Full length article

"Food for thought": Blogging about food as dialogical strategy for self-disclosure and otherness

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1. Introduction

Education is still striving to find innovative ways of being effective and tackling the new challenges that society proposes. Students at school often report lack of motivation (Walkey, McClure, Meyer, & Weir, 2013), feelings of frustration (Pardos, Baker, San Pedro, Gowda, & Gowda, 2013), and a negative and stressful classroom climate (Ahnert, Harwardt-Heinecke, Kappler, Eckstein-Madry, & Milatz, 2012). Collaborative learning, supported by the diverse technological devices available, seems to offer opportunities for empowering students' commitment in learning via metacognition, self-regulated learning and social processes (Järvelä & Hadwin, 2013). Of course, technology is not a magic stick. To be effective, it should be integrated into meaningful tasks where students can express themselves, work on interesting topics, and be involved in new ways of talking, writing, and discussing. When students can connect school tasks to their daily live, learning seems to me more motivated and effective (Hedegaard, Aronsson, Højholt, & Ulvik, 2018).

In this paper, we present an Italian national project, named 'Dialoghi IN Corso' (DINC) – (Ongoing Dialogues) - based on students' team-blogging, designed as a school activity providing students with opportunities to talk about themselves. By doing so, we expected students to discover the value of discussing with peers, comparing different habits and values, and ultimately, better understanding themselves.

The DINC project was enacted in 2016, within the framework of a broader international programme aimed at implementing intercultural and interreligious dialogue, run by a national network of 30 public schools called 'Rete Dialogues', initiated and supported by the Italian Ministry of Education with the Generation Global programme in seven Italian regions, widespread along all the national territory.[1] The dialogical dimension – understood as the capability to enter in relationship with others through self-disclosure – has both inspired the tasks and guided the qualitative analysis of the data collected.

Blogging is an interesting educational tool for many reasons. It is a type of asynchronous technology, that implies a time lag between the moment when the message is posted and the moment when it is read. Before posting the message, it is possible to reflect upon it and polish the content, making it more coherent to the thinking behind it. Similarly, before replying to a message the writer can re-read it carefully and make sure the content is correctly exposed. These lags – between thinking, reading and writing – can function as reflective practices, improving dialogue with others and within themselves.

Blogging has some similarities to talking – such as length and style –as well as to writing (Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, & Swartz, 2004). Therefore, blogging can be considered a way to self-express, offering interesting options for disclosure, enhancement, construction and re-construction of positions.

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  [1] Rete Dialogues was created in 2011 to implement *Generation Global* (then called *Face to Faith*), a global school dialogue program. The aim of the project is to develop students' critical thinking, open-mindeness and communication between peers from different cultures, through videoconferences or written dialogue. Generation Global is run by the Tony Blair Institute (then Tony Blair Faith Foundation), in Italy it is implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Education (MIUR, Ministero dell'Istruzione, Università e Ricerca). The DINC project was developed within the *Generation Global* framework. For a detailed overview see http://generation.global/ and http://retedialogues.it

Within the Computer Supported Collaborative Learning (CSCL) framework, blogs have been considered as spaces for reflection through discussion. According to Michailidis and his collaborators (Michailidis, Kapravelos, & Tsiatsos, 2018), blogs do not only "highlight the collaborative dimension of interaction, but may also accommodate metacognitive processes and collaborative construction of knowledge" (p. 37). Kim (2008) reported evidence of the benefits of using blogs; for instance students improved critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills. Critical and analytical thinking is enhanced via blogs because students can experience a broader perspective since their audience is larger than that possible by just discussing in the classroom (Ellison & Wu, 2008). Moreover, the text posted on a blog remains at the disposal of the participants for reflection, becoming a source for new ideas and prompting further discussions (Van den Boom, Paas, Van Merrienboer, & Van Gog, 2004).

One of the most interesting features of blogging is its capability to support self-disclosure (Harper & Harper, 2006; Hewitt, 2005; Stone, 2003). Because of its resemblance to a diary, bloggers feel encouraged to express themselves, to report their thoughts and narrate what they do. Unlikely paper and pencil diaries, the online nature of blogs encourage a reciprocity of self-disclosure and increase the likelihood that the readers will also disclose themselves. The reciprocal exchange will positively influence participation, interaction, social integration, and even subjective well-being (Ko & Kuo, 2009). Therefore, the type of self-disclosure possible through blogging profits from specific elements such as the use of text - instead of face-to-face verbal communication - and the larger audience reached through internet.

