation for a ‘girl with ADHD’: from ‘unwilling student’ to ‘agentive learner’, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, 24:3, 254-272, DOI: 10.1080/13632752.2019.1609270

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/13632752.2019.1609270
Tracing unique trajectories of participation for a ‘girl with ADHD’: from ‘unwilling student’ to ‘agentive learner’

Ann-Carita Evaldsson and Johanna Svahn
Department of Education, Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden

ABSTRACT
The overall aim of this study is to explore how individual children with long-term school difficulties follow unique ‘trajectories of participation’ in special educational needs settings, sometimes in unexpected ways, and how this contributes to alternative forms of identification and processes of learning. The data draws on long-term video-ethnographic work, tracing trajectories of participation during the course of a school year for an individual girl with an ADHD diagnosis who is a newcomer to a special support school in Sweden. We use a multi-layered theoretical and methodological framework to learning, identities and participation as situated practices to explore how the focal girl, through her everyday participation in classroom contexts structured to amplify the student’s capabilities, gradually moves from an ‘unwilling student’ to an ‘agentive learner’. Through a multimodal interactional analysis, we demonstrate how the focal girl’s actions and the teacher’s scaffolding responses are interactionally organised, and the emotional and relational dimensions in the creation of participation frameworks for learning. It is argued that the student’s agency and emerging emotional engagement in school-based learning are intimately linked to the pursuit of building long-term learning relationships based on mutual trust.

KEYWORDS
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD); identity formation; trajectories of participation; emotional scaffolding; multimodal interactional analysis

Introduction
To date, much of the work on identity in special needs settings has demonstrated the process through which individuals are treated as representatives of disability identities, informed by biomedical standards ascribed to them by others (see Hjörne and Säljö 2012; Hjörne and Evaldsson 2016; Graham 2007; Slee 1998; Visser and Jehan 2009, 127). Few studies have focused on the agency displayed by students in special educational needs practices in response to being recognised as disabled (see Davies and Watson 2001; Evaldsson and Melander 2016; Renshaw, Choo, and Emerald 2014). In this study, we take into account the agency displayed by an individual by tracing the emergent identity formations for a female student with a long-term history of school failures. More specifically, we explore how a 13-year-old girl, diagnosed with ADHD, in and through her everyday participation in scaffolding practices – especially structured to amplify her engagement in school-based learning – gradually overcomes her resistance to schooling. For this purpose, the analysis is based on integrated levels of description combining a socio-cultural approach to identity formations and learning as changing forms of participation in a particular community of practice (Holland et al. 1998; Lave and Wenger 1991), with a multimodal interactional approach to participation and affect as situated practices (Goodwin 2007; Goodwin, 2000). We use this multi-layered theoretical and methodological framework to demonstrate how emergent identifications...
for an individual, which constitute the focal student as agentive, self-aware and competent, are built up over time in day-to-day classroom encounters. We will show how these processes take place in often emotionally charged face-to-face and body-to-body interactions, in a way that warrants unique and alternative forms of participation and identifications for an individual student with previous long-term school failures (cf. Cekaite 2012; Hjörne and Evaldsson 2016; Wortham 2004).

The data draws on long-term ethnographic work combined with video recordings, tracking trajectories of participation for an individual girl during her first school year in a special support school (Swedish: resursskola). This particular school context provides an especially interesting case, as it applied an educational philosophy permeated with a participation agenda whereby students were treated as active agents in their own learning and teachers were observed using forms of emotional and relational scaffolding (Renshaw 2013) that encouraged the students’ engagement and active participation. We are particularly concerned with the agency of the student in the emerging identity formation processes and how the teachers’ scaffolding practices, indexing the student as an ‘agentive learner’ become consequential for how a girl diagnosed with ADHD came to achieve alternative forms of identification.

**Disability identities, student agency, and classroom participation**

Despite much disagreement (see, for example Graham 2007; Slee 1998) about whether a diagnosis such as ADHD is ‘caused by biomedical factors’ (Visser and Jehan 2009, 127), problems linked to social and environmental circumstances or the organisation of learning and teaching practices (see, for example Graham 2008; Norris and Lloyd 2000), such diagnoses continue to dominate the remedial actions taken in response to issues of problematic student conduct in schools. The deployment of widely circulating biomedical discourses of disabled children as mainly disorderly (see Graham 2008) has led to a tendency of children with problematic school conduct to be mainly categorised in pathological terms based on the criteria associated with the diagnostic label attributed to them (Hjörne and Säljö 2012; Slee 1998). As Hester (1998) demonstrates in his study of referral meetings, for example, being a child in need of remedial actions typically implies being positioned by others as in need of help, and as being behind, different, etc., which all ascribe some form of impairment, incompetence, deviance, and otherness to this individual.

However, as Renshaw, Choo, and Emerald (2014) note in their study, a focus on disability as the defining identity category for disabled children may in fact hide ‘the complexity and subtlety of how diverse identities are actually achieved in everyday schooling contexts’ (see also Rapley, Kiernan, and Antaki 1998). In particular, Davies and Watson (2001) have pointed to the lack of studies focusing on the agency of disabled children in everyday educational practices. They found, for example, that the children rejected the stereotypical identities of disability ascribed to them by others, and even used resistance in strategic ways to challenge this. In another study, Evaldsson and Melander (2016) demonstrate how a male student with an ADHD diagnosis exerted a considerable degree of agency in the classroom by resisting teacher authority and the categorical conduct ascribed to him (see also Evaldsson 2014). The student’s non-compliant responses were strategically shaped as aggravated oppositional affective stances that accentuated his unwillingness to submit to the teacher’s instructions and the disorderly emotional behaviours ascribed to him. In their study, Renshaw, Choo, and Emerald (2014) found how diverse disability identities were accomplished for two children in the communication between teachers and parents, in ways that contributed to a view of one of the children as ‘more agentive and self-aware’.

