STUDIUM EDUCATIONIS
XXIV - 2 - Dicembre 2023 | ISSN 2035-844X
DOI: 10.7346/SE-022023-02

Available on-line at
https://ojs.pensamultimedia.it/index.php/studium
OPEN ACCESS

Ricevuto: 23/4/2023
Accettato: 7/11/2023
Pubblicato: 29/12/2023

STUDI E RICERCHE

"The teacher said that at school": Negotiating epistemic and deontic rights in parent-child homework conversations

Vittoria Colla
Research fellow | Department of Studies on Language and Culture | University of Modena and Reggio Emilia | Adjunct professor, Department of Education Studies "Giovanni Maria Bertin" | University of Bologna | vittoria.colla2@unibo.it

"L'ha detto l'insegnante a scuola": La negoziazione dei diritti epistemici e deontici nelle conversazioni genitori-figli sui compiti a casa

Abstract

Parental involvement in education is commonly viewed as a good practice, however little is known about its interactive unfolding. Based on videorecorded homework sessions and drawing on conversation analysis, the article focuses on a discursive activity occurring during parent-assisted homework: epistemic and deontic negotiations, i.e., interactive sequences whereby parents and children negotiate who knows best and has the right to decide about the assignments. The analysis illustrates the structural features of such negotiations, showing how children make relevant their first-hand knowledge of school experiences to claim epistemic and deontic rights over homework. The article argues that parent-child negotiations are relevant arenas for investigating the interactive dynamics of parental involvement in homework and the situated ways in which parents manage the distance-involvement dilemma.

Keywords
Homework, parent-child interaction, negotiations, parental involvement, distance-involvement dilemma

Nonostante il coinvolgimento dei genitori nell'educazione scolastica dei figli sia generalmente considerato positivo, poco si sa di come esso si realizza concretamente. A partire da un corpus di sessioni di compiti a casa videoregistrate e tramite l'analisi della conversazione, l'articolo analizza un'attività discorsiva che coinvolge genitori e figli: le negoziazioni epistemiche e deontiche, cioè sequenze interattive attraverso le quali si stabilisce chi possiede la conoscenza necessaria per prendere decisioni sui compiti. L'analisi illustra la struttura di tali negoziazioni e i modi in cui i bambini mobilizzano la propria conoscenza della vita scolastica per affermare diritti epistemici e deontici. L'articolo mostra come tali negoziazioni siano luoghi privilegiati per osservare il declinarsi concreto e interattivo del coinvolgimento dei genitori nell'educazione scolastica dei figli.

Parole chiave
Compiti a casa, interazione genitori-figli, negoziazioni, coinvolgimento dei genitori nell'educazione scolastica, dilemma educativo

1. Introduction

The present article adopts an interactive approach to investigate a phenomenon that has long been at the core of socio-pedagogical research and policies: parental involvement in children's education, particularly in homework. Since the eighties, several studies have indicated that parental involvement in children's school-related activities has positive effects on children's learning and motivation (e.g., Epstein, 2001). Concurrently, education policies in Western countries have converged in proposing the so-called "family-school partnership" as a resource to improve children's academic results and promoting social equality (see for example the *No Child Left Behind Act* in the US and D.P.R. November 21, n. 235 in Italy, art. 5bis). Parental involvement in education has thus gradually become a taken-for-granted "good practice": parents are nowadays expected to be engaged members of the school community and act like "quasi-literacy teachers" at home (Blackmore, Hutchinson, 2010, p. 503; Kremer-Sadlik, Fatigante, 2015; Forsberg, 2009; Gottzén, 2011; Ochs, Kremer-Sadlik, 2013).

Among the activities aimed at promoting parent participation and the "family-school alliance" (Contini, 2012; Milani, 2012; Bolognesi, 2016; Pati, 2019), homework plays a key role (Colla, 2022, 2023; Caronia, Colla, 2021; Caronia, Colla, Bolognesi, 2023). Being a school activity carried out inside the home, homework provides parents with daily occasions to get involved in their children's formal education (Pontecorvo, Liberati, Monaco, 2013; Montalbetti, Lisimberti, 2020; Bolognesi, Dalledonne Vandini, 2020). Yet, such an involvement is far from unproblematic: some studies have pointed out that parental engagement in homework can cause arguments and stress among family members (Meirieu, 2000; Kralovec, Buell, 2000; Forsberg, 2007; Forsberg, Wingard, 2009; Solomon, Warin, Lewis, 2002). In particular, homework arguments have been frequently attributed to the "distance-involvement dilemma". That is, on the one hand, parents are expected to monitor, support, and direct children's learning activities at home; on the other hand, they are supposed to acknowledge and promote children's autonomy in school-related accomplishments (Forsberg, 2007; Edwards, 2002). Parent-child homework arguments therefore constitute a perspicuous case for investigating what parental involvement in children's homework looks like concretely and how the distance-involvement dilemma is locally managed by parents and children.

