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# This is my truth, tell me yours. Positioning children as authors of knowledge through facilitation of narratives in dialogic interactions

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## ABSTRACT

The article discusses data from educational workshops in English and Italian classrooms, in the context of a research project funded by the European Union. The research promoted children's work on personal memories and the dialogical exchange in the classroom of narratives related to memories. Facilitation was utilised to foster children's contributions to interactions, empowering children's epistemic status as authors of valid knowledge to create favourable conditions for dialogue in the classroom. The article discusses a facilitative action that impacted on the promotion of children's narratives: facilitators' comments on narratives. Facilitators' comments take form as 1) personal stories; 2) displacements. Both types of comments proved particularly effective in supporting children's agency as authorship of narratives during workshops as a component of dialogic learning.

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## Introduction

This article discusses data from educational workshops in English and Italian classrooms with school children age 8–13. The workshop was organised to experiment the use of innovative pedagogical practices, within a research project funded by [funding statement here], coordinated by an Italian university with a British university and a German university. In particular, the innovative practices experimented in the workshops aimed to facilitate children's work on personal memories and the dialogical exchange of narratives related to those memories in the classrooms.

The design of the classroom workshops was articulated in two interrelated project activities, connected to the aim of the research. First, the project supported the children's collection and production of visual materials related to their personal and cultural memories. Second, the project supported the facilitation of dialogical exchange of narratives about these visual materials in the classroom, promoting expectations of equality, empathy and personal expression. Facilitation of dialogue in the classroom was led by professional educators trained in the practice of dialogic pedagogy. Visual materials, in particular photographs, were approached by the project as a pivot for the

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production, and exchange of children's personal and cultural memories. The research investigated how facilitation can foster children's contributions to interactions and enhance empowerment and recognition of these contributions, supporting 1) children's agentic participation to learning; 2) dialogue as the form of communication structuring children and adults' participation to learning. The research consisted in an evaluation of the use of facilitative methodology for pedagogical innovation and its impact on children's agentic production of narratives. The evaluative research produced large corpora of data, including videorecording of workshops that offered a wide array of interactions to an analytical interest on facilitation as a methodology for the dialogical exchange of narratives.

This article discusses a specific facilitative action among those observed in the workshops through the research: facilitators' comments on narratives. Facilitators' comments on children's narrative proved effective in promoting children's narratives. The analysis of data produced invites to categorise facilitators' comments as 1) facilitators' *personal stories* and 2) facilitators' *displacing comments*.

In this article, according to recent literature (Baraldi *et al.* 2021), *personal stories* describe stories based on facilitators' past experiences and linked to children's previous narratives. *Displacing comments* refer to surprising and humorous comments addressed to children's narratives. The discussion of the data in this article concerns examples of how facilitators' personal stories and displacing comments promoted children's agentic participation as authors, co-authors and commentators of narratives. In the following section of the article, section 2, the concepts of *narratives* and *facilitation* are presented to frame our analysis theoretically. Section 3 illustrates the methodology of the research and related ethical considerations. Sections 4 and 5 present illustrative examples of the results of our analysis of video-recorded interactions. The final section of the article concerns the discussion of the results and concludes on the potential impact of facilitation for the enhancement of dialogical educational practices.

## Theoretical framework

The research was interested in the facilitation of children's narratives because authorship of narrative was understood as an example of agentic participation. During the workshops, narratives constructed by children could concern the contents of the photographs collected or produced by children, the circumstances in which the photographs were taken but also the personal cultural trajectories (Holliday and Amadasi 2020) that the photographs represented and evoked, including affective and relational aspects of these trajectories.

In this section, the meaning of facilitation, agency and narratives that framed the design of the research and the evaluation of workshops is discussed. Facilitation was utilised as the methodology (e.g. Hendry 2009, Wyness 2013, Baraldi 2014, Baraldi and Iervese 2017) to create favourable conditions for children's access to the role of authors of narratives in classroom interactions, which was considered a form of children's *agency*. Previous research has demonstrated that facilitation can upgrade children's agentic status by giving positive value to children's contributions, treating children as persons who can express their own perspectives, experiences and emotions (Maine and Čermáková 2021) and making relevant expectations of children's personal expression (Baraldi 2014). In

empirical interactions, facilitation takes form as sequences of 1) adults' actions that *enhance* children's production of knowledge and choices and, 2) children's actions that *display* their production of knowledge and choices. As the production and display of choices that make a difference in the interaction connote conditions of agency, facilitation is a form of communication that constitutes a favourable context for children's agency.

Agency is a key concept in childhood studies (Baraldi and Cockburn 2018, James 2009, James and James 2008; Leonard, 2016, Oswell 2013). A situation of agency is a situation where actions in communication show choices that are consequential because they can open different courses of action (Harré and Van Langenhove 1999, Baraldi 2014), making a difference for all participants in the context. A situation of children's agency is a context of social interaction where children's choices are supported, appreciated and expected (see Baraldi 2012, 2014, Graham and Fitzgerald 2010, Matthews 2003, Shier 2001, Wyness 2013; Yuchen Shi *et al.* 2021). The research was based on the idea that in educational interactions, agency can concern children's access to rights and responsibilities for constructing knowledge. Rights and responsibilities for constructing knowledge are conceptualised by Heritage and Raymond (2005) as *epistemic authority*.

Key to the theoretical framework of the research and this article, a concept of epistemic authority as *rights and responsibilities* for constructing intersects Alexander's definition of the aim of enacting dialogic teaching. When clarifying the aim of dialogic practices in education, Alexander suggests that genuine dialogic teaching approaches learning is a joint activity between teacher and student and among students, flourishing with the gradual development of students' *sense of responsibility* for what and how they learn (Alexander, 2020). Epistemic authority can underpin the access to the status of authors of narratives that are accepted in the interaction as valid knowledge that makes a difference for all participants. Positioning children as authors of valid knowledge is underpinned by an orientation towards communities and relationships that prioritises interpretive authority and enacts an *ethic of relating* (Aukerman and Boyd 2020) and therefore is key to the enactment of genuine dialogical practices.

