Offering and soliciting collaboration in multi-party disputes among children (and other humans)*

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Introduction

A surge of recent research, while describing a sophisticated structure in two-party children’s disputes and arguments, either ignores the multi-party situation (Brenneis and Lein, 1977; Eisenberg and Garvey, 1981; Genishi and DiPolo, 1982, Lein and Brenneis, 1978) or pays it only passing attention (Boggs, 1978). There are exceptions. Goodwin (1982a) shows how a series of challenges and returns between two boys is changed to an arena of storytelling in which the comparative and competitive process is continued not only by them but by others who are co-present. In another study, Goodwin (1980) considers the ‘he-said-she-said’ argument in which an affronted party accuses another of talking about her behind her back. Most of these arguments are dyadic, although the affronted party may produce the accusation not only in the presence of the accused, but also among other spectators, any of whom may then take up a position that supports the affronted or the accused. Finally, Maynard (1985b) discusses the ‘politics’ of multi-party disputes as the means by which children realize their specific interactional interests.

These papers deal implicitly with collaboration among parties to a dispute by in-depth analyses of extended, single episodes. My aim, in this paper, is to examine patterns of collaboration more systematically by analyzing 45 multi-party arguments out of a total of 75 that were gleaned from videotapes of unsupervised reading groups in a first-grade classroom. (Thirty of the total were two-party disputes.) Fifty-four children (23 male and 31 female) from eight groups in three classrooms of one elementary school participated in the study. The subjects were caucasian, native speakers of English and from middle class

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American families. The official activities for children in these reading groups included reading (silently or aloud), completing worksheets, and drawing pictures related to reading material. Multi-party arguments occur in these reading groups when members either offer or solicit collaboration immediately after a two-party dispute is articulated. Following what Mehan (1979: 20-21) has called 'comprehensive data analysis,' I do not examine all episodes of multi-party disputes in this paper; however, generalizations are based on a study of, and apply to, the entire corpus. Before turning to my primary concern with offered and solicited collaboration, I discuss the structure of two-party disputes and define 'alignment structures' in multi-party arguments.

The structure of two-party disputes

Two-party disputes are considered to have three phases (Maynard, 1985a; cf. Eisenberg and Garvey, 1981; Genishi and DiPaolo, 1982): (a) an antecedent or arguable event, whose status as the first phase of a dispute is partly made visible by (b) an oppositional, argumentative utterance or action. Then occurs (c) a reaction phase, in which the opposition itself is handled in various ways as by negation, substitution, accounting, insisting, and so on. The following example illustrates these phases (see Appendix for transcribing conventions used in this and subsequent segments):

(1)  #4
1.  B : ((reaching in crayon bin and pulling a crayon out)) This is my own crayon. Right here.
2.  A : It is no::t.
3.  B : It is.
4.  A : It is not.
5.  B : it is too::.
6.  A : It is not.
7.  B : Yes it is, yes it is, yes it is.

Line 1 is a claim or (a) an arguable move that (b) is opposed at line 2 with an argumentative contradiction. Lines 3-7, a series of 'inversions' between positive and negative statements, comprise (c) the reaction phase.
Multi-party disputes

The three part structure is helpful in analyzing the beginning phases of disputes that involve several parties. However, as a two-party argument is transformed into a multi-party dispute, additional concepts are necessary to handle its complexity.

(2)  #3
Mary, Judy, Jim, and Betty are seated at a rectangular table. Judy is at the end of the table. Mary and Jim are across from one another, on either side of Judy. Betty is on Jim’s left.

1. Judy, who has been using a crayon, puts it on Jim’s paper, and returns to her own work.
2. Mary, who is half-standing, leans across the table, takes the crayon, and drops it in the box for crayons in the center of the table.
3. Jim says, ‘Hey that was mine, you’ as he half-stands and retrieves the crayon from the box. He puts it back in his own small box, located by his left elbow, and sits down.
4. Mary stands up, reaches across toward Jim’s box.
5. Jim grabs the box, and puts it between himself and Betty, further from Mary, who sits down and begins writing in her workbook.
6.* Betty grabs the box, and pulls it away from Jim toward her left side.
7. Jim stands up and grabs the crayon box from Betty, putting it on his right side.
8. Jim says, ‘I’ll tell.’
9. Betty says, ‘I didn’t get it.’

Up until Betty’s starred move (line 6), we have a basic two-party dispute. Mary’s taking the crayon from Jim’s paper (line 2) is (a) an arguable event that is opposed by (b) Jim’s verbal claim and his embodied action of retrieving the crayon at line 3. In (c) the reaction phase, Mary attempts to retrieve the crayon (line 4) and Jim maintains possession (line 5).

Here is where things become more complex. At line 6, a third party, Betty, alters her ‘participation status’ (Goffman, 1979) from that of onlooker to participant by grabbing the box. Meanwhile, Mary has returned to her workbook and withdrawn from participation in the dispute over the crayon. Jim engages in a struggle with her, regains the box, and threatens to ‘tell’ (line 8) before Betty performs a mitigating action (line 9). It would be possible either to consider lines 6-9 as part of the reaction phase of the original dispute or to consider it as a different dispute that could be mapped according to the entire three-stage
model. In the former case (treating lines 6-9 as part of the reaction phase), we
might consider Betty’s move as unique to a third party. The latter case (describ-
ing those lines as a different dispute) is perhaps the more tempting analytical
possibility because of Mary’s seeming withdrawal. However, following that
temptation would miss how the interaction between Jim and Betty may be re-
lated to that between Jim and Mary.

