

Beyond belonging. How migrant children actively construct their cultural identities in the interaction*

Sara Amadasi[°]

Summary. *This article analyses the discursive construction of cultural identity in the interaction among children aged 11-13 who are engaged in learning Italian as a second language. Cultural identity is here conceived as a positioning mode within the interaction, highlighting its processual and relational nature. The Positioning Theory, used as a theoretical framework for this paper, allows to call into question a reified and essentialized idea of identity and culture, acknowledging the possibility of participants' active choice in constructing narratives about their sense of belonging and membership to a particular cultural group. Based on a fieldwork in a primary school and a first grade secondary school, this article observes the different ways through which children actively participate in complex processes of identity negotiation.*

Key words: *children; migration; cultural identity; positioning; interaction*

Introduction

In the last years, the relevance assumed by the poststructuralist research paradigm has introduced meaningful changes in social sciences.

In both childhood studies and migration studies these changes have been translated into a recognition of the active role of the involved subjects, children and migrants respectively, in social processes.

Received: 19.09.2013 - Revision: 22.02.2014 – Accepted: 21.05.2014

° FISPPA Department – Section of Sociology - University of Padua - samadasi@yahoo.it

Thus, on one side the debate around children's agency has assumed a central role in sociology of childhood (James, Jenks, Prout 1998, James and Prout 1997; James 2009; Belotti 2010; Baraldi, 2010; Baraldi, Iervese 2012) fostering research and reflections on children's ability to choose within a system of constraints and norms, as well as opportunities (Belotti 2010).

On the other side, Abdelmalek Sayad's work (1999), and Transnational migrations' studies (e.g. Glick Schiller *et al.* 1992), have introduced important considerations on the role of the migrant, who is now observed in its complexity, emphasizing “the ongoing and continuing ways in which current-day immigrants construct and reconstitute their simultaneous embeddedness in more than one society” (Glick Schiller *et al.* 1995: 48). According to transnational migrations studies, the migrant is now recognized as a social agent able to collaborate to the creation of a dynamic reality.

However, despite the proliferation of studies in both these fields, there are yet few works that seek to merge these two perspectives. Studies concerning children and migration have privileged the issue of second-generation's integration in multicultural societies (Baraldi, 2010), or, in the transnational field the study of transnational families (e.g. Parreñas, 2001) rarely focusing on children's voices about their ongoing ties to their departure countries. In particular, in Italy, where most of the children with a migration background face the problem of learning Italian as a second language, few studies have focused on the analysis of the *social competences* (Hutchby, Moran-Ellis 1998) of those children whose lives is characterized by mobility, or, to use Beck's expression, *place polygamy* (Beck 1999).

On an international level, some scholars have only recently begun to pay attention to the study of children's mobility and their active role in transnational migration, both in sociology and anthropology (e.g. Gardner 2012; Zeitlyn, Mand 2012; Mand, 2010; Punch, 2012; Ní Laoire *et al.* 2010) and in the field of geography (e.g. Holloway, Valentine 2000).

However research works which associate children's mobility to a situation of problematic disorientation and passivity are still common, especially in education and intercultural studies. This perspective originates from a reified and essentialized idea of culture and identity.

Based on a research conducted in a primary school and first grade secondary school in the province of Reggio Emilia, with migrant children attending Italian as a second language (ISL) classes, this article aims to investigate how children aged 11-15, who are in touch with their origin countries through temporary return experiences to their family's countries

or through familiar language, actively participate to the discursive construction of their cultural identities in the interactions.

With the analysis of the data collected in this research the aim is to highlight the relevance of observing cultural identity not as a final product, defined by the belonging just to one place, but rather as a process composed by multiple possibilities as in perpetual negotiation. In this process migrant children are active participants, showing their social competences.

Constructing “in-between” identities

The interest that poststructuralist theories have addressed to the issue of agency, both in migration studies and in childhood studies, could not disregard the question of identity. As observed by Norton (2013), Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha are only two of the leading scholars who have dealt with the issue of the de-essentialization and deconstruction of identity categories such as race and gender (Norton 2013).

The debate in this area is thus so broad and rich in contributions that in this paper we will wittingly omit the whole debate in order to focus only on some reflections on how the issue of identity could be linked to the question of children's mobility.

