Children's social organization and peer socializing practices in the classroom: A study on the peer group in contemporary heterogeneous schools
Organizzazione sociale e pratiche di socializzazione tra bambini e bambine a scuola: Uno studio sul gruppo dei pari nei contesti eterogenei

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates children's peer practices in two primary schools in Italy, focusing on the ordinary and the Italian L2 classroom. The study draws from video-ethnographic research and sets out from the paradigm of language socialization, focusing thus on children's language and social interaction. As the analysis illustrates, children deploy various verbal and non-verbal resources to (a) co-construct and negotiate the social organization of the peer group and (b) socialize their classmates to expected ways of behaving at school. In the discussion it is argued that these kinds of practices are relevant to children's social inclusion or exclusion in the classroom. On the basis of this appraisal, the study advances few implications for teachers' professional practice.

La ricerca esplora le pratiche dei bambini all'interno del gruppo dei pari, focalizzandosi sulla classe ordinaria e il laboratorio di italiano L2 in due scuole primarie del Nord Italia. Lo studio è basato su una ricerca video-etnografica e muove dal paradigma della socializzazione linguistica e da un'attenzione analitica per il linguaggio e l'interazione sociale dei bambini. L'analisi mostra come i bambini impieghino varie risorse verbali e non-verbali per (a) co-costruire e negoziare l'organizzazione sociale del gruppo dei pari e (b) socializzare i loro compagni di classe ai modi attesi di comportarsi a scuola. Nella discussione si sostiene che questo tipo di pratiche sia rilevante per l'inclusione o l'esclusione sociale dei bambini in classe. Sulla base dello studio, l'articolo propone alcune implicazioni per la pratica professionale delle insegnanti.

KEYWORDS

Classroom interaction, Peer group, Peer tutoring, Peer learning, Ethnography and Conversation Analysis
Interazione in classe, Gruppo dei pari, Tutoraggio tra pari, Apprendimento tra pari, Etnografia e Analisi della Conversazione

Quality of life / Qualità della vita

1. Introduction

In the last decades, public schools have become increasingly heterogeneous, enrolling children with disparate socioeconomic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. These *diverse environments* (Zoletto, 2017) are primarily responsible for socializing children into competent membership of a single community: it is mainly in schools that children are gradually introduced to the social expectations of the broader community. The teacher is usually regarded as the main responsible for this socializing work. However, children spend a significant amount of time in the peer group, interacting with their classmates about the most disparate matters. Notably, the prominence of the figure of teacher has brought scholars to neglect this facet of classroom everyday life: previous classroom literature had not extensively focused on the peer group, at least in comparison to the attention devoted to teachers' practice. For instance, there has been a tendency to consider primarily teacher-led interaction, possibly because of difficulties in collecting peer data and because of a propensity to deem off-task peer activities as not necessarily relevant for learning (Maybin, 2006).

This article reports the results of video-ethnographic research that was conducted in two primary schools in Northern Italy. This research is inscribed in a broader PhD thesis that was discussed in 2022 at the University of Bologna. The study analyses children's practices in the peer group, adopting an ethnographic perspective and focusing on children's language and social interaction. Specifically, the analysis considers three distinct analytical phenomena. First, it analyses children's peer socialization to institutional norms of appropriate language use. Second, it considers children's formulation of must-formatted rules to achieve a position of authority in the peer group. Third, it illustrates children's argumentative strategies during peer conflict. These phenomena are discussed in relation to the idea of children's peer interactions as a "double opportunity space" (Blum-Kulka et al., 2004), serving as an arena for children's negotiation of their social organization *and* for children's acquisition of various sociolinguistic skills. The study also underlines how classroom peer interactions are relevant to children's social inclusion and exclusion in the community. On the basis of this appraisal, the article advances few implications for teachers' professional practice.

The study has three main analytical aims. A first research goal concerns the analysis of the interactional resources that children deploy with their classmates in a culturally and linguistically heterogeneous context. A second goal of the study is an appraisal of children's co-construction and negotiation of their local peer culture and social organization. A third goal of the study is the analysis of the potential of peer interactions for children's learning and development.