Alignment patterns

To analyze multi-party conflicts among children, I will consider the antece-
dent, arguable event in a dispute as consisting of a position or stance, whether
it is taken explicitly, as in a verbalized or embodied claim, or implicitly, as in
a presuppositional claim. Here, Mary’s taking of the crayon and putting it in
a communal ‘pot’ exhibits a territorial claim to the effect that the crayon is
public property. Opposition can be done by exhibiting an alignment against or
contradicting the initial position and/or exhibiting an alignment with a coun-
terposition. Jim does not just contradict Mary here (as might be done with a
negative directive, such as ‘don’t do that’); he takes a counterposition in this
example; that is, he displays a claim that the crayon is part of his own posses-
sional territory. Then, parties previously outside the dispute arena enter it by
aligning themselves relative to the position, its contradiction, or a counterposi-
tion.

In this example, it would be possible to consider Betty as not only aligning
against Jim but also with Mary’s original position, but we cannot assume that
is the case with the evidence we have. For instance, Betty might have been align-
ing against Jim’s counterposition because of an orientation to the group’s pos-
sessional claim, in which case she would be, in a sense, aligning with Mary’s
position. However, Betty might also have been asserting a claim on behalf of
herself. Or finally, her move may have been primarily contradictory or nega-
tive in terms of alignment, not proposing any association with another posi-
tion.

On aligning with and against a position or its opposition

One reason these distinctions are important is that parties can dispute a particu-
lar position for different reasons and by different means, a matter that is evi-
dent in the following example.
(3)  #11
(Mary is standing and leafing through some papers in the center of the table during this episode; the others are sitting.)

1. Mary : Where's my where is my folder—?
2. (2.5)
3. Julie : How'm I sposed to know---w?
4. Minda: Mary, whaddiya expect us to do. (0.4) Find everything for ya?
5. (3.5)

Opposition occurs with respect to Mary's line 1 utterance, which is superficially analyzable as a question or request for information. However, both Julie and Minda produce complaints that deal with the utterance at a presuppositional level (Maynard, 1985a). Julie's line 3 utterance proposes that a question such as Mary's carries the presumption that recipient is or should be knowledgeable about the item in question. By querying 'how' she is 'supposed to know,' Julie suggests her lack of knowledge regarding the location of the folder and opposes the presumption that she should have such knowledge. She may also thereby suggest that Mary ought to keep track of her own property. In a different vein, Minda's line 4 analysis of Mary's utterance is that it is a directive (Ervin-Tripp, 1976); i.e., it carries an expectation to engage in a search to 'find' the folder. And use of the phrase 'find everything' submits that the folder is one of many items that the others must locate for Mary. As she produces this utterance, Minda continues to work in her own book, thus nonverbally contradicting the expectation. Finally, Jim's 'yeah' at line 6 apparently agrees with Minda's formulation. Thus, opposition is produced here by two parties, in distinct ways, complaining about and aligning against presuppositional stances proposed as part of Mary's utterance. A third party, Jim, aligns with the opposition by producing an agreement token after Minda's argumentative utterance.

Another reason to distinguish between alignment against a position and alignment with a counterposition has to do with the contingent nature of the dispute process. An initial statement of opposition, even when strongly provocative, may be taken as a repair initiation. It is when opposition itself receives disagreement that a dispute is advanced (Goodwin, 1983; Maynard, 1985a).

(4)  #9
Jim, Wanda, Minda, Bonnie, Gary, and Mary are sitting at a table with two other children. Gary opens a box which is near him on the table, and removes a pencil-like object.
1. Bonnie: Could I have it. Ree eraser, Gary?
2. (1.4)
3. Gary: [Hmnn]
4. Jim: Ree eraser!
5. Wanda: Ree eraser? That's not (how you say it).
8. Wanda: eRAser not reer eraser
9. (0.2)
12. Bonnie: ((nods head affirmatively))
15. Wanda: eraser.
16. (1.1)
17. Wanda: eraser.
18. (Gary): [ eraser. ]
19. (0.4)
21. Mary: Not reer eraser.
22. (1.1)
23. Bonnie: Mary you don't know how to say it, it's reer eraser.
24. (0.2) ((Wanda stands up, leans over toward Bonnie, shakes head, takes crayon out of box))
25. Wanda: No it is NOT
26. (0.2)
27. Wanda: We know it isn't it's NOT. ((Wanda shakes head))
29. (3.2) ((Wanda sits down))
30. Wanda: We're older than you Bonnie. And WE know. . .
31. We KNOW it was erase— eraser.

The antecedent, arguable event, in this episode, is at line 1, and consists of Bonnie's pronunciation of the word 'ree eraser.' Both Jim and Wanda exhibit their noticing of the word by using a standard form of repair initiation, repeating the item that is the source of trouble (lines 4-5). Wanda, in a stronger way of initiating repair, 'negates' Bonnie's pronunciation (line 5). Bonnie, however, does not repair the trouble source; she disagrees with Wanda and stays with her original position (line 6). Thus, what might have been a repair sequence becomes a full-blown dispute.
In sequential terms, alignment against the initial, pronunciational claim occurs first in this example. Then, parties produce alignment with the counterposition. That alignment against the initial position occurs before alignment with the counterposition may be due to a particular aspect of repair work in conversation, the preference for self-over other-correction (Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks, 1977). Other’s opposition can be taken as a repair-initiation that provides an opportunity for self — i.e., the party whose utterance or action is the source of trouble — to repair the trouble. When that party rejects the initiation (i.e., elects not to repair the trouble source), it has the potential for transforming a possible repair sequence into a dispute. In the situation where other opposes self’s position by producing a candidate correction, or immediately aligns with a counterposition, the generalization still holds. That is, whether an oppositional utterance (alignment against an initial claim, or alignment with a counterposition) is an item in a repair sequence or a dispute depends, in part, on how ‘self’ or recipient of the oppositional move elects to treat it.

