

## **Observing migrant children: Shifting from linguistic competence to display of agency**

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### **Introduction**

When discussing inclusion of migrant children, mainstream pedagogical literature suggests that improvement of language competence (bilingual education) should be prioritised (Karoly and Gonzales 2011; Harris and Kaur 2012; Burger 2013; Devine, 2013, Baraldi, 2014). Limited language knowledge is claimed to impact migrant children's participation in interactions with adults and peers. We challenge this prevailing discourse about migrant children through second order observation (Glaserfeld, 1987; Luhmann, 1995), that is, the observation of observations through innovative educational practices in multilingual settings. The analysis of video-recorded interactions involving children and teachers at an Italian *Scuola dell'infanzia*, influenced by the Reggio Emilia Approach, was ethically and methodologically committed to positioning all children as competent agents. This approach allowed a shift in the frame of teachers' observation, from *linguistic competence* to *participation in communication*, and a shift in expectations from migrant children as deficient to a recognition and promotion of their agency. This chapter focuses on two interrelated aspects of the video-recorded interactions to argue that teachers' and children's modes of designing their turns to talk may promote shared personal expressions of ideas, emotions, and experiences, accessing the agentic status of authors of knowledge.

### **Narratives of Children's Incompetence**

For several decades Childhood Studies has deconstructed mainstream narratives of childhood, particularly regarding intergenerational relationships (Qvortup, 1990; James, 2009; James et al., 1998; Oswell, 2013; Wyness, 2014; Leonard, 2016; Alanen, 2019) observing that children's rights and responsibilities for constructing knowledge through interactions (defined by Heritage and Raymond (2005) as *epistemic authority*) is not promoted (Hutchby, 2007; Baraldi and Iervese, 2012), particularly in educational contexts (Scollan and Farini, 2021) because children's autonomous access to domains of knowledge, (or *epistemic status*, Heritage 2012), is downgraded by adults. As we have argued (Farini & Scollan, 2019) the epistemic status of children continues to be subordinated within adult evaluations and agendas. A narrative of children's low epistemic status and limited epistemic authority is detrimental to migrant children, particularly when difficulties in oral production are observed (Karoly and Gonzales

2011; Harris and Kaur 2012; Burger 2013) and difficulties in integration are expected on the basis of cultural differences between family background and hegemonic expectations within educational settings (Farini, 2019a).

Early years education is often the first social environment where migrant children are immersed in different linguistic and cultural contexts (Pascal and Bertram, 2009; Baraldi, 2014; Scollan and Farini, 2021). Expectations of linguistic difficulties and cultural divergence may contribute to downgrading migrant children's epistemic status, favouring their inclusion as objects of adult practices, expectations, and planning (Palludan, 2007) to 'fill the gap' designed by the adult, for the child, on behalf of the child (Farini and Scollan, 2015). This promotes a discourse of 'children's needs' (Wehmeyer et al., 2017; Scollan, 2021) which is then readily translated into demands for more intensive learning, primarily second language learning, considered a precursor to active participation with teachers and peers. The investment in supporting second language acquisition can be critically approached as the consequence of the construction of migrant children as having a peculiar need for 'more education'.

### **Promotion of Children's Epistemic Status**

Epistemic authority is particularly limited for young children (Farini, 2019b; Murray, 2019) because of low epistemic status. Epistemic authority is further reduced for children who display difficulties in the oral production of language (Seele, 2012). When observation focuses on linguistic production, migrant children are often positioned as not-yet-competent because the focus on linguistic needs ignores children's holistic capabilities and knowledges. For migrant children who display difficulties in linguistic production, the hierarchy in epistemic status between adults and children that characterises educational contexts (Baraldi and Corsi, 2017) and legitimises adults' control over the trajectory and agenda of interactions (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975; Mehan, 1979; Seedhouse, 2004; Margutti, 2006, 2010; Farini, 2011) is further reinforced. The development of specialised education for migrant children invites observation to focus on their needs rather than their interests, inviting distrust in their capabilities to actively participate in social interactions.

This troubling landscape provides a firm justification to shift the focus of research observation from linguistic competence to participation in communication. This shift describes a movement from a prescriptive model where active social participation is seen as dependent on linguistic competence, to an interest in what children *do* as they interact. Shifting the focus to social practices devotes attention to the multifaceted nature of children's participation, as celebrated in the Reggio Emilia Approach, the *Hundred Languages of Children* (Filippini and Vecchi, 1997). As a consequence, an alternative discourse of childhood that elevates children's epistemic status becomes possible (Prout, 2000; Percy-Smith, 2010; Valentine, 2011, Wyness, 2013; Baraldi et al., 2021).

