

## **Between Marginalisation and Agency. Primary School Teachers' Narratives in London and the Position of Children with Migrant Backgrounds**

FEDERICO FARINI<sup>4</sup>

ORCID: [0000-0001-8498-0453](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8498-0453)

Centre for Psychology and Social Sciences, Centre for Education and Research  
University of Northampton, UK

ANGELA SCOLLAN

ORCID: [0000-0001-9005-5838](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9005-5838)

School of Health and Education, Centre for Educational Research and Scholarship  
Middlesex University, UK

Based on qualitative interviews with primary school teachers in Greater London, this article explores teachers' narratives to uncover how children with migrant backgrounds (CMB) are positioned in the contexts of their learning experience. In particular, the article utilises the analytical category of trust to argue that the position of CMB in teachers' narratives is related to the form of teachers' trust. When trust is based on categorical inequalities, CMB are often considered untrustworthy partners construction of the learning and teaching experience. Trust based on categorical inequalities becomes a form of trust in distrust and CMB are positioned in the children's needs paradigm where decision-making is reserved to teachers who act for them and on their behalf. When trust is based on personal relationships, CMB are positioned as agents who are capable to voice their interests, bringing about consequential changes in the contexts of their experiences. CMB are positioned in the children's interests paradigm, where agency is expected and promoted as a right of children who are socially constructed as agents who can make a difference with their choices.

**Keywords:** trust; agency; inequality; self-determination; narratives; primary education

---

<sup>4</sup> Contact: [federico.farini@northampton.ac.uk](mailto:federico.farini@northampton.ac.uk)

## 1. Introduction

The analysis of interviews with primary school teachers in Greater London focused on teachers' perspectives on the integration of Children with Migrant Background (CMB) in the classroom brought an emerging narrative to the attention of the authors where the positioning of CMB can be determined by the type of trust that underpins teacher-children relationships. In particular, the analysis of narratives, inspired by Luhmann (1988), Giddens (1991) and Tilly (1998) sociological theorisations of trust, indicates that two types of trust can have implications for the positioning of CMB in the learning environment: *trust based on categorical inequalities* (inspired by Luhmann's work on trust in education and Tilly's work on categorisations) and *personal trust* (based on Giddens's theory of interpersonal communication).

Sociological research questioning the structures that support the reproduction of education has demonstrated that learners' trust in the expertise of teachers is necessary for their acceptance of teaching and underpinning role-based hierarchy (Vanderstraeten, 2004; Baraldi and Farini, 2013; Baraldi and Corsi, 2017; Farini, 2019). This article takes another perspective: based on the analysis of teachers' narratives, the article focuses on *teachers' trust in learners* and how different types of trust, or distrust, can influence the positioning of learner, in particular CMB, in the classroom.

## 2. Methodology

The data consists of 18 audio-taped qualitative interviews. Participants were qualified teachers, interviewed remotely, age range 25–51, 14 females, 4 males. Two non-probabilistic sampling methods were used to recruit participants. The first one was purposive sampling: participants were recruited because they work in schools that participate in the Horizon2020 Project Child-UP of which the interviews were a component. The second sampling method was convenience sampling: participants were selected from the pool of teachers working in the schools because they agreed to participate and gave permission for the use of data for research and dissemination.

The interviews with teachers were designed by the Horizon2020 Child-UP consortium to serve the aims of the project. Thus, most items in the interviews were concerned with the integration of CMB in education. Trust was not envisaged as a theme of the interviews. However, an ethical and methodological imperative of avoiding the substitution of the researcher's interests for the accounts held by the participants invited the authors of this article to acknowledge the importance of the narrative emerging from data, where the positioning of CMB can be determined by the type of trust that underpins teacher-children relationships. Supported by excerpts from teachers' narratives, the article discusses how different types of trust influence the positioning of CMB in the classroom.

It is an important methodological point to discuss how this article understands narratives, as social constructions through which the narrators interpret and present their experiences in form of stories (Gergen, 1997). Narratives express knowledge as well as constituting the context for the production of knowledge (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2011; Amadasi and Iervese, 2018), including the construction of personal and professional identities (Gergen, 1997).

The interest in narratives is not new in the social sciences; there is a long history of ethnographic studies that include the analysis of personal accounts. However, ethnography takes the events described in the stories as the object of investigation; stories are media that channel transmission of knowledge. Distancing itself from the ethnographic use of narratives, this article considers narratives as a resource to constitute reality in communication processes (Somers, 1994); in particular, the article approaches narratives as a social construction utilised by teachers to make sense of their relationships with CMB by *storying* them (Linde, 1993)

Stories do not reflect the world out there; rather, they are constructed, rhetorical, and interpretive (Riessman, 1993). Linde's concept of life stories as cultural products and Riessman's interactive rhetoric inform the approach to teachers' narratives of this article, where the positioning of CBM in the classrooms is captured *in the making* (Rosenwald and Ochberg, 1992).

As a component of Child-UP, research with teachers in London Primary Schools were underpinned by a robust ethical framework that can be described as doing research *with* participants, rather than research *on* participants. The research was approved by the University of Northampton Ethics Committee. All personal references to participants were anonymized. Transcripts from the interviews are used as sources of data.

However, ethical considerations reach beyond participants' informed consent and management of data; researchers need to reflect on the multiple ways in which their own positioning influences the research process (Khawaja and Lerche Mørck, 2009).

