A successful form of trade-off in compensatory policy classrooms

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A successful form of trade-off in compensatory policy classrooms: Processes of ostentation and masking. A case study in French physical education

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Abstract

Since 2010, French middle schools with a high enrolment of difficult students have benefited from a compensatory policy called 'Écoles Collèges et Lycées pour l'Ambition, l'Innovation et la Réussite' (ECLAIR) (Primary and Secondary Schools for Ambition, Innovation and Success). These difficult students frequently misbehave, disengage from academic tasks and provoke conflict in the classroom. However, some physical education (PE) teachers are able to develop successful teaching strategies. This case study has analysed precisely the activity of the teacher in relation to the activity of the students in these difficult classes. It examined the successful forms of interaction between teachers and students in PE classes and sought to determine the meaning of these interactions in structuring a 'difficult' classroom culture. The study was conducted within a situated cognitive anthropology framework in middle schools enrolled in the ECLAIR programme. Eight successful PE teachers and 24 students between the ages of 12 and 16 were involved in this qualitative study. The results revealed that, in spite of divergent intentions, the respective activities of the teachers and students remained coordinated. This coordination was based on a recurrent form of classroom interaction that made use of processes of ostentation and masking.

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Compensatory education policies and class management in physical education

Compensatory education policies

Many countries have developed compensatory education programmes since the end of the 1960s. In France, compensatory policies lie midway between those of the USA (emphasizing a 'positive discrimination' with the Economic Opportunity Act in 1962, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965, then Head Start and Follow Through) and those of the UK (focusing on 'disadvantaged areas', with Education Priority Area in the 1960s and Excellence in Cities in 1999), combining notions of areas of need and affirmative action.

Since the 1960s these compensatory political strategies have evolved from an initial focus on helping students 'in difficulty' (i.e., disadvantaged students) to including the management of 'difficult' students (i.e., misbehaving students) (Kherroubi and Rochex, 2002; Machin et al., 2004; Senac, 2000; Ward and O'Sullivan, 2006). In France, a text was recently published on the ECLAIR 'Écoles Collèges et Lycées pour l'Ambition, l'Innovation et la Réussite' (Primary and Secondary Schools for Ambition, Innovation and Success) policy (Circular No. 2010-096, 2010). It clearly stated that the 325 concerned schools should focus principally on the difficulties arising from the poor school climate and incidents of violence, as these issues raise many problems for the teachers regarding classroom management.

Student misbehaviour and teachers' classroom management

The research on compensatory education policies as they are enacted in the classroom has remained relatively rare, although several studies have investigated the interactions in 'difficult' classes. In physical education (PE), these studies have particularly focused on (a) student behaviour (Vors et al., 2010; Ward, 2006) and (b) teachers' classroom management (Flavier et al., 2002; Hastie and Pickwell, 1996; Hastie and Siedentop, 1999; Monnier and Amade-Escot, 2009).

Student misbehaviour is a key topic, because in 'difficult' classrooms these behaviours frequently disrupt the lesson plans. In PE, disciplinary incidents happen very frequently: every three to four minutes (Piéron and Emonts, 1988), or every two minutes (Turcotte et al., 2008) during the time spent for a teaching session. They mostly take place during the phases of knowledge transmission, organization and setting up of learning activities and when the students are moving from one place to another (Tousignant and Siedentop, 1983; Turcotte et al., 2008). Moreover, they are mostly expressed verbally (Kennedy, 1982, cited by Turcotte et al., 2008).

In the classes' part of the compensatory education programme, the misbehaviours happen even more frequently and show up as a disengagement from the task (Ward, 2006). These repeated disengagements can lead the students to drop out of school. The amount of time dedicated to disengagement and misbehaviours considerably takes over the time dedicated to actual practice, reflecting the students' inability to stay focused on their task. For difficult students, the motor engaged time is particularly low: 14.4% of the total lesson time (Vors et al., 2010) versus 21.9% in the usual context (Piéron, 1993). Various studies have shown that 'most difficult students spend a quarter less time at practicing the activity during the lesson' (Piéron, 1993: 57).

During these phases of disengagement, the students seek frequent contact with their peers, which strongly alters social interactions (e.g., Garn et al., 2011). These socially oriented inter-actions are particularly prevalent in PE classes. The shared work space that characterizes PE classes puts students in greater contact. Frequent opportunities for peer interaction are irresistible to many, changing 'the dynamic from a teacher-student interaction to more of a student-student interaction' (Garn et al., 2011: 86). In 'difficult' classes, these frequent interactions between students increase the misbehaviours exponentially – like a 'ripple effect' Hardy (1999: 128):

> Although the initial incident mainly involved individuals or groups of students, many more students were disrupted at a group and class level. Whereas 43.16% of the incidents involved one student, only 26.5% of those incidents were contained to the misbehaving student.

In general, studies on teaching show that social interactions within the class can bear other negative effects and generate teasing (Thornberg, 2010), harmful comparisons between the stu-dents (Thijs et al., 2010) or even a lack of work (Supaporn et al., 2003). Those interactions between students may create an atmosphere that reduces the participation of some students and decreases opportunities for learning (Supaporn et al., 2003).

These behavioural problems are of great preoccupation to teachers and classroom management appears to be their primary consideration, even more important than engaging students in learning tasks (Carter and Doyle, 1995; Doyle, 1979; Supaporn et al., 2003). In PE, focusing on the interaction problems with the students seems to be an increasing concern for the teachers (e.g., Beckers-Ledent et al., 1995).

Dealing with the misbehaviours often depresses the teachers, for whom the students' disruptive behaviour is a source of stress (Cloes et al., 1998; Desbiens et al., 2011) – no matter the teachers' gender or experience, or whether they work in primary or secondary schools (Royer et al., 2001). This important source of stress can bring teachers to reconsider their career choice and, in some cases, to completely leave teaching (Turcotte et al., 2008). Indeed, Opinel (2001) shows that in Canada nearly 15% of new teachers leave their job after a year. Furthermore, teachers report that spending too much time on handling student misbehaviour is a leading contributor to teacher burnout (e.g., Kulinna, 2007). These various studies show that when it comes to misbehaviour, the teacher–student interactions can particularly generate conflicts.

Teacher–student interactions

The teacher–student interactions are notably unstable in difficult classrooms whatever the disci-pline. They are subject to permanent modifications of the established rules (Bergin and Bergin, 1999; Bertone et al., 2002; Thornberg, 2010). These compromises are inevitable in educational acts, but they can have negative impacts leading the students to 'counter-activity' by deviating from the expected task (Bertone et al., 2003; Méard et al., 2008). Even if managing the interactions within the classroom is not easy, some teachers can interact positively.

