Crossing Boundaries
Intercontextual Dynamics Between Family and School

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School at Home and Home at School

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FAMILY AND SCHOOL: CROSSING BOUNDARIES AND EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

The main idea of this chapter is to explore some evidence of the link between family and school, with a specific look at the dynamics involved in the crossing boundaries of these educational contexts. We devote a strong interest in these settings for different reasons: Firstly, we assume that family is the most crucial context of interaction between generations, because of the possibility to acquire social, cognitive, and linguistic competence through interactions between family members. At the same time, the school context is a relevant one in the process of children's socialization, above all because of the experimentation with different social competences outside of the family system.

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interrelationships of family, community, school, and peer groups as they affect students' well-being and academic performance. School, family, and community partnerships include practices initiated by parents, educators, or other community members. The significance of the theoretical perspective of overlapping spheres of influence lies not only in the identification of different types of parental involvement, but also in the recognition that parents' involvement in children's education and family-school connections is not static; it is a complex phenomenon that is influenced by characteristics of overlapping spheres of influence and the nature of participants' interrelationships.

Davies (1997) argues that usually family and school are interconnected when parents seek to influence their child's education, because they cross a boundary into the teachers' professional world, and at the same time when teachers advise families about what they should do to be better parents, because they cross into the private family's sphere. Children's chances for success in school and life are to be improved when family, school, and community collaborate closely. In this sense, Henderson and Berla (1994) show the connection between programs of collaboration and children's achievement in school and their attendance, motivation, and behavior.

More recently, the new interest and advances in crossing boundaries studies determined a major consciousness of the importance of this domain in the psychological field (Beach, 1999; Bugnon, Arcidiacono, & Perret-Clermont, 2010; Tömi-Gröhn & Engeström, 2003). This attention to boundary-crossing processes allows us to consider this concept in depth.

Usually, we refer to boundary-crossing in order to define a process of breaking the boundaries of one's knowledge and competencies by deliberately searching for contact with another expert culture or community. As suggested by Tömi-Gröhn and Engeström (2003), "crossing boundaries involves encountering difference, entering into territory in which we are unfamiliar" (p. 4). The main characteristic of this process is the boundary zone (Konkola, 2001): It is the area of contact between two or more social communities in which participants are encouraged to share ideas and knowledge without prearranged routines or rigid patterns. As suggested by Tömi-Gröhn (2007), these processes also involve different concepts, such as the boundary-crossing interaction between social communities or activity systems, the interaction between educational or professional communities, and the integration of symbolic or material tools in the human activities. It is also possible to consider boundary encounters, such as meetings and conversations, as events that provide connections between systems (Wenger, 1998).

Following this perspective, Lambert (2003) proposed the boundary-crossing place as a model for promoting developmental transfer in education. The interest in crossing boundaries presupposes a specific attention to the worlds of the communities implied in the process. In the case of the relation between
school and family, these contexts correspond to the cultural experiences found within boundaries of students' families, peer groups, and schools. As each context contains values, expectations, beliefs, actions, and emotional responses familiar to insiders, participants could employ it in different social settings. In this sense, contexts may be found within the bounds of any one world and may include actors from various worlds. As noticed by Phelan, Davidson, and Cao (1991), "people in the same social setting may or may not share the same cultural knowledge acquired from the constellation of their individual worlds. The terms boundaries and borders refer to real or perceived lines or barriers between worlds" (p. 225).

As previous studies generally focused on families and schools as distinct entities, now we need to explore how different aspects of these contexts could be combined in the everyday lives of parents, children, and teachers. We also need to know how people negotiate boundaries or how barriers that prevent their connection with institutional or informal contexts impede them. In order to analyze connections between family and school contexts, we have to consider many different aspects of these worlds, with the idea that there are constant transitions among social settings in which actors are engaged. For example, a possible model that shows relationships between different settings is shown in Figure 3.1.

This model is a possible way to describe students' multiple worlds and the relationships between them. It is relevant to the nature of boundaries and processes of transition between worlds, as well as the strategies actors employ to adapt to different contexts and social settings. The meanings drawn from each of the worlds combine to influence participants' actions. For some students, values, beliefs, and expectations are parallel across worlds, and, although the circumstances of everyday contexts change, students could perceive boundaries between their family, peer, and school worlds and move from a setting to another.

Presently, we think that a turning point is needed: Researchers have to pay attention to the intersections between family and school contexts. From a psychological point of view, actors have to achieve a certain degree of consciousness about the relationships between these two worlds, beyond the aspects linked to formal contacts that intervene in institutional settings. In the following part of the chapter we will present specific situations of the everyday interactions that could operate to facilitate boundary-crossing strategies in the educational contexts of family and school. As the focus is on conversation as an event that could provide connections between the two worlds, we first present some aspects related to the discursive use of language in family and school contexts.

