

# Accomplishing the categorial landscape of the classroom: The case of group singing

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## *Abstract*

This article contributes to the corpus of ethnomethodological studies concerning the lived order of educational settings and, specifically, the accomplishment of what we call the ‘categorial landscape’. In this sense, we aim to further demonstrate the contribution of ethnomethodology for understanding educational settings as accomplished through the local, practical, reflexive, and accountable accomplishment of the ‘classroom-as-context’ by its participants. Our particular contribution is the description of how institutional educational settings are not only accomplished in and through stable category relations (i.e., “teacher” – “pupil”) and associated ‘bound activities’ but, rather, how other category relevancies and devices might be in play for specific activities which sustain the setting as one in which ‘education’ is demonstrably getting done in this instance, a class singing session. Drawing on insights from studies of membership categorisation practices (Watson 2015; Fitzgerald 2020), we demonstrate how the multi-layered categorial landscape of the classroom is accomplished in and through the singing which occasions shifting relational devices of ‘teacher-pupil’ and ‘leader-follower’. Most significantly we show how the staffing and incumbency of these categories is not necessarily mapped in expected ways by and for the setting’s staff.

## INTRODUCTION

A central contribution of ethnomethodological studies is the description of how commonplace scenes are staffed by members in ways that orient to, recognise, and accomplish that scene as a particular context. In this sense, educational order has been shown to be a local production phenomenon (Hester and Francis 2000; Francis and Hester 2004). Ethnomethodological studies have aimed to specify the ‘missing what’ (Garfinkel 2002) of classroom order and have explicated various methods through which the lived detail of the context of the classroom is accomplished; that is, what work makes a classroom scene recognisable as such. That educational order is a *local* order is routinely overlooked by formal analytic studies of education that make, for example, psychological subjects or, indeed, ‘cultural dopes’ (Garfinkel 1967) of the classroom’s participants who

learn within the expert's models of the world. Even approaches that proclaim to be concerned with pedagogic practice often miss their phenomena in highly specialised ways. The world that ethnographers aim to study and describe is a pre-described, already competent world assembled by its participants as staff (Garfinkel, 2002) in and through methods for teaching and learning the ordinary, mundane, everyday affairs they display (Macbeth 2010). Indeed, members are the first methodologists on the scene, and it is these methods that are instructive in producing an 'analytically adequate ethnography' (Garfinkel 2002, 100; Moerman and Sacks 1988, 115; Macbeth 2010, 394). In that sense, studying educational settings (indeed, any social setting in which some activity is getting done) is in itself an instructional and pedagogic exercise. The analyst learns from the members the methods required for the observation and description of the scene; methods and phenomena of order that are discoverable, and only discoverable (Garfinkel 1991, 17).

For ethnomethodologists, the classroom is treatable as 'work site' staffed by bodies performing competently and adequately the work of both the classroom's order and the specific activity the participants are engaged in at just that moment (Garfinkel 2002). Setting and activity are not distinct orders but mutually elaborative in the sense that any given activity – group singing, in our case – is accomplished through methods that are oriented to the task of singing but which are configured in such a way that displays that the singing is getting done in a classroom, and, as such, is part of an educational setting. It is in this way that categories of 'teacher' and 'pupil' are both yielded, displayed, and omni-relevant, yet also potentially side-lined or put 'on hold' in terms of their operational relevancy at any given point. Considering this, we are able to see, not only how participants engage in a setting, and therefore define it as such, but also 'that their actions are oriented to contextual relevancies for the actions they are engaged in' (Moutinho 2021, 172). Moreover, we are able to move beyond a normative approach to categories and their predicates (Reynolds and Fitzgerald 2015).

That in a classroom the categories 'teacher' and 'pupil' are relevant is a self-explicating and reflexive matter. Indeed, unlike formal analytic studies, ethnomethodology does not proceed from the unexamined adoption of the categories in order to describe scenes 'as another member' or to simply 'put some category in' in order to make formal sociological sense of what is going on (Sacks 1995[1], 41-42). The question for ethnomethodological studies is, instead, in and through what practical procedures are relevant categories selected, invoked, displayed, and oriented to, in the building of, and as, the emergent order of a particular activity. For members, it is an unremarkable fact that categories and context, and the relevance and relationship of one to another, are accomplished in their mutually constitutive, reflexive, moment-by-moment, accountable practices. Such category practices are, of course, a central element of members' competent use of ordinary language as a quintessential method in making sense (or "culturally recognisable sense") of theirs and others' actions and how these orient to and affect each other (Watson 1992). For Garfinkel and Sacks (1970, 342) the notion of member – understood in reference to the mastery of natural language – 'is the heart of the matter'. Indeed, 'if social order (e.g., the orderliness of educational institutions) were anything at all, it has

to be first and foremost a communicative order' (Watson 1992, 263). In other words, the lived order of a classroom is not a matter of actions or categories in a context (with context being some kind of container for action) but, rather, *categories-in-context* (Hester 1994).

In what follows we describe the lived order of a class singing session. The first section considers how the 'teacher' and 'pupils' provide 'hints' (Sacks 1995[1], 595) that subtly invoke and display their categorial incumbency and status. We also consider how the 'bound' activities of the 'teacher' – for example, the requesting of the attention of the class, and the initiation of activity sequences – are specifically designed in such a way that projects and reflects the forthcoming activity. That is, that the activities get done in such a way that they are see-able by the children both as being done by a 'teacher' in a classroom but, also, as oriented to the activity of singing together. Following this we describe how the singing, initially led by the 'teacher' and collectively produced by the children such that they display the category 'class', is then subtly disrupted before being reinitiated in such a way that makes relevant the category pair 'leader'–'follower'. These category and associated activities are 'staffed' in ways that demonstrate the shifting relationship between category, activity, and incumbent in relation to the ongoing activity. In explicating this multi-layered category work of the participants, we describe how the categorial landscape of the classroom is accomplished *in situ* and *in vivo* by the participants of the scene. We begin to orient the analysis by briefly reviewing the insights generated by ethnomethodological studies of classroom order and educational studies, with a specific attention to their categorial grounds.