Children's epistemic authority in 'Reggio Emilia Approach' (Edwards et al., 1998; Cagliari et al., 2016) positions children as active, competent, and autonomous authors of knowledge (Rinaldi, 2012); observed as naturally expressive and competent agents. The Reggio Emilia Approach introduced the concept of *scuole dell'infanzia* where the ethos and methods of

education are devoted to promoting children's access to the agentic status of authors of valid knowledge following a relational approach (Rinaldi, 2005; Dahlberg, 2009; Kjørholt and Qvortrup, 2012). *Scuole dell'infanzia* are underpinned by a philosophy committed to enhance all children's epistemic status and epistemic authority, as epitomised by their name: the translation of *scuole dell'infanzia* is not schools for childhood but schools *of* childhood, indicating that learning is constructed and owned by children, for children and adults. *Scuole dell'infanzia* provide an interesting site for empirical research concerned to observe the systematic elevation of children's epistemic status that promotes migrant children's active participation in social interactions even where linguistic proficiency is limited, thus offering an alternative to the discourse of children's needs and deficiencies.

### **Ethnomethodology and the *observations of observations***

The implications of teacher observation of/for migrant children became the subject of our research. We are interested to explore what happens when migrant children are observed as competent *communicators*, even in situations of limited linguistic proficiency. We are curious about the consequences of a shift in the focus of observation that positions migrant children as authors of valid knowledge when active participation is promoted.

Ethnomethodology allows for the observation of teachers' observations; the choice of method was underpinned by a concern to observe epistemic status and epistemic authority through an analysis of empirical sequences of actions-in-interactions. Ethnomethodology explores practical activities and practical organisational reasoning (Allen, 2017). The word ethnomethodology illustrates its mission: the scientific study (-ology) of the patterned actions (-methods) of the members of a social group (ethno-) (Garfinkel, 1967). It generates detailed observations of routine, everyday affairs, the often *seen but unnoticed* social practices (Pink, 2013; Punch and Oancea, 2014) that reveal how the social order is an omnipresent feature of human life constantly reproduced through interactions (Laurier, 2009). Ethnomethodology concerns how people co-construct realities, through social interactions, based on normally unstated expectations and assumptions (Lieberman, 2013). Typically, audio- or video-recordings of human activities are generated to study situated practices in close detail which are then subjected to analysis that seeks to identify particular social practices (Schatzki et al., 2001; Flick, 2015).

The choice of ethnomethodology allowed us to approach sequences of actions-in-interactions (the social practices) as empirically observable cues for the link between the positioning of migrant children vis-à-vis their epistemic status (the unstated expectations) and their access to the agentic role of authors of knowledge (the social order reproduced by interactions). It is important to clarify that observed interactions were not approached as exemplary cases of generalisable social and cultural processes. Rather, interactions were studied regarding their intrinsic properties (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Mukherji and Albon, 2018), in particular, the association between actions-in-interaction and the promotion of migrant children's epistemic authority as authors of knowledge

Over the last two decades, the traditional use of observation in education to serve the assessment of early child development against fixed learning objectives has been widely

criticised (e.g., Carr, 2001; Carr and Lee, 2012; Palaiologou, 2012). This is particularly pertinent for research interested in observing how observation can promote migrant children's agency through upgrading their epistemic status and epistemic authority. The observation of observation could not be filtered by consideration of performances and levels of development (Murray and Palaiologou, 2018), for instance regarding linguistic competence. The dialogical approach to participant observation (Lawrence, 2021) was therefore chosen because it understands observation as a mutual encounter to be accomplished in and through interactions (Heath et al., 2010), and because observation is a communicative act rather than a solipsistic individual act (Markovà and Linell, 1996), where the epistemological duality 'observer and object of observation' is replaced with the acknowledgement that identities and assumptions about the world are co-constructed by continued engagement with others in an intersubjective milieu (Kabuto, 2008).

