Crying and crying responses: A comparative exploration of pragmatic socialization in a Swedish and Japanese preschool

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Abstract

This paper explores pragmatic socialization by examining episodes of two to three-year-old children’s crying and adults’ responses to this crying in two preschools: Sweden and Japan. Based on approximately 100 hours of naturally occurring interactions, it focuses on crying episodes that emerged within peer conflict, and analyzes ways that teachers structured a triadic framework of mediation. The results show how teachers mediated by using (1) question-response sequences to clarify what happened and (2) directives and declaratives to convey norms of behaving/speaking and to attune children to the crying of others as a negative affective act that requires a remedial response. The results reveal similarities and variations in adults’ responses to children’s crying in the two preschools. Although the findings in part instantiate traditional models of socialization in these two societies, they also suggest ways that departed from these models.

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1. Introduction

Crying is a basic and universal form of human expression, manifested at birth and across the lifespan. While it has traditionally been treated primarily as a manifestation of private mental states (Lutz, 2001; Vingerhoets and Bylsma, 2015), crying has recently been examined as a public phenomenon that is performed and responded to in various ways (Hepburn and Potter, 2007; Kidwell, 2013; Bateman, 2015; Waring and Yu, 2017; Holm Kvist, 2018). As an interactionally and "culturally constituted sign" (Wilce, 1998), crying varies in its production, including volume and intensity (e.g., loud, quiet), duration (e.g., lengthy, brief) and quality (e.g., sobbing, accompanied by talk). As a social action, it is a "performance of distress" (Wilce, 1998: p. 114) and serves as a "recruitment of assistance" (Kendrick and Drew, 2016), deployed to seek or solicit another’s help, comfort, or support. How recipients respond is tied to various dimensions of the social context, such as the setting, activity, and their relationship to the crier. In institutionalized settings of caregiving, certain parties have the right and responsibility to respond to children’s crying—aimed at stopping it—as part of their “care” provision, which is both a moral and an ethical project (Black, 2018). In addition to providing for children’s physiological and emotional needs, adults’ responses perform social and relational work, such as shaming (Lo and Fung, 2011), teasing (Eisenberg, 1986; Miller, 1986), and upbraiding or reprimanding (Demuth, 2013; Holm Kvist, 2018). Their responses thus can be a vehicle of pragmatic socialization: the process of attuning others how to act and speak in situationally appropriate ways (Blum-Kulka, 1997; Aukrust, 2004; Li, 2017). To date, as most studies of children’s crying and adults’ responses have focused on family settings (Miller and Sperry, 1987; Demuth, 2013), there have been few studies that have examined crying in institutional settings such as preschools (e.g., Danby and Baker, 1998; Ahn, 2016; Kyratzis and Köymen, 2020). Such settings have specific goals for children’s development

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In this paper we ask: How do teachers in two preschools (Sweden and Japan) respond to young children’s crying? We also inquire into the import of these responses for children’s pragmatic socialization, as it is bound up with fostering their development of morality, identity, and emotion (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984, 2011). These societies provide an interesting point of departure for a comparative exploration. While both societies have strong early childhood education systems that inculcate children into everyday communicative practices and social norms, preschools in these two societies place somewhat different emphases on developing children’s personhood. Swedish preschools tend to prioritize children’s individual autonomy and solidarity in line with the democratic values of interpersonal equality and freedom of expression (Cekaite, 2020), whereas Japanese preschools tend to prioritize children’s self-restraint and group membership (Burdelski, 2010) in line with the value of maintaining interpersonal harmony and recognizing one’s status in relation to others (Hendry, 1986; Peak, 1991; Tobin, 1992). As we will argue, however, teachers’ responses to children’s crying socialize children into a complex view of themselves and others that at times departs from these traditional models. By attending to the unfolding verbal and embodied turn shapes and sequential trajectories of crying episodes, we aim to illuminate teachers’ response practices and to consider their potentials for encouraging children how to act and to use linguistic and other communicative resources in pragmatically appropriate ways.

2. Crying and responses as pragmatic socialization

Over the past few decades, research on adult-child social interaction has shown ways in which adults respond to children’s crying (Lewis and Rosenblum, 1978; Harkness and Super, 1985; Miller and Sperry, 1987; Danby and Baker, 1998; Schieffelin, 1990; Wilce, 1998; Brown, 2002; Demuth, 2013; Ahn, 2016; Holm Kvist, 2018). These studies suggest that crying episodes are a site for children’s pragmatic development (Ochs and Schieffelin, 1979; Ninio and Snow, 1996; Matthews, 2014). Some studies reveal how adults treat children’s crying as a pragmatic act by labelling it as a display of negative emotion/affect (e.g., “What are you angry about?”) and by characterizing it as performing social action (e.g., “What are you complaining about?”). Other studies illuminate how adults’ responses provide a model of pragmatic acts and extended pragmatic activities that are valued by community members, such as “troubles tellings” (Wilce, 1998) and “lying” (Brown, 2002). For instance, Wilce (1998) observed in a Bangladesh community that “troubles tellings” (a central activity among adults) were initiated and modelled through mothers’ responses to children’s crying. He showed how a mother posed open-ended questions to the crying child (e.g., “What happened?”) that “construed the infant’s crying as a message,” thereby treating the child as “possessing intentionality and capable of engaging adults in pseudoconversation” (p. 109).