Collaboration

When the three-party alignment occurred in the last episode, it was after Wanda had initially stated the counterposition. Thus, the other two parties joined Wanda in opposing Bonnie in a collaborative way. In general, collaboration can be offered or solicited. Offers of collaboration occur when a party outside an ongoing dispute — an ‘outsider’ — without invitation produces a display of alignment with or against the position of one who is already involved — an ‘insider’ or ‘principal party.’ Solicits of collaboration consist in a principal party asking for such a display in particular ways.

Collaboration offers

Minda and Mary taking up the counterposition in chorus with Wanda can be called parallel displays of alignment in the sense that they exhibit the same counterposition as Wanda’s. Alignment displays can also be accomplished by parties exhibiting consistent forms of opposition. Notice, in lines 20 and 21, that Wanda and Mary engage in what Sacks (1965) called the joint production technique; i.e., the two parties produce a syntactically coherent utterance across their adjacent turns of talk. Wanda first states the counterposition and then Mary contradicts Bonnie’s original stance. In short, alignment displays can be produced when a party who is outside the original conflict takes a stance that is parallel or consistent with that of a principal party.
I will refer to outsiders' parallel and consistent displays of alignment, which occur subsequent to those of the principals, as offers of collaboration. The term collaboration here implies nothing about what participants are trying or attempting to do in a psychological or even interpersonal sense. It involves only how insiders and outsiders to a dispute may accomplish, in their talk and action, joint alignments on practical issues that emerge within the group. I use the term 'offers' to suggest that collaboration is an achieved and not an automatic result of an outsider providing a display that is parallel or consistent with an insider's. This is because insiders treat outsiders' displays of alignment in ways that appear to accept or reject the possibility of collaboration. Furthermore, outsiders themselves can follow their own displays of alignment with moves that moderate their collaborativeness.

*How collaboration offers may be accepted*

Uninvited alignment displays, produced by parties outside an original two-member dispute, can be considered as offers that implicate collaboration. Such displays are parallel to (the same as), or consistent with, one of the already-exhibited positions, and thus may be referred to as *sympathetic* alignments. If an offer is not rejected, we may assume that the collaboration is achieved. That is, collaboration offers need not be formally accepted in the sense that the party whose position is joined performs a recognizable expression of gratitude or acknowledgement. Acting together in parallel or consistent ways, as in lines 13-21 of example (4), may be enough by themselves to form the collaboration. I refer to this as *implicit* collaboration.

(4a)

14. Minda: [eraser.]
15. Wanda: eraser.
16. (1.1)
17. Wanda: [eraser.]
18. (Gary): [eraser.]
19. (0.4)
21. Mary: Not ree eraser.
22. (1.1)
23. Bonnie: Mary you don't know how to say it, it's ree eraser.
24. (0.2) ((Wanda stands up, leans over toward Bonnie, shakes head, takes crayon out of box))
25. Wanda: No it is NOT
26. (0.2)
27. Wanda: We know it isn't it's NOT. ((Wanda shakes head))
29. (3.2) ((Wanda sits down))
30. Wanda: We're older than you Bonnie. And WE know. . .
31. We KNOW it was erase--eraser.

However, there are means to demonstrate acknowledgement of, and thus explicitly accept, an offered collaboration. After Mary’s negating utterance in line 21, Bonnie addresses Mary and accuses her of not knowing ‘how to say it, ree eraser’ (line 23). Then, Wanda responds with both nonverbal and verbal negative moves in the slot (lines 24-25) where Mary is the selected next speaker (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, 1974). While preserving her own original oppositional stance (see example 4, lines 5, 8), Wanda simultaneously produces a move for Mary. It is as if the prior displays of alignment with her counterposition provide Wanda the opportunity to pre-emptively answer, on behalf of the others, Bonnie’s continuing displays of her initial position. This is further evident in Wanda’s next utterance (line 27), where, in producing a knowledge claim, she uses the ‘we’ term and thus formulates the claim on behalf of those who have stated the alternative pronunciation. Then, after being admonished about shaking the table (line 28) and sitting down (line 29), Wanda accounts for the knowledge claim by invoking age status, and reproduces that claim, again using the ‘we’ term (lines 30-31). In speaking ‘on behalf of’ Mary and the others, Wanda acts as ‘spokesperson,’ which move acknowledges the alignment displays as it uses them to warrant such speaking. That move also accepts the collaboration those displays offer.

How collaboration offers are rejected

Collaboration offers can be turned down when a principal party, whose position in a dispute has been articulated, opposes an outsider’s alignment display which is parallel or consistent with the principal’s position. In the next example, two outsiders produce alignment-displays consistent with an insider’s position. The first outsider’s display appears to be accepted, while the second one’s display is clearly rejected.

(5) #32
Ann, Ralph, Barb, and Kathy are sitting around a circular table.
Ann and Kathy discuss Kathy’s upcoming birthday party. At one
point, Ann says, '... I can’t wait until I get to go to Kathy’s birthday party and stay over night.' After this, the two discuss another person, Nancy, who might also be there. Then:

1. Barb : Kathy can you invite me?
2. (1.2) (Kathy shifts her gaze to Barb)
4. Barb : Can you invite me.
5. Kathy : I can’t.
6. Barb : Why:::
8. (1.2)
9. Ann : She can’t invite anybody else over.
10. Ralph : [Barb]
11. Ralph : Barb
12. Barb : (looks down at the table) (Shut up)
13. Ralph : [You - ] you don’t beg
14. people of - invite -  you over  [I’m ] not BEGging.
15. Barb :
16. (0.6)
17. Ralph : Yes you are.
18. (4.8) (Ralph erases; Barb gazes at Ralph)
19. Ralph : They just invite
20. Ann : [She is not Ralph. ] ya.
21. (2.2)
22. Ann : She is not begging Ralph.
23. (1.0)
24. Barb : I was just asking.