Several efficient interaction strategies have come into light. In these difficult contexts, some teachers succeed in interacting positively due to a negotiable social interaction based on a com-munity of practice (Pane, 2010). In some classes, 'community teachers' manage to create and maintain a vibrant cultural life in the learning setting (Murrell, 2001: 340). In the compensatory education context, Murrell explains that 'a community teacher is an accomplished urban teacher who develops the contextualized knowledge of culture, community and identity of children and

their families as the core of their teaching practice' (Murrell, 2001: 340). These studies agree with the one led by Pane (2010), who pointed out a culturally responsive classroom discipline as a negotiable social interaction based on a community of practice.

> Viewing each classroom as a community of practice in which the teacher and his or her African American students (in this case) participate with each other and historically and generatively construct new cultural and societal forms of activity may transform the need for exclusionary discipline practices. (Pane, 2010: 95)

Also, other efficient strategies of teacher–student interaction are based on high, positive expectations from the teacher (Chauveau, 2001). This author showed that effective teaching in French compensatory education is easily spotted in 'successful teachers'. This study emphasized that years of teaching experience is not the only criterion for ensuring the success of students, but rather that successful teachers are effective because they have positive expectations of their students and firm requirements, they have a teaching style that is both rigorous and flexible, they devote considerable time to academic learning and support (helping students to learn, teaching learning methods, providing methodological support and working individually with students according to their needs) and actively encourage student participation (building a sense of community and taking advantage of learning situations; Chauveau, 2001: 150). Moreover, these studies to date have focused mainly on the teacher's activities regarding the students but have not taken into account the student interactions among themselves or with the teacher.

The trade-off process in the class

The trade-off process appears to be very important for the teacher–students' interaction in difficult classes. The more difficult the context, the greater the teacher's 'zone of acceptable responses' and tolerance of non-task-oriented behaviour will be (Sanders and Graham, 1995). Teachers experience these situations as particularly unstable and exhausting because of the need to continually try to coordinate their actions with those of their students. The teachers adapt by allowing certain student social interactions and by informally accepting certain misbehaviours. They seem to consider that such strategies will limit the interruption of the smooth running of the class. To achieve a semblance of balance in this system of classroom interaction, teachers and students necessarily make 'trade-offs', which are not easy negotiations, and are particularly prevalent in difficult classrooms (Hastie and Pickwell, 1996).

This trade-off process in the class often leads teachers to lower their expectations regarding school work (Debars and Amade-Escot, 2006; Méard et al., 2008; Méard and Bertone, 2009). Teachers spend a significant amount of time coping with misbehaviours, setting up easier tasks and aiming for low-level skills (Debars and Amade-Escot, 2006).

Studies focusing on the meaning of the actions help going further in understanding this trade-off process. They highlight the perceptions, interpretations and concerns of the teacher and students within the interaction. The importance given by the teacher to the disruptive behaviours would not only be related to their frequency, but also to the significance interpreted by the teacher (Desbiens et al., 2009). The anxiety felt by the interns facing the students' insubordination would be more due to the way they perceive and interpret their behaviours, rather than an accurate representation of these behaviours' severity and the problems in dealing with them. So the teacher's perception is more important than the actual amount of misbehaviours. This perception is incomplete anyway, as nearly half of the students' misbehaviours are not perceived by the teachers (Beckers-Ledent et al., 1995; Dervaux et al., 2008). Also, these perceptions and interpretations differ following the teacher or the

students. For instance, Hardy (1999) shows that the teacher and students do not see the same significance in the misbehaviours. The students justify their misbehaviours following four factors: teacher behaviour, peer behaviour, personal behaviour and nature of the activity, whereas the teacher attributes the students' misbehaviours to external causes, principally linked with the student's characteristics. This idea also appears in the conclusions of other studies outside PE showing that 'the general trend at all school levels was for teachers to attribute behavioural problems as external to teacher factors, like home and student' and even more so for the interns (e.g., Kulinna, 2007: 27).

These different ways of perceiving the misbehaviours lead to conflictual interactions between teachers and students. Usually, students do not understand the teacher's intervention and thus become frustrated and convinced that an injustice has been perpetrated, which often leads to open conflict with the teacher (Beckers-Ledent et al., 1995; Flavier et al., 2002; Piéron and Emonts, 1988). These misunderstandings often lead the teacher to adopt a repressive attitude (Flavier et al., 2002). In general, studies on teaching show than the more difficult the students, the more the teacher will react in a disciplinary and repressive – even sometimes aggressive – way, which has counter-productive effects (Lewis et al., 2005; Riley et al., 2010).

The concerns of the various actors are another important aspect to understand trade-offs within the class. The class interactions in these difficult environments are based on contradictory concerns between teacher and students, and this applies for all of them (Monnier and Amade-Escot, 2012; Vors and Gal-Petitfaux, 2011). For example, the concern of difficult students is to socialize in opposition to the concerns of teachers focused on order and class work by limiting the interactions of students. Still, we do not know much about a trade-off process that would allow one to manage these inevitable, contradictory intentions within the class – and especially in difficult classes. What is more, many of the studies about trade-off focus on the teachers' and students' opinions about the misbehaviours in general, and do not focus particularly on a definite behaviour, at a definite time.

Aim of the study

The aim of this study being to better understand how teachers and students coordinate their activities in the classroom, we therefore elaborated a study to examine teacher–student, student–student and student–teacher interactions.

The objective is to understand the successful forms of interaction in an ECLAIR middle school, with successful teachers. More precisely, this analysis focuses on the trade-off process that will enhance work in the class.

Theoretical framework

Our study was conducted within the 'course of action' framework (Theureau, 2003, 2006, 2010), which has been used to analyse teacher and student activities in PE (Durand, 2001; Saury et al., 2013). The methodology of the 'course of action' framework relies on videotaped recordings collected in real situations, and then self-confrontation interviews in which the actors viewing the videotapes are urged to recall and explain what they were experiencing at that time. This framework gives a central role to teachers' and students' points of view: it allows one to link what they do with what they experience. Through the video recordings, teachers' and students' behaviours can be described in detail. Through the self-confrontation interviews, their activity can be reconstructed as it was experienced by them. This meaningful activity can be described by the actor in terms of actions, sensations, focuses of attention, emotions and the knowledge mobilized by them during the activity.