Although many of these studies locate children’s crying within a dyadic (adult-child) participation framework, several studies have shown how adults’ responses emerge within and evoke multiparty participation frameworks (e.g., Brown, 2002; Schieffelin, 1990). For instance, in a Kaluli community, Schieffelin (1990) observed how adults encouraged young children to move away from the innate affective disposition of “softness,” displayed through communicative acts of distress such as whining or crying, to the learned affective disposition of “hardness,” demonstrated through assertive verbal and embodied acts. This pragmatic competence was shaped through caregivers’ use of prompting to instruct children what to say to others (e.g., Father: “Is it yours to take? — say it”), and by engaging them in teasing routines. Such socialization into assertiveness rather than vulnerability (as displayed, for instance, through crying) was also demonstrated in a study examining mother-child interaction in white working-class, single-mother households in South Baltimore (Miller and Sperry, 1987). Miller and Sperry (1987) observed that mothers encouraged children to respond to peer taunts and aggressive acts by being assertive and acting in self-defence so as not to appear to be a “sissy” and not show vulnerability and sadness, and praised them for not crying in such situations (p. 16).

Research examining adults’ responses to children’s crying has also been conducted in educational settings, where emphasis is placed on children’s pragmatic competence in interacting with teachers and peers. For instance, Ahn’s (2016) study of Korean preschool teachers’ responses to three-year old children’s crying showed how teachers linked crying to hierarchical social roles and relationships by using discursive practices to emphasize intergenerational “emotion hierarchies.” She revealed how teachers treated children’s crying as an inappropriate display of affect (e.g., dislike of something) or improper enactment of their age-related roles (e.g., behaving like a ‘baby’ when the child should have been behaving like an ‘older brother’) (p. 17). In a study of peer conflict in a U.S. daycare center, Kyратzis and Kőymen (2020) observed how teachers encouraged crying children to transform their distress by “using your words” (p. 625), or by verbalizing social actions, emotions, and desires to peers in attempting to resolve conflict. They suggest that such encouragement through modelling and prompting the crying child what to say shaped crying children’s linguistic/embodied responses and conduct.

The research sketched above suggests that adults’ responses to children’s crying has the potential to socialize children to pragmatic knowledge and skills related to how to act and speak with others, including how to perform social actions, display affect, and maintain social relations. The present study seeks to advance our understanding of the discursive infrastructure and socializing potentials of adults’ responses to children’s crying through a comparative analysis of interaction in preschools in two societies. In contrast to studies of crying located within dyadic interaction, our analysis and discussion shed light on ways in which crying is located within a web of social relationships, events, and actions.

3. Data, setting, and methods

The aims of this paper are to illuminate the similar and variable ways that crying was responded to by Swedish and Japanese preschool teachers and to probe its import for children’s pragmatic socialization. We view this aim as a two-step process. First, it
involved detailed turn and sequential analysis (i.e., multimodal conversation analysis, see Mondada, 2016), based on audio-visual recordings in a Swedish preschool (63 h over 18 months) and a Japanese preschool (45 h over 10 months), in order to examine social actions and stances at the micro level (Section 4). Second, based on this analysis, we then consider the implications for what is potentially being conveyed and fostered at the meso level (e.g., identities, institutional norms) and macro level (e.g., societal norms, ideologies) (Section 5) (see The Douglas Fir Group, 2016). With this aim in mind, our study is exploratory, primarily qualitative (with some quantitative data), and comparative. A comparative study is valuable, because it allows us to view our data in a new light, and make observations that may have been missed working with one data set.

Each preschool had specific goals for children's learning and development. In the Swedish preschool, an important goal was to develop children's empathy (e.g., understanding of others' perspectives and feelings), while highlighting individual agency and independence. This goal reflected the child-centeredness and democratic rights revered in Swedish society (Cekaite, 2013). The Japanese preschool also aimed to develop children's empathy along with their ability to cooperate as a member of a social group. To this end, a great deal of effort was expended in engaging children in politeness routines, such as expressing thanks, apologizing, and making requests and offers, which facilitate interpersonal harmony in Japanese society (Burdelski, 2010).

The spatial configurations of the two preschools varied: the Swedish preschool consisted of various rooms where children were able to play freely away from teachers' view. In the Japanese preschool, children in each age group were expected to do most of their daily activities in the same room (e.g., playing, eating, napping), which resulted in the children being under the surveillance of teachers' gaze. At both sites, consent was received from parents, teachers, and administrators. The data in the Swedish preschool was collected by a single videographer, whereas in the Japanese preschool it was collected by two videographers (researcher and undergraduate or post-doc assistant). At both sites, each videographer operated either a hand-held camera or one set up on a tripod or monopod, and moved around while filming daily activities.

In looking through both sets of data, a key observation that arose was that teachers' responses to children's crying most often occurred in situations of “peer conflict” (e.g., Corsaro and Rizzo, 1990; Holm Kvist, 2018; Moore and Burdelski, 2020). This can be compared to, for example, accidents involving one or more children, or separation from a family member involving one child, in which crying was less common. We developed our insights both independently and jointly based on 40 “typical cases” of crying in peer conflict in each data set. Our aim was to document common practices, while at the same time identifying differences between the two settings. We do not claim that our observations are representative of preschools in these two societies. Nevertheless, the review of data showed that in both preschools peer conflict and crying frequently included physical acts (e.g., pushing, hitting, pinching), exclusion, and acts involving objects (e.g., throwing toys, taking another’s toy away). Crying episodes often entailed tears, sobbing, and variations in loudness and pitch, which at times co-occurred with talk (Cekaite and Holm Kvist, 2017), making these episodes identifiable within and across the data. All names have been changed to pseudonyms to protect participants’ privacy.

4. Results: teachers' responses to children's crying in peer conflict

This section examines how teachers in the two preschools responded to children's crying in peer conflict through structuring a triadic framework of mediation where they used various communicative practices in attempting to investigate and resolve the conflict (Burdelski, 2020; Cekaite, 2020; Burdelski and Cekaite, 2021). Their responses can be characterized as residing within two distinct activities of intervention: 1) investigative activity: teacher attempts to clarify the “precipitating event” (Harkness and Super, 1985), and 2) reparatory activity: teacher engages children in a resolution of the conflict, through encouraging a “remedial interchange” (Goffman, 1971) aimed at restoring the moral and social order between the children (Danby and Baker, 1998).