Based on 62 video-recorded homework sessions collected in 19 Italian family residences and drawing on conversation analysis (Sacks, Schegloff, Jefferson, 1974), this article investigates a particular type of argument occurring between parents and children in the study: epistemic and deontic negotiations, i.e., interactive sequences whereby parents and children establish who knows best about homework and has the rights to decide about assignments (e.g., what exercises must be done, for when, and how). The article identifies two types of parent-child epistemic and deontic negotiations, describing their structural features (section 4). It also shows how, in the unfolding of such negotiations, children make relevant their first-hand knowledge of school experiences as a means to claim epistemic and deontic rights over homework (section 5). As the article illustrates, these negotiations are paramount to deepening our understanding of parental involvement as they constitute a window on the concrete, day-to-day realization of homework as a parent-assisted activity. It is indeed through this kind of interactive activities that parents and children manage the distance-involvement dilemma, elaborate mutual rights and responsibilities for homework, claim and acknowledge their own and one another's authority, project individual identities, and ultimately give situated meanings to the notion of "involved parenting".

Yet, before delving into the analysis of parent-child negotiations, it is worth introducing the notions of epistemics and deontics in relation to social interaction. As the next section explains, these notions are key dimensions of sociality that are rooted in and elaborated through social interaction.

2. Epistemics and deontics in social interaction

Research focusing on social interaction has long and convincingly demonstrated that knowledge and authority are not given once and for all, preceding and informing social relationships. Rather, they are inherently *interactive* dimensions, being not only displayed but also negotiated, (re)affirmed, and even challenged in the unfolding of social interaction. The interactive nature of epistemics and deontics and participants' orientation to knowledge and authority are made visible in the ways in which turns, actions,

and sequences are structured in conversation (Heritage, 2012a, 2012b; Stevanovic, 2011; Stevanovic, Peräkylä, 2012). For example, interactants adjust their utterances according to their interlocutors' knowledge and power (Goodwin, 1979; Stevanovic, Peräkylä, 2012), they demonstrate the acquisition of new information through "change of state tokens" (Heritage, 1984), and use different classes of utterances (e.g., proposals *vs* assertions) to convey a more or less deep epistemic and/or deontic asymmetry between themselves and their interlocutors (Heritage, Raymond, 2005; Raymond, Heritage, 2006). Interactants orient not only to what they know, but also to *how* they know it (Pomerantz, 1984). Particularly relevant for the present study is the distinction between "type 1" and "type 2" knowledge proposed by Pomerantz (1980). While the former indicates first-hand knowledge, deriving from situations directly experienced by the knowledge claimer, the second one indicates knowledge that is second-hand, derivative, and known in indirect ways. Typically, speakers with more detailed, type 1 knowledge about a given matter are treated as having primary epistemic and deontic rights, i.e., as having the rights to make claims and decisions on that matter (Heritage, Raymond, 2005; Pomerantz, 1980; Stivers, Mondada, Steensig, 2011).

Importantly, participants' epistemic and deontic rights are locally negotiated. In the turn-by-turn unfolding of interaction, participants constantly – yet mostly incidentally – affirm and negotiate the relative distribution of epistemic and deontic rights, locally establishing who embodies the epistemic and/or deontic authority, i.e., the one knowing best and/or having the rights to decide on the matter at hand. Sequentiality plays a crucial role in this process: once an epistemic and/or deontic claim is made by a speaker, the following interactional turns are key in ratifying or challenging such a claim. Indeed, following turns may be used by the same speaker to upgrade or downgrade their previous claim (Antaki, Kent, 2012; Stevanovic, 2015); alternatively, they may be used by the interlocutors to either acknowledge or resist it the speaker's claim and authority (Heritage, Raymond, 2005; Stivers, 2005).

In negotiating rights to know and decide, interactants constantly demonstrate accountability for what they know or do not know, their level of certainty and authority, the degree to which they have rights and responsibilities for the knowledge and decisions at stake (Stivers, Mondada, Steensig, 2011). In this sense, epistemic and deontic negotiations are strictly connected to social identities. The ways in which interactants stage themselves as having (or not) the rights to know and decide constitute crucial means for establishing, maintaining, or even challenging participants' social identities and mutual relationships (Raymond, Heritage, 2005). Claiming knowledge and authority is therefore a way to construct and display individual identities as well as acknowledge – or potentially challenge – the roles and identities embodied by others. This is key for the present study. Indeed, as we will see, epistemic and deontic negotiation about homework have clear implications for the interactive construction of participants' identities as "children", "pupils", and "involved parents".

3. Data and analytical procedures

The data used in this study are drawn from a corpus of 62 videorecorded homework sessions collected in 19 family residences in the north of Italy between 2018 and 2020. The families taking part in the study were composed of two working parents and at least one child attending primary school (i.e., aged 6-10); they were selected among the author's personal and work connections. To minimize the potential impact of the research setting, the videorecording process was self-administered by the parents in line with the researchers' guidelines. Participants' consent was obtained according to Italian law n. 196/2003 and EU Regulation n. 2016/679, which regulate the handling of personal and sensitive data.

Once collected, the videorecordings have been observed multiple times to identify the interactive ways in which parents got involved in children's homework. After repeated observation, sequences of "epistemic and deontic negotiations" have been singled out. These include interactive sequences whereby parents and children establish who knows best about homework and has the rights to decide what assignments should be done, for when, and how. The collected excerpts have then been transcribed and analyzed by drawing on conversation analysis conventions (Sacks, Schegloff, Jefferson, 1974). Transcripts have been enriched with notations for non-verbal features (e.g., gaze direction, gestures, body movements) when ostensibly relevant for the participants to unfold the conversation. Each verbal turn in the transcript features two lines: the original Italian version is followed by an idiomatic translation in American English. For the sake

of anonymity, all names have been fictionalized. The entire collection together with the analyses of each sequence have been discussed with other researchers and intersubjectively validated in a series of data sessions and presentations.