The workshops led by facilitators aimed to promote children's authorship of narratives based on children's choices: for this reason, the practice of facilitation could be evaluated considering its success in promoting children's agency, creating a social context where children may feel freer to speak up and share their thoughts. A social context where, at least in the local dimension of the workshops were designed to be local contexts where extended talk was promoted, to generate conditions of agency as authorship of knowledge (Aukerman and Boyd 2020)

Authorship of *narratives* is a context of children's agency. Narratives can be conceived as social constructions through which individuals interpreted and 'story' their experiences. Fisher (1987) offers a sociological conceptualisation of the function of narratives: communication is characterised by exchanges of narratives that are situationally, historically and culturally grounded, contributing to the interactive negotiation of expectations and identities.

Identities are interactively contextualised, and their local construction can be facilitated by participants' actions as narrators and listeners (Goleman 1995; Dunn; Dunn 2005, Corrie 2009, Sharp 2014). Narratives are produced in all communication processes, and communication processes can be seen as the expansion and exchange of narratives.

With regard to the objects of narrative negotiation of meaning, Somers (1994) differentiates between ontological narratives (concerning the self), public narratives, conceptual narratives (including scientific concepts) and metanarratives (of 'the epic dramas of our time', p. 619). Narratives can be produced in face-to-face interactions (Norrick 2007). This article is provoked by Norrick's idea that the interactional construction of narratives is shaped by the continuing management of the *rights* to access the status of authors of knowledge.

Founded on the theoretical construct of the intersection between production of narrative and management of authorship rights at the level of interactions, this article discusses how facilitation as an interactional practice intersects the management of the rights to access the role of authors of narratives and its implication for children's agency, which is considered an essential aspect of dialogic pedagogy. In particular, the results of the evaluation of facilitated workshops invite us to focus on how facilitation promotes the conditions for all participants to contribute to narratives as teller, co-teller or elicitor of new narratives. The interactive production of narratives entails the possibility for any narratives to be reacted by co-interactants with comments that can be considered as response narratives. The production of comments thus entails the possible production of interlaced stories and, if approached from the angle of facilitators' participation in the workshops, facilitators' comments on children's narratives can be considered a facilitative action within a theoretical framework where knowledge is not only transmitted but also negotiated and re-created (Alexander, 2020).

Comments are understood in the analysis presented here as actions that follow and develop children's narratives. The results of the research suggest that facilitators' comments that followed up and developed children's narratives supported children's epistemic rights as authors of valid knowledge, thus valuing their voices and insights. Based on the analysis of facilitative interactions, it is possible to categorise in the corpora of data two types of facilitators' comments: 1) *personal stories*; 2) *displacing comments*. Both types of facilitators' comments created favourable conditions for children's agency by displaying support, attention and openness to children's narratives and expectations of children's personal expression.

*Personal stories* consist in ontological narratives that display facilitators' closeness to children and their interest in children's narratives. According to Bamberg, the production of ontological narratives constructs the meaning of the identity of the narrating persons (Bamberg 2011). In the context of the workshops, through personal stories facilitators produced instances of *self-history* (Nelson 2003), positioning themselves as equal and committed participants and displaying trust in children (Hoerl 2007, Norrick 2012). Personal stories display that facilitators are willing to exchange the role of teller and listener with children. Children are therefore invited to position facilitators as equal participants in the interaction.

The second type of facilitators' comments is *displacements*. Displacements enrich narratives with actions aimed at surprising and entertaining children. The use of displacements as a facilitative action is based on facilitators' choice to work with humour and unpredictability. Displacements are semantic forms of narratives, where the unexpected is inserted into the assumed shared knowledge of the world underpinning the interaction. By producing displacements, facilitators act as *tricksters* (LeBaron 2003) who reframe children's narratives through humoristic, creative and dissonant narrative shifts.

In our corpora of data, displacements create a positive relationship between facilitators and children as well as expectations of unpredictability. Unpredictability is particularly important: by opening the interaction to unpredictability, displacements create favourable conditions for agency because they support expectations of autonomous choices and personal expressions.

## Data and method

The corpora of data analysed in the research consist in the transcriptions of 90 video-recorded workshops, for a total of nearly 180 hours of facilitated interactions in the three participating countries. Nevertheless, this article will discuss examples taken from the Italian and the English datasets because personal stories and displacements were infrequent in the German settings that are characterised by different facilitative actions.

The workshops were designed to promote children's production of narratives based on memories encrypted in photographs of their choice. Adult educators trained in the use of facilitative methodology and children aged 8–13 were involved in the workshops. The UK settings of the research consisted of 16 primary school classrooms distributed across 4 schools in the London Borough of Barnet. Children were between 9 and 11 years of age. The Italian settings of the research consisted of 16 classrooms, distributed across 4 Primary schools (age: 9–11) but also 3 Secondary schools (age: 12–13). All Italian schools were located in the North-East of the country. The excerpts presented here were selected as illustrative of the morphology of personal stories and displacements and their effect on the enhancement of children's narratives, the authorship of which is considered a context of children's agency.