After Kathy rejects Barb’s request for an invitation to the party (line 5), Barb asks why (line 6). Kathy provides a minimal, proxy answer (line 7), after which Ann produces an utterance (line 9) that, in suggesting a reason for the rejection, can be heard as an answer to Barb’s question. Ann’s utterance thus opposes Barb’s request not in the same way as Kathy’s outright rejection. It is, rather, a display of alignment that is consistent with Kathy’s position. Because Kathy allows that display to stand — i.e., does not oppose it in any way — she implicitly accepts the collaboration offer.

In contrast, when Ralph displays a counterposition that could also be a basis for collaborating with Kathy and Ann, his move is unsuccessful. That may be partly because the potential for collaboration in the move is low. That is, Ralph produces a normative assertion ‘about not ‘begging people’ to ‘invite you over’ that opposes Barb’s solicit by questioning its propriety. While Ralph’s utter-
ance could be a reason for rejecting the request, it clearly rests on different
grounds than the one that Ann proposes; rather than allowing the solicit and
explaining the rejection, it focusses on the etiquette of the solicit itself. Still,
in being consistent with Ann and Kathy’s opposition to Barb’s request, Ralph’s
normative assertion thereby offers collaboration. However, the offer is reject-
ed by Ann’s utterances at lines 20 and 22.

Why collaboration offers may be rejected

Even though a party displays a stance that is abstractly consistent with that of
the original position or opposition, the collaboration thereby offered may be
rejected because of what it projectably promotes. That is, the offer may be con-
cretely inconsistent with the interests of its recipient, which suggests that the
issue of ‘consistency’ may be one that is decided by participants in and during
an actual dispute episode. For example, one dispute (#49) started when Tanya
was bumped by Craig, who was sitting next to her, whereupon she elbowed him
and said, ‘You don’t have to go like that. Gosh.’ Donald, sitting across from
Tanya, and Craig, collaborated on opposition to her expletive:

(6)  
1.  Donald: You said god.
2.  Craig  : That was a naughty word.

That is, Donald and Craig jointly produce a two-part accusation, involving (in
line 1) a proposal of what Tanya pronounced, and (in line 2) a characterization
that makes it appear violative. Tanya replied ‘Gosh is not,’ thus denying the
accusation by producing her pronunciational version of the expletive and by
contradicting the naughty word characterization on the basis of this version.
For a series of utterances, the parties continued to dispute whether she said
‘god’ or ‘gosh.’ Subsequently Craig accused Tanya of being a liar, whereupon
Tanya suggested the two ‘guys,’ Donald and Craig, didn’t ‘know’ their words.
Then, another outsider, Karen, entered the conversation:

(6a)  Karen: God is not a word– a naughty word. It isn’t Tanya.
        Tanya : I said gosh.

Karen’s utterance is collaboration-implicative with Tanya’s position in that it
displays an alignment against the ‘naughty word’ characterization Donald ear-
erlier produced. However, Karen’s contradiction is different from Tanya’s in
that it does not question Donald’s pronunciational proposal. For Tanya to ac-
cept the preferred collaboration could mean relinquishing on that issue, a possibility she rejects by disagreeing with the premise that she said god ('I said gosh'). In this way, she also effectively turns down the collaboration offer. To return to example (5), we have seen that while Ralph's utterance about 'not begging' goes against Barb's request of an invitation and is thereby abstractly consistent with Ann and Kathy's rejecting that request, Ann still contradicted Ralph's suggestion that Barb has 'begged' to be invited. At least two effects derive from Ann's aligning against Ralph's position. First, in a context where Ann and Kathy's discussion of the birthday party displays an exclusivity to their relationship, Ralph's alignment display may be interpreted by Ann not just as a collaboration offer, but also as a bid to intrude on that relationship (Maynard, 1985a). In the rejection of Barb's invitation-solicit, we already have evidence that preserving the relationship between herself and Kathy is an interest of Ann's. Her way of dealing with Ralph's alignment display may further that interest. Second, Ann's disagreement with Ralph may also mitigate the prior rejection of Barb's request. That is, Ann's utterances at lines 20 and 22, which oppose Ralph's 'begging' characterization, align in a parallel way with the position exhibited by Barb at line 15.

13. Ralph: You--you don't beg
14. Barb:...people of-- invite--vite you o ver
15. [I'm ] not BEGging.
16. (0.6)
17. Ralph: Yes you are.
18. (4.8) (Ralph erases; Barb gazes at Ralph)
19. Ralph: They just invite ya.
20. Ann: [She is not Ralph.]
21. (2.2)
22. Ann: She is not begging Ralph.
23. (1.0)
24. Barb: I was just asking.

And, at line 24, Barb produces a contrast characterization of her activity that is consistent with the negations both Barb and Ann have produced. It is not only that Ralph's collaboration offer is rejected, then, but that it occasions a form of collaboration between Ann and Barb in which it is retrospectively clear that Ann's opposition to Barb's request, exhibited in her producing a reason for Kathy's rejection, did not involve questioning the propriety of the request.
Outsiders' retrospective strategies

Given a situation in which third parties enter an articulated two-party dispute, collaboration between an outsider and a principal is an achieved outcome, not an automatic consequence of an outsider exhibiting a stance that is sympathetic with a principal party's position. Alignment displays operate as collaboration offers, which can be accepted (implicitly or explicitly) or rejected. A further dimension to the achieved nature of collaboration is that outsiders themselves can follow their own alignment displays with utterances or actions that constitute or reconstitute the collaborativeness of those displays.

(7) #68
Several children sit at a rectangular table. Ellen is across from Sally, who is the appointed 'responsible person' for the day in this group, which means she is charged with keeping members quiet and orderly. On Ellen's right is Jeanie. They are writing numerals in their workbooks. Jeanie says, 'I think you're supposed to go three. I think Sally, let me go ask the teacher.' When Jeanie leaves the table, Sally says, 'No we're supposed to go one two, one two, one two.' Shortly thereafter, Jeanie returns to the table.

