

Communicating Care and Coercion in Juvenile Probation

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Abstract

In most Western states, probation of juvenile delinquents spearheads social policies. The general idea behind these policies is to protect society against the wrongdoing of young offenders by monitoring and rehabilitating them. The mixture of corrective and supportive approaches makes juvenile probation a hybrid practice. This study analyses the interactional strategies of both probation officers and juveniles to deal with this situation. It is shown that participation in conversations about recidivism and risky behaviour creates the opportunity for juveniles to show genuine intent to change their problematic behaviour and for probation officers to assess the chances of future progress in a more realistic way. The nature of the relationship between care and coercion depends on how things are worked out in the interaction between professional and client.

Keywords: Juvenile probation, court-related social work, interactional analysis, care and coercion

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Introduction

In the Netherlands, juveniles under the age of eighteen who are prosecuted for an illegal offence are referred to the department of juvenile probation located in the Child Welfare Office (Bureau Jeugdzorg). The Public Prosecutor or the judge can assign a Juvenile Probation Officer (JPO) whose function is to monitor compliance and help the juvenile to solve the problems related to his or her criminal behaviour. Non-compliance with the JPO's directions is reported to the court and may lead to further-reaching interventions.

Juvenile probation is a hybrid form of social work with both repressive and empowering functions. Its major goal is to reduce the likelihood of recidivism, but the ways to attain its aims are diverse. On the one hand, JPOs have to keep an eye on the juveniles and monitor whether they adhere to the directives that were issued. This is a restrictive strategy of limiting young offenders' freedom under certain conditions. On the other hand, JPOs try to help juveniles to organise their lives themselves, to reinforce their learning capacities and to enlarge their self-determination. This strategy of broadening juveniles' possibilities and advancing their ability to manage for themselves is in line with a rationalised and calculated government strategy to regulate (certain groups in) the population, and direct their behaviour (Rose, 2000). Juvenile probation is intended to reduce recidivism by maintaining contact with young offenders and trying to influence their thoughts and conduct.

The entanglement of welfare and justice is not exclusive to juvenile probation and exists in other social sectors, like forensic psychiatry (Salize and Dressing, 2005), child welfare (van Nijnatten, 2005), education management (Nodding, 2001), court-supervised drug treatment (Burns and Peyrot, 2003) and financial family support (Tufano and Schneider, 2009). The mixture of care and coercion is at the centre of the modern state based on individual autonomy for citizens who are trained to behave according to social rules. Civil rights and individual autonomy are in fact limited freedoms, based on the idea that citizens can 'earn' freedom of movement by behaving within societal limits (Donzelot, 1979). Hence, the proof of a successful intervention is in its success of producing autonomy by empowering the client to behave as someone who knows society's bounds. If not, then the client's autonomy is restricted by monitoring his or her compliance, followed by interventions in the case of recidivism. Probation practices aim at self-determination and self-control under threat of coercive interventions. The hybrid nature of probation is often considered to be problematic because care and coercion involve different social work strategies which may be at odds with each other. This hybrid nature is an effect of juvenile probation organised at the intersection of justice and welfare and becomes manifest in probation communication.

Juvenile probation is a mixture of directing and motivating in communication. The Dutch Companion of Juvenile Probation states that its goal is to monitor, in regular encounters, the juvenile's behaviour and to negotiate arrangements about the juvenile's behavioural improvements (Vogelvang, 2005). Juvenile probation is a hybrid practice of court-mandated care. Like other forensic communication (Linell and Jönsson, 1991; Komter, 2003), interactions in juvenile probation mean the management of downgrading and upgrading accusations and defences in order to find a balance between coercion and empowerment.