## EDUCATION AS A SETTINGED ACTIVITY

'Settings do not stand ready-made and pre-defined but are made-up in situ by the same practices which make them accountable to the members' (Fox 2006, 439). In this sense, the classroom, as a setting, and as a context for pedagogic occasions 'does not make any situation within it pedagogical just because it is happening in there' (Maeder 2018, 144). As Sacks (1995[1], 516) suggests:

We could put it this way: Is it possibly the case that, first, the phenomenon of a 'setting' needs be recognized as also a Members' phenomenon, and not, for example, one of those things which, as social scientists, we construct and manage? And if so, then we have got to find out what kind of a thing it is that they're doing with it – what kind of a thing it is.

Multiple activities can take place in classrooms that are not necessarily pedagogical, around and within the formally organised lessons. Games, the spreading of rumours, the development of personal relationships, as anyone who has spent time as a pupil in a classroom knows well, are as much the stuff of classroom life as the lessons themselves. It is in and through the work of the participants, collectively, that activities are organised in such a way that they are recognisable as institutional, educational, pedagogic occasions, and not something else. The classroom scene is thus assembled *in situ* (Maeder

2018), moment-by-moment in relation to ongoing, and often multi-layered, courses of activity. ‘Context’ routinely serves as a gloss for both the activities that constitute the setting in particular ways, and the ways in which the location (and sub-divisions thereof) of those activities is reflexively organised in relation to ‘category-relevant settings’ (Smith 2017) which are, themselves, generative of categories (Jayyusi, 1984). Indeed, ‘classroom’ provides only a gross spatial category device that gathers up a range of potentially relevant and recognisable category-setting-activity relations (teacher’s desk, front row, back of the class, outside the door, the ‘quiet corner’, and so on and so on). Through this respecification of context we see how abstract concepts such as ‘education’ irrevocably live in the way members deal with, orient to, and produce such moments, in practice, rather than allowing such concepts to remain ‘on holiday’ (Lynch and Bogen 1997). Approaching ‘context’ in such a way that treats of the available scene as an assembled activity (Sacks 1995[I], 89; also, Smith 2020) and in which the possibility of observation is understood to be grounded in the methodological production/recognition of activities (Watson 2005), is a central means of taking seriously Garfinkel’s efforts in making the familiar strange. This attitude – traceable back to the phenomenology of Schutz – has been adopted as a more general ethnographic principle, and as applied by professional ethnographers, usually means *explaining* what is going on in a given setting, rather than remaining with the endogenous sense-making procedures of members. Procedures which are, of course, also unavoidably used by the professional ethnographer. On this matter, and as particularly relevant for this paper and special issue, it is worth quoting Christian Greiffenhagen and Rod Watson (2009, 86) at length:

In the sphere of visual interaction, issues of (ethnographic) ‘context’ are very likely to emerge. However, the question is not so much whether to include contextual features in the analysis, but how this may be done. Thus it seems clear that in these fragments the general classroom culture, the specific task (what the teacher has told pupils to do), the physical layout of the room and the individual differences between pupils (including the degree of pro-activeness of each pupil, their knowledge of the play, as well as their technical competence), all have a potential bearing on each analysed instance. Whether they become salient to the particular case is a strictly occasioned matter, and the challenge would then be to exhibit whether and how these issues enter into pupils’ practices and the ‘participation framework’ (Goffman 1981) within which these practices take place.

There is a large corpus of educational ethnography, primarily influenced by developments in psychology, anthropology, and sociology. In many of these works, schools, colleges, and universities are used as institutional contexts in which theories, models, and conceptualisations of social types are applied in order to ‘explain’ the order and regularity of classroom life; the descriptions of these contexts are then ‘reassembled as evidence or exhibits on behalf of the explanations’ (Macbeth 1991, 282) leading to a deep methodological irony. This irony is perhaps particularly strong in educational settings where the analyst and observer fail to learn from the instructable methods of the teachers and



learners they set out to observe. As we noted above, categories yielded by the setting are used as an unexamined, unexplicated, descriptive convenience. In ethnographies of school settings, for instance, ‘teacher’ and ‘pupil’ are often seen as readily available, obviously relevant, categories by virtue of the institutionalised properties of the setting. We have reports of what teachers do and what pupils do, and what they do together. Whilst these categories are readily ‘perceptually assignable’ in a primary school classroom, how and when, and through what procedures those categories are made operationally relevant (Coulter 2001) for the parties to the classroom for their specific activities, remains unspecified. By observing the staged actions and interactions within the ‘classroom’, the analysis is able to account for the membership and category incumbent participants display/recognise through their situated actions. In other words, ‘teachers and pupils can have themselves recognisable as such by display the features of their rights, obligations, and expectations’ (Payne 1976, 36).

That educational situations, particularly in the context of institutionalised formal education, include the presence of someone doing the teaching work and others doing the learning work is visibly and conceptually available to everyone. However, this simple observation is relevant in the sense of considering the possibility of recognisability and analysability of settings and occasions categorisable as educational. We know there is a teacher (or a lecturer or a professor), who does the teaching part, and usually a group of students – which in the context of primary education are often referred to as pupils – which does the learning part. ‘Doing teaching’ and ‘doing learning’ indexes certain sorts of orderly procedures, which are culturally recognisable, and which mutually constitute each other in and as a formal pedagogic setting. These categories are omni-relevant in the sense that participants do not go about explicitly claiming self-identification with such categories but instead provide for one another hints (Sacks 1995[I], 595) for another next first time. As described by Fitzgerald (2020, 91) ‘Sacks’s observation points to both the categorial and sequential relevance of the device in that, at any point in an interaction, someone can expectedly and relevantly invoke an omni-relevant device to accomplish an activity, or, in doing some activity, invoke an omni-relevant membership device’.