Our analysis below tracks these two activities, while emphasizing their co-constructed and multimodal dimensions. Notably, we observed that during teacher intervention, children's crying would sometimes (quickly) subside and at other times escalate. Moreover, on occasion children who were not originally crying began crying during the teacher's intervention.

4.1. Investigative activity: Ascertaining what happened and co-constructing a telling

In intervening in children's crying episodes within peer conflict, teachers in both preschools often initiated an investigation—or what Kidwell (2013) refers to as a “problem inquiry sequence”—in order to arrive at a co-constructed understanding of the precipitating event (e.g., who did what to whom). This investigative activity often took the form of short to extended “narrative accounts” (Sterponi, 2014)—consisting of a telling of at least two clauses in temporal order (Labov, 1972)—that involved one or more children conveying their version of the event (Holm Kvist, 2018). These tellings were carried out through a series of teacher-led question-response exchanges, which structured children's contributions in specific ways. Teachers typically launched the investigation with an open-ended interrogative (e.g., “What happened?”; “How is it going?”) that solicited one or more children's responses (Danby and Baker, 1998), and then used other interrogative formats to make inquiries or provide candidate understandings (e.g., “What did you do then?”; “He took this from you?”). To illustrate how this investigative activity was carried out, we present an excerpt from each preschool.

In Excerpt 1 from the Swedish preschool, two girls (Mona, 2 years; Neha, 3 years) had been playing together in a room where there was no teacher present. When Neha begins knocking bottles off the play table, Mona starts crying loudly and continues for 13 s (line 1) until a teacher who is in the corridor announces 'Mona is crying' (line 3) and then enters their room (line 5). (Note: In the second column of the excerpts, capital letters [e.g., NEA] are used for verbalizations, whereas small letters [e.g., nea] are used for non-verbal actions.)
Excerpt 1 “Mona is crying”

01 MON:  \( a:a:a: \ a \uparrow A: \ Ah A: :\ a:a:a \ | \ (0.2) \ A:: :: maa:: A::: \)

\( hh \ ma::ma::: \)

‘Mama’

\( \text{nea} \)

\(|(\text{pushes bottles, walks out of room})\)

02 MON:  \( MA:::h (.) hh (.) e::hh e::hh \ (0.2) \)

03 TEA:  \( \text{[Mona gr\ddot{a}rer].} \)

‘Mona is crying.’

\( \text{tea} \)

\(|(\text{in corridor, approaching play room})\)

Figure 1. Neah (right) puts both arms around a crying Mona.

04 MON:  \( \uparrow A:::h: e::::h: e::h: e::h: h: e::h: e::h \)

NEA:  \( [\text{okey.}] \)

‘Okay.’

\( \text{nea} \)

\(|(\text{runs to MON})\)

\(|(\text{puts hands around MON’s face})\)

Figure 2. Mona and Neah look towards the door of the room.

05 MON:  \( \uparrow A: :e:::h \ uh \ he:::h \ he:::h \ huhhh \ \uparrow A: : \ a:::h \)

\( \text{tea} \)

\(|(\text{comes into room where NEA is embracing MON})\)
06 MON: [huːːh
TEA: [vad hände?
   ‘What happened?’
07 MON: [[huhh eh huhh   |huhh huhh huhh
NEA: jag tröstade hon.
   [‘I comforted her.’
   tea [(stroking MON))
   [[(crouching down ||puts hands around MON))
08 MON: [huh huhh huhh huhh
TEA: [ja- vad var det som hände Mona?
   ‘Yes- what was it that happened Mona?’
09 mon (non-comprehensibly talks while crying))
10 MON: [huːh
TEA: [[vad var det som hände?
   ‘What was it that happened?’
   tea [(looks at NEA))
11 NEA: [[jag skulle () jag skulle () jag skulle eh () leka med hon.
   ‘I was () I was () I was eh () to play with her.’
MON: [huːːh |huːh (0.2) hhheh
   mon [(moves into teacher’s embrace))
12 TEA: ja fast () det kändes inte som att det gick jättebra va?
   ‘Yes but () it did not feel that it went very well, did it?’
Upon entering the room—where Neah has been embracing Mona with both hands (Fig. 1) and is now standing and gazing towards the door (Fig. 2) —the teacher approaches a crying Mona and puts her arm around her (Fig. 3) while posing a “what happened” question to the girls (lines 6 and 8). This question does not initially position either child as a “culprit” or “victim” (Kidwell, 2013), but rather invites the girls to convey their views of the precipitating event. Although Neah responds first in a way that evaluates herself as a morally good actor (line 7: ‘I comforted her’) within a specific past time frame (i.e., after Mona had already started crying), Mona responds by pointing at Neah (line 8), which seems to implicate Neah as the “culprit” in the event. These responses by the children shape the teacher’s emergent understanding of the event as manifested in her continuing investigative work.

More specifically, in pursuing the investigation, the teacher locates a different past time frame (i.e., pre-crying) in guiding Neah to recall her emotion and action that led up to Mona’s crying (lines 13—14, 17, 18, 19 and 20). She ascribes ‘anger’ to Neah by using an interrogative (line 13: ‘Did you become angry at Mona?’), while comforting Mona who is still crying (Fig. 4). This interrogative invites Neah to align with the ascription of emotion (line 14), and thus represents a kind of “emotion talk” (Wang, 2013). In response to Neah’s alignment, the teacher discursively steers Neah to articulate her actions that followed the ascribed emotion (line 17: ‘but when you got angry with Mona what did you do then?’). By revealing that she ‘threw things’ (line 18), Neah co-constructs a cause-effect relationship between her emotion and untoward action and the resulting conflict/crying. As described by Ochs et al. (1979), a “cause-effect relationship is [or can be] conversationally implied” (p. 251) through the temporal juxtaposition of two utterances. Here, rather than being produced by a single actor, a cause and effect relationship is jointly constructed by different speakers: the teacher articulates a cause (i.e., ‘become angry’) and Mona articulates an effect (i.e., ‘threw things’). Through the linguistic and sequential structuring of question-response exchanges, the investigative activity involved children’s participation in co-telling about emotional/affective stances and physical actions that led to a peer’s crying.