Davis and Harré describe positioning as the *discursive practice whereby people are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines* (Davies & Harré, 1999: 37). In real-life research, both researchers and participants cannot suddenly stop being human in the name of objectivity. Research is a social act, with unavoidable limits to objectivity attached (Meighan and Siraj-Blatchford 1997) because meanings of data are constituted both in relation to and within the interview environment (Ritchie and Rigano, 2010).

The researchers and authors of the article are sociologists interested in the intersection between intergenerational relationships and migration processes in educational settings. This interest was the lens through which data was interpreted. Participants were teachers with a professional duty to enable all children to fully participate in the learning and teaching experience as designed by current curricula, a position that may affect how they *storied* their relationships with CMB.

### 3. Trust in education

Whilst the *socialisation of the child* only requires the possibility for the child to read the behaviour of others as selected information concerning, for instance, potential dangers or social expectations (Vanderstraeten, 2000), the *education of the pupil* aims to generate standardised learning patterns of specialisation that cannot be left to chance socializing events because they presuppose the coordination of a plurality of efforts (Baraldi and Corsi, 2017). However, education cannot be conceived as the rational form of specialised socialisation, because it cannot eliminate the possibility of learners' rejection of educational communication, both with regard to its meanings and with regard to the positioning of individuals that underpins communication (Luhmann, 1982). The addressee of educational communication can reject not only the contents but also the role of someone who needs to be educated. Research suggests that even at very young age children actively participate to educational communication, selecting whether to accept it or not (Bjork-Willen, 2008). The instability of education makes learners' trust in teachers, and in teaching, imperative: without learners' trusting commitment, education could not exist.

What are the characteristics of trust in education? Trust can guarantee basic pre-suppositions of action and relationships in education when it is based on expertise (Luhmann, 1988). This is the case for classic pedagogy (Vanderstraeten and Biesta, 2006; Britzman, 2007) and for the recent revival of teacher-centred pedagogy (Kitchen 2014): children's commitment to education depends on their trust in teachers' expert guidance, counselling and teaching. Children engage with teaching, assessment or any other social situation in the classroom based on trust in the expertise of teachers (Hawley, 2014). Trust in teachers' *expertise* is a case of *system trust*, where trusting commitments are referred to social roles (Luhmann; 1991). Trust in the role of the teacher transcends trust in the person of the specific teacher (Faulkner, 2015) and it is the need for participation in education (Giddens, 1991).

Whilst children's trust in education has been the object of research (Baraldi and Farini, 2012; Farini, 2012, Farini, 2019), less attention has been devoted to other end of the trusting relationship: teachers' trust in children. Stimulated by teachers' narratives emerging from qualitative interviews for the project Child-UP, this article aims to tackle that gap by investigating teachers' trust in children and how different forms of teacher trust can contribute to the different positioning of CMB.

The analysis of teachers' narratives allows to recognise two forms of teacher trust in children, with important implications for the positioning of CMB: 1) *trust based on categorical inequalities*; 2) *personal trust*. Utilising Wehmeyer and colleagues' work (2017) to discuss the implication of different forms of trust for CMB positioning, it is suggested that trust based in categorical inequalities contributes to position CMB within a *children's needs paradigm* and personal trust positions CMB within a *children's interests paradigm*.

Wehmeyer and colleagues recognise that children's positioning in educational practices depends on the paradigm through which the child is conceptualised, whether a *children's needs* paradigm or a *children's interests* paradigm.

The children's needs paradigm positions adults as advocates who act on behalf of children, to provide them what adults consider to be needed for their development. Oppositely to the children's needs paradigm, the children's interests paradigm positions children as independent from adults, capable to theorise their interests and pursue them in practice as subjects whose action can make a difference in the contexts of their experiences (Wyness, 2014; Farini & Scollan, 2019a).

Whilst the children's needs paradigm reserves decision-making for adults, thus silencing children's voices, within the children's interests paradigm, self-determination is expected and promoted as a right of children who are positioned as agents who can make a difference in their social contexts with their choices.

The children's needs and the children's interests paradigms proposed by Wehmeyer and colleagues can be considered a development of the theory of *positioning*. The theory of positioning helps reflecting on how individuals use words and narratives to position themselves and others, because it is with words that individuals ascribe rights and claim them for themselves as well as placing duties on others (Davies and Harré, 1990). The theory of positioning encourages the consideration that not all participants in social situations have equal access to rights and duties to perform specific actions, in that specific moment and with those specific co-participants (Moghaddam and Harré, 2010). Harré defines a *position* as a cluster of short-term disputable rights, obligations and duties (Harré, 2012).

The theory of positioning can be applied to CMB's access to rights, agency and responsibilities in the classroom. Teachers' narratives in our data suggest that trust based on categorical inequalities and personal trust are elements of, and contribute to, the children's needs paradigm and the children's interests paradigm respectively, thus constructing diverging positions of CMB.

Based on illustrative excerpts from teachers' narratives, the next section of the article discusses the concept of trust based on categorical inequalities and the concept of personal trust, focusing on their implications for the positioning of CMB.