In the project here presented, blogging is proposed as an activity for students to narrate about their habits and the values concerning food. This is a pretext to support a new vision of school activities, close to students' daily life, meaningful, involving external people and, at the same time, able to trigger intimate and personal thoughts.

2. Theoretical underpinnings

The vision of learning discussed above is well described by the two theoretical frames adopted in this project: the so-called Trialogical Learning Approach (TLA) and the Dialogical Self Theory (DST). The first approach clearly addresses innovation in school and inspires the design of the team-blog activities. The DST is able to capture the dialogical dimension of the data and the positions students express while blogging. Team-blogging about food was proposed to allow students to experiment a new way of expressing and reflecting on themselves and on their own daily practices and values. In the following, we will shortly present TLA and DST and how these two approaches were implemented into the project.

2.1. The Trialogical Learning Approach (TLA)

The TLA emphasises collaborative knowledge building in connection to the knowledge creation metaphor of learning, complemented by acquisition and participation metaphors. The suggestion not to choose one metaphor of learning but, rather, to combine a metaphor that emphasises individual learning (namely the metaphor of 'container' or 'transfer' of knowledge) with metaphors valuing social participation, was first introduced by Sfard (1998). Within her vision, learning is a combination of individual knowledge acquisition and participation in collective meaningful activities. Building on this idea, Paavola and Hakkarainen (2005) elaborated the 'knowledge creation metaphor' to underline that learning is strictly connected to the creation of new knowledge and practices in collaboration with others. The TLA stresses the relevance to direct learning toward the collaborative creation of an object, addressing real users and using modern technology.

Real and useful objects built collaboratively activate a flow of communication where 'others' (even outside the class-community) are fully part of the knowledge building process. It is called 'trialogical' because learning is conceived as a dialogue between three elements: the individuals, the community, and the object to be built. In our case through team-blogging we want to foster a dialogue between students at a distance, the community formed into the virtual space of the blogs (the blog sphere) and the text-blog, which is the object students are building.

The crossing of boundaries between education and society, envisioned by the TLA, motivates students because learning becomes closely connected to real life (Paavola & Hakkarainen, 2014).

2.2. The Dialogical Self Theory

The DST is proposed by Hermans (2013) and it is inspired by both William James (1890) and Mikhail Bakhtin (1973). These two authors share a vision of the self as composed of several elements. James distinguishes the *I* and the *Me*, where the *I* is equated with the self-as-knower and the *Me* is associated with the self-as-known. The encounter of these two elements generates the complexity of self. Bakhtin, starting from the analysis of Dostoyevsky's novels, elaborates the idea that the sense of identity is based on a narrative always populated by characters that act as independent thinkers, each of them with their own view of the world. This implies the rejection of a vision of a multiplicity of characters within a unified world, and considers a plurality of consciousnesses located in different worlds. The multiple-voices compose a polyphony engaged in either opposition, consensus or conflicts (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984). As Hermans (2001) claims, the Self is in a perpetual and dynamic dialogue between positions speaking through different voices, having different natures. These positions can be internal (inner voices of the Self, recognizable most of the time because they are marked by the expression "I am …") or external (voices initially coming from relevant others but incorporated within the individual landscape marked by the expression "my …"). In our project, we consider the team-blogging activity as a mean to support the expression of positions. Through self-disclosure, students can "voice" who they are and in what relation they see their positions to other significant people. Reciprocal self-disclosure will allow the appropriation of others' positions resulting with an enlargement of

the positions repertoire.

This vision is relevant in education, where the internal I-position as a student is obviously connected to other positions – included those of peers. Through blogging, students can reflect upon their own changes in terms of different or new positions they acquired thanks to discussion engaged into the blogs.

In DST's vision the various I-positions are all connected. The connection has a dialogical nature and the overall quality of this dialogue determines how the Self is articulated. The dialogue is at the nexus: the net of positions is built discursively; dialogue is the glue that keeps together the various I-positions and, at the same time, scaffolds the acquisition of new positions as well as ultimately, the construction and re-construction of the whole identity system. The notion of 'dialogue' adopted by the DST is rooted in Bakhtin thoughts. Interesting for our scope are the concepts of 'voice' and 'multivocality'. Bakhtin (1986) sees the dialogical relationship as "the layering of meaning upon meaning, voice upon voice, strengthening through merging the combination of many voices (a corridor of voices) that augments understanding" (p. 121). In other words, bringing one's own voice into a 'multivocality' implies engaging in a process of active management of voices.