Starting from the critical analysis made by important sociologists of childhood such as James, Jenks and Prout (2002) to the developmental psychology's approaches and their construction of the child as an *in becoming* individual (James, Jenks, Prout 2002: 167), in the last years some scholars began to reflect on how these approaches have influenced the study of children in situation of mobility.

According to Ní Laoire *et al.* (2010) the widespread assumption that looks at children as having a natural need for stability and security in their developmental process, as observed by Holloway and Valentine (2000), could be associated with the idea of home as the natural and best place for children's growth (Ní Laoire *et al.* 2010). Ní Laoire *et al.* draw our attention on how this assumption has generated, in western societies, powerful ideologies that place childhood in fixed and bounded spaces, often associating the issue of mobility with the idea of detachment.

This association, however, is not only the consequence of a notion of 'home' as site of security, that provides a sense of belonging, as suggested by Ní Laoire *et al.* It is also, and above all, strongly linked to the process of identity-making.

As Christensen, James and Jenks (2000) claim,

“Traditionally, following the classical account of Barth (1969), the process of identity formation has been seen as tied to or reflected through particular fixed geographical or spatial localities. Within this tradition nationalist discourses, for example, have been regarded largely as debate about belonging, and social identity has been articulated through, and in relation to, tangible material space.”

(Christensen, James, Jenks 2000: 140)

This concept of identity as tied to fixed geographical localities seems therefore to imply a developmental process of the identity itself, as if, to quote Bhatia and Ram, there was “an 'authentic' or 'real' self that we potentially could achieve at some given point in time” (Bhatia, Ram 2009: 142).

Several studies concerning the issue of belonging and identity of children involved in meaningful experiences of mobility, have been conducted from a cross-cultural perspective. Works focusing on Third Culture Kids (e.g. Fail *et al.* 2004;), *cultural homelessness* or, more broadly, cross-cultural identities (Hoersting, Jenkins 2011), are interesting examples of how the evolutionary approach is still very current in the study of children whose lives are characterized by mobility.

The TCK's member, for instance, is described as

“a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents' culture. The TCK frequently builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any.”

(Pollock, Van Reken 2009: 13)

Repeated cross-cultural movements at a young age are considered a challenge in individuals' identity formation (Fail *et al.* 2004) as children might experience difficulties in attaining a solid cultural identity (Hoersting, Jenkins 2011).

According to TCK approach, children whose life is characterized by *place polygamy* (Beck 1999), are seen as disoriented, deprived of their sense of belonging. Hence, TCK's members constitute a social group with its own well-defined culture: that of someone who does not fully belong to any culture.

Following this perspective, migrant children thus seem to be individuals who, because of their *place polygamies*, are stuck between two cultures (Mannitz, 2005), which emphasizes exclusively their condition of neediness and difference (White *et al.* 2011: 1160).

This inclination to focus on a singular narration of migrant children, which conceives and constructs child's mobility as traumatic and

dangerous, and children as passive recipients of culture and identity, appears to be twofold. First, a psychological concept of development incorporated into the everyday understanding of children (Prout, James 1997) that is linked to an idea of the evolution of identity, is still present. The second reason is a reified and essentialized idea of culture as well as identity, that takes both of them as given (Piller, 2007), denying children the possibility to be active participants in social processes.

Cultural Identity as a form of Positioning

According to the social constructionist perspective, culture and identity are linguistic and social practices. Therefore they should not be taken as given, but rather observed and considered as discursively constructed (Piller, 2007).

In his work on cultural identity and diaspora dated 1990, Hall claims that cultural identity is 'not an essence but a "positioning"' (Hall 1990: 226).

Hall looks at positioning as a political negotiation between different cultural groups, focusing on the concept of power. This insight of positioning implies that "identity is situated in politics and does not evolve out of some authentic, universal origins" (Bhatia, Ram 2009: 142).