Method

Participants and setting

Our research was conducted over six years in two difficult middle schools ranked as top priority in the ECLAIR programme. These schools were noted for the students' daily demonstrations of major incivilities. The eight selected classes were considered by the teaching staff as difficult because of student unrest and misbehaviour. Eight successful PE teachers (Chauveau, 2001) agreed to partner with the study after being briefed on the research topic and protocol. The 37 students of the study were selected by the teachers as the ones presenting the greatest problems of misbehaviour. Twenty-four of these students were selected for our study. To preserve anonymity, the participants' names have been changed. Each lesson focused on the teacher and three students. PE lessons were observed and video-recorded in gymnastics classes, organized into small workshops. In both schools, the teachers had opted for a workshop organization plan that would (a) stay the same for each lesson and for each class, (b) reduce the workspace so that the students would not wander around, escape from the gym or drift away to another workshop and (c) allow the teacher a good visual control of the whole class. For example, one of the teachers systematically organized the workshops along the wall of the gym (Figure 1).

Data collection

Two types of data were collected: extrinsic and intrinsic. The extrinsic data were collected in class from ethnographic notes and audio-visual recordings. The recorded data were collected by video camera and a high-frequency microphone worn by the teacher or the student. All of the eight lessons taught by each of the eight teachers were video-recorded. Each lesson lasted 90 minutes of effective teaching. In fine, a total of 52 hours were video-recorded (Table 1). In order to allow teachers and students to become familiar with the recording material, which was located in a corner of the gym, we started to analyse students' actions and communications from the third lesson until the sixth (Table 1). These data were used to identify traces of the classroom activity of teachers and students and their interactions.

The intrinsic data were collected from 40 self-confrontation interviews held after the lessons (Theureau, 2010; Table 2).

During these interviews, the student and researcher viewed the recording, and the student was invited to describe and comment on their activity step by step. Specific prompts were used to encourage the student to re-experience the dynamics of the situation and to obtain information concerning the actions, intentions, sensations, perceptions, focuses of attention, emotions and the knowledge mobilized by them during activity. All teachers and students were asked to precisely describe their actions, intentions ('What are you trying to do?'), sensations ('What sensations are you experiencing?'), focuses of attention ('What has your attention?'), emotions ('What are you feeling?') and knowledge ('What are you thinking about?'), at every moment of their course of action.

Data analysis

The materials were processed in two stages: (a) the construction of a two-level protocol; and (b) the identification of archetypal forms of interaction.

Construction of a two-level protocol. This stage consisted of presenting the recordings and interview materials in a synthetic and exploitable way. The two-level protocol first entailed the description of
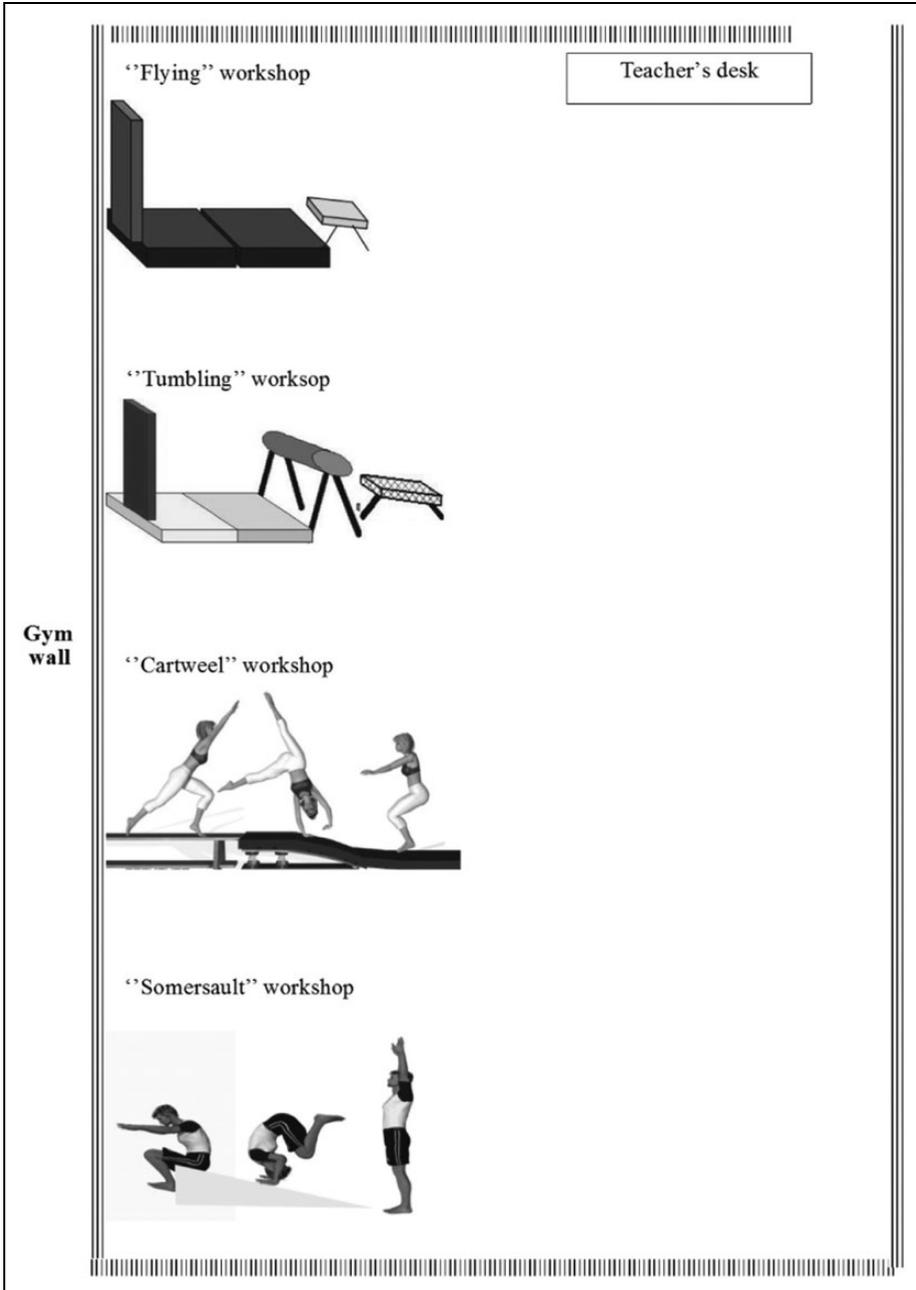
Figure 1. Example of the spatial organization of the workshops.

Table 1. Extrinsic data collection.