Indeed, the team-blogging project here presented fits well the notion of multivocality. Through the topics, tasks and processes activated, a new "dialogical space" becomes available, where "the participants are open to each other's experiences, although these may be very different from their own" (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p.181). The blog sphere created by the team blogging in our project represents such "dialogical space".

2.3. Common points between TLA and DST

Many common points between TLA and DST could be retrieved, but we would like to emphasise two in particular: the materiality and the dialogue.

Materiality is obviously relevant for the TLA because of the centrality given to objects. Building objects is the final aim of this approach. Objects reify the knowledge needed to build them.

Within the DST materiality is considered in relation to the external positions, such as "my favourite books", "music", "food" or even "my bank account" (Hermans & Kempen, 1993). This happens because individuals attach symbolic meanings to the objects, representing important aspects of the self. Objects convey aspects of the self, well expressed through the features of these elements. Zittoun (2006) introduces the concept of material elements as symbolic resources, accompanying people in everyday spheres of experience. Food and meals, with all their social, cultural, anthropological, and psychological implications, well conveys the features DST attributes to objects.

The centrality of dialogue is another common point for TLA and DST. In this sense, the reference to Bakhtin is a joint aspect. Dialogism is fundamental in both the construction of trialogical objects and the definition of I-positions. Furthermore, the dialogue can involve material aspects, as we have already remarked. People can entertain dialogue with others, within themselves and also with objects. Objects became counter-partners in the dialogical perspective, entrusting feelings and desires as well as knowledge and ideas.

In the next section, we will show analytically how these two approaches are applied to our project.

2.4. Implementing TLA and DST

In this project, we consider blogs as capable of conveying information not only about the topic of the blog itself – food – but also about family organization, tradition and culture and, ultimately, about themselves. Whereas TLA allows us to describe the

Table 1
TLA and DST in the DINC project.

	TLA	DST
Food as an "object"	Talking about food implies a balance between individual participation and collaborative reflection	Students can position themselves while talking about their food preference, the connection with tradition, and food as "object"
Blogging	Blogs are "external" objects capable of gathering and reifying collective and individual knowledge	Blogging is a format of communication requiring reflection before writing and combining talking and writing; such combination facilitates self-expression
Time for reflecting	Reflection fosters informal learning, which usually occurs out of the traditional schema. This helps students' free expression about personal matters	Providing time to reflect implies more awareness about I-positions. Reporting them in a public space allows students to reflect upon their own positions and others' positions
Transformation	Blogging engages creativity and story-telling skills. This supports some learning strategies such as creativity, narrative, declarative and procedural awareness and the capability to reflect on tacit learning	Students are required to transform their experiences into stories and comments to be posted in the blog. This allows changes and advancement in positions. It may even be possible to acquire new positions
Cross-fertilization	The class is perceived as open. Borders between classes, between school and family and between school and society at large are crossed	Interactions with students from other schools promote encounters with diverse positions; between family and school life; formal and informal contexts; personal and cultural positions
Leading	Leading means taking responsibility, implementing some type of peer-tutoring and reciprocal scaffolding. These are considered forms of useful collaborative learning	Each class is required to lead the project for at least a week. This way, students from the leading class are encouraged to take promoter-positions

educational foundations of this project, DST helps us to understand how students position themselves in connection to the symbolic value of food, to personal and collective values, family and friendship, tradition and social innovation. Table 1 shortly clarifies how TLA and DST were implemented in this project.

3. The project: designing the team-blogging experience

By designing the DINC project, a structure was defined that could work as a source for opportunities to sustain the dialogical dimension and, at the same time, to define roles through which the students could regulate their blogging activities within a certain degree of autonomy. Particular attention was devoted to find the right balance between collaboratively setting the "rules of the game" and eliciting free expression. The agenda of the activity, the initial set of rules, and a 'netiquette' were first drafted by teachers and researchers and later discussed and finalised together with the students. As presented elsewhere (Barzanò, Cortiana, Jamison, Lissoni, & Raffio, 2017), the whole DINC experience involved in total 2.677 students that tackled three large set of topics, over a period of two years. The three topics were: i) identity and self-expression (2015–16), ii) faith and beliefs (2016), iii) food traditions (2016). In this paper, only the latter topic will be considered.