Studies on diasporic identity, inspired by Hall's work such as that proposed by Bhatia and Ram (2009) and from a psychological perspective, or on transnational belonging (e.g. Zeitlyn 2012), although extremely meaningful in the debates on migrations and relevant to challenge essentialist and fixed conceptions of identity, risk to maintain an idea of identity as something which exists independently from everyday discursive practices, and to which children have to be socialized to (Zeitlyn 2012). Thus, although the perspective of Hall is far from that adopted in this work, I would like to focus on the concept of *positioning*, as a basic aspect of interpersonal interactions.

Davies and Harré (1999) refer to positioning, as the "discursive process whereby people are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines" (Davies, Harré 1999: 37). Through this concept the idea is to introduce a dynamic alternative to the more static concept of role (Harre, Van Langenhove 1999).

According to this perspective, conversation is the tool through which the social realm is created and it is within conversations that "social acts and societal icons are generated and reproduced" (*Ibidem*: 15). Hence the role of the relation between individuals participating in the same conversation is considered to be of paramount importance: in every interaction the participants, through their on-going discursive practices, create positionings

of themselves and, consequently, they also position other participants. Thus in positioning there is both a reflexive component, related to self-positioning, and an interactive one, which leads to other-positioning (Baraldi, 2009).

A central notion in positioning theory is that of the “positioning triangle” through which it is possible to envision “a dynamic stability between actors' positions, the social force of what they say and do, and the storylines that are instantiated in the sayings and doings of each episode” (Harre, Van Langenhove 1999: 10)

In this game between acceptance, refusal and negotiation of positionings coming out in an interaction, issues concerning cultural identity can also emerge, representing a part of the storylines which are created in conversations (Carbaugh 1999, Baraldi 2012) and thus an important element in the construction of the self. Cultural identity is therefore subject to the same process of discursive construction.

The field

The data reported in this paper are part of a larger study for my Phd research exploring how children, who keep ties with their origin countries through temporary return experiences to their family's countries or familiar language, construct and give meaning in the interaction to their *place polygamies*.

It also aims to understand how school, as an institution, construct and manage the idea of children's mobility across different countries. In fact, some of these return trips to parents' countries take place during the school year, lasting even several months, and thus affecting the child's schooling.

The research was conducted in two primary schools and a first grade secondary school in the province of Reggio Emilia and in Parma. The research started in November 2012 and ended in November 2013.

The first part took place in Reggio Emilia where I worked with the students of the two Italian as a second language (ISL) classes.

One class, in the primary school, involved children aged 7-10, while the ISL class of the first grade secondary school involved girls and boys aged 11-15ⁱ. Both groups consisted of 15/20ⁱⁱ students each, all originating from different countries. For the workshops, each group was divided into 3 sub-groups.

During the second part of the research, I conducted the same workshops realized in Reggio Emilia with an entire ordinary class (this group, composed by 24 children was also divided into subgroups) of a school in Parma. This group included both Italian children and children with a migration background.

The purpose of the work with this class was to observe and to investigate how, in a situation with frequently national and international departures and arrivals, children who experience these journeys personally and those who do not – but who are waiting for their mates – construct together and give meaning to mobility.

For this project I used different tools to collect data. First I had a period of 5 months (November-March) for ethnographic observation during standard ISL lessons, and field notes were taken for every lesson.

Then I conducted workshops and focus groups with these same three groups and all the workshops were video-recorded and transcribed using the Jefferson code. Finally I interviewed twenty teachers, ten in Reggio Emilia (both ISL classes' teachers and ordinary classes teachersⁱⁱⁱ) and ten in Parma (only ordinary classes teachers), and also in this case the interviews were recorded and transcribed.

I will now proceed with the analysis of the data, which is realized according to two different perspectives. On the one side, workshops and focus groups are analysed by focusing on interactions and therefore with special attention given to the different positionings emerging and to the narratives associated with this positionings. On the other side, teachers interviews are analysed according to discourse analysis with the purpose to investigate which discourses around children mobility and *place polygamy* (Beck 1999) circulate inside school and among teachers.

The topic of the workshop conducted with children was that of travel.

With the group of Reggio Emilia, from which some of the data collected are taken to realized this paper, I divided the work into three encounters. During the first, I read to the students the story of the *Petit Prince*, in a simplified version and without an end. After a discussion all together, trying to let emerge the main aspects of the story from their point of view, I asked them to create together an ending.