2. Theoretical background

The study sets out from an extensive milieu of studies which, starting from the 1960s, focused on the role of language and social interaction in the management and constitution of people's social life-worlds (see Caronia, 2021). This focus on language and social interaction is reflected in the approach to developmental processes: the study adopts a phenomenologically-oriented approach to socialization (Caronia, 2011) and considers learning and development as *embedded* in specific social contexts and thus as *mediated* by language and other semiotic systems (Pontecorvo 1993; Vygotsky 2012[1934]). Specifically, the study is inscribed in the paradigm of language socialization (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2012), which focuses on the process through which children are introduced, through language, to the expected ways of thinking, acting, and feeling in a specific community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). By interacting on an everyday basis with the more competent members of a certain community, children (or novices) are gradually socialized to the set of norms, beliefs, values, routinary practices, and bodies of knowledge that constitute and regulate the social life of that community.

One of the major contexts of socialization to the expectations of our society are public schools. During everyday school activities, children are socialized to the social expectations of the classroom community and, more broadly, of the adult society (Burdelski & Howard, 2020). Notably, schools are becoming increasingly heterogeneous, as they enroll a relatively high number of students with a migratory background (Commissione europea/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019). Moving from this recognition, several authors have analysed and discussed the issue of diversity at school, underlining the centrality of a perspective focused on everyday practices (among others, Baraldi, 2009). Broadly, through everyday practices and activities, children are introduced to the appropriate ways of behaving at school: out of their different backgrounds, children are socialized into competent membership of a single, shared community.

As mentioned above, this process mainly happens in and through social interaction and several scholars have focused on the dialogic practices that constitute the backbone of classroom activities. Notably, most studies have considered the institutional figure of the teacher, focusing on various aspects of his/her professional practice. For example, these studies have considered classroom normativity and discipline (Margutti & Piirainen-Marsch, 2011), the 'architecture' of classroom interaction (Seedhouse, 2004), or teachers' corrections (Macbeth, 2004; see Caronia & Nasi, 2021 for an overview). Apart from this focus on the teacher, another milieu of studies focused on what *students* do in the classroom—i.e., on the practices within the peer group. Broadly, these studies highlighted that also students play a central role in the management of classroom everyday life, variously impacting on the developmental and learning trajectories of their classmates. This milieu can be traced back to the 1970s (Ervin-Tripp & Mitchell-Kernan, 1977) and to a shared interest in children's dialogic practices (see Cook-Gumperz, Corsaro & Streeck, 1986). These studies set out from a view of children as *agentive* actors, able to deploy various resources from the local environment according to their local purposes (see Hutchby & Moran-Ellis, 1998). According to this perspective, children are not passively internalizing

adults' messages and ideologies, but actively appropriating them in order to pursue their interests, goals, and communicative purposes. Children's transformative appropriation of the features of the adult worlds has been termed *interpretive reproduction* (Corsaro, 1992). By re-interpreting values, beliefs and ideologies of the adult world, children jointly construct a social order which can be variously aligned or misaligned to the adult one. In institutions such as schools, this means that children construct a social organization which can either ratify or resist the institutional normative and ideological frame. Notably, children's social order and peer culture are worth studying in their own terms, i.e. in their alterity in comparison to the adult world.