3.1. The topic: food as a content for dialogue

We decided to focus our analysis on food because it can be considered one of those objects that are capable of representing relevant parts of the self in terms of tradition and family, but it also conveys current preference and future expectations. In other words, as a topic for dialogue food can trigger emotional expression and awareness of how local and contextual dimensions (i.e. local ingredients, family traditions, etc.) are combined with more general and cultural issues (i.e. religious warnings, values assigned to food and eating, etc.) (Harris & Barter, 2015). By analysing what people say when they talk about food, it is possible to uncover the role of cognitive and social understanding of the many processes connected to this topic, such as cooking, having meals with family or friends, sharing, conviviality, value assigned to food. At the same time, "bodily and emotional 'materials' […] the unconscious, habits, imagination, fantasies, desires and dreams" (Swan & Flowers, 2015, p.160) can be brought to light. Indeed, food literacy is a major and multifaceted/multimodal topic in most education systems' curricula and it is highly appreciated by adolescents among their interests and concerns (Ronto, Ball, Pendergast, & Harris, 2016). In their recent review, Truman, Lane, and Elliott (2017) identified six different dimensions in the way food literacy is defined: skills/behaviours, health, culture, knowledge, emotions and food systems. In Italy, food literacy is not a specific self-standing subject in compulsory education, but it is rather a transdisciplinary topic, embedded into a variety of subjects. Recently, in the occasion of the world 2015 EXPO titled 'Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life', held in Milan (Lombardy), the Ministry of Education has promoted several initiatives and released new guidelines for food education (MIUR, 2015). Therefore, schools have benefited from a variety of opportunities that have increased awareness and interest among youngsters about food and all its associations.

In our experience, tackling food as a topic for dialogue implied the consideration of a variety of perspectives. Particularly relevant is what Fischler (2011) defines "commensality": eating at the same table, sharing food as a fundamental form of human sociality that while bonds participants, excludes outsiders and "involves the very structure of social organisation no less than the division and allocation of resources" (p. 529). Commensality "counteracts the essential, basic, biological, 'exclusive selfishness of eating' and turns it into […] a collective, social experience" (Fischler, 2011, p. 530). This does not necessarily hold a ceremonial dimension, but it concerns the common meal, yet "it could even be said that it finds its most salient expression in that particular, daily social occurrence" (Fischler, 2011, p. 30).

Therefore, talking about favourite food means not only reporting about taste, but also about the connections with traditions and family, with private lives, habits, and ways of living both everyday life and special events. Through food, it is also possible to achieve reciprocal understating, particularly when different diets and habits are compared and the reasons for such differences are discussed.

3.2. Research aims

The main aim of this study is to understand how team-blogging about food can be a dialogical activity helping students' self-disclosure and improving understanding of otherness. In particular, we wanted to understand what students express when they are asked to blog about a theme such as food, what kind of interactive strategies they use, how self-disclosure is shaped, and how other instances about this topic are received and put into relation to their own thinking and experience. Dialogical dimensions – considered as communication strategies based on "voicing" and "positioning" – should be able to give insights about why and how our students blog about food. In synthesis, our research question is "What dialogical dimensions can be recognized into a team-blogging experience about food?"

3.3. The task structure

To unravel the wide theme of food, the teachers/researchers team proposed four questions around which the team-blogging activity was structured (see Table 2). The agenda and the description of the task were sent to the schools and the classes registered to the "Rete Dialogues" network (see note 1). Teams of three classes – each from a different city - were formed, based on registrations received. As a team, they had to selected three questions out of the four proposed by the teachers and lead the blogging activity for three weeks in total, considering one question per week. Each classroom composing the team took turn in leading the blogging

Table 2
Data generated by the team-blogging about food traditions.

	No. students entry	No. replies	
1. It is a day of celebration; you are with your family. What dishes should not be missing at your table?	138	1.235	1.373
2. What does eating together with your family, friends, or classmates mean to you?	148	812	960
3. Imagine the ideal supper table. With whom would you like to eat and what would you prepare?	132	898	1.030
4. "The supper table of dialogue". What do you talk about over lunch or dinner?	18	242	260
Tot.	436	3.187	3.623

activity for a week. The leading class was responsible for entering comments about the question of the week, while the other two classes were expected to reply. Each student from the leading class was required to open a personal blog by writing an entry in the form of a short essay answering the question of the week. Therefore, a number of blogs corresponding to the students composing the leading class was generated each week. The students from the other two classes of the team had to enter the blogs of the students from the leading class, read their entries and comment them by posting replies focusing on their ideas and experiences. This was a simple mechanism allowing responsibility-taking, rotation, and free participation at the same time. During the school activity, a specific time for team-blogging was allocated and home writing was also encouraged.