The analysis of data was influenced by Conversation Analysis (CA) focus on the interactive achievement of meanings through sequences of actions-in-interaction. The analysis of interaction was influenced by the conversationalist focus on the interactive achievement of meanings through sequences of actions-in-interaction. For CA, talk-in-interaction is both shaped by the context of an interaction that works to (re)produce the context of the interaction. This was an important point for the methodology of the research: as a type of talk-in-interaction, facilitation can shape the context of adult-child relationships, contributing to the positioning of children as agentic authors of knowledge. However, it is important to highlight that the analysis of data discussed in this article shares CA focus on sequences of action in interaction; however, it does not share the conversationalist interest in the features of turn design and sequence organisation. In this article, the analysis prioritises the observation of how facilitation functions to create favourable contexts for children's agentic authorship of narratives, with a focus on facilitators' personal stories and displacements. The article is motivated by sociological and pedagogical interests in how two types of adults' action, personal stories and displacements, can create conditions for children's agentic participation as authors of knowledge. Whilst the conversational interest in the morphology of each action-in-interaction is appreciated and valued, it is not conducive to the approach the analysis of facilitation presented in the article.

The research was underpinned by a robust ethical framework that can be described as doing *research with* children, rather than *research on* children. Informed consent was sought from children, their guardians and facilitators for the collection and processing of

data. Facilitative workshops were underpinned by a concern for safeguarding all participants. Utilising the framework recently developed by Kay (2020), reflexive ethical decision-making was implemented balancing safeguarding of children and facilitation of opportunities for them to articulate their views and experiences. If, at any time, it was deemed that narratives were moving towards sensitive topics, priority was given to the protection of the child, including switching off the video-camera. The videorecording of the workshops was stored in a locked cabinet only accessible by the members of the research teams, located inside the participating universities' facilities. In the transcripts, all references to participants or third parties have been completely anonymised.

The transcribed excerpts presented in the next two sections were chosen as illustrative of how facilitators' comments promote the interactional production of interlaced narratives in the workshops, supporting children's access to the agentic status of authors of knowledge. Excerpts 1 to 4 illustrate personal stories; excerpts 5 to 8 illustrate displacements.

### Personal stories: Involvement and closeness

Personal stories are an action of facilitation that connotes the development of workshops in the UK contexts. Excerpt 1 refers to a conversation around a photograph of a wedding brought by a child.

Excerpt 1 (PS3, 5A, second meeting)

1. FAC: Has anybody else got a memory about a wedding they want to share?
2. F2: I remember when I was two. I think my mum took me to Poland for her sister's wedding and we actually (.) my auntie's and a lot of people, like guests, they were basically dancing with me. I was like only two and everybody was trying to take care of me, but I was mostly crying during the wedding so (.) but I do remember like the music we had and like the cake.
3. FAC: Does anybody (?) going to see (.) I don't know about how you felt but you've reminded me how it's lovely to see everybody at weddings. You see people you haven't seen for ages and you think oh I forgot about you, am I related to you. There's some cousins you might have or friends who are a bit annoying (?) Do you remember that from a wedding, do you remember that, did you have to do that at your wedding, what did you have to do, what stuff happened?
4. F3: ((Gestures with hands)): Because I was smaller I had to go and say hello (?).
5. FAC: Yes, it's hard to connect to someone when you've not seen them for a while and you've got to go up and talk to them, and you're like what are you going to talk about and you've kind of got so many connections and stuff, I always feel a bit shy too. Does anybody else want to share a wedding experience, we've got a few eager.

The facilitator comments twice on a child's ongoing narrative of her memories of a wedding. The first comment (turn 3) is prefaced by a disclaimer that downgrades the facilitator's epistemic authority, favouring expectations of equality in participation ('I don't know about how you felt but you've reminded me how it's lovely to see everybody at weddings').



‘You’ve reminded me’ is a pivotal semantic unit that communicates active listening by valuing F2’s contribution as an action that changes the context of the interaction. The facilitator refers to personal experiences in the second part of turn 3, promoting expectations of personal expression. In this excerpt, the facilitator does not share a personal story; rather, she shares reflections on personal experiences. Facilitator’s comment channels experiential knowledge. It also offers children the opportunity to interlace new narratives because it is combined with an open question at the end of the turn that ‘throws out a net’ that extends the area of participation to all children.

Turn 5 includes a second comment from the facilitator that addresses F3’s reaction to the open question in turn 4. As in the second part of turn 3, the facilitator shares reflections on personal experiences, related to the challenge of reconnecting with people after a long separation. This excerpt illustrates situations where personal comments albeit indirectly related to stories, can support children’s participation. A personal comment such as ‘I always feel a bit shy too’ is a reflection on a personal experience that exposes ideas and feelings, thus modelling empathy and trust in children. In the second part of turn 5, children are invited to share their own experiences of weddings, accessing the agentic status of authors of narratives.

Excerpt 2 is taken from a conversation developing from a story shared by M1. Previously, M1 had shared his feelings when he met someone he used to know at school but did not know whether to make himself known or not.

Excerpt 2 (PS1, 6A, second meeting)

1. FAC: How did he make you feel, I wonder, when you bumped into someone that you know, and you bump in (.) how was that?
2. M1: A little bit awkward
3. FAC: How (.) why? Why did it feel awkward?
4. M1: I don’t know
5. FAC: Did you want to say hello to him?
6. M1: Yeah but I didn’t
7. FAC: You didn’t?! Oh you didn’t (.) is it because you didn’t know how to do it or was it because you thought would he remember me and stuff like that because you said that as well ((indicates to F2)) you said if someone would remember you so we feel a bit shy sometimes ((speaks to whole class))
8. Video person: Did he see you?
9. M1: I don’t think so
10. FAC: I went to (.) um I’m quite old now, I’m just over twenty-one ((giggles)) and a little bit more (.) but I went to a school reunion and these were people I went to school with, oh, um (.) thirty years ago and we went to this school reunion and I thought no-one’s going to remember me, no-one’s going to know what I look like now because I don’t look like it then but when I went to school, we all recognised each other and it was a really nice feeling (.) it was a bit awkward ((indicates to M1)) I felt a bit awkward and a bit shy and there were a couple of teachers there who were still going strong at this reunion and I couldn’t believe it and it made me feel really good but a bit awkward and a little bit (.) I wondered if they would remember me so



I really connected with what you were saying just then ((indicates both M1 and F2))  
 (.) ((to F2)) do you want to see if anybody else has any more questions?