CONVERSATIONS IN TWO EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS

The present contribution is an application of the conversational and discursive analysis in two educational contexts: the family and the school. We aim to identify the participation of children and adults in the communicative structure of the context in which they interact. For this reason, we assume that conversational analysis is a valid instrument for exploratory research of socialization processes in educational contexts. As suggested by Fasulo and Pontecorvo (1999), the study of the infant socialization through conversational interactions exactly answers the need of understanding better the developmental process of competence with daily activities. The present work also considers the notion of conversation as an exchange between at least two speakers and as a common discursive practice in everyday interaction. Both Vygotskij (1992) and Billig (1996) have shown that all languages are social in their genesis as well as functions, and imply various socio-normative schema (De Grada, & Bonaiuto, 2002). Another relevant point concerns the fact that the quality of family relations is fundamental during everyday interactions at home: Parents are the children's most important models, and the family as a system is a crucial context of interaction between generations where social, cognitive, and linguistic competences are acquired (Ochs & Taylor, 1992; Scabini, 1995; Stamp, 1991). At the same time,
time, peer interactions at school are another relevant element of socialization for children (Mercer, 2004) to experiment with their social competence outside of the family system.

The analysis of children's everyday activities in different contexts of socialization, such as the family and the school, has been a useful practice in order to explore, especially through the observation of verbal interactions, what Bruner (1987) called the "mind in culture." Studies on socialization play a main role in the psychological research field on how children are socialized into a culture, through and by the use of language. In fact, language is not only an instrument, but also one of the objects and aims of the socialization process. Many studies on this line have been devoted to the study of talk in interaction as the basis for social life.1 Sociolinguistics underlines the main role of the language in the socialization process both in family exchanges and in the interactions among peers (Edwards, 1990). In particular, we can refer to a series of studies that pointed attention to the interconnection between language use in school and at home. Wells (1981) showed that the two contexts are similar in the use of conversational routines; Heath (1983) underlined differences in children's use of language at school related to the different social classes of their families; and Philips (1983) showed the role of the culture by the fact that different uses of language could be related to the ethnic origins of people.

In the conversational perspective to study interactions in educational contexts, one of the ideas that generally guides many studies on the comparison between family and school settings is the fact that usually family is considered the context for the early socialization of children, while the school is the context for learning. Although settings are different, there are many reasons to consider the similarity between these two worlds, since learning also occurs in family and children are also socialized at school (Pontecorvo, 2004). If we assume a relationship between learning and socialization, because of the fact that in the learning process there are different components of socialization, we can consider family and school as the two main contexts of these activities. The relationship between these educational settings is based on a process of continuous transfer. The topicality of the transfer issue is present in the debate between the constructivist and the situated approaches to learning (Anderson, Reder & Simon, 1997; Greeno, 1997): It is assumed that what is transferred is not packages of knowledge that remain intact, because the process of transfer involves active interpretation, modification, and reconstruction of the knowledge to be transferred. This process is also multidirectional and multifaceted, involving transitions between different contexts such as school and family. Following this line, we have to recognize that the fundamental mechanism of socialization and learning is usually the participation in discursive practices, both in families and at schools; that learning is a type of socialization; and that it is a result of interactional phenomena within a specific community (Bruner, 1996).

Moving from the assumptions we mentioned above about the interrelationships between family and school contexts, the present contribution is organized in two parts, in order to present results of different studies conducted in these two educational settings. The first study concerns the analysis of conversational interactions at dinnertime in Italian families, specifically when participants talk about school topics. The second study presents the opposite situation, such as students' discussions at school around family topics. Both studies have been conducted within the theoretical and methodological approach of conversational and discursive analysis. A short presentation of the main aspects of these perspectives will be presented before the illustration of the studies. In the final part of the chapter, we will show evidence of the link between these two educational contexts and present a concluding discussion focusing on crossing boundaries.

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDIES:
CONVERSATIONAL AND DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS

The approaches of conversation analysis (CA) and discourse analysis (DA) (see respectively, Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974; Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Panthas, 1995; and McKinlay, Potter & Wetherell, 1998) have been developed as an alternative to the traditional methods of study in social sciences. CA and DA contribute to the exploration of social phenomena in the actual contexts of everyday life, as they occur spontaneously during interactions. These approaches are based on the collection, description, and analysis of natural data, mainly collected by ethnographical methods that replace other research methodologies in psychology, such as interviews, questionnaires, and experimental procedures. The aim of these approaches is to identify and to describe the sequential patterns of discourse produced by participants during their interactions. At the core there is a need to record, transcribe, and analyze data by assuming the participants' own perspective. For this reason, the procedure is based on the identification of some relevant phenomena in a corpus of data, by the building of a collection of similar instances. In order to analyze the data, discursive sequences of turns are selected, because it is only possible to understand each turn with respect to the previous and following turn:

