Dialogue, agency and experiential learning in international camps

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Abstract

Experiential learning may be conceived as a social communicative process that displays agency, which indicates autonomous construction of meanings during social process. This paper explores social conditions and cultural presuppositions of experiential learning, showing that it can be successfully enhanced through a form of dialogue which empowers participants' personal expression of ideas and emotions. The specific meanings of empowering dialogue are the promotion and fair distribution of active participation in interaction (equity), the display of sensitivity towards the interlocutors' interests and/or needs (empathy), and the treatment of disagreements and alternative perspectives as enrichments in communication. These meanings are explored through the analysis of transcriptions of videotaped interactions which were collected in four international residential camps for adolescents, coordinated by expert adults. First, the analysis of the data shows those adults' dialogic actions which work effectively in promoting experiential learning: appreciations, acknowledgement tokens, affective non-verbal behaviour, continuers, formulations, promotional questions, direct invitations and suggestions. Second, the analysis identifies the main obstacles for empowering dialogue, which are adults' negative assessments and assertions of hierarchical stances with adolescents. Some final considerations are drawn regarding the features of empowering dialogue that can empower experiential learning as agency in interactions.

Keywords

Agency, Dialogue, Experiential Learning, Interaction

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Diálogo, agência e aprendizagem experencial em acampamentos internacionais

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Resumo

A aprendizagem experiencial pode ser concebida como um processo social de comunicação que demonstra agência, o que indica a construção autônoma de significados durante o processo social. Este artigo explora as condições sociais e pressupostos culturais de aprendizagem experiencial, mostrando que ela pode ser melhorada através de uma forma de diálogo que potencializa a expressão pessoal de idéias e emoções dos participantes. Os significados específicos do diálogo empoderador são a promoção e distribuição justa da participação ativa na interação (equidade), a demonstração de sensibilidade para os interesses e/ou necessidades dos interlocutores (empatia), e o tratamento de divergências e perspectivas alternativas como enriquecimentos em comunicação. Esses significados são explorados através da análise das transcrições das interações filmadas que foram coletadas em quatro acampamentos internacionais para adolescentes, coordenados por especialistas adultos. Em primeiro lugar, a análise dos dados mostra as ações dialógicas desses adultos, ações essas que funcionam eficazmente para promover a aprendizagem experiencial: elogios, símbolos de reconhecimento, comportamento não-verbal afetivo, continuadores, formulações, perguntas promocionais, convites diretos, sugestões. Em segundo lugar, a análise identifica os principais obstáculos para ao diálogo empoderador, que são as avaliações negativas dos adultos, e as afirmações de posições hierárquicas junto aos adolescentes. Traçam-se algumas considerações finais sobre as características do diálogo empoderador que pode empoderar a aprendizagem experiencial como agência nas interações.

Palavras-chave

Agência, Diálogo, Aprendizagem Experencial, Interação

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The concept of experiential learning (EL), or learning-by-doing, originates in theories which were concerned with individual psychology and behaviour (Dewey 1955; Rogers 1969; Kolb 1984). These theories focus on the individual making of meanings from direct experience. Their main innovation is that learners are considered active in their reflection and conceptualisation of their experience, as well as in decision-making and problem-solving as regards their social tasks; they construct the meanings of their experience (Sutinen 2008). Theories of EL state that action is more effective for learning than understanding is (Lehmann-Rommel 2000).

More recently, the interplay of learning and social processes has been considered in the pedagogical literature (e.g. Biesta 1994, 1995). Sociocultural approaches explore the coupling between individual learning and specific social processes, demonstrating that learners are active constructors of knowledge who can express their views, challenge different ones and explore different options (see Kovalainen and Kumpulainen 2007; Mercer 2000, 2002; Mercer and Littleton 2007). Learning is observed as the result of interactions between educators and learners (Seedhouse 2004, 2005, 2007) and as a social communicative process (Mercer 2000). Teachers can promote learners' active participation (O'Connor and Michaels 1996); children can learn while they participate in interactions with teachers which aim to promote their autonomous production of ideas and projects, their interpretation of things that pass unnoticed to the teachers' attention (Gavioli 2005). Therefore, learning is based on reciprocal interactions which produce mutual influence (Erickson 1996).

In the perspective of this approach, learning is promoted through "dialogic teaching". Dialogic teaching is defined as "that in which both teachers and pupils make substantial and significant contributions and through which children's thinking on a given idea or theme is helped to move forward", and through which "teachers can encourage students to participate actively" (Mercer and Littleton 2007, 41), "orchestrating" this participation (Erickson 1996; O'Connor and Michaels 1996). The value of learners' experience is affected by the extent to which dialogue "enables them to appreciate the purpose of the activities they do, and how these activities fit together into a meaningful sequence of events" (Mercer and Littleton 2007, 55).

