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Chapter

SOCIAL INTERACTIONS IN FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS AS CONTEXTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPACES OF THINKING

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this chapter is to present and discuss some of our empirical data collected in educational contexts in order to show the relevance of conversational processes among children and adults. Within a socio-cultural perspective, we assume that the child's thought is developed through discourse, especially during everyday activities involving peer interactions and adult-guided discussions. In order to examine the conversational procedures by means of which participants jointly construct and negotiate social relationships, we consider family and school contexts as two analytic frameworks for the development of spaces of thinking during the everyday lives of adults and children. In particular, we analyze how family conversations and school discussions offer interactional opportunities through which children can foster a critical attitude in the process of discussion carried out with peers and adults. Implications of discursive practices in these two educational settings are discussed in order to highlight the relevance of social interactions as spaces of thinking and development.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to explore the relevance of conversational processes among children and adults in two educational contexts, such as families and schools. Within a socio-cultural perspective, we assume that the child's thought is developed through discourse, especially during everyday activities: the examination of the conversational procedures by means of

which participants jointly construct and negotiate social relationships is thus a powerful way to understand how adults and children develop spaces of thinking during their everyday lives. Families and schools are assumed as two analytic frameworks offering interactional opportunities through which children can foster a critical attitude in the process of discussion carried out with peers and adults. Through the presentation and the qualitative analysis of some of our data collected in both contexts, we intend to highlight the role of social interactions in these settings, assumed as spaces of development and thinking in children and adults.

SOCIAL INTERACTIONS IN CONTEXT: A THEORETICAL FRAME

People do not develop alone in a social vacuum but within settings of joint activities that confront them with different discourses, subjectivities, perspectives, and opinions (Perret-Clermont, 2006). As participants of such contexts, children and adults have to construct their moves, to test the acceptability of their actions for communication, understanding and success. These aspects are crucial for the development of critical attitude in social activities and for learning processes. However, fundamental questions remain to be opened, such as: How is this achieved? In which conditions and situations? How do people learn to co-ordinate different meanings and movements in various social activities of the everyday lives? In our perspective, conversation plays a central role in this endeavour: in conversation thoughts are implied within a set of rules that require and scaffold some kind of interpersonal coordination and joint activity. Thoughts are shaped within the unfolding of conversation, a conversation that is not a mere container of thoughts and learning, but it is a constituent (Rigotti & Rocci, 2006) of learning and socialization processes.

The link between conversation and context allows us to another crucial element that guides our research: the evidence that the role of language cannot be separated from the overall socio-cultural knowledge (Valsiner, 1995; Pontecorvo & Arcidiacono, 2010). Children learn progressively a complex set of relations between contexts of use and linguistic features. Linguistic knowledge is embedded in socio-cultural knowledge, and at the same time values, rules, concepts are acquired through language. This process of *language socialization* (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986) includes both socialization through language and socialization to use language. It is a process that is never completed and never ends (Ochs, 1990): every interaction is potentially a socializing experience inasmuch members of a social group are socializing each other by negotiating and sharing situational meanings (Pontecorvo, Fasulo & Sterponi, 1998, 2001).

In presenting our contribution we assume a socio-cultural perspective (Zutavern & Perret-Clermont, 2000; Perret-Clermont, Carugati & Oates, 2004) within which a special attention is devoted to the semiotic tools people use in accomplishing cognitive activities. According to Vygotskij (1934/1962), a fundamental role is thus attributed to language in order to define the child's development as a progression accomplished through a complex set of culturally shared and socially supported language-games (Jost, 1995). For instance, understanding mental states of others, false belief or deceit in children can be a matter of learning the appropriate cultural language-games for intentional behaviour in their internal logical sequence. Our intention is to analyze development and education as social

constructions and practices, in which people are continuously oriented to become competent and to achieve understanding (Edwards, 1995). Such an epistemological approach can help the elaboration of a psychological perspective that aims at understanding how development and education take place within a culture as social, cognitive and linguistic processes.