3.4. Participants and data

A total of 436 students (ranging from 11 to 14 years old, lower secondary school grade 6th to 8th grade) and 32 teachers - 21 of them as students' facilitators, 10 as observers and one as a tutor - participated in the activity we are here analysing.[2] These participants came from 21 classrooms from 13 different schools, all members of the national network "Rete Dialogues" (see note 1). They are urban and sub-urban schools, situated in different national regions; three in the Northern part of the country (Piedmont, Lombardy, and Veneto), two in the central part (Lazio and Tuscany) and two in the South (Apulia and Sicily). Table 2 reports the posts obtained for each questions[3] and the correspondent replies generated.

The architecture of the project allowed each student in turn to produce her/his own blog; therefore, we had 436 blogs, corresponding to the number of participants. Adding to the 436 initial entries the number of replies, including those produced by the same students that started up the blog, we have 3.623 notes in total, posted in the period between January and May 2016.

3.5. Method of analysis

To find out the dialogical functions our students developed by blogging about food, all the posts – both entries and replies - were analyzed qualitatively (Riff, Lacy, & Fico, 2014). They were read by two researchers and by the teachers involved in the project. First, all the blogs were read to select those where I-positions, "voices" and dialogue between "voices" could be retrieved. This selection required several cycles of data reading, grounding them in the guiding theories, while attempting to answer our research question. Based on a thematic content analysis (Neuendorf, 2016), the researchers agreed in singling out three dialogical dimensions through which to present the results relevant to specific aspects of the theoretical framework inspiring the project. These dimensions will be described in the next section, together with some excerpts clarifying their meaning.

4. What it means for students to blog about food: three dialogical dimensions

Through our qualitative analysis, we singled out the three following dialogical dimensions retrieved into in the students' blogs: (a) cross-generation interaction, (b) multi-layered space of dialogue, and (c) cultural identity. These aspects are not mutually exclusive, but are often present in different combinations in the same blog. We have selected some examples where one of them appears to prevail.

4.1. Cross-generation interaction

While writing about food, students are actually talking about family and friends. A "commensality" (Fischler, 2011) eliciting a variety of dynamics emerged. Frequently, the relational network of parents, grandparents and extended family is evoked in both everyday situations and special events, such as parties or holiday celebrations. Meals work as a meeting place for different generations. Parents and grandparents are evoked as well as cousins, uncles and aunts but also newcomers such as new partners of relatives and new born. The interaction with different generations appears to have different nuances; some time it goes smooth, as in the case of Corinna[4] (Rome, Garden School, grade 7) "I love cooking for my family because I know they will appreciate it for sure".

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[2] The teachers leading the blogging classes were offered a parallel professional development activity, where the development of the classroom activities were the focus of several discussions, peer observations activities etc.

[3] The last two questions (3 and 4) are alternative.

[4] All the names are fictional to protect privacy

Other times, some tension can be recognized: "My parents are divorced. Normally there are discussions, quarrels and bustles" (Carola, Bergamo-Lombardy, Mountain School, grade 6). Older generations can be perceived as supporting ("My grandmother literally adores me" - Giacomo, Catania-Sicily, Silver School, grade 7) or as controlling ("Last time they fought because my grandmother always wants to have control over everything!" - Stefania, Treviso-Venice, grade 7).

Interestingly, among the desired invitees we also encountered a couple of grandparents, who have already passed away:

> I would like to invite my grandparents who died when I was a baby, I would like to ask them about their youth, about my parents: were they naughty when they were young? (Melissa, Turin, Piedmont, Edelweiss School, grade 7).

The grandparents are used here as imaginary resources to explore parents' youth. This could be considered a meaningful example of reflecting on someone else position, in this case the positions of relevant others – the grandparents. Melissa is interested in those positions to gain a better understanding of her parents and, probably, to compare their behaviour to her own way of being. Wondering how her parents were when they were young would entitle her to eventually defend or correct her own behaviour. Putting in connection the past of her parents and her own present or next future position is a way to reflect upon the ontological nature of her own positions. Probably the reflection generated in this post is connected to Melissa wondering to what extent her own positions are influenced by her heritage, rather than being a result of what she is as an individual and unique person. Grandparents are evoked here in their capacity to testify such influence. Therefore, reflecting upon the nature of one's own positon could be considered as an effect of the team-blogging activity that allows this type of personal expression and led to share these feelings and ideas with peers. In this perspective, describing the guests Melissa would wish at her table becomes an occasion for her to consider more deeply the nature of her own personal positions, using her grandparents as a means to trace a conjunction between herself and her parents. In this case, the cross-generation dialogue is not limited to a reciprocal knowledge or an exchange of information or values. Ancestors are used as a resource to better understand the nature of one's own positions; this shapes the dialogue between internal and external positions, that is now addressed at finding to what extent current positions may be based on others' (the parents') positions in the past.