During the second encounter children were asked to discuss together their personal travel experiences while the third encounter was different for the two ISL classes: children aged 7-10 were asked to do a list of things/people they would bring in Italy from their countries of origins and things/people they would bring in their countries of origins from Italy; to the children aged 11-15 I gave some cameras a week before the last encounter and I asked them to take pictures to describe their life: what they like/don't like of their lives in Italy, what they miss/don't miss of their countries of departure, and the moments in which they feel happy or sad to be in Italy. For the third encounter they were asked to choose some of the pictures taken, and to describe them to the group.

The difference between the two classes wasn't due to an age issue, but to the agreements that were negotiated with teachers. All the workshops were video-recorded.

Before starting the activities, all students were asked their consent to participate the project through a consent form. During this stage they were also asked to choose a fake name, which I use as pseudonyms for the transcriptions.

Constructing Cultural Identity

The two episodes analysed in this paragraph are extracts of the encounter with the group of children aged 12-13.

During these encounters the theme of cultural identity was not disclosed openly to the group. However, it emerged spontaneously among the students, especially in the third encounter, the one in which they were asked to choose some of the pictures they took and explain them to the group. Students took pictures of places, people, food, objects, dresses and symbols which they considered meaningful for some reasons.

This discussion starts with Zainab showing us a picture of *mehndi* (figure 1) and starting to explain what *mehndi* is. In the group there are two guys from Punjab, two girls from Pakistan, one boy from Pakistan and one boy from Ucraina.

In the analysis reported here we focus on the interaction between Zainab (Pakistan), Ahmed (Pakistan), Amrit (Punjab), Jotwinder (Punjab) and R. (the researcher).

In the translation from Italian to English I tried to maintain the speakers' mistakes and hesitations in the selection of some words.



Figure 1: *Mehndi - Picture taken by Zainab*

Extract 1¹

1. Zainab: Prof, questo noi facciamo quando c'è la nostra festa.
Zainab: Prof, we make this when it's our holiday
2. R: eh:: come- che cos'è? come:: come si fa?
R: eh:: how- what is it? How is it made?
3. Zainab: è un-
Zainab: it's-
4. Amrit: Mehndi mehndi
Amrit: Mehndi mehndi
5. Zainab: è come un matita che::
Zainab: it's like a pencil that::
6. Amrit: no non è una matita
Amrit: no it's not a pencil
7. R: allora aspetta, prima sentiamo:: l'esperta poi dopo (sentiamo tu)
che cosa:: ((Zainab ride)) eh be però tu lo fai no
*R: well wait, first we listen to the expert and then (we listen to you)
what:: ((Zainab laughs)) well, you make it, right?*
8. Zainab: sì sì. eh:: questa è una nostra (festa) e facciamo
Zainab: yes yes. Eh:: this is our holiday and we make
9. Jotwinder: anche quando c'è il matrimonio lo facciamo!
Jotwinder: also when there is a wedding we make it!
10. Ahmed: Sì:::
Ahmed: ye:::
11. Amrit: anche quando si sposano
Amrit: also when they get married
12. R: quando c'è una festa?
R: is it when there is an holiday?
13. Zainab: sì:, se vogliono fare (fanno sempre)
Zainab: yes, if they want to make it (they always make it)

¹ Transcription symbols

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| [] | Overlapping utterances; |
| (.) | Micropause (>2 seconds) |
| () | Inaudible expression |
| (expression) | Not clear expression, probable |
| ((expression)) | Description of non-verbal act |
| text- | Interrupted turn |
| : | Sound extension of the last letter of a word |
- i Since, although the standard age for first grade secondary school is 11-13, most of the students attending ISL class have repeated some years due to their low level of Italian knowledge.
- ii The number of students in a ISL class can vary during the school year depending on new arrivals.
- iii In the school of Reggio Emilia, children's school activities are divided between the participation in the ordinary mixed class and the class for the learning of Italian as a second language

In this exchange Zainab introduces *mehndi* practice as something that identify her cultural group. The strong use of *we* and *our*, is a way to differentiate her group from other groups, and to position herself as a member of that group and as an expert of this cultural practice. Moreover, the reference to “our holiday”, gives to *mehndi* a high symbolic value, which reinforces its meaning and its function of practice used as a way to express cultural identity in public. In turn 4 and turn 6, the contributions of Amrit seem to break Zainab's positionings both as the only member of that cultural group and as the only expert about *mehndi* practice: in turn 4 Amrit, naming it, displays to be aware of what Zainab is speaking about; in turn 6, correcting Zainab, he places her in the condition of not fully competent, taking on a position of better knowledge and expertise.