Number of ECLAIR middle schools	2 (school A and school B)
Number of classes and teachers	8 (4 in each school)
Total number of students identified by the teachers	37 (4 or 5 in each class)
Total number of students identified by the researchers for the study	24 (3 per class)
Total number of lessons included in the gymnastics cycle for each class	7–8 consecutive lessons
Total duration of the gymnastics lessons	2 h per class
Temporal organization of the lessons	4 parts: (a) setting up the equipment (20 min); (b) warming up (30 min); (c) workshop activities (1 h); (d) putting the equipment back (10 min)
Spatial organization of the sequence 'workshop activities'	4–5 workshops, so 12–15 min per workshop
Total number of video-recorded lessons	32 lessons (4 per class)
Place of the recorded lessons within the gymnastics cycle	Lessons n°3–6
Type of sequence recorded for each class	'Workshop activities'
Total duration of audio-video-recorded material	52 hours (6 h 30 min per class, 1 h 30 min per lesson)
Total duration of the analysed recordings	32 hrs (1 h per workshop and per class)
Number of cameras set up for each lesson	2 cameras: 1 to follow the teacher with a wide angle shot, 1 to follow the whole class with a long shot. 2 to follow the 3 students with a long shot

ECLAIR: Écoles Collèges et Lycées pour l'Ambition, l'Innovation et la Réussite.

Table 2. Intrinsic data collection.

Total number of self-confrontation interviews with the teachers	16 interviews (2 per teacher)
Total number of self-confrontation interviews with the students	24 interviews (1 per student)
Total and average duration of the self-confrontation interviews	48 h in total: 20 h for the teachers (1 h 15 min on average per teacher). 28 h for the students (45 min on average per student)
Selection of the periods commented by the teachers and students during the interviews	Periods selected by the researcher: -interview with the teacher about the whole workshop sequence -interview with the students: one working section on one workshop

the observable activity of the students and teacher (using the ethnographic notes and audio-visual recordings) in the dynamic context of their interactions and verbatim transcription of the self-confrontation interviews. Then, these two types of material were put into parallel (Table 3).

Identification of an archetypal form of interaction. This step permitted us to demonstrate the recurrent character of teacher–student interactions during PE lessons in three stages.

Table 3. Extract from the two-level protocol of Mr Jean, one of the teachers and Soufiane, one of the students.

Time	Student actions	Student self-confronting data	Teacher actions	Teacher self-confronting data
22:00	In the 'Jumping over' workshop, Soufiane executes a jump and falls after the reception.	Student (Soufiane): 'There I make the jump, it's easy, I'm going to have fun.' Researcher: 'Uh-huh, so when you think the exercise is easy, you say to yourself that there will be time to play around?' Student: 'Well, yeah.' Researcher: 'And then what do you do?'	The teacher is taking care of another group of students. He asks students to show him where they are in the execution of the somersault.	Teacher: 'There, I'm helping Maureen, she doesn't like gymnastics. At the same time, I look discreetly in Soufiane and Aris's direction. Because they're playing, they're not doing the exercise.'
22:10	Then he returns to the line.		He helps Maureen to execute the exercise. He puts his hand behind her head: 'Be brave, you'll get there.'	Researcher: 'So what are you doing about Soufiane and Aris?'
22:20	Soufiane looks towards the teacher. He insults Aris when Aris is preparing to make his jump over the horse. Aris misses his jump and falls in the reception, which causes the hilarity of the group.	Student: 'I see where the teacher is (if he's far away) so I can fool around with my friend (Aris).' Researcher: 'You're shrewd, you see where the teacher is?' Student: 'Yeah, you have to be careful not to get caught!'	The teacher watches Maureen's rotation carefully. After her reception, he says, 'Tuck in your head. It's important, otherwise we will not turn!' At the same time, he looks in the direction of Soufiane and Aris at the end of the gym.	Teacher: 'Nothing there, they're having fun.' Researcher: 'Yes but then Aris grabs Soufiane and hits him?' Teacher: "That's the game, one insults, then the other runs after and retaliates by giving him a shot. All this, it's part of the same game. It's not bad, they have fun.'
22:30 22:40	Soufiane tries to flee Aris, who pursues him. Aris catches him and gives him a violent blow on the shoulder. Soufiane shouts while laughing 'Stop, stop!'			
22:50	Then Soufiane and Aris return to the line in their workshop to work.		Then he looks at Eva, who is ready for the somersault. Then he says 'I want you to watch Miriam.'	

1. Identification of the recurrent form of the students' activity by spotting the similar recurrences in their different experiences, particularly the way they take the teacher into account for their own actions, intentions, sensations, perceptions, focuses of attention, emotions and knowledge.
2. Identification of the recurrent form of the teachers' activity by identifying the recurrences in their experiences, particularly the way they take the teacher into account for their own actions, intentions, sensations, perceptions, focuses of attention, emotions and knowledge.

3. Characterization of the recurrent form of teacher–student interaction in class; that is to say, the articulation of their activities. This was accomplished by matching the activities of students and teachers to identify how they relate. From a matching of their experiences, the analysis identified how the teachers took the students into account in order to act and, conversely, how the students took the teachers into account, in such a way that their conflicting/opposing activities are coordinated in the service of collective work activity.

Data reliability

The two researchers coded the data separately and systematically obtained an agreement rate better than 83% at the end of each step. They discussed points of disagreement until finding one common analysis.

Results

The results showed a recurrent form of teacher–student interaction based on a double process of ostentation/masking. This result allows one to understand how the trade-off process occurs in these difficult classes based on the ECLAIR programme. Ostentation is the action of over-zealously showing something or someone, even oneself, in order to emphasize a characteristic, to be the centre of attention, to be understood, seen or to prove something to others (in continuity with the research of Matheron and Salin, 2002). Masking is the fact of hiding one's deeds or intentions in order to avoid being caught. Despite the divergence in the intentions of the teacher and students, this form of trade-off allowed them to coordinate their activities. The interaction form will be presented first from the students' perspective and then from the teachers' perspective.

Students' ostentatious/masked form of trade-off with the teacher

Our results showed that the difficult students systematically took the teacher's action into account to adapt their interactions. The analysis of the components of the students' experience revealed two recurrent intentions among the 37 students studied: 'Work to avoid trouble' and 'Play to avoid boredom'. These two intentions appear in the interaction with the teacher following a double process: (a) the process of ostentation, that is, displaying one's work to avoid trouble; and (b) the process of masking, that is, transgressing the rules to avoid boredom.

The process of ostentation: Displaying one's work to avoid trouble. The students' classroom activity appeared chaotic and disorderly, marked by numerous disengagements. The ethnographic data show fragmented and discontinuous activity, with a wide range of behaviours giving an impression of disorder. Yet the verbatim excerpts from the interviews indicated that this syncopated structure of activity was due to the continuous and abrupt changes in their intentions.