4.2. Multi-layered and diversified space of dialogue

In many posts we found students describing several spaces of mutually interconnected dialogue. Meals are special moments during which family members gather all together and, while sitting around a table, they talk and discuss. The quality of the discussions over meals is not homogenous and the structure is never linear. For instance, in some occasion, the dialogue is depicted as positive and pleasant; but uninteresting and annoying atmospheres are also reported. The following excerpt well describes this latter situation.

> I do not care about food, let's say it does not attract me, I usually eat just what I need, amid the screams of my mother and the teacher. At parties such as Christmas, my grandparents prepare too much food, I could eat for a whole week. I do not like sitting at the table, four hours eating. You do not socialize, you always have your mouth full or your cell phone in your hand. I think that Christmas is only used for eating and has lost the true meaning it once held for socializing and enjoying the company of our loved ones […]. (Carmela, Rome, Garden School, grade 7).

Carmela declares not to be keen on food. She finds the general Christmas atmosphere boring and describes food as a way to keep mouths full so that talking is not easy; therefore, dialogue turns out to be poor. She recognizes that meals can be occasions to socialize and enjoy each other's company; however currently, in her experience, food seems to cause an impoverishment of the dialogical experience. Another troubling issue appears in Carmela's description: the presence of cell phone. Her bitter words capture Roberto's attention and he replies with this post:

> […] I also agree with you that nowadays we are always sitting at the table with our phone and this does not allow us to socialize as it used to be in the past. However, I think that the phone sometimes helps youngsters to escape from unpleasant company and feel connected with the rest of the world. I personally do not use the phone when we are eating, because I like to laugh and joke with people around me. (Roberto, Catania-Sicily, Silver School, grade 8).

Roberto sees another side of the story: he points out how, through an iPhone, parallel dialogues could be maintained with friends, while attending unpleasant meals. Technology seems to offer a way to escape from situations felt as not congenial, opening the possibility to enter, in parallel, more involving dialogues. The not linear structure of the dialogue is now visible: the conversation is not only between diners but also between diners and the not-present people. The mobile phone is considered a sort of lifeline, a remote space allowing youngsters to skip overwhelming adults' chats. It seems that students perceive technology as capable of augmenting their reality by adding an additional layer of dialogue. Probably, the two layers are interconnected to each other: while talking into technology-mediated spaces students may refer to what is happening in real life and vice-versa.

This surely can be defined as an effect of the emergence of "mobile" practices across different settings and situations where offline and online are interconnected, symbolically and physically. This challenges the traditional and clear-cut boundaries between online and offline and it shows how the discursive framing of the content and the participants involved are significantly contributing to the general framing of the context. This framing combines and mixes up different levels: the "here and now" of the face to face discussion, the others' perspectives made relevant discursively, and the space (real and digital) used to define what is the activity at stake (Ritella, Ligorio, & Hakkarainen, 2017).

These different layers of dialogue are described in the blog, which ultimately becomes an additional layer including and further elaborating the dialogue occurring in the face-to-face and mobile-mediated space-time – chronotopes, as Bakhtin (1981) would call it.

Therefore, blogs – at least in this project – can be considered as able to generate multi-layered space of dialogue. Within the virtual space of the blog, students are actually sharing ideas and reflections and a specific genre of dialogue is emerging, composed by references to episodes of various kinds, to other students participating the blog and to relevant people not involved in blogging. In this type of dialogue students seem to interconnect internal positions to external positions of others both physically attending the situation and dragged into the situation via digital means. As the discursive space offered by the blog is enlarged by the multiple-layers also its reflective affordance results to be amplified. Within this space, several positions are activated through diverse "voices"; therefore the dialogue can be deepened and widened. As Ligorio, Annese, and Wegerif (2015) explain, "while widening increases the range of voices in the dialogue, deepening increases the degree of reflection about assumptions and grounds" (p. 240). The space of dialogue within the blogs results to be expanded granting also an expanded space for reflexive thinking.