1. Jeanie : Miss Andrew said we have to put a three.
2. (1.0)
3. Sally : Wh::ere.
4. Ellen : (C'mon) you don't have to put a three.
5. Jeanie : Mm hhm. (0.4) teacher even said [ Oh ]brother.
6. Sally :
7. (4.0)
8. Jeanie : ((points across at Sally's book)) And that ain't supposed to be a two.
9. (0.6) ((Sally pushes Jeanie's hand away))
10. Sally : Be quiet! Jeanie.
11. Jeanie : You ain't respons— you ain't only responsible [ person.
13. (0.6)
14. Ellen : C'mon Sally be nice to her.
15. (0.8)
16. Ellen : You know you're hurting her feelings.
In this example, opposition is first produced between Jeanie and Sally on whether they are supposed to write the numerals one and two, or one, two, and three. Sally’s claim is the former (‘one and two’), while Jeanie’s stance is the latter (‘one, two, and three’). As Jeanie reports it, the teacher’s position appears to support her own (line 1). Ellen nonetheless (line 4) aligns against that position in a way that could be consistent with Sally’s. Ellen (line 14) also supports Sally’s position after Jeanie criticizes another aspect of Sally’s work (lines 8-9), Sally (line 11) tells her to be quiet, and Jeanie (line 12) charges that Sally is ‘not the only responsible person.’ By disagreeing with Jeanie (at line 14), Ellen affirms Sally’s status within the group and her right to produce ‘quieting’ statements.

However, Ellen next addresses Sally with an appeal to ‘be nice’ to Jeanie (line 16). This displays alignment against, and simultaneously proposes by way of an implied contrast, a possibly ‘nasty’ element to Sally’s prior admonishment (line 11). At line 18, Ellen produces an assessment of its effects on Jeanie’s ‘feelings.’ In this dispute, then, the utterances of an outsider did not ‘side’ uniformly with the alignment displays of a principal party. Rather, the outsider exhibited alignments that went with and then against particular implicit and explicit stances of the insider. Thus, not only can an apparent collaboration offer be treated in various ways by its recipient so that it is more or less successful, but offerer herself can follow with various strategies that retrospectively construct how an alignment display should be construed.

Solicits of collaboration

Two-party conflicts become multi-party disputes when outsiders display an alignment with or against an insider’s already-exhibited position or counterposition. So far, we have seen outsiders offer collaboration by producing such alignment displays without being invited. Insiders solicit collaboration by inviting an outsider’s display of alignment. They also produce solicits by asking for an outsider’s participation in a joint oppositional activity.

Soliciting collaboration by inviting an alignment display

Soliciting collaboration and inviting an alignment display can be distinct activities. When a principal party invites a display of alignment that is sympathetic with his or her particular stance, it is a clear solicit of collaboration. When an insider forms an invitation that is not marked as to what kind of display it seeks, the invitation is accountably neutral. It may, nonetheless, be collaboration-implicative.
(8) #22
Matt, sitting on the left side of Tom at a round table, gazes at
Tom's workbook, while Tom is working in it.
1. Matt : 'hyyy! You're not supposed to write inside.
2. (0.8) ((Tom looks up at Matt)
3. Tom : Yes you can.
4. Matt : ((shakes head negatively))
5. (1.2)
7. (0.3)
8. Matt : Well I wouldn't.
9. (1.2)
10. Tom : But you can.
11. (0.5) ((Tom leans over to Sharon))
12. Tom : You can write inside can't ya.
13. (0.8) ((Sharon gazes at Matt, then shifts gaze to Tom))
15. (1.5) ((Sharon returns to work))
16. Matt : Oh I didn't know that.

This episode starts when Matt opposes Tom's writing behavior (line 1). Tom
contradicts the oppositional utterance at line 2, and there follows a series of
inversions (lines 3-10) until Tom addresses Sharon (line 11) and produces an
utterance (line 12) whose syntax and tag question invite a display of alignment
with his position. Sharon provides such a display at line 14, and then Matt per-
forms a backdown (line 16) by offering a remedial remark.

Thus, the party whose position is opposed in this example solicits, and suc-
cceeds in getting, a sympathetic alignment from an outside party. The one who
produces opposition can also seek sympathetic alignments.

(9) #12
Gary is sitting at the end of a rectangular table. On his right cor-
ner sits Judy. On his left corner is Minda, and sitting on Minda's
left is Myra. Gary appears to be working on his own paper, but
also glances at Judy's.
1. Judy : ((looking at Gary)) Don't look at my paper.
2. (4.0) ((Judy rests her head on her arms so as to cover her
paper; she gazes away from Gary, then back, then
at Myra, whose head is below the table as she looks
at something under the table.))
3. Judy : Myra?
4. (0.3) ((Myra lifts head and torso to upright position))
5. Judy : Will you tell Gary to stop looking at my paper.
6. (1.4) ((Judy and Myra both gaze at Gary))
7. Myra : [Gary:......]
8. Minda : Stop looking at her paper.
9. Gary : ((points pencil at Myra)) (  )
10. Myra : Shut up.

((Children go back to work))

Here, Judy (line 1) opposes an imputed nonverbal activity of Gary, and then invites (line 3, 5) a sympathetic display of alignment from Myra by asking her to address a directive to him. Myra then (line 7) produces Gary's name in a sanctioning way, with downward intonation and elongation of the ending sound. At line 8, another outside party, Minda, also produces opposition. Thus, collaboration is both invited and offered here although it appears less successful, as compared with the last example, in obtaining a verbal repair or remedy of the claimed violation.