In mundane communication, meaningful interaction is only possible when the participants try to achieve inter-subjectivity by testing whether the others'

utterances are in line with what they think is shared knowledge (Rommetveit, 1974). If a problem arises in the interaction, participants will try to maintain consensus by accounting for their utterances. These are so-called 'accounting procedures', such as excuses, justifications, explanations or defences. In institutional communication, the representatives will adopt the institutional perspective and the clients will try to demonstrate that they are aware of this perspective by 'situated knowing' (Mäkitalo, 2003). Through the use of accounting procedures, they show they understand the institutional goals and the relevant categories that correspond to these goals. Categories are crucial instruments in institutional communication, for both professionals and clients. In her study of vocational guidance, Mäkitalo (2002) shows that the interaction between vocational workers and unemployed individuals is focused on assessing the latter's intentions as job-seekers. Discourse on these interactions has to be in line with the vocational agency's goals. The vocational worker's questions accordingly invite clients to demonstrate their good efforts to gain entry to the labour market. Crucial for the outcome of such interaction is the way the unemployment is interpreted by the professionals: is it the result of a lack of will, effort and intention, or the effect of a saturated labour market? This determines the category in which clients will be classified and whether they may claim benefit.

We will study how juvenile probation is 'talked into being' (Heritage, 1984), how probation officers design the interactions with juvenile delinquents and how the latter try to influence the images that are presented of them. In juvenile probation interactions, it is the officer's task to *categorise* juveniles' rehabilitation chances by considering whether their behaviour is promising enough to continue the path of self-determination or whether it is so troubling that a shift to a more corrective approach is needed. Probation officers monitor and evaluate the juveniles' conduct and attach categories to it, based on what the juveniles share in the encounters. Further to this monitoring and evaluation procedure, they make an assessment of the juvenile's progress in the probation route.

Clients may have a decisive influence on the way they will be categorised, by how they position themselves in the interaction or by adopting certain attitudes that are in line with a specific category (Eskelinen *et al.*, 2010). This is especially so when the client demonstrates responsibility by showing initiative, which is preferred by the institution. When the client adopts a more defensive approach, this may lead to a different (more negative) classification (Solberg, 2011). Juvenile clients in probation are well aware of the categorising task of the probation officer and factor this in, in their interactional approach (van Nijntten and Stevens, 2011). They show themselves in the best possible light in the hope of being categorised favourably. The juveniles' reactions to categorisation are relevant because they show their situated knowledge of the probation order.

Method

We will combine micro-analytic and sequential interpretations (Sacks, 1992), as well as discourse analysis, paying attention to the institutional (care and coercion) context of the conversation. Turn-taking in institutional communication is often pre-specified (Drew and Heritage, 1992), leading to a pattern in which the institutional representative poses the questions and controls the issues that are related to the relevant institutional goals, with the client providing minimal answers. The institutional goals often appear as categories that play a crucial role in the professional efforts to change clients' lives (Mäkitalo, 2006). Both institutional questions and advice giving are often indicated as a sensitive part of social work (see Hall and Slembrouck, 2013) that go with conversational prudence to avoid open conflicts.

In this study, we will look at confrontational and client-centred strategies of JPOs, outlining the preferred route to non-recidivism and rehabilitation (compare Heritage and Sefi, 1992). We will also look at how juveniles try to mitigate the seriousness of the accusations (Martinovsky, 2006) or emphasise positive perspectives. We expect both institutional representatives and clients to use accounts. The JPOs will do this when they anticipate problems in the interaction with the client, giving extra arguments and explaining the reasons for categorisations (Mäkitalo, 2003). Juveniles will do so by acknowledging or rejecting the categories used by the JPOs (Potter and Wetherell, 1997). The major goal of juvenile probation is to prevent repetition of delinquent conduct. According to the What Works approach (Martinson, 1974, in Vogelvang, 2005), which is followed by the Dutch Companion, the intervention should focus on the prevention of recidivism. The officers should emphasise the factors that lead to crime: antisocial elements of cognition, network, conduct or personality (Andrews and Bonta, 1998). In our analysis, we will look at possible differences in advice delivery and reception in this category.

The interactional contributions of the JPOs are considered to be a mixture of information gathering and advice delivery. In the analysis of the design of their categorising questions, we will look at the use of direct and indirect strategies, distinguish between personalised and non-personalised suggestions (Silverman, 1997) and examine accounts and delicacy markers (e.g. the use of soft words, humour, extra explanations; van Nijnatten and Suoninen, 2013). Juveniles' responses to institutional categorisation may appear in unmarked acknowledgments ('mm', 'yeah', 'right'), which is acceptance or a form of passive resistance that primarily serves to continue the conversation (Heritage and Sefi, 1992). The juveniles may also accept or reject categorisations by rephrasing the PO's wording or reasoning; they may use their own wording and present new categories to show they are aware of the aims and nature of the intervention. Finally, the juvenile may also openly demonstrate

agreement or disagreement, in which case acceptance or rejection is then emphasised.