The facilitator produces an extended personal story about her school experiences to display empathy towards M1's feeling of awkwardness when meeting some people. The personal story is a comment on M1's contribution that has developed across several minimal turns. As in excerpt 1, the personal story promotes expectations of personal expression that are compatible with dialogic forms of communication. In particular, facilitator's personal story: 1) values M1's contribution as consequential in the interaction; 2) position herself as a person rather than a role in the local context of the interaction; 3) offers contextualised role-modelling for children displaying trust in co-participants and choice of personal expression, without imposing it.

On completion of the personal story, the facilitator shares an emphatic connection to the experiences of children, promoting the interlacements of narratives. The long turn of talk is closed with an invitation for F2 to manage the distribution of participation in the interaction through the selection of the next speaker, in this way further upgrading her status in the context of the facilitated interaction.

In excerpt 3 M3 shares a memory of an old family holiday. The facilitator interlaces a personal story with the M3 narrative.

Excerpt 3 (PS3, 5A, first meeting)

1. M3: I have a memory. So, I went to Dubai this waterpark is called (?) and there is like KFC and McDonald's, and they have this surfing place (?) over there. So, I just put my tummy on the ground. I didn't learn how to swim, and then there were trees like this and then I ate McDonald's.
2. FAC: You know when you put your belly on the ground, was it so that you could pretend to be swimming?
3. M3: Yeah.
4. FAC: Do you know what – you really remind me when I was a little girl, which was a really, really long time ago, my dad took me swimming to Brighton which is a seaside
5. ((Class all talk – talking about also visiting the same seaside as FAC))
6. FAC: And my dad, he couldn't swim but I didn't know he couldn't swim. And he put me on his shoulders when I was a little girl, probably about your size, and I was on his shoulders and he took me up. And I was wondering why my mum was getting really cross. She was standing on the side of the sea and she was going like this come in, like this. And my dad was laughing. And I think he was laughing because he was kind of joking with my mum because she knew he couldn't swim. And he took me out a little bit. And I thought my dad was the best swimmer in the whole wide world and I was safe, but really, he was taking me out and he couldn't swim either. And I was on his back and then he had to come back in because my mum told him off, and you've really made me remember that.
7. M4: And my dad he took me to the deep end like 2 m and (?) and those boys over there (?) sometimes the wave comes, so what happened my dad said come here and

then I went there, he picked me up and then he's like jump and I will catch you, and I was no – I'm scared and then he'd take me back.

The facilitator shares a personal story related to her memory of a seaside trip, emphasising her father's behaviour, her lack of risk awareness as well as her happiness for being carried by the father on his shoulders (turn 6). The facilitator's personal story is loosely connected to M3's previous contributions. Turn 4 is therefore dedicated to highlight such connection to preserve the consequentiality of the child's actions. The personal story promotes M4's access to the role of author of narratives by offering the child the possibility to interlace a narrative to the facilitators' reference to risky behaviour.

Also, M4's narrative is loosely interlaced with the previous one; nevertheless, it lends itself as an example of agency because its production is based on the child's choice and makes a difference for the course of the interaction. For this reason, excerpt 3 is an exemplar of the effects of the 'throwing out the net' technique: the facilitator prioritises offering children the possibility to use her personal stories as a pivot for their own stories, even if those are only partially interlaced. It is a form of facilitation based on role modelling and opening opportunities with a minimal intervention on children's contributions.

Differently from a straightforward explicit change of topic, personal stories can shift the focus of the interaction whilst acknowledging the validity of the ongoing narrative, because it remains consequential as the foundation of new courses of action via the mediation of the comment. The epistemic status of the author of the ongoing narrative is preserved even if new topics are introduced. Explicit appreciations or a summary of the narrative can be used by the facilitator to introduce personal comments that open the possibility of a topic shift, in order to confirm the validity and consequentiality of the commented narrative as valid knowledge to build upon.

When personal stories are used to extend the area of participation, the first interactive slot after the personal story is crucially important. The most frequent facilitative action utilised to promote children's interlacement of new narrative to the facilitator's personal story is invitations to talk in form of questions, often utilising an open format.

Excerpt 4 is taken from a conversation around a photograph brought in by a child. The photograph pictures the child standing by a young sibling. The facilitator inserts a personal story into an interactional slot opened by the lack of reactions to her invitation to talk.

Excerpt 4 (PS1, 6A, third meeting)

1. FAC: Anybody else got anything to ask about the picture?
2. ((silence, 5 seconds))
3. FAC: I had a picture of a baby in a cot (.) but the baby was climbing out of the cot and the baby put all their pillows on the top and ((turns the photo)) I think the baby was about your age ((points to photo)) just coming up to one and a half, two (.) and didn't want to be in the cot anymore (.) they put the pillows and then put the teddy on the top and then climbed out of the cot ((does motions of climbing)) cot and the baby put all their pillows on the top and ((turns the photo)) I think the baby was about your age ((points to photo)) just coming up to one and a half, two (.) and

- didn't want to be in the cot anymore (.) they put the pillows and then put the teddy on the top and then climbed out of the cot ((does motions of climbing))
4. M2: That's smart
  5. FAC: That was a very smart one and a half, two year old, I couldn't believe it (.) and er (.) that was what you call wanting to break for freedom ((laughs as they notice C1 is motioning to another student (.) do any of you remember being in cots? (to class))
  6. ((several voices)): Oh yeah
  7. FAC: Do you remember?
  8. ((voices from audience continue))
  9. FAC: You was in a bed ((indicates audience member)) what was (.) do you remember being in a cot? ((indicates another audience member (.) hold on a minute guys, let's have a listen
  10. F3: (?) a seal and not exactly sure what that is (?)
  11. FAC: Uh huh (.)
  12. F3: and they're like as big as me
  13. FAC: and they're in the cot with you?
  14. F3: Yeah
  15. FAC: That's a really good memory to remember that, thank you (.) and do you remember? ((indicates another audience member))

The facilitator's choice of producing a personal story (turn 3) is interesting in itself: the facilitator chooses to promote participation by sharing a personal story linked to her memory of a photograph rather than putting pressure on children, for instance, by selecting specific children as next speaker. Putting pressure on children using the management of turn taking would support participation; however, it would also limit children's choices, therefore hindering their agentic status.