In addition, in a longitudinal study, Hjörne and Evaldsson (2016) demonstrate how shifting forms of identities were ascribed to a young girl diagnosed with ADHD in a special teaching class through the interactions of her teachers, parents and classmates, as they accounted for the girl’s school conduct. The long-term data illustrates how, across the trajectory of a school year, an accumulated record of disorderly emotional behaviours was attributed to the girl. It was found that the dispositional
character of the emotional behaviours attributed to the individual in the social and sequential context of teacher–child interactions ultimately positioned the focal girl as acting in abnormal ways. In this process, the girl’s highly affective calls for help were recurrently dismissed. As Rapley, Kiernan, and Antaki (1998) demonstrate, a person with a learning disability, just like anyone else, can either assert or dismiss his/her institutionally ascribed identity.

Two other studies are particularly relevant to our purpose in that they use longitudinal data: the works by Wortham (2004, 2006) and Cekaite (2007, 2012). Although Wortham and Cekaite do not study children in special needs practices, they share with the present study the aim to investigate how identities are built up over longer timescales for an individual student and through everyday classroom participation. Particularly relevant is Wortham’s (2004, 2006) work on the longitudinal tracking of an individual student’s academic learning and social identification, showing how these systematically constitute each other. Wortham explores the unique trajectories of participation for one ninth-grade student with an African-American background, Tyisha, who attends an urban US school. As Tyisha progressively began to challenge the teacher’s instructions and acted in ways that contradicted the teacher’s gender-stereotypical expectations, her identification gradually shifted over a period of three months from ‘good student’ to ‘disruptive outcast’. In a similar way, Cekaite (2012) uses longitudinal tracking of teacher–child interactions in an ethno- graphic study of a young immigrant student’s classroom participation in an immersion school (see also Cekaite 2007), showing how language socialisation into normatively predictable cultural patterns did not occur. Cekaite’s study demonstrates the importance of taking into account the agency of a young child and how a novice’s affectively charged embodied responses to (teacher) socialising attempts become consequential for the emergence of a socio-culturally problematic identity as a ‘bad subject’.

Building on the research discussed above, we introduce integrated levels of analytical resources to examine what Wortham (2004) calls ‘unique trajectories of participation’; that is, how individuals develop diverse identities that deviate from the typical ones in complex and sometimes unpredictable ways (see also Cekaite 2012; Dreier 2003).

Trajectories of participation and emergent identity formations

The present study takes the shape of a single case study based on a longitudinal study of an individual girl who is a newcomer to a special support school. As such, this study retrospectively traces personal trajectories of participation and emergent identifications and/or learning processes over multiple events across spatial and-temporal configurations (Wortham 2004). For this purpose, we draw on the concept of participation as developed in a socio-cultural approach, with its close relation to a view on learning and identity formation as interrelated (Lave and Wenger 1991). From a socio-cultural perspective, processes of social identification are made available through shifting forms of participation, whereby actions, language use, and the material environment constitute cultural resources for the participants to change their membership from newcomers to competent members of social practices (Holland et al. 1998). A focus on personal trajectories of participation, as Drier (2009) notes, is a way to study persons as situated participants in structures of social practice, and what this involves for their emerging personal identities and functioning in structures of social practice. From this also follows that a person’s ‘current mode of participation in a given context’ is affected by its embeddedness in structures of social practice (Drier 2009, 197), neither of which can be reduced to the other.

In this study, we argue for the need to anchor the socio-cultural notion of participation in situated interactional moments of teacher–student interactions, to explore an individual student’s emerging identity formation within its sequential, embodied and socio-cultural context of use (Cekaite 2012). For this purpose, we use the more situated notion of ‘participation’ and ‘stance’ as analytic concepts, as developed by C. Goodwin (2017) in his conceptualisation of co-operative
actions. The notion of co-operative action underscores that participants build actions together by incorporating the semiotic resources provided by others, including bodies, talk, voices, and the affordances provided by the environment. Multimodal interactional analysis will be used to approach an individual student’s unwillingness to participate in school-based learning, not as primarily located in the individual but as interactive, dialogical actions and stances. We draw on Goodwin’s (2007, 2017) notion of participation to capture the ways in which the participants (student and teacher) display their alignments or lack thereof towards one another, and how the stances (affective and epistemic) taken through talk, bodily postures, gestures, and voices shape their interpretations of ongoing actions and claims of positions. The analysis focuses on how the student’s actions and the teacher’s scaffolding responses (to the student’s often non-compliant actions) are mutually elaborated through assembling semiotic resources, and how as a consequence the student’s participation in the classroom gradually changes over time (cf. Cekaite 2012). We will show how the teacher’s use of various scaffolding practices, multimodally designed and orchestrated to support student agency, provides a ground for the focal girl to gradually gain mastery of the school-based practices for becoming a competent, agentive and self-aware student.

The argument for capturing an individual student’s emerging identity formations within regularly occurring teacher–student interactions during a school year through a multimodal interactional approach is based on the assumption that changing forms of participation in socio-cultural practices are located and can be observed in moments of interaction within and across situated activities (cf. Goodwin 2017).

Method and data

Ethnographic setting and participants

The selected data draws from a larger ethnographic study with video recordings (70 hours) of teacher-student and students’ peer interactions in a special support school in Sweden. The school was chosen as it offered special support within the municipality for students with severe school problems, high rates of absenteeism, and low or no grades. The majority of the students (nine in total) had neuropsychiatric diagnoses such as ADHD, ADD, Tourette’s syndrome, and/or OCD. The school’s ideology emphasised social relationships of trust based on mutual support and respect for student’s individual educational and emotional as well as behavioural capacities. The school applied a salutogenic perspective based on a philosophy permeated with a sense of coherence (SOC), which aimed at encouraging the students’ competencies, well-being and health, rather than focusing on their disabilities. The five teachers working at the school had long experience of supporting individual students with long-term school difficulties. As part of the school’s ideology, each student was assigned one teacher as her/his mentor. A psychologist also paid weekly visits to the school and was available for individual talks with students outside the classroom.