Sequence...[is]...another candidate type of unit, the practices of which can underline the production of clumps of talk. The organization of sequences is an organization of actions, actions accomplished through talk-in-interaction, which can provide to a space of conduct coherence and order which is analytically distinct from the notion of topic. (Schegloff, 1990, p. 53)
To illustrate a range of interaction modalities developed by participants during conversations, these approaches refer to the concept of "participants' categories" (Garfinkel, 1967; Sacks, 1992): CA and DA avoid making predictive assumptions regarding interactants' motivational, psychological, and sociological characteristics, and these factors can only be invoked if the participants themselves are "noticing, attending to, or orienting to" them in the course of their interaction (Heritage, 1995, p. 296). In order to examine the interactive sequential procedures by means of which participants jointly accomplish conversations and thereby construct and negotiate social relationships, we need an analytic framework that takes into account both local aspects of talk in interaction and global aspects of the social structure: In the qualitative analysis of conversational sequences, researchers are guided by the idea that phenomena could be studied both by an idiographic and an interpretative approach, with specific attention to the details, and by a nomothetic method, in order to learn something about social regularities of discourses.

All conversational sequences of the two studies we will present in the following part of this chapter were fully transcribed according to the Jeffersonian conventions (Jefferson, 1985). 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: We consider the topic as the subject of a sequence of no less than three consecutive turns of at least two different speakers.

**STUDY I: CONVERSATIONS IN FAMILY CONTEXT**

The first study is part of a larger research project on family dinner conversations that started in Italy in 1991. The general aim of the project has been the observation and the analysis of discursive socialization processes that occur at dinner time conversations: The idea was to observe family members when they were engaged in spontaneous and prolonged interactions at home.

The data corpus is constituted of the recordings of 76 dinners, held by 23 Italian middle-class families from Rome, Naples, Florence, and Reggio Calabria; the families were selected on the grounds of similar criteria (presence of both parents; presence of a child aged from 3 to 6 years; presence of at least one preadolescent child). Researchers met all families in a preliminary phase to inform them about the general lines of the research and the procedures. The data collection was 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 family did the video recordings following the first one autonomously, when

the researchers were not present. Each family videotaped their dinner time three to six 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.

**School at Home: Family Dinnertime Conversations**

Concerning discursive interactions, we know the importance of the dimension of the social construction, because the knowledge is continuously produced during practices (Wertsch, 1985), and by negotiations between participants (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In family dinnertime conversations, parents and children engage themselves in many different discussions. In this study, we selected conversational sequences concerning the school as topic of the discourse. As first evidence, we pointed out that family conversations about school topics were conducted above all in a conflictual way. For this reason, we will present here an excerpt showing family members engaged in discursive interactions about school topics during a dispute. We think that the conflictual nature of the discursive sequence we selected is in part due to the fact that school topics during dinnertime conversations at home offer a lot of argumentative potential for disputes both for parents and children. In particular, when parents call their children to account about school activities or results, many aspects related to personal skills, competences, and identities of children could emerge during interactions. Above all, they perceive the situation as a competitive setting in which different components of their world could be argued.

In this chapter we do not enter into a detailed presentation of what a conflict at dinner time conversation is. However, some comments concerning this specific situation are needed. From a discursive point of view, in a conflictual situation, the fact that disputants frequently accuse each other indicates their orientation towards finding fault with the opponent as an effective means of constructing oppositional moves. For instance, Goodwin (1990) observes that a frequent argumentative action in disputes involves "categorizing what prior speaker has just said as a culturally defined offense" (p. 154). As Boxer (2002) points out, speech behavior such as direct complaining and disapproval exchanges occur most often "where the relationship has already been established and where the disapproval has less chance of hindering the relationship" (p. 50).

In order to offer an example of this kind of interaction, Excerpt 3.1 shows a situation in which these aspects of complaining and disapproval exchanges are present during a dinnertime conversation on a school topic.

Excerpt 3.1 concerns a discussion between the parents and the son about homework done by the child. The specific topic of the conversation
EXCERPT 3.1

Family MIN: dinner 4; participants: mom, dad, son 1 (Luca, 10,9 years old), daughter 2 (Luaisa, 3,10 years old)

1. PAP: che, non ti hanno interrogato oggi a scuola? ((Luca non risponde))
   1. DAD: so, you were not queried at school today? ((Luca doesn’t reply))

2. PAP: ti hanno interrogato?
   2. DAD: were you queried?

3. Luca: no, aspetta; (che ho fatto oggi a scuola?)
   3. Luca: no, wait; (what did I have at school today?)

4. PAP: oggi, hai fatto tecnica (che, no?
   4. DAD: today, you studied technical design (right?)

5. Luca: no.
   5. Luca: no.

6. PAP: hai fatto; (che, no?)
   6. DAD: you studied (right?)

7. Luca: non mi ha interrogato; (l’ho fatto lungo tre pagine)
   7. Luca: I wasn’t queried; athletics, I didn’t participate, I didn’t study.