The analytical part of the article is divided in two main sections. Section 4 illustrates the structural features of two types of parent-child epistemic and deontic negotiations identified in this study: short *vs* extended negotiations. Section 5 focuses on extended negotiations and illustrates how children faced with parents' rejections of their claims make relevant their own first-hand knowledge of school experiences, thus presenting themselves as the epistemic and deontic authority over homework.

4. Epistemic and deontic negotiations over homework: short *vs* extended sequences

The epistemic and deontic negotiations identified in this study can be distinguished in two different types according to the structural features of the sequence: short negotiations *vs* extended negotiations (see Table 1).

Short negotiation	Extended negotiation
1 Parent's epistemic and deontic claim	1 Parent's epistemic and deontic claim
2 Child's rejection	2 Child's rejection
3 Parent's ***acceptance*** [NEGOTIATION ENDS]	3) Parent's ***challenge*** [NEGOTIATION CONTINUES]
	4) Child's evoking of school experiences
	5) Parent's acceptance [NEGOTIATION ENDS]

Table 1 – Epistemic and deontic negotiations over homework: short vs extended negotiations

As can be seen in Table 1, both types of negotiations are opened by the parent, who claims *some* epistemic and deontic rights over homework (1). Importantly, parents' claims in first position can be more or less strong, with parents presenting themselves as more or less knowledgeable and entitled to making decisions about homework. Indeed, as the analyses will show, parents' epistemic and deontic claims range from very mitigated ones, such as proposals, to stronger ones, such as directives. The second component of negotiations is the child's rejection of the parent's claims (2). Through this turn, the child presents themselves as the one having epistemic and deontic rights over homework. What distinguishes short negotiations from extended negotiations is the parent's reply in third position (3). Unlike in extended negotiations, in short negotiations the parent *accepts* the child's claim. In so doing, they ratify the child's epistemic and deontic rights over homework and bring the negotiation to an end. The excerpt below provides an example. Here, the mother is helping her child Gaia catch up with the exercises she has not done because she was absent from school. To do that, the mother is relying on a school textual artifact, i.e., a photocopy that shows the exercises done at school in the child's absence. The negotiation begins when the mother proposes an alternative way to do the homework exercise.

Ex. 1 – You cannot do it however you like
F4H1 (38.26 – 38.48)
Mother; Gaia (seven years old, second grade)

1	Mother	>se noi scusa lo facciam subito sul-< diviso? ***excuse me what if we do it immediately on the- divided?***	** 1) Parent's mitigated epistemic and deontic claim**
2		(1.5)	
3	Mother	possiam far subito ^diviso in sillabe? ***can we do it immediately divided into syllables?***	
4	Gaia	^*((stops writing and turns towards the mother))*	
5		(0.8)	
6	Gaia	no ***no*** *((shaking her head))*	
7		(0.9)	
8	Gaia	se lì non è: fatto così, non-non devi farlo così. ***if there it is not done that way, don't- you mustn't do it that way***	** 2) Child's rejection**
9		(0.9)	
10	Gaia	non è che puoi fare come °vuo:i° ***you cannot do it however you like***	
11		(1.8)	
12	Mother	allora avanti ***then let's go on***	** 3) Parent's acceptance [NEGOTIATION ENDS]**

In line 1, the mother opens the negotiation by proposing an alternative way to do the homework exercise (i.e., by immediately dividing the words into syllables). Note that the mother's epistemic and deontic claim is quite mitigated. By the very fact of making a proposal, she presents herself as somewhat entitled to participate in homework decision-making. However, through the "what if" interrogative, she marks the feasibility of the proposal as contingent upon the child's approval (Stevanovic, Peräkylä, 2012, p. 307), thus giving Gaia the final say on the issue. Getting no answer (see the gap in line 2), the mother repeats her turn, formulating the proposal as a request for permission ("can we do it immediately divided into syllables?", line 3). Through this formulation, the mother further mitigates her claim: she discursively constructs the child as the one who knows best how homework must be done and is therefore entitled to give or deny the permission to do it in a particular way.

In her reply, Gaia bluntly rejects the mother's proposal ("no", line 6) and then provides an account

based on the information provided by the photocopy (lines 8 and 10). By the very fact of answering the mother's request, Gaia assumes the role of epistemic and deontic authority previously projected by the mother's turns (lines 1 and 3). Yet, Gaia goes even beyond that: she problematizes the mother's request, thus *de facto* questioning her rights to even make such a request. Indeed, through the "if…then" structure (line 8), Gaia presents the reason for her rejection as logical and obvious, thus conveying the mother's proposal as unreasonable and inappropriate. The mother's suggestion is further constructed as inacceptable when the child describes it as "doing however you like" (line 10). In this way, and consistently with the mother's projection, Gaia presents herself the one knowing best how the exercises should be done and having the rights to decide on the issue. At this point, the mother accepts the child's rejection: by urging Gaia to resume homework ("then let's go on", line 12), she ratifies Gaia's authority over homework-related issues and closes the negotiation.