Today, dialogic education is considered the most important setting for the achievement of cosmopolitan citizenship, which is conceived as a form of living together in a differentiated and interdependent world, based on principles of co-operation as well as critical and responsible participation (Osler 2005). Cosmopolitan citizenship firstly requires the empowerment of different ideas and perspectives, within contexts of cultural diversity. Education should encourage critical thinking and responsible participation, inviting children both to assert their rights (Invernizzi and Williams 2008) and to accept different cultural perspectives. Education aims to create cross-cultural adaptation (Kim 2001) and intercultural conflict management (Ting-Toomey and Oetzel 2001), contrasting inequalities and discrimination, power asymmetries among different groups and problems with their acceptance. In this context, dialogic education should create the conditions for EL stimulating a critical reflection about the cultural diversity constructed through communication (Alred, Byram, and Fleming 2003).

The present study is based on a sociological framework which should demonstrate how specific social processes, i.e. communication processes, and EL may be connected. Starting form an analysis of sequences of conversation between adults and adolescents during educational activities in international camps, it aims at observing if and under which conditions EL can be enhanced in and through interaction and dialogue.

Promotion of experiential learning as agency

According to the social systems theory (Luhmann 1984/1990, 1986), social interactions are systems of communication. Communication

implies both (verbal and non-verbal) action (utterance) and understanding of the meanings of action/utterance and uttered information; therefore, participation in communication may be intended as both action and understanding. Specific educational interactions are parts of the education system, which is one of the most important subsystems in modern society (Luhmann and Schorr 1979).

Systems of communication are based on expectations, which constitute the cultural presuppositions which contextualise specific interactions (Gumperz 1992), giving meanings to them.

Interactions that aim at enhancing students' learning are based on some cultural presuppositions (or expectations) constructed in the education system. A main expectation is that learning depends on learners' understanding of values, roles and contents of teaching; this expectation is reflected in a pattern of interaction which implies that teachers speak and learners listen to them. Learners are expected to be mainly still and silent, paying attention to the teachers for almost the entire time, and they are rarely asked to express their personal perspectives, while the primary value is assigned to their role performances as a reproduction of knowledge, which are assessed in order to check correct learning. These expectations create the conditions for individual learning of predetermined knowledge; they enhance attempts to change individual learning processes from outside (cognitive expectations), and to control learners' actions (normative expectations), in both cases encouraging learners' standardised performances.

These educational expectations have been criticised in sociology of childhood, observing that children's creativity and competence in constructing meanings is strongly reduced "by curricular and behavioural rules and structures" (Wyness 1999, 356) because educational systems are not interested in children as social agents (James and James 2004; Gallagher 2006; Prout 2000). According to this approach, children are social agents, i.e., competent participants in social processes (e.g. James, Jenks, and Prout 1998; James and Prout 1997; Jenks 1996). The concept of *agency* indicates the display of "one's course of action as one from among various possibilities" (van Langhenove and Harré 1999, 24). Consequently, it also indicates one's autonomous construction of meanings during social processes (Jans 2004). This approach assumes that children are competent agents who can give meanings to their learning, through their participation in structured social relationships. Following this line of reasoning, it is possible to observe that agency is an important aspect of EL.

Agency can be observed through active participation in communication (Baraldi 2008). This observation sets out from the presupposition that, although individuals participate in communication both acting and understanding, agency implies action; i.e., it is *active* participation. In this perspective, learning is experiential because it is active participation in social interactions; an important consequence is that EL is displayed in the interaction as learners' agency that enhances new courses of action, indicating learners' autonomous construction of meanings. Therefore, successful EL is shown as learners' agency. This study aims to show ways in which communicative processes create opportunities for displaying EL as agency.

In communicative processes, learners' agency is based on teachers' supporting actions. Promotion of agency is based on expectations of learners' display of their own autonomous perspectives in the interaction, i.e. on expectations of learners' *personal expression* of ideas and emotions (affective expectations). Personal expressions are not subjugated to expectations of change or control from outside: personal expressions indicate that learners do not adapt to prescribed expectations; rather, they introduce new ideas and their emotions in communication. It has been demonstrated that early learners can display their agency

through their personal expressions and that their affective attunement in communication with caregivers is an important presupposition of this display (Legerstee 2005; Stern 1985).