Data

As Moroccan-Dutch juveniles are overrepresented in Dutch juvenile justice (Stevens *et al.*, 2009) and Dutch forensic social workers frequently complain about the difficulties in communicating with Moroccan juveniles (van Nijnatten and de Kruijf, 2008), this study aims at investigating the communication between Dutch probation officers and Moroccan juveniles. The Dutch Companion of Juvenile Probation recommends an alternative approach of juvenile delinquents of ethnic minorities when the content of a programme is not sufficiently sensitive for cultural differences by, for example, giving suitable examples that correspond with the lives of juveniles from ethnic minorities.

The fragments used for this study were recorded on video after both the juveniles and their parents had given their informed consent. The conversations took place in youth probation agencies situated in four medium-sized cities in the Netherlands. The agencies selected male clients of whom at least one parent was born in Morocco. In total, 108 juveniles were selected for the study. Forty-six cases were excluded from the study for various reasons (e.g. seriousness of the case did not permit any interference; long-term illness of the PO). The remaining sixty-two clients and their parents received a letter containing information on the study and a consent form. The letter was written in Dutch and Arabic. Ultimately, twenty-two juveniles and their parents gave permission for the conversations to be recorded. All but two of the juveniles were born in the Netherlands. They were between fourteen and eighteen years old. The average duration of the conversations was twenty-five minutes and fifty seconds. The conversations were transcribed according to Jefferson's (2004) transcription conventions.

For this study, two cases of the twenty-two were selected, namely Transcripts 4 and 12. The first two fragments were taken from Case 4 of a conversation between Fouad (sixteen years, one-year probation) and a male PO. The third fragment was taken from Case 12 of a conversation between Ahmed (fifteen years, under-one-year probation) and a female PO. The transcripts were selected because they differed from each other in a number of relevant respects. First, the PO of Case 4 was male and of Case 12 female. Second, the male officer had been working for twenty years, and the female officer for less than a year. Finally, the case of Transcript 4 had just started, whereas Ahmed in Transcript 12 was at the end of the probation trajectory.

The analyses were carried out on the original Dutch data. The transcripts were transcribed roughly. Relevant fragments were selected. These fragments were analysed in detail and translated into English.

Results

Fragment 1 (Case 4) (PO is the probation officer, F is Fouad)

-
- 36 PO: Ok. (1.2) What I know is this (1.4) . hh you ski ... (.) well,
 37 not really skipped but you were late sometimes and that
 38 kind of thing
 39 F: Ye-ah
 40 PO: Well, that didn't go unnoticed
 41 F: Yes.
 42 PO: Well that's (0.8) ↑ I found that surprising because it
 43 is a very big school (.)
 44 F: Yes.
 45 PO: And you have only just started (.) so (1.5) they don't
 46 know your face from say, the past two or three years and
 47 within two mo:onths there was already >well< I won't say panic,
 but it was noticed that you (.) were sometimes
 48 late(.) and em when Piet Tehh was there he phoned
 49 me that morning to ↑ tell me. Then I said straight away
 50 OK ↑let's ↑ make sure that we talk to Fouad about it
 51 to ↑see (2.6) how much of it is true and what should be
 52 done from here (.) >so< that's why the whole gang was
 53 around you within [two hours.
 54 F: [That's right. It startled me.
 55 PO: Yes, it startled you alright, you didn't like it
 56 F: Course not.
 57 PO: No.
 58 F: You could see from my behaviour >behaviour<.
 59 PO: PARDON?
 60 F: You could see from my behaviour
 61 PO: Yes exactly. You were really pissed off. (1.1) what
 62 were you most pissed off ↑ about then
 63 F: .ptt Yeah that they say yeah that I eh skipped all those
 64 Classes
 65 PO: Yes.
 66 F: Yes:ah and at least a few of those classes that they say
 67 that they say I skipped I didn't skip them. I was just at
 68 (.) class and I was on time too.
 69 PO: Ok.
 70 F: Yeah and I did ↓skip eh a few classes maybe two > but
 71 the rest< I just got there late =
 72 PO: =Exactly.
 73 F: And that's all they ↑ are talking about.
 74 PO: Yes. ((nods and looks at the boy))
 75 F: Yes (.) she only looks >at the computer(paper)< not at
 76 what really happened. >She only looks at the computer,
 77 yep he missed those classes < [so that's that
 78 PO: [Exactly. Just the printout =
 79 F: = ↓ Yes.
 80 PO: But she had ta ↑ lked to you about it before, ↑ hadn't she?
 81 F: Hmmm no:o she didn't (.) about being punctual, I was
 82 I was sometimes late for class
 83 PO: Ok.
 84 F: Yeah, she says I have to change that, you have to be late
-