8. PAP: religione?
   8. DAD: religion?

9. Luca: non mi ha interrogato
   9. Luca: I wasn’t queried

10. (2.0)

11. PAP: e matematica?
    11. DAD: and maths?

12. (1.0)

13. Luca: no, matematica non l’ho fatta.
    13. Luca: no, I didn’t study maths.

14. PAP: ()
    14. DAD: ()

15. Luca: e non mi ha interrogato
    15. Luca: and I wasn’t queried

16. PAP: t’è andata bene!
    16. DAD: you made it!

17. (2.0)

18. TAR: perché? anche se mi interrogasse
    18. Luca: why? even if I was queried

19. MAM: non ho capito perché non sei riuscito a finire il compito; com’è sta storia?
    19. MOM: I don’t understand why you didn’t finish the exercise; tell me!

20. PAP: quale compito?
    20. DAD: which exercise?


22. PAP: non sei riuscito a finire il tema? non l’ha finito, (che, non è abituato a concettualizzare)
    22. DAD: you haven’t finished the composition; he hasn’t finished it; because he’s not able to conceptualize.

23. Luca: me de che ahoi (l’espressione dialettale per intendersi, ‘t’ho fatto lungo tre pagine’)

24. PAP: ah.

24. DAD: ah.

produces was, during the interaction, a dispute among participants because of the topic’s nature and the asymmetrical positions of the interactants. Previous research has shown that in close relationships, accusations, complaints, and criticisms are common activities in conversations between people who are on intimate terms (Tannen, 2001). Usually, accusations and corresponding activities entail a request to the defendant to remedy the perceived violation; for instance, by producing an account for their behavior or by offering an apology. Specifically, Goffman (1971) viewed accusation sequences as “remedial exchanges.” The interactor, who violated a rule or a norm, is expected to produce a remedial activity. The function of the remedial work is to change the meaning that otherwise might be attributed to the relevant activity, with the aim of changing what could be considered offensive into what can be considered acceptable.

Hence, from a structural point of view, by issuing an accusation, the speaker forces the addressee to respond in a certain way. In Excerpt 3.1, dad (turn 1 “so, you were not queried at school today?”) asks Luca about the school workday (and in particular about the absence of teachers’ “interrogation”). The beginning of the father’s first turn contains an indicator of a specific modality to address the discourse by the speaker. In fact, when conversation must be kept “on track,” participants try to achieve a mutual understanding as alignment, especially at the openings of conversation. In the excerpt 1, the father starts by saying “so...”: the use of this topic initiator (Bouton & Lee, 1987) in order to start a new discourse is designed and understood with respect to some shared knowledge. In this way, the father could define the frame of the situation. By this attempt he would open a new topic of discussion about the school world, and this transition from a previous topic to a new one implies a series of elements related to norms, values, beliefs, expectations, and actions of the new topic of discourse. The first reaction of Luca (he doesn’t reply) could be interpreted as the fact that the child is not yet ready for this shift of topic, and that he tries to gain time in order to be able to reply in an efficient way. In fact, the child tries to justify his position when the father is problematizing him. And also, during the course of the sequence, Luca uses the strategy of the negation, especially in turns 5, 7, and 9.
We know that a judgment around school activities can assume, in the family context, an evaluative educational connotation, because parents can express opinions about children’s actions in order to activate a redefinition of their identities. In this sense, the reference to a school topic could represent a critical area of discussion. In the excerpt 1, the father uses the pretext of homework in order to make irony (turn 16 “you made it?”) and to criticize Luca in a general way (e.g., in turn 22 there is an implicit criticism using the third person pronoun, “he hasn’t finished it, because he’s not able to conceptualize”); we can observe that Luca does not reply to this evaluation on a cognitive level, but he remains always focused on the first problematization (turn 23 “what are you saying? it was rather complete!” referring to the composition).

In general terms, as sociolinguistic research has shown (Orletti, 1998), accusations could involve different aspects: a reference to the relevant activity, attitude, or characteristic; a negative evaluation of that action, attitude, or person’s trait, based on the perceived violation of some underlying norm or the speaker’s preferences and/or expectations; the attribution of responsibility for the relevant action, attitude, or characteristic and its consequences to the accused; and a request to the defendant to remedy the perceived failure, for instance, by offering a remedy or an explanation of their behavior. In the context of the ongoing interaction, however, some of these aspects are often not made explicit. For instance, the attribution of responsibility is frequently implicit by way of direct address. Similarly, the negative evaluation of the activity in question may be unspoken as, for example, in accusations that are realized by statements that merely allude to the relevant behavior or attitude without explicitly mentioning it or the norm that has been violated, and without explicitly calling into question the defendant.