This singular example from the 'Tumbling' workshop is representative for the dynamics of the actions of the 37 students. Within a 50-second period, Antony changed his behaviour eight times. He performed the required somersault, stayed 10 seconds lying down on his back, tripped up Maureen, laughed, pushed Alice who was about to do a roll, messed up with Alice by lightly slapping her, took a long run before jumping, then did the required somersault without getting up afterwards.

Despite its great diversity, the activity of each student showed a recurrent and stable structure, which reflected a cyclical recurrence of work actions, intentionally produced and conspicuously displayed before the teacher. Although discontinuous, these actions made up the major part of the students' activity. The recurrent intention to work corresponds to actions related to the work that is

expected by the teacher – when the student tries to do an exercise, then wait for their turn, read the instruction card, go back to the waiting line, write down that they went through the exercise, ask for advice, go to see the teacher, put the equipment back in place or evaluate a peer. During the interviews, the students indicated that these actions reflected two intentions: one to practice the exercises, perform them successfully and be given a decent grade; and one to show the teacher that they were indeed working in order to avoid problems and be well thought of by the teacher.

In action, the students' focus of attention was often related to the teacher's activity. The students constantly sought to locate the teacher. When he was nearby, they seized the opportunity to get his attention: 'Mr. Sylvain or Miss Marina, look!' In this case, their intention was both to show the teacher that they were working and to gain his approval of what they had just done. Those following extracts show two examples of this phenomenon.

Self-confronting interview with Mohamed: 'Here, we are playing (they play at who will do the most spectacular jump), then I see the teacher coming so I do the exercise and I take the opportunity to ask him if it's good.'

Researcher: 'You don't know by yourself if it's good?'

Mohamed: 'Yes, I know, but I want to be sure . . . and I want to show him that I'm working!'

Self-confronting interview with Tony: 'Here, I'm calling the teacher so he can see me working. I ask him for help for the stall turn (. . .), so he can't say I'm not working. I show him I'm working and he's happy.'

These extracts also illustrate the knowledge used by the students in their interaction with the teacher. The students built the knowledge that: 'The teacher is more tolerant if he sees me working.' It was important for them to show to the teacher that they were working, because when they were caught not doing what had been asked of them they were not reprimanded as severely.

The process of masking: Transgressing the rules to avoid boredom. The students' interactions with the teacher were also organized by a masking of transgressive activity. Many of the students hid their moments of disengagement behind a dominant display of task engagement. The results showed that these moments of disengagement had a systematic character, despite their great variety. The students' activity was based on two recurrent forms of disengagement: wandering and play. Their actions revealed 'wandering' both in the physical sense as when they wandered around the gym and in a psychological sense, as when they complained that 'I don't know what to do' or said they felt bored. This wandering was reflected in apathetic behaviours of idly waiting and/or observing the events around them. The students also disengaged from task-oriented activities to have fun, particularly by playing games. A recurrent intention was to avoid boredom by 'provoking others'. However, because they remained hidden, these moments of disengagement did not lead to confrontational interactions with the teacher. These transgressive actions had three main characteristics that made them difficult to detect by the teacher: they were (a) furtive, (b) hidden from the teacher and (c) integrated into task performance.

The students hid their transgressions, giving them a furtive character. The recurrent knowledge that guided their action was that 'to reduce the chances of being spotted by the teacher, keep the games short'. Their intentions often alternated between work activities, play activities and wandering.

Self-confronting interview with Jenifer: 'Here, I quickly shove Ines.'

Researcher: 'What do you mean by 'quickly'?'

Jenifer: 'In fact, I shove Ines just when she does the exercise so she falls and . . . me and my friends have a good laugh.'

Researcher: 'And you do that quickly?'

Jenifer: 'Yes, I do it quickly and discreetly so I don't get caught by the teacher. (. . .) After that we go back to work and the teacher won't say anything to us.'

In addition, the teacher's proximity was a recurrent perception for the students, causing a shift in their intentions. In order not to be caught by the teacher, students checked where he or she was before misbehaving. They particularly noted what particular workshop she was in and the orientation of her shoulders. In the following example, Ali spotted the teacher moving towards the other end of the room with her back turned against him. This position was particularly meaningful for him and provided the opportunity to play with a friend.

Self-confronting interview with Ali: 'I'm working . . . and here I see the teacher leaving, so I take the opportunity to play a little bit with my friend Alexis. The teacher can't see us, he's looking in the other direction.'

Lastly, these episodes of disengagement were integrated into the required task, which makes them hard for the teacher to detect. The students' games took place in the workshop space and with the equipment used for task execution, which aided the students in masking their play from the teacher.

Example from the 'Flying' workshop: The students frequently tried somersaults even though the teacher asked them for 'straight jumps'. A detailed examination showed that the off-task jumps (somersaults) lasted only a split second, whereas the remaining actions (i.e., the jump reception, return to the back of the line, waiting to go again, the run-up) lasted nearly a minute . . . Thus, if the teacher looked up just for a second, he had one chance in 60 of identifying an off-task jump, as these were cleverly embedded in the on-task activities.

The three recurrent characteristics of the masking of misbehaviour (furtiveness, hiding from the teacher's line of sight and incorporating misbehaviour into task performance) minimized the behaviours and made it difficult for the teacher to see them. As they remained hidden and furtive, these disengagements did not cause confrontational interactions with the teacher nor with other students. Those processes of displaying work and hiding playful misbehaviour are recurrent of all the students we focused on, and gave rise to a recurrent form of the students' activity that was consistent with the teacher's expectations. The ostentation/masking allows one to understand how the trade-off process occurs in these classes according to the students' point of view.

Teachers' ostentatious/masked form of trade-off with the students

In order to act in these difficult classes, these successful teachers had to constantly take the students' actions into account in order to prevent prolonged disengagements from work that would lead to agitation and conflict. The analysis of the components of the teachers' experiences showed that students were seen as meaningful elements that oriented the teachers' intentions and therefore their actions. The study showed two types of recurrent intention common to the eight teachers studded: (a) an ostentatious process, that is, emphasizing the work done and focusing on it; and (b) a masking process, that is, controlling the class and avoiding conflicts.

An ostentatious process: Emphasizing the work done and focusing on it. The teachers' activity also showed a recurrent structure. The teachers conspicuously expressed their interest in student work. Despite constant agitation, most of their verbal interventions concerned advice about the required exercises rather than reprimands.

The process of ostentation that the teachers use with the students is characterized by the theatricality of their actions. When they correct, help or encourage a student who is working, they make them visible by their gestures, tone of voice, facial expressions, etc., in order to gain the interest of the surrounding students.