A CONVERSATIONAL AND DISCURSIVE APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION

We found in conversation and discourse analysis (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974; Schenkein, 1978; Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Goodwin, 1981; Button & Lee, 1987; Schegloff, 1989; Sacks, 1992) a powerful tool for a cultural and discursive approach that is offering means adequate to the presentation and explanation of human behaviour and of its development. In using both approaches to explore talk-in-interaction we are trying to combine a language socialization dimension to our psychological interest in understanding how children practice cognitive competences in different everyday activities. Indeed our choice for studying interactions in families and schools is not random: it is driven by the fact that these are the major settings in which children's socialization and development occur. In line with the language socialization research trends (Ochs, 1982; Schieffelin, 1990; Ochs, Pontecorvo & Fasulo, 1996; Pontecorvo & Arcidiacono, 2007; Arcidiacono, 2011) our study explores, within the Italian context, how children are socialized to a particular type of language-game or procedure of reasoning, the argumentative discourse, which can be found both in school setting and in the family context of dinnertime conversations. By adopting a comparative look we will try to single out similarities and peculiarities of the two speech events in terms of contexts that foster a critical attitude in discussion and as spaces of children's thinking and development, in the direction highlighted by Perret-Clermont¹ in her work along years concerning different settings of activity (Perret-Clermont & Nicolet, 1988; Perret-Clermont, 1993, 2004, 2005; Perret-Clermont & Iannaccone, 2005; Arcidiacono & Perret-Clermont, 2009, 2010, in press; Bugnon, Arcidiacono & Perret-Clermont, 2010; Sinclair-Harding, Miserez, Arcidiacono & Perret-Clermont, 2013; Breux, Arcidiacono & Perret-Clermont, in press). The inherently discursive and cultural nature of cognitive activities will be taken into account in order to throw light on how the cognitive development actually unfolds within everyday socialization activities.

EXPLORING EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS

Family and school are surely the two most prominent *loci* of young children linguistic and cognitive socialization, although there are several differences between the two contexts (Fasulo & Pontecorvo, 1999; Pontecorvo, 2004; Arcidiacono, 2013). In our research within the family setting, a particular type of family has been observed: a middle class family

¹ The first author of this chapter recalls that the first time she encountered Anne-Nelly Perret-Clermont research work was in December 1972 (Perret-Clermont, 1979) in the "Trappeto" Study Center of Danilo Dolci, with Wilhelm Doise and Jacques Vonèche both involved in the project of building an organizing new ways for infant education from three to six years old.

composed by two parents and at least two children (one of them between 3 and 5 years of age) meeting at dinnertime. We are aware that middle class refers to the social stratum lying above the working class and below the upper class. Precisely because most families identify with the middle class, understanding tacit assumptions about middle class working families moved to the center of the research interest. As highlighted in other studies within the family context (Arcidiacono & Pontecorvo, 2010), we assume that the basis for the commonly expressed view to be middle class is therefore that many or most of families call ourselves middle class, and that the old badges of status of the working class are no anymore longer reliable. On the other side, classroom activities at different grades have been studied from the point of view of the discursive activity led by participants in various situations. As hypothesized and shown by several researchers (e.g. Heath, 1983; Davies, 1997), the common ground about the two contexts is the fact that both parents and teachers have the dominant aim of socializing children, although they differ in the priorities and in the tools they use. Actually, if the general mechanisms of interaction do not differ too much, a difference is due to the fact, for example, that children's accountability is in the family linked to "doing" and to the possible negative consequences of actions, while in school is more linked to knowing, and then to the cognitive contour of activities: paying attention, answering, remembering, giving cognitive explanation.

