

**BOOK OF ABSTRACTS**  
**Patchwork. Learning Diversities**

**August 30st – September 1st 2012**  
**Belgrade**

PATCHWORK. LEARNING DIVERSITIES  
BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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## SYMPOSIUM I

### STUDYING SOCIAL INTERACTION IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

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Social interaction is an inevitable part of our everyday lives. Starting from the beginning of our life we are permanently immersed in the social world, thus our personal development is shaped by interaction with people around us. As the interaction infuses all aspects of our lives, it is not surprising that the field of social interaction studies is rich and very heterogeneous, with the long tradition.

Symposium "Studying social interaction in different contexts" brings together different studies exemplifying different approaches to study collaborative interactions within goal-directed activities. The role of conversation and dialogues in social interaction has been the object of research during the last decades and it has produced a series of findings that are basic for the understanding of what, how and why happens during social interactions among people. However, we think that a stronger focus of qualitative view within the field of studies traditionally labelled as "social interaction research" can contribute to understand better to what extent children's capacity to interact and to (re)create meanings in collective learning contexts is also a product of their discursive co-construction of sense making within the interaction with partners. The papers that will be presented within the symposium take into account the complexity and the richness of children's and adults' contributions during various types of interaction. These papers create a promising space of theoretical and methodological debate around the relation between learning, discussing, debating, and confronting in different contexts.

*Keywords:* social interaction, learning, qualitative analysis

### DIVERSITIES IN LEARNING TRAJECTORIES AND LEARNING DIVERSITY THROUGH SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

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It is admitted in education and psychology that interacting with adult or peer partners can be beneficial to children's learning and the development of their thinking. Most of the studies have used a design with several phases: pre-test - social interaction (training) - post-tests 1 and 2. However, very few of these studies have examined in detail how what is learnt during one phase of this design is (or not) re-used in a later phase. What are the affordances for re-use? How are the

children relying on semiotic tools that have been provided by the partner or co-constructed with him? Do they transfer knowledge to a new social setting differently as a function of the social circumstances under which they have learned it? We provided children with different "micro-histories" offering them different social opportunities to learn to solve a spatial task. In one condition, children (N=26) met an adult for phases 1 and 4 (pre-test and post-test). The phase 2 consisted in an explicit teaching of strategies by an adult in a "Vygotskian-Brunerian" scaffolding manner and then, children did a joint activity in phase 3 with another peer. In another condition, the micro-history is the same except that children (N=28) did not receive this teaching phase and met directly a peer for a joint activity (as in phase 3 of the first condition) after the phase 1. There was also a control group (N=46) with a restricted micro-history consisting of phases 1 and 4 only.

The dyads and their members were examined qualitatively as case studies. The data shows how semiotic resources circulate (or not) between the partners and through the different phases. They were not always source of cognitive development. We can distinguish different kinds of re-used of these semiotic resources. For example, in one case a child borrowed some semiotic resources from his partner but this did not immediately help him to solve the task. In another case, we observe a co-construction of new semiotic resources that get integrated into both partners' ways of reasoning and re-used successfully to solve better the task. We will discuss this diversity in the use of semiotic resources and its relations to different forms of learning.

#### **"WELL, I WANT HERE TO AGREE": REGULATION OF SOCIAL RELATIONS AND ITS IMPACT ON JOINT THINKING<sup>1</sup>**

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Taking the perspective that learning is a social process the study focuses on the opportunities for learning through peer collaboration. Having in mind the intertwining of social and cognitive aspects of learning through the joint activity, we aim to explore how sometimes regulating social relationships during joint work can prevent children from learning. Although the opportunity to build cooperative relation among partners has been emphasized as one of the major factors influencing opportunities for knowledge co-construction within peer interaction, we intend to consider also situations in which the focus on this aspect of the interaction can potentially inhibit learning processes.

Transcripts from peer interactions analyzed in this paper are part of a larger research study employing a mixed methodology. In the pre-test phase 173 ten years old children have been exposed to a set of short texts assessing their reading literacy. Based on the results from the pre-test, nineteen pairs of children with the equal score have been selected. An innovation in the research design has been the use of the IRT analysis in order to assess reading literacy level of each student as well as to select items in the ZPD of the dyads. In the second phase children got five more reading items within their ZPD. They have been asked to read each item jointly and to discuss it until they have reached an agreement about a common answer for each task.

The analysis of peer interactions over reading items focuses on the ways students' efforts to sustain "nice relation" with a peer can limit their possibilities to discuss and to think together about the task. In addition, we intend to discuss how some children manage to regulate both social relation and joint thinking, coming together to the right conclusions at the end of the task.

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### **ASYMETRICAL PEER INTERACTION AND FORMAL OPERATIONAL THINKING: ANALYSIS OF DIALOGUES IN UNSUCCESSFUL DYADS<sup>†</sup>**

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This work originates from the research into asymmetrical peer interaction as a factor of formal operations development. It combines Piagetian and socio-cultural paradigm. Recently, two approaches got closer and made the understanding of peer interaction's role in thinking development broader and more profound. Piagetians diverted attention to the importance of peer interaction for cognitive development and Vygotskians emphasized the relevance of asymmetry in peers' cognitive competences. The main goal is to analyze dialogues in unsuccessful dyads in which students with lower competences regressed after the interaction with the more competent peer. The dialogue analysis relies on theoretical and research grounds of studies within Piagetian and socio-cultural approaches as sources for the operationalization of relevant characteristics of peer dialogues. Two groups of dialogue characteristics were derived: productive and hindering. Productive characteristics are cooperation, shared socio-cognitive conflict, aha moment, mediation, and justification of the right answer. Hindering characteristics are inconsistent behaviour, domination, submissiveness, lack of cooperation and indifference.