Turn 5 presents a characteristic feature of sequences where personal stories are produced by the facilitator: the personal story is followed by an invitation for children to access the role of authors of narratives. The invitation takes form empirically as an open question ('do any of you remember being in cots?'), so to extend the area possible participation. In turn 6, several voices take up the invitation to talk, displaying children's willingness to actively participate in the interaction. In turn 9, the facilitator coordinates participation by selecting F3 as the next speaker, supporting the child to access the role of author of narratives. In turn 11, the facilitator supports the epistemic status of F3 as author of narrative with a continuer that displays active listening. The question in turn 12 again display active listening, adding to that function a more explicit promotion of further expansion of the ongoing narrative. Questions are more complex and versatile facilitative action than continuers, although their use must be well balanced by the facilitator to avoid excessive interventionism that would threaten equality in the possibility to participate actively in the interaction. In turn 15, the facilitator displays appreciation for F3's status of author of narratives. F3's participation was not a consequence of facilitator's pressure, but the consequence of the child's choice to take up the opportunity offered by the facilitator's invitation to talk; for this reason, it is possible to consider her narrative as an example of agency.

It can be argued that by creating expectations of personal expression with the sharing of personal stories, facilitators create favourable conditions for trusting commitments,

based on mutual disclosure. The relationship between trust and agency has been widely researched: trust supports participation, personal initiatives and risk-taking attitudes (Baraldi and Farini 2013, Farini 2019).

Taking the risk of sharing personal stories allows facilitators to construct, story after story, layers of self-disclosure that invite children to mirror facilitator's trusting commitments. The use of personal stories produces a gradual disclosure and a gradual creation of expectations of personal expressions. Personal stories are used to promote trust and expectations of personal expression. If combined with other facilitative actions such as appreciation of children's contributions, personal stories can also contribute to upgrade children's epistemic status as authors of knowledge. In the data analysed, the production of personal comments is often introduced by, or combined with, positive connotation of children's ongoing narratives that validates children's agentic status as authors of knowledge.

### Displacements: Entertainment and unpredictability

Displacements are the second type of facilitators' comments on children's narratives observed during the analysis of video-recorded workshops. The use of displacements connotes workshops in Italian settings. Morphologically, displacements are single or sequenced turns of talk that insert creative, often humoured, disruptions into the children's narratives, to provoke children's participation in reaction to them.

Excerpt 5 is taken from a group discussion around diverse experiences of family celebrations. At this point in the conversation, children and facilitator are talking about memories of weddings.

Excerpt 5 (SP2, 5A, second meeting)

1. FAC: volevi aggiungere una cosa?  
*Did you want to add something?*
2. M3: sì anch'io come la situazione di F7  
*Yes me too like F7's situation*
3. FAC: sì  
*Yes*
4. M3: e la mamma si è sposata in Guinea e il papà era già in Italia  
*E: mum married in Guinea and dad was already in Italy*
5. FAC: e quindi anche da voi avete dovuto trovare una persona che  
*And so you too had to find a person who*
6. M3: eh
7. FAC: chi è che aveva scelto per per per mettersi – ma tu eri là in Guinea oppure eri qui in Italia?  
*Who did she choose to to take – but were you there in Guinea or ar- were you here in Italy?*
8. M3: ero in Guinea  
*I was in Guinea*
9. FAC: te lo ricordi?  
*Do you remember it?*

10. M3: ((moves head meaning so so))
11. FAC: o eri piccolino?  
*Or were you too young?*
12. M3: ero piccolo  
*I was young*
13. FAC: e cosa ti hanno raccontato di quel giorno?  
*And what did they tell you about that day?*
14. M3: e: non me l'hanno raccontato perché (ero piccolo)  
*E: they didn't tell me about it because I (was young)*
15. FAC: eh però questa cosa è interessante che (.) ci si può sposare anche senza che il papà ci sia (.) eh? qui in Italia non ce lo farebbero micca fare lo sai? (.) siamo strani noi qui in Italia eh? Hh Eh *but this thing is interesting that (.) one can marry even without dad it there (.) eh? Here in Italy they wouldn't allow us to do this you know? (.) we are strange here in Italy eh?*

The facilitator produces a displacing comment in turn 15. The displacement follows two children's narratives of wedding ceremonies. Both narratives are characterised by the physical absence of the narrating children's fathers and their proxy replacement with a relative. Turn 15 is complex: the facilitator initially displays interest in the narratives, thus reinforcing the epistemic status of children. A first comment mentions the difference between the situations narrated and ordinary weddings in Italy. The following comment is a displacement ('siamo strani noi qui in Italia eh?') because what is highlighted is not the 'strangeness' of proxy weddings, as it could have been expected, but of those Italian customs that most children in the interaction would see as the only normal situation. The displacing comment creates a 'we-identity' embracing the facilitator and the Italian children and powerfully shifting the connotation of 'strangeness' from the social and cultural experiences of the narrating children and their families to the experiences of Italian people. The displacement is here utilised to promote favourable conditions for dialogue, because it prevents the development of ethnocentric oppositions that would hinder empathy, equality and acceptance of personal expression.