In turn 7 the researcher steps in, to help Zainab, roughly interrupted by Amrit, finish her sentence. In trying to re-position Zainab in the role of the competent one about the topic, R. uses the word “expert”. In doing so, R. actually amplifies this sort of play/challenge among students to be the more expert about *mehndi*.

Thus, Jotwinder, Zainab and Amrit go on participating this conversation adding always new descriptions of *mehndi* and its use, producing two results: first, they position themselves as experts about the practice in question; and secondly, in so doing, they construct themselves as members of a certain cultural group.

In extract 2, Amrit explains to the researcher how henna, used for the drawings, is produced. In turn 17 through the question “Is it the same in India?” R. aligns Amrit and Jotwinder with Zainab, identifying the description of *mehndi* put forward by Amrit as belonging both to the Pakistani and Indian context, thus positioning all three children as equally experts on the topic.

This attempt, however, is openly rejected by Zainab who instead introduces into the conversation the discourse of diversity, which was latent but unexpressed until then. The reason through which Zainab rejects her being positioned in the same cultural group with Amrit and Jotwinder, is that she sustains the non-authenticity of Indian practices, and therefore the false commonality between the two groups: “India always copies from Pakistan!” (turn 21).

In turn 23, Ahmed – he is also from Pakistan – tries to break the juxtaposition between Pakistan and India by claiming that *mehndi* is widespread throughout the Arab world. Such a statement is meaningful because it introduces a view of culture that does not merely correspond to national borders but is more inclusive and transnational.

Extract 2

14. Amrit: prof. fan- fanno:: è una pianta, prendono i fogli della pianta poi::
Amrit: Prof, they ma- make:: it's a plant, they take the plant's sheets and then::
15. R: le foglie
R: the leaves
16. Amrit: poi fanno
Amrit: then they make::
17. R: anche in India uguale?
R: Is it the same in India?
18. Amrit: sì
Amrit: yes
19. R: anche i disegni?
R: the drawings as well?
20. Amrit: Sì
Amrit: yes
21. Zainab: India co- sempre copia da Pakistan!
Zainab: India co- always copies from Pakistan!
22. Amrit: non è vero
Amrit: it's not true
23. Ahmed: ((a Zainab)) o dai (.) ((a R.)) Anche:: gli arabi fanno
Ahmed: ((addressing Zainab)) oh come on (.) ((addressing R.))
Also:: the Arabs do it
24. R: Sì? In eh:: Arab- cioè in che zona?
R: really? In eh:: Arab- well in which area?
25. Ahmed: mh:: dappertutto
Ahmed: Mh:: everywhere
26. R: cioè dici che è una tradizione araba?
R: that is, are you saying it's an Arab tradition?
27. Ahmed: sì come in Marocco ehm::
Ahmed: yes as in Morocco ehm::
28. Zainab: tut- tutti i musulmani fanno!
Zainab: all- all Muslims do it!

As Carbaugh suggests “the discourse of difference thus stratified participants not only through the vision of social life it created [...] but also because the immediate social reaction to this discourse was itself somewhat divisive” (Carbaugh 1999:164). As shown in the above extract, this is applicable in our case as well: the discourse on difference that emerges between students in this interaction, creates a separation among the participants not only because of the vision of cultural/national differences,

but also because this discourse generates divisive reactions in itself. Thus the juxtaposition is not only between Pakistani and Indian students, but also between the different opinions generated.

Moreover, albeit of Ahmed's choice of the word Arab, instead of Muslims or Islamics in the last turn, a new position is realized: Zainab belonging's group now is no more grounded on nationality, but rather on religion, thus conferring a new meaning to her and other participants' cultural identity (turn 28).

Positioning and conflict

In this last extract we focus on a group of children aged 11-12.