In this perspective, teachers may be considered as *organisers* of learning, understanding that children are social agents who can and must tackle important issues (Holdsworth 2005). Dialogic teaching (Mercer and Littleton 2007) may be seen as organisation and coordination of children's agency. Here, the term 'dialogue' indicates a specific form of communication that promotes different perspectives (Bohm 1996; Wierbicka 2005) and empowers the participants' agency: for this reason, it may be defined as *empowering dialogue*, in order to avoid confusion with the more general idea of dialogue as communication based on differentiated turn-taking. Empowering dialogue presents three main features (Baraldi 2009): (1) the promotion and fair distribution of active participation in interaction (equity), (2) the display of sensitivity towards the interlocutors' interests and/or needs (empathy), and (3) the treatment of disagreements and alternative perspectives as enrichments in communication (empowerment).

In his seminal book, David Bohm (1996) proposed some techniques for the promotion of empowering dialogue in group meetings. More recently, other researchers have described the features of specific kinds of *dialogic actions*, which are supposed to promote equity, empathy, and empowerment in communication (e.g. Gergen, McNamee, and Barrett 2001; Gudykunst 1994; Littlejohn 2004; Winslade and Monk 2008).

In this perspective, empowering dialogue can create the social conditions for EL as agency in the form of personal expression. In order to analyse the social conditions of EL as agency, it is necessary to investigate whether and in what ways empowering dialogue works in interaction, in particular whether and in what ways organisers' dialogic actions promote learners' agency.

Research design

This study presents data which are part of a research project concerning activities which involved adolescents in international settings organised by an international charity, CISV, which is based in the UK (CISV 2004, 2008). Over the last 50 years, CISV has organised thousands of international meetings, involving more than 150,000 children and adolescents in more than 70 countries all over the world. These meetings aim to promote children's and adolescents' EL through their interpersonal relations, fostering their interest in peaceful relationships and respect for different perspectives, reducing their prejudices and stereotypes, in a word creating the educational conditions for their citizenship in a global, intercultural world.

The research concerns international summer camps promoted and organised by CISV in order to create the conditions for participants' EL and achievement of cosmopolitan citizenship. In these camps, eight delegations of four adolescents of 14 or 15 years, led by an adult (called the "leader"), live together for three weeks. Other adults ("staff members") help in the organisation of the camp and cooperate with the leaders in organising interactions involving the adolescents. Leaders and staff members are trained in facilitating camp activities and coordinating adolescents' groups (Kangaslathi & Kangaslathi 2003). Children are selected by the CISV local chapters and, in general, they belong to middle-class families which are interested in promoting their linguistic and intercultural competences.

In summer camps, four progressively more complex kinds of activities are put forward, aiming to gradually transform superficial mutual understanding into interpersonal trust: name/ice breaking games (introducing participants); running games; contact games; simulation, cooperation and trust games. After these activities, the program includes discussions to reflect on what has been learned. Summer camps aim to promote adolescents'

responsibility in planning and discussing important topics, while the adults' task is to facilitate discussion among adolescents and adolescents' EL.

The research focuses on interactions involving 32 delegations (128 adolescents and 32 leaders), 4 camp directors and 20 staff members in 4 summer camps. The camps were held in Italy: consequently, the large majority of the staff members were Italian, while the leaders and adolescents came from 29 different countries all over the world. In these summer camps, 135 hours of interactions were videotaped during 12 weeks.

Videotaping is considered the most important instrument for social research on interactions with children (e.g. Hutchby 2007), although it cannot be exhaustive (Heath and Hindmarsh 2002). Videotaping allows collecting the largest amount of data regarding interaction, analysising such data after their collection, comparing them, and submitting analysis to other researchers. Videotaping is not possible in certain, delicate situations, in which the right of privacy is claimed and the presence of a video camera can be very intrusive, e.g. in family life, in restricted political or business meetings, or in healthcare services. In other public situations, such as CISV activities, videotaping is part of daily life. Furthermore, the possible deviation caused by the presence of the video camera can be detected observing how the participants act in the interaction. If this kind of deviation is observed, it signals that the participants' are doing their best to accomplish their roles and show their agency.

The data were taped by 4 trained field researchers during the daily meetings, in which groups of adolescents planned some activities with the help of leaders and staff members. In these meetings, the adults had the task to facilitate interactions among the adolescents, to coordinate their decision-making and to mediate their discussions.

In this kind of study, it is impossible to create a sample, as the amount of accomplished interactions cannot be "counted". The research procedure aimed to videotape the largest number of interactions during the activities, in order to analyse the cultural presuppositions which guided them. Frequently, different groups worked simultaneously and it was necessary to choose where the interactions should be videotaped. This choice was guided by the attempt to include all delegations in the corpus of data. The involvement of all delegations was useful to check the possible influence of different national cultures (Hofstede 1980) in the interaction.