4.3. Cultural identity

Food is not just feeding. Food preparation, choice and sharing are processes strongly influenced by social, territorial, cultural, and family circumstances; therefore, food pertains the domain of culture (Caraher, Baker, & Burns, 2004; Tseng, 2017). Students in our project talk about traditional recipes and ingredients linked to their territory. By blogging about food, they show the strong connection they feel with their cultural context; which becomes stronger while talking about it. Their writings are coloured and lively, with detailed and rich descriptions of recipes, almost leading the reader into a real kitchen. In many posts, the "voice of the territory", of the land where students live, can be clearly heard. Through the descriptions of ingredients and traditional recipes, students' roots and sense of belonging to a specific culture are brought into the virtual space of the blogs, re-stated and shared.

The post reported below develops from the question about the "ideal table" and the most interesting people to invite (see question 3 reported in Table 2). Agnese's entry focuses on the comparison between the South and the North of Italy:

> This question has prompted me to address something I did not take into great account so far. This way I'm rediscovering my true culinary traditions. I have started to keep my eyes more open when I am eating with my family. I'd really like to introduce the Apulian culinary culture to my great-uncles who live in Emilia […] (Agnese, Bari-Apulia, Ocean School, grade 8).

Agnese is here reporting on how the blogging activity makes her more aware of the culinary traditions of her context, she understands how food represents her cultural background and it becomes a way of expressing her identity (Caraher et al., 2004, p. 269). Being connected to the traditions implies a cultural re-positioning: she is rediscovering traditional values and she is now proposing herself as a spokesperson of such tradition with her relatives living elsewhere, in a different region (great-uncles who live in Emilia). As Hermans and Hermans-Konopka (2010) claim, the self is fundamentally positioned in the environment people live in. The *I* is nourished by elements coming from the concrete experience within the material world and, during the dynamic process through which a position emerges these elements can be either appropriated or rejected. In Agnese's post, we can recognize a re-positioning during which the elements of the culinary tradition, previously neglected, are now reconsidered. The new position defined by Agnese is that of someone more connected to her cultural background and eager to introduce it to other people and relatives.

Agnese's entry gathered many replies from her peers, some of them very reflexive and describing some kind of re-position, as in the following post authored by Antonio (Bari-Apulia, Red Lion School, grade 7): "Like you, I was not very familiar with this topic but thanks to this project, I now speak a lot about it at home."

In the attempt to reply to Agnese's note, Antonio reflects on how the project represents for him an opportunity to engage in new topics for discussion at home. He recognizes this is a topic he never thought of before and that blogging about it generates a good opportunity for discussion at home, valuing the family tradition and "nourishing" a cultural identity of which he was not so aware before.

5. Concluding remarks

In this study, we presented a cross-school team-blogging project about food. We combined the Trialogical Learning Approach to the Dialogical Self Theory to have a theoretical background guiding us in the design and realization of an effective dialogical activity, as well as in analysing the data collected. 436 students, from 11 different Italian schools, posted their thoughts about food by answering to four questions – about unmissable food during family celebration, wanted guests for the ideal meal, what it means to eat together, what issues are tackled during meals' conversations - defined by the teachers/researchers team involved into the project. The notes posted offered a very rich data set, within which three dialogical dimensions could be retrieved. Indeed, our main aim was to understand how blogging could foster self-disclosure and otherness understanding. The three dimensions we found - cross-generation interaction, multi-layered space of dialogue, and cultural identity – are strictly interconnected in defining the dialogical process based on which food turned out to be a functional and strategic topic. While blogging about food, hidden positions are unpacked and new ones are generated; "voices" from the past (i.e. parents and grandparents) intertwine with those the present and the future; and they are located into a multi-layered space-time emerging from the blogging activity itself, representing different levels of the context. By analysing the three dimensions, it became clear that values attached to food and to the people involved in the actions concerning food (cooking, eating, etc.) are part of the self of those posting and reading the blogs. By expressing feelings and opinions about food, students share parts of their identity creating a network where they can connect, reciprocally build on one another contributions and further discovering who they are.

Of course, we are aware of the limitations of this study. In particular, we acknowledge that our sample is culturally bounded, since

all Italian students compose it. The dialogical value of a topic like food would be better understood within a multicultural breadth. Food might sound like a theme with a specific relevance for the country where the project has been implemented (Italy) and we could not control this particular effect.

Furthermore, we recognized that even if the general architecture of the team-turn taking is simple – three classrooms grouped into a team and each classroom takes the leading in blogging for a week - the organization, and management of it is not that easy. Much time is needed to set up the tasks and agendas and to monitor the whole process.