The upshot of this insight is that whilst categories such as ‘teacher’ and ‘pupil’ and, indeed, ‘classroom’ are seen unproblematically by members and professional observers alike, what is missed are the ways in which they feature, or not, as a local categorisation device (that is, a *locally-assembled* collection of categories and associated *locally-warrantably* rules of application). By this we do not mean that these categories are ‘brought in’ from somewhere else to structure the interaction, but that they are collaboratively produced within it, accomplished-in-use (Smith 2020), and observable through the participants’ orientation towards the ‘effectiveness’ of their actions. Sacks (1995[I], 594) describes this ‘effectiveness’ in terms of how ‘the sheer seeing that something being done is intended to be such-and-such an action, or that that observable action is legitimate, may involve reference to that categorial membership’.

Classic EMCA studies (McHoul 1978, Mehan 1979) have describe how ‘teacher’ and ‘pupils’ are organised, interactionally, as ‘local organisations of rights, privileges,

sequential structure, and practical contingency' (Macbeth 1991, 285). A pervasive feature of classroom interaction is the invitation-response-evaluation (IRE) sequence. This manages issues pertaining to parsing and next-speaker selection in that teachers speak, they usually refer to the cohort, from which one next speaker is selected through various methods (e.g., the hand rising system, the pointing system, naming, eye contact, and so on), and in response, the speaker does so as the cohort's turn as a multi-party unit (usually between 20 to 30 children in a regular primary school classroom). The subsequent evaluation is done by the teacher and is, therefore, done for the class as a whole. It is important to note, again, that the IRE structure is not external to the activity, but it is endogenous to the production of the activity as a pedagogic activity. In this sense, just as with the turn-taking system generally, it is no surprise to find variations, adaptations, partial completions, and activities that do not produce the IRE structure at all. We also note, and go on to describe below, how more recent studies, drawing specifically on developments in the study of membership categorisation analysis – have demonstrated that, although the category device teacher–pupils cannot be ruled out until the end of the activity, it can be temporarily 'put aside'; 'at the simple fact that the participants are in a classroom does not mean that are always operating under the aegis of the same categories' (Moutinho 2020, 174).

In our case of group singing, where the group have already had some experience of the activity, the participants are engaged in what we might call a 'concerted doing' in which the mutually elaborative orders of category-relevancy and actions and the turn-taking system are organised by participants in relation to both ongoing formulation and organisation of the scene as a classroom scene (and not just any occasion of singing together) as well as the contours of the activity itself (singing is, of course, an activity formatted in particular ways in and through component elements such as rhythm, verses, chorus, melody, harmony and so on). For doing singing together, selecting next speaker does not suppose the same coordinational problem of speaking one at a time. On the contrary, the cohort displays the understanding that they are to act next *together*. In other words, commonly in lessons addressing the cohort as 'everyone in the class', can pose a puzzle regarding the selection of the next speaker, but in this case 'everyone' is non-problematic as it comes formulated as a collective action, i.e., everyone together must act at the same time. Moreover, for the cohort, in terms of self-selecting themselves as next speaker, the structure of the song itself provides with a similar resource to what Sacks called the 'completion' phenomenon of recognisable complete utterances. Whilst we are not saying that the case of group singing is uniquely distinct from other classroom activities, we do think it has some interesting characteristics that mark it out from more formal lessons where the aim of the lesson is to organise activities, initiations, responses and evaluations in and through relation to some piece of formal knowledge that is to be adequately accomplished in and through teacher-pupil talk (an example, being the study of the collaborative accomplishment of formal geographic knowledge of cities (McHoul and Watson 1984)). Returning to Sacks's questioning of the doing of formulating a setting and the uses thereof, we suggest that the case serves as a perspicuous setting for the

analysis of classroom order as a dynamically assembled gestalt contexture in and through which the staff of the setting produce/recognise and demonstrably orient to a categorial landscape of their own making, rather than decontextualised, formal structures, of sequential and categorial order.

## DATA AND METHODOLOGICAL REMARKS

The data presented here were gathered in November 2019 as part of a doctoral project about the practical and local achievement of digital competence on primary schools. The project involved two months of fieldwork, in which the researcher visited a Welsh pioneer school on a regular basis. Spending full days in the school, following a class throughout the day allowed for an intensive participant observation of the locally and situationally produce culture of the class, which was complemented with fieldnotes and sixty hours of video recordings. The data excerpts presented and analysed below are from a video of the class singing session. We focus on a strip of activity lasting around five minutes, and from that analyse the first minute and a half. The video has been analysed by us, as well as at a shared ‘data session’. We draw, in places, on wider ethnographic knowledge of the school and the class themselves which is, of course, knowledge that the participants have too. The video materials are not high-definition and some utterances, particularly when the class are chatting together, are inaudible. For certain types of analysis, the single angled, slightly blurry, low-definition video will not do. Indeed, we point to a number of instances where it is not quite clear what was said or who said it. For our purposes, however, these materials are certainly ‘good enough’ (Fitzgerald 2019) for the description of the accomplishment of the order of the group singing as *classroom* group singing. Besides, in working with such materials the ‘falseness’ of the perspective of frame-by-frame analysis is revealed – the gestures of the teacher for example, so clearly visible as relevant at full speed, and obviously oriented to by the participants in the scene, can, ironically, fade away when viewed in isolation. We analyse the video, and describe the stills represented here with what might be called ethnographic description, and we do so unapologetically. We also approach, and present, the analysis of categorial practices as cases, rather through than collections. In keeping with the recommendations of Watson (2008, *inter alia*), we do so in order to preserve categorisation practices in their ‘distinctive, specific contextual embeddings, in their phenomenal “just this-ness”’ (Watson 2015, 46).