Japanese teachers also responded to children’s crying that emerged in peer conflict by initiating investigative activity. They too engaged children in question-response sequences aimed at co-constructing a telling of the precipitating event. In
Excerpt 2 from the Japanese preschool, a boy (Zuberi: 2; 9) begins crying loudly. When the teacher abandons her current activity to immediately attend to the crying, she ostensibly sees Zuberi (who is crying) using his hand to hit towards a girl (Lan: 2; 9) who is also hitting at him with a toy (small cushion). Despite that both children are engaged in hitting, as we will see, the teacher aims her questions only at one child (here, the crying child Zuberi), which was typical in the Japanese data. As we join the interaction, the teacher reaches towards Zuberi to stop the children from hitting each other (line 2; Fig. 5).

**Excerpt 2.** “Toy futon cover”

01 ZUB:  
02 TEA:  
03 TEA:  
04 ZUB:  
05 ZUB:  
06 TEA:  
07 ZUB:  
08 TEA:  
09 ZUB:  
10 TEA:  
11 ZUB:  
12 TEA:  

Figure 5. Teacher reaches hand out to Zuberi (far right) to stop the hitting.
While engaging in affective touch on the crying child (Zuberi) to calm him down, the teacher poses an open-ended question to investigate the precipitating event (line 3: ‘What happened?’). As Zuberi continues to cry, she repeats her question (lines 6 and 8), until Zuberi produces a relevant response (line 9)—a deictic hand gesture towards Lan. Similar to Ex. 1, this non-verbal response to the teacher’s investigative question informs the teacher’s emergent understanding of the precipitating event as displayed in her further investigative work.

More specifically, in responding to Zuberi’s hand gesture, the teacher points towards the toy that is in Lan’s possession (Fig. 6) and asks Zuberi two clarification questions (line 10: ‘This?’, line 12: ‘You wanted this?’). In the second question, she ascribes to him an affective stance of “desire” (Kulick and Schieffelin, 2005) for the object, and through the interrogative format invites him to align with this ascription (‘You wanted this?’). Zuberi aligns by producing a minimal verbalization and head nod (line 14). With her question, the teacher implies a cause-effect relationship that led to the conflict and crying (i.e., because Zuberi wanted the toy, he attempted to take it from Lan, resulting in the hitting and crying). In contrast to the Swedish data (Ex. 1), much is left unsaid here. The boy’s actions prior to the hitting and which child initiated the untoward act (i.e., hitting) is not pursued. Thus, the Japanese teacher does not invite the child to articulate an untoward action that presumably followed from his desire for the toy. Yet, through this series of question-response exchanges, the teacher and child co-construct a telling of the precipitating event.

In this section, we have observed how Swedish and Japanese preschool teachers responded to children’s crying arising in peer conflict, in which they engaged children in question-response sequences to co-construct a telling that arrived at a mutual understanding of what happened. An important difference between the two excerpts presented is that the Swedish teacher, through an extended narrative, guided the child to explicitly articulate her untoward action that led to the conflict/crying. The Japanese teacher, in contrast, conducted the investigative work rather quickly (addressing her questions to only one of the children involved), leaving much unsaid. Importantly, this investigative activity invited the addressed children to discursively position themselves as actors within cause-effect relationships that involved their own emotions/affective stances (and in the Swedish case, physical actions) that resulted in conflict and crying.

4.2. Reparatory activity

Teachers in both the Swedish and Japanese preschool responded to children’s crying that emerged in peer conflict by engaging children in reparatory activity. This involved remedial work that was aimed at restoring the social and moral order of peer relationships (Danby and Baker, 1998). Of particular interest is that reparatory activity consisted of teachers’ use of “directives,” or acts of overt social control “designed to get someone else to do something” (M. H. Goodwin, 1990:67). These directives can be divided into two categories: 1) what to do/not to do: convey local and normative social rules, 2) what to say: 

![Figure 6. Teacher points to toy near Lan (left) while addressing Zuberi.](image)
prompt to use speech. There was a great deal of variation in these two directive categories between the two preschools (Table 1). More particularly, in the selected episodes, the Swedish teachers used directives on what to do/not to do more than three times as often as the Japanese teachers (37 vs. 11 tokens), whereas the Japanese teachers used directives on what to say nine times as often as the Swedish teachers (36 vs. 4 tokens).

Moreover, in comparison to the Swedish teachers whose directives on what to say (prompting) were aimed at only a few social actions (apology, thanks, and seeking permission), the Japanese teachers’ directives on what to say were aimed at a wider range of social actions (e.g., request, apology, offer/compliance, thanks, etc.). In the following, we present an example of directives on what to do/not to do from the Swedish preschool (Section 4.2.1), followed by an example of directives on what to say from the Japanese preschool (Section 4.2.2), as these kinds of directives were the most common in each preschool.