For example, when the teacher corrected the movement of Luc, he pointed his finger at the student's exemplary somersault to show the others exactly what he expected from them. Moreover, his voice was loud so he would be heard by students at a distance. He looked towards the rest of the group and spoke in a way that made it clear he was talking to everyone: 'Great, Luc! Do the rest of you see? It's great! Did you (the others) see how he did it? ... in a ball, chin tucked in, just excellent.'

This episode shows that the teacher not only focused on the knowledge to be acquired, but did so in a dramatic way so as to gain everyone's attention. He was then able to engage them in their work more effectively when they momentarily disengaged. At these moments, he used ostentatious practices: by simultaneous gestures and spoken words he called the class to attention and focused them on the task at hand. In the above excerpt, for example, he firmly pointed to the student to indicate – and show everyone – the positive point to consider; by dissociating his gesture (pointing out the positive aspects of the student's performance) from where he was looking (not at the student but at all the students), he made a public statement of what knowledge needed to be acquired; by speaking loudly so that even the students in the back could hear him, he made sure all were listening to what he had to say; finally, by repeatedly using such words as the collective 'you' or 'everybody', he acted in a directive manner with the students, which positioned him to remind them later when necessary what he expected them to learn. The ostentatious actions about what needed to be learnt were used to attract more students and thus interact with several of them within the same workshop. The teacher constantly brought the students' attention to what needed to be learnt by doing the following: spatially, bodily and verbally indicating what the students needed to know; systematically associating tips or advice with a specific physical action (gesture, tone of voice, spatial positioning, direction in which he was looking) to make sure they were involved; and instructing the entire group during individual instruction. A particular form of interaction emerged from this recurrent form of addressing the students (individual-group and verbal-gesture), which served to coordinate his activity with that of the students.

During the interviews, the teachers expressed being attentive to students' transgressions, yet made a point to interact with those who demonstrated a commitment to performing the tasks. By responding ostentatiously to the students' work, the teachers' intention was to focus attention on work and not to draw attention to transgressions with reprimands. The recurrent knowledge that guided their action was that 'when students' attention is focused on the work they've accomplished, they remain engaged in a positive learning dynamic and progress, not in a downward spiral of repression'. The following extracts show this will of the teachers to bring the attention of the students on the work.

Self-confronting interview with teacher Mr. Sylvain: 'Yes, here I intervene in their work. It's essential.'

Researcher: 'What is essential?'

Teacher Mr. Sylvain: 'Well, to intervene and act on the contents, it shows the students what's important, and that's what I find interesting in this job ... not to be about discipline all the time.'

Researcher: 'And here on the video, how do you do that?'

Teacher Mr. Sylvain: 'Here, I help and congratulate Sofia who's trying to do the exercise and I don't pay attention to Manon who's just playing. By doing so, I hope to bring her back to work.'

Self-confronting interview with teacher Mr. Jean: 'At this moment, you can hear me encouraging them (as heard on the recording), 'Well done Lucie, that's excellent'. See how she's keeping up straight.'

Researcher: 'What makes you intervene in that way?'

Teacher Mr. Jean: 'I want to mark the occasion and show the others that what she's doing is good. I over-congratulate her (. . .), she's happy! So that the other students can understand that if they want me to congratulate them, they must get to work.'

A masking process: Controlling the class and avoiding conflict. The teachers' interactions with their students were also structured by a process of masking their awareness of misbehaviour in the class. The teachers' activity was coordinated with that of the students, even though the activities may have seemed contradictory, because (a) they sometimes pretended not to see minor misbehaviours and (b) they deliberately camouflaged their control of the class.

The recurrent knowledge that guided their actions was that by pretending not to see certain social behaviours that were off-task and tolerating them, they were able to favour student engagement in the task. This margin of freedom granted to the students was the condition to have the students engage in the task and remain involved in the class without 'dropping out'.

Self-confronting interview with teacher Miss Caroline: 'Yes, I'm pretending not to see Nawel (who is playing with a friend). They need it. If they didn't have these games . . . these times to fool around . . . they would drop out. So, rather than see them doing nothing, I prefer having a time for working and a time for playing.'

Self-confronting interview with teacher Mr. Pierre: 'Here you see, I leave Florent be, he dives on the mat, it's not very important.'

Researcher: 'Did you see he was diving at that time?'

Teacher Mr. Pierre: 'Yeah, I saw him from a distance. But I didn't intervene, I've got other things to do, well . . . and for me that was not important, he did that and then did the exercise again . . . I prefer to focus on work.'

The teachers also intentionally masked their activities of monitoring the students' behaviour in order to avoid conflict and episodes of prolonged disengagement. They noted that these difficult students 'hated being constantly monitored'. 'If I always tell them off, they either stop working or get angry, and then conflict follows.' The actions of monitoring class work were thus masked by the actions of giving instructions. While helping a student, these teachers were always positioned in such a way that they could discreetly take in the other students' behaviours.

Self-confronting interview with teacher Miss Mariana: 'Here, I help Ines do the exercise, she's struggling, she needs me . . . and I the same time I keep an eye on the 'jump' workshop (. . .). I glance to check they're working . . . I also listen to what's going on around me, if there's any noise that would have nothing to do with a PE lesson.'

Self-confronting interview with teacher Mr. Jerome: 'I intervene in the 'Tumbling' workshop because the students are struggling, they can't do it. But I still keep control of the rest of the class. Between each turn I check if the others aren't messing around . . . You see, I keep an eye on them discreetly (. . .), I regularly check on the whole class's mood.'

Nevertheless, when the collective activity of classroom work is threatened, these teachers made it clear that they controlled the class. Their interventions were linked with three recurrent perceptions that immediately mobilized them: when they perceived that the student transgressions were prolonged, when there were safety issues and when the student interactions became harmful and detrimental to classroom work. When they sensed that the work atmosphere had deteriorated, they circulated through the small workshops being purposefully highly visible to the students and they used public reprimands to show that there were strict limits that had to be respected.

Yet with the exception of these three recurrent perceptions, these teachers avoided stepping in for slight deviations of behaviour, as long as the situation was perceived as relatively controllable. They deliberately masked any repressive aspect in their interactions. They allowed the students to express themselves within carefully controlled limits by indirection: either they let the students think they had not seen certain transgressions (while ensuring that these latter were self-regulated) or they limited student movements in space without interrupting the lesson dynamics. Thus, the double process of masking control and displaying work is recurrent to all teachers studied; it allowed the coordination of their activity with that of the students in such a way that the group activity was propitious for academic work. In that way, the ostentation/masking allows one to understand how the trade-off process occurs in these classes according to the teachers' point of view.