The transcription of videotaped interactions allows the analysis of oral communication (or talk), in order to understand the social conditions for promoting EL as competent agency in empirical situations.

This analysis combines the research methodology of Conversation Analysis (CA) with the theoretical approaches of interactional sociolinguistics, the social systems theory, and the theory of dialogue. CA treats interactions as organised sequences of talk, on the basis of mechanisms of turn-taking. The analysis regards the ways in which any "current action may project (...) one among a range of possible next actions" (Goodwin and Heritage 1990, 288) and next actions show their being in tune with former actions. Interactional sociolinguistics studies the cultural presuppositions (Gumperz 1992) of interactions. In the social systems theory, interactions are considered parts of communication systems (Luhmann 1984/1990) and their cultural presuppositions are analysed as forms of expectations. Theories of dialogue analyse in which ways presuppositions of empowering dialogue and specific dialogic actions can project display of agency in interactions. According to Hutchby (2007, 10) "work on children's talk" shows how talk-in-interaction is a resource "through which children, as social participants or members of a culture, display interactional competence, both in peer groups and among adults", i.e., they display their agency.

In the following section, meaningful examples of transcribed interactions will be described and discussed for identifying if and how adults' dialogic actions projected adolescents' display of agency. The extracts used in the following section represent the main types of discourse organisation in the interactions, and provide an idea of the sequences of talk making the bulk of the adult-adolescents interactions observed in the collection of data.

Analysis and discussion

Interactional conditions of empowering dialogue

In the summer camps analysed, in a number of situations the leaders' and staff members' actions displayed their intention to foster and support the adolescents' agency in the interaction in ways which may be considered dialogic actions. The following extracts show examples of these actions and highlight their effects in terms of personal expression and therefore of EL as agency.

In extract 1, an Argentine female adolescent (Farg) initiates the interaction, expressing her personal perspective (turns 1, 4) about the activity, supported by a Danish adolescent (Mdan) through an overlapping piece of talk (turn 2). The adolescents' expressions are encouraged by the Greek female leader (LFgre) in turns 3 (mm, mmm) and 5 (yeah). These responses stimulate Farg's checking of the leader's understanding (turn 8), which is confirmed by LFgre's answer (turn 9). In the following turns, LFgre seeks to improve her own understanding of the planned activity through questions which invite the adolescents' clarifications (turns 11, 14, 16). This sequence shows that the leader's attention and support for expression of proposals can result in an effective coordination with the Argentine adolescent (turns 13-17).

Extract 1: the leader as a responder; coordination between leader and adolescents

1. Farg: Ah for example (...) ah:m he can't see ah we put like an activity that he, he, he (?) can't do, only he can do and I need to (.) to: (.) to cross ahm one place without ahm falling with some objects and the other ahm, the other participants in that group have to tell him what [where he have to go
2. Mdan: [where he can go
3. LFgre: mm mmm
4. Farg: so that he doesn't fall and in that way they are helping him.
5. LFgre: yeah.
6. Farg: ahm although she can't see
7. Fita: ok
8. Farg: do you understand?
9. LFgre: yeah, I understood
10. Mdan: I also [have
11. LFgre: [but there, there are gonna be six groups and the six groups are gonna do something at the same time?
12. (02)
13. Farg: no, no! they are gonna be in different places
14. LFgre: yea, so they are gonna be in different places at the same time doing different things?
15. Farg: yes and then they are going to (.) change, like to go around
16. LFgre: so every group has to go to every –
17. Farg: every situation yeah

In extract 2, LFgre's actions facilitate the active participation of an Italian female adolescent (Fita). Fita's hesitant proposals (turns 1, 3, 5) project firstly LFgre's encouragement to continue (turn 2: mm mm) and secondly her checking of expressed meanings through a question (turn 4). This action stimulates Fita's checking of understanding, which is addressed to Farg (turn 5), and promotes a dyadic exchange between the adolescents (turns 6-7, 11-14). LFgre supports this exchange reformulating the meanings of Fita's proposal (turns 8, 10), and Fita can confirm the meanings of LFgre's reformulations (turns 9, 11). The final effects of LFgre's actions emerge

in turns 12 and 14, when Farg displays her understanding of Fita's proposal: LFgre's action is successful in enhancing coordination between the adolescents.