### Table 1

Teacher practices in relation to what to do/not do and what to say in the Swedish and Japanese preschools (based on 40 episodes of conflict/peer conflict from each preschool).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What to do/not do</th>
<th>Swedish</th>
<th>Japanese</th>
<th>Example [Swe = Swedish; Jpn = Japanese]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>37</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Du får vänna tills den är ledig. [Swe]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘You have to wait until it’s available.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Det är inte okej att slåss med kompisar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Då får man inte vara med å leka. [Swe]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘It’s not OK to fight with your friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Then you can’t play with them.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>oshitara ikemasen. [Jpn]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘You mustn’t push.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>tocca dame. [Jpn]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘It’s no good to take it.’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What to say</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Example [Swe = Swedish; Jpn = Japanese]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. request</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>tsugi kashite tte. [Jpn]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(18)</td>
<td>‘Say can I borrow it next.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. apology</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>kan du säga förå. [Swe]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(11)</td>
<td>‘Can you say sorry?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. offer/compliance</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>doozo tte. [Jpn]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. thanks</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>då säger man tack. [Swe]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>‘Then one says thank you.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. informing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>kootai no jikan desu yo tte. [Jpn]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>‘Say it’s time to take turns.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. seeking or claiming possession</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>sore no yo tte tieba ii no. [Jpn]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>‘You should say it’s mine.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. invitation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>isshoni asoboo tte. [Jpn]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>‘Say let’s play together.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

social actions (apology, thanks, and seeking permission), the Japanese teachers’ directives on what to say were aimed at a wider range of social actions (e.g., request, apology, offer/compliance, thanks, etc.). In the following, we present an example of directives on what to do/not to do from the Swedish preschool (Section 4.2.1), followed by an example of directives on what to say from the Japanese preschool (Section 4.2.2), as these kinds of directives were the most common in each preschool.

#### 4.2.1. Directives on what to do/not do

Just prior to the fragment shown from the Swedish preschool, three girls had been playing together when one of them (Neah, 3 years) expressed a desire for a purple bottle that another girl (Naomi, 2 years) was holding. When Neah takes away the purple bottle from Naomi who begins to cry, the teacher intervenes and returns the bottle to Naomi.

**Excerpt 3. “Green bottle”**

```
01 TEA: så får du ha den gröna.
   ‘Then you can take the green one.’ ((to NEA))
02 NEA: [Nej.
   ‘No.’
   nea *((shakes her head, silent sobs))
```
The teacher issues a directive to Neah to take a different colored bottle (line 1: ‘Then you can take the green one’), which is designed to appease Neah’s desire for a bottle. In the Swedish preschool, directives on what to do/not to do were often accompanied by declaratives to invoke and emphasize common rules of object use. Here, when Neah rejects the offered bottle (line 2 and Fig. 7), the teacher responds by using declaratives to invoke a common rule of object use (line 3: ‘But Naomi had it first. It wasn’t available’). In Sweden, children’s play with objects is often governed by a rule of “availability” that allows the initial user of an object relatively unlimited use or “ownership” until it becomes no longer in use. As with many other preschool rules, this is not the teacher’s personal rule, but one “that lies somewhere beyond self” (Keane, 2016: 43), namely within the institution and wider society. Thus, such rules are rarely, if ever, negotiable as illustrated in this excerpt.

More particularly, when Neah escalates her crying, the teacher issues another directive, which reinforces the earlier declarative rule (line 4: ‘You have to wait until it’s available’). She then produces more declaratives to frame the rule as a given state of affairs (line 6: ‘That’s the way it is’; line 9: ‘So it is’). Such directives and declaratives related to rules of conduct have the discursive effect of blocking possibilities for children’s negotiation with the teacher (Goodwin and Cekaite, 2018). Notably, in comparison to Excerpt 1 and 2 above, here the teacher’s directives are not accompanied by tactile comforting or soothing on the crying child Neah (Fig. 8) (Bateman, in press). Instead, the teacher unwaveringly conveys to Neah not only how to act in relation to object use within peer play, but also how to act within the teacher-mediated reparatory activity: the child must align with the teacher’s conveyed rules and not cry in resistance.
4.2.2. Directives on what to say

Just prior to this excerpt from the Japanese preschool, a boy (Hamid, 2; 2) could be heard saying *dame* ‘no good’ in a loud voice before starting to cry. As a teacher turns towards him, she ostensibly sees that a girl (Mao, 2; 7) has picked up a toy (an orange train tunnel) from Hamid’s play space and is beginning to run away with it. As we join the interaction, Hamid continues to cry as the teacher stops Mao from running away with the toy.

**Excerpt 4**: “Orange train tunnel”

01 HAM:  *a en::::::* 
02 TEA:  [*h en::::::*] 
03 TEA:  *[(ka:shi:te:) itte yu u no ga [saki desho::::::*]
‘First you say can I borrow it, right?’

04 HAM:  *[en::::::]*
05 MAO:  *[ka:shi::]*
06 TEA:  =kashite da tte.
‘(She says) can I borrow it.’

07 TEA:  =ham ([ham stops crying]) 
08 HAM:  |[nn]
09 MAO:  |[(takes orange tunnel out of TEA’s hands)]
10 HAM:  |[dame na no?]
‘It’s no good? (=You won’t let her borrow it?)’

11 MAO:  |[(steps back, away from MAO and TEA)]
12 HAM:  |[(takes orange tunnel out of MAO’s hands)]
13 MAO:  |[ka:shi:te.]
‘Can I borrow it.’

14 MAO:  |[(steps and leans forward toward HAM)]
15 HAM:  |[(steps back further away from MAO)]

Figure 9. As Mao holds the toy, the teacher turns her towards Hamid.
11 HAM: (0.6)
12 ham |((looks down at toys [tunnel and train] in his hands))
13 TEA: これかしてだって。
   |kore kashite da tte.
   ‘She says, can I borrow it.’
   |((points to tunnel in HAM’s hands))

---

Figure 10. Teacher points at the tunnel now in Hamid’s hands.