In presenting the materials, we adopt principles of the graphic transcript conventions developed by Eric Laurier (2014). The figures and panels are referred to in the text numerically (i.e., action shown figure 1, panel 1 is referred to as Fig. 1.1). The positioning of the speech bubbles is intended to give a sense not only of the speaker, but of sequence of occurrence when read from left to right. We aim to show overlapping talk, by positioning speech bubbles in vertical alignment. We make limited use of Jeffersonian conventions where relevant for an individual utterance. We suggest that graphic transcripts are especially suitable for (the description of) membership categorisation analysis (MCA) work,

due to their fidelity to the scene itself. One of the key affordances of graphic transcripts is that they support, visually, our main argument in this paper. With traditional text-based transcripts, categories are often assigned to members by the analyst in the production of the transcript. Indeed, in our own initial analyses, we worked with a text transcript with the participants labelled as ‘T’ (teacher), ‘Px’ (for individual pupils), and ‘C’ (for concerted turns from the children). Whilst these serve as useful short-hand, there is a risk that they are carried through into the analysis without their endogenous production being explicated and then treated as *the* relevant categories at all points. Speakers are thus often labelled with categories drawn from the setting, but which are only presumably relevant for their speech. Teachers are shown to be doing teacher talk, without allowing for how their talk, and other activities, establish the relevancy of that category *among others*. The graphic transcript, whilst perhaps sacrificing some of the detail available through other conventions, nevertheless, retains something of the gestalt of the setting in and through which categories, devices, predicates, and their relevancies for the activity are observable. Put another way still, the centrally relevant categories, or at least those assumed to be central, are obvious in the images and in the descriptions of the actions. And that seems significant for efforts to describe scenes ‘from within’. Indeed, the relevancy of categorial practices as accomplished-in-use is the key concern of this paper, and we can now return to the scene at hand.

## GETTING IT TOGETHER

The activity that forms the case described in this paper takes place on a Monday morning in a Year 5 class in a primary school in Wales. The scene is staffed by a young woman and twenty-four children. The scene comprises typical material features of a classroom, including tables and chairs, resources such as books and stationery, and a large white board on the wall, at the front of the room. The planned activity is practising singing the song ‘Three Little Birds’ by Bob Marley which will be sung by the class in a school assembly in five days’ time. The focus of the particular part of the session described below – which is the first part of this singing session – is concerned with singing the harmony of the song *together* with, in the words of the teacher, ‘one voice’.

We join the scene at what is an observably ‘pre-activity’ phase. The preparation activities of the teacher take place at the front of the class in what is accomplished as the ‘teacher’s space’ – she is in full view of the assembled children and has, to hand, various props and resources (Eglin 2009). The laptop is connected to the projector via Bluetooth, and is, on this occasion displaying the lyrics of the song the children will sing. There is a general chatter from the children sat on the floor and their attention is on the conversation in their small groups.