Continued

Continued

85:	you have to be on time [otherwise
86 PO:	[Exactly. But it's not <u>she really</u>
87	took you aside to talk to you, she <u>did</u> (.) she did notice
88:	and she was just saying look you have to be punctual
89	next time
90 F:	Yea:ah I think what happened was I was ehh late once =
91 PO:	= 'Exactly.'
92 F:	And then she sent me out of class. (.) Later she came to
93	me to (.) to talk to me about it =
94 PO:	=Ok.
95 F:	To say that I ehh needed to change =
96 PO:	=Yes.
97 F:	Because it's not acceptable.

The issue in this fragment is truancy. JPOs consider truancy to be a high-risk factor for juvenile delinquency. This makes truancy a delicate issue. POs' accounts for having paid a sudden visit to a school must be seen in this perspective ('I will explain that in a minute'/not in the fragment), and lines 52–53). By reporting the school counsellor's speech (line 48) (Juhila *et al.*, 2013), the PO substantiates the reasons for his intervention. By reformulating and mitigating his utterances: 'well', 'not really', 'that kind of thing' (lines 36–38), 'well, I won't say panic, but, ...' (line 47), he tries to soften the impact of the sudden inspection visit. Finally, the PO shows empathy that Fouad was shocked by his sudden appearance. Fouad's responses that the intervention had caught him by surprise (line 54), his blunt reaction (line 56) and his remark that his reaction must have revealed his shock (line 58) show that the PO was right and that Fouad may be perceived as being far from indifferent about what is going on and that he does take things seriously.

In the next turns, the PO starts to investigate the background to Fouad's hurt feelings, starting with an open question (lines 61–62). Fouad denies the supposed truancy. First, he denies having skipped all the classes as reported by the school (lines 66–68), and then mitigates the magnitude of it (lines 70–71). Finally, he blames the school for concentrating on the computer printouts without looking at what really happened (lines 75–77). These contributions are all aimed at showing that his behaviour is not as alarming as is supposed by the school representatives. But then the PO confronts Fouad with the fact that the school counsellor did talk to him about his problematic behaviour. First, Fouad denies that the school counsellor did this but then admits it at a later stage (lines 92–93).

It is relevant that the PO saved Fouad's face by giving in that the school counsellor did not take Fouad aside, but that she was 'just' telling him to be punctual. This gives Fouad freeway to give his version of the happenings between him and the counsellor. By doing so, the PO enables Fouad to build up the category entitlement of witness, the juvenile demonstrating his relevant conversational position by quoting the conversation with the

school counsellor (Potter, 1996). At the same time, the PO hinted that she spoke with the school counsellor and that so she has power to verify Fouad's reported speech. Although Fouad is only repeating the lesson that he was taught by the counsellor and does not express any intentions to change his future behaviour, his detailed report of his conversation with the counsellor may be seen as an indication of his admittance that he should give in. Fouad's initial reluctance to admit his truancy and his resentment toward school seem to make his final climb-down more powerful. Now, the PO has more reason to believe that Fouad is moving to change his conduct and to use the chances that are given to him.

At the end of the same conversation, the PO returns to the relevance of the juvenile's commitment to education.