Our analyses of school practices have single out that children's reasoning is highly co-constructed and narrative activity is often spontaneously co-authored and multi-voiced. To some extent, children's clashing positions are never simply juxtaposed but are negotiated, transformed and often blended in new reasoning paths. Another element concerns the fact that children's reasoning unfolds through complex argumentative patterns; overwhelmingly, hypothetical format and counterfactual structure are used in different situations at school. More, reasoning processes are rhetorically shaped and participants make use of refined discursive strategies and rhetorical moves for achieving agreement and consensus about a task or a pedagogical activity. These features of children's reasoning in school setting are closely linked with the results of other studies that have already shown that narrative activities in a wide range of human contexts are overwhelmingly co-constructed (Pontecorvo, Amendola & Fasulo, 1994), that they often stimulate hypothetical thinking (Ochs, Taylor, Rudolph & Smith, 1992) and constitute a privileged tool for cognitive and linguistic socialization (Lucariello & Nelson, 1987; Pontecorvo & Fasulo, 1997).

The interesting evidences about children's competences in school activities of reasoning led us to develop other hypotheses about the role of the school in terms of educational context in which different spaces of thinking can be developed. Do children learn to argue before they go to school and when can we say that they are improving their learning within the school context? How are they socialized to the discursive tools and the rhetorical devices of everyday reasoning outside the school? In trying to answer to these questions we need to turn back to another context of interest we have developed during the last decades, the study of family dinner conversations.

Indeed also in family dinner conversations there is a remarkable amount of spaces of thinking in which people (adults and children) can use talk, narratives, spontaneous conversations as occasions to improve their communicative and social capacities. In particular, previous research has shown that narratives are spread throughout all the various speech activities participants commonly accomplish in talking together at dinner table (i.e. remembering, planning, jokes' telling, disputes). Remarkable studies on the activity of

storytelling (Jefferson, 1978; Goodwin, 1984) have shown that since their very beginning narratives are interactional accomplishments. However, an uptake from another participant is necessary in order to have narratives' unfolding overwhelmingly carried out collectively. This is true not only when there is agreement and harmony between the co-tellers of the storytelling; even when speakers don't share the same view on the reported events the narrative is most of the time co-constructed through quick turn's exchanges, oppositions of descriptions, negotiation of remembering. By participating to family conversations, children acquire the conventions of story-telling, the discursive devices to construct the reality (Bruner, 1990) so that they practice different forms of participation in collective activities.

In comparison with the school context, in family narratives participation roles are more flexible and often exchanged: within the same storytelling not only the role of narrator is shared and passed among participants, children included; also challenging moves such as critique and refusal can be performed by all participants. As suggested by Ochs and Taylor (1995), social familiarity encourages complex reasoning: "*where participants know one another well, they may be less hesitant to express uncertainty or perplexity over the problematic affairs in the narration and more open to invite the help of others in explaining the narrated events. Where participants know one another well they are able within limits to enter into the other's telling of events and reconfigure the other's version without dissolving the relationship*" (p. 43). This aspect allow us to highlight a commonality between school and family in terms of educational implications: familiarity among children and between teachers and children is not only to be pursued as it offers to all the participants a positive emotional milieu for their everyday experience also because it contributes to create a proper space to encourage complex cognitive processes.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE: THE SETTING OF THE RESEARCH WITHIN THE FAMILY CONTEXT

The data presented in this chapter are drawn from a corpus of a large research project on family conversations that started in Italy in 1991². Researchers met participant families in a preliminary phase, to inform them about the general lines of the research and the procedures. The collection of the data is based on video-recordings of family dinners: during the first visit, a researcher was present in order to place the camera and to instruct the participants on how to use the technology. The video-recordings following the first one were done by the family autonomously, when the researchers were not present. Each family videotaped their dinnertime 3 times, over a 20-day period; the first videotaped dinner was not used for the aims of the research, in order to familiarize the participants with the camera and it was left to the family. All dinnertime conversations were fully transcribed (Jefferson, 1985). For the symbols used in the transcription, see the appendix. All transcriptions were revised by two researchers (reaching a high level of consent) and then coded. The unit of analysis has been the *topic* of discourse, defined as the subject of a conversational sequence of no less than three consecutive turns of at least two different speakers.