This focus on peer groups and peer cultures has brought scholars to focus on various practices that happen among children and youth. For instance, scholars analyzed children's games and pretend play (Cekaite & Aronsson, 2005; Goodwin, 2002), children's conflict (see Moore & Burdelski, 2020), or children's storytelling and gossip (see Goodwin & Kyratzis, 2012). As regards the classroom, there is now considerable literature on both on-task and off-task activities in the peer group (see among others Evaldsson & Cekaite, 2010; Sterponi 2007). Broadly, previous literature has highlighted that children are often oriented to two central concerns in their peer life-worlds, namely (a) their *participation* in peer activities and (b) the *social organization* of the peer group (see Kyratzis, 2004). As regards the former, a central value in children's peer worlds is the 'sharedness' of everyday activities—i.e., the simple fact of doing things together. Thus, children often seek to protect their interactive space against intrusion from other peers, whereas uninvolved children look for possible 'access strategies' in order to participate in the ongoing activity (Corsaro, 2003). As regards the latter, children's social actions are often bound to the social organization of the peer group, which comprises children's local identities and their social roles in the group. Specifically, children continuously dispute and negotiate their respective positions of power and subordination: these asymmetries are relevant in relation to the right to control and shape the ongoing activity (Kyratzis & Goodwin, 2012) and are constructed through a variety of verbal and embodied practices (see Goodwin, 1990; Sheldon, 1996; Nasi, 2022c).

These two central concerns resonate with the notion of children's peer interactions as a "double opportunity space" (Blum-Kulka et al., 2004), serving as an arena for both the joint construction of children's social hierarchy *and* for the acquisition of various sociolinguistic skills (Cekaite et al., 2014). Apart from the negotiation of the social organization of the group, peer interactions are relevant to learning and developmental processes: through their daily interactions in the peer group, children socialize each other to the social expectations of a certain community (e.g., the classroom community). The potential of peer talk is bound to a central dichotomy in the social sciences, namely that between *social inclusion and exclusion*. In this study, inclusion and exclusion are approached as situated phenomena, bound to participants' local actions which might include or exclude other participants from the current activity (Weiste et al., 2020).

Specifically, these practices regard (a) the possibility to participate in the current activity as a ratified participant (see Goffman, 1981) and (b) the social role that is ascribed to other children (e.g., a valued or despised social role). Children make use of various language practices and stances to index affiliation with the members of the group and marginalize other children that are perceived and constructed as 'outgroup'. For instance, children can include other children by jointly producing songs and chants or by positively assessing peers or peers' work (see Cook-Gumperz & Szymanski, 2001). Conversely, children might use linguistic and embodied resources to index exclusion (e.g., by performing an "aggravated" error correction; Goodwin, 1983; Nasi, 2022b). Overall, previous literature highlights the potentials of peer talk for children's acquisition of various skills, together with the risks of exclusion that are inherent to children's unsupervised peer interactions.

3. Setting and methodology

The study was conducted in two primary schools in Northern Italy. These schools enrol a heterogeneous student body, whose majority is made of children with a migratory background. To deal with children who had limited competences in Italian, the schools organized several Italian L2 classes, which are usually attended by a small group of children with a similar level of competence. This study considered both the ordinary classroom and these Italian L2 classes.

Data were collected during 9 months of video-ethnographic fieldwork. At the beginning of the fieldwork, a broad research focus was on the communicative resources that participants deployed in these diverse environments. In the field, this broad focus was gradually narrowed down to children's peer interactions. This re-specification of the research focus was due to the phenomena that could be observed in the classrooms (e.g., children arguing, or helping each other) and to academic consideration (i.e., peer group interactions were relatively uncharted territory in comparison to teachers' talk; see above). In order to video-record children's interactions, the research team deployed a camera, two directional microphones, and a small microphone which was placed on children's desks. A total of 30 hours of classroom interactions were video-recorded.

The video-recorded data were transcribed (see Jefferson, 2004) and analyzed with the micro-analytical instruments of Conversation Analysis, which allow to study social interactions in their sequence and to account for the various semiotic resources that participants locally deploy (Cekaite, 2013). The analysis also relied on ethnographic information, which was relevant in order to examine the wider structures and ideologies that children drew upon during their local interactions (Maynard, 2006). Apart from that, the analysis proceeded inductively: videos and transcripts were repeatedly viewed to identify relevant phenomena, which were then discussed and validated in several data sessions with both the local research group and international colleagues. This combined method has been widely used in the study of children's life-

worlds and permits to consider children's social actions from their own, emic perspective (Goodwin, 2006).

