

## Book and media reviews

# From teacher to facilitator: developing the community of dialogue for children's rights

Baraldi, C., Joslyn, E., Farini, F., Ballestri, C., Conti, L., Iervese, V., & Scollan, A. (2021). *Promoting Children's Rights in European Schools: Intercultural Dialogue and Facilitative Pedagogy*. London: Bloomsbury. 256 pp., £26.09 (paperback) ISBN: 9781350217829; £85.50 (hardback) ISBN: 9781350217782; £20.87 (Ebook) ISBN: 9781350217799.

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From a child-centred perspective, *Promoting children's rights in European schools: intercultural dialogue and facilitative pedagogy*, provides readers and especially educators, with valuable insights into the practice of facilitating narratives with and from children.

Based on the two-year Shared Memories and Dialogues project (SHARMED), funded by the European Commission, the book aims to transform teachers into facilitators and co-narrators. It also explores the possibilities of multicultural classrooms as evolving communities of intercultural dialogue where children's agency thrives through their free and active participation. The research encompassed 48 classes involving over 1,000 children aged eight to 13 years, representing both migrant and non-migrant backgrounds in England, Germany, and Italy. The research team (the volume's authors) poses crucial questions about preparing teachers for enabling children's active participation and expression in multicultural schools.

The book opens with an introduction (Chapters 1 and 2) on the planning, processing, and achieving of SHARMED project goals, with a focus on the underlying conceptual framework

and the broad sociocultural contexts of the child participants. The remainder of the text is structured into three parts, presenting the fundamental principles (photographs and narratives); potential challenges (initiatives, issues, and conflicts); and systematic reflections (evaluation, model, and training manuals) related to the research pedagogy and methodology.

In Part 1, the focus is on the theories and operating methods of turning photographs into narratives which might create communities of dialogue relationally constructed between children and facilitators. Chapter 3, authored by Vittorio Iervese, introduces the rationales and practices of photo-elicitation methodology utilised throughout the SHARMED project, emphasising the role of photos in pedagogical facilitation and in enabling children's agency. Children's participation is largely realised through their narration of memories from about the images they bring into the classroom. Iervese argues that the 'photograph not only elicits children's comments or reactions to visual input but can also be the starting point for a participatory dialogue' (p. 32). Teachers serve as facilitators, guiding the transformation of photographs from mere images into narratives. This process aims to create interactive storytelling between children and facilitators. In Chapter 4, Chiara Ballestri and Vittorio Iervese explore narrative production's role in fostering children's participation and identity negotiation. They analyse various narrative modes (interactive, co-production, intertwined) and their links to ontological, public, and metanarrative forms. Their goal is to identify techniques of facilitating the (co)narration and (inter)action of children's autobiographical memories. Chapter 5 (Federico Farini and Angela Scollan) assesses how facilitator actions like questioning, inviting discussions, and providing minimal responses, can support children's engagement.

Part 2 identifies challenges faced by facilitators in fostering orderly and peaceful dialogue communities. Claudio Baraldi focuses on children's spontaneous actions during facilitation, addressing how facilitators manage the consequences of children's initiatives that 'not only are not prompted by facilitator's action but also represents unexpected variations' (p. 186). Luisa Conti discusses the role of dialogic intercultural competence in promoting children's understanding of culture from 'multicultural issue' to 'intercultural dialogue'. The book also acknowledges that facilitation can increase the potential for conflict among children. Hence, in Chapter 8, Claudio Baraldi underscores the importance of effective facilitator management and assesses the project's handling of conflicts, including narrative and interactional disputes among children. Notably, at the end of Chapter 6, the book includes a set of photographs which, lack a clear connection to the specific narratives analysed. If the authors had aligned images and narratives, this aids the reader in comprehending the narrative production process.

Part 3 highlights the reflection, evaluation, and sustainable outcomes of SHARMED project. The project provides ongoing educational resources such as guidelines, models, and digital

archives for teachers to work with facilitative methodology in and beyond Europe. In Chapter 9 Claudio Baraldi and Chiara Ballestri reflect on diverse facilitation approaches developed in the project and present (positive) feedback from participating teachers and children. In a subsequent chapter, they apply the SHARMED model to teacher education and reporting on an e-training manual and sustainable Massive Open Online Course (MOOC). In the concluding chapter, Baraldi, Joslyn and Farini reflect on the success of facilitative pedagogy, particularly in fostering intercultural understanding among children.

Importantly, this book adds to the extensive literature on children's agency and active participation in education. It underscores their role narrators, producing personal photographs, memories, and narratives in classroom dialogue communities. However, there remain questions for further research. First, I would contend that the meanings and scope of children's rights are seemingly constructed from an adult perspective. Do children's rights necessarily involve extensive discussions and voice in the classroom? By facilitating, children are likely to be motivated to talk and share. On the other hand, the risk remains that some children may not want to share, talk, express and interact, but want to stay silent (Lewis, 2010). Notably, the research setting may affect the quality of children's narratives. Although the research team assert, they have followed ethical procedures by 'securing the emotional well-being, physical well-being, rights, dignity and personal values of research participants' (p. 11), children's participation is 'recorded' (p. 48) and open to public. If participation is structured and under supervision, can one really say that children 'express themselves as freely as possible' (p. 47)?

Secondly, the project intends to provide chances for children to recount memories related to photographs they bring to school. Nevertheless, it overlooks the possibility that children may reconstruct visuals from past experiences or create entirely new ones (Rose, 2016). Besides, why are the narrative materials leading to narratives solely visual, ignoring other sources or senses (Gallagher et al., 2017), such as smelling the culturally diverse cooking seasonings? In essence, facilitative pedagogy could focus more on the diversity and innovation of narrative materials in line with the nature of children's agency. Third, the authors acknowledge their facilitation under specific classroom conditions, but offer very limited discussion of how children's narratives relate to and enhance the learning of specific subjects, such as maths and language. Involving all children in narrative production appears time-consuming and may pose challenges in regular classrooms and school systems. The development of a contextually supportive and sustainable environment for facilitative pedagogy is a crucial long-term consideration. Furthermore, meticulous language proofreading would enhance the reading experience, as occasional errors are run through the book.

Overall, the book provides fresh perspectives for educators, encouraging reflection on converting teaching into narrative facilitation and classrooms into communities of dialogue.

This transformation contributes to advancing the realisation of children's agency and rights within educational environments.

## References

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