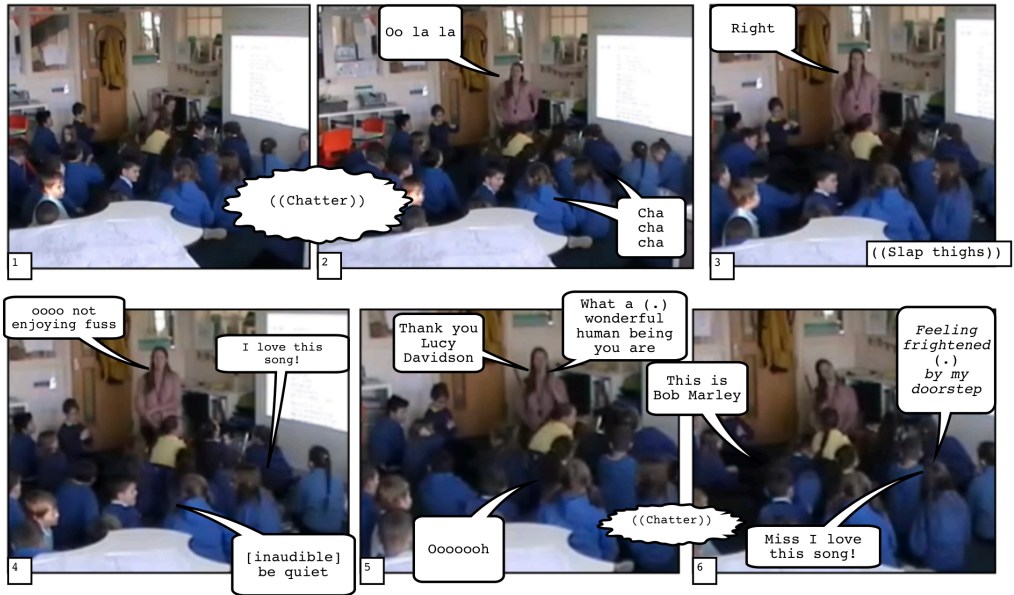


FIGURE 1: Getting started

The chatter continues as the teacher puts down the laptop (Fig. 1.1). She then kneels up and begins to attempt to recruit the children's collective attention by performing what we learn is the first part of a prior, locally, established adjacency pair with the sung utterance 'oo-la-la', to which the children (are supposed to) respond – not entirely collectively – with 'cha-cha-cha' (Fig. 1.2). The third part of the intended sequence initiated by the teacher is that the children *should* fall quiet, but the loud general chatter continues. The teacher then makes further attempts to gain the attention of the children by saying, loudly, 'right', and slapping her hands on her thighs, quickly and alternately, eight times (Fig. 1.3). She follows this immediately with a second turn, 'oooo not enjoying this fuss' (Fig. 1.4). The utterance is timed with her sitting back on her heels. It overlaps with a child saying excitedly that they 'love this song'. The child's turn might be seen as an orientation to the forthcoming activity, available on the whiteboard, and so not directly inappropriate or sanctionable. It is allowed to 'pass' by the teacher. Another pupil, however, provides a next utterance (only partially audible) and says something relating to the class being quiet, to which the teacher responds, somewhat sarcastically 'thank you Lucy Davidson. What a wonderful human being you are' (Fig. 1.5). It is only at this point, and for an instance, that the children-as-a-class visibly orient to the teacher rather than to a speaker amongst their cohort. Then, the children resume their chatter – albeit more quietly than before – and the girl repeats that she 'loves this song', with the turn specifically directed at 'Miss' this time and sings a couple of lines (Fig. 1.6 – with the incorrect lyrics, correctly transcribed). During these later stages, the teacher begins to subtly shift from side to side. Following the start of the singing from the girl, the teacher tilts their

head to the side, apparently listening to the singing of the girl in a such a way that might be read as her waiting for the girl to finish.

In this pre-phase the activities of the teacher are demonstrably 'bound' to and make relevant the category 'teacher' to any observer. This viewing, of course, is not only done in a way that associates categories with activities, but it is done in context (Hester and Francis 2003) and in concert with the material lay-out of the room. The activities accomplish the space as a kind of publicly-visible 'backstage' region where the teacher, despite being in view of the class, can continue, uninterrupted, in preparatory activities ahead of the focused activities (Eglin 2009). The trouble or 'fuss' indexed by the teacher's turn is occasioned by the class not collectively orienting to both the informal 'attention requests' and the institutional two-part pair 'ooh la la la', 'cha cha cha' which leads to the direct complaint (Fig. 1.4). The class are addressed as a group in getting the activity started, and the 'fuss' is treated as a general matter for the class, rather than an individual one by the teacher. We do not wish to overstate the significance of this noticing, but some consideration might be given to how, despite other candidate individuals being available for reprimand (for example, the girl who 'loves this song' and others talking at the time), it is the pupil who remarks that the class should be quiet that is responded to individually and sarcastically by the teacher. What might be displayed in that turn is a reference to the categorial rights of telling the class or its pupils to be quiet. That is, that activity is for the teacher, and not others, to do, even though it was the correct occasion for someone to do so in that the class had not yet fallen quiet.

Beyond these more standard features of getting classroom activities started, and the asymmetry of rights and privileges of classroom participants to do so, there is a specificity to the form that these transition markers take in relation to the upcoming activity (the group singing). Indeed, the rhythm of the 'oh la la', the slaps on the thighs, the swaying and bouncing all seem to provide for the projection of rhythmic, shared, and coordinated activity. The call and response (Fig. 1.2) are an adjacency pair that might be said to provide for a projectionable *adjacency relationship* in which the first part provided is to be responded to by the group. It is tempting, here, to claim that this initiation action is 'bound' to the category 'teacher'. Yet, this is to retain too structural and stipulative a notion of the relevancy of such 'role-type' categories. Moreover, the most problematic outcome of such a stipulation is that use of the category 'teacher', in this way, retains a sense that the category is directly *a person*, or 'attached' to an individual member, rather than representing incumbency in some operationally relevant category at just that time, in just that context, as made available through the activity. In a similar sense, the 'pupils' are addressed as a group, and are, in for example the 'oh-la-la' 'cha-cha-cha' call and response, treated as a cohort. The category relevancy is yielded by the setting. That they are a group of pupils is, of course, perceptually available via their wearing of a school uniform and their location in a school, but what is less clear is how the category pair 'teacher'–'pupil' is operationally relevant for the activity of singing as a group. We are, of course, not saying that the 'educational setting' device, gathering up, in this instance 'teacher' and 'pupil' is *not* relevant but, that, rather, what can be treated as an assumedly

‘standardised relational pair’ is made relevant and constitutes, reflexively, that context in and through other practically relevant ‘turn-generated categories’ and ‘category-generated turns’ (Watson 2015) that accomplish the adjacency relationship of ‘teacher’–‘pupil(s)’, *alongside others* as we go on to show below.

### GETTING STARTED

The chatter, and the singing of the one pupil continue and she is joined by another who sings the first line of the chorus (Fig. 2.1). The teacher continues to sit back on her heels. That this might be seen as the teacher *allowing* these activities to continue is instructive as regards prior observations of the authority of the teacher in relation to turn-order and activity initiations. This is, it seems, partly because what might be seen as a lack of attention or a failure to be silent, are, in fact, co-accomplishing an orientation to the activity ahead, its rhythmic, musical, and collective character that mark it as distinct from more formal classroom activities.