4. Analysis

The analysis of the corpus of video-recorded interactions highlighted various phenomena which were relevant to children's life-worlds. However, the study revolved around three specific phenomena which could be put into the broader analytical frame of the PhD thesis. These phenomena are (a) non-native children's peer socialization to institutional norms of language use (section 4.1.), (b) children's deontic rule formulations to achieve a position of authority (section 4.2.), and (c) children's argumentative strategies during peer conflict (section 4.3.).

4.1 Children's peer socialization to institutional norms of language use

The first phenomenon (thoroughly analysed by Nasi, 2022b) concerns the set of practices through which non-native children socialize their classmates to the appropriate ways of speaking, reading, and writing in Italian. Specifically, the analysis considers how children enact the role of the teacher by reproducing institutional linguistic norms in the peer group. These *subteaching* practices (Tholander & Aronsson, 2003) regard lexical and pragmatic norms in relation to everyday language use, as well as norms concerning literacy. The data were collected in the Italian L2 class and regard 8- to 10-year-old children with a migratory background.

Excerpt 1 (*Table 1*) is an emblematic example of this phenomenon. Few minutes before the sequence, the teacher introduced a norm according to which children must say 'please' (per piacere) when they ask for something. In Excerpt 1, a child reproduces this institutional norm in the peer group.

1	Ramil	((*is looking into his pencil case*))
2 3	Ahsan	ramil! (.) posso, e::m: (.) ^l'azzurro? **ramil! (.) can i, e::m: (.) ^the azure?** ^((*points to Ramil's pencil case*))
4 5	Ramil	((*closes his pencil case, smiles*)) ah? **ah?**
6		(0.2)
7	Ahsan	<azzurro.> **<azure.>**
8		(0.3)
9	Ramil	per? **plea-?**
10	Ahsan	il cielo. **the sky.**
11	Ramil	per piacere **please**
12	Ahsan	per piacere. **please.**
13 14 15	Ramil	((*opens his pencil case, stops smiling*)) azzu:rro (0.2) io non ce l'ho azzurro! **azu:re (0.2) i don't have azure!** ((*shows his pencil case*))
16	Ahsan	((*drops his head*))

Table 1. Excerpt No. 1

At the onset of the exchange, Ahsan asks Ramil an azure pencil, using both verbal and non-verbal resources: a polite question (*can I*), a hesitation (possibly indicating a word search), and a hand gesture toward Ramil's pencil case (lines 2, 3). Ramil does not comply with the request and seems to initiate a repair trajectory (*ah?*, line 5). Ahsan interprets Ramil's move as a failure in understanding, and slowly articulates the requested item again (*azure*, line 7). However, in Ramil's turns (lines 4, 5) there are some cues that suggest a different interpretation: the child closes his

pencil case and smiles, providing a key that indicates the playful character of his action. Considering these details, it seems that Ramil has indeed understood the request and chooses to *suspend* the expected reply to start an inserted pedagogical sequence.

As a matter of fact, Ramil tries to locate more precisely the trouble source. He reproduces the first part of the politeness formula (*plea-*, line 8), prompting his classmate to complete it (viz. "designedly incomplete utterances"; Margutti, 2010). Nevertheless, the answer is not the expected one: Ahsan misunderstands

Ramil's turn, as he interprets the Italian preposition '*per*' in its final meaning (i.e., *what for*?). Thus, Ahsan gives an account for his request (*[for] the sky*, line 10). At this point, Ramil is forced to reproduce the entire formula (*please*, line 11). Notably, Ramil further sustains his gaze toward Ahsan, applying a certain moral pressure for compliance. Indeed, Ahsan promptly repeats the formula (line 12). Satisfied with Ahsan's alignment, Ramil opens his pencil case to give Ahsan the azure pastel, which he cannot find. He thus gives Ahsan the bad news (*I don't have azure*, line 14) and shows his pencil case to provide material evidence of his statement (line 15).

This sequence is an example of Ramil's enactment of the teacher through the reproduction of an institutional rule in the peer group. After few months of attendance at the Italian school, the child is able to reproduce teachers' talk, thereby socializing a classmate to the expected ways of using Italian in the classroom. Apart from its socializing potential, the sequence is relevant to children's social organization: by correcting his classmates, Ramil claim the identity of the more competent student and ascribes Ahsan a subordinate position in the group hierarchy.