Parents in the study did not always accept children's claims of authority. In contrast to what we have seen in ex. 1, parents happened to challenge children's claims in second position, which had the effect of extending the negotiation (see Table 1). Excerpt 2 provides an example. We join the conversation when Ernesto has just finished a homework exercise. At this point, the mother asks him what must be done next.

Ex. 2 – The teacher says that at school
F11H1 (16.18 – 16.35)
Mother; Ernesto (7 years old, second grade)

1	Mother	che cosa dobbiamo fare-^tutti e tre* li devi fare?= ***what do we have to do?- all three* you have to do?***	**□ 1) Parent's mitigated epistemic and deontic claim**
2		^*((pointing to three exercises on the book page))*	
3		=però sul quaderno. c'è scr[itto. ^°se non sbaglio.° ***but on the notebook it's written if I'm not wrong***	
4	Ernesto	[ə-	
5	Mother	^*((looks toward the open school planner))*[Fig. 1]	
6	Ernesto	questi du:e °sul quaderno. questo qui.° ***these two on the notebook this one here*** *((pointing to the different exercises))*	**□ 2) Child's rejection**
7	Mother	m::: ***mmmm*** *((looking toward the open school planner))*	**□ 3) Parent's *challenge***
8		(0.5)	

9	Mother	[°c’è scritto°- ***it’s written***	
10	Ernesto	[lo dic(e) la maestra a ↑sc<u>uo</u>la ***the teacher says that at school***	**4) Child’s evoking of school experiences**
11		(0.4)	
12	Mother	vabbè. ***alright*** *((making a doubtful facial expression))*[Fig. 2]	**5) Parent’s acceptance [NEGOTIATION ENDS]**

* i.e., all three *exercises*

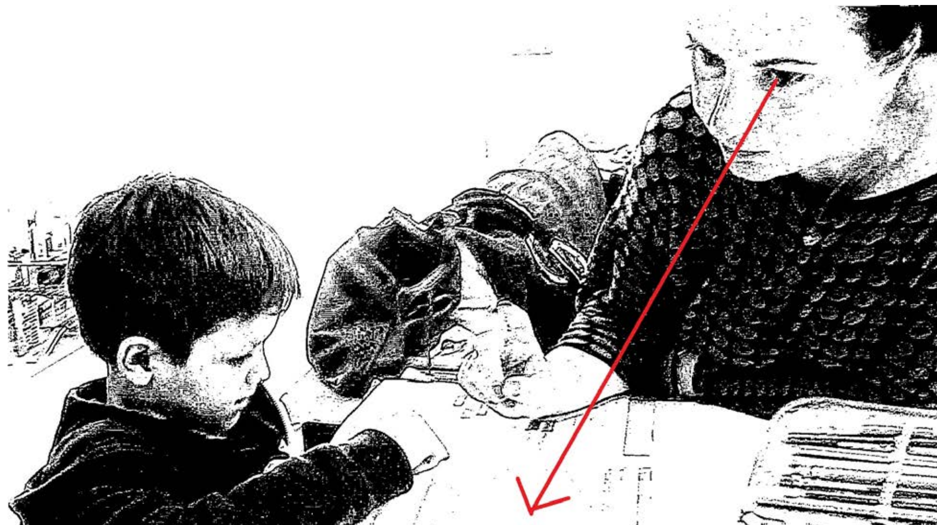

Fig. 1: The mother looks toward the open school planner

Fig. 2: The mother makes a doubtful facial expression

In the turn at line 1, the mother asks Ernesto what homework exercises must be done next. By the very fact of requesting information from the child, the mother treats him as more knowledgeable than her about homework. Yet, note that in continuing her turn (line 3), the mother stages herself as also knowledgeable about homework, particularly about where the exercises must be done ("on the notebook"). In this way, the mother presents herself as somewhat entitled to tell the child what to do, i.e., the exercises must be done on the notebook. In accounting for this claim, the mother indicates the school planner as the source of her knowledge ("it's written", line 3; she looks toward the planner, line 5, Fig. 1). Then she downgrades the reliability of her claim by resorting to a "post-statement display of uncertainty" ("if I'm not wrong", line 3; Stevanovic, 2015). By presenting her knowledge as type 2 (i.e., derived from the school planner) and uncertain, the mother retrospectively frames her epistemic and deontic claim ("but on the notebook", line 3) as a request for confirmation, thus establishing Ernesto as the main authority on the matter. By the very fact of providing an answer to the mother's request (line 6), Ernesto ratifies himself as the one who knows best about homework assignments. Importantly, in his reply Ernesto rejects the mother's previous claim (line 3), as he states that only two exercises out of three are to be done on the notebook (line 6).