Extract 2: the leader as responder; coordination between adolescents

1. Fita: yeah but we can do the: (.) they (02) we can ahm no they can: use another, another sense, because the eyes are, must use
2. LFgre: mm mm
3. Fita: you must use
4. LFgre: because it's night you mean? we must use them?
5. Fita: yeah, we must use (both the eyes) (??) you understand?
6. Farg: no
7. Fita: but
8. LFgre: they cannot see
9. Fita: yeah
10. LFgre: so they must use another sense
11. Fita: ((nodding)) another sense
12. Farg: ahh! I understand
13. Fita: yea. And we can ahm I don't know do: ahm a (?) or (?)
14. Farg: ah I understand! I understand what she's saying

In extract 3, a male leader from Costa Rica (LMcos) supports the adolescents' active participation through different kinds of action: promoting their expressions of ideas and preferences through questions (turns 1, 10, 12, 14, 18, 20); appreciating (turns 5, 8) and acknowledging (turns 18, 23: *Ok*) their proposals; showing closeness through non-verbal actions (turn 12); performing linguistic mediation (turn 18); actively proposing his personal ideas (turns 3, 10), while leaving the adolescents free to choose and decide on the basis of their preferences and previous experience. The final result is a cooperative double echo, concerning the name of the game ("picture game", turns 22-23) which indicates the participants' effective coordination.

Extract 3: the leader as a promoter; coordination between the leader and the adolescents and among the adolescents

1. LMcos: is there any song you would like to sing or -? Do you have any to suggest?
2. Mcos: no
3. LMcos: ok (.) let me think, it's like a sing, dance, energizer -
4. Ffin: (??)
5. LMcos: yeah yeah! One, two, three, four!
6. Ffin: five, six, seven, eight!
7. ((the leader simulates the energizer together with the Finnish girl; the Dutch girl suggests something that is inaudible))
8. LMcos: ahhhh! The chain of love. Do you remember it?
9. Fola: yeah
10. LMcos: ok, so (..) activity. We can have activity (03) ok let's start with (03) would you like to run, or would you like to do some arts and crafts, or would you like to do some drama?
11. (05)
12. LMcos: ((putting his hand on the Finnish girl's shoulder)) do you remember any activity from your (..) from your (..) minicamp?
13. Ffin: I don't remember
14. LMcos: you don't remember?
15. Ffin: no
16. LMcos: all right (..) ((to his delegate)) E. do you remember the activities you liked?
17. ((his delegate answers something in Spanish))
18. LMcos: ok. Erm (.) in a summer camp we did this activity that he is talking about ((he describes the game in Spanish)) Do you think you like something like this?
19. Mnor: yeah
20. LMcos: how should we name it?
21. Mnor: ((smiling)) picture game
22. Mcos: picture game
23. LMcos: picture game. Ok, let's make like (..) erm bigger ideas and then we start.

In extract 4, a Canadian female leader (LFcan) promotes the adolescents' reflection with questions (turns 1, 5). Firstly, she distributes equal opportunities of personal expression, trying to let the males speak, and for this purpose she uses echoes (turns 3, 13), acknowledgement (turn 9: Ok) and non verbal support (turn 8: smiling). Secondly, she reformulates the different proposals, giving the adolescents the chance to decide autonomously between them (turn 11). Although a female Brazilian adolescent (Fbra) tends to prevail in the interaction (in turn 6, she steals the turn from her Danish mate), LFcan's actions succeed in getting the adolescents involved, in promoting the expression of their ideas, and also in activating a coordination between them (turns 6-7; 14-15).

Extract 4: the leader as a promoter; coordination between adolescents

1. LFcan: what do you think? (03) Your idea was to have two, like you would say maybe commoner and something else?
2. Fbra: ah::m I, I was thinking special
3. LFcan: special/perfect
4. Fbra: yeah, special and it doesn't have to be perfect, we are perfect as we are
5. LFcan: what do you guys think? Did you hear what she said? Did you guys listened to that?
6. Fbra: is perfect, but (.) he's perfect but we are also perfect, like for us we are perfect
7. Mdan: we are perfect selves
8. ((LFcan smiles))
9. LFcan: ok
10. Fbra: but the commoners (?) it
11. LFcan: so we have two ideas: we can call it special/perfect or the common-commoner (03) it's up to you guys, whatever you think
12. Mita: special/common
13. LFcan: special/commoner?
14. Mdan: let's do that
15. Fbra: yeah::hhh

Extracts 1-4 show several kinds of leaders' dialogic actions which promote adolescents' display of competence in coordination in the form of personal expression. In particular, in extracts 1-2, the adolescents' initiatives are supported by the leaders' actions (leaders are responders); in extracts 3-4, the leaders' actions promote the adolescents' initiatives (leaders are promoters). In extracts 1 and 3, coordination is achieved between the leader and the adolescents; in extracts 2, 3, and 4 coordination is achieved between the adolescents. Adolescents' personal expressions demonstrate their agency.