4.2 Children's deontic rule formulation and local enactment of authority

The second phenomenon (furtherly analysed in Nasi 2022a) regards children's explicit formulation of must-formatted rules in the peer group. Specifically, the analysis illustrates that children formulate institutional rules after perceived transgressions of the classroom order. These rules are formulated in two distinct sequential positions and accomplish different social actions: they can be deployed as 'reproaches' or as 'accounts' that justify a previous action. Notably, deontic rule formulations are relevant to the negotiation of authoritative positions among classmates.

Excerpt 2 (*Table 2*) is an emblematic example of this phenomenon. An untoward behaviour is sanctioned, but the 'transgressor' openly resists the sanctioning. In response to that, a child formulates an institutional rule, which justifies the previous sanction and re-actualizes the pressure for compliance on the recipient. The sequence was recorded in the ordinary classroom during group work. Yassin violates a rule regarding the completion of the task and is sanctioned by his 'teammate' Melek. At the beginning of the sequence, the teacher is standing a couple of meters away from the children.

1	Dario	questo dove va? **where does this go?**
2	Dario	((*shows a marker by lifting his arm*))
3	Teacher	questo nella plastica, **this in the plastic,**
4	Yassin	questo nella: nella (pupù) **this in the: in the (poo-poo)**
5	Yassin	((*looks at Melek*))
6	Melek	ma la smetti?! **will you stop?!**
7		(0.2)
8	Yassin	oh ma cos' ti ho detto? **oh but what have i said to you?**
9	Melek	((*shakes her ^head*))
10	Melek	^devi ^lavorare. **^you must ^work.**
11	Melek	^((*points to Yassin's notebook*))
12	Yassin	((*looks down on his notebook*))

Table 2. Excerpt No. 2

Dario, a child from another group, walks to the teacher and asks her where to put the marker he holds in his hand (lines 1, 2). The teacher's answer (*this in the plastic*, line 3) is recycled by Yassin, who substitutes the last element of the turn with a scatological reference (*this in the poo-poo*, line 4). The turn is not audible for the teacher and the subsequent gaze (line 5) locates Melek as a recipient. Melek is put in front of a choice: she can align with the institutional order and sanction Yassin *or* she can take side with the transgressor (e.g., by laughing). Melek chooses to reproach her classmate. She utters a rhetorical question

(*will you stop*?!, line 6), which works sequentially and prosodically as a directive to stop the inappropriate behaviour and to avoid its recurrence. Yassin resists Melek's sanctioning (*oh but what have i said to you?*, line 8), defending his action in terms of content (what have I said?) and addressee (*to you*?).

Melek avoids joining the dispute that Yassin is seemingly setting out (i.e., a dispute about what can and cannot be said in the classroom): she formulates a deontic rule which points to the morally appropriate conduct during group work (*you must work*, line 10). This rule formulation accounts for the previous re-

proach by linking it to a shared classroom norm. In the face of resistance, children might invoke an institutional rule to assume an authoritative position and claim the right to decide about the ongoing activity. Notably, the urgency of the directive is strengthened by the use of non-verbal resources: a shake of the head that prefaces the oppositive move (line 9) and a hand gesture toward Yassin's notebook, locating the 'correct' focus of his attention (line 11). At the end of the sequence, Yassin does not further resist and starts looking at his notebook (line 12). Melek's authoritative position has been interactionally established.

Excerpt 2 is an example of children's deployment of must-formatted institutional rule to achieve a position of authority with their classmates. Specifically, an institutional rule is mobilized to justify previous sanctioning, which is thereby legitimized, and to re-state the need for compliance. Through this practice, a child manages to achieve an authoritative position among classmates and to decide about what must be done in a specific situation.