14 TEA: どうですか。
   *doo desu ka.*
   ‘How about it?’
15 ham  |((handing train to MAO))
16 TEA: あ、そっちならいいって。
   |a, socchi nara ii tte.
   ‘(He) says (you) can have that one.’
   |((taking the offered train from HAM))
17 TEA: よかったね、マオちゃん。
   *yokatta ne, mao-chan.*
   ‘That’s great, Mao.’
18 それでいい?
   *sore de ii?*
   ‘Is that (one) okay?’
19 MAO: トンネルは?
   *tonneru wa?*
   ‘What about the tunnel?’
20 TEA: |↑ト(h)|hh .h >↑ト(h)トンネルは(h)○<
   |*to(h)|hh .h >↑t(h)onneru w(h)○<
   ‘What about the tunnel’
   |((covers mouth with hand while laughing))
   |((leans in close to HAM))
21 TEA: |.h トンネルがほしいだって。=
   |.h tonneru ga hoshii n da tte.=
   ‘She says she wants the tunnel.’
   |((pointing at tunnel in HAM’s hand))
In initiating the reparatory activity, the teacher turns Mao’s body to face Hamid (Fig. 9) while prompting her to say ‘can I borrow it’ to him (line 3). Similar to directives on what to do/not to do (Ex. 3), such prompting provides children with little room to negotiate an alternative. Here, when Mao complies with the teacher’s directive by “animating” (in Goffman’s, 1981 sense) the request expression to Hamid (line 5: ‘Can I borrow it’), Hamid continues to cry without producing a relevant next response (e.g., compliance with or rejection of the request). In the Japanese preschool, prompting on what to say (to one child) was often followed by reported speech (to the other child) (Burdelski, 2020). Here, when Hamid does not respond to Mao’s request that the teacher had prompted Mao to say, the teacher repeats Mao’s request to Hamid as reported speech (e.g., line 7: ‘She says “can I borrow it”’; also line 13), while pointing towards the toy in Hamid’s hands (Fig. 10). In comparison to this kind of prompting, reported speech does not supply the child with the expected expression, but leaves it to the child to come up with a relevant next response. Here, Hamid responds in his own way by offering Mao a different toy than the one she had requested (i.e., a train instead of the desired tunnel; line 15). Hamid’s response extends the reparatory activity, as Mao displays dissatisfaction with Hamid’s response by redoing her request for the toy tunnel (line 19). This leads the teacher to continue her mediation in the conflict (lines 21 and 22) until Hamid ultimately rejects Mao’s request for the tunnel (line 23). In these ways, Japanese teachers’ prompting and reported speech encourage children to engage in paired social actions (e.g., request-response) in resolving the crying and conflict.

In the preceding two analytical sections, we have observed that preschool teachers in both Sweden (Ex. 3) and Japan (Ex. 4) carried out reparatory activity by employing directives along with other practices that were variable across situations (e.g., declaratives, reported speech) to convey rules of acting and speaking with peers. Reparatory activity was aimed at encouraging children to produce a next utterance and/or embodied action, and at attuning them to avoid and deal with conflict and manage interpersonal relationships. In the following section, we build on our observations of this reparatory activity in relation to emotion/affect.

4.2.3. Inviting children to see/hear crying as an affective act in need of a response

In relation to issuing directives that convey social rules of acting and speaking, reparatory activity was also a site for inviting children to see and hear another child’s crying as an affective and pragmatic act in need of a particular response. Towards this end, both Swedish and Japanese teachers ascribed emotional/affective stances to crying children through the use of interrogatives and declaratives. These ascriptions often occurred alongside directives and other practices as examined in Sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 above. In the Swedish preschool, such ascriptions were often formulated as interrogatives that invited the addressed child to align, as illustrated in Excerpt 5.

Here, two boys, Gustav (3 years) and Henrik (2; 5 years), had been playing together when Gustav (in a tussle over an object) hits Henrik who starts crying loudly and is treated as needing to be comforted. In the excerpt shown, rather than providing this comfort herself, the teacher urges Gustav to apologize to Henrik (line 5), which leads to Gustav comforting Henrik. As the excerpt begins, Henrik has moved away from Gustav and is now several meters from him, as the teacher is upbraiding Gustav while putting her arms around him to get his attention (Fig. 11).

Excerpt 5. “Hug”

| TEA: | det är inte okej å göra såna dumma saker. |
|      | ‘It’s not okay to do such foolish things.’ |
|      | ((holds firm grip on GUS’s body)) |
Figure 11. Teacher grips onto Gustav’s body with both hands.

02  nu fär vi pausa lite gustav. jo.
   ‘We have to take a short break now Gustav. Yes.’
03  |ser du så ledsn henrik blev.
   ‘Do you see how sad Henrik has become?’
   |((points towards HEN))

Figure 12. Teacher orients Gustav’s body towards a crying Henrik (not in frame).