Fragment 2 (Case 4)

597 PO:	We're going to keep an eye on things <u>but</u> you're not
598	twelve years old anymore. You made the decision to
599	go to school. [But we <u>know</u> where you come from, what
600 F:	[Yes, right
601 PO:	your background is and that it's sometimes (.) difficult.
602	That doesn't matter, but it is more or less where we're
603	coming from. And If I <u>ask</u> you Hey how was <u>school</u> .
604	Then ehh we soon need to get to a stage where you say,
605	great, I did this, I did that, work experience is going
606	well, I got these grades, that will be enough. Instead of
607	saying, I didn't skip class this week. Because I will
608	believe it.
609 F:	Yes.
610 PO:	I'm confident that you will. And if not then (.) I'll hear
611	it from you, OK? that you're having some eh some ehh
612	difficulties. Or I'll hear it ehh from ehh I've forgotten
613	his name again [him
614 F:	[Piet
615 PO:	Piet. Right. Now if we can manage that then ehm your
616	parents ehh will have more faith in you again. =
617 F:	=Yes.
618 PO:	And you will be able to carry on (.) with school in your
619	own way, right?
620 F:	((Nods)) (2.8) Sure:
621	(1.7)

In the first line of the fragment, the PO twice gives expression to the ambiguous nature of probation work — on the one hand monitoring Fouad's behaviour and on the other hand emphasising Fouad's growing autonomy and the necessity for him to assume the responsibilities that go together with the capacities of a boy who is older than twelve years. In the next sentence, Fouad's own decision to start this education is underlined, but the PO adds that he is aware of his problematic history. The PO's other statements

follow a similar pattern, with one point of view in the main clause and an opposite one in the subordinate clause. Later on (lines 610–611), he once again holds the juvenile responsible: he relies on the boy's ability to mark when he needs help. However, he does not neglect to mention the school counsellor, who also has a responsibility to report on the boy's behaviour (lines 611–612). This once again shows the PO's dual strategy of relying on Fouad's independence and at the same time keeping an eye on him.

The PO goes one step further, projecting the goals for school and describing the future situation in which school attendance has to be the effect of inner motivation rather than a struggle against truancy. The juvenile's response (line 609) is no more than a continuer. By showing empathy (mentioning that it may be hard for the boy), by presenting school as a common project (line 604), by emphasising cooperation, speaking of 'we' and by referring to a school employee, the PO tries to be convincing, but again the juvenile's response is minimal. The vagueness of his utterances and his apparent hesitation (lines 615–616/618–619) may be an indication that the officer himself is not entirely convinced of the success of his efforts. In any case, the PO's contributions about this issue are less clearly defined than when he discussed truancy. Only when the PO directly asks Fouad whether he agrees ('isn't it?') does the boy show some agreement, by saying 'sure', but the answer is delayed (2.8) and expressed in a soft voice.

It seems that both professional and client are more emphatic when a high-risk category is discussed than when a topic is discussed which, at most, is indirectly related to such categories. In contrast to the first fragment of this conversation, the juvenile remains quite passive in his reactions to the PO's assertions. The boy shows himself to be co-operative, but does not add to the conversation (van Nijnatten, 2013). This may reflect how the juvenile considers the relevance of the issue that is discussed. When a negative issue such as truancy is discussed, he has to be on his guard and do what he can to change the negative categorisation. When something vague such as inner motivation is discussed—despite the PO's effort to formulate it in concrete terms (lines 604–608)—the juvenile may be less inspired to participate in the discussion.

The first two fragments were taken from conversations about current issues. The next fragment is from a case that is ending its probation trajectory.

Fragment 3 (Case 12) (PO is the probation officer, A is Ahmed)

64 PO:
65
66
67 A:

Yes. (1.4) Because if you look back for example, now
OK? now you're (.) a year further, because it took quite
some time, altogether [the whole journey. In 2005
[Yes.