Another controversial aspect is that, the activity is composed by many elements and it is difficult to comprehend precisely what elements are responsible for what effects. In our case, we have the teachers' and researchers fine monitoring, the team organization, the affordance of writing online and reaching a large audience, the value of the topic; these are all elements concurring in determining the global impact in the context.

Nevertheless, we believe our study has twofold implications: at theoretical and practical level. At a theoretical level, our study shows how the Dialogical Self Theory (DST) and the Trialogical Learning Approach (TLA) can be compatible and complementary, effectively concurring into the designing of learning experiences aimed at developing dialogical skills and the understanding their impact. The two approaches are compatible because they both emphasise dialogicality and materiality as relevant aspects of human experiences – including, of course, the learning experience. They are complementary because they both value the convergence between the pedagogical and psychological perspectives as necessary to promote innovation into educational situations. Blogging is – at least for the Italian schools routine – an unusual activity, considered as innovative by the students and the teachers involved. Introducing it in school meant to promote not only innovation in terms of educational practices but also new students' positions and an occasion to reflect upon their current positions. This was surely a new opportunity for our participants. By posting and reading one another's blogs, students discovered the reciprocal connection between their positions and reflected upon similarities and differences.

From a practical perspective, in our opinion, the three dialogical dimensions we outlined in blog texts – cross-generation interaction, multi-layered space, cultural identity – can give account of how this specific tool (the blog) can be introduced in a learning context as a dialogical activity. Team-blogging is a type of collaborative writing supported by technology that should be encouraged in school activity. Often online communication is associated with social networks (such as Facebook), largely based on the need to give and receive appreciation (likes) by people who are already part of the social network (Sánchez, Cortijo, & Javed, 2014). Through the type of blogging we described in this project, communication becomes reflexive and collaborative mainly because thoughtfully guided by teachers and researchers, structured around a clear schedule and pre-defined questions. By blogging, students are invited, as part of their school activity, to get in touch with peers they do not know, to amplify their social network and, consequently, to consider new perspectives. This situation allows them to reflect on their own experience and, at the same time, the narration of others becomes part of their own narrative. The entries and replies posted in a blog could be considered a single text producing a multi-voiced narrative.

For our students, blogging was a great opportunity to talk about aspects of their personal life usually neglected in the classroom, which positively affects their individual participation and motivation, as well as the overall classroom atmosphere, as the facilitating and observing teachers endorsed (Cortiana & Barzanò, 2017). Students appreciated the opportunity to have a real audience and to address peers who were actually replying. This was challenging, but more than that, it was a lot of fun, particularly because it was embedded in a school task. Through this experience, we learnt how questions related to food can elicit students' narratives about themselves and support a deep dialogical relationship with others through self-disclosure and reflection (Zheng, Arada, Niiya, & Warschauer, 2014).

Finally, we also want to report some insights about the impact of the project on the teachers. By reading the blogs, they gathered new information about their own students, that led them to deep reflection about the inter-personal relationship within the classroom. As several teachers observed, the direct contact with the liveliness of students' blogs generated new inside views about their daily lives; feelings and emotions became available from them, that it would had been impossible to obtain by mere paper and pen writing or verbally. Furthermore, teachers felt they had a tangible, accessible and supported environment where to actually practice and learn more about the educational value of technology. As researchers, we also learnt how to support the expertise and skills necessary for teachers to develop self-evaluation and appraisal activities. The intense teacher peer observation's tasks implied in the project offered an effective test bench (Barzanò & Grimaldi, 2013; Cortiana & Barzanò, 2017). In particular, we could see the effects of introducing peer-tutoring in teaching (Stoll & Louis, 2007), overcoming a vision of professional training based on theoretical lecturing. Moreover, teachers could appreciate the value of technology as a teaching resource, because they could experience how to use it in practice. The virtual space of the blogging became a reflective space also for teachers. They could see their own students from a new perspective and this impacted their attitude in the classroom. In addition, teachers learnt how to sustain each other and to develop collaboratively new activities for their classrooms. These are elements featuring teacher professional development (Borko, 2004; Stoll & Louis, 2007) and the sense of online community (Garrison, 2007).

To conclude, we believe the team-blogging we proposed succeed to be an important identity experience capable to encourage self-discourse and otherness' understanding. The contents reported in the blogs also offered us many insights about the strengths and the weaknesses of the DINC project, based on which we are elaborating interesting hints for future progresses. Indeed, a new edition is under development and schools are eagerly ready to implement it.

Acknowledgements

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