4.3 Children's argumentative strategies during peer conflict

The third phenomenon regards children's argumentative strategies during peer conflict. As the analysis illustrates, children deploy various strategies to sustain their point of view and achieve their local communicative aims. For example, children mobilize authoritative sources from the institutional context, they reformulate the utterances of the other disputant, or they construct logical arguments to avoid blame. Through this set of practices, children negotiate their social organization and acquire sociolinguistic skills regarding appropriate ways of participating in conflictual events (for further examples of children's peer conflict in the classroom under scrutiny, see Nasi, 2022e).

Excerpt 3 (*Table 3*) is an emblematic example of this phenomenon. The sequence was recorded in the ordinary classroom. The teacher is momentarily out of the classroom, but the lesson is about to start: several children are distributing the materials to their classmates. The children responsible for the distribution are written on a poster which regulates children's assignments (see *Figure 1*). Although Yassin is not responsible for the distribution, he tries to take some notebooks and repeatedly claims to be one of the appointed children. In response to that, Dario shifts the local *frame* from serious to playful (Goffman, 1974; see Goodwin, 1997) as a strategy to achieve his local aims during conflict: this move changes the "structure of intelligibility" of the ongoing interaction by advancing a different interpretation of what is happening (Goodwin, 1997, p. 71). In this case, Yassin's serious requests are re-interpreted by Dario in a playful key.

Figure 1. "Who does what…": children's 'duties'

1		*((yassin starts taking some notebooks in order to distribute them))*
2	Dario	no: li devo prendere io tu non sei in tabella **no: i must take them you are not on the table**
3	Yassin	sì che sono **yes i am**
4	Dario	dove? **where?**
5	Yassin	guarda là **look there** *((points to the poster))*
6	Dario	non ci credo **i don't believe you**
7	Yassin	allora vai a vedere **then go and check** *((points to the poster))*
8	Dario	( )
9	Yassin	**nono**
10		*((Dario takes the notebooks and goes away, Yassin follows him))*
11 11 12 13	Dario	va bè prendi questi. tanto son tutti gli assenti. **alright take these. anyway they are all absent.** (0.5) ^questo. (.) prendi pure quelli. tanto son tutti assenti. **^this. (.) take also those. anyway they are all absent.** ^*((gives Yassin some notebooks from the closet))*

| 14 | Carlo | distribuisci agli assenti yassin
distribute to the absentee yassin *((laughing voice))* |
| 15 | Yassin | ma no: e sempre me niente
but no: always nothing for me *((goes away))* |

Table 3. Excerpt No. 3

Dario is one of the children responsible for the distribution of the notebooks. When he sees that Yassin starts taking some notebooks, he immediately stops him by referring to the 'table'—i.e., the poster on the wall (*no i must take them you are not on the table*, line 2). Dario builds thereby his argument on the basis of an object that represents the institutional order, which is publicly available to the children also when the teacher is not present. Ahsan aligns with Dario's orientation to the authority of the poster, but he tries to bend it to his favor: he maintains that he is one of the appointees to distribute the notebooks (*yes I am*, line 3) and points again to the artefact (*look there*, line 5). Notably, Yassin is *not* responsible for the notebooks and is thus using the institutional artefact to deceive his classmate.

Possibly on the basis on their previous relationship, Dario doubts his classmate's claim (*i don't believe you*, line 6). Yassin further tries to achieve his aim through a reference to the poster (*then go and check*, line 7) and by closely following Dario (line 10). Realizing that Yassin has no intention of letting go, Dario opts for a different strategy: he shifts frame and re-interprets Yassin's claim in a playful manner, starting to mock his classmate. He apparently allows his classmate to take the notebooks, but only those that cannot be distributed, since the owner is absent (*alright take these. anyway they are all absent*, line 11; see also lines 12, 13). This paradoxical task is quite funny for Carlo, who promptly aligns with Dario by reformulating his contribution with a laughing voice (*distribute to the absentee yassin*, line 14). This joint derision ends the dispute, as Yassin briefly complains and goes away.