Trajectories of participation for a girl with ADHD in a special support school

The fieldwork was designed to track individual students’ trajectories of participation in formal and informal special educational activities during the course of a school year. The data for this study constitutes trajectories of participation for an individual student, a 13-year-old Sweden-born Kurdish girl named Mariam, during her first year in the special support school. Upon transferring to the school, newcomer Mariam had been receiving special needs support for several years. Before attending the school, she had been diagnosed with ADHD and assessed to be highly emotional, loud and impulsive, with intellectual proficiencies below the average standards.
The ethnographic fieldwork was crucial for documenting Mariam’s individual personal trajectories of participation and the structural arrangements in the context of the special support school at hand (Drier 2009). Mariam’s participation in the school involved trajectories of participation across diverse educational contexts with a variety of activities, social relations, and co-participants. The structural arrangements of institutional trajectories included a curriculum, an educational programme, and weekly meetings with the mentor teacher, who set up personal goals and evaluated the student’s academic progress. The mentor teacher also organised activities outside school hours, which consisted of exercises inspired by cognitive behavioural therapy, physical training, or social activities such as going to the movies. As the work method also required close home-school collaboration, Mariam’s mentor teacher had regular contact with her parents. Certain lessons were devoted to working primarily with students’ social, emotional, and moral behaviours in weekly sessions of ART. Despite the broad health institutional arrangements, the regular classroom lessons were mainly aimed at developing students’ competencies relevant to school-based learning. In this study, we focus primarily on teacher-student interactional encounters in classroom contexts. Of particular interest are the ways in which the teachers were observed to use various forms of scaffolding (see Renshaw 2013, for an overview of research on scaffolding; see also Koole and Elbers 2014) to support and empower the students to exert agency over their school situation.

Unfolding trajectories of participation for an individual in a special needs classroom

The multimodal interactional analysis explores trajectories of participation for Mariam, in order to retrospectively track the systematic accumulated changes of her participation in the social and sequential context of classroom-based learning during the course of one school year. For this purpose, we have constructed trajectories of video-recorded sequences of teacher–student interactions from three different time periods: early, middle, and late phase. Each trajectory is examined in terms of how the student’s, and the teacher’s participation is multimodally organised during the time period at hand, and how the student’s participation gradually changes in respect to what happened before as well as how these changes project what will come next in the overall trajectory of participation (Cekaite 2012; Evaldsson and Melander 2016).

The multimodal interactional analysis details the cultural, emotional, and embodied practices through which the focal student’s participation is interactionally, dialogically organised in teacher-student classroom encounters within the particular special educational context: How does an individual student create her own trajectories of participation or pathways of identification, given the affordances provided by the structural arrangements in the classroom at hand? What forms of identities and learning processes emerge over periods of time? How are the teacher’s scaffolding practices designed and multimodally orchestrated to support an individual with long-term school failures? These are some of the issues we will explore.

Early phase – affectively resisting a ‘learner’ identity

For the first two months at the school, Mariam’s lessons were held in the same classroom, which she shared with the other two seventh graders; all three students had an adjusted study programme. During the scheduled time the students were expected to do their schoolwork in the classroom, and the teaching was structured to assist the individual students. During this time, Mariam often refused to participate in the teacher’s scaffolding practices. She often responded with emotional outbursts and got into conflicts with her teachers and classmates, ending up yelling and crying. As a consequence, the teacher’s’ scaffolding of her actions’ in the creation of a participation framework for learning was carefully calibrated to assist Mariam to engage in her schoolwork.
Displaying a negative emotional attitude towards schooling

Our first example shows how, during this first period, Mariam openly displays a negative emotional attitude towards schooling and how the teacher repeatedly attempts to assist her with her schoolwork. In this instance, Mariam is expected to practice subtraction in her math book at her desk. However, already after getting a glimpse of the first calculations in her assignment, she displays her non-understanding – ‘but this is hard’ – while positioning herself as someone who ‘doesn’t know these’ (line 1). In so doing, she turns her whole body away from the desk as she throws herself back in the chair in a dramatic and emotionally laden, whining manner.

Mariam’s affectively charged and resigned embodied actions in line 1 towards the task at hand are designed as a negative self-assessment, indexing her lack of academic knowledge (Cekaite 2012, 651). Her body posturing, accompanied by a whining voice, also displays a strong form of frustration (Evaldsson and Melander 2016). Simultaneously, her use of the negative form of an epistemic verb (the modal ‘kan inte’/‘don’t know’) is a common feature of help-seeking sequences in classrooms (Kärkkäinen 2003). The teacher’s (here Ulrika) response: ‘but wait wait wait here’ (lines 2–3), orients to both the potential trouble of Mariam’s highly affective conduct and her emergent need for support. In the subsequent actions, the teacher rearranges her talk and body as well as the material environment to make it possible to offer Mariam help with the assignment.

In this scaffolding process, the teacher does not provide just any type of help; as Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) demonstrate in their study, but it is responsive to the level of expertise the child/student shows (Koole and Elbers 2014). At first, the teacher places her body close to Mariam while verbally instructing her to direct her attention to the assignment sheet and focus on relevant aspects of the task: ‘write the numbers that have been cut out’ (lines 3–4). She then uses deictic means, ‘and here eh ten minus what is six’ (line 4), to help Mariam solve the specific math problem. In the subsequent verbal instructions, the teacher repeatedly makes use of the all-inclusive we’. The use of the collective pronoun in the verbal instructions of ‘then we check’ and ‘we take some money’(line 6) incorporates the teacher’s orientation to the task as a shared activity. Mariam’s non-compliant embodied response, ‘I don’t want it’
(see Picture 1, line 7 excerpt 1a), displays her unwillingness to participate in the action trajectory projected through the teacher's scaffolding.