The context of excerpt 6 is a conversational exchange between a child and the facilitator, centred around the child's narrative of her own birth.

Excerpt 6 (SP1, 4A, first meeting)

1. FAC: che giorno sei nata?  
*What day where you born?*
2. F2: sono nata il vent-il ventidue agosto (.) duemila e sette, le le ore me le ricordo le dodici e ventiquattro  
*I was born on twent- twenty-second of August (.) two thousand and seven, I remember the the hour twelve and twenty-four*
3. FAC: e cosa stavi facendo quando sei nata?  
*And what were you doing when you were born?*
4. F2: ((gesticulates)) hh
5. Some: hhh
6. FAC: no questa te lo dico perché questo non te lo ricordi di la verità

*No I tell you this because you don't remember this, tell the truth*

7. F2: questo non me lo ricordo  
*I dont remember this*
8. FAC: questo non se lo ricorda (.) ma qualcuno di voi si ricorda il giorno in cui è nato?  
*She doesn't remember this (.) but does some of you remember the day in which s/he was born?*
9. Some: (((raise their hands)))
10. F5: [sì  
*[yes*
11. FAC: te ti rico- no no ma adesso son curioso io tu ti ricordi il giorno in cui sei nata  
*You remember no no but now i am curious you remember the day in which you were born*
12. F5: ((nods)) sì  
*yes*
13. FAC: e cosa facevi quando sei nata?  
*And what did you do when you were born?*
14. F5: e: intanto piangevo  
*e: first of all I was crying*
15. ?: hh
16. FAC: ah ok, (.) perché come hai visto com'era il mondo hai detto aspetta che qui bisogna iniziare a piangere *ah ok (.) because when you have seen how the world was you have said wait it is necessary to start to cry*
17. Some: hhh
18. FAC: no perché piangevi?  
*No why did your cry?*
19. F5: no perché hh il primo giorno ho quando il primo giorno che ho visto papà, e: mi ha f- e: lui è venuto all'improvviso e mi ha fatto un po' spaven[tare *no because hh the first day I have when the first day that I have seen my dad and he ma- e: he came suddenly and he scared me a bit*
20. FAC: [ti ha spaventato  
*He scared you*
21. F5: sì  
*Yes*
22. FAC: questo te l- te lo ha raccontato la mamma o il papà?  
*This wa- was told you by your mum or your dad?*
23. F5: e:m: mia: il papà  
*E:m my my dad*
24. FAC: il papà  
*My dad*
25. F5: sì  
*yes*
26. FAC: perché ci è rimasto male  
*Because he was upset*
27. F5: hh
28. FAC: dice io vado lì per abbracciarla e lei si mette a piangere [eh? Hh

*He says I go there to hug her and she starts crying [eh?*

29. F5: [hh

In the opening turns of the excerpt, a question-answer dyadic exchange, centred on F2's date of birth, is characterised by the child's claim to *remember* the exact hour of her birth. The facilitator's comment is a displacement in the form of a question, asking F2 what she was doing when she was born (turn 3). After a short hesitation, F2 displays her understanding of the humorous nature of the displacement, laughing it off as other children join her. In turn 6, the facilitator challenges F2's claim to *remember* what she was doing on her birth whilst maintaining a non-conflictual tone. In turn 8, the facilitator's repetition acknowledges F2's answer to his question and, in the second part of the turn, he invites other children to share a story if they remember the day when they were born.

In turn 11, F5 answers positively and the facilitator asks her if she remembers the day when she was born. By addressing a question to the children's answer, in turn 13 the facilitator accepts F5's answer as a valid foundation for the development of a new narrative, rather than rejecting it. The choice of the facilitator to support F5's access to the status of the author of valid knowledge creates interactive conditions for the construction of a narrative. In turn 16, the facilitator utilises humour to comment that he was not surprised that F5 was crying, considering the world she was entering. This is a second displacement, which is however followed by a question (turn 18) that combines to the disruptive humour of the displacement an explicit support for the development of the narrative, supporting F5's agentic status of the author of valid knowledge.

F5 occupies the interactive slot opened by the facilitator's question to share a memory concerning her fear of the father when she saw him first; this is a vicarious narrative based on another person's memories. In turns 26 and 28, the facilitator comments that F5's father was surely upset when she was showing to fear him as he tried to hug her.

In excerpt 6, displacements are utilised to display facilitator's interest in children's narratives, thus indicating his acknowledgement of children's status as authors of valid knowledge. At the same time, displacements position the facilitator as an equal participant who is willing to engage with children's narratives using humour whilst avoiding judgement of their validity.

In other interactions, displacements were used to comment on family situations that transpire through children's narrative, with the caveat that displacements are not used when it appears that narratives could be hinting to family problems. This use of displacing comments is illustrated by excerpt 7, where a child talk shares a story that hints to different relationships with her parents.

Excerpt 7 (SS2, 2B, second meeting)

1. FAC: mh e quando uscite insieme che cosa vi piace fare?

*Mh and when you go out what do you like to do?*

2. F1: o andiamo al cinema, (.) o andiamo fuori con papà a fare a fare delle passeggiate, poi gli dico tutte le mie cose (.) non così tante ma quelle che non le dico alla mamma le dico al papà *either we go to the cinema (.) or we go out with dad for*





could appear, because she chooses either the mother or the father as the recipient of information alternatively, therefore choosing which one should be kept in the dark at the same time. The facilitator comments that the parent can share what they get to know about her, a weakness in her strategy that F1 acknowledges with a laughter, maintaining the status of the current speaker to produce a family narrative. F1 narratives concern a secret trip to shops with her father only to bump into her mother and her brother at a restaurant. The facilitator firstly builds a humorous comment on the narrative, suggesting that the mother went out secretly too (turn 17). The facilitator produces another humorous displacement as he suggests that F2's family does not seem to be very imaginative in the choice of restaurants (turn 19).