### **The analysis of interaction**

The analysis of data produced through ethnomethodological participant dialogical observation was influenced by a conversation analytical focus on interactive achievement of meanings through sequences of actions-in-interaction. An important theoretical point for our research is that interactions can shape the context of adult-child relationships (Wingard, 2007; Gardner and Forrester, 2010), for instance contributing to the positioning of migrant children as authors of knowledge (Scollan, 2021). The analysis of data discussed in this chapter used two conversation analytical concepts: *turn-taking* and *sequence organisation* (Heritage and Clayman, 2010) to investigate how the negotiation of the role of speaker (turn-taking) and the use of turn design such as questions, invitation to talk, comments, feedback on action (sequence organisation) can influence migrant children's epistemic status and epistemic authority.

Although non-verbal communication may be important when children with difficulties in oral production are involved, the focus of our analysis concerns teacher's (and other children's) explicit encouragement of migrant children's authorship of knowledge, through their verbal contributions. The analytical focus on actions-in-interaction allowed the conditions that support migrant children to display their epistemic status and epistemic authority in interactions with other children and teachers to be observed, despite difficulties in speaking Italian, thus accessing the agentic status of authors of knowledge.

### **The Research**

The excerpts discussed in the following section refer to activities in *Scuola d'Infanzia* in the Province of Modena (Italy), where *programmazione* (educational planning) is influenced by the Reggio Emilia Approach. *Programmazione* underpinning the activities observed within the research was interested in promoting the *Scuola d'Infanzia* as a social space to foster the construction of children's linguistic, communicative, relational, and cognitive competences in intercultural and interlinguistic contexts.

The recorded interactions involved five children of different nationalities (including Italian) across the winter term. Framed by dialogical participant observation, the research included five observations with each child. Each observation extended to a whole day of school life.

Only interactions with teachers and other children were recorded, for a total running time of three hours and 50 minutes.

This chapter specifically discusses interactions recorded during observations with a four-year-old girl from Morocco (pseudonym Nadja) in the *scuola d'infanzia*. Two excerpts from transcribed interactions, involving Nadja, other children and two Italian teachers, including an *Atelierista* (the coordinator of creative workshops and art education) are presented. The excerpts analysed in the following section were selected to illustrate forms of promotion of migrant children's epistemic status and epistemic authority, connected to *the shift of observation from linguistic competence to participation in communication*. The English renditions of the interactions attempts to reproduce the oral production of participating children, which was conditioned by age and linguistic background.

### **Inspired by practices: observing migrant children's epistemic status and epistemic authority**

This section discusses three forms of interactions where migrant children's epistemic status is upgraded, and their epistemic authority is acknowledged and promoted: 1) facilitation of interactions between native and migrant children (excerpt 1); 2) negotiation of conflict between native and migrant children (excerpt 1); 3) facilitation of migrant children's epistemic status (excerpt 2).

Excerpt 1 is taken from a role-play activity where a small group of children are playing the roles of shopkeepers and customers who buy food and pay for it, inventing and negotiating prices. Two teachers (including the *atelierista*) are supervising the role-play, supporting the children in the monetary transactions, and promoting their reflection on the activity.

#### **Excerpt 1**

1'	Lorenzo	E il melone quello bianco, bianco <i>And the melon, the white one, white</i>
2	Nadja	Signore questo? <i>Mister this?</i>
3	Lorenzo	((moving to another stall)) Quanto quello? <i>How much that one?</i>
4	Enrico	Tre euro, mi devi dare tre euro <i>Three euros, you must give me three euros</i>
5	Lorenzo	((returns to Nadja's stall)) e il melone bianco <i>And the white melon</i>
6	Nadja	Il mellone bianco <i>The white melon</i>
7	Lorenzo	Quello <i>That one</i>
8	Nadja	Ecco <i>Here it is</i>

9	Nicola	Il melone bianco <i>The white melon</i>
10	Lorenzo	ho finito ho comprato tutto <i>I'm done, I bought everything</i>
11	Teacher	E hai pagato tutto tutto Lore? ((to other children)) dite che ha pagato tutto tutto Lore? Adesso va via ma ha pagato tutto? <i>And have you paid for the whole shopping Lore) ((to other children)) you think he paid for everything everything? Now he's off but has he paid for everything?</i>
12	Nicola	Sì <i>Yes</i>
13	Atelierista	Ma Nadja, dove sono i soldi del melone bianco? <i>But Nadja, where are the white melon money?</i>
14	Nicola	Boh <i>Dunno</i>
15	Teacher	Hai pagato la tua spesa Lore? Dico tutta? <i>Have you paid for your shopping Lore? I mean all of it?</i>
16	Atelierista	((to Nicola)) qui dal banco della frutta, dove sono i soldi di Lorenzo? <i>((to Nicola)) here, at the fruit stall, where is Lorenzo's money?</i>
17	Nadja	Dammi i soldi Lore, mi dai i soldi? <i>Gimmie the money Lore, do you gimmie money?</i>
18	Enrico	Ho scritto qui ((indicates a sheet of paper)) cosa ha comprato <i>I have written here ((indicates a sheet of paper)) what he bought?</i>
19	Lorenzo	Ho finito I soldi <i>I have finished my money</i>
20	Nadja	Sono 5 eurosoldi 5 <i>It's 5 euromoney 5</i>
21	Lorenzo	Ho un grosso soldo tieni sono 5 <i>I have one big money, take it, it's 5</i>
22	Nadja	Un soldo grande, ben, ciao <i>A money big, goo, bye</i>
23	Lorenzo	Avevo tanti soldi adesso non ho più <i>I had lots of money now I have no more</i>
24	Nadja	Mi ha dato i soldi! <i>He has given me money!</i>

