

BOOK REVIEW

Nicola Nasi. 2024. *Children's Peer Cultures in Dialogue.*

Participation, hierarchy, and social identity in diverse schools.

Amsterdam: John Benjamins. ISBN 978-9-0272-1788-2 x + 202 pp. 

Reviewed by **Jessica Jane Nocella** (Università di Modena e Reggio Emilia)

In this book, Nicola Nasi guides readers through children's peer interactions, highlighting the centrality of dialogue and showing how the multifarious activities in which children engage – ranging from conflict, to gossip, play and humour – help constitute a local peer culture. The book focuses on children's everyday practices and starts from the assumption that social interaction is the core structure of both human sense-making and of the construction of a shared social world (Enfield and Levinson 2006; Schegloff 2006). As already clear from the title, the book looks at the centrality of children's interactions in school environments and how these shape their social roles and identity: such encounters are supported by excerpts showing real interactions among peers. The book uses empirical data collected mostly from primary schools but also pre-schools and secondary schools located in Finland, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Thailand, and the USA: by supporting theory with video-recording extracts, Nasi adopts a combined methodology of both conversation analysis and videoethnographic research, stemming from previous work on children's 'natural' practices (Ervin-Tripp and Mitchell-Kernan 1977; Corsaro 1985; Cook-Gumperz, Corsaro, and Streeck 1986).

Chapter 1 aims to provide readers with fundamental notions that will be the *fil rouge* of the book, namely dialogue, intersubjectivity, and diversity in education. Dialogue is seen as a local achievement of intersubjectivity, meaning that it is accomplished through any interaction and encounter where all human sense-making practices are understood and interconnected with other voices and with what others do – connecting past, present, and future (Bakhtin 1981; Linell 2009; Weigand 2010; 2017). Another definition of dialogue provided by the author is that of a sense-making schema, namely a social action that involves the interactive encounter of two or more people who adopt semiotic resources to coordinate their actions (Baraldi 2009; Linell 2009; Goodwin 2018). Dialogue is then linked to intersubjectivity, which combines both the appraisal of sharedness of semiotic systems together with synchronic negation: this requires not only the awareness of 'the Other', but also mutual understanding through dialogue. The notion of 'the Other' is connected to that of diversity, another core element of the book, which



is grounded in the idea that reality making of human nature is always mediated by individuals' beliefs, values, and ideas. One of the excerpts provided by the author shows how diversity becomes visible through interaction and how intersubjectivity is already channelled in diverse environments.

Chapter 2 looks at children's learning and development from a social perspective. Drawing upon previous studies (Vygotski 1978; Ochs and Schieffelin 2017), the author argues that human development is a relational matter that children experience through dialogue, highlighting how the relationship between linguistic structure and socio-cultural knowledge is indexical and how every action is a socializing experience through which children gain competence. The book, in fact, takes into account non-linear features of competence and socialization, exploring how local performances are intertwined with local ideologies and social identities. Another relevant aspect of this chapter is that of *agency* (Giddens 1984), namely the ability of human beings to act within boundaries. The chapter deals with agency as a multifaceted construct, which comprehends both individuals' flexibility and accountability, with the former meaning the degree to bend one's own repertoire of resources towards their local goals and the latter being related to the control of a course of action. In relation to children, agency is seen as their ability to act over social-cultural material and to be accountable on their social actions. Finally, the chapter also deals with notions of *identity* (Antaki and Widdicombe 1998; Stokoe 2012), which becomes extremely relevant in a context of diversity. This is intertwined with competence, which children gain through both implicit and explicit forms of socializing practices, also establishing power relationships. The chapter also focuses on interaction as a form of belonging and marginalization: these are tackled from two perspectives, namely children's participation in current activities and from the social roles they enact in interaction – which are bound to participatory frameworks, symmetrical and asymmetrical frameworks, time and diachrony.

Chapter 3 focuses on children's peer language and culture and opens with a critique to the social construct of childhood, which is normally seen as a period of apprenticeship to adulthood. However, the book takes into account children's practices in the social culture, looking at how they co-construct their social organization day by day (Goodwin and Kyratzis 2012), which on the one hand differs from the adults' world while on the other it develops within its framework. This means that children creatively reproduce adults' worldview (e.g., ways of speaking, body posture, etc. – see also Corsaro 1992). This is further supported by an excerpt dealing with both children's alignments and misalignments of adults' ideology at school, showing how they adopt adults' resources to build social organization and agency. Through a set of stable activities and routines, children co-construct their local peer culture, creating "arenas of action" (Hutchby

and Moran-Ellis 1998) which leave space for the negotiation of peer local organization. Peers' interaction becomes a "double opportunity space" (Blum-Kulka, Huck-Taglicht, and Avni 2004; Blum-Kulka and Gorbatt 2014; Cekaite et al. 2014) for both social organisation and children's learning. In his excerpts, Nasi shows how children negotiate roles and identities and how these are useful for language acquisition: through socialising practices children acquire both sociolinguistic competences and local identities. Nasi explores the relevance of identity construction of individuals, linked to both their multilingual repertoire and their perceived background, which are a fundamental aspect of today's contemporary diverse environment. Starting from Bakhtin's (1981; 1986) concept of heteroglossia, Nasi shows the struggles of dealing both with centripetal and centrifugal forces, namely the standardisation and diversification of/from the norm in multilingualistic and multicultural contexts. In fact, children engage in acts of affiliation and disaffiliation through diachronic practices, which allow children to create social bonds.