² The first suggestion came from a similar project started in 1989 in USA and directed by Ochs. For more details about the Italian research group, cf. Pontecorvo (1996).

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCES: NARRATIVES IN A FAMILY CONVERSATION

In this section we intend to introduce and to discuss an example of conversation among family members in which different narratives and social interactions can be highlighted as elements for the development of thinking spaces.

Firstly, we present an excerpt involving four participants (the mother, the father, and two children: Luca, 10 years 9 months old; Luisa, 3 years 10 months old) that are engaged in a dinnertime conversation at home. The topic of the discussion concerns a TV program for children, titled “L’albero azzurro” (“The Blue Tree”), that Luisa is used to watch. The names used to identify the participants are fictitious.

Excerpt 1

1. Luisa: e poi ho visto .h poi io sono intelligente: molto intelligente. perché, ho seguito l'albelo l'albero azzurro, che è molto intelligente. lo seguo. non è che tu non apri il cervello. non lo segui, non lo segui perché tu non sei intelligente Luca.
and then I watched .h then I'm clever: very clever. because, I watched the albelo the albero azzurro, that is very clever. I watched it. it is not that you don't open the mi:nd. you don't watch it, you don't watch it because you are not cleve:r Luca.
2. Luca: ((ride))
((laughs))
3. MOM: io sono intelligente: co- ma che: di:ci! ((ridendo e parlando al posto di Luca))
I'm clever: wh- but what: are you say:ing! ((laughing and speaking in Luca's name))
4. Luca: mhm mhm perché ridete?
mhm mhm why are you laughing?
5. MOM: perché Luca è intelligente. che gli stai dicendo? che non è intelligente? ((a Luisa))
because Luca is clever. what are you saying to him? that he is not clever? ((to Luisa))
6. DAD: la bambina ((Luisa)) vuole, voleva dire, se tu dici che Luca non è intelligente, Luca si offende
the girl ((Luisa)) wants, she was saying, if you say that Luca is not clever, Luca will be anno:yed
7. MOM: perché dice “allora sono cretino”. ((ridendo))
if not he says "so I'm stupid". ((laughing))
8. Luisa: ma io mi devo offendere. che voi ridete:
but I have to be annoyed. because you are laughing:

9. MOM: perché ti devi offendere? amore mio, ma noi non è che per te, ridiamo per quello che hai detto. perché tu hai detto che tuo fratello è cretino. anzi che non si offende Luca e che ride. a te ti piacerebbe se tuo fratello ti, ti dicesse "perché tu non hai cervello?". cara Luisa,
why have you to be annoyed? my darling, but we are not laughing because of you, we are laughing because of your words. because you have said that your brother is stupid. it's strange that Luca is not annoyed and he is laughing. would you like that your brother will, will say "why you don't have a mind?". dear Luisa,
10. DAD: l'albero azzurro è una: una trasmissione veramente che apre il cervello diglielo. è così? ((a Luisa)) e quando noi la vediamo Luca non c'è mai. per questo la bambina ((Luisa)) ha voluto sottolineare questa cosa qua.
the albero azzurro is a: a program that really opens the mind let's say to him. right? ((to Luisa)) and when we watch it Luca is not here. for this reason the girl ((Luisa)) was highlighting this aspect.
11. MOM: ma noi non lo possiamo sapere tutto questo discorso. io capisco questo. anche °Luca° capisce questo. scusami, sai.
but we can't know all these aspects. I understand it. °Luca° too he understands it. please, excuse me.
12. DAD: perché lei ((Luisa)) è più piccola e ha più tempo per vedere queste cose.
because she ((Luisa)) is younger and she has more time to watch this kind of program.
13. Luca: no io dico (.) magari °fossi° io piccolo!
no I'm saying (.) if only I °was° a little child!
14. DAD: °è vero°? °eh°?
°really°? °eh°?