The excerpt presented above allows us to better comprehend the ways by which family members can initiate and manage their dinnertime conversations, and sometimes their disputes, as also revealed by other studies (Arcidiacono & Pontecorvo, 2009). Considering a general discussion about homework, it is important to understand how accusations can be employed by speakers as an interactional resource to exert a degree of discursive power by placing constraints on the discourse options available to the recipient (Atkinson & Drew, 1979). The qualitative analysis of this family dinnertime discussion around a school topic shows how, in the sequence of turns, conversation plays a significant role in the interaction. Our attention focused just on some aspects that characterize in a cultural way this specific type of interaction, because each family reveals a particular way “of doing conversation,” continuously co-constructed and renegotiated by participants through different strategies. In this sense, we underline that we aim not at generalizing results but at showing possible reading key of different modalities of participation employed by family members in the specific context of dinnertime conversations about school topics.

References to school topics during family conversations are tools of socialization that could produce various argumentative strategies; also, paralinguistic, prosodic, and nonverbal cues such as increased volume, contrasting stress, exaggerated intonation contours, and gestures, further emphasize the argumentative character of turns. In addition, the modalities of the interaction in family conversations are specific to this particular cultural world, and they can activate a specific frame in which participants share ethical principles and behavioral codes. Finally, the main elements we highlighted concern the fact that school topics in family conversations could activate different discursive strategies of participation, involving a series of related worlds’ aspects of each family member.

**STUDY II: CONVERSATIONS IN SCHOOL CONTEXT**

Peer interactions at school can constitute a significant resource and a powerful tool for enhancing children’s development, cognitive abilities, and the making of personal existential meaning. Schools may become a place in which children can find opportunities to practice, enrich, and refine the reasoning skills they have acquired at home, in their everyday interactions (Maroni & Arcidiacono, 2003). School is the first institutional context in which children must act without parents’ help. A fundamental aspect of the school socialization is the familiarization of children with an institutional system of activities, in which the same rules are valid for everyone and individuals must conform to behavior repertoires linked to the roles. While in informal situations the possibility to reorganize the discursive participation is always present, in the school context the standard organization of turn-taking, when the teacher interacts with all the pupils, is that the turn goes back to the teacher after he/she transferred it to someone in particular or to the class in general with its previous participation.

Within the large tradition of the conversational studies in the school context, we can refer to two main perspectives: The first one is more “quantitative” because of its interest in codifying the behavior of students and teachers in a systematic way (Amidon & Hunter, 1971; Flanders, 1969; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). These studies underline the fact that classroom interactions are not characterized by a simple alternative of turns, but that there is a specific discursive structure that assigns to students and teachers recurrent modalities (for example, in the assignment of the turn-taking). The second perspective is more “qualitative” and tends to analyze in an ethnographic way different school interactions (Hammersley, 1990; Woods, 1986). In this perspective, major attention is devoted to the context, by the analysis of the
cultural aspects that involved not only students and teachers, but also the researchers called to observe the processes and to interpret the data.

Here we present a study based on this second perspective. We cannot reject the fact that previous research underlined differences between formal and informal contexts during the everyday interactions, above all concerning the sense and the means of the discourse. In fact, in an ordinary informal conversation the sense of the discourse is established turn by turn, whereas in the classroom students usually cannot negotiate the sense without the teacher. However, as suggested by Fele and Paoletti (2005), the teacher is always engaged to find equilibrium between the control of the classroom activity and the active and autonomous participation of children. In addition, other studies underlined the link between discursive interactions in classroom and the development of children competences: for example, Orsolini and Pontecorvo (1992) showed that a teacher displaying less control of the discursive interaction in the classroom produces more interactions among children and increases their learning. This could support the idea that, in spite of the traditional view on formal/informal setting differences, school and family contexts are both relevant settings of socialization. For this reason, specific attention to the boundary-crossing between these two contexts is needed.

**Family at School: Classroom Conversations**

The second study we present here concerns an ethnographic observation of different classroom interactions at school. The main goal of the research was the qualitative study of discursive interactions at school during classroom activities around current events. The methodology we used is based on participant observation of different classrooms in two different schools in Rome, during the lessons of Italian literature. All the interactions were video-recorded and then transcribed, as explained in the introduction to the studies presented in this chapter. As specified above, our approach has been ethnographic, and for this reason we do not have a previous system of lessons’ categorization based on specific hypotheses. We selected for the present analysis some conversational sequences in which participants were discussing family topics in the classroom. Within the large project of school interaction analysis (Arcidiacono & Pigotti, 2005), in this chapter we present some evidences selected from an 8th grade classroom of a middle school located in the outskirts of Rome.