This is part of the first encounter, in which children were asked to create together an ending to the *Petite Prince's* story. In the group there are three girls from Pakistan (Anwal, Alishba, Fatima), two boys from Pakistan (Ali, Abdul) and one boy from Punjab (Tanveer). In the interaction here reported, children are discussing two different ideas for the story's ending: one introduced by Tanveer and the other one introduced by Alishba. The researcher is trying to understand which one the students prefer and why.

Extract 3

1. R: e perché- perché siete d'accordo con la sua e non con la sua?
R: and why- why do you agree with her and not with him?
2. Tanveer: Pourquoi? Pourquoi?
Tanveer: Pourquoi? Pourquoi?
3. Fatima: ()
Fatima: ()
4. R: Perché?
R: Why?
5. Tanveer: perché io sono:: un indiano quindi:: [(.) quindi:::] quindi non so dire niente scherzo
Tanveer: because i'm an Indian so:: [(.) so:::] so I'm not able to say anything I'm kidding
6. Fatima: [No]
Fatima: [No]
7. Ali: eh gli indiani scherzano!?! ((Risate))
Ali: eh Indians kid!?! ((Laughs))
8. R: ((alle ragazze)) (è per quello?) è per quello?
R: ((addressing girls)) (Is that why?) Is that why?
9. Anwal: No
Anwal: No
10. Abdul: Sì!

Abdul: Yes!

11. Ric: No:: allora sentiamo per- no sent-

R: No:: well let's listen wh- no let-

12. Ali: Prof io abito lì eh! ((guardando la cartina appesa al muro)) in Pakistan!

Ali: Prof I live there eh! ((looking at the map on the wall)) In Pakistan!

In turn 1 and 4, R. attempts to start a reflection about the two possible endings introduced by Tanveer and Alishba. In turn 2 Tanveer steps-in to understand why the two girls prefer Alishba's ending rather than his. However Fatima and Anwal don't seem willing to participate in the discussion.

In turn 5, Tanveer gives his own interpretation to their choice, positioning himself as discriminated because Indian and thus positioning Pakistani girls as those who are discriminating him. Through the statement "I'm kidding" pronounced without hesitation at the end of his contribution, Tanveer shows to be aware of the potential conflict he is generating. This in fact causes the reaction of Fatima, who rejects this position denying Tanveer's assumption (turn 6). It is not clear, however, in turn 10, whether Abdul is confirming the positioning Tanveer assigns to Fatima and Anwal, or he is positioning himself as someone who does not support Tanveer's ending because he is Indian.

In turn 11, R. clearly avoids the conflict (Baraldi, 2012; Iervese, 2012) trying to divert the discussion to another subject. What is relevant however is Ali's reaction (turn 12), who steps-in to draw the attention on his own national belonging.

Although in this extract it would be more appropriate to speak of national rather than cultural identity, we can observe how juxtaposition becomes a discursive strategy used by children and in this juxtaposition belongings and identities are constructed.

As suggested by Krzyżanowski and Wodak "attachments are also emphasized by topoi of difference, in which the difference from group X or Y is constructed as a point of reference for one's identity and range of attachments." (Krzyżanowski and Wodak 2008: 109). These juxtaposition can lead in some cases to conflictual exchanges, in which it is possible to observe how participants negotiate, reject or accept the positionings they assume in the interaction.

Moreover, in this extract, discordance seems to be taken by participants as an opportunity for the interaction (Iervese 2012), highlighting how through conflict "children produce social organization, create political alignments, and thereby realize their

practical interests within a changing set of social relationships” (Maynard 1985: 208).

Conclusion

At a broader level this analysis focused on cultural identity not as an element in order to verify the integration of migrant children inside Italian society, but rather as a way to observe and recognise their active participation in social processes and their social competences (Hutchby, Moran-Ellis 1998).

In particular, the observation of the interactions between them and with the researcher provides insight into how culture identity is both constructed through discursive strategies and, at the same time, its construction becomes a strategy and a means to participate in the interaction. Through the positionings taken up in the interaction, children show their ability to choose in a system of constraints and norms, as well as opportunities (Belotti 2010), negotiating their positions in the conversation and constructing around them alliances or juxtapositions.