In order to show how this sequence is structured as a space of thinking among family members, we intend to highlight different elements that participants employ during this excerpt of dinnertime conversation as components of a narrative process. The first intervention of Luisa is an assertion implying an inference about the people watching a specific kind of TV program (turn 1: *and then I watched then I'm clever very clever because I watched the albero azzurro, that is very clever. I watched it. it is not that you don't open the mind. you don't watch it, you don't watch it because you are not clever Luca*). As the program "L'albero azzurro" is a clever TV program, people watching it are clever, and consequently, the others are not clever. In the line of this kind of reasoning, as Luca is not watching the program "L'albero azzurro", he can't be clever. The logic inference used by Luisa follows a "modus ponens" (*if p → so q; as it is p → then it is q*) that is typical of an argumentative reasoning linking a premise to a conclusion. The intervention of the girl

provokes the reaction of the other participants: while Luca is laughing, the mother tries to invite Luisa to account for her assertion. This requested accountability is due to the fact that a family rule has been violated (Luca has been annoyed) and takes the form of a request for justification (turn 3: *but what are you saying!*), a counter-assertion (turn 5: *Luca is clever*) and an explicit disagreement (turn 5: *what are you saying to him? that he is not clever?*). In other words, the mother's intervention is also a way to reproach Luisa because she is using any correct disagreement to Luca (turn 5).

The sequence developed by participants is a form of socialization to the social discourse. The words used by the family members have an effect also at the emotional level: the mother uses the inferential form "*if...so...*" as a reported speech (Goffman, 1981) that voices the potential internal reaction of Luca in front of his sister's assertion. Luisa is thus confronted to the voice of Luca that is embodied by the mother: the adult is trying to build a rational side of the exchange (turn 9: *why have you to be annoyed?*). At the same time, she is making a distinction between a personal disqualification of Luisa and a disagreement (turn 9: *but we are not laughing because of you we are laughing because of your words*). The mother's argumentation is sustained by a hypothetical empathic scenario in which the child (Luisa) is confronted to the other's point of view, in order to be able to take the other's position.

At the end of the sequence, a repair of the family solidarity is needed: the capacity to take care about participants, in terms of vicarious account (Sterponi, 2003) is displayed by the parents when they sustain the reasons of both children. The confrontation/conflict between the children is transferred to a parental level. Two distinct sides are created: the father aligns the position of Luisa, reformulating her intention (turn 10: *the albero azzurro is a program that really opens the mind let's say to him. right? and when we watch it Luca is not here for this reason the child – Luisa – was highlighting this aspect*), while the mother defends Luca offering some arguments that make reasonable his position (turn 11: *but we can't know all these aspects. I understand it. Luca too he understands it*). Within this frame, Luca uses the father's argumentative repertory in order to use the situation as a space to affirm his position (turn 13: *no I'm saying if only I was a little child!*) in front of Luisa.

The excerpt we have presented above is an example of how the discursive nature of cognitive, affective and relational processes in family conversations is accomplished by participants in and through the social interactions of their everyday lives. The verbal exchanges at dinnertime are spaces that allow for the possibility to catch the intersubjectivity among participants through the observation of social practices at home. In particular, family members assume different socializing roles that are often mediating the conversational exchanges between parents and children in the attempt to realize a mutual comprehension.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE: THE SETTING OF THE RESEARCH WITHIN THE SCHOOL CONTEXT