04  GUS:  |lek- lek- leka med henrik.
      ‘Pla- pla- play with Henrik.’
      gus  |((looks towards HEN))
05  TEA:  ja då kan du säga förlåt till henrik.
       ‘Yes, then you can say sorry to Henrik.’
06  GUS:  |Ja.
       ‘Yes.’
      gus  |((walks towards HEN))
07  TEA:  ja.
       ‘Yes.’
While issuing a directive to Gustav to take ‘a short break’ (line 2), the teacher orients Gustav’s gaze and body towards Henrik who has now stopped crying (Fig. 12). In addressing Gustav further, she ascribes an emotional stance of ‘sad’ to Henrik, using an interrogative format that invites Gustav to align (line 3: ‘Do you see how sad Henrik has become?’) (see also Holm Kvist, 2018). In using the words blev ‘become’ and ledesen ‘sad,’ the teacher urges Gustav to consider and reflect upon his prior actions as having caused a change in Henrik’s emotion. In response, Gustav addresses the teacher by proposing his own resolution, namely, a joint activity with Henrik (line 4: ‘play with Henrik’). After acknowledging Gustav’s proposal, the teacher engages Gustav in a remedial action by prompting him to apologize to Henrik (line 5: ‘then you can say sorry to Henrik’); see also Table 1. Similar to the Japanese preschool teacher observed earlier (Ex. 4), here the Swedish teacher provides the child with an utterance (i.e., apology formula föråt) accompanied by a directive to ‘say’ it (säga) to the peer (Henrik). This prompt implies a social rule: when one’s actions have led to another’s crying/sadness, one performs an apology so as to make amends and restore the social order (Björk-Willen, 2018). As we have observed elsewhere in both the Swedish and Japanese data (Burdelski and Cekaite, 2021), at times children responded to teachers’ verbal prompts by aligning in their own way. Here, rather than animating the teacher’s apology expression, Gustav approaches Henrik and puts his arms around him in a kind of “reconciliatory hug” (Cekaite, 2012; Goodwin and Cekaite, 2018) (line 8, Fig. 13), which is an “intercorporeal” display of positive affect (Meyer et al., 2017). This hug may serve a similar purpose to the apology, but it provides bodily soothing and comfort of Henrik who had been crying in displaying distress. In these ways, the teacher’s actions were aimed at getting a child (Gustav) to reflect on his untoward action, and to see and hear the other child’s (Henrik’s) crying as a display of negative emotion (‘sad’) in need of a compassionate and reconciliatory response. By responding to the teacher’s prompt in the way he did, the child displayed his own understanding of how to perform a remedial act in this situation (through a hug). It can be noted that while encouraging children to hug each other in reparatory activity was observed in the Swedish preschool, it was not observed in the Japanese preschool.

In the Japanese preschool, teachers also ascribed affective/emotional stances to crying children in urging remedial work. Their ascriptions were often in the form of declaratives, and they appeared in a wide range of sequential positions, especially after a prompt and/or other directive. Just prior to Excerpt 6, two boys, Zuberi (2; 10) and Hamid (2; 3), have reached into a box of toys, when Zuberi takes away the toy that Hamid had taken out first. When Hamid begins to cry in protest, a nearby teacher has come over to investigate, and then directs Zuberi a number of times to return the toy to the crying Hamid, but to no avail. As we join the interaction, the teacher addresses Zuberi again by ascribing an affective stance of distress to Hamid (line 3).

**Excerpt 6. “Pitiable”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>HAM:</th>
<th>TEA:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>.hhh EN:…………: en: en: a:……:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>| hhhhh A:……: ↓ A:……: hek: [a:……:</td>
<td>.hhh]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tea | (wipes HAM’s nose) |</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td></td>
<td>[ズベリ,かわいそう [だから]]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[zuberi, kawaisou] da kara|</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘Zuberi, since (Hamid) is pitiable,’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[(wipes HAM’s face)]|</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In continuing the reparatory activity, the teacher wipes away the tears from Hamid’s face (Fig. 14). At the same time, she addresses Zuberi with a declarative that ascribes an affective stance of *kawaisoo* (‘pitiful/feel sorry for’) to Hamid (line 3; also line 13). Similar to Clancy’s (1986) observation of how Japanese mothers use *kawaisoo* as an “appeal to feelings” in directing children to stop an untoward action towards an object (e.g., hitting a toy), here the teacher uses *kawaisoo* in relation to a crying child (Hamid) as an attempt to persuade Zuberi to perform a specific next action: returning the toy to Hamid. This use of *kawaisoo* occurs in an extended reparatory activity in which the teacher has issued directives to return the toy (line 4) and declaratives to urge Zuberi to attend to Hamid’s ‘crying’ (*naiteru*; see lines 6 and 10). However, none of these practices immediately produced the expected response. Notably, while the teacher does not attempt to take the toy away from Zuberi (cf. Ex. 3, Ex. 4), her mediation involves verbal directives on what to do/say and appeals to consider Hamid’s crying as a display of affective stance. In this way, the teacher uses more pragmatically forceful practices of directives along with less forceful persuasion. After Hamid’s crying continues for a couple more minutes, a resolution is achieved by the boys themselves who start a new game.

In this section, we have observed how Swedish and Japanese teachers carried out reparatory activity by ascribing emotional/affective stances of distress to the crying child. Such ascriptions invited children to notice and observe the other child’s crying in relation to negative emotion/affect, Swedish and...
Japanese teachers encouraged the addressed child to contemplate his or her untoward actions towards a peer, and invited him or her to remedy the situation to alleviate the other child’s distress.

5. Discussion and conclusions

In this paper we have examined teachers’ responses to children’s crying that emerged within peer conflict in preschools in two societies: Sweden and Japan. Our findings expand our understanding of children’s crying as an act of distress that is located not within the child but rather, as a public act, within a web of social relationships, actions, and activities. From this perspective, we have observed that crying itself is a pragmatic and social act, which displays distress, recruits/invites assistance, and attempts to position the self as a victim in an event. We have shown how teachers recurrently responded to crying by constructing multiparty frameworks of mediation. They attempted to discover what happened and attuned children to the social, affective, and moral implications of their own and others’ crying. We argue that adult responses to children’s crying are both locally and culturally situated in that they are tied to the contingencies of the immediate interaction and informed by institutional norms (or pedagogies [Bateman, in press]).