The general research project followed different steps in order to access classroom lessons. Before the data collection, we contacted school directors in order to gain the formal authorizations to film teachers and students. When our presence in the classroom was accepted, we devoted the first meeting to explain to the participants the general goal of the research project (the observation of the interactions during some lessons at school), without furnishing other elements that potentially could inform participants about our specific interests, such as the study of the relation between school and family contexts. For practical reasons, due to the fact that lessons were in small spaces, a researcher was always present during the video recordings in order to move the camera following speakers or specific group activities. As we were authorized to collect data only a few times, a previous practice of familiarization of participants with the instruments was not possible. However, the presence of the researcher and of a camera was not perceived as a trouble, as revealed by participants after the data collection, during a final meeting. We recorded four lessons in the classroom to which we are referring in this section. In one case, the teacher was testing students on Italian literature, and in the other cases she proposed discussions about current events.

During lessons in which students were called to discuss current events, the topic of the family life and of relationships with parents emerged frequently, in particular where the classroom was talking about the main values of life. Concerning the age of students we observed, it is important to point out that, during adolescence, relationships with other family members are perceived as very important in the developmental process. Family is an everyday context of education and socialization in each time of life, but especially at this age, when adolescents could refer themselves to familiar experiences even in an institutional setting such as the school. In the following excerpts, the topic of the discourse concerns the family as value and the students’ relationships with parents. The teacher, in agreement with students, established the classroom activity. The participants decided to discuss the general topic of family values. Students made different interventions, even without explicit solicitation by the teacher. During the course of the discussion, the teacher introduced the topic of the divorce, trying to find out which students were in that situation.

In Excerpt 3.2, participants are solicited to discuss the question of the parental divorce. The teacher introduces the topic in turn 491 ("Is there anybody here who has parents who are separated?"), and then two students involve themselves in the conversation on the matter. In particular, Manuela and Federica make explicit, even if in different ways, their painful feelings about the divorce of their parents. In turns 496 and 498, the difficult expression of this feeling is evident: Manuela starts to cry and Federica affirms clearly that she does not like to talk about it. The teacher tries to involve into the discussion another student, in order to not continue with Manuela and Federica, because of their intention to not talk about the divorce of their parents. In turn 499, the teacher is referring to Simone, assuming implicitly that there are no problems in involving him into the
EXCERPT 3.2

Interaction between the teacher and three students (Manuela, Federica, Simone)

491. ins: c’è qualcuno in classe (1.0) in classe che ha i genitori separatii, a parte lui che non eh (si riferisce ad un ragazzo che non ha acconsentito alle riprese)

492. ((Manuela e Federica alzano la mano))

493. ins: Manuela? non lo sapevo! Federica, si, da quando che sono separati papà e mamma?

494. Manuela: due anni.

495. ins: ti vuoi parlare?

496. Manuela: ((scuote la testa e comincia a piangere))

497. ins: no no no no no! Scusati! (ti, Federica)

498. Federica: eh sono tre anni, ma non ho voluto parlarmi.

499. ins: neanche tu vuoi parlarmi, ok, ecco, lui ((riferendosi a Simone)), è otto anni, e di fatto è più sereno, vedete? perché ormai dopo otto anni, prima cosa è successo che era molto piccolo

500. Simone: va al bagno (rivolgendosi a Manuela che segue a piangere)

501. ins: e poi, ((Manuela si alza per andare al bagno)) mi dispiace che (6.0) ecco questo cosa ci fa capire? quanto dolore provoca

502. ins: ti prego che non ci preoccupate, sono stato al bagno e non ho nulla.

503. ins: no no no, stop! (to Manuela)

504. ins: e che diavolo vi preoccupate, non siamo a scuola, sono su una discussione ("ok, so, him (referring to Simone) since eight years, effectively he's more relaxed, right?")

From the teacher's perspective, Simone is a "positive" case that could show how it is possible to talk about the divorce of the parents after a certain number of years, when the pain is less present in the feeling of the child involved into the situation. However, the sequence shows that students do not support this assumption of the teacher. He ignores the emotional content of the conversation and she only tries to follow the topic by searching for other potential participants. For this reason, Simone is substituting as the teacher when he suggests to Manuela to go outside the classroom (turn 500, "go to the bathroom," talking to Manuela, who is crying). Only at this moment, the teacher tries to align herself to the situation: She apologizes and, after a pause, offers a moral explication of the implications of the situation they are talking about (turn 501).

Excerpt 3.2 shows how topics related to family relationships could offer a space of emotional interactions, even in the setting of classroom lessons. The management of this kind of situation depends on different factors concerning the personal experiences, the values, and the emotions of participants. The discursive co-construction of the situation by the participants is a relevant element that could permit (or not permit) the development of a discussion and the direction of the interventions made both by teacher and by students.

During the same lesson (cf. Excerpt 3.3), another student makes an intervention in order to underline the importance of the family in life and to add something about the previous topic of divorce, but using a different level of discursive participation.