At this point, unlike in ex. 1, the mother challenges the child's claim. After voicing her uncertainty through a "response cry" ("m:::", line 7; Goffman, 1978), she refers once again to her source of knowledge (i.e., the school planner) as a means to support her previous claim concerning the need to write all three exercises on the notebook ("it's written", line 9). Confronted with the mother's challenge, Ernesto evokes school experiences as the source of his knowledge (line 10). Through an instance of indirect reported speech of the teacher's statements ("the teacher says that at school"), Ernesto presents his claim (line 6) as based on the indications of the school authority. In addition, by specifying that the teacher made the claim "at school", the child stresses his exclusive knowledge of school experiences deriving from his identity as a "pupil", thus downgrading the authoritative relevance of the school planner and the mother's claim based on it. Last but crucially – as will be shown more in detail in Section 5 – the reference to his first-hand knowledge (*vs* the mother's second-hand, object-mediated knowledge) of school experiences allows Ernesto to claim more epistemic and deontic rights on the issue (Pomerantz, 1980; Stivers, Mondada, Steensig, 2011). In this way, the child makes his previous statement (line 6) hardly contestable as well as ignorable by the mother. Not surprisingly then, following the child's evoking of school experiences, the mother accepts Ernesto's claim ("alright", line 12). Despite her visible reluctance (see her doubtful facial expression, line 12, Fig. 2), she acknowledges the child's epistemic and deontic rights over homework and closes the negotiation.

As this section has shown, extended negotiations (ex. 2) feature parents' *challenges* to the child's claims, which require more interactive work on the part of the child to be acknowledged as the epistemic and deontic authority over homework. It is only after evoking their exclusive, first-hand knowledge of school experiences (e.g., teachers' speech) that children were ratified as authoritative subjects and reached the closing of the negotiation sequence.

In the next section, we will focus specifically on extended negotiations and we will see how children manage to counter even strong deontic claims made by their parents such as directives.

5. Evoking first-hand knowledge of school experiences in extended negotiations

As illustrated in the previous section, children in the study referred to school experiences as the source of their knowledge vis-à-vis parents' challenges in extended negotiations. It is worth pointing out that school experiences constitute a type 1 knowable for children and a type 2 knowable for parents (Pomerantz, 1980). While children have direct, first-hand knowledge of school experiences, parents can only have mediated, second-hand access to them, i.e., knowledge deriving from indirect means such as children's reports or school artifacts (e.g., the school planner, as in ex. 2). Having "epistemic primacy" (Raymond, Heritage, 2006) on school experiences, children evoked this source of knowledge as a means to claim primary rights to decide about homework. In particular, children in the study made relevant their first-hand knowledge of school experiences in two ways: 1) by evoking school rules and habits, or 2) by attributing claims to the teacher. The next sub-sections illustrate each of these cases.

5.1 *Evoking school rules and habits*

Many studies have emphasized that school and classroom constitute "communities of practice" characterized by specific rules, expectations, and routines (Boostrom, 1992; Thornberg, 2008). Ex. 3 illustrates that children evoke such rules and routines as a source of knowledge and authority in homework negotiations with their parents. Here, Gaia and her mother are discussing the appropriate dimension of the child's handwriting; while the mother relies on her second-hand knowledge derived from a school textual artifact (i.e., a photocopy), Gaia makes relevant her first-hand knowledge of school habits, which ultimately prevails.

Ex. 3 - The teacher makes us do also two squares
F4H2 (08.45 – 09.21)
Mother; Gaia (seven years old, second grade)

1		Mother	°più piccolo° gaia deve star ^dentro un quadretto. ***smaller gaia it* has to fit into one square***
2			^*((turns to the photocopy))*
3			(0.9)
4		Mother	deve star dentro un quadretto. ***it* has to fit into one square*** *((taking the photocopy))*
5		Gaia	n-è u- è uguale, ***n-it's the s- it's the same***
6		Mother	*((shows the photocopy to Gaia))*
7		Gaia	*((clears her throat))*
8	→		ma è ↓uguale la >maestra ci fa< anche fare due quadrett(i) ***but it's the same the teacher makes us do also two squares***
9			(1.4)
10		Mother	(oke-) inizia però a ridurre un po' ***(oke-) start reducing a bit though***

*it = the child's handwriting

Unlike in the examples seen so far, in this excerpt the mother makes strong deontic claims, thereby affirming her rights to decide on homework and tell the child what to do. Indeed, by issuing a series of directives (lines 1 and 4), the mother stages herself as knowledgeable about the way in which the exercise should be done and, therefore, as entitled to tell Gaia how to write (i.e., smaller, by fitting letters into one square). Note that the mother's claim of authority is based on her visible orientation to the photocopy (the mother turns to the photocopy in line 2 and takes it in line 4). This school artifact shows how the exercise has been done at school and therefore provides the mother with type 2, object-mediated knowledge of school habits. In her reply, Gaia rejects the mother's claims, downplaying the relevance of her directives ("it's the same", line 5). Importantly, with this turn the child is not merely resisting the mother's directives:

she is also presenting herself, rather than the mother, as the one having epistemic and deontic rights on the matter. By showing Gaia the photocopy without speaking (line 6), the mother challenges the child’s claim, further treating the photocopy as an authoritative source of epistemic and deontic rights, and using it to deliver a further, embodied and artifact-mediated directive.

Vis-à-vis the mother’s challenge, Gaia evokes her first-hand knowledge of school experiences: she recycles her previous turn (“but it’s the same”) and reports the classroom habits (“the teacher makes us do also two squares”, line 8). The design of the child’s turn is interesting: the present simple (“makes us do”) conveys the habitual dimension of the action, while the first-person plural of the pronoun (“us”) presents Gaia as the member of a community of practice, i.e., the classroom. Through the appeal to her own type 1 knowledge of classroom habits deriving from her identity as a pupil, Gaia rejects the mother’s claims of authority and stages herself as the only one having the knowledge and rights to decide about this homework-related issue.