Displacements produce a casual atmosphere that can be very favourable to children's agency. If personal stories create favourable conditions for agency promoting trust, displacements create favourable condition for children's agency by explicitly and creatively marking a shift from ordinary educational communication. In turn 20, F1 concludes the exchange still giggling at the facilitator's comments; she comments that her mother was a bit angry for having been left in the dark about the father and daughter day out. In excerpt 7, the facilitator produces a series of displacing comments across the whole narrative which proves successful in creating conditions for F2's access to the status of the author of knowledge.

In the same fashion as excerpt 5, albeit in a different classroom context, excerpt 8 is taken from a conversation around memories of family celebrations.

Excerpt 8 (SP1, 4C, first meeting)

1. FAC: qualcuno di voi? ((domanda a tutta la classe)) (.) ha visto le foto dei suoi genitori mentre si sposano?  
*Some of you (question to the whole class) (.) has seen the pictures of you parents during their wedding?*
2. ((Some raise their hands))
3. FAC: ah beh ci sono degli altri (.) e che che che che foto sono? Chi chi chi vuole raccontare la foto dei propri genitori?  
*Ah ah there are others (.) and what what what pictures are they? Who who who wants to tell the parents' pictures?*
4. ((some lower their hands))
5. FAC: prova a dire  
*Try to tell*
6. F3: una foto di quando il papà e la mamma stavano stavano entrando nella macchina  
*A picture about when dad and mum were were entering the car*
7. FAC: il giorno del matrimonio o un altro giorno?  
*The day of their wedding or another day?*
8. F3: no il giorno del matrimonio  
*No, the day of their wedding*
9. FAC: ah quindi (.) tu non hai una foto (.) di: della cerimonia ma del momento successivo

*Ah so (.) you don't have a picture (.) of of the ceremony but of the following moment*

10. F3: sì  
*yes*
11. FAC: quando la cerimonia era stata fatta, e stavano salutando tutti e se ne stavano andando in viaggio di nozze?  
*When the ceremony was done and they were were greeting everywhere and leaving for the honeymoon*
12. F3: sì  
*yes*
13. FAC: e te cosa facevi?  
*And what were you doing?*
14. F3: io:  
*I:*
15. FAC: non c'eri  
*You were not there*
16. F3: non c'ero  
*I was not there*
17. FAC: eh hh
18. Some: hhh
19. FAC: perché quel giorno lì avevi una festa da un'altra parte no?  
*Because that day you were at a party elsewhere, weren't you?*
20. ?: h
21. ?: no
22. F3: no perché non ero ancora [nata  
*No, because I was not yet [born*
23. ?: [(??) in discoteca  
[(??) to the disco
24. FAC: ah: non eri ancora nata ecco  
*Ah: you were not yet born I see*
25. ?: h
26. FAC: e: c'è qualcuno di voi che invece c'era (.) al matrimonio dei suoi genitori? *And is there someone who was there (.) at their parents' wedding instead?*
27. M5: è impossibile  
*It's impossible*
28. FAC: no non è impossibile [perché [capita capita  
*No, it's not impossible [because [it can happen it can happen*
29. M3: [(says something to M5)
30. F4: [(raises her hand)
31. M5: [ah!
32. FAC: te c'eri?  
*Were you there?*
33. F4: sì  
*yes*
34. FAC: e come mai c'eri?

*And why were you there?*

35. F4: eh: perché ero già nata

*Eh because I was already born*

36. FAC: vedi ((a M5)) è possibile perché le cose sono possibili in tante maniere (.) e: e avete una bella impressione di quelle foto? Cioè nel senso che i vostri genitori ve ne hanno parlato ((gesticola)) con emozione, con entusiasmo, oppure le avete trovate voi (.) andando a guardare (.) degli album di famiglia?

*You see ((to M5)) it is possible because things are possible in many ways (.) and and do you have a good impression of those pictures? I mean, did your parents talk of them to you ((he gesticulates)) showing emotions, enthusiasm, or did you find them (.) while looking for (.) family albums?*

In excerpt 8, the connection between displacements and the creation of expectations of unpredictability is made explicit by the facilitator. The excerpt is inaugurated by an invitation to talk in the form of an open question. After a series of turns dedicated to the management of turn taking, F3 is selected as the next speaker to share a narrative related to a photograph taken at her parents' wedding. In turn 13, the facilitator asks what F3 was doing when the photograph was taken; the question is a form of displacing comment to create expectations of a freer participation if compared with the ordinary school experience. The displacement appears to generate some confusion in F3 because she hesitates to answer; the facilitator supports F3's engagement in the conversation by suggesting her an answer to his displacing comment (turn 15: 'non c'eri'), which is immediately accepted by F3.

Other children in the classroom laugh at the displacement and the facilitator adds another displacement, clarifying that he did not mean F3 was not born yet; rather, he meant that she was at another party (turn 19). F3 rejects the displacement protesting that she was not born yet as another child connects his participation to the facilitator's displacing comment, suggesting that indeed F3 was at the disco. At this point of the interaction, displacements have contributed to produce a complex interlacement of participants' contributions and positions. In turn 24, the facilitator acknowledges F3's answer with another displacing comment, as he displays surprise to know that she was not born when her parents got married ('ah non eri ancora nata ecco'). In turn 26, the facilitator extends the area of participation with an invitation to talk as a question that he addressed to other children. In turn 27, M5 answers that it is not possible for anyone to attend his or her parents' wedding; interestingly, in turn 28 the facilitator questions the validity of M5's statement. This is an important facilitative action because it creates safe conditions for children to present narratives that may challenge expectations. In turn 30, F4 connects to the facilitator's opening to share that she was at her parents' wedding. The facilitator displays appreciation of F4's contribution, making it consequential for the development of a long comment that he utilises to make a plea for expecting unpredictability of contributions and narratives. The facilitator's comment in turn 36 combines acknowledgement of F4 agency because her story makes a difference for the development of the interaction, with the invitation to children to re-construct expectations when interacting with others towards a positive attitude to diversity, surprise and the unexpected.

