Building Common Ground in Dialogue between Teachers and Parents

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Abstract

This study analyzes two parent–teacher conferences to investigate how immigrant parents and teachers negotiate common ground in supporting students' learning. Based on ethnographically collected audio data in a migrant-dense neighborhood in Turin, the study uses Conversation Analysis to examine role positioning and the co-construction of the pupil's image. It highlights parents' agency and the crucial role of informal mediators in facilitating communication and building collaborative school-family relationships.

Keywords: *parental involvement; migrant school contexts; conversational roles; agency; mediation.*

1. Introduction

Collaboration between teachers and parents is widely acknowledged as a key factor in promoting students' well-being and academic achievement (Jeynes, 2022), particularly in culturally and linguistically diverse contexts. Among the potential obstacles are challenges in establishing a common linguistic code, as well as discrepancies in mutual expectations regarding the student's educational trajectory. Several studies have explored strategies to support homework and study supervision by allophone parents (e.g., Sordella, 2012, 2015, 2016, 2018, 2020, 2022; Andorno & Sordella, 2021a, 2021b). These works, among others, have also shown that teachers, afterschool educators, and parents of migrant backgrounds often encounter difficulties in negotiating shared understandings of "who should do what" (Sordella, 2024) when supporting students' learning processes.

In this paper, attention is focused on a specific context of collaboration: the parent–teacher conference (PTC). In particular, two cases are examined, involving a Moroccan mother and a Peruvian mother. The study aims to analyze how common ground is negotiated with regard to the pupil's educational trajectory by observing participants' positioning dynamics and the co-construction of the child's image across the two different PTCs.

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Civitas educationis, a. XV, n. 1, giugno 2026 • Mimesis Edizioni, Milano-Udine
Web: universitypress.unisob.na.it/ojs/index.php/civitaseducationis • ISSN (online): 2281-9568
• ISBN: 9791222334332 • DOI: 10.7413/2281-9568164
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2. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT

Parental involvement is a theoretical and methodological construct that has been extensively studied internationally. Book *et al.* (2018), in a meta-analysis of 75 studies conducted between 2003