Discussion and conclusion

These results from classes benefiting from compensatory education policies show a recurrent form of interaction between teacher and students in the classroom. We cannot obviously generalize the findings of these case studies to all classes classified as 'difficult', but they launch the debate on how teacher and students interact in the classroom. This form of teacher/students interaction is successful due to a double process of ostentatious/masked allowed coordination of contradictory intentions focused, respectively, on maintaining order in the class to keep the students on-task, and minimizing work in order to maximize playtime with peers. The originality of this double process of masking and ostentation opens the door to several scientific discussions.

Co-existence of the masking process

This part of the discussion will focus on the masking process: (a) from the teacher's point of view; (b) from the students' point of view; and (c) on the very co-existence of this process. Firstly, the masking process of the teacher relates to management strategies allowing positive interactions with the students, which leads to more efficiency in teaching. This masking process is part of 'overlapping' (in PE: Tousignant and Siedentop, 1983; in the education field: Emmer and Evertson, 1981; Kounin, 1970; Sabers et al., 1991), that is to say, the capacity to run several actions at the same time. Indeed, our study shows that when the teacher interacts with the students, they are able to help one of them while keeping an eye on the others and mask their control intention. When teachers helped a student through a gym exercise in a workshop, they were always oriented so that they could discreetly keep an eye on the other workshops and check on the other students'

behaviour. These actions of surveillance were simultaneous and embedded with the instruction actions. This result can have practical consequences for the practitioners and their training: this process of masking allows the teachers to keep their attention both on the whole class to control it, and on particular students to guide them and correct their work. Thus, teachers can accomplish their teaching role while (mockingly) controlling the students' misbehaviours in order to avoid 'ripple effects' (Hardy, 1999), which are quite frequent among difficult students.

Our results also show that teachers mask their misbehaviour management by using no verbal intervention. This corroborates with results of several disciplinary studies showing that competent teachers ignore minor distractions and deal with potential disruptions by using eye contact, moving through the classroom, and with short comments directed to the disruptive student (Brunelle et al., 1993). Our study goes further, by showing the capacity of the teachers to use their body to monitor the class, with a systematic association of a learning rule with a particular physical action (gesture, spatial position, stare) to involve the students. The purpose of this strategy of hidden intervention is to make it easier to get the students involved in their work in a non-conflictual manner, but also to diminish the amount of disciplinary measures. Moreover, our study demonstrates that the teacher tries to limit the repressive interventions in the class. This finding concurs with several studies demonstrating that decreasing the amount of disciplinary measures allows one to build good student–teacher relationships, and ensures the teaching and learning progress (Yuan and Che, 2012). Finally, our study reveals that the teacher's masking process also allows them to take the students' behaviour into perspective by taking their time to react to it. This capacity to put disruptive events in the class into perspective allows the teacher, whenever possible, to have a better understanding and think about the students' motives, which cools off the tensions and establishes positive interactions between teacher and students (Yilmaz and Sahinkaya, 2010; Yuan and Che, 2012).

Secondly, our results reveal that this masking process is also recurrent among the students. For them, it is a learning strategy allowing them at the same time to avoid trouble with the teacher, and also to avoid boredom. They manage to stay focused on their task while breaking the rules. This process is rendered possible because the students hide their misbehaviours by acting furtively and by embedding their actions within the expected task. This masking strategy could be the reason for the low amount of drifting behaviours reported in certain studies in PE (Beckers-Ledent et al., 1995; Dervaux et al., 2008). Moreover, our results demonstrate that because of this masking strategy the transgressive behaviours are a minority, and the conflicts or total drop-outs of the students can be avoided. By hiding their intentions, the students showed less drifting activity.

These results agree with studies on teaching whatever the discipline, like those of Allen (1986) assessing that in class, students act in order to avoid trouble and boredom. These students' strategies of masking emphasize the nature of the interactions in 'difficult' classes, as they also avoid them drifting away from learning, which would lead them to totally drop out of school (Glasman and Oeuvrard, 2004; Ziomek-Daigle, 2010). This statement is also true for other subjects, such as mathematics:

> Karim's relative success in managing several apparently incompatible concerns lies in his capacity to blend these concerns within a behaviour seen as 'academically correct' (. . .) It is because the activity of 'doing something else than mathematics' stays in 'reasonable' proportions compared to the activity 'doing mathematics', that the students are still able to follow the lesson and learn maths skills. (Guérin et al., 2008: 78)

To conclude with the students' masking process, by hiding their intention to play with their peers from the teacher, they behave as 'competent bystanders' (Tousignant and Siedentop, 1983). They develop elaborate strategies to play while pretended to fulfil the teacher's expectations and

they know 'how to use the class format to hide their low level of participation within the task structures' (Tousignant and Siedentop, 1983: 49). The masking process observed among the students was characterized by its spatial and temporal features in the class: temporal, because the transgressive behaviours were very brief (i.e., shoving, hitting, jumping or diving on the mats); spatial, because they had to take place in an appropriate place (i.e., hidden behind a mat, or while pretending to put the material back in place). Still, contrary to the study led by Tousignant and Siedentop (1983) that shows a fake engagement of the student, our research shows an important engagement from the students' part in the instruction task due to the ostentation process.

Finally, the originality of our results highlights both the co-existence of the masking process of the students, and of the teacher. Even if both parties do not precisely know what the other is hiding at any given time, the fact that each of them dissimulates aspects of their activity generates a compromise between teacher and students. More explicitly, these masking processes restrict the number of actions that would make the students–teacher interactions conflictual. On one hand, the teacher hides their intention to control the students in order to avoid a conflictual situation. They know their students 'can't stand being policed' and had a tendency to react aggressively, or to 'drift away' (Vors and Gal-Petitfaux, 2014). On the other hand, the students were hiding their intention to play with their peers to avoid trouble with the teacher. The transgressive actions of the students are not a source of conflict with the teacher because they are kept hidden. This compromise helps the students work in a low-conflict class environment, and favours better teaching conditions and is less tiring for the teacher. By highlighting the co-existence of such a process for both teacher and students, our study brings forth a better understanding of what brings this trade-off process already emphasized by various authors (Hastie and Pickwell, 1996; Méard et al., 2008; O'Donovan and Kirk, 2007).

Co-existence of the ostentation process

The discussion will focus on the ostentation process: (a) from the teacher's point of view; (b) from the students' point of view; and (c) on its co-existence.