The research conducted in the school context concerns a project aiming at exploring the scientific and narrative capacities of Italian preschool children between 5 and 6 years of age (for more details, cf. Orsolini & Pontecorvo, 1992). In this chapter, we focus our attention on a narrative recorded activity led in Rome by the teacher in a classroom including 12 children and implying different phases. Firstly, small groups of four children were read by the teacher

a Tolstoj's fairy tale "*Masha and the bear*"; the reading was interrupted at crucial points and the children were asked to predict how the story would continue. The teacher led the discussion by asking children to explain the intentions and the motives behind the actions of the characters in the story, to evaluate what other actions might be plausible given those motives, and to evaluate the cleverness of the story protagonist (Masha) and her adversary (the bear); finally, an overall discussion took place in the large-group context. The story summary of "Masha and the bear" is the following: *Masha went with her friends to the wood. She got lost and she found a small house in which a bear was living: the bear compelled her to stay with him. She would like to run away from the bear and she asked him to bring a basket full of fritters to her grandparents' house. The bear offered to do it for her. She prepared the basket and told him not to open it: "I will climb up the oak tree and I will check on you from there!" While the bear went outside to look whether it was raining, Masha hid within the basket and put the fritters dish over her head. During the way, when the bear stopped, Masha said to him: "I saw you. Do not stop, go on!" So they arrived at the grandparents' house. When they were nearby, the dogs barked because of the bear's scent. The bear was frightened and ran away. Masha was free!*

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCES: NARRATIVE ACTIVITIES OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

In this section we present an example of discussion developed by a small group of children (Fabiola, Sabrina and Walter) in the classroom about the reasons of the protagonist's actions of the story ("Masha"). The system of transcription is the same used in the previous excerpt. The names used to identify the participants are fictitious.

Excerpt 2

1. Teacher: come ha fatto ((Masha)) a scappare da dentro- dalla casetta dell'orso?

 how could ((Masha)) flee from within- from the bear's house?
2. Fabiola: lei stava a vedere se pioveva, allora, il cestino era aperto, allora lei, zacchete! se ficca dentro, però così- e in testa ce mette le frittelle. ma se è grande ((Masha)) se rompe er cestino però!

 she was looking whether it rained, then, the basket was open, then she, zacchete! ((Italian onomatopoeia)) she slips in, but so- and she puts the fritters on her head. but if she is big ((Masha)) the basket will break down!
3. Walter: perché se Masha era come noi o come te poteva rompere il cestino, perché il cestino sarà così o così ((piccolo))

 because if Masha was like us or like you she could have broken the basket, because the basket was so and so ((little))

4. Sabrina: il cestino era grande, se no non ce metteva neanche le frittelle. Ce n'ha messo tre o quattro. o cinque o sei!
the basket was big, otherwise she could not even put the fritters in it. she has put three or four. or five or six!
5. Fabiola: o sei! almeno. dopo il cestino: ciacchete!
or six! at least. after the basket: ciacchete ((onomatopoeia that means "crashing down"))
6. Walter: see, così sei è più grande, sei chili pesa, no? con le frittelle, così ce se mette Masha che pesa almeno sette chili e quello ((il cestino)) se sfascia tutto. sette chili, quaranta chili!
yeah, so six is bigger, it weighs six kilos, doesn't it? with the fritters, so Masha puts herself that weighs at least seven kilos and that ((the basket)) will all crash down. seven kilos, forty kilos!

Excerpt 2 is a complex narrative activity jointly accomplished in a preschool setting. Children's collaborative reasoning, rather than emerging from mutual agreement, is realized through oppositions and explanations along a counterfactual line. In fact, Fabiola provides her narrative version, puts forward her hypothesis but formulates herself a possible objection: the solution would not work if Masha was too big (turn 2: *but if she – Masha – is big the basket will break down!*). The use of conditional forms from which negative effects can be derived results typical in the preschool setting: Fabiola and afterwards other children use them as the more compelling forms when they want to deny an alternative hypothesis produced by another participant. Challenges, oppositions, counter-proposals facilitate reasoning to unfold. Opposing hypotheses, the accounting activity it triggers and the seeking for consensus allow children to reach collectively an articulation of reasoning far more complex than the one each of them would achieve alone. In other words, through contrasting perspectives they are co-constructing higher level of reasoning.