The first part of the next section concerns trust based on categorical inequalities. Although cues for trust based on categorical inequalities are less common in teachers' narratives than cues for personal trust, the data suggests that trust based on categorical inequalities can be the underpinning of the positioning of CMB within the children's needs paradigm. Moreover, to the best of our knowledge, the concept of trust based on categorical inequalities itself represents an innovative contribution of this article.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 Trust based on categorical inequalities

Similarly to trust in expertise discussed in section 3, trust based on categorical inequalities is a condition for, and a consequence of, the organisational dimension of education. It is a type of trust that develop from categorisations that create inequalities.

Tilly (1998) suggests that inequalities based on categorisations, or categorical inequalities, may be the material foundation for differentiated allocations of trust or, in other words, categorical inequalities may be the material foundation for choice whether to allocate trust or distrust in specific partners in communication.

Tilly's suggestion can be applied to educational organisations, for instance schools, where inequality among academic performances and adherence to behavioural rules, if repeated over time, support the development of differentiated expectations. Differentiated expectations, as Tilly puts it, necessarily lead to durable categorical inequalities. In schools, recurring episodes of evaluation are the material foundation for the categorisation of learners, based on proximity to expected levels of academic development. Learners are categorised according to their performances, and such categorical distinctions make inequality a stable feature of the school.

Relevantly to the argument presented in this article, categorical distinctions are stabilised inequalities that support differentiated allocations of teachers' trusting commitments in children.

Categorisation is the foundation of trust based on categorical inequalities and inequality among children represents its outcome. Whilst some children are categorised as trustworthy partners of teachers in their educational journey, other children are categorised as untrustworthy and denied agentic status. Some children are trusted, are considered a resource for education and can make decisions that are consequential in their educational journey, other children are distrusted, are considered a risk for education and observed as objects of teachers' control. Depending on the categorisation of each learner, trust based on categorical inequalities can support inclusion or marginalisation; in the latter case, categorical inequalities create a paradoxical form of *trust in distrust*. Differentiated access of children to agentic status in the contexts of education depends on differentiated allocation of trust and contributes to the positioning of children within the paradigm of children's interest (trust) or within the paradigm of children's needs (lack of trust).

The examination of teachers' narratives suggests that trust in distrust based on categorical inequalities may contribute to the positioning of CMB within the children's needs paradigm, with negative implication for their agentic status. Positioned in the children's needs paradigm, CBM are not trusted as decision-makers and teachers act for them and on their behalf, replacing children's agency with control, as exemplified by the two excerpts below:

The question is to have a clear picture of what each child needs. It is important to understand what realistic expectations are at one moment in time and move from there. If a child comes with needs in terms of language for instance, we have got to have plans that are right for that profile, to make the right decisions for the child who can be a bit displaced if we do not understand what he needs

(Teacher, 29 y.o., primary school year 6)

I have, we have got some experience and it is not easy but not hard to see what a child needs maybe at the beginning of a new journey, coming from a completely different situation of learning and sometimes from a series of different situations if the family is more, more mobile. If it has been a long-complicated journey for the child. I feel that we are the child's advocates and his voice really, also with the family, to explain what the child are needs the work that needs to be done which not all parents have the knowledge of education in here to grasp

(Teacher, 47 y.o., primary school year 4)

The differentiated allocation of trusting commitments based on categorisations supports teachers in the choice whether to give or withdraw trust, as illustrated by the excerpt below. The excerpt invites reflection on the consequences of categorical inequalities for the positioning of CMB

It is obviously wrong to expect the same from all children; there are different levels of personal and emotional development, different stages, and there are variables that change that, for instance for children who have just joined from overseas from very different systems in particular: it would be wrong to expect from them the same that we expect from more established profiles. And it is OK really, you know when to give more space or less, what kind of stimulation for each child. Observations are key to support decision about each child, who can do more and who needs more of us at the moment, for a whole array of reasons, surely a typical case is a different background.

(Teacher, 31 y.o., primary school year 5)

The positioning of CMB in the children's needs paradigm contributes to the stability of the educational organisation because it allows the development of expectations that facilitate pedagogical routines. In the mainstream narratives of education, knowledge is constructed and delivered by adults, and children must 'learn' it (James and James 2004; James et al. 1998; Woodhead 1997; Wyness 1999). Pedagogical routines are based on this differentiation between social roles, where children are not trusted as authors of valid knowledge as they are recognised low *epistemic authority* (Heritage and Raymond, 2005). A position of low epistemic authority is emphasised with regard to CMB who are socialised in families where they learn a language and familiarise themselves with cultural orientations that are different from those that prevail in the classroom (Burger 2013; Harris and Kaur 2012; Karoly and Gonzales 2011). CMB may encounter problems of participation in interactions with adults and

peers due to their difficulties in speaking the host country's language and understanding its culture (Herrlitz and Maier 2005).

The classroom can be the first environment in which CMB can actively participate in the host society, speaking the host language. However, their low epistemic authority and the lack of trust in their contributions can favour the positioning of CMB as objects for teaching practices *on* rather than *with*, them. The authority of teachers and the legitimacy of the exercise of control over children increases and children's epistemic authority decreases: the authority of teachers is therefore higher and demands of control are more stringent with regard to CMB.