Excerpt 1 is characterised by a conflict between Nadja and another child, Lorenzo. The conflict is provoked by the intervention of the teacher (turn 11) and the *atelierista* (turn 13) who introduce doubt that Lorenzo, who is playing the role of the customer, has not paid for his shopping in full. It is important to highlight that the Reggio Emilia Approach, as well as other pedagogical approaches is interested in promoting children's agency, observes conflict as an opportunity to meet the other, based on the theories of conflict management that see conflict

as a form of communication that can produce mutual understanding if managed dialogically (Bohm, 1996; Farini, 2014).

Excerpt 1 illustrates the idea that conflict is a form of communication rather than an obstacle against communication: the management of conflict between turn 11 and turn 24 becomes a scenario of the upgrade of Nadja's epistemic status. In the first part of the excerpt, between turn 1 and 10, Lorenzo interacts with other children, including Nadja who is playing the role of shopkeeper, as he buys some groceries. In turn 5 he asks for the *melone bianco* (white melon), which is on offer at Nadja's stall. The second part of the excerpt included the conflict, and its management led by Nadja who displays, despite a limited use of the Italian language, high epistemic status (knowledge) on the one hand, and agency with epistemic authority (expressing knowledge in the interaction) on the other hand. In turn 11, the teacher observes that Lorenzo might have not paid for all items and seems to suggest that Lorenzo did not pay for the whole shopping corroborated by the *atelierista* in turn 13. The teacher and the *atelierista* thematise the incomplete payment again in turn 15 and 16, inviting children's attention to it. Although the teacher and the *atelierista* interest for the full payment of Lorenzo's grocery shopping may appear as an instance of adult-centred attempt to socialise children, in this excerpt it is instrumental to the promotion of children's participation, to offer opportunity for their active participation.

In turn 17, Nadja self-selects as the next speaker, displaying agency, asking Lorenzo to pay the *melone bianco*. Nadja's initiative is not prevented by her limited knowledge of the Italian language, and it is not made less effective, as shown by the negotiation between Nadja and Lorenzo across turns 19–24. Nadja displays high epistemic status and epistemic authority as she takes the initiative, without any external support, to initiate and lead the management of the conflict centred on payment for the *melone bianco*, until an agreement is negotiated. In excerpt 1, the intervention of the teacher and the *atelierista* creates a favourable situation for Nadja's agency. Nadja can successfully lead the management of conflict through her personal initiatives, starting from the self-selection as speaker, because the adults position her as a competent participant in the interaction, acknowledging her epistemic status and epistemic authority.

Excerpt 2 illustrates an interaction that took place in the context of a small group activity. The interaction is apparently initiated by Nadja's personal initiative. Although the theme of the interaction diverts the trajectory of the small group activity, in line with the Reggio Emilia Approach Nadja's initiative is appreciated and supported, based on the idea that children's personal initiatives are an opportunity of mutual learning, from the child, for the child, for the adults. Nadja's attention is captured by the teacher's blue nails. Rather than imposing the agenda of the activity, the teacher supports Nadja's personal initiative with a question that invites expansions (turns 1 and 3). When Nadja experiences some problem in the use of the Italian language, her limited linguistic competence does not result in her marginalisation and the downgrade of her epistemic status. Quite the contrary, the other participants in the interaction, the teacher, and other children, take the initiative to support her, coordinated but not directed by the teacher. The agentic involvement of two Arabic-speaking children who take

the initiative to support Nadja displays high epistemic status that support the access to the role of authors of knowledge who can manage the interaction autonomously.