Employing different devices, principal parties in both examples 8 and 9 request sympathetic displays of alignment from outsiders. But invitations can be formed more neutrally. In one episode, Stan and Harold were coloring an Indian's deerskin clothing and began arguing over its proper shade:

(10) #29
1. Harold : Here's the color of deerskin lookit.
2. Stan : No it isn't. (1.0) This is more like it.
3. Harold : It's the same thing as this.
4. Stan : No it isn't. It's real light mine's more light and that's the color of deerskin.

After this, the two parties continued producing claims and counterclaims until Stan addresses Linda:

(10a)
1. Stan : ((turns, looks to Linda)) Do you like mine? or Harold's.
2. (2.0)
3. Harold : Whose is the best.
4. (1.6)
5. Linda : Uhm. ((points to Stan's paper))
6. Stan : Mine?
7. (1.0)
8. Stan : That looks more like deerskin doesn't it Linda.
10. Harold: (Not mostly can’t—) doesn’t show up gooder ’n mine.

Stan’s utterance (line 1) is an either-or question that does not elicit or structurally prefer the display of a particular, sympathetic stance. After a silence (line 2), Harold (line 3) formulates the query differently, still preserving Linda as next speaker and asking for her assessment with a question that is again structurally neutral in the kind of reply it occasions. These, then, invite alignment displays but do not markedly solicit collaboration.

Of course, Stan’s and Harold’s questions occur in the context of their prior argumentative and claims-making activities, so that the recipient of their questions, provided she has observed or overheard these activities, may be aware that her response will not be treated as an answer to a survey question — i.e., simply categorized and filed away. Rather, her answer will be a resource for one of the parties to advance his claims. This is apparent in the activities (lines 6-8) subsequent to Linda’s (line 5) nonverbal indication of alignment with Stan’s position. Stan (line 8) ‘checks out’ her answer with a question-repeat that states his position (as displayed before) and asks for agreement with it. Linda then produces an agreement token (line 9), after which Harold counters with an utterance (line 10) that exhibits a version of his own previous stance.

In belittling Stan’s color, the utterance may also be a ‘face-saving’ move (Goffman 1967, pp. 15-23). Thus, while some utterances may be formed so as to accountably propose the neutrality of an alignment-invitation, such utterances may still be embedded in, and partly constitutive of, a partisan discourse context. An invitation for an alignment-display, that is, may not be marked as to its collaboration-implicativeness, but may contain it by virtue of contextual features exogenous to the utterance-invitation itself.

Inviting participation in joint opposition activity

So far we have seen solicits composed of questions regarding an outsider’s position on some issue. An example of collaboration being solicited by way of an invitation to participate in a joint oppositional activity is apparent in an episode of teasing. It is set up when Joe, who is seated on the left side of Mitch, takes a small stuffed animal belonging to and in front of Mitch. Mitch does not notice Joe’s activity because he is talking to Shawn, who sits across the table. Joe’s move, consisting in the violation of Mitch’s possessional territory, can be considered as a provocative, oppositional move, but its success requires noticing by the one who is thereby opposed. Joe occasions such a noticing by querying Mitch, ‘Where’s your little animal?’
Joe's query, as an instance of a 'known-information' question that is used to test the knowledge of recipient, initiates the teasing episode. In response to the query, Mitch looks around the table, underneath it, and in the hood of his sweatshirt, while asking, 'Where's my little—?' He thus provides a public display of his ignorance on the matter. In answer to Mitch's question, Joe says, 'I don't got it.' While the question could be taken as seeking a simple 'location' answer, Joe treats it as implying that location involves possession. By denying possession, he offers a candidate answer to Mitch's question that is a claim of innocence. Thus, Joe's hiding the toy, his initial query regarding its whereabouts, Mitch's response, and Joe's continued withholding of information, make visible asymmetrical states of knowledge that correspond to situated identities of 'teaser' and 'victim' for Joe and Mitch, respectively.

While Mitch continues to look for the animal, Joe then softly, and in a way that inhibits Mitch from hearing, addresses the girl who sits across the table (opposite himself): 'Diane, I see it.' She asks where it is and Joe shows her by bending over and looking underneath the table. She gazes downward and then up at Mitch.

(11) #75
1. Diane : Where did your animal go.
2. (1.0)
4. (2.4)
5. Joe : hih hih hih
6. Diane : Don't ask me?
7. (4.0)
8. Mitch : Joe:...:
9. (2.5)
11. (0.4)
13. Diane : [He does ]n't got 'im.
14. (0.4)
16. (0.6)
17. Diane : Because. (0.3) Joe showed me.
18. (1.5)
19. Joe : Where 'e is.
20. (1.0)
21. Joe : Diane knows where he is but in— (0.4) she won't tell will ya Diane.
23. (1.0) ((Diane shakes head no))
24. Mitch : Diane, where is it.
25. (2.0)
26. Diane : Should I?
27. (0.6)
28. Joe : No. It's over— we:: threw it in the t— we threw it in the
men's bathroom someplace.
29. Mitch : [ I'm tellin.
30. Mitch : I'm gonna tell.
31. Joe : Oh: · · ·! ((twirls pencil in air))
32. Diane : [ No:: it's only right there ((Diane points to floor))
((Mitch gets up from chair, walks to end of table, and retrieves the
suffed animal))