By identifying how caregivers’ responses were carried out (at the micro level), this examination has put us on a foundation in which to argue for a nuanced picture of pragmatic socialization. More specifically, Swedish and Japanese teachers potentially socialized children into appropriate verbal and embodied ways on how to act towards and what to say to others, as well as how to display affective stances towards them in getting along as a member of a peer group. We do not claim that our observations, which are based on a relatively small sample of episodes (40 in each preschool), are applicable to all preschools in these two societies, as we would expect variation within a society (e.g., Holloway, 2000). Nevertheless, in both preschools, we observed how teachers responded to children’s crying by engaging children in reparatory activity involving the situating of children in face-to-face formations, and encouraging their appropriate re-orientation to others (Keane, 2016). Although teachers’ directives evoked rules on how to act and what to say to peers, we observed a somewhat different preference of practices in the two preschools (Table 1). Also, in both preschools, teachers used reparatory activity to ascribe emotional/affective stances to the crying child. Based on this observation, we argue that reparatory activity was also a key site for socializing children to perspective taking and empathy, as displays of understanding of another’s subjective experiences through one’s own considerate actions (Hollan and Throop, 2008; Keane, 2016). In urging children to perform remedial actions, while invoking the displayed emotional/affective stances of the crying child, teachers in the Swedish and Japanese preschools potentially socialized children to display empathy in action, even when children did so in their own way (Ex. 5) or did not immediately align with their efforts (Ex. 6).

We also argue that teachers’ responses to children’s crying was a site both for instantiating normative tendencies that have been previously reported on in preschools in these two societies and that at times departed from them: in short, normative tendencies in the Swedish preschool included individual autonomy and solidarity, and those in the Japanese preschool included self-restraint and knowing one’s status in a social group. First, during investigative activity, Swedish teachers recurrently encouraged both children in the conflict to convey their views of the precipitating event (Ex. 1), which is congruent with the democratic ideals and individual rights that are highly valued in Swedish society (Cekaite, 2013). However, they tended to discursively steer children towards a particular view of the event, or what can be considered as mainly a teacher-driven version of the event (Danby and Baker, 1998), but one that was informed by children’s verbal/non-verbal contributions. In this way, while providing children with the rights to tell their version of what happened, teachers also guided children (especially the child positioned as the “culprit”) to produce and align with the teacher’s emergent understanding of what happened, which was in part shaped by the crying child’s version of the event (Ex. 1). This tendency for steering children towards the teacher’s view of the precipitating event was also commonly observed in the Japanese preschool (Ex. 2), which is consistent with a societal value of recognizing one’s status (e.g., the teacher as socially higher and one whose viewpoint is to be respected and given importance); this value is certainly not limited to Japanese society. More importantly perhaps, Japanese teachers tended to be more content than Swedish teachers with leaving a great deal unsaid during the investigative activity (Ex. 2), which we argue is undergirded by a preference in many situations for indirectness and ambiguity, and thus could be a site for socializing children into this communicative preference at the micro level of interaction (Clancy, 1986). In any case, in both preschools, investigative activity was more than simply a means of gaining information about a precipitating event, but was a vehicle for encouraging children’s use of pragmatic skills, including participating in question-answer exchanges that required them to reflect upon and convey their views of an immediately past event.

Second, during the reparatory activity, Swedish teachers often encouraged children to adhere to social and institutional rules of acting and speaking. Similar to Ochs’ (2002) observation that, “[r]ules are closely tied to moral beliefs about right and wrong,” we argue that reparatory activity was also a vehicle for attuning children to morality (Fader, 2011), including what is viewed as “appropriate” and “inappropriate” conduct with peers. Moreover, these social rules were non-negotiable. Thus, in some situations, Swedish teachers provided children with little autonomy to shape the outcome of the reparatory phase (Ex. 3). In such way, during post-conflict, children experienced a variety of discursive and social roles: while during the investigation they were entitled to verbalize or convey in embodied ways their perspective to an extent, during reparatory activity their expected participation was limited to non-negotiable adherence and compliance with the social rules. Similarly, in the Japanese preschool, teachers prompted children what to say (much more so than in the Swedish preschool), which is congruent with rules of politeness in Japan in which social actors are expected to ‘discern’ (wakimae) social situations (Ide,
and deploy language (e.g., formulaic expressions) accordingly, in part to avoid conflict or manage conflict after it has begun so as to maintain interpersonal harmony. These findings suggest that both Swedish and Japanese teachers provided the child positioned as a “culprit” with minimal or limited autonomy for choosing the kind of next action to produce.

Finally, we have also revealed how children themselves are agents of pragmatic socialization, even within this relatively constrained institutional context, who use various resources in aligning, resisting, and responding in novel ways. Teachers’ responses to children’s crying potentially contributed to socializing children’s pragmatic knowledge and skills, while preparing them for participation in daily activities and valued discursive genres related to how to avoid, manage, and resolve conflict/crying episodes. In these ways, we suggest that responses to children’s crying entail both reproduction and transformation of the social and moral order within and beyond the walls of the preschool.

Funding

Financial support from The Swedish Research Council, project ‘Communicating emotions, embodying morality’ (PI A. Cekaite, project number 742-2013-7626) is gratefully acknowledged.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix

Transcription conventions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEA</th>
<th>Speaker identification.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tea</td>
<td>speaker identification of non-verbal action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(words)</td>
<td>Non-verbal actions described.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----→</td>
<td>Indicates continuation of non-verbal action beyond the current utterance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>Indicates non-verbal action continues and then ceases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>Pause in tenths of a second.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[</td>
<td>Overlapping talk by different speakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;word&lt;</td>
<td>Faster speech.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;word&gt;</td>
<td>Slower speech.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↑word</td>
<td>Following sounds are produced with rising pitch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↓word</td>
<td>Following sounds are produced with lower pitch or a return to normal pitch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wo:rd</td>
<td>Vowel elongation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ℓwordℓ</td>
<td>Quiet voice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‾</td>
<td>Continuing intonation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>Rising intonation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>,</td>
<td>Falling intonation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References


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Asta Cekaite is a professor in Child Studies at Linköping University. Her research takes an interdisciplinary approach to language, culture, and social interaction, by focusing on embodiment, touch, emotion, and moral socialization. Empirical fields cover adult-child and children’s peer group interactions in educational settings and families. With Lorenza Mondada she has co-edited Touch in social interaction: Touch, language, and body (2020).

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