FIGURE 2: Getting together



The movements of the teacher from side-to-side might be said to simply indicate ‘waiting to start’, yet we suggest that these movements also pre-figure the forthcoming rhythmic order of the forthcoming activity which is also available to the children in the form of the lyrics projected on to the whiteboard. Nonetheless, the ‘waiting’ state is also displayed in the teacher’s next turn (Fig. 2.1) that again references the ‘fuss’ being made,



with a direct instruction, this time, for it to stop (Fig. 2.2). The children respond to this utterance by beginning to settle down. Although they do not become entirely quiet, their gaze is now collectively oriented to the teacher (Fig. 2.3). The teacher then indicates the beginning of the activity by uttering a transition marker 'K' (Fig. 2.4). Without further explicating the preferred response from the cohort (repetition, mirroring, call and response, and so on), the teacher begins to sing the harmony, marking the rhythm with her hands in cyclical motion, and gently bouncing up and down in time to the beat (Fig. 2.5). Two or three children join in for the second part of the harmony (Fig. 2. 6) and the activity of group singing begins to get underway.

In Sacks's (1995[1], 595) words – the actions of the teacher are available as a 'hint' for the forthcoming activity and, of course, demonstrably indexes prior occasions. These actions hint both at the initiation of the activity without it being explicitly stated and, in doing so, invokes the status of 'teacher' in this context and also 'leader' of the activity (a point we return to below). The effectiveness of such actions depends on them being seen as being done by the 'teacher' by the 'pupils'. These activities thus have two consequences: they clearly establish the incumbency of the category 'teacher' (for another next first time) and the bound activities of initiating and leading activities; and, consequently, the children are addressed by those actions as 'pupils'. The children, in turn, display for each other, and for the teacher, their incumbency of the 'pupil' category through their individual and collective responses to the activity initiations of the teacher that display practically adequate participation.





The class gradually join in the singing and begin to sing as a group *with* the teacher. This coming together as a group progresses across each repetition, with more children joining in, and the volume of the singing increasing. The finer-grained detail of the timing of the individual children joining in is not discernible from the video, but we would suggest that this is perhaps less important for the participants to the activity than the display of their orientation to the class singing *as a class*. Whilst the response is to ‘join in’ by repeating the harmony, over and over, the joining in itself is predicated on the participants’ ability to organise subsequent joint responses such that they are demonstrably ‘on time’. In this sense, the singing stops being a response to the initiation of the teacher and as each next turn is elaborated through and elaborates the structure of the group singing and the singing together of the pupils with the teacher in assembling a chorus. The initial singing of the teacher is, then, not simply a demonstration to be repeated, but is also an invitation to participation by re-enacting the singing. Paraphrasing Sacks (1995[II], 43), the way the pupils have to show they have been chosen, and chosen to do something, is to do that right then and there. We are able to see what it is that the teacher has done by reference to its being part of the pupils’ business to show what *they* see that the teacher expects them to do next, which in some way exhibits that they see they are selected, and see they are selected to do something, by virtue of being pupils of the teacher.

It is also relevant that the second part of the harmony pair – ‘da da da da: dum’ – is consistently sung louder and by more of the children as if it were a response to the initial ‘da da da da da:’ from the teacher. This is perhaps a display of the relevancy of ‘teacher’ in terms of providing for the first part of a pair, and a hesitation of the pupils to lead in the singing of the first part. Whether that is the case or not, what is significant is the method for adequate participation is built into the non-lexical vocalisation as a recognisable part of the doing of the singing and is done so in and through the context of the classroom-as-setting.<sup>1</sup>

The teacher recognisably ‘does being a teacher’, in and through activities viewable as ‘bound’ to that category which display the relevancy of that category-in-context; that is a classroom, in a primary school. These activities include rights to activity initiation, ‘controlling’ the turn-taking system and the floor, orienting the children’s attention to the task, structuring that task in specific ways, and rights over access to the room itself. Yet we also note how the entrance of the pupil demonstrates something of multi-layered character of these activities. At that moment there are two relevant ‘activity tracks’ running for the teacher: the continued group singing, and the entrance of the child. One is, of course, temporally embedded within the other, and the teacher briefly engages in the waving in of the child whilst still leading the singing. The ‘class’ continue in their singing

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<sup>1</sup> The use of non-lexical vocalisations has been widely reported in the literature on musical educational practices (Weeks 1996; Tolins 2013; Reeds et al. 2013). These studies observe that, in the teaching and learning of nonverbal skills such as musical ones, ‘learning cannot be displayed through talk but has to be made visible/audible through nonlinguistic actions’ (Reeds et al. 2013, 24). Made visible in this context means to demonstrate by ‘doing it oneself’ so others see what they are supposed to do. Demonstration therefore comprises the core focus of these instructional activity and a main pedagogical resource.

although individuals break rank by laughing at the entrance, and the teacher responds by getting them back on track. It seems, then, the category ‘teacher’, whilst available via the omni-relevancy of the ‘educational setting device’, is also joined by other categories that have specific relevance for the task at hand. That is, that ‘leader’ might be a more adequate way to describe the activity of providing for the harmony pair and monitoring the rhythm of its singing by the ‘followers’. ‘Teacher’, then, might be seen to be a categorial gloss (Heritage 1978) for a range of activities that take place within the classroom, activities which generate other category relevancies that are, in turn, related to the competency of completing a relevant activity (Jayyusi 1984, 35-47). We see more of the dynamic assembly of the multi-layered categorial landscape in the following phase of the activity.

### MANAGING DISRUPTION AND A METHOD FOR TAKING THE LEAD

The shifting, multi-layered, character of the categorial landscape of the classroom that we have been hinting at thus far is clearly shown as being continually ‘worked up’ by members in the next excerpt. Here we find the teacher managing a minor disruption, followed by a more significant collapse of the order of the collective class singing which is managed and repaired through an alternate means.