Low epistemic authority is a component of a children's needs paradigm specific to intercultural and interlinguistic pedagogy concerned with the integration of CMB, and chiefly concerned with intensive learning, above all second language learning (Baraldi, 2014). Positioning CMB in the children's needs paradigm risks reproducing positions of marginalisation, transforming categorisation in the ingredient of self-fulfilling prophecies of educational problems. This can be traced back in teachers' narratives, as suggested by the excerpts below:

the experience we have, we have things in place that go off in a when a situation if need is evident; it could be when a child arrives in a year and because of experience we can kind of expect the needs and what to do. It's of course on a case-by-case basis but experiences, many years of practice which is in a way the school's memory support each teacher in making the right decision to support needs that can be expected

(Teacher, 47 y.o., primary school year 4)

There are systems in place, all systems go as they say; I remember a child from Albania into year 3 which they usually have some English but that was not the case and this is clearly a situation when the expectations needs to adjust to meet the needs that we know will show up at some point; and the language needs are of course more obvious but there are needs that are hidden, so to speak, but still they regularly pop up at some point so there are those system that allow for extra case and maybe more consideration for the children who have diverse experiences as they get into the classroom

(Teacher, 27 y.o., primary school year 5)

What a child can do it is not age but there are many variables, and as a teacher it is imperative to know that extra freedom, who can be given that and who would be a risk because he has shown over the year not to be ready, or maybe not to be so confident in the interaction with other, this is the case of children who join at some point of the year from different contexts who cannot hit the ground running and it may not do them any favour to give them that space that others have at the moment

(Teacher, 31 y.o., primary school year 5)

Trust based on categorical inequalities is intertwined with trust based on expertise: teachers' expertise legitimises selection, and selection is the material reference

for categorical inequalities. Trust based on categorical inequalities and trust based on expertise are coupled: the effects of one are presuppositions of the other. The excerpt from a teacher's narrative below suggests that the positioning of CMB may be defined by the intersection between trust based on expertise and trust based on categorical inequalities.

As I have said it is the experience and the pedagogical knowledge that support the teacher who is a well-prepared professional to see up to where that individual child can go, what is the profile that fits better at the moment, where the child stands and what are the situation where the child can be given more space without this being detrimental for the child

(Teacher, 37 y.o., primary school year 6)

## 4.2 Personal trust

Trust in expertise is the foundation of the relationship between social roles in education, the *pupil* and the *teacher*; however, trust in expertise has been questioned for failing to value the competences and autonomy of the *child* (Shapiro, 2002; Kelman, 2005).

For instance, it must be recognized that CMB may have excellent reading, writing, and speaking skills in their heritage languages that do not match those required in the classrooms. This lack of match does not imply that these students are in any way in deficit. What it does mean is that they present a special challenge for teachers (Garcia, 1994). However, what it *does* in educational practices when coupled with trust in teachers' expertise that legitimises evaluation is to favour categorical inequalities, marginalisation and trust in distrust.

Relevant for this article, critical pedagogy and sociological childhood studies converge in questioning the effectiveness of teachers' expertise in promoting children's trusting commitment. Children's opportunities of participation in educational settings may be limited by hierarchical relationship that underpin selection and expectations of standardised role performances (Wyness, 1999; Farini, 2011). The connection between educational selection and standardised role performances can create conditions of marginalisation, as Karoly and Gonzales (2011) have observed with regard to CMB already in the early stages of education. Section 4.1 has discussed how CMB's access to the agentic status of active participants in their own education can be affected by categorically-based withdrawing of trust that represent the foundation, as well as the consequence, of categorical inequalities.

Both trusts based on expertise and trust based on categorical inequalities leave the floor to problems of distrust. However, they represent two possible types of trust underpinning relationships in education contexts, where trust can be based also on *interpersonal affective relationships* that mobilise trust through a process of mutual disclosure. This third type of trust can be defined, following Giddens, *personal trust*, where trusting commitments do not depend on the evaluation of role performances

but on affectivity in the context of what Giddens calls a *pure relationship* (Giddens, 1991), that is, a relationship structured by expectations of personal expressions rather than evaluation of role performances.

As anticipated in section 3, personal trust emerges more frequently than trust based on categorical inequalities from teachers' narratives, where it contributes to children's positioning in the children's interests paradigm, conceptualised through expectations of self-determination and choice, as agents who can make a difference in the educational contexts. A clear illustration of the consequences of the children's interests paradigm and its connection with personal trust for the positioning of CMB and is offered by the excerpt below:

The unique child, this is key to education; it means that each and every child brings skills and knowledge and talents into the classroom that maybe he does not express verbally as other and maybe they are skills that go beyond the curriculum or better that they hit the curricular areas from side-ways. I had that child who was not academic at all but so resourceful and a true leader outdoor. But in order to actually see those talents it is necessary to trust the child to make decisions to have a voice and power. Not the other way around because if one waits for the child to keep up with the subjects and because of that to give the child some space that skills I was talking about are not seen. This is so true for children who come from abroad, they are two different children in the classroom and outdoor, if we could only see it more often, if we could only get to know each and every child apart from subjects

(Teacher, 27 y.o., primary school year 5)

The paradigm of children's interests is compatible with pedagogies that promote children's *agency* by supporting children's self-expression, taking their views into account, sharing power and responsibility for decision-making with them (Matthews, 2003).

Agency in education is observed when children's choices are not determined by adults' choices (James et al., 1998; James, 2009; James and James, 2008; Baraldi, 2014); agency is visible in social interactions when children's choices are autonomous, based on self-determination (Bae, 2012; Baraldi, 2014; Baraldi and Iervese, 2014; Bjerke 2011) and consequential, because they make a difference for all participants in the educational context (Holdsworth, 2005; Markstrom and Hallden, 2009; Moss, 2009).