EXCERPT 3.3

Interaction between the teacher and a student (Sandro)

512. Sandro: posso dire una cosa sulla famiglia?

513. ins: certo!

514. Sandro: (s) per me la famiglia è come se è un punto di riferimento su cui puoi contare, se hai problemi ne puoi parlare, anche sul divorzio, potrei dire una cosa però?

515. ins: eh

516. Sandro: per me sono le donne che ci fanno esasperare!

517. ins: ti sei complimentato con loro?

518. Sandro: no, ma le donne sono le donne, e se non sono le donne, allora sono i uomini che ci fanno esasperare! (s)

519. ins: ma non è nella tua famiglia?

520. Sandro: no, è una generalizzazione, ma è un punto di riferimento...

521. ins: e poi, come ti senti con le tue familiari?

522. Sandro: (s) mi sento bene con le mie familiari, è un rapporto di rispetto.

523. ins: ma perché non parliamo di questo con la classe?

524. Sandro: (s) perché è un punto di riferimento...

525. ins: e poi, come ti senti con le tue familiari?

526. Sandro: (s) mi sento bene con le mie familiari, è un rapporto di rispetto.
Following the previous interaction about the family relationships, the teacher offers a space to intervene to other students, and she agrees with Sandro's intention to take the turn. This student suggests the general importance of the family in life, but then he aims at expressing also an opinion about the previous topic of the divorce (turn 514, "even about the divorce, can I say something more?"). In this sense, the teacher and the student are creating an expectation within the classroom, due to the fact that previously the topic of the discussion has elicited a particular emotional response. Anyway, Sandro attempts to change the mood of the situation by an ironic intervention that ends the discussion (turn 516, "in my opinion women are the cause of our exasperation!"). This excerpt is a basic example of how students use different conversational modalities during an interaction about family relationships, even in situations that directly imply emotions and personal experiences of everyday life. The context in which this type of discussion takes place could solicit participants to talk with their peers, or to preserve their personal sphere of life; in both cases, the role of the teacher, the specific topic of the discussion, and the involvement of other students could play a main role in the development of the interaction. In fact, this transition from one world to another implies different dimensions and factors that we have to consider in the analysis of the situation, in order to understand better how students can discuss family matters in the classroom context.

We know that the evidence related to the excerpts we presented here are not general for all situations and people. Each observation is strongly influenced by the specific settings in which it emerges. However, it is important to note that the ethnographic exploration of different situations could offer a lot of elements related to the ways in which people interact about specific contents, looking at the boundaries that link two or more worlds. The possibility to explore classroom discussions in depth by an ethnographic approach is one of the ways to study qualitatively the interactions between peers and between students and teacher, in agreement with studies that underline the relevance of paying attention to the spontaneous and natural conversation in other contexts, such as the family.

**CONCLUSIONS: LESSONS LEARNED**

In this chapter, we have tried to explain how family and school contexts can be linked in the analysis of everyday conversations. We explored the procedures of the boundary-crossing analysis of the two settings, using excerpts from research in which conversational and discourse analysis was employed to show how it can reveal ways of language use for sharing "worlds" in informal and in institutional settings. We have also shown how qualitative analysis can be used to assess intentions of students and family members interacting in the everyday activities. In particular, some elements emerged as characteristic of such contexts we observed. We will try to offer in this section a reflection on some points coming from our qualitative analysis.

Concerning the first study, we assumed family discourse as interactionally complex, supportive, competitive, and asymmetric with regard to power relations, though intimate in social bonding between the members (Blum-Kulka, 1997). In fact, as suggested by Brumark (2008), "competitive behaviour among siblings makes family discourse resemble peer interaction where fighting for power and favours may result in aggressive argumentation-strategies" (p. 253). We recognized that during family dinners the impact of the sociocultural context appears clearly, especially when implicit rules (Goffman, 1974) determine what kind of communication is accepted. In particular, there is some evidence that an explicit pedagogic communication is allowed at dinner table conversations, specifically aiming at socializing the children (Brumark, 2006). We observed that in the specific context of family dinner table conversations, participants use different discursive strategies in order to define the frame of the situation (for example, by the use of topic initiators), and to start the transition from a previous topic to a new one. In this sense, they move from one frame to another, with the implication of related norms, values, beliefs, expectations, and actions. We found that the situation related to the school topic could represent a critical area of discussion between parents and children. On one side, parents could align themselves in conversational sequences, using irony or accusations, for active strategies of accounts and justifications by children. This "adult" tendency to create conditions to solicit a response from children could be also present in the school context, as a bridge between these worlds.