The device for inviting another party's display of alignment here appears to be 'putting her in the know.' Once that move is performed, knowledge-recipient is in a position of utilizing that knowledge in various ways. For example, it can be used on behalf of the teasing victim, to remedy his lack of knowledge, as eventually happens here (line 33) after he threatens to 'tell' (lines 30-31). Before that, however, Diane uses the known-information question (line 1) to occasion a displayed lack of knowledge on the part of Mitch (line 3). In other words, Diane initially uses the knowledge offered her by Joe to do teasing in a way structurally similar to Joe's. She thereby accedes to Joe's invitation, aligns with his provocative, oppositional stance (i.e., she helps perpetuate the violation of Mitch's possessional territory), and thus collaborates in the tease. Because of the concealed way in which collaboration is achieved, this episode also exhibits collusiveness (Goffman 1974: 514-515). However, the collusiveness founders when Mitch appeals to Joe (lines 8-10), Joe produces another denial of possession (line 12), and Diane confirms the denial (line 13), which reveals that she has knowledge regarding the whereabouts of the hidden toy. At least, the latter is an analysis of Diane's utterance by another party, Minda, who produces an 'epistemological' question, asking 'how' she knows (line 15), whereupon Diane reveals the source of her knowledge (line 17). 'Subsequently, Joe confirms that Diane has knowledge (lines 19, 21), and requests her to keep it secret (lines 21-22). He thus seeks to prolong the collaboration, but it breaks down, as noted, following Mitch's threats to 'tell.'
Refusing collaboration solicits

This suggests that, as collaboration offers can be rejected, solicits can be refused. The next episode further illustrates this point. Prior to this episode, Mike had accused Tom of not being done with a particular page in his workbook. Tom denied the accusation. Then they both went back to work for 17 seconds and until this:

(12) #36
1. Mike : ((turning the page in his workbook)) You didn’t even do
3. Mike : No you didn’t.
4. Tom : Did too.
5. Mike : Did not.
6. Tom : Did too.
7. Mike : Did ‘e Jimmy?
8. Jimmy : I don’t know.
10. Mike : [ No he didn’t. ]
11. Jimmy : ((displays ‘I don’t know’ with shoulder shrug, hands out, and face grimace))
12. Mike : Well I don’t think he did.

Tom (line 3) again denies Mike’s accusation (line 1) and the two produce a series of inversions (lines 4-7) that contradict each other’s utterances. Then, at line 8, Mike invites an outsider’s alignment by querying Jimmy about the matter. Jimmy rejects aligning with either party’s position by claiming a lack of knowledge (line 9). Next, Tom produces another invitation (line 10) that is markedly collaboration-implicative; i.e., it prefers a display of alignment with his own stance. Still, Jimmy refuses to take a position (line 11).

Claiming a lack of knowledge regarding some issue may be a way of remaining uninvolved and therefore neutral during a conflict episode. There is another sense of neutrality that can be exhibited without rejecting a solicit of alignment. An outsider’s stance that is exhibited in response to an insider’s solicits may be produced so as to align equally against everyone rather than just one or the other disputant’s position. In one group of six children, for example, Laura and Sandy were reading out loud while the others wrote in their workbooks. Jane attempted to hush them with a ‘sh’ sound. When they continued reading, she told them to ‘be quiet.’ Still getting no proper response, Jane appealed to Jeff, the ‘responsible’ person, to ‘tell them to be quiet.’ Jeff then
pointed to each member of the group, including himself. With each point, he said 'quiet.' Thus, while Jane sought an alignment from Jeff against the activities of particular others, his response was to admonish each person in the group. Later, when the two parties who were reading out loud attempted to quiet each other, Jeff’s aid was again sought:

(13)   #69
Sandy  : Je::ff. Je::ff, tell her to be quiet (points at Laura)
Jeff   : ((gazes at Laura)) Quiet.
Jeff   : (shifts gaze to Sandy)) You too.

In both instances, Jeff handled solicits of his collaboration by carefully taking stances not just against one or two parties on behalf of others, but against everyone equally. In summary, the collaboration-implicativeness of an invited alignment-display can be avoided by recipient declining involvement in an ongoing dispute. Neutrality can also be achieved by accepting an invitation and producing alignments that favor no one’s position.

Conclusion

This paper has aimed to remedy a neglect of multi-party disputes by addressing how those involved in a two-party argument may collaborate with others who are co-present. Collaboration is a complex phenomenon. In the first place, we have seen that disputes, although initially produced by two parties, do not consist simply of two sides. Rather, given one party’s displayed position, stance, or claim, another party can produce opposition by simply aligning against that position or by aligning with a counterposition. This means that parties can dispute a particular position for different reasons and by different means. It is therefore possible for several parties to serially oppose another’s claim without achieving collaboration. A second complexity, then, is just that collaboration is a negotiated phenomenon. For example, while it is possible for an outside party to produce an uninvited alignment display that is sympathetic to an already-stated position in a two-party dispute, the party whose position it supports can agree or disagree with that display. Thus, outsiders’ uninvited alignment displays that occur subsequent to those of the insiders or principals in a two-party dispute must be considered as collaboration offers, which can be accepted or rejected. But that is not the end of it, for an outside party can offer alignments that now align with a principal party’s position and then, addressing a different aspect of the principal’s talk, align against it. Finally, in addition to being offered, collaboration can also be solicited. A principal in a two-
party dispute solicits collaboration by inviting an outsider to display an alignment favorable to inviter's own position or to participate in a joint activity that supports that stance. Such solicits can be accepted, rejected, or, again, handled in such a way as to exhibit neutrality. Argumentative collaboration, in short, is a specific, momentary, and delicate state of affairs that is also an organized, technical achievement.

The fact that the subjects for this study were children has become submerged in the formal analysis of alignment structures and collaboration. Thus, following this research, two directions can be pursued. One would be to ask how children's arguments differ from those occurring among adults. A reasoned answer would be that matters of substance or content may distinguish disputes among youthful persons from those occurring among older ones, while the forms of disputing remain relatively invariant (Maynard, 1985a, 1985b). In other words, by studying multi-party disputes among first-grade children, we learn about the structure of collaboration as a generic phenomenon among at least practitioners of standard English no matter what their age. This claim can be sustained in part because the analysis presented here depends upon deriving a priori conventional relations between utterances, rather than statistical relations between variables (Coulter, 1983). We have not examined exogenous influences — which would include the age characteristics of participants — on disputes, but rather the endogenously-produced structure of argumentative discourse. Still, the claim that patterns of collaboration are generic to children and adults can be examined with further research on multi-party disputes among different age groups.  