After the child’s evoking of school experiences, the mother accepts the child’s claim and closes the negotiation (line 10). Even though the mother’s acceptance is not total (the mother issues a final directive “start reducing a bit though”, line 10), the mitigation of the final directive (see the inchoative periphrasis “start reducing” and the adverb “a bit”, line 10) demonstrates that the mother acknowledges the child’s epistemic and deontic authority over homework matters.

5.2 *Attributing claims to the teacher*

As we have seen in ex. 2, attributing claims to the teacher is a way in which children in our study legitimized their epistemic and deontic claims in extended negotiations. This is consistent with previous studies that indicate that reported speech in interaction has the effect of heightening evidentiality and, therefore, increasing the reliability of the claim (Clift, Holt, 2006; Holt, 2016, 1996). The following excerpt illustrates how children also used indirect forms of reported speech (similar to glosses or summaries, see Holt, 2016) to evoke teachers’ statements as the source of their knowledge. We join the conversation when the mother is correcting the math calculations done by the child.

Ex. 4 – Teacher Marco told me that
F6H2 v.3 (02.30 – 02.52)
Mother; Virginia (eight years old, third grade)

1	Mother	perché lo hai trasformato in se:i?
		why did you turn it into six?
2		(3.0) *((Virginia stares silently at the calculation))*
3	Virginia	°do:po >devi fare< quattro per ^no:ve°
		then you have to do four times nine
4		^*((turns to the mother))*
5		(0.9)
6	Mother	n:o::,
		no
7	Virginia	°sì:,°
		yes

8		Mother	l’operazione è [cinquanta per nove
			the calculation is fifty times nine *((pointing to the calculation in the math notebook))*[Fig. 3]
9	→	Virginia	[me l’ha ^detto il maestro marco
			teacher marco told me that
10			*^((pushes the mother’s hand away from the math notebook))*[Fig. 4]
11		Mother	va bene. £se te l’ha detto il maestro marco, (.) rimane
			ok. if teacher marco told you that it remains
12		Mother	così:h e domhh.ani (lo) correggerà il maestro marcoh£
			like this and tomorrow teacher marco will correct it

Fig. 3: The mother points to the calculation in the math notebook

Fig. 4: Virginia pushes the mother’s hand away from the math notebook

The excerpt is opened by the mother’s request for an account problematizing the way in which Virginia has done the calculation (line 1). The request for account (Sterponi, 2003) is quite a strong epistemic and deontic claim: by problematizing the child’s work, the mother presents herself – rather than the child – as the one who knows how the calculation should be done. After a three-second gap, Virginia explains the procedure for the calculation (line 3). With this instructive turn, the child rejects the mother’s claim of knowledge and stages herself as the epistemic authority on the calculation. However, the mother challenges the child’s claim (“no:,” line 6), explaining why the procedure described by Virginia is wrong (line 8). Note that, while talking, the mother points to the math notebook (line 8, Fig. 3), thus making visible the specific calculation she is referring to. Similarly to what we have seen in the previous examples, the mother makes relevant a school artifact (i.e., the math notebook) as the source of her knowledge and basis of her claim of knowledge and authority.

The mother’s claim is bluntly rejected by Virginia, who refers to her type 1 knowledge of school experiences. By attributing her previous statement to the teacher (“teacher Marco told me that”, line 9) and concurrently pushing the mother’s hand away from the homework page (line 10, Fig. 4), Virginia multimodally constructs homework (particularly the calculations) as her exclusive territory of knowledge and decisions. In reply to the child’s evoking of school experiences and particularly teachers’ speech, the mother accepts the child’ statement (“ok”, line 11) and closes the negotiation. Despite voicing her skepticism through an ironic comment (“if teacher Marco told you that, (.) it remains like that and tomorrow teacher Marco will correct it”, lines 11 and 12), the mother acknowledges the child’s rights to decide over homework deriving from her direct experiences of school life. Homework is thus interactively claimed by Virginia and finally acknowledged by the mother as an object pertaining to the child in terms of decisions and responsibility.

6. Discussion

The analysis has illustrated how parents and children negotiate who should make decisions concerning homework and based on what type of knowledge. The homework negotiations presented here were initiated by the parents, who staged themselves as somewhat entitled to participate in homework decision-making. As the analysis has shown, parents opened the negotiations through various discursive formats, such as proposals (ex. 1), requests for confirmation (ex. 2), directives (ex. 3), and requests for account (ex. 4). Undoubtedly, each of these formats conveyed different levels of epistemic and deontic asymmetry between parents and children, with parents claiming more (as in ex. 3 and 4) or less (as in ex. 1 and 2) rights to know and tell the child what to do. Nevertheless, all these discursive formats demonstrate parents’ orientation to homework as a *shared activity*, in which they ought to be actively involved, and for which they have rights and responsibilities. On their part, children rejected parents’ claims by presenting themselves as the only ones having the appropriate knowledge and authority to make decisions concerning homework. Sometimes, children’s claims were in clear contrast with the ones made by the parents as they went against parents’ directives (ex. 3) or problematization (ex. 4). In other cases, children’s claims of knowledge and authority roughly followed the asymmetric distribution of epistemic and deontic rights projected by parents’ turns (ex. 1 and 2). However, even in these cases, children’s claims firmly rejected parents’ attempts to participate in homework decision making. When parents accepted children’s claims of knowledge and authority, the negotiation was rapidly closed (ex. 1). In contrast, when parents challenged children’s claims, the negotiation continued, with children pursuing the acknowledgement of their rights to knowledge and authority. In extended negotiations, children invoked their own direct knowledge of school experiences in terms of classroom routines (ex. 3) or teacher’s statements (ex. 2 and 4). Constituting type 1 (i.e., direct, first-hand) knowledge for children and type 2 (i.e., derivative, second-hand) knowledge for parents, school experiences were hardly contestable by parents. Whenever children invoked their type 1 knowledge of school experiences, parents ended up accepting their claims, at least to some extent and despite their visible skepticism, and closing the negotiation.