Ex. 3 is an example of the argumentative strategies that children might deploy during peer conflict. In order to resolve a deadlock, Dario re-arranges the frame within which the interaction is taking place: by reinterpreting Yassin's repeated claims in a jocular manner, he manages to end the dispute and achieve his local aim (which is arguably to stop being bothered by Yassin). In this regard, shifting frame from serious to playful can be seen as a "practical solution to interactional dilemmas" (Goodwin, 1997, p. 71).

5. Concluding discussion

The analysis offers some emblematic examples of the phenomena that has been observed during video-ethnographic research in two primary schools in Northern Italy. As mentioned above, these schools are characterized by a heterogeneous student body, whereby the majority of students have a migratory background. In this diverse environment, the study focused *on children*, analysing their social practices in the peer group and considering thereby a relatively understudied dimension of classroom everyday life:

in comparison to the wealth of studies on teachers' practices, there is a relative paucity of research that analysed children's peer interactions in contemporary heterogeneous schools. Specifically, this study revolved around three phenomena which have been selected for analysis among the many possible.

The first phenomenon consists in non-native children' enactment of the role of the teacher with their classmates. This local enactment is accomplished by reproducing teacher's typical ways of speaking, which are mobilized to correct other classmates' inappropriate contributions. Through this kind of practice, non-native children socialize their classmates into the set of appropriate ways of speaking/writing/reading Italian as L2 in the classroom. The second phenomenon regards children's mobilization of must-formatted institutional rules in the peer group. These *deontic rule formulations* are deployed to reproach a classmate or to account for a previous move that has been problematized by the other interlocutor. By illustrating the sequential organization of rule formulations, the analysis underlines how children make use of institutional rules to assume an authoritative position in the peer group. The third phenomenon regards children's argumentative strategies during peer conflict. The analysis illustrates that children deploy multifarious argumentative strategies to achieve their local aims in the peer group. Through these practices, children manage to deal with another classmate's opposition and locally negotiate the social organization of the peer group.

As regards the first research aim, the analysis highlights how children agentively draw from adult institutional 'entities' when interacting in the peer group. Specifically, children use verbal, embodied, and material resources that are related to the institutional school frame. For example, the analysis illustrates children's reproduction of teachers' typical ways of speaking, their deployment of institutional rules, or their orientation to the material artefacts of the classroom (such as posters). These multiple semiotic resources are made locally relevant by children, who deploy them in ways that are sensitive to context and reflective of their local concerns and purposes in the peer group. In this regard, the study corroborates previous literature by underlining children's agency in providing their own rendering of adults' resources and practices, thereby co-constructing their own unique social order and peer cultures (see Corsaro, 1992). Notably, children's local order might be variously aligned or misaligned to the adult one, since institutional messages and ideologies can be reproduced, but also renegotiated and resisted in the peer group.

As regards the second research aim, the analysis illustrates that children use these practices to shape and negotiate the social organization of the peer group. Specifically, children's joint negotiation of local order of the peer group is germane to issues of power

and social hierarchy among classmates: children attempt to achieve the valued position of the 'best student' in the group and thereby to obtain a superordinate position among classmates. This coveted position regards both the epistemic and the moral order of the group. First, the analysis highlights how children construct or make relevant asymmetries in knowledge with their classmates, thereby attempting to achieve the valued position of the more competent pupil. At the same time, the other interlocutor is constructed as non-competent and in an epistemically-subordinate position. Second, children construct local hierarchies in relation to the moral order of the classroom. The analysis shows that children display their being 'good pupils' with peers and teachers, while holding others as morally at fault in relation to local conceptions of right and wrong. Apart from the social hierarchy of the peer group, children's negotiation of their social organization also regards friendship relationships. The study highlights how children ascribe and resist membership to categories such as 'good/bad friend' or strengthen the boundaries of a group of friends by preventing other children to participate in the interaction at hand.