Continued

Continued

-
- 64 PO: Yes. (1.4) Because if you look back for example, now
 65 OK? now you're (.) a year further, because it took quite
 66 some time, altogether [the whole journey. In 2005
 67 A: [Yes.
 68 PO: things were not going so well with you at all, because
 69 you were also arrest ↑ ed then.
 70 A: Yes.
 71 PO: And you were in prison for a couple, a couple of days.
 72 A: Yes.
 73 PO: And if you look at how you felt ↑ then and how you feel
 74 now (.) you see a ↑ difference. =
 75 A: = Yes. That I'm ehh better now (1.9) when I'm out on the
 76 street, calmer on the street.
 77 (4.4)
 78 PO: Are there things you pay special attention ↑ to when
 79 you're out on the street now?
 80 A: No, or if something has happened, like with the police
 81 then ehh I just leave. Then I don't, don't stay around,
 82 the police and near ehh guys where it happened (1.8)
 83 PO: Were you much [more curious before?]
 84 A: [Yeah. (1.9)
 85 PO: °Hmm° (1.1) and not anymore?
 86 A: ↓ No, not so much.
 ...
 99 PO: So you're not afraid of the poli ↑ ce, and you're not
 100 afraid that they'll recog ↑ nise your face.
 101 A: Yeah.
 102 PO: But nowadays you go home instead of hanging around
 103 to see [what really happened.
 104 A: [Yes.
 105 Yes.
 106 PO: And now you have to hear it from other people. (.) What
 107 was up.
 108 A: Yes, it doesn't matter, what happened.
 109 PO: Oh, so you sometimes don't even need to ↑ know what
 110 happened. =
 111 A: = Yeah.
 112 PO: ↑ Hmm (2.4) well done ↑ ((laughs)) because if someone
 113 is curious, then I think they will always be curious,
 114 every time. For instance ehh if they hear police cars
 115 then > they look out the window or they might go, What
 116 happened?, maybe call someone to ask, Hey do you
 117 know what happened there, [I heard police cars? <
 118 A: [No.
 119 I do look, and then I just say (.) Yeah, then I just,
 120 just ↓ leave. Look- suppose ehh
 121 A police car comes by ↑ there.
 122 PO: Hmmhmm.
 123 A: If it stops with its siren on, then I ↑ take a look.
 124 PO: Hmmhmm.
 125 A: Yeah then ehh (0.7) there's nothing special, then I, I just
 126 (.) go away,
 127 PO: Hmmhmm. (0.9) Yes (2.5) and that's, that's enough
 128 for you, as it were. =
 129 A: = Yes.
 130 PO: Yes. Funny. (1.0) But really ↑ good. (.) That you're not
 131 sticking your nose into everything any more.
-

The beginning of this fragment again shows the officer's ambivalence in trying to find a solution with the least possible control and the greatest possible leeway for self-determination. The PO is reflecting on the development of Ahmed's identity, and invites him to consider his development retrospectively. She creates a contrast between Ahmed's former delinquency (lines 68–71) and his current state as someone who is watching his step. It is relevant that the PO refers to his former identity (emphasising the negative quality by the use of 'at all' and 'also arrested') and that Ahmed refers to the current positive situation (lines 75–76). After explaining the problematic past, the PO invites Ahmed to find the positive differences. In this way, Ahmed participates in assessing the progress in his situation. Ahmed immediately confirms (line 75) and gives a personal interpretation of the improvements in his present situation. The PO takes the long pause (line 77) as a marker that Ahmed does not want to add to that answer and asks for further details, using Ahmed's wordings ('when you are out on the street') without giving any suggestions for a preferred answer. The boy then zooms in on events where the police are present and demonstrates the change in his conduct, namely that he takes care not to be around when such things are happening on the street. It is striking that the PO is looking for a change in cognition ('curious', 'afraid') whereas Ahmed talks about his actions and about what may happen. Throughout, the PO gives plenty of room for Ahmed to answer—the pauses are lengthy (lines 84, 91, 95, 98, the last three not in the fragment). When the PO suggests that Ahmed now has to learn from others what is going on in the street, the boy answers that he is okay with that. That is the moment when the PO pays him a big compliment, thus sealing the shift in Ahmed's identity, although she follows this with another check, which is mitigated by laughing (line 112). The PO suggests in a non-personalised way that anybody who is curious will remain curious and so, when a police car is in the street, that person will go and inquire. The boy directly denies that he would do so and gives a detailed personalised description of how he would act in such a situation. Three times he uses the word ('just'), as if to say that his behaviour is nothing special or anything to worry about. Although the PO expresses some doubt by saying 'Funny', she repeats her compliment, which then seems a shared agreement.