Following Bruner (1986), we can affirm that children are constructing a dual landscape³, switching back and forth between action and consciousness. The narrative is rather complex as it considers both the protagonists' actions and their thoughts and feelings. Furthermore, they add their own perspectives as narrators. The landscape of consciousness illuminates protagonists' doings and offers to the audience the narrator's position and the interpretation of the events. As result, the enrichment of the reasoning through this dual landscape is deployed collectively: it is worth noting that the narrative activity children are engaged in allows for different perspectives to be put forward and negotiated. Different plots can be followed and, insofar as they respect the criteria of internal consistency, they can all be considered equally possible and acceptable. As consequence, the narrative activity not only organizes the experience and imbues it with meaning: it illuminates the experience and it also reveals a multiplicity of interpretive frames for organizing the experience (Capps & Ochs, 1995; Ochs & Capps, 1996; Ochs, 1997). Therefore, narrative activity promotes plurality and cultivates

³ The concept of the double landscape history in the understanding has been introduced in order to explain the need to combine the story of the childhood with reference to the emotions, thoughts and feelings of the protagonists.

critical thinking. It encourages comparisons among different perspectives and understandings; it brings different voices into dialogue without aiming at making of them a unison chorus.

CONCLUSION

One of the more relevant results of our findings in two educational contexts is related to the fact that children's reasoning does not emerge from mutual agreement, but from oppositions, challenges, even from diverse reasoning forms. Children develop them collaboratively in particular discursive phases, with a clear preference for specific strategies, as we found in children's interactions both in discourses about school narratives and in family conversations. The continuity in the reasoning processes in diverse settings concerns the evidence that a self-produced co-constructive discourse in children is almost always performed in a semantically contingent way, showing a refined skill to build up claims and justifications through opposition and counter-opposition. This way of reasoning through arguing seems to be found almost naturally in different types of peer interactions as well as in peer-adult interactions in family and school contexts.

The proposed analyses show the relevance of conversational processes both between adults and children and among children themselves in studying the child's thought through discourse: this discursive and conversational perspective accounts for a set of general dimensions in the frame of socio-cultural psychology. In particular, we have observed the complexity of narrative activities in family and preschool settings. Children are able to suggest various alternatives and different narrative versions through peer discussion: others points of view and hypotheses can be taken into account as well as criticized. This clashing of perspectives triggers a collective reasoning whereby children attempt to resolve discrepancies and, in the case of school narratives, sketch a meaningful storyline towards narrated events. Furthermore, faced with the need of defending their positions and undermining others' points of view, participants have the opportunity for exercising their argumentative skills and for improving their capacity of handling narrative situations.

Family and school situations seem to be productive spaces for thinking development. Doing qualitative research in such contexts has to be intended as a proper modality to observe the reality, to describe and to understand it. However, a specific attention has to be paid to the role of the context in fostering a critical attitude in discussion, because the possibility of identifying a space of thinking development is the result of a complex coordination of cognitive, social and emotional dimensions. As people are thinking, reasoning and acting always within a cultural and social setting, our perspective to study the development as a thinking space allows us to consider the interrelation of personal and collective elements of every social interaction. Looking at how the narrative task facilitates the construction of spaces of thinking and offers help for children narrative comprehension, we can be able to properly understand the processes of socialization among adults and children. The family meetings and the school settings can be thought as spaces of potential development, in which the capacity to account and the sense of responsibility can be improved through discursive, argumentative and narrative activities, culturally and historically situated within specific frames of interaction.

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APPENDIX: TRANSCRIPTION SYMBOLS

.	falling intonation
?	rising intonation
!	exclaiming intonation
,	continuing intonation
-	abrupt cut-off
:	prolonging of sounds
—	stressed syllable
.h	inhalation
° °	quiet speech
“ ”	reported speech
(.)	pause (2/10 second or less)
(())	non-transcribing segment of talk