At first, the teacher simply ignores Mariam's refusals to engage in the task, recycling her own prior instructions: 'here we have some money' (line 8). In her next move, the teacher orient more explicitly to Mariam's particular difficulties with the school task: 'can't it be easier for you' (line 10). When Mariam continues to refuse to participate – 'no' (line 11) – we can see how the teacher upgrades her attempts with a form of 'challenging question' (Emmertsen 2007): 'how else would you be able to count Mariam' (line 12). Compared to the verbal instructions, this form of question has a more assertive interrogative format, and for the first time the teacher more explicitly brings into play a normative dimension. The teacher now makes Mariam accountable for her unwillingness to participate. In what follows, the teacher reorganises the oppositional participation framework at hand as she pushes the assignment sheets closer to Mariam. The scaffolding process is then concluded with a 'known information question' (Mehan 1979), directly referring to the content of the assignment: 'how much is ten minus one' (line 13). The teacher's last moves are also left unanswered by Mariam, who now makes publicly visible her unwillingness to participate by moving her whole body away from the assignment.

**Re-enacting a positioning as ‘unknowledgeable’**

As demonstrated, the teacher's scaffolding so far is unsuccessful and is met with non-compliance and explicit embodied moves of resistance by Mariam. We will now show how the teacher's help paradoxically come to reinforce Mariam's unwillingness to participate in the schoolwork, which in turn nurture her positioning of herself as an unknowledgeable subject.

---

**Excerpt (1b)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>37. TEACHER:</td>
<td>minus tycker du är lite svårare (.) eller hur you find minus a bit harder (.) right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>(3.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. TEACHER:</td>
<td>vad e det för tal som kommer innan tio what number comes before ten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. MARIAM:</td>
<td>tjugo twenty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. TEACHER:</td>
<td>om du räknar -ah if you count -yeah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42.</td>
<td>(3.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43. MARIAM:</td>
<td>nio nine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44. TEACHER:</td>
<td>a då har du tagit bort yeah then you’ve removed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45.</td>
<td>(.) ett (.) vad kommer innan nio då one (.) what comes before nine then</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46. MARIAM:</td>
<td>tio ten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47. TEACHER:</td>
<td>vad kommer innan nio what comes before nine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48. MARIAM:</td>
<td>tio sa ja I said ten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49. TEACHER:</td>
<td>ja tio kommer efter nio men innan nio vad kommer då yes ten comes after nine but before nine what comes then</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50.</td>
<td>(1.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51. TEACHER:</td>
<td>ska vi lägga upp den här should we place this here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52. MARIAM:</td>
<td>men jag tycker den här e svårt jag kan inte but I find this hard I can’t</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The teacher’s next question (line 37) serves partly as a confirmation of Mariam’s lack of expertise. The teacher now more explicitly orients Mariam to her particular difficulties by incorporating Mariam’s evaluation ‘hard’ (see Excerpt 1:1) of the task at hand into her own ‘harder’. The adverb ‘a bit harder’ (line 37) serves both as an affective softener of Mariam’s negative affect display and as a way to downgrade Mariam’s own subjective status of not knowing. The lexical choice of ‘harder’ also serves to challenge Mariam to accomplish the assignment by showing her that it can be manageable with the teacher’s support.

This time, the teacher’s verbal instructions are met with silence from Mariam. In response, the teacher repeats her previous ‘known information question’ (Mehan 1979): ‘what number comes before ten’ (line 39), trying to redirect Mariam’s attention back to the educational business at hand. Mariam now delivers a wrong answer (line 40), and the teacher immediately instructs her in how to arrive at a more correct answer ‘if you count’ (line 41). Mariam’s correct answer, which is delivered after a longer pause, is met with a minimal acknowledgement: ‘yeah’. The teacher then goes on to describe the problem Mariam has just solved: ‘then you’ve removed one’ (lines 44–45). The description can be seen as a way of keeping Mariam’s attention on the on-going classroom activity.

Subsequently, the teacher initiates a continuation of the instructional activity by delivering another known-answer question – ‘what comes before nine then’ (line 45) – which is then repeated in line 47. Repeating a known-answer question in this manner serves to publicly display the student’s lack of knowledge (Nystrand et al. 2003). As such, this question format also serves as a strategy for moving the classroom activity forward. As shown, Mariam continues to respond with her wrong answer, now in a more agitated manner – ‘I said ten’ (line 48) – which in turn upgrade her negative attitude towards the task at hand. When the teacher then yet again tries to get a correct answer, Mariam does not respond at first. It is only when the teacher suggests that they can use the play money to do the subtraction that Mariam explicitly formulates her negative attitude towards the assignment: ‘but I find this hard’ (line 52). Her negative self-assessment strengthens her position as ‘not knowing’, which in turn puts an end to the teacher’s instructional activity, which ends exactly as it began.

The multimodal interactional analysis highlights the moral and cognitive dilemmas that both the teacher and Mariam face in the classroom activity, and how the teacher’s repeated scaffolding attempts aimed at offering support instead contribute to rendering the student helpless and incompetent. From this perspective, the affectively charged non-compliant embodied actions, displayed by Mariam in response to the teacher’s embodied assistance and instructions, can be seen as a form of agency through which the student takes control over her own subordinate position while managing to resist doing the school assignment (Cekaite 2012).