An important aspect of the interactions shown in extracts 1-4 is that the adolescents are treated (and treat their interlocutors) as agents who can express and coordinate their emotions and ideas. Promotion of adolescents' agency failed when the adults either stepped in when they were not supposed to or did not involve the adolescents in the interaction. In both cases, failure concerns the support of personal expressions, because the adults projected cognitive and normative expectations, emphasising their roles as experts, negatively assessing the adolescents' contributions, and authoritatively directing the processes of collective reflection.

For example, in extract 5, while the adolescents are trying to coordinate, negotiating their proposals (turns 1-9, 11-13), an Italian female staff member (SFita) takes a hierarchical stance (turn 10); she displays lack of consideration for their attempts to find an autonomous solution to the problem (turns 12, 13), treats them as incompetent ("you have to keep in mind") and claims the adults' responsibility for the final decision. This leads to the exclusion of the adolescents from decision-making (turn 14: "you are not allowed to take a decision about the bedtime"). These actions project a suppression of adolescents' personal expression and autonomous choices (turns 11, 12).

Extract 5: the leader's hierarchical stance and negative assessments

1. Mcan: someone else? (..) ok. We have a proposition for tonight: sleep over
2. ((someone applauds, someone else asks to sleep over the night after))
3. Fdut: just one thing. Erm we want to do tonight because tonight there's one delegation leaving and tomorrow night there are already three delegations gone so –
4. Group: yeah!
5. Feng: yeah, sleep over tonight ((someone: yeah!)) and tomorrow ((someone: yeah!))
6. Mcan: everyone agrees on that?
7. ((someone applauds, someone raises the hand))
8. Feng: yeah, everybody is agreeing
9. Mcan: ok. ((giving the turn to the staff member))
10. SFita: you have to keep in mind that tomorrow will be a really hard day. We have to clean up everything and also we planned to stay awake all the night all together, yeah without Finland, but (.) yeah. I think that it will be too much don't sleep for two days. We will have a great evening tonight, we will visit the bell of peace and we will come back late. So, I don't know. We can discuss it in the staff meeting and leaders meeting but (.) ((smiling a bit)) I'm not so sure that you can don't sleep tonight. Maybe we can make something with our friends from Finland but not don't sleep, I don't think so -
11. Feng: yeah, it's our final night of the whole camp and yeah, you are supposed to spend it all together, so we can't just do it tomorrow without three delegations
12. Fdut: I make erm I have a suggestion. What we may do is that we stay awake until Finland has left (...) so we all spend as long as we could all together but we can also sleep. And if we also sleep on the bus I think we can manage just to have enough sleep for cleaning tomorrow. And then we have sleep over tomorrow too
13. ((discussion among adolescents goes on and leads to several proposals as well as to some decision))
14. SFita: ((seriously)) I already said that we have to think about it with leaders and staff. You are not allowed to take a decision about the bedtime. So, we'll try to do our best but please don't (..) repeat always the same stuff

Extract 5 shows that the adults' actions which underline normative expectations determine the marginalization of adolescents' personal expressions and display of EL. Extract 5 demonstrates failure in empowering dialogue which is based on the adult's (1) negative assessment of adolescents' contributions, and (2) assertion of role hierarchy and power stances. These kinds of action restrict the possibilities for adolescents to participate actively: the adult's actions primarily project the necessity of adolescents' passive adaptation to normative expectations, and their marginalisation in the interaction.

Categories of dialogic actions

Dialogic actions which were observed in extracts 1-4 can be included in three categories: confirmation, perspective-taking and promotion of alternative narratives. This three category distinction aims at classifying ways in which empowering dialogue and adolescents' agency are promoted in the interactions; the categories are theoretical elaborations of the meanings assigned to the collected data, on the basis of the relevant literature (cited below). Analysing extracts 1-4, it is possible to identify specific dialogic actions.

Confirmation implies actions which focus on participants' feelings and ideas, introduce positive connotations of these emotions and ideas, and therefore encourage participants' personal expressions. The actions of confirmation which were observed in the data are:

1. *Appreciations* of adolescents' contributions (e.g. "yeah yeah!"; "that's so cool!"; "It's amazing!"; "ahhhh!"). Appreciations display unconditional positive regard (Mearns and Thorne 1999) supporting adolescents' personal expressions, creating positive connotations of their utterances, and drawing new horizons for communication, starting from their agency.