As conversations are on-going and evolving discursive practices in which storylines and participants’ roles are not fixed but subject to change (Yamakawa *et al.* 2005), positioning theory allows us to look at children as skilled negotiators, recognising also the importance of conflict as a way through which they construct and control their positions in the interaction. Through the extracts analysed in this paper, it is possible to reflect on how conflict appears as interactions do not have “predictable and obligatory outcome and that any outcome may be none other than a result of the way in which the participants manage to coordinate among themselves” (Iervese 2012: 143). Hence, the interaction and the meanings it generates depend on the active participation of the individuals taking part in it (Iervese 2012).

Linked to this, in this paper I have attempted to highlight the active role of children in social processes. The concept of positioning, when applied to interactions among children, is of paramount importance in order to better reflect on children as choosing subjects, and on how “the possibility of choice in a situation in which there are contradictory requirements provides people with the possibility of acting agentically.” (Davies, Harré 1999 p. 49).

Although the presence of the researcher created a break with the ordinary everyday school's routine and the purpose was to create an “evaluation-free” environment, the workshop context and the presence of an outsider (the researcher) has nevertheless, and certainly, influenced children's interactions. However, this fact reinforces the hypothesis

presented in this paper rather than undermining it: conceiving identity as relational and thus observing cultural identity through the perspective of positioning theory allow to better reflect on identity-negotiation as something which is extremely relevant in studies concerning children's mobility and migration because it takes into account its complexity, avoiding the risk of dangerous, simplistic associations between mobility and deviance.

References

- Baraldi, C. (2012). Intercultural education and communication in second language interactions. *Intercultural Education*, 23(4), 297–311.
- Baraldi, C. (2010). Children's Citizenships: Limitations and Possibilities of Childhood Sociology in Italy. *Current Sociology*, 58(2), 272-291
- Baraldi, C. (2009). Empowering Dialogue in Intercultural Settings. In C. Baraldi (ed.), *Dialogue in Intercultural Communities: Form an Educational Point of View*, (pp. 3-28). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Baraldi, C. & Iervese, V. (2012). Introduction. In C. Baraldi & V. Iervese (eds.), *Participation, Facilitation, and Mediation. Children and Young People in Their Social Context*, (pp. 1-11) New York/London: Routledge.
- Beck, U. (1999). *Che cos'è la globalizzazione*, Roma: Carocci.
- Belotti, V. (ed.) (2010). *Costruire senso, negoziare spazi. Ragazze e ragazzi nella vita quotidiana*. Quaderni del Centro nazionale di documentazione e analisi per l'infanzia e l'adolescenza.
- Bhatia, S. & Ram, A. (2009). Theorizing identity in transnational and diaspora cultures: A critical approach to acculturation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 33, 140–149.
- Carbaugh, D. 1999. Positioning as display of cultural identity. In R. Harré, L. van Langenhove (eds) *Positioning theory* (pp. 160–77). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Christensen, P., James, A., Jenks, C. (2000). Home and Movement. Children Constructing “Family Time”. In S. Holloway, G. Valentine (Eds.) *Children's Geographies: Living, Playing and Transforming Everyday Worlds* (pp.139-155). London: Routledge.
- Davies, B. & Harré, R. (1999). Positioning and Personhood. In R. Harré, L. van Langenhove (eds) *Positioning theory* (pp. 32- 52). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Fail, H., Thompson, J., Walker, G. (2004). Belonging, identity and Third Culture Kids. Life histories of former international school students. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 3(3), 319–338.
- Gardner, K. (2012). Transnational Migration and the Study of Children: An Introduction. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 38(6), 889-912.