Another, more radical, research orientation, would be to consider, in any social arena where the members are identified as children, how it is that such a 'membership category' (Sacks, 1972) is relevant. If that query is made, then research on 'children's arguments' would involve investigating formal practices for exhibiting the accountable category 'children' as much as it would mean describing the ways that disputing is done. Those who have studied children's arguments, in Pollner's (1979) terms, have treated 'children' as a social fact, a 'thing,' rather than as a socially organized meaning, or 'ing.'

To attend to the -ing of things involves a radical modification of the attitude of daily life, for it requires attending to the processes of constitution in lieu of the product thus constituted (Pollner, 1979: 253, fn. 11).

In short, we have treated arguments as the important event without also seeing how it is that the category 'children' is constituted as a recognizable feature of and within the research setting.
Notes

1. See also Goodwin’s (1982b) discussion of ‘instigating’ the social process that culminates in a he-said-she-said confrontation.

2. This study is a re-analysis of a portion of data collected by Louise Cherry Wilkinson, Department of Educational Psychology, University of Wisconsin, Madison. The original research was funded by the National Institute of Education through a grant to the Wisconsin Center for Education Research (OB-NIE-G-81-009). The opinions expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect the position, policy, or endorsement of the National Institute of Education or the Department of Education.

3. Videotaping of both teacher and students, and the presence of several adults (including student interns, nurses, parent aides, and specialist teachers) besides the classroom teacher were regular features of the classroom. Thus, the equipment and research team involved in the original study seemed minimally disruptive of classroom routine. For further discussion of the data and the collection, see Wilkinson and Calculator (1982).

4. I owe this point to John Heritage (personal communication), who also suggests the possibility that Julie’s move is strategically pre-emptive, in forestalling a subsequent accusation from Mary that the others have covered or hidden her paper.

5. Sacks (1965, lecture 1) observed that in instances of the joint production technique, syntax is in a sense exploited for social organizational purposes. A powerful way of aligning with another person or with their position is to divide a task (such as producing a syntactically coherent utterance) which does not lend itself to easy division and which could be done by either party acting alone.

6. Sacks (1965, lecture 1: 9-10; 1966, lecture 8: 1-3) discusses the use of ‘we’ in a categorical sense (e.g., as referring to ‘Americans’) as compared to its more restricted use in differentiating among particular and nameable members of a group (e.g., ‘we’ as opposed to ‘company’). When ‘we’ is employed in the restricted sense (as it is in examples 4 and 4a), then an utterance in which it appears asserts something only ‘on behalf of’ specific group members and not the members of some category that is applicable to the larger collectivity (Sacks, 1966, lecture 9: 11).

7. Maynard (1985a: 19) discusses normative assertions as ‘utterances that oppose a prior arguable action or utterance by proposing what should, can, ought, or is supposed to happen.

8. However, after Karen later repeats that ‘God is not a naughty word,’ which utterance Craig then contradicts, Tanya abandons the tactic of arguing about pronunciation:

   (6b) Tanya: Well sometimes my mom says goddam it. Sometimes she does.
   Craig: You said it now.
   Tanya: Yeah cause she lets me. I can say any words I want. Cause I’m gonna be a swearin’ lady when I grow up.

Therefore, Tanya was not incapable of yielding on the pronunciational issue. Insofar as Karen’s alignment against the ‘naughty word’ characterization implies a counterposition that ‘god’ is permissible to say, Tanya may here be responsive to the offered collaboration in claiming that she can say ‘any words’ she wants. The reasons for that are different from what Karen has proposed. That is, what Karen has suggested that ‘god’ is not ‘naughty,’ Tanya simply suggests that she can say ‘any words’ because her mother lets her, and because she is going to ‘be a swearin’ lady’ when she grows up. However, the upshot is the same in both Tanya’s and Karen’s utterances: ‘God’ is utterable.

9. By ‘interest’ here, I am not referring to a psychological need or want on the part of a single
party. Rather, I mean to capture the interactional outcome of conversational practices.

10. Notice that, roughly speaking, had Ralph's offer been accepted, Ann, Kathy, and Ralph would have been on one side, and Barb on the other, with respect to the issue of the solicited invitation. Instead, a different and more complicated alignment structure is accomplished. Barb and Ralph are both excluded from the Ann and Kathy relationship, while Ann and Barb are aligned against Ralph regarding the propriety of Barb's soliciting a party invitation. On exclusivity in dyadic relationships, see Eder and Hallinan (1978). Goodwin (1980: 691, fn. 21) suggests that a common occurrence among girls is the formation of alliances against third parties.

11. Prosodically, the utterance may signal a preferred stance. Upward intonation after the word 'mine' and downward intonation after 'Harold's' could indicate the expectation that Linda would evaluate Stan's color more positively than Harold's.

12. Not all episodes of conflict among children are 'serious' in the sense that opposition is the principal feature of their interaction. Often, opposition is 'keyed' in various ways so that primary disputing behavior emerges as a teasing and playful activity. See Maynard (1985a: 8-12).

13. See the discussion of 'known-information' questions in Mehan (1979: 194-195), who also provides further references on the topic.

14. See Whalen and Zimmerman's (forthcoming) analysis of police calls and 'epistemological displays' within them - the ways that callers demonstrate in their talk how they come to know of some police-relevant matter.

15. What might be found are orderly variants on the structures described here, rather than different patterns altogether (Coulter, 1983). For a discussion of the development of argumentative skills before the age of 5 or 6, see Maynard (forthcoming).

References