In this fragment, the PO poses many closed questions (lines 78–117). In general, this type of question is considered to inhibit a client's further exploration, but that does not seem to be the case in this fragment. This may be explained by the nature of the dialogue. First, the conversation is proposed as an invitation to look back and is thus not aimed at monitoring the current state of affairs. Second, Ahmed got the chance to state the positive turn in his life. Based on this, the PO's subsequent closed questions do not inhibit Ahmed in elaborating on the background to his changed behaviour. This confirms the study of Ruusuvaori (in [Peräkylä and Vehviläinen, 2003](#)) in primary health consultations, who found that the nature of the doctor's visit rather than the grammatical form of the opening question (open-ended

or closed) is related to the patient's answer. The not-controlling nature of the conversation is further confirmed by the way the final check is marked by the PO's laughter, which may be considered as a playful comment on the fact that the PO gives a big compliment, which is rare in this type of conversation (line 112). Ahmed may understand from this that the PO is already convinced of his progress and that this final check is a demonstration of mutual understanding rather than control. In one perspective, Ahmed's reactions may be seen as signs of resistance, presenting a different version of his future behaviour, and providing detailed and experience-based knowledge in response to the PO's diagnostic expertise (Ijas-Kallio *et al.*, 2010). In an alternative perspective, Ahmed's reaction may be considered as a constructive contribution to reaching a shared understanding about his progress.

Conclusion

Juvenile probation is aimed at reducing recidivism by moving juveniles from a dependent state of being governed by professionals' decisions and monitoring to a position of self-regulation. For the officers, the conversations are a major instrument to achieve a realistic assessment of the risk of recidivism and, for the juveniles, to show their compliance. It is often said that care and coercive elements in juvenile probation involve different kinds of social work strategies: on the one hand restrictive and repressive methods and on the other hand empowering and supportive approaches. It is thought this may jeopardise trust between professional and client.

The officers in our study indeed indicate the double function of probation work. In the interactions, the POs often proceed cautiously in order to prevent their client from becoming defensive, such as by formulating delicate issues in a non-personalised way (Fragment 3). The first case shows that the social worker's monitoring tasks are comprehensively justified. Yet the conversation that follows this episode also shows that the discussion about a negative category, which is truancy, does not put the juvenile off, but on the contrary motivates him to defend himself and to participate actively in the discussion with the probation officer. In the end and after some struggling by the juvenile, PO and juvenile come to a shared assessment of the juvenile's conduct. The result is that the boy now gives indirect signals and understanding of the problematic nature of his behaviour by quoting in detail the school counsellor's reprimands. Moreover, the juvenile's initial resistance before he submits under some pressure seems an additional indication that his compliance is not just pretence, but rather a promising sign of moving in the right direction. Hence, the conversation about issues that go with the most restrictive elements in the probation order are the most productive in assessing the progress in the juvenile's autonomy development.

This becomes even more clear when we compare this fragment about truancy and how to change this negative category with a fragment later in

the same conversation when the PO tries to change the juvenile's motivation for school. This discussion is about the PO's wish that the juvenile would report about what he learned at school rather than about his struggle against truancy. The juvenile's minimal reactions show that he is little motivated to talk about this 'low-pressure issue'. It is even more surprising that the PO does not seem to be able to draw the dividing lines precisely and concretely. This indicates that talk about high-risk categories seems to exert more pressure on the participants to join the conversation. Although the PO is vague in his utterances, he puts pressure on the boy to answer, who, in the end, gives in a little. Yet, his reactions are not much more than continuers for the sake of politeness (Silverman, 1997).