- Glick-Schiller, N., L. Basch, C. Blanc-Szanton (1995) From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 68(1), 48-63
- Glick-Schiller, N., L. Basch, C. Blanc-Szanton (1992). *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered*. New York: New York Academy of Sciences.
- Hall, S. (1990). Cultural identity and diaspora. In J. Rutherford (ed.), *Identity: Community, culture, difference* (pp. 222–237). London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Harré, R. & Van Langenhove, L. (eds.) (1999). *Positioning Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hoersting, R.C. & Jenkins S. R. (2011). No place to call home: Cultural homelessness, self-esteem and cross-cultural identities. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35, 17–30
- Holloway, S. & Valentine, G. (eds) (2000). *Children's Geographies: Living, Playing and Transforming Everyday Worlds*. London: Routledge.
- Hutchby, I. & Moran-Ellis J. (1998). Situating Children's Social Competence. In I. Hutchby, J. Moran-Ellis, *Children and Social Competence. Arenas of Action* (pp. 8-28). London: Falmer Press.
- Iervese, V. (2012). Conflict and Mediation in International Groups of Children. In C. Baraldi & V. Iervese (eds.), *Participation, Facilitation, and Mediation. Children and Young People in Their Social Context*, (pp. 128-146). New York/London: Routledge.
- James, A. (2009). Agency, in J. Qvortrup, G. Valentine, W. Corsaro, M.S. Honig (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies* (pp. 34-45). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- James, A. & Prout, A. (eds) (1997). *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*. London: Falmer Press. (Orig. pub. 1990.)
- James, A., Jenks, C., Prout, A. (1998). *Theorizing Childhood*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- James, A., Jenks, C., Prout, A. (2002). *Teorizzare l'infanzia*. Roma: Donzelli
- Jenks, C. (1996). *Childhood*, London: Routledge.
- Krzyżanowski M. & Wodak R. (2008). Multiple Identities, Migration and Belonging: 'Voices of Migrants', in C.R. Caldas-Coulthard and R. Iedema (eds.), *Identity Trouble. Critical Discourse and Contested Identities* (pp. 95-119). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mand, K. (2010). 'I've got two houses. One in Bangladesh and one in London: everybody has': Home, Locality and Belonging(s). *Childhood*, 17(2), 273–287.
- Mannitz, S. (2005) Coming of Age as the Third Generation: Children of Immigrants in Berlin. in J. Knörr (ed.) *Childhood and Migration: From Experience to Agency*. Bielefeld & Somerset, N.J.: Transcript & Transaction Publishers, 2005.
- Maynard, D.W. (1985). On the Functions of Social Conflict Among Children, *American Sociological Review*, 50(2), 207-223

- Ní Laoire, C., Carpena-Méndez, F., Tyrrell, N. and White, A. (2010). Introduction: Childhood and Migration. Mobilities, Homes and Belongings. *Childhood*, 17(2), 155-162.
- Norton B. (2013). *Identity and Language Learning: Extending the Conversation - 2nd Edition*. Bristol UK: Multilingual Matters
- Parreñas, R. (2001). Mothering from a distance: emotions, gender, intergenerational relations in filipino transnational families." *Feminist Studies*, 27(2), 261-291.
- Piller, I. (2007). Linguistics and Intercultural Communication. *Language and Linguistic Compass*, 1(3), 208-226.
- Pollock, D.C. & Van Reken, R.E. (2009). *The Third Culture Kid Experience Growing Up Among Worlds*. Boston, MA: Nicholas Brealey Publishing
- Prout, A. & James, A. (1997). A New Paradigm for the Sociology of Childhood? Provenance, Promise and Problems. In A. James and A. Prout (eds) *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood* (pp. 7-32), London: Falmer Press. (Orig. pub. 1990.)
- Punch, S. (2012). Studying Transnational Children: A Multi-Sited, Longitudinal, Ethnographic Approach. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 38(6), 1007-1023.
- Sayad, A. (1999) *La double absence*. Paris: Seuil
- White, A., Ní Laoire, C., Tyrrell, N., Carpena-Méndez, F. (2011). Children's Roles in Transnational Migration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 37(8), 1159-1170.
- Yamakawa, Y., Forman, E., & Ansell, E. (2009). Role of Positioning: The role of positioning in constructing an identity in a third grade mathematics classroom. In K. Kumpulainen, C. E. Hmelo-Silver & M. Cesar (Eds.), (Tran.), *Investigating Classroom Interaction: Methodologies In Action* (pp. 179-201). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Zeitlyn, B. (2012). Maintaining Transnational Social Fields: The Role of Visits to Bangladesh for British Bangladeshi Children. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 38(6), 953-968 .
- Zeitlyn, B. & Mand, K. (2012). Researching Transnational Childhoods. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 38(6), 987-1006.
-