Resisting classroom activities through negative affect displays

The next series of excerpts further illuminates how during this first period Mariam openly and highly affectively displays her resistance to the teacher’s attempts to get her engaged in the schoolwork. As Mariam’s classmate, Rebecca, leaves their geography lesson for a bathroom break, Mariam also tries to withdraw from her schoolwork. First, she asks the teacher, here Tobbe, to let the students ‘take a break’ (line 1), and when he declines she starts to question his decision: ‘why’ (line 3).
As can be seen, Mariam launches a report about a highly emotional personal event (line 5) in response to the teacher’s attempts to co-construct a common understanding of the classroom situation, ‘because we got short enough lessons as it is’. Mariam’s use of an ‘extreme case formulation’ (Pomerantz 1986) here ‘everything is my fault’ (line 5) heightens the emotional significance of the described actions and the importance of paying attention to her own personal problems. After a minimal acknowledgement, ‘but you know’ (line 7), the teacher now in a gentle way shifts from Mariam’s particular emotional problems into a more general moral lesson of concern for all students in class, ‘that you have to like work- so we like get somewhere’ (lines 9–10). And in what follows (Excerpt 2b) the teacher responds to Mariam’s particular concerns with a ‘no’ (line 12), while he simultaneously directs her to not pay attention to her own emotional problems ‘never mind that now’ (line 14).

Excerpt (2b)

11. MARIAM: alt e mitt fel
   it’s all my fault=
12. TEACHER: nää de e in-
   no it’s [no-
13. MARIAM: =ää ni kommer ringa min mamma så jag får skill på min mamma
   =and you will call my mom so that I will get yelled at on my mom
14. TEACHER: Fast Mariam strunta i de nu tänk så här
   But Mariam never mind that now think like this in
   in stead of the book you have there lying=
15. (2.0)
16. 17. TEACHER: =liggande, vi ska faktiskt-
   =there, we are actually-
18. MARIAM: jo det käns som alt e mitt fel
   yes it feels like everything is my fault
19. TEACHER: ni det e inte ditt fel (...) däremot så kanske
   no it’s not your fault (...) however one might think a
20. man kan tänka sig för lite vad man gör
   little about what one does
The teacher’s verbal instructions serve both to neutralise Mariam’s affect displays while offering a solution for her to handle her emotional reactions (Svahn 2017). The following instructions – ‘think like this instead’ (lines 14–15) and ‘think a little about what one does’ (line 20) brings up the student’s cognitive capacities for thinking and is designed to help her to take control over her emotional and behavioural conduct. At the same time, the teacher reorganises the embodied participation framework at hand by turning his body towards Mariam while pushing the textbook towards her (lines 16–17) (Goodwin 2007). However, despite the teacher’s embodied attempts to shift Mariam’s attention towards the schoolwork, Mariam continues to refuse to reorganise her actions and to refer to her own feelings, ‘it feels like’ (line 18).

As shown, the teacher’s embodied verbal instructions are responsive to Mariam’s repeated attempts to shift her emotional and cognitive attention away from the schoolwork. The teacher’s carefully designed scaffolding practices of bringing Mariam back to the educational business are, we would argue, informed by the school’s salutogenic approach towards students’ competencies and well-being rather than their disabilities. At the same time, Mariam can be seen as orienting to her own history of school failures and to her ADHD diagnosis to take control over the classroom situation and to liberate herself from a demanding classroom task.

**Middle phase – moving in and out of problematic classroom identities**

A few months into Mariam’s first term at the school, all the seventh graders were assigned their own individual classrooms. These new institutional arrangements were partly due to repeated conflicts between Mariam and one of her classmates. After the move to a separate classroom, Mariam initially continued to express her unwillingness to engage in the classroom work. As time passed she also gradually began to accept the teacher’s help and guidance and more often ended up completing her assignments on her own. As a consequence, the teachers were able to more accurately respond to Mariam’s level of knowledge in the various subjects and to adjust her workload.

**Resisting the teacher’s instructions while making claims of understanding**

The next excerpt demonstrates how Mariam’s participation in the classroom is organised through shifting forms of alignments (or the lack thereof) with the teacher’s instructions throughout a lesson. The teacher-student exchange, taking place during an English lesson between Mariam and one of her teachers, here Mats, illuminates this back-and-forth manoeuvring. As Mariam starts off refusing her given assignment, the teacher makes his first attempt to encourage her, this time ascribing her an ‘epistemic status’ (Heritage 2013) – ‘this for example you know how to do’ (line 1) – as ‘competent’ and ‘knowledgeable’.

Excerpt (3)

1. TEACHER: nå men sånt här till exempel kan du no but this for example you know how to do
2. MARIAM: ja men jag tycker de e svårt yeah but I find it hard
3. TEACHER: a: kan du säga- vet du vad ‘she’ är? yeah can you say- do you know what ‘she’ is?
4. MARIAM: akt a ( ) jag kan själv, backa go away ( ) I can do it myself, back off

“I can do it myself, back off”

MARIAM

Teacher
Although Mariam does not directly oppose the epistemic status ascribed to her by the teacher, she downgrades her own academic competencies by describing the assignment as ‘hard’ (line 2). The adoption of the first-person pronoun ‘I’, combined with the evaluative marker ‘find it’, shows that the negative assessment is presented from a subjective point of view (cf. Kärkkäinen 2006). The negative self-assessment positions herself as someone to whom the given assignment comes with some amount of struggle. Interestingly, the teacher treats Mariam’s negative self-assessment as a request for assistance. The teacher’s uptake in the form of an interrogative, ‘can you say’ and ‘do you know’ (line 3), serves as a form of ‘epistemic status check’ (ESCs). However, already in line 4, we can see how Mariam responds to the teacher’s knowledge check with an embodied disalignment, instructing him to ‘go away’. Interesting here is also how Mariam now makes what can be referred to as a complete epistemic turnabout from an ‘unknowing participant’ to an ‘agentive learner’, through her assertive claim of being able to ‘do it [herself]’ (line 4).