Excerpt 2

1	Teacher	((as Nadja takes her hand and taps on her fingernails)) hai visto le mie unghie? <i>Have you seen my nails?</i>
2	Nadja	Unghi <i>Nail</i>
3	Teacher	Hai visto il colore? <i>Have you seen the colour?</i>
4	Nadja	Si blu sorella grandi <i>Yes, blue sister bigga</i>
5	Teacher	Sí? <i>Yes?</i>
6	Nadja	tanto ((pause)) tanti tela' <i>Lot ((pause)) lots of tela'</i>
7	Teacher	Oh ((to Mahmood who is standing by)) come é in Italiano? tanti <i>Oh ((to Mahmood who is standing by)) how's in Italian? Lots of?</i>
8	Aleem	tela' ((pause)) tela' azafr <i>tela' ((pause)) tela' azafr</i>
9	Nadja	tela' azfr <i>tela' azfr</i>
10	Teacher	((to Mahmood)) e come si chiama in Italiano? Cos' é? <i>((to Mahmood)) and how do you say it in Italian? What is that?</i>
11	Enrico	Cos' é? <i>What is that?</i>
12	Teacher	((to Mahmood)) hai sentito Enrico? <i>Did you hear Enrico?</i>
13	Aleem	Az a fer <i>Az a fer</i>
14	Nadja	Azfr <i>Azfr</i>
15	Teacher	Assaf? <i>Assaf?</i>
16	Aleem	Az a fer <i>Az a fer</i>
17	Teacher	Azafer <i>Azafer</i>
18	Aleem	Si ((laughs)) <i>Yes ((laughs))</i>
19	Nadja	((to Mahmood, very quietly)) tel zafr



		<i>((to Mahmood, very quietly)) tel zafr</i>
20	Mahmood	Cosa?
		<i>What?</i>
21	Nadja	Tel tela' azfr
		<i>Tel tela' azfr</i>
22	Aleem	Cosí (imitates the gesture of varnishing fingernails)
		<i>Like that ((imitates the gesture of varnishing fingernails))</i>
23	Teacher	Ah, tagliaunghie
		<i>Ah, nail clipping</i>
24	Nadja	no taglia, é ((pause) é
		<i>No clipping, is ((pause)) is</i>
25	Teacher	Lima fa le unghie belle
		<i>Nail file makes nails nice</i>
26	Nadja	No blu fa blu
		<i>No blue makes blue</i>
27	Teacher	Azafer? ((to Mahmood)) ma tu sai che cosa vuole dire?
		<i>Azafer? ((to Mahmood)) do you know what that means?</i>
28	Mahmood	Lo so
		<i>I know it</i>
29	Teacher	Cosa?
		<i>What?</i>
30	Mahmood	Azfr é, sí, é eeee, si dice unghia s tela', si dice
		<i>Azfr is, yeah, isssss, you say nail s tela', you say</i>
31	Teacher	Unghie lunghe?
		<i>Long nails?</i>
32	Mahmood	No comeeee
		<i>No liiiiike</i>
33	Nadja	Il colore unghi!
		<i>The nail colours!</i>
34	Teachers	Ecco! Il colore delle unghie, lo smalto, smalto per le unghie!
		<i>Here it is! The nails' colour, the varnish, fingernails varnish!</i>

Nadja displays agency by introducing a new, unexpected theme in the interaction through self-selection as next speaker. The teacher supports Nadja's personal initiative with her questions that invite expansion and, even more explicitly, the teacher displays active listening and engagement with Nadja's contribution in turn 5 by interlacing a question to Nadja's previous turn 4. In turn 6 Nadia encounters a linguistic problem because she does not know the Italian word for fingernails polish (*smalto*). The first part of excerpt 2 shows that Nadja's limited knowledge of the Italian language does not prevent her agentic participation in the interaction. The second part of the excerpt, from turn 7, is characterised by the teacher's promotion of the active role of migrant children in the construction of linguistic mediation to support the ongoing interaction and narrative. In turn 6 Nadja must resort to the use of the Arabic word for fingernails polish (*tela'*, from *tela' azafer*). In turn 7, the teacher invites Mamhood who can