Chapter 4 deals with (mis)alignments to school cultures, with school seen as the institutional culture where children interpret and reproduce adults' routines. Excerpts show how children both enact and resist subteaching practices (Tholander and Aronsson 2003) with the use of specific linguistic strategies (e.g., reformulation), and in and through various practices of compliance and resistance. Nasi shows how subteaching is linked to the hierarchical negotiation of roles and identities. Drawing on several previous studies (Pallotti 2001; Cekaite 2007; Blum-Kulka and Gorbatt 2014) on the use of second language in new communities of practice, excerpts show how children socialise towards institutional practices of literacy. By reproducing institutional norms of literacy and language use, children also reconstruct social expectations as they (re)negotiate everyday sociocultural norms – which are bound to morality and normativity.

Chapter 5 explores classroom asymmetries in peers' dialogues, highlighting the existing tension between structural asymmetries and their local reconstitution, through notions of statuses and stances (Heritage 2012; Stevanovich and Peräkylä 2014; Caronia and Nasi 2022). Nasi questions and investigates the relationship between epistemic and deontic statuses and stances, in other words, how the entitlement to know and to decide emerge through dialogue. In line with previous studies (Gumperz and Herasimchuk 1972; Maynard 1985; Goodwin and Kyratzis 2012), the author shows how children negotiate and co-construct asymmetries through dialogic interactions and how heterogeneous groups allow children's development of competence and repertoire mobilizing also available features in the local environment (e.g., rules, teachers' intervention, etc.). Nasi shows how superordinate roles can be achieved through authoritative sources and institutional rules which, through their entextualisation (Bauman and Briggs

1990), can be used to sanction classroom social order (Cobb-Moore, Danby, and Farrell 2009; LeMaster 2010; Karlsson and Nasi 2023). The chapter also explores the concept of epistemic primacy and its negotiation, also supported by excerpts. Nasi argues how it might be difficult to readdress established social roles and how interactional competence is fundamental in building hierarchical organization of social groups.

Chapter 6 explores peer conflict and, more specifically, how children argue with each other. The chapter opens with a definition of conflict grounded on previous studies (Ehrlich and Blum-Kulka 2010; Moore and Burdelski 2020) and is considered as a social practice where parties show oppositional views on the same matter. Such practice is fundamental for both children's development and for negotiations in social organizations: hence, conflict also becomes a space for double opportunity (Ehrlich and Blum-Kulka 2010). Through the support of one excerpt, the author shows how children negotiate both their identity and social organization, highlighting the importance of social alliances against transgression. Another important aspect of the chapter is children's role in the mediation of peer conflict: this functions as a means of social exclusion of target children but also as a way for children's inclusion in a new community. Again, through the support of excerpts, we can see how children function as non-professional mediators in peer environments, witnessing also how conflict resolution might also end with the intervention of teachers (Danby and Baker 1998; Cekaite 2012; Church 2009). The chapter shows how conflict can become a "perspicuous arena for reshuffling of social relationships" (Luhmann 1996; Baraldi 2009).

Chapter 7 explores creativity in peer dialogue, which is a prevalent feature of everyday dialogue: this requires some improvisation within the contingencies of the non-written codes of a certain social situation. Nasi underlines children's tension between a ritualized and improvised performance: children creatively reproduce elements from their sociocultural background according to their local goals. Excerpts show how the creative repetition of a word is linked to a humorous event proving that language-play and "entextualization" (Baumann and Briggs 1990) help creating the performance of an innovative repetition. Such humorous events are functional to the construction of both social alliances and boundaries while being a fundamental characteristic of human dialogue.








To conclude, the book discusses the gradual process of socialization among peers with the support of snapshots from everyday life in school settings, highlighting the various activities that characterize children's local peer culture and their social organization. The book also addresses diversity in class and how promotion of children's background develops sense of belonging. Throughout the book, the author manages to show the centrality of dialogue and how different social practices help create an interactional space for children, giving them both

the opportunity to develop social linguistic skills and to negotiate established social roles. Excerpts show how transgression in classroom is functional for peers' learning and might be also useful for teachers. Overall, the book raises awareness on children's practices and provides a useful tool not only for teachers and for educators as a support in classroom, but — given its multifaceted theoretical background, its interdisciplinary methodological approach and the various aspects analysed — it might also be of interest for scholars in the field of linguistics, sociology, education, and pedagogy.

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Address for correspondence

Jessica Jane Nocella
 University of Modena and Reggio Emilia
 Department of Studies on Language and Culture
 Largo S. Eufemia 19
 41121 Modena
 Italy
 jessicajane.nocella@unimore.it

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