In the following turn, the teacher’s scaffolding practices are oriented towards modifying the difficulty of the task at hand by contrasting it with the one made by Mariam earlier: ‘it’s really simple’ (line 5). By referring to mental states such as ‘if you just think’ (line 5) and ‘it’s all about concentrating’ (line 7), the teacher indirectly invokes Mariam’s particular difficulties of concentrating related to her ADHD diagnosis. When Mariam does not respond, the teacher continues to verbally instruct her in how to accomplish the assignment (line 9). In response to the instructions, Mariam delivers yet another decisive claim of understanding, ‘I know’ (line 10), through which she agentively displays her understanding of the teacher’s explanation (Koole and Elbers 2014, 61).

Interestingly enough, it is Mariam who actively puts an end to the teacher’s scaffolding attempts – ‘keep at it’ (line 11) – as she decisively ask the teacher to leave: ‘bye’ (line 13). At this point, the teacher responds by withdrawing from the classroom (line 17 + picture 2), leaving Mariam to finish her schoolwork on her
own. Regardless of her previous refusals to engage in the assigned work, Mariam now gradually manages to complete the entire assignment, for which the teacher praises her at the end of the lesson.

**Disaligning and aligning with the teacher’s instructional moves**

In the next excerpt, we will look more closely at how Mariam responds to the various scaffolding resources used in the teacher–student interactions during this mid-period. The history lesson at hand is organised as a one-on-one instructional activity with the teacher, Tobbe, sitting next to Mariam at her desk. After Mariam has opened her history book and browsed to a section on ancient Egyptian culture, the teacher formulates a content question: ‘why was the Nile significant’ (line 1). In the first three turns the scaffolding practices follows a typical Initiation–Response–Evaluation pattern (Mehan 1979) in which the teacher helps the student by asking questions and then assessing the answers.
As we can see, Mariam promptly responds to the teacher’s initial query, providing a relevant response – ‘you could grow some things’ (line 2) – which demonstrates her understanding. The teacher acknowledges Mariam’s response, ‘mmm’ (line 3), and then immediately continues with a follow-up question, which places higher expectations on her ability to answer. The second query is met with an initial moment of silence from Mariam, who leans back in her chair, and asks the teacher in a whining voice to be excused from class: ‘may I leave’ (line 5). Mariam thus, quite demonstratively, through both her talk and embodied actions, tries to avoid displaying her non-understanding of the task at hand. However, Mariam’s pleading appeal is ignored by the teacher, who instead provides an explanation, ‘you could grow’, before he interrupts himself and directs Mariam to look in the book ‘let’s see here’ (line 6). This provides the basis for, as Goodwin (2007) notes, a ‘triadic framework of joint attention’, in which the actors are attending to the same object in the environment. The teacher positions his body closely to Mariam’s to make her join him in finding the answer in the textbook in front of her. When she refuses to take part in the embodied participation framework at hand, the teacher simply continues to look in the book while repeating his explanation ‘you could grow’ (line 9). The embodied scaffolding attempts are then upgraded with an act of pointing together with a deictic reference to direct Mariam to attend to a specific place in the book (Goodwin 2007, 55), ‘yeah what does this say’ (lines 9–10). Something Mariam demonstratively refuses to attend to by demonstratively bending her body backwards and looking up at the ceiling.

Of interest here is how the teacher’s various scaffolding practices – explanations, directives, deictic references, and orientations to the material in the creation of an embodied framework of learning – are all ‘responsive to [the fact] that the student has a problem’ (here with accomplishing the schoolwork) ‘and [seek] help to solve this problem’ (Koole and Elbers 2014, 63). Thus, rather than openly expressing empathy (cf. Jefferson, John, and Lee 1992) with Mariam’s claim of non-understanding and her more personal problems, such as ‘Tobbe I feel sick’ (line 15), the teacher makes persistent attempts to redirect her visual attention to the schoolwork, using the deictic reference ‘here’ (line 16) while pointing to a relevant section in the book. At this point, Mariam finally displays her co-participation in the embodied participation framework organised by the teacher, putting her head on the desk (see Picture 2, line 16 excerpt 4). At the same time, she demonstrates with her whole body (see Picture 2, line 16 excerpt 4) that she is unwilling to participate in the requested line of actions (cf. Cekaite 2012). At this point, the teacher temporarily shifts footing and expresses his empathy with Mariam’s poor physical condition (lines 18, 19, 21). His affectively charged explanations and questions actually latch onto the topic of food in the student’s assignment. By simultaneously orienting to the affective dimensions in the participation framework initiated by Mariam and the participation framework created through ongoing scaffolding practices, the teacher manages to guide her back into the educational framework at hand.

The scaffolding processes enacted by the teachers during the mid-period are culturally responsive both to the level of knowledge Mariam displays in her understanding of the task at hand and to her affectively charged resistance to schooling. Through their contingent verbal support (verbal instructions, explanations, deictic references, questions, evaluations), bodily arrangements, and their use of the relevant school materials, the teachers create a mutually relevant form of participation framework that facilitates for Mariam to engage in and take responsibility for her schoolwork. It is also obvious that Mariam, through her participation is provided with affective support for overcoming her resistance, and for taking control over her own often aggravated emotional reactions when handling her academic difficulties.

Late phase – displaying an emotionally competent and co-operative student identity

In the last period of the school year, we will continue to focus attention on how the teachers make use of what Renshaw (2013) refers to as culturally responsive forms of scaffolding practices and how they are multimodally orchestrated in moments of interaction through hybrid interactional practices extending beyond the IRE format. As Renshaw (2013) notes, such hybrid formats provide ‘the context for enacting a culturally responsive form of scaffolding in the classroom’. We will show how the social and affective dimensions of culturally responsive forms of scaffolding are central for how a student like Mariam, with a
history of school failures, gradually manages to act as a ‘co-operative student’ and an ‘agentive learner’, who even begins to make connections between what she has learned and what is expected of her in the future.