First of all, the results of our study reveal the presence of a recurrent process of ostentation from the teacher. It is similar to the ostentation processes current to didactic mathematics (e.g., Brousseau, 1996). These processes are used to demonstrate theory to the students (e.g., Matheron and Salin, 2002). In our study, the teacher reveals the expected learning by focusing on the work accomplished by the students. By relying on this work, they want to show them what they have to learn. The goal of this ostentation process is to keep the students' attention permanently focused on what has to be learnt due to highlighting spatially, materially, corporally and orally what should be learnt by the students; a systematic association between learning instructions and a particular corporal action to involve the students; collective instructions, led simultaneously during individual interventions. These collective, theatrical interventions remind us of the techniques used specifically during the phases of active supervision in PE, with isolated or combined use of verbal, non-verbal and paraverbal interventions (Desbiens, 2003; Gal-Petitfaux, 2010; Gal-Petitfaux et al., 2011). This idea of addressing the whole collectivity also corresponds to what Kounin (1970) calls the 'group alerting' strategy, aiming at keeping the group alert. Our results bring in practical implications useful to practitioners and researchers by completing the studies bearing on the ostentation practices in mathematics (e.g., Matheron and Salin, 2002), by highlighting the learning to be acquired and the attitude to be adopted. In other words, the teacher focuses the attention of the class on the desired learning and attitude by ostentatiously cheering the good behaviours within the classroom.

Then, this ostentation strategy is also recurrent among the students. The results of our study show that the students use ostentatious processes to show the teacher they are working. The works of Matheron and Salin (2002) helped us to go further in our interpretation, as they point out that the ostentation practices appear to be building an official, collective memory of the class. In our study, when the students show their teacher that they are working in an ostentatious, recurrent way, it also builds a set of collective habits and knowledge. So the students' ostentatious practices bring them to build a collective memory turned towards work.

Finally, these results show the co-existence of the ostentation process, used by both students and teachers, thus triggering a virtuous cycle of positive teacher–students interactions. We could even go further in explaining this virtuous cycle, thanks to other research in the field of teaching. Our results show that the ostentation of work by the teacher and by the students resulted in few repressive interventions and limited disruptive behaviours. Other studies show that students who are little reprimanded are less disrupted when teachers deal with misbehaviours and generally act more responsibly in that teacher's class. On the contrary, unnecessarily harsh and punitive disciplinary practices against students create a climate that contributes to school violence (Lewis et al., 2005). Moreover, some studies reveal the importance of interactions in class:

> . . . trying to build a positive student-teacher relationship can effectively minimize the chances of the happening of student misbehaviour, and also, it can solve the problem easier. [. . .]. Teachers should also judge their position in the classroom as a kind and warm person to adjust the behaviour of the students but not a strict adult charger. (Yuan and Che, 2012: 149)

Our results help to go further as they emphasize a process generating this kind of positive relations in the class. Indeed, the process of work ostentation generates a virtuous cycle of positive teacher–students interactions while reducing the misbehaviours. This process also prevents the class interactions to be locked into a vicious cycle of reciprocal causation.

Co-existence of the processes of masking and ostentation

The originality of our results demonstrates that the co-existence of the two processes masking/ostentation helps creating a work-favourable atmosphere in the class. These two processes constitute the basis of trade-offs at the heart of the students–teacher interaction system.

Our results are analogous to a particular form of trade-off in the study, whatever the discipline, called 'procedural display', which is helping the smooth running of the lessons (Bloome et al., 1989). The procedural display corresponds to specific interactions within the classroom, 'when teachers and students are displaying to each other that they are getting the lesson done, constructing a cultural event within a cultural institution' (Bloome et al., 1989: 272). Moreover, several studies specific to compensatory education classes help in understanding more specifically what is underlying the procedural display. These studies typically show a dynamic of prevented activity, in which the actors trade-off: they constantly adjust their individual actions so that they do not become contradictory. The teacher informally accepts many of the behaviours, provided that they do not interrupt the smooth running of the lesson. In parallel, the students accept a larger workload when they are granted occasions to socialize:

> For students, a class that allows them to socialize while learning something interesting as they pass the course is the best of classes. Students accept high work demands and a routine structure and even enjoy these academic activities if they can socialize while performing them. (Allen, 1986: 456)

Our research follows this train of thought, the observed procedural display bearing on work ostentation and the masking of actions that could be a source of tensions. On one hand, it corresponds to what is valued within the teacher–students interaction, which is the work to be done (ostentation process). On the other hand, the procedural display includes what is depreciated in the teacher–students interaction, that is to say the actions generating conflicts and tensions (masking process). Both these processes of masking and ostentation are the core of trade-offs in the class, they help dealing with the behavioural issues in the classroom while keeping the actors involved in the learning process. In these particularly difficult classes, more than in other classes, it is professionally interesting that teachers learn how to use these two processes simultaneously so as to establish a form of interaction favourable to learning.

Moreover, the co-existence of these two processes of masking/ostentation concurs with the works on 'reciprocal care-giving' (Aultman et al., 2009; Riley et al., 2010). It is a mutual recognition of the teacher and students in the class. Each actor has built up knowledge about the other, which they use by taking care of them in their actions. Various studies reveal that thanks to reciprocal care-giving, the relationships are likely to last longer than the average teacher–students relationship, and therefore have a positive impact on anxiety and aggressiveness (Riley et al., 2010). Our results show that the trade-off process in the class is based on reciprocal care-giving. The teacher knows how to catch the students' attention and knows that acting in a coercive way would generate trouble issues. The students know how to catch the teacher's attention by showing that they are working and attempting to do what is expected from them. Each actor has built up a knowledge about the other and uses it effectively to take care of the other; this phenomenon is the basis for the processes of masking and ostentation.

To conclude, the trade-off process highlighted in our study helps to create a work-favourable atmosphere within the class. We found that class interactions are structured by a process of trading-off, based on the processes of masking and ostentation. By stressing the co-existence of these two processes, both among teachers and students, our study helps one to understand what generates the trade-offs already revealed by other authors (in PE: Hastie and Pickwell, 1996; Méard et al., 2008; O'Donovan and Kirk, 2007; or in the education field: Bloome et al., 1989; McDermott and Roth, 1978; Strauss, 1992; Woods, 1978). This trade-off process, which exists whatever the discipline, leads to the creation of a favourable atmosphere in the classroom, in the way that it is a form of 'reciprocal care-giving' (Aultman et al., 2009; Riley et al., 2010). It helps building a collective memory in the class (Matheron and Salin, 2002), generates a virtuous cycle of positive interaction (Lewis et al., 2005) that can facilitate the teaching and learning process, and reduces the amount of student misbehaviour (Yuan and Che, 2012). It can also appease the tensions and conflicts within the classroom (Yilmaz and Sahinkaya, 2010) and reduces the feelings of anxiety and aggressiveness (Riley et al., 2010).

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