We choose four out of 37 dyads in which less competent students regressed most after the interaction. The mentioned dialogue characteristics were traced in conversations of chosen dyads in order to discover if some of them can be related to a regression of students with lower competences. We also analyzed the presence of dialogue characteristics in the two most successful dyads, in which less competent students advanced most on the post-test. The comparison of conversations in successful and unsuccessful dyads should provide additional understanding of dialogue features in unsuccessful dyads that led to the regression of less competent students. Results show that conversations in successful dyads are exclusively marked by the presence of productive characteristics. The most salient characteristics of dialogues in the successful dyads are the cooperation and the joint activity over the process of task solution. This implies an active involvement of both participants in a dialogue. In the conversations within unsuccessful dyads hindering characteristics prevail and productive characteristics appear occasionally. The engagement of less competent students also differs in two types of dyads. In successful dyads less competent students actively contribute to the process of task solving. This kind of behaviour is accepted and supported by their more competent peers. The behaviour of the less

competent students in unsuccessful dyads is not homogeneous. The less competent students in the two dyads did not show much initiative. In other two dyads the students with lower competences were pretty active but their engagement was often blocked by the dominant attitude of their partners. The analysis implies that dominance of hindering and the rare presence of productive characteristics in communication between peers in the unsuccessful dyads can be connected to the regression of the students with lower competences.

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## **SOCIAL INTERACTIONS AT SCHOOL: TALK AS SOCIAL MODE OF THINKING**

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The aim of this study is to present and discuss a set of empirical data collected in school contexts of different grades in order to show the relevance of conversational processes in children's thinking. Assuming a socio-cultural perspective, we consider the classroom activities as fruitful social frameworks for the development of thinking. According to Edwards (1995), development and education have to be intended as social constructions and practices in which becoming competent and achieving understanding are matters of how people get counted as that. In fact, through different discursive procedures children can jointly construct and negotiate social relationships in school contexts. In this study, our main goal is to account for these processes at different levels (pre-school, primary and secondary grades), employing the perspectives of discursive and argumentative analyses as tools of investigation. In using conversational analysis approach and thus exploring talk-in-interaction we are not dismissing our psychological interest in understanding how children practice cognitive operations to build their thinking: contrarily, we intend to put into a dialogue the interrelation between individual/collective talk and reasoning during different classroom activities.

Three different situations constitute the empirical core of this study. Firstly, we refer to the argumentative strategies of constructing hypotheses, counter-factual reasoning and categorization used by preschool children in collective disputes about narrative. We intend to highlight some specific features, mainly linked to a need of generalization and logical bases through which young children interact in order to co-construct a narrative talk. Secondly, we present the analysis of a case in which reasoning through arguing is applied in primary school to construct an instructional talk about historical matters. In particular, we analyze how children in a social situation can practice peculiar argumentative and epistemic procedures characteristic of historical reasoning. Finally, we intend to apply a socio-cultural discourse analysis in order to understand the use of specific types of talk in classroom discussions in secondary schools: the aim is to highlight consistency in using forms of talk as signs of regulation's processes within school social interactions, as well discrepancies.

The findings of the three selected situations permit to highlight how collective classroom discussions offer interactional opportunities through which children

can foster a critical attitude in the process of thinking carried out with peers. Some implications of discursive practices in this educational setting are discussed in order to consider the relevance of social interactions as powerful modes of thinking.

## **DISCUSSION ON SOCIAL INTERACTION FROM TWO PERSPECTIVES: EXPLANATORY VS. ANALYTIC VIEW<sup>1</sup>**

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Studies of social interaction within the fields of developmental, educational and social psychology are framed within different theoretical and methodological approaches. In our understanding different approaches can be classified in two broader groups.

Within one group (we will refer to it by using the term explanatory view) one can find studies which aim is not to study interaction *per se*, but to explain something that is considered as a result of interaction (for example, social or cognitive abilities, some specific knowledge etc.). Hence, this kind of studies is directed toward explanation of how characteristics of participants are (re)formed through interaction. Looking at the studies presented within this symposium, we can illustrate this perspective by referring to the work done by Stepanović Ilić, in which it is analyzed and discussed how different dimensions of a dialogue among peers can influence later performance of one child. Similarly, in the work of Buđevac & Arcidiacono it has been showed how some actions of partners, aimed at regulation of social relation among them limit opportunities for learning through symmetrical peer interaction.

Within the other perspective (labelled in this presentation as analytic view) social interaction is the main object of research, thus the scholars' efforts are directed toward detailed description of its diverse patterns and dynamics. This perspective is based on the assumption that personal characteristics (thinking, abilities etc.) are relational and contextual, thus that the study of interaction is the main source for the understanding of the ways in which different activities are linked within social interaction and create certain kinds of dynamics and trajectories. As an illustration of this perspective, the study of Arcidiacono can be used. In this study the author is discussing data collected in different school contexts in order to show the relevance of conversational processes in thinking of children.

We want to argue for a meaningful integration of two perspectives because it could advance our understanding of both complexity (explanatory perspective focus) and diversity (analytic perspective focus) of social interaction.

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