Changing participation and displaying a willing attitude towards schooling

The following excerpt demonstrates how Mariam, during this last period of the school year, more actively orients to school-relevant topics to build positive affective relationships with her teachers. At the end of the school year, Mariam’s student identity gradually began to shift from that of an ‘unwilling student’ who inappropriately resisted teachers’ instructions, refused to answer, and tried to escape from class. Although Mariam did not demonstrate much actual knowledge progression in the school subjects, all her teachers now identified her as an overall ‘co-operative student’. Some evidence for this shift comes from how she changed her embodied participation in class and how the participation framework in the classroom was now structured so that teacher and student (Mariam) cooperated on the schoolwork in progress (compare with Goodwin 2007).

Excerpt (5)

1. TEACHER: ja () men om du tittar vad finns det för ord yes () but if you look which words do we have here
2. här som skulle kunna beskriva hur grodan ser ut that could describe what a frog looks like
3. MARIAM: (Yawns before starting to read)) och ett. ett. fram. grodan. mystiskt. bak. and. one. front. the frog. mysterious. back
4. TEACHER: tittas en () grönknottrig look a () green granular
5. MARIAM: kan du skriva det? can you write that?
6. TEACHER: ah vi — jag kan göra så här vi bara kommer ihåg att () en () yeah we — I can do like this we just remember that () a ()
7. så skulle du kunna lägga in grönknottrig groda then you could add green granular frog
8. MARIAM: ja e - jag — jag kommer inte få betyg eller hur I’m — I — I won’t get a grade right
9. TEACHER: du kolla här () finns det nåt mer som skulle kunna hey look here () is there anything else that could describe
10. beskriva hur grodan ser ut what the frog looks like
11. MARIAM: den () mystisk [that one () mysterious [(Points in the book)
12. TEACHER: en mystisk grönknottrig groda () a mysterious green granular frog ()
13. det skulle det också kunna va () de it could be that too () that one
14. där skulle kunna va före, en mystisk could come before, a mysterious
15. grönknottrig groda green granular frog
16. (4.2)
17. TEACHER: du vill att jag ska hjälpa dig å skriva? you want me to help you to write?
18. MARIAM: jag har ont, jag ka- här vad e det () jag har ont I’m in pain, I co- here what’s this () I’m in pain
19. TEACHER: du har slagit i kanske you’ve bumped it maybe
The jointly performed orchestration of Mariam’s schoolwork is of interest for several reasons. Firstly, the collaboratively organised embodied participation framework at hand is rather different compared with previous interactions, in which Mariam was continuously contesting the interactive organisation of the classroom activity. The teacher’s contingent use of shifting embodied formats of instructions (lines 1, 6, 7, 9–10, 13–15) invites Mariam to focus her attention on relevant aspects of the schoolwork and to actively take part in the assignment. The ways in which the teacher and Mariam mutually align their bodies (see Pictures 1 + 2, excerpt 5) create a dynamic participation framework that allows the participants to mutually orient to the schoolwork in progress.

The dialogical and affective organisation of the scaffolding also creates a context of mutual trust in which Mariam begins to consciously reflect on her school failures: ‘I won’t get a grade, right?’ (line 8). However, her school failures are not abstract or simply restrained to the individual but are instead locally situated, comprising something that affects not only the one who has failed but also the current, immediate projects of co-present others (Goodwin 2007, 65). What the teacher and Mariam are collaboratively trying to accomplish at the moment, such as Mariam’s request for help – ‘can you write that’ (line 5) – to accomplish her schoolwork project is thereby satisfied by the teacher’s ‘you want me to help you to write’ (line 17).

**Initiating school-relevant topics and establishing working relationships of mutual trust**

The last excerpt, a few weeks after the previous one, takes place at the end of Mariam’s first school year. This time the teacher, Tobbe, is conducting a science lesson outside in the school’s front yard. In the middle of a teacher-student exchange, Mariam initiates a request to take her schoolwork home: ‘can I take that home and read it there’ (line 1). The request for homework makes publicly visible not only how Mariam takes responsibility for her own schoolwork but also that she has an acquired a form of ‘epistemic curiosity’ (Berlyne 1954), displaying both her genuine interest in the schoolwork and the mutual embodied arrangements of Mariam and her teacher, incorporating her willingness to interact and work together with the teacher.

**Excerpt (6)**

1. MARIAM: den där kan jag –kan jag ta hem den där och läsa den där
   I can take that -can I take that home and read it there
2. TEACHER: nej jag ska ha den nästa gång också
   no I’m using it next time as well
3. MARIAM: till mig eller?
   for me then?
4. TEACHER: a både dig [och Rebecca]
   yeah both you [and Rebecca]
5. MARIAM: ska jag skriva mitt namn?
   should I write my name?
6. TEACHER: det kan du göra, skriv där
   you can do that, write there
7. MARIAM: kan du kopiera en sån till mig Tobbe
   can you make a copy of this for me Tobbe
8. TEACHER: vi kan –du kan ta den sen (.) när vi har
   we can -you can take it later (.) when we’ve
9. arbetar klart med den [kan du få den
   finished working on it [you can have it
10. MARIAM: [a:]
    [yeah]
11. (10.00)
12. MARIAM: Tobbe tänk att jag går i åttan snart
    Tobbe imagine that I’ll be in the eighth grade soon
13. TEACHER: ja::
    yeah::
In many ways, it is Mariam’s initial request for homework that enables a more informal and intimate teacher–student relationship to develop in the ensuing interaction. As the teacher first responds by declining her request, we can see how Mariam immediately aligns with the formal design of the teacher’s embodied turn by elaborating on what it means ‘for me then’ (line 3). What is important here is how Mariam not only orients to the lesson plan of the day but how she also makes connections to what is expected of her in the near future. The smoothness with which she responds to the teacher’s positive affirmation with another request, ‘should I write my name’ (line 5), displays both a mutual awareness of the teaching procedures and her orientation to the specific pieces of information that are relevant. The collaborative framework visible in the entire sequence, through the highly synchronised turn-taking and the jointly performed embodied actions, highlights the emotional and relational dimensions of the teacher’s scaffolding (Renshaw 2013, 59).