The concept of agency recognises that children's self-determination and consequentiality of their choices interact with their social context (Bjerke, 2011; James, 2009; James and James, 2008; Moosa-Mitha, 2005; Valentine, 2011; Wyness, 2014). As a social context, education is a dense cultural space that includes the construction of the meaning of childhood (Alanen, 2001, 2009) and the construction of forms of intergenerational order (Qvortup, 1990). This contextual conceptualisation of agency supports the discussion presented in section 3 concerning the positioning of CMB within the paradigm of children's needs or children's interest and its implications for their participation in education.

Mainstream educational practices are centred around standardised role performances that represent a reference for evaluation. Evaluation is legitimised by teachers' expertise and becomes the material foundation of differentiated allocation of trust based on the categorical inequalities (Parsons and Bales, 1965; Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975; Mehan, 1979; Vanderstraeten, 2004; Farini, 2011; Walsh, 2011).

However, sociological research in the last three decades has been discussing a shift in pedagogical practices towards the positioning of children as agents who have a voice in their own education, a positioning based on personal trust (Holland and O'Neill, 2006; Baraldi, 2015; Harris and Kaur, 2012; Farini and Scollan, 2019b). This shift in the positioning of children, with regard to the positioning of CMB, is illustrated by the excerpts from teachers' narratives presented below. In particular, the excerpts suggest that personal trust can be a presupposition of CMB's access to an agentic status in the classroom.

Scratch the surface, I see it like that, or dusting an old window to see through. I have never been disappointed every time I got to know a child; and I would say this is true about the children who are usually trusted the least, for example, children who are seen to be in some sort of deficit place, for instance children from migrant situation with little English sometimes, initially I men. What disappoints can be the academic progression, but this is about standards not about the true child. Yes, I trust each and every child in its uniqueness as much as I know that each child deserves to be trusted and have their voices heard. Without trust no voice is heard

(Teacher, 33 y.o., primary school year 3)

It is true in my experience that there is no child who is not ready to express his or her opinions and who does not deserve attention for the ideas and dreams and creativity. This cannot be conditional on academic achievement, because this would create differences with some children to be trusted more when trust is actually about their freedom and determination in their own life, a very basic right, I would suggest. And then, one can see that very often those children who are trusted the less are profiled, they are from specific backgrounds or situations like recent immigration where until they prove to be at that level academically the ayre kept in a sort of bubble, or half-bubble. Surely, they must be ready to know and think about their own lives!

(Teacher, 30 y.o., primary school year 4)

Personal trust and agency are intertwined with the promotion of the voices of children in classroom interactions: child-centred pedagogical approaches invite adults to embrace the risk of engaging in interpersonal affective relationships with children, listening to their personal expressions and supporting them empathically (Rogers, 1951; Gordon, 1974).

Valuing the voices of children is cornerstone of a discourse of children's interests, where children are positioned as capable to voice ideas and capable of planning social action that can bring about consequential changes in the contexts of their experiences (Colombo, 2012). Promoting expectations of personal expression is condition for the

development of affective relationships where the *child*, that, is the unique person, becomes the reference for communication replacing the standardised role, the *pupil*. This can change the positioning of CMB, because if expectations of personal expressions replace expectations of role performances, the material foundations of categorical inequalities are removed. Valuing the voices of children as personal expression, rather than using the voices of children as a reference for evaluation can influence the positioning of CMB (Friesen, 2012), as exemplified by the following excerpts:

Listening to children is the basic pedagogical act, I should say. But it must be true listening, not listening through the filter of the portfolio of the child's schoolwork or even more awkwardly through the report from the previous year's teacher. This is not listening because there are expectations from the past that condition it. True listening is about the child who lives the moment with you to appreciate what he has got to say not what he cannot say. This changes the perspective, and it is so inclusive because what a child can give and wants to give is shared. This is so fantastic when it happens with children who'd be generally seen not listened properly because they would be seen through the lenses of their academic issues such as children who come from completely different experiences. But the child stands whatever the experiences

(Teacher, 41 y.o., primary school year 3)

If we are concerned with measuring how a child speaks, we missed out the point because we think about what the curriculum wants them to say and how, but the truth is that we should listen for real so how children use the language that they have to do things with others. The many languages and ways of expression and this is how we discover just with real listening how children with little English maybe, how they do engage actively even before developing the language

(Teacher, 27 y.o., primary school year 4)

It is argued that the transformation of the cultural presuppositions of education towards the recognition of children's agentic role is important for the construction of children's citizenship in the education system (Percy-Smith, 2010) characterised by the recognition of their self-determination and support of the consequentiality of their choices (Besozzi, 2014). This is true from the earliest stages of education (Kjørholt and Qvortrup, 2012; Lansdown, 2004, 2005).

Personal trust positions children as agents in education, with important consequences for the reproduction of the education system itself. As suggested by the excerpt below, personal trust can support children's active citizenship in education (Lawy and Biesta, 2006; Pascal and Bertram, 2009), avoiding the risk of marginalisation entailed in trust based on categorical inequalities. This is particularly important for CMB, who are often positioned in the children's needs paradigm as a consequence of categorically-based withdrawing of trust (Seele, 2012). Personal trust, independent from adults' assessment of role performances, can emerge as the foundation of *all* children's active participation in their own education.