As regards the third research aim, the analysis outlines the relevance of children's peer practices for their sociolinguistic development and their socialization into the range of expected ways of speaking and acting in the community. A first insight in this respect is children's ingenuity in constructing their own learning environment: apparently off-task moments or breaks between 'official' activities are used by children to initiate pedagogical sequences. Thus, the pedagogical relevance of classroom interaction is not limited to task-related activities that the teacher plans. Apart from this broad recognition, the analysis illustrates that children socialize each other to the local expectations of the community (be it the 'restricted' community of the peer group or the community of the classroom). Children enforce norms of appropriate language use and of appropriate social conduct, thereby introducing their classmates to classroom normativity and to the institutional expectations of the context. This socializing potential might be especially relevant in the L2 class, where children have little knowledge Italian school system. Furthermore, by interacting with each other on an everyday basis children develop and refine their sociolinguistic skills: in and through the practices highlighted in the analysis, children can appropriate and learn effective ways of using language and other semiotic resources to achieve their communicative and social aim. Eventually, the analysis underlines the relevance of peer conflict for children's development. During argumentative events, children can learn to master tools of arguing and thinking that potentially foster their socio-cognitive development. Moreover, in and through conflict children socialize each other into peer-specific and broader societal values regarding expected ways of participating in argumentative events (see also Nasi, forthcoming).

Overall, the practices highlighted in the study are relevant in relation to the dichotomy between *social inclusion and exclusion*. As regards children's *inclusive* practices, the study illustrates how children can introduce their classmates to the normative expectations of the classroom: both native and non-native children may act as 'spokespersons' for the institution and socialize their classmates to appropriate ways of speaking and acting at school. These practices potentially favour children's complicated apprenticeship period in the community. Moreover, the study suggests that children can indeed develop a broad range of sociolinguistic competences by interacting with their classmates. These competences allow children to competently participate in mundane activities, that is, they provide them with opportunities to access local interactions as ratified participants. Thus, the interactional practices in the peer group might be instrumental to children's gradual inclusion in the school community. Despite their potential for social inclusion, the practices analysed are also potentially constructing *exclusion*. In the corpus, this potential for exclusion is mostly bound to children's strict interpretation of classroom normativity: children might sanction even slight departures from the norm, holding transgressors as individually responsible for what is constructed as a moral failure. Moreover, sanctioning and correction practices might be accomplished in an aggravated manner and/or involve mockery, thereby forcing on the recipient the identity of the non-competent child, or that of the outsider. This local ascription to an out-group category is based on the set of appropriate ways of speaking/reading/writing/behaving, which are seen as criteria for membership in the peer group. This can lead to the exclusion of children who do not conform to this strict set of institutionally-sanctioned behaviours (children with learning disorders or limited competences in the L2 might be especially affected). The study also shows that children might form local alliances against a classmate. These local frameworks of two-against-one are crucial for the potential exclusion of a targeted child: in order to take hold, negative ascriptions and assessments often rely on their ratification by another interlocutor (Garcia-Sanchez, 2014). In this regard, the analysis shows how a 'transgressor' might face a local alliance of two children forcing on him/her the identity of the non-competent and morally-reproachable child. To sum up, the peer practices highlighted in the analysis appear both a potential vehicle for children's inclusion in the community and a potentially problematic locus where social exclusion is constructed and brought to bear.

Considering their potential impact on children's social inclusion or exclusion in the classroom, peer interactions are extremely relevant for teachers' professional practice. In this regard, the study offers insights that shed light on this 'hidden' dimension of classroom everyday life, providing knowledge that can raise teachers' awareness of the concrete practices that might unfold in the peer group. In turn, this awareness can help teachers make more informed choices when faced with events of difficult interpretation (such as two children who argue animatedly). Several implications for teachers' practice have been already outlined elsewhere (Nasi, 2022d; forthcoming). In this article, we just underline (a) the relevance of teachers' displayed stances and actions in the classroom, since children might reproduce them in the peer group, and (b) the risks of an acritical approach to teaching methods such as peer tutoring and coop-

erative learning, which often involve children's unsupervised interactions, and (c) the developmental potential of children's apparently disruptive practices (such as peer conflict).

Apart from their relevance to teachers' practice, the study offers a glimpse into the familiar and yet so distant world of childhood, presenting a perspective on the world that might be valuable to every adult reader.

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