## Discussion and conclusion

Personal stories and displacements are interesting ways to facilitate children's agency as authorship of narratives by involving facilitators and children as co-tellers that upgrade the epistemic status of children as legitimate authors of valid knowledge, thus their epistemic authority, their rights and responsibilities in producing knowledge. Comments on children's narratives are facilitative actions that mark a difference from ordinary instructional activities in school. In excerpts 1–4, the facilitator's production of *personal experiences and stories* (in excerpts 2–4 about her own childhood) interlaces with children's narratives, therefore displaying active listening and attention to children, as well as creating the conditions for further children's narratives. In excerpts 5–8, facilitators' *displacing comments* trigger children's surprised or amused reactions. Displacing comments invite to reflect on the value of unpredictable personal expressions that may construct favourable context where children feel more relaxed and safe to share their memories. In line with the ethos and methods of facilitation, both personal stories and displacement do not aim neither to transmit adult-owned knowledge nor to evaluate children's narratives. Rather, they favour closeness between participant in communication, where children and facilitators share epistemic authority as co-tellers of narratives. The use of personal stories and displacements signpost a change in the social structures of adult–child interaction either by bringing self-disclosure in the interaction (personal stories) or by bringing unpredictability (displacements). Self-disclosure and unpredictability are components of dialogical communication (Baraldi *et al.* 2021) that mark a difference between facilitation and ordinary, adult-centred, educational communication.

Actions and choices in interaction can impact on children's and adults' engagement in educational communication. Our data suggest that facilitators' comment on children's narratives, both as personal stories and displacements, can create favourable conditions for affectivity, amusement, trust and, last but not least, a sense of unpredictability. Data produced across two different linguistic and cultural contexts, such as Italy and the UK, suggest that the use of comments as components of a broader application of facilitative methodology (for instance, comments are often coupled with other facilitative actions such as continuers, positive feedback or questions) can introduce equal, contingent and unpredictable production of knowledge as key characteristics of the learning experience. The choice of personal stories or displacements is not related to micro-cultural differences between schools or macro-cultural differences between national contexts. Rather, they are related to the facilitators' styles of action, and therefore, they are potentially compatible with different cultural contexts. The similar success of different styles of facilitation in promoting children's access to the status of authors of knowledge also indicates that different facilitative practices may converge in promoting children's agentic production of narratives.

Both types of comments can facilitate a change in the way of thinking and acting knowledge in classroom interaction: from transmission of knowledge to co-production of knowledge. Comments can contribute to the success of facilitation in enhancing dialogic learning if they are utilised to acknowledge and include children's knowledge in the learning experience. It is important to acknowledge that personal stories and displacements are not exempt from risks because their potentially pervasive nature can

become a hindrance for children's engagement and active participation. Thus, the use of personal stories and displacements to promote children's agency as authorship of knowledge may present a dilemma between two potentially conflicting instances of agency: children's agency and facilitators' agency. The analysis of data, illustrated by the selected excerpts, suggests that personal stories and displacements which represent instances of adults' initiatives do not hinder children's agency when they: 1) are contextually relevant, that is, are connected with the themes of children's stories; 2) are followed by actions, such as invitation to talk (particularly to interlace new stories) or questions that open up spaces for children's active participation. Personal stories and displacements must be adapted to the interactive context, connected to the children's narratives and respectful of the children's status as primary authors of knowledge through narratives that concern first and foremost their memories.

Nevertheless, whilst personal stories and displacements need a careful coordination of communication, both types of comments can contribute to facilitation's success in enhancing children's agency. In the UK settings, personal stories were utilised to 'throw out a net' to capture children's participation without putting pressure on them, choosing instead to role-modelling trust in a form of communication framed by expectations of personal expression and mutual disclosure. Throwing out a net is a metaphor for non-directive invitation to contribute, opening spaces for children's choices. In the Italian settings, displacements fulfilled the equivalent function of promoting children's access to the agentic status of authors of narratives. Differently from personal stories, displacements fulfil that function by displaying that unpredictable contributions are legitimate and appreciated forms of participation. This, however, was not done by 'throwing out a net'; rather, displacements created closeness and sense of unpredictability, based on shared entertainment and complicity.

Both types of comments, 1) personal stories promoting trust and 2) displacements promoting unpredictability lend themselves as examples of how facilitation can change the context of children and adults' learning, generating qualitative changes in lived educational practices. Seeking ways to genuinely listen to children's voices is an opportunity for adults to learn with from children (Screech 2019). Aukerman and Chambers Schuldt (2017) summarise three goal orientations that enhance dialogical practices: 1) valuing student voices, consonant with an enacted ethic of relating; 2) interanimation of voices, consonant with inter-comprehending, and, 3) heteroglossia, consonant with epistemic authority. Each of the three goal orientations is entailed by facilitation of narratives as observed in the context of the research discussed in this article.

As components of facilitative methodology, personal stories and displacements shift the social structures of learning and teaching towards dialogic forms of communication, based on equality among participants, empathy and expectations of personal expressions.

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## Data Availability Statement

All data underpinning this publication are openly available from the University of Northampton Research Explorer at: <https://doi.org/10.24339/0460fe8b-3c94-42d9-9536-c31d62ac8911>

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