It is up to us as professional to make sure that we do not discard the child in his unique talents because we are not tuned in to him. So many times, I could have thought “you know, this is just arrived, or this is are the issue because of that background, let’s stay in the case and make sure he catches up with the rest”; however, this would have hidden the true child in the here and know behind deficit or better expectations of deficit. Which is fine however it being not fine because catching up means putting some sort of measures that in a way put the child in a peculiar position in the group, he is seen as the one who struggles. So, what I do think is to start from involvement fully in the life of the classroom, making sure everyone is heard by everyone and seen as equal; from there and not vice-versa, catching up academically will come

(Teacher, 28 y.o., primary school year 5)

## 5. Conclusion: the *pupil* and the *child*

In the previous section, the discussion argued that trust based on categorical inequalities and personal trust are embedded in two alternative paradigms: children’s needs and children’s interests. Based on the analysis of teachers’ narratives, it is possible to recognise that the children’s needs paradigm and the children’s interests paradigm position CMB differently vis-à-vis their possibility of agentic participation in education.

Whilst permeated by the commitment to protect and support CMB, the children’s needs paradigm may contribute to marginalising CMB, excluding them from agentic participation in the classroom, where they are distrusted based on their categorisation as members of a *deficit-group*. On the contrary, the children’s interests paradigm is based on personal trust, that is, a type of trust that is not conditional on academic performances or status and positions CMB as agents in their own education. Ultimately, the discussion points to a challenge for inclusive education: the challenge is to establish the conditions for mutual trust, that is, mutual humanization and mutual reassurance, based on acknowledgment of interests of all participants.

The UK promotes the concept of appreciating cultural diversity, although it falls short in developing functional intercultural programs. The ability of classroom teachers to recognize and appreciate the value of each child’s contribution depends on the ability to adjust classroom conditions to treat fairly those contributions. The final part of the conclusion is therefore dedicated to outline a possible way for pedagogical practices to tackle the challenge of promoting a form of inclusive trust centred on the unique child rather than a conditional and exclusive trust centred on the academically performing pupil. Using Buber’s powerful language (Buber, 2004), the challenge for education consists in the transformation of educational relationships from and ‘*I to It*’ model, where the ‘other’ is the project of our expectations and planning (the *It*, the pupil), to an ‘*I to Thou*’, model, based on the acknowledge of the incommensurable alterity of the ‘other’ (the *Thou*, the child).

Children's agency in the education system has been the object of sociological research interested in evaluating if, and how, mutual trust can be created *through*, rather than *despite*, teaching. Since the 1990s, research on practices of dialogic teaching has demonstrated how dialogic teaching can create conditions of negotiation and communication in the classroom, based on the acknowledgment that all children can be active participants in constructing meanings and social practices, influencing the cultural and social situations in which they are involved (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; Baraldi and Iervese, 2012; Baraldi and Iervese, 2017; Farini, 2019; Farini and Scollan, 2019a).

Dialogic teaching considers the value of children's educational experience as a consequence of the extent to which teaching enables children to appreciate the purpose of the activities they do, and how these activities fit together into a meaningful sequence of events (Mercer and Littleton, 2007). In dialogic teaching, both adults and children make substantial and significant contributions, because children are supported in participating actively as agents of their own education (Mercer and Littleton, 2007).

Facilitative dialogic teaching is a specific form of dialogic teaching based on methodologies of facilitation, where adults position themselves not as a superior epistemic authority but as organisers of mutual learning (Holdsworth, 2005). The practice of facilitation emphasizes the production of different perspectives and an expectation in communication of divergent interpretations, different stories and experiences, unpredicted emotions (Baraldi and Iervese, 2012).

Based on facilitation, facilitative dialogic teaching aims to create the opportunity to negotiate and share individual contributions in educational interactions, valuing the positive involvement of all participants, independently from expectations of standardised (and adult-evaluated) role performances. A recent action-research at the intersection of facilitative dialogic teaching and intercultural education, supported by the European Commission (Erasmus+ 2015–2018 Project *Shared Memories and Dialogue*, [www.sharmed.eu](http://www.sharmed.eu)) has demonstrated the possibility for facilitation to successfully create conditions for personal trust that can support CMB agency (Baraldi et al., 2018). Research suggests that in classroom interactions, facilitation makes it possible to coordinate and manage children's active participation whilst assuring the achievement of curricular learning-outcomes (Baraldi et al., 2018). Facilitative dialogic teaching provokes education, if an inclusive form of trust is to be created toward integration based on agency of *all* children, to substitute the *pupil* with the *child* as the internal reference of the education system.

## References

- Alanen, L. (2001), *Conceptualizing Child-Adult Relations*, London: Routledge.  
Alanen, L. (2009), Generational order, in: J. Qvortrup, W. Corsaro M.S. Honig (Eds.) *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp. 159–174.