7. Conclusions: Striking a balance between parental involvement and children's autonomy

Negotiating who knows best and has the rights to decide about homework is not only a matter of distributing "territories of knowledge and authority" between parents and children. As underlined by Forsberg (2007), homework negotiations constitute precious occasions for parents to position themselves in relation to children's autonomy and contemporary discourses on parental involvement. In the excerpts examined here, parents appeared oriented to finding a balance between taking part in homework decision-making and promoting children's autonomy. By making proposals, issuing directives, and even challenging children's claims, parents got authentically engaged in homework; they staged themselves not as mere observers but rather as 'involved parents' who have responsibilities for homework completion. At the same time, by leaving the final decision to the child, parents acknowledged the child's school-derived, superior knowledge, authority, and ultimately accountability over homework. The epistemic and deontic negotiations analyzed in this article therefore clearly show the situated, interaction-based ways in which parents in the study coped with the "distance-involvement dilemma". For these parents, involvement in homework consisted in providing supervision and actively participating in decision-making, while leaving to the child the final decision on specific issues. In the development of conversation and in response to specific claims made by their children, parents calibrated their own engagement in homework: despite offering support, parents also left children spaces of autonomy, thus socializing them into taking responsibility for their own school-related accomplishments.

This study also points to the implications that epistemic and deontic negotiations have for identity construction. By rejecting parents' claims and invoking their own, direct, and exclusive knowledge of school experiences, children staged themselves as ratified members of the classroom community, affirming their own identity as competent pupils. It is precisely by relying on this identity, which is relatively independent from their family-related identity as sons and daughters, that children managed to be acknowledged as more knowledgeable and authoritative than their parents. On their part, parents ratified children's identity as pupils by treating their school-based knowledge as relevant as well as by accepting – sometimes even projecting – children's rights to decide on homework-related matters. Similarly, parents' identity and authority were locally and interactively (re)produced, one negotiation at a time. Even though the negotiations analyzed here ended with children being acknowledged as the epistemic and deontic authority over the matter, it is worth noting that kids' authority was strictly limited to the specific homework task under discussion. Furthermore, and crucially, children's authority had to be *ratified by the parent*, who had the last word on whether the child actually "knew it best" and had the right to decide. Even though parents acknowledged the child's limited, homework-specific authority, nevertheless they maintained their role as the main authority, which inherently characterizes the relationship between parents and children.

References

Antaki C., Kent A. (2012). Telling people what to do (and, sometimes, why): Contingency, entitlement and explanation in staff requests to adults with intellectual impairments. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 44 (6-7), 876-889.

Blackmore J., Hutchinson K. (2010). Ambivalent Relations: The 'Tricky Footwork' of Parental Involvement in School Communities. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 14 (5), 499-515.

Bolognesi I. (2016). Coinvolgere i genitori nella scuola multiculturale. Un progetto di ricerca azione per la costruzione di una cultura della partecipazione. *Rivista Italiana di Educazione Familiare*, 2, 81-93.

Bolognesi I., Dalledonne Vandini C. (2020). Fare i compiti a casa. Uno studio etnografico di un'attività quotidiana svolta in famiglia. *Rivista Italiana di Educazione Familiare*, 16, 157-177.

Boostrom R. (1991). The Nature and Functions of Classroom Rules. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 21 (2), 193-216.

Caronia L., Colla, V. (2021). Objects that matter: The hybrid and distributed agency in parent-assisted homework interactions. *Language and Dialogue*, 11 (1), 8-34.

Caronia L., Colla V., Bolognesi I. (2023). When school language and culture enter the home: testing children as a 'school-aligned' parental activity. *Civitas Educationis. Education, Politics and Culture*, XII(1), 157-177.

Clift R., Holt E. (2006). Introduction. In E. Holt, R. Clift (Eds.), *Reporting Talk: Reported Speech in Interaction* (pp. 1-15). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Colla V. (2022). "Don't complain and do it properly": 'Pedagogicalized parents' and the morality of doing homework. *Rivista Italiana di Educazione Familiare*, 20 (1), 211-228.

Colla V. (2023). *Education in everyday family life. Language, culture, and morality in homework interactions*. Pisa: ETS.

Contini M. (Ed.) (2012). *Dis-Alleanze nei Contesti Educativi*. Roma: Carocci.