speak Arabic to support her to understand Nadja but in turn 8 Aleem takes the initiative to self-select as next speaker, taking control of turn-taking management, which is not sanctioned by the teacher. Nadja repeats the Arabic word in turn 9, and the teacher again invites Mamhood to take the role of speaker, this time echoed by an Italian-speaking child (turn 11). Again, in turn 12 the teacher invites Mahmood to intervene. Although Mahmood is selected as the next speaker by the teacher as the recipient of the invitation, Aleem and Nadja display agency by accessing the roles of speakers, insisting on repeating *tela*, expanded in *tela' sfr* (*azafer*) by Nadja in turn 14. The teacher's reaction to Aleem and Nadja initiative to ignore her selection of Mahmood as next speaker is particularly interesting from an ethnomethodological perspective. The teacher's reaction to Aleem and Nadja's personal initiatives can either support their agency or impose the teacher's control over the interaction. The teacher's reaction displays, through empirically observable actions, whether Aleem and Nadja are observed as agents and whether their epistemic authority is promoted, or not. Turn 15 shows the teacher's support to Aleem and Nadja's personal initiatives: their choice to access the role of speaker is not sanctioned by the teacher. On the contrary, it is indirectly validated as the teacher tries to repeat the word *tela' sfr*. The teacher's attempt at speaking Arabic allows Aleem to claim high epistemic status as he corrects the teacher's pronunciation. In turn 17 the teacher validates Aleem's epistemic status as she accepts the correction and tries to apply it. Interestingly, Aleem's positive feedback on the teacher's response completes the three-turn sequence 'Initiation-Response-Feedback' recognised by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), Mehan (1979), Margutti (2006, 2010), Farini (2011), Farini and Scollan (2021), among many others, as a structure of educational interaction. Nevertheless, in excerpt 2 the roles are inverted, with the child as the initiator and the evaluator of the teacher's response, making the I-R-F sequence a cue for Aleem's high epistemic status and the teacher's acknowledgement of it. In turn 19, Nadja takes another personal initiative as she selects Mamhood as the recipient of a question. However, Mamhood seems to misunderstand Nadja, triggering an extended turn in Arabic language where Nadja initiates a repair to restore mutual understanding, without much success (turn 24). In turn 26 Nadja unsuccessfully tries to explain herself in Italian. The following sequence of turns at talk are characterised by a shared commitment to restore mutual understanding, where all participants play an active role. Finally, in turn 33 Nadja finds the words to express herself in Italian, and the teacher enthusiastically displays her understanding (turn 33).

Excerpt 2 is only apparently a trivial attempt to find the Italian word for fingernails polish. If observation becomes second order observation, focusing on teacher observations of children's position vis-à-vis their epistemic status and rights, then it is possible to appreciate that the teacher systematically promotes children's status as authors of knowledge. Throughout the interaction, the teacher validates migrant children's personal initiatives upgrading their epistemic status as 'interpreters' thus facilitating their agentic cooperation to secure mutual understanding.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

The excerpts illustrate instances of facilitation (enhanced by teachers' initiatives), coordination (enhanced by children's initiatives), and negotiation (enhanced by both teachers and children's

initiatives). Facilitation, coordination, and negotiation can elevate migrant children's epistemic status, which support a higher epistemic authority as authors of knowledge; producing a change in migrant children's positioning as they access rights and responsibilities in the construction of knowledge, regardless of their linguistic competence. Such transformation is enhanced in different ways by teachers and other children. Teachers can facilitate the interaction, promoting migrant children's epistemic status and epistemic authority. Other children can actively participate in coordinated interactions and negotiations, taking initiatives that display support and appreciation.

An emphasis on improving language competence as a pre-condition for meaning participation in interaction is ancillary to dominant developmental paradigms. Such emphasis is underpinning by an approach to observation ultimately devoted to capture migrant children's needs, missing the richness of childhood experiences (Sakr & Osgood, 2019) and the knowledges that migrant children bring with them in the classroom (Baraldi, Farini & Ślusarczyk, 2022)

The excerpts show consequences of shifting observation from linguistic competences to practices of participation of communication. It challenges the link between limited linguistic competence and deficiency, inviting the promotion of children's agency through the elevation of epistemic status and epistemic authority that might promote greater inclusion. If observation focuses on children's ability to participate in interactions in unique ways (as *authentic listening*, Scollan, 2021) inclusion can be pursued as the promotion of agency thereby resisting a (re)positioning of migrant children within an ontology of troubled *childhood in deficit*.

The promotion of migrant children's agency as the upgrade of their epistemic status and epistemic authority lends itself as an alternative to scaffolding of children's learning. We believe this invites reflection and further research on the impact that different approaches to observation can have on the experiences of migrant children.

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