Between the fourth and fifth repetition of the harmony pair, a pupil enters the classroom (Fig 2.4). The door opens, occasioning laughter from some of the children. The child enters quickly, looking at the teacher, who waves him in, and sits down as the door closes behind him. The entrance appears to have a minor disruptive effect on the class. The two pupils nearest the door begin to talk to one another. The singing becomes generally quieter, although one boy sings the second part of the harmony in an exaggerated fashion. The teacher continues with the repetition of the harmony, and with the accompanying embodied rhythmic resources of the bouncing and the circling motion of the hands during the sixth and seventh repetitions.

In this short sequence, the categorial status of the teacher is displayed both through the pupil orienting to the teacher upon opening the door, and the consequent response of the teacher waving them in, as well as the continued leading of the singing. To be clear, we are making the claim of the teacher ‘leading’ the singing because that is how it is demonstrably oriented to by pupils’ own treatment of the harmony pair. The ‘classroom’ category device (and associated rules of application) is then assembled collectively through activities that make relevant ‘teacher-pupils’ but also ‘leader-followers’. Which is to say that through this multi-layered category landscape, actions that are demonstrably bound to ‘leader’ can be adequate for organising the singing without, necessarily, being bound up with ‘teacher’. This is clearly shown when, following the seventh repetition of the harmony, the teacher says ‘on your own’ (Fig. 4.1).



The 'on your own' directive provides for the withdrawal of her singing (Fig. 4.1) and is followed by her rolling her fingers in a slightly less fluid manner, indicating that the children are not quite adequately 'together' in this repetition. In withdrawing her own singing, the teacher shifts from a continued participation through which she demonstrates, *in vivo*, the correct melody and rhythm through voice and bodily movements, to an instructional formulation, issued at the end of the first independent repetition for the class to sing 'together, as one voice' (Fig. 4.2). The instruction is issued within an appropriate insertion slot in the rhythm of the singing but continues past the point where the children should have begun the next repetition of the harmony pair. Only a very small number of children, quietly, begin the next repetition and the class fall silent as the teacher is committed to finishing the second part of her turn (Fig. 4.3). The 'you' is, of course, indexical to the class as a cohort and to the singing as a shared, choral, and collective activity in that context, but the significance is that in completing the (relatively) extended instructional turn, the correct point at which the repetition should begin is missed and lost. As the class fall momentarily silent, the stalling order of the rhythmic activity yields a point at which a participant can, and perhaps should, make an intervention and in so doing 'take the lead' through some category-relevant action.

With the teacher committed to her instructional turn (Fig. 4.2-4), a pupil steps in and counts the class down to being the singing again '3, 2, 1' (Fig. 4.4). As he counts down, the pupil, like the teacher, recruits embodied resources, marking the count with exaggerated hand motions, and bouncing in time; actions bound to the category 'leader' as accomplished within *this* locally assembled device. Other pupils quickly orient to the

count and the new leader. Another pupil imitates his actions on 2 and 3 demonstrating the action's projectionability in *this* context. Indeed, the class begin singing again at the correct point without the intervention of the teacher, who finishes her turn (Fig. 4.3), and begins the rhythmic bouncing again at the point the singing commences.

The pupil intervention is produced synchronously with the previously established rhythm of the song and the points of turn-singing. The timing is also harmonious with the teacher's instruction, in the sense that as she finish uttering 'together, as one voice', the pupil starts the counting in '3, 2, 1', which occur in parallel with the teacher's continuation of the instruction, 'that's how you sing, as one'. The end of the last part of the instruction is heard as precluding the end of the counting in almost perfect coordination. In this way, despite it being a pupil rather than teacher becoming temporarily incumbent of the 'leader' category position – and thus temporarily shifting the category landscape that previously found teacher mapped with leader – the action can be treated, by all parties, as a complementary utterance to the efforts of the teacher, rather than contradictory or disrupting. Moreover, the result is the beginning of the singing coordinately (at least for the first part) rather than, say, laughing and so rather than becoming an accountably matter of 'classroom discipline', the counting is accomplished as a reasonable and rational method for the task of doing singing together. We might also note that the treating of the counting down as disruptive or 'naughty', perhaps by the teacher invoking that category as tightly bound to 'leading' (e.g., 'I'll do the counting in, thank you' or similar), would have caused severe disruption of the task by breaking to tell the pupil off for an action that was perfectly adequate for the task. Such an action would, of course, have contradicted the aim of what we might call the teacher's overall instructional project and so they can, for practical purposes, let what could be an accountable matter pass.

FIGURE 5: Restarting, again, and closing the phase



Despite the methodical efforts of the pupil, the class singing does not quite get together again (Fig. 5.1). The teacher, again, intervenes with an instruction for them to sing ‘all at the same time’, which is spoken over the faltering repetition of the second part of the harmony pair. The timing of the utterance, over the children's singing, instead of the in the gaps between as previously done, indicating the projectionability of the progressive failing synchronicity of the class. The teacher then recruits the ‘counting in’ method (this time in Welsh), previously deployed by the pupil, to take the lead in doing getting the singing back together and back on the beat (Fig. 5.3). We might say that ‘counting in’, once present, is then absorbed into the collection of resources the teacher uses to maintain the singing session order in which she is clearly the one leading and conducting the session. This is also joined by her resuming singing at the appropriate point – a previously significant resource for the synchronicity of the class singing – and the cohort once again sing with ‘one voice’, or close enough, for the practical purposes of performing as a class (Fig. 5.4). As the children sing the second part of the harmony pair (Fig. 5.5) the teacher turns away, toward the board, again possibly signalling the expectation that the second part of the pair will follow the formatting of the first, and begins to stand up, bringing the phase of the activity to a close with a positive assessment token (Fig. 5.6).