Edwards R. (2002). Introduction: Conceptualising relationships between home and school in children's lives. In R. Edwards (Ed.), *Children, Home and School. Regulation, Autonomy or Connection?* (pp. 1-23). London: Routledge Falmer.

Epstein J.L. (2001). *School, Family and Community Partnerships. Preparing educators and improving schools*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Forsberg L. (2007). Homework as serious family business: power and subjectivity in negotiations about school assignments in Swedish families. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 28 (2), 209-222.

Forsberg L. (2009). *Involved Parenthood. Everyday Lives of Swedish Middle-Class Families*. Doctoral Dissertation, Linköping University, Sweden.

Goodwin C. (1979). The interactive construction of a sentence in natural conversation. In G. Psathas (Ed.), *Everyday Language: Studies in Ethnomethodology* (pp. 97-121). New York: Irvington Publishers.

Gottzén L. (2011). Involved fatherhood? Exploring the educational work of middle-class men. *Gender and Education*, 23 (5), 619-634.

Goffman E. (1978). Response Cries. *Language*, 54, 787-815.

Heritage J. (1984). A change-of-state token and aspects of its sequential placement. In M. Atkinson, J. Heritage (Eds.), *Structures of Social Action: Studies in Conversation Analysis* (pp. 299-345). Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press.

Heritage J. (2012a). The epistemic engine: sequence organization and territories of knowledge. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 45 (1), 30-52.

Heritage J. (2012b). Epistemics in action: action formation and territories of knowledge. *Research on Language and Social Interaction,* 45 (1), 1-29.

Heritage J., Raymond G. (2005). The terms of agreement: indexing epistemic authority and subordination in assessment sequences. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 68 (1), 15-38.

Holt E. (1996). Reporting on talk: the use of direct reported speech in conversation. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 29 (3), 219-245.

Holt E. (2016). Indirect Reported Speech in Interaction. In A. Capone, F. Kiefer, F. Lo Piparo (Eds.), *Indirect Reports and Pragmatics* (pp. 167-187). Cham: Springer.

Kralovec E., Buell J. (2000). *The end of homework: How homework disrupts families, overburdens children, and limits learning*. Boston: Beacon.

Kremer-Sadlik T., Fatigante M. (2015). Investing in children's future: Cross-cultural perspectives and ideologies on parental involvement in education. *Childhood*, 22 (1), 67-84.

Meirieu P. (2000). *Les devoirs à la maison. Parents, enfants, enseignants : pour en finir avec ce casse-tête*. Paris: Editions La Découverte.

Milani P. (2012). Sconfinamenti e connessioni. Per una nuova geografia dei rapporti fra scuole e famiglie. *Rivista Italiana di Educazione Familiare*, 1, 25-37.

Montalbetti K., Lisimberti, C. (2020). Dal confine alla soglia. I compiti a casa tra scuola e famiglia. *Pedagogia Oggi*, 1, 309-322.

Ochs E., Kremer-Sadlik T. (2013). The Good Enough Family. In E. Ochs, T. Kremer-Sadlik (Eds.), *Fast-Forward Family: Home, Work, and Relationships in Middle-Class America* (pp. 232-252). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Pati L. (2019). *Scuola e Famiglia. Relazione e Corresponsabilità Educativa*. Brescia: Scholé.

Pomerantz A. (1980). Telling my side: 'Limited access' as a 'fishing device'. *Sociological Inquiry*, 50, 186-198.

Pomerantz A. (1984). Giving a source of basis: the practice in conversation of telling 'how I know'. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 8, 607-625.

Pontecorvo C., Liberati V., Monaco C. (2013). How school enters family everyday life. In Marsico G., Komatsu K., Iannaccone A. (Eds.), *Crossing Boundaries. Intercontextual Dyamics between Family and School* (pp. 3-34). Charlotte, NC: IAP.

Raymond G., Heritage J. (2006). The epistemics of social relations: Owning grandchildren. *Language in Society*, 35, 677-705.

Sacks H., Schegloff E.A., Jefferson G. (1974). A simplest systematics for the organization of turn-taking for conversation. *Language,* 50 (4), 696-735.

Solomon Y., Warin J., Lewis C. (2002). Helping with Homework? Homework as a Site of Tension for Parents and Teenagers. *British Educational Research Journal*, 28 (4), 603-622.

Sterponi, L. (2003). Account Episodes in Family Discourse: The making of morality in everyday interaction. *Discourse Studies,* 5 (1), 79-100.

Stevanovic M. (2011). Participants' deontic rights and action formation: The case of declarative requests for action. *Interaction & Linguistic Structures*, 52.

Stevanovic M. (2015). Displays of uncertainty and proximal deontic claims: The case of proposal sequences. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 78, 84-97.

Stevanovic M., Peräkylä A. (2012). Deontic authority in interaction: the right to announce, propose, and decide. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 45 (3), 297-321.

Stivers T. (2005). Modified repeats: one method for asserting primary rights from second position. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 38 (2), 131-158.

Stivers T., Mondada L., Steensig J. (Eds.) (2011). *The Morality of Knowledge in Conversation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Thornberg R. (2008). A Categorisation of School Rules. *Educational Studies*, 34 (1), 25-33.

Wingard L., Forsberg L. (2009). Parent Involvement in Children's Homework in American and Swedish Dual-earner Families. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 41, 1576-1595.