2. *Acknowledgement tokens* (e.g. "Yes"; "yeah"; "Good"; "Fine"; "Ok"). These tokens confirm the receipt of the prior turn (Gardner 2001) and in this way display confirmation of personal expressions, giving positive feedback to the adolescents.

3. *Non-verbal behaviours* (e.g. putting hand on a shoulder; smiling). These behaviours are manifestations of affective attunement (Legerstee 2005; Stern 1985) which support adolescents' personal expressions.

Confirmation avoids both actions against someone or something and assessments of actions, experiences and persons, and therefore it avoids inequity (hierarchical relationships) and lack of empathy (negative connotations).

Perspective-taking means that a participant's action explores the interlocutor's meanings, showing understanding and acceptance. Perspective-taking supports interlocutors' contributions, permits organisers to check their perceptions, or enhances feedback on the effects of previous actions in terms of interlocutors' understanding and acceptance, promoting coordination. The actions of perspective-taking which were observed in the data are:

1. *Continuers* (e.g. mhm; mmm) and *echoes* (repetition of previous turns or parts of turns: e.g. "picture game" in extract 3). Continuers and echoes are used to pass up an opportunity to speak (Gardner 2001). They can display active listening (Rogers and Farson 1979), confirming the importance of the adolescents' actions. Active listening is an expression of empathy, which shows sensitivity for interlocutors' needs and feelings, through signals of explicit involvement in communication. Active listening requires systematic attention to communication which reveals a personal effort in understanding and interest. Continuers allow the adolescents to feel that their actions are effective in the interaction and this encourages them to continue in their expressions. Echoes reinforce this encouragement by reflecting the adolescents' perspectives; reflection is considered the most important form of encouragement as it avoids any risk of misinterpretation of the interlocutors' utterances, allowing them to deepen their unstoried experiences (Mearne and Thorne 1999).

2. *Formulations* of the meanings expressed by the adolescents (e.g. "so they must use another sense"; "so they are gonna be in different places at the same time doing different things?"). Formulations display help, attention and openness with reference to the adolescents' actions. In particular, formulations of differences between discourse positions (e.g. "so, we have two ideas") make it possible to enhance a direct coordination among the adolescents. Formulations demonstrate attention to the interlocutor and at the same time project a direction for subsequent actions by inviting responses insofar as they "advance the prior report by finding a point in the prior utterance and thus shifting its focus, redeveloping its gist, making something explicit that was previously implicit in the prior utterance, or by making inference about its presuppositions or implications" (Heritage 1985, 104). Formulations shift the focus and treat the gist of previous actions, which may be glossed, made explicit, or developed. Formulations may (1) demonstrate attention and sensitivity to the interlocutor's expressions, and (2) project a direction for subsequent actions, by inviting responses (Baraldi and Gavioli 2007), in this way empowering the interlocutor's agency. Formulations are "revoicing moves" of adolescents' utterances (O'Connor and Michaels 1996) that do not related to adults' desired results of reasoning and/or propositional contents.

Narratives are social constructions, in which the meanings of actions are interpreted and "storied" (Baker 2006). Narratives describe, explain and legitimise actions in communication. Promotion of alternative narratives means creation of the social conditions for the construction of alternative stories, building them as incompatible with hierarchical forms of relationships (Winslade and Monk 2008). It encourages participants to see relationships in alternative ways and to consider new ways of dealing with different perspectives. The actions showing alternative narratives which were observed in the data are:

1. *Promotional questions* (e.g. "what do you think?"; "do you want to say something? Do you have any to suggest?"; "because it's night, you mean?"; "we must use them?"). Promotional questions enhance equal opportunities of participation and facilitate reflection on the communication process, creating the conditions for "double listening", i.e. listening for pieces of information as indications of other stories (Winslade and Monk 2008). These questions display a genuine interest in the interlocutors' perspective and not previous knowledge of the answers as it happens in questions aimed at assessing answers or testing coherence in the interlocutors' actions. They promote the emergence of unstoried experiences or the clarification of partially storied ideas, enhancing exploratory talk (Mercer and Littleton 2007). Promotional questions are the most frequent dialogic action in the data.

2. *Direct invitations* to contribute ("it's up to you guys, whatever you think"). Invitations enhance the adolescents' expressions of personal opinions and collective reflection, i.e., they enhance the emergence of the adolescents' alternative narratives of personal needs, ideas and feelings.