In doing taking the lead of the class singing, the ‘counting in’ method operates reflexively in terms of the sequential order of the activity – as it coordinates the collective next action (the recommencement of the repetition) – and in terms of the dynamic categorial order of the class activity (in which, as shown, it is not necessarily the ‘teacher’ who ‘controls’ the methods for coordinating the group). The two instances of counting in are

significant in ways that warrant further attention. In the case, where the counting in is provided by a pupil, the restart comes off for the participants in a number of ways that accomplish the continued order of the classroom. It is not treated as a disruption despite the potential for it to be so via the imposition of a rigid relationship between category and action. For *all* participants to the scene, the counting in done by the pupil is accountable in and through the activity in a gross sense (in that counting in belongs in musical settings) and in a fine sense (in that the counting in follows at just that point in time: the lapse in singing and the silence of the class as the teacher still talks). In this way, and at just this point, we suggest that the category pair ‘teacher’–‘pupil’ has little relevance for getting the singing started again. Through the first and second viewer’s maxims the counting in can be seen to be done by a ‘leader’ and can be seen to be done *because* the singing had broken down. The pupil who does the counting in thus displays an appropriate orientation for the task of singing together, and acts in an appropriately consequential way for the ongoing activity, making relevant a second omni-relevant device, that of ‘leader-followers’ *whilst* the teacher is engaged in an overlaying ‘activity track’ of ‘doing being a teacher’ by providing an extended instruction.

The significance for the activity is that the action of the ‘pupil’ can be viewed not as a disruption or as ‘rude’ (in relation to a rule that says, for example, that pupils shouldn’t speak whilst a teacher is talking), but as an appropriate action *at that point*. The second point is the readily available projectionability of the next actions from that viewing of the counting in as appropriate. This is displayed by the production cohort, for the cohort, in and through: the actions of the pupil who is able to imitate, and thus co-accomplish for the class, the immediate nexts of the counting in (labelled in Fig. 4.4); the pupils displaying the adequacy of the counting in through the resuming of the singing; and, notably, the teacher not issuing any sort of reprimand and letting the action of restarting continue in to the former patterns of repetition that have structured the activity to this point. That the ‘pupil’ can, and does, become, momentarily, the ‘leader’ of the activity demonstrates how categories and memberships and, indeed, their ‘incumbency’ are not fixed to an institutional semantic grid, nor ‘attached’ to individuals. They are, instead, interwoven with social action in setting activities (Watson 2015). Moreover, the counting in displays interactional and interpretative competence of classroom events as locally, collectively and ongoingly produced phenomena such that it is recruited again by the teacher in the later work of getting the singing restarted and ‘together’ for another time. What Garfinkel would call ‘the song’s work’, as the objectification of the *good-enough* performance of it, thus recruits and re-organises the categorical and sequential arrangements of the group singing session.

## CONCLUSION

In the course of this paper, we have aimed to make clear what we see as the central ethnomethodological contribution to respecifying educational order. That is, rather than treating the classroom as the place where education happens, a place populated by

teacher(s) and pupils, we have aimed to demonstrate how members themselves produce and orient to the classroom as itself an assembled activity, produced moment-by-moment, in and through social action that makes relevant various, multi-layered, categorisation devices, categories and locally established rules of application (Housley and Fitzgerald 2015). Indeed, this is to attend to the reflexive character of classroom practices as ‘setting activities’ (Sacks 1995[I], 516) in and through which actions hint at, make explicit, or indeed, side-line, shifting *categories-in-action* and *categories-in-context* that map out the interactional possibilities by which the classroom activity can unfold (in this case, in just this way).

Through our description of the practices involved in producing and sustaining the group singing as *classroom* group singing, we have demonstrated something of how participants’ actions assemble a categorial landscape in and through which activities are ‘staffed’ in ways that enable us to avoid treating membership categories as standing in for ‘roles’ and, perhaps worse, a sense of an individual’s obligation to dutifully perform the activities ‘bound’ to ‘their’ category. Taking ‘pupils’ as an example, we hope to have demonstrated that as the staff of the singing session, they have the competence to work out in situ, just what the activity is an occasion of, and which contextual, categorial and sequential relevancies are at play for the activity. The pupil who does ‘leading’ by offering the count in for the cohort (which of course includes the ‘teacher’ for all practical purposes) is the key example, but the collaborative group singing done *with* the teacher in their ‘choral turns’ demonstrates how they are not simply acting *within* the order curated by the teacher. So, despite the omni-relevance of the ‘teacher’s authority’ (Macbeth 1991), what we might call ‘task adequate contributions’ can be staffed in such a way that shows how the right to initiate and structure activities is not owned by anyone but takes place in multi-layered forms of order (Watson 2015; Moutinho 2020).

More generally, we hope to have demonstrated some ways of avoiding the temptation of treating ‘membership categories as though they were status roles or “slots” occupied by “incumbents” who acted according to the category and who gained their identities from those “slots”’ (Watson 2015, 29). It is in this sense that we refer to the *categorial landscape*, as accomplished, negotiated, and reconfigured by the reflexive and situated constitution and reconstitution of interactional layers of relevance (Fitzgerald 2020), rather than to membership categories on the one hand, and individuals on the other. The methodological upshot is rather than the analyst using a decontextualised version of the viewer’s maxim to see that teachers are, indeed, doing teacher-like activities, an attention to the actual practices involved in locally assembling and orienting to such membership category devices reveals a far more dynamic and locally-contoured categorial landscape in and through which the specific activity – in this case, class singing – is accomplished. This formulation respecifies how methods of inquiry are discoverable, in situ, and, moreover, who a methodologist or an analyst might be (Garfinkel and Sacks 1970). This standpoint is analytically radical. If taken seriously, it leads educational studies to renunciate the received analytic appointments and ambitions of conventional sociology (Macbeth

2010) and ubicate the understanding of educational order in the constitutive detail of lived, ordinary, social order.

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