This study also shows that the nature of the relationship is a relevant factor in advice reception. In the last fragment, the boy actively participates in the discussion. The issue of the conversation, Ahmed's behaviour on the street, may explain this. Yet the PO frames the conversation as a kind of evaluation of the juvenile's identity development by inviting him to look back and see the progress he has made. Thus, although the content of the conversation is about one of the major risk categories, in this case the risky conduct of Ahmed on the street, keeping company with unsuitable peers and finally the court injunction, the pressure is off. According to the same reasoning as above, this, on the contrary, would then lead to less juvenile participation. How, then, can we explain that Ahmed does participate expressly in this fragment? This may be due to the fact that the frame is defined as a common evaluation of a positive development rather than an actual control of the juvenile's street behaviour. This puts the conversation in a 'lighter' perspective in which the conversation—in spite of the grammatical form—can be seen as a common activity rather than an interrogation. This is reinforced by the PO's laughter, which is a confirmation in footing (Goffman, 1981), indicating that the social worker wants to continue her definition of the conversation as a friendly, joint enterprise of looking at something positive. There seems to be a common understanding that the juvenile has accepted that the PO is the one in control and the one who lays down standards. The PO then departs from her monitoring function and in a playful interaction shows the juvenile that she thinks that things have turned out fine. Mission accomplished!

This study analyses the communication between probation officers and pupils in two cases and only short extracts could be shown. Although we think that these extracts are exemplary for the kind of communication in juvenile probation, the results of this study cannot just be generalised to other (juvenile) probation communication. Future research has to show whether these types of interaction are a pattern in (juvenile) probation interaction. Moreover, the communication between probation officers and pupils is only one element of probation, whereas other elements—advocacy, intervention programmes, etc.—also play a relevant role in that they shape a client's experiences of probation and will affect the quality of the relationship (and thus the conversations) between worker and client.

A major challenge of professional work in general, and in this study in particular, of professional juvenile probation work is the need to bridge the gap between the perspectives of client and professional. In this study, we found that the juveniles participated from an action perspective, whereas the professionals did so from a more cognitive point of view. This difference may be the result of the differences in the educational and professional background of the two groups. Social workers are trained as experts in the field of psycho-social problems and are professionally aimed at relating social factors with individual cognitive functioning. Most of the (lower-class) clients of agencies such as juvenile probation have participated in (if any) a practical training. Future study has to reveal whether this is a structural phenomenon of (forensic) social work and how this gap may be bridged best.

Indeed, the mixture of care and coercion is at the centre of the social institutions in modern states. Juvenile probation is a classic example of such a social institution. Its disciplinary strategies (Foucault, 1979) are aimed at training its clients to maintain or achieve autonomy. The main task of the probation officers is to know their clients better by collecting and archiving information about them. This may be realised by monitoring, which is at the heart of forensic social work. By monitoring, the whereabouts of juveniles are checked, information is asked by crucial persons in the juvenile's life (parents, school, work and other professionals) and finally the juvenile is confronted with this information. We have seen this approach of the social workers in this study. Yet, bringing the client to confession—not just of the offences committed but also of all kind of intentions, wishes and temptations (Foucault, 1980)—is an equal source of information. This study also gave examples of social workers trying to entice the juveniles to tell more about themselves, to express their perspectives on events in the past and to become aware of the (positive) changes in their conduct. Control and self-examination are the two major instruments to (re)construct the aspirant citizenship of juvenile delinquents. In this study, it was shown that the interactional features of the care–control relation between forensic social work agencies and their clients is crucial in achieving clients' autonomy (including social responsibility). In the end, the hybrid nature of juvenile probation may be an advantage rather than a disadvantage. By a sophisticated intertwinement of different strategies that sometimes are more urging or coercive and sometimes are more supporting and empowering, forensic social workers hope to find the balance between protection of the society against individual violence and protection of the individual against an all too repressive approach of the state.

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Appendix

Convention used for transcription:

- (1.5): a silence with the length of the amount of indicated seconds.
- (.): pause of (less than) 0.3 seconds.
- Text = : there is no observable silence between the turns of two successive speakers
- = tekst2. or between successive utterances of the same speaker
- [speaker these two participants start a turn at the same time.
- [speaker2
- ↑ tone rises.
- ↓ tone descends.
- Accent the underlined syllable is accentuated.
- Stre:tch the concerning vowel or consonant is striking longer than 'normal' for this speaker
- °soft° text that is uttered in a soft voice;
- LOUD text in capitals is uttered loud
- > the following text is uttered in a more quick space (closing up sign <)
- < the following text is uttered in a more slow space (closing up sign >)