- Amadasi, S. and Iervese, V. (2018), The Right to Be Transnational: Narratives and Positionings of Children with a Migration Background in Italy, in: C. Baraldi T. Cockburn (eds.), *Theorizing Childhood*. London: Sage, pp. 239–262.
- Bae, B. (2012), Children and teachers as partners in communication: Focus on spacious and narrow interactional patterns, *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 44(1), pp. 53–69.
- Bamberg, M. and Georgakopoulou, A. (2008), Small Stories as a New Perspective in Narrative and Identity Analysis, *Text & Talk*, 28, pp. 377–396
- Baraldi, C. (2014), Children’s participation in communication systems: A theoretical perspective to shape research, *Soul of Society: A Focus on the Lives of Children and Youth*, 18(18), pp. 63–92.
- Baraldi, C. (2015), Promotion of migrant children’s epistemic status and authority in early school life, *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 47(1), pp. 5–25.
- Baraldi, C., Ballestri, C., Conti, L., Farini, F., Iervese, V. A. Scollan (2018), *SHARMED, Shared Memories and Dialogue. Final Research Report*. Retrieved August 19, 2019, from <https://www.sharmed.eu/uk-international/publications/>.
- Baraldi, C., Corsi, G. (2017), *Niklas Luhmann. Education as a Social System*, London: Springer.
- Baraldi, C., Farini, F. (2013) Trust and Facilitation. in: Warming, H. (Ed.) *Participation, Citizenship and Trust in Children’s Lives*, London: Palgrave Macmillian, pp. 132–153.
- Baraldi, C., V. (Eds.), (2012), *Participation, facilitation, and mediation. Children and Iervese young people in their social contexts*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Baraldi, C., Iervese, V. (2014), Observing children’s capabilities as agency, in: D. Stoecklin, J.M. Bonvin (Eds.), *Children’s rights and the capability approach. Challenges and prospects*, Dordrecht: Springer, pp. 43–65.
- Baraldi, C., Iervese, V. (2017), Narratives of memories and dialogue in multicultural classrooms: new challenges. *Narrative Inquiry*, 27(2), pp. 398–417.
- Besozzi, E. (2014), Citizenship/Citizenships: old and new issues for education policies. *Italian Journal of Sociology of Education* 6(1), pp. 184–218
- Bjerke, H. (2011), It’s the way to do it. Expressions of agency in child-adult relations at home and school, *Children, Society*, 25(2), pp. 93–103.
- Bjork-Willen, P. (2008), Routine trouble: How preschool children participate in multilingual instruction, *Applied Linguistics*, 29(4), pp. 555–577.
- Britzman, D.P. (2007), Teacher education as uneven development: Toward a psychology of uncertainty, *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 10(1), pp. 1–12.
- Buber, M. (2004), *I and Thou*. New York: Continuum.
- Colombo, M. (2012) From the side of the children. The challenge of childhood studies to sociology of education. *Italian Journal of Sociology of Education* 4 (3), pp. 138–144.
- Davies, B, Harré, R. (1990), Positioning: The discursive production of selves, *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 43–63.
- Davies, B.,, Harré, R. (1999), Positioning and personhood. In R. Harré, L. van Langenhove (eds.), *Positioning theory: Moral contexts of intentional action*, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 32–52.
- Farini, F. (2011), Cultures of education in action: Research on the relationship between interaction and cultural presuppositions regarding education in an international educational setting, *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43, pp. 2176–2186.
- Farini, F. (2019), The paradox of citizenship education in Early Years (and beyond), The case of Education to Fundamental British Values, *Journal of Early Childhood Research*

- Faulkner, P. (2015), The Attitude of Trust is Basic, *Analysis*, 75, pp. 424–429
- Farini, F., Scollan, A. (Eds.) (2019a), *Children's Self-determination in the Context of Early Childhood Education and Services: Discourses, Policies and Practices*, Amsterdam: Springer Nature.
- Farini, F., Scollan, A. (2019b), In, out and through digital worlds. Hybrid-transitions as a space for children's agency, *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 28 (1): 36.
- Friesen, J. W. (2013) Personal, Cultural, and Educational Implications of Language Loss/ Transformation: A Canadian Context. *Northwest Journal of Teacher Education*, 11 (2).
- Garcia, E. (1994), *Understanding and meeting the challenge of student cultural diversity*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Gergen, K.J. (1997), Who speaks and who replies in human science scholarship? *History of the Human Sciences*: 10, pp. 151–173.
- Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge Polity.
- Harré, R. (2012), Positioning theory: moral dimensions of social-cultural psychology, in: J. Valsiner (Ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Culture and Psychology*, pp. 191–206. New York: Oxford University.
- Hawley, K. (2014), Trust, Distrust and Commitment. *Noûs* 48: pp. 1–20.
- Harris, F., Kaur, B. (2012), Challenging the notions of partnership and collaboration in early childhood education: A critical perspective from a whānau class in New Zealand, *Global Studies of Childhood*, 2 (1), pp. 4–12.
- Heritage, J., and Raymond, G. 2005. "The terms of agreement: Indexing epistemic authority and subordination in talk-in-interaction, *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 68 (1), pp. 15–38.
- Holdsworth, R. (2005), Taking young people seriously means giving them serious things to do, in: J. Mason, T. Fattore (Eds.), *Children taken seriously. In theory, policy and practice*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Holland, S., O'Neill, S. (2006), We had to be there to make sure it was what we wanted. Enabling children's participation in family decision-making through the family group conference. *Childhood*, 13(1), pp. 91–111.
- James, A. (2009), Agency, in: J. Qvortrup, G. Valentine, W. Corsaro, M. S. Honig (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of childhood studies*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp. 34–45.
- James, A., James, A. (2008), *Key concepts in childhood studies*, London: Sage.
- James, A., Jenks, C., Prout, A. (1998), *Theorizing childhood*, London: Polity Press.
- Karoly, L. A., Gonzales, G. C. (2011), Early care and education for children in immigrant families, *The Future of Children*, 21(1), pp. 71–101.
- Kelman, H. (2005), Building trust among enemies: The central challenge for international conflict resolution. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29, pp. 639–650.
- Kitchen, W.H. (2014) *Authority and the teacher*, London: Bloomsbury.
- Kjørholt, A. T., Qvortrup, J. (Eds.), (2012), *The modern child and the flexible labour market. Early childhood education and care*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Khawaja I., Lerche Mørck, L. (2009), Researcher Positioning: Muslim "Otherness" and beyond, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 6 (1–2), pp. 28–45.
- Lansdown, G. (2004), Participation and young children. *Early Childhood Matters*, 103, pp. 4–14.
- Lansdown, G. (2005), Can you hear me? The right of young children to participate in decisions affecting them (Working Paper 36), The Hague: Bernard Van Leer Foundation.