Mariam’s statement in line 12, ‘Imagine that I’ll be in the eighth grade soon’, in turn demonstrates how learning with and from others is built upon emotional relationships of trust. Despite long-term school failures and history of absenteeism, she is now able to imagine a future attending school. Here, the possible ‘self’ or identity of an ‘active learner’ evoke the figured world (Holland et al. 1998) of the classroom – Mariam’s possible and likely future activities, motivations, and positions with respect to schooling. The hypothetical future Mariam elicits also demonstrates a form of ‘meta-process’ (Mehan 1979, 43) that directs the co-participants (student and teacher) to mutually reflect on what Mariam has learned during her first year at this school and to make connections to what she will learn in the near future.

The ways in which Mariam actively orients to the embodied participation framework as collaboratively organised by herself and the teacher, by initiating school-relevant activities, planning ahead, and taking responsibility for her daily schoolwork, vastly differ from her refusal to participate in classroom activities at the beginning of the school year (see Excerpt 1–4). It is also notable how the teachers, in their emotional scaffolding, create what can be referred to as a ‘transfer of agency’ (Tulbert and Goodwin 2011), from themselves to Mariam. As a consequence it is Mariam, with the teacher’s support, who acts as a ‘competent’ and ‘collaborative student’ and is thereby the one who exerts agency in the classroom activity at hand.

**Concluding discussion**

Over the course of a school year, Mariam gradually moved from acting as a ‘disruptive’ and ‘unwilling’ student to being recognised by both herself and her teachers as a ‘co-operative “and “agentive learner’, displaying intellectual and emotional capacities for actively engaging in school-based learning. Through the longitudinal examinations of trajectories of participation for an individual, we found that shifting forms of social identification were achieved through the participation in scaffolding episodes indexing the student as an “agentive learner”, and through repeated responsive uptakes of this position. Using a multimodal interactional approach informed by Goodwin’s (2017) notion of co-operative action, we have highlighted how students’ uptakes in scaffolding episodes are enacted not only through talk but also through the participation framework constituted through the mutual alignments of the participants’ (teacher and student) bodies and actions, voices, gazes, and gestures, amongst other semiotic resources. Such collaboratively orchestrated participation frameworks of learning create a dynamic frame for achieving shared attention and common points of reference for meaning-making (Goodwin 2007). Moreover, the structural and repeated arrangements of dyadic relationships of one-to-one teacher-student dialogues allow the student to gain access to and to actively participate in the communicative and cultural practices needed for managing school life.

As we have shown, the unfolding forms of scaffolding practices enacted in the classroom across spatiotemporal configurations are responsive to the level of knowledge Mariam displays both through her (lack of) understanding of the schoolwork and through her affectively charged resistance to schooling. The long-term examinations of teacher–student interactions demonstrate how the teachers’ scaffolding is oriented towards what Mehan (1979) refers to as teachers’ ‘choice
and product elicitation, which mainly aim to enable the student to master simple and factual responses, rather than to reflect on the grounds of her/his reasoning. Such forms of elicitation connect to a form of emotional scaffolding in which teachers take a high degree of responsibility so that the student can focus attention on ‘the growing edge of their capabilities’ (Renshaw 2013, 58). Central to this almost conventionalised form of culturally responsive scaffolding in the special educational context at hand is the creation of participation frameworks that are also responsive to the student’s agency and resistance to schooling. As we have shown, the teachers’ scaffolding practices in the special educational context at hand are as much about building learning relationships based on mutual trust as they are about enhancing the relevant skills required for becoming a competent student. The emotional learning relationships that develop over time between Mariam and her teachers in and through their co-participation in everyday school-based activities create an atmosphere of mutual appreciation of the student’s capabilities and agency that is demonstrated through Mariam’s changing affective and embodied engagement in school-based learning during the course of a school year. In turn this highlights, as Renshaw (2013) notes, the need to focus attention on the emotional and relational dimensions of scaffolding and how an individual student’s agency and emotional engagement in learning are situated and displayed in ‘the pursuit of building learning relationships’. This, in turn, raises further issues of how students with long-term school failures enter into positive emotional relationships within special educational needs contexts of learning.

Notes

1. The notion of sense of coherence (SOC) is a salutogenic approach, developed by the medical sociologist Aaron Antonovsky, to handling stress in human functioning and the negative impact stress has on a person’s health or sense of coherence. According to Antonovsky, SOC has three components: comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness.

2. The original Aggression Replacement Training (ART) method is an empirically validated and theoretically grounded cognitive-behavioural intervention developed by Goldstein, Glick, and Gibbs (1998), designed to prevent and reduce aggressive behaviour. Based on an assumed inter-correlation between aggression and the lack of a series of socio-cognitive, emotional and moral capabilities, the method identifies three crucial areas to work with: Interpersonal Skill Training, Anger Management, and Training in Moral Reasoning (Goldstein, Glick, and Gibbs 1998).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was supported by the The Swedish Research Council [2011-5746].

Notes on contributors

Ann-Carita Evaldsson is Professor in Education, Uppsala University, Sweden. Areas of expertise are interactional approaches to language, identity (gender, ethnicity, disability), morality and emotions as locally accomplished in their social and cultural contexts. Her research covers studies of children’s peer language practices, multilingual interaction, classroom order and adult-child interaction.

Johanna Svahn is Senior Lecturer in Education at Uppsala University. Her research interests cover interactional practices in a variety of formal and informal educational settings, addressing topics such as childhood, socialization, learning, morality, conflict and identity. Her work draws mainly on ethnomethodology and conversation analysis.
References