In the second study, we aimed at analyzing how the school context is a possible world into which family matters could enter. As previous research focused on the problem of the transfer of learning between school and other activities, we think it is also important to understand the interrelation between school and other contexts (in particular the family), by investigating conversational interactions that emerge during everyday classroom activities and by the consideration of different elements involved in this transition from one world to another. For instance, Dewey (1916) argued that "when schools depart from the educational conditions effective in the out-of-school environment, they necessarily substitute a bookish, a pseudo-intellectual spirit for a social spirit" (p. 38). We think that the study we conducted in the school context has important implications at different levels. It could provide teachers and others with a way of thinking about students in a more holistic way, because the data suggest a focus for educators as they think about different features that can impact students'
lives. In order to create a setting for discussing, working together in the classroom, and having a equal investment in school and in life, we need to identify institutional and informal structures that operate to facilitate boundary-crossing strategies and that do not require children to give up or hide important features of their lives. It means that children and adults must acquire skills and strategies to interact adequately with different people in different social settings. And all the actors affected in this process, for example in the school context, have to support efforts to achieve this goal.

This chapter suggests the relevance of crossing boundaries between family and school contexts; in this concluding discussion, it is possible to highlight some characteristics of family and school encounters as contexts of discussion and conversational development. Firstly, we underline the complexity of multiparty interactions, as well as the participation of children of different backgrounds in discussions about specific topics, such as school matters or family relationships. One has to move continuously between multiple parallel contexts that demand and afford different mediating tools and patterns of social interaction. As boundary crossings are polycontextual, multi-voiced, and multi-scripted, they are characterized by alternative discourses and positionings that afford opportunities for the transformations of conflicts and tensions into rich zones of learning (Tsui & Law, 2007). Secondly, the analysis of conversational sequences reveals a diversity and mixture of argumentative moves, though with a tendency toward coherence within the exchanges. In fact, boundaries are often seen as sources of potential difficulties or as opportunities for innovation and renewal. As suggested by Engeström (2001), “important transformations of our personal lives and organizational practices, we must learn new forms of activity which are not yet there. They are literally learned as they are being created” (p. 138).

As lessons learned from the results of both observational researches in two contexts, we can affirm that evidence we found could be used to improve the quality of conversation in other contexts, as educational tools of socialization for the participants. We noted that new forms of communication, new relationships, and new connections among apparently discrete domains led to renegotiations of what it means to know. Knowing is a continuous process in which adults and children participate in new forms of activities, coming to a transformed understanding of the activity in which they are engaged. Starting from the evidence in these studies, it is possible to see how conversation could be used not only to introduce new information, but also to orient to each other’s perspectives and in order to understand and pursue plans of action. In this way, it will be possible to examine what is achieved through involvement in discussions and offer constructive advice about how discussions can be made more effective during everyday interactions. Discussions in the classroom and in the family might promote not only activity-related and social purposes, but also functions of socializing children into socioculturally relevant interactional practices. For this reason, future studies have to implement more detailed designs in order to permit full access to the educational worlds in which adults and children are immersed during their everyday lives.

NOTES

1. For a general presentation of the history of language studies in educational contexts, see Stubbs (1990).
2. Each excerpt of conversational sequences has been converted into a simple form (see the Appendix). For all participants, fictitious names replace real names in order to ensure anonymity.
3. The first suggestion came from a similar project started in 1989 in the U.S. and directed by Elinor Ochs. For more details about the Italian project, see Pontecorvo (1996). For a recent presentation of the main research topics, see Pontecorvo and Arcidiacono (2007).
4. For a presentation on this topic, see Arcidiacono (2007).
5. Problematicization is a critical process that poses others’ knowledge as a problem, allowing new viewpoints, reflection, and consciousness. In this sense, participants could problematicize an action or an assertion of any other member of the family (Menghini, Grisel & Pontecorvo, 2000).
6. We recorded only lessons of Italian literature, because in the Italian school system they cover a lot of didactic time, and this permitted more possibilities to observe a classroom during the time when our presence in the classroom was authorized.
7. Polycontextuality conceptualizes how different systems, tasks, and actions are related and how agents move among them. This term comprises various communicative spaces that are interconnected. Within these spaces, people are engaged not only in multiple simultaneous tasks and participation frameworks, but they are also increasingly involved in multiple communities of practices. Different studies have demonstrated the polycontextuality of boundary crossing as central to personal knowledge transformation (Reder, 1995; Engeström, Engeström & Karikkinen, 1995). As suggested by Cranefield, Yoong, and Huff (2008), “the act of crossing boundaries requires the boundary spanner to filter, interpret and translate knowledge and to create mediating concepts” (p. 12).
APPENDIX: TRANSCRIPTION SYMBOLS

- falling intonation
? rising intonation
! exclaiming intonation
: continuing intonation
= prolonging of sounds
( ) pause (2/10 second or less)
(2.0) pause (2 seconds)
() non-transcribing segment of talk
( )) segments added by the transcriber in order to clarify some elements of the situation

BOLD highlights segments or special analytical interest

REFERENCES