3. *Suggestions* of actions ("let me think, it's like a sing, dance, energizer"; "would you like to run, or would you like to do some arts and crafts, or would you like to do some drama?"). Suggestions demonstrate first-person involvement in narrating alternative stories, without imposing perspectives.

Finally, extract 5 shows that cognitive and normative expectations and the assessment of the adolescents' role performances prevent the achievement of confirmation, perspective-taking and promotion of alternative narratives, and therefore the achievement of successful empowering dialogue.

These three kinds of dialogic actions (confirmation, perspective-taking and promotion of alternative narratives) seem to succeed in coordinating (1) equal distribution of the adolescents' personal expressions, and (2) their reflection on these expressions. The result is that the adolescents' expressions display their agency with peers and adults. They do not simply understand the adults' actions and information; they are able to develop the gist of their proposals, and make efforts to explain them and to facilitate their interlocutors' understanding, reaching successful coordination outcomes. They demonstrate to be competent interlocutors of both the adults and their peers and their agency highlights the meaning of EL in the coordination of different actions and perspectives.

Conclusions

This study has aimed to demonstrate that the analysis of communication and its cultural presuppositions is important to understanding experiential learning as a display of agency. The most important conclusions which can be derived from the data are the following.

1. It is possible to promote adolescents' agency in group communication through empowering dialogue.

2 . Empowering dialogue is promoted through organisers' dialogic actions which confirm personal expressions (e.g. appreciations, acknowledgement tokens and nonverbal behaviour), take their perspectives

(e.g. continuers, echoes and formulations), and introduce alternative narratives in the interaction with them (e.g. promotional questions, encouragement of contributions, suggestions).

3. These dialogic actions show that empowering dialogue is based on affective expectations, i.e. expectations of personal expressions of emotions and ideas. They demonstrate that affective expectations: (a) can be implemented in specific interactions which aim to enhance cosmopolitan citizenship, through actions which project opportunities of expressions; (b) create the social conditions for display of agency through personal expressions.

4. The effects of negative assessments and assertion of role hierarchy show that the exclusion of cognitive and normative expectations seems to be particularly important in contexts of education which imply empowering dialogue (Ashton 2007).

These results lead to two kinds of new findings regarding the correlation between social interaction and learning. Firstly, they show some specific dialogic actions which help to understand in which ways empowering dialogue can be achieved in educational communication. Secondly, they look at experiential learning as personal expression, suggesting that it can be highlighted and appreciated without assessments of knowledge, and more generally without finalising dialogue to learn specific kinds of knowledge. To teach the desired propositional contents, confirmations, perspective-taking and narratives are not finalized.

Furthermore, these results lead to a new definition of the meaning of empowering dialogue and experiential learning in intercultural settings. In these settings, empowering dialogue does not necessarily promote the emergence of cultural differences. The analysis did not in fact verify such an emergence in CISV camps. When they are based on dialogic actions, interactions feature (1) opportunities to express personal perspectives and emotions (equity), and (2) sensitivity towards these perspectives and emotions (empathy). This consideration is coherent with CISV's presupposition that the promotion of interpersonal relationships is the best method to enhance successful coordination in intercultural communities. Therefore, experiential learning may not lead to those types of results that are often expected from studies in intercultural education, which are learning meanings of cultural identities and intercultural competences (e.g. Herrlitz and Meyer 2005; Portera 2008; Unesco 2006), shaping intercultural beings (Alred, Byram, and Fleming 2003; Kim 2001), making them capable of intercultural sensitivity i.e. of understanding and performing appropriate actions in intercultural situations (Yamada and Singelis 1999). These studies overlook the fact that empowering dialogue creates the conditions for agency, not necessarily for "cultural" and "intercultural" competence. This also implies a more general conclusion: that promoting experiential learning as personal expression means embarking into the unknown (Holdsworth 2005) with unpredictable results (Holland and O'Neill 2006).

The research was based on the participation of selected middle-class children and trained adults in a peculiar setting; therefore, the analysed meanings of dialogic actions are linked to conditions which cannot be easily reproduced in schools or other educational settings. Furthermore, extracts 1-5 have been used to clarify the prevailing meanings which were produced in the camps, but they are not representative of the quantitative distribution of forms of interaction; consequently, this analysis does not demonstrate that empowering dialogue is prevalent in CISV summer camps.

Future research into different contexts and situations should try to show whether empowering dialogue is always effective in creating conditions of agency, and which dialogic actions are most effective for this purpose. Future research in intercultural communities should broaden knowledge of the relationship among empowering dialogue, personal expressions and the meanings of cosmopolitan citizenship.

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