- Lawy, R., Biesta, G. (2006), Citizenship-as-practice: The educational implications of an inclusive and relational understanding of citizenship, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 54(1), pp. 34–50.
- Linde, C. (2001), Narrative and social tacit knowledge, *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 5(2), pp. 160–170.
- Luhmann, N. (1982) *The Differentiation of Society*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Luhmann, N. (1988), Familiarity, confidence, trust: Problems and alternatives, in: D. Gambetta (Ed.), *Trust: Making and breaking cooperative relations*, Oxford: University of Oxford, pp. 94–107.
- Luhmann, N. (1991) *Risk: A Sociological Theory*, Berlin: de Gruyter
- Markstrom, A. M., Hallden, G. (2009), Children’s strategies for agency in preschool. *Children and Society*, 23, pp. 112–122.
- Matthews, H. (2003), Children and regeneration: Setting and agenda for community participation and integration. *Children, Society*, 17, pp. 264–276.
- Mehan, H. (1979), *Learning lessons*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Mercer, J. and Littleton, K. (2007), *Dialogue and development of children’s thinking*, London/ New York: Routledge.
- Meighan, R and Siraj-Blatchford, I. (1997) *A sociology of educating*, London: Continuum.
- Moghaddam, F., Harré, R. (2010), *Words of Conflict, Words of War: How the language we use in political processes sparks fighting*, Santa Barbara: Praeger.
- Moosa-Mitha, M. (2005), A difference-centred alternative to theorization of children’s citizenship rights. *Citizenship Studies*, 9, pp. 369–388.
- Moss, P. (2009), *There are alternatives! Markets and democratic experimentalism in early childhood education and care*, The Hague: Bernard Van Leer Foundation.
- Parsons, T., Bales, R. F. (1965), *Family, socialization and interaction process*, Glencoe: Free Press.
- Pascal, C., Bertram, T. (2009), Listening to young citizens: The struggle to make real a participatory paradigm in research with young children, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 17(2), pp. 249–262.
- Percy-Smith, B. (2010), Councils, consultation and community: Rethinking the spaces for children and young people’s participation, *Children’s Geographies*, 8(2), pp. 107–122.
- Qvortrup, J. (1990), *Childhood as a Social Phenomenon An Introduction to a Series of National Reports*, Vienna: Eurosocial Report, 36/1990.
- Riessman, C.K. (1993), *Narrative analysis*. Newbury Park: Sage
- Rogers, C. (1951), *Client-centred therapy: Its current practice, implications and theory*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin
- Rosenwald, G.C., and Ochberg, R.L. (eds.) (1992), *Storied Lives: The cultural politics of self-understanding*. New Haven: Yale University Press
- Seele, C. (2012), Ethnicity and early childhood. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 44(3), pp. 307–325.
- Shapiro, S. (2002), Toward a critical pedagogy of peace education. In G. Salomon, B. Nevo (Eds.), *Peace education: The concepts, principles, and practices around the world*, Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum, pp. 63–72.
- Sinclair, J., Coulthard, M. (1975), *Towards an analysis of discourse. The English used by teachers and pupils*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Somers, M. (1994), The narrative constitution of identity: A relational and network approach. *Theory and Society*, 23 (5), pp. 605–649
- Tilly, C. (1998), *Durable inequality*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Valentine, K. (2011), Accounting for agency, *Children, Society*, 25, pp. 347–358.
- Vanderstraeten, R. (2000), Autopoiesis and socialization: On Luhmann's reconceptualization of communication and socialization, *British Journal of Sociology*, 51(3), pp. 581–598.
- Vanderstraeten, R. (2004), The social differentiation of the educational system. *Sociology*, 38(2), pp. 255–272.
- Vanderstraeten, R., Biesta, G. (2006), How is education possible? Pragmatism, communication and the social organisation of education. *British Journal of Education Studies*, 54(2), pp. 160–174.
- Walsh, S. (2011), *Exploring classroom discourse: Language in action*, New York: Routledge.
- Wehmeyer, M. L., Shogren, K. A., Little, T. D., S.J. Lopez (2017), Introduction to the self-determination construct, in: M. L. Wehmeyer, K. A. Shogren, T. D. Little,, S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *Development of self-determination through the life-course*, Amsterdam: Springer, pp. 3–16.
- Wyness, M. (1999), Childhood, agency and education reform. *Childhood*, 6(3), pp. 353–368.
- Wyness, M. (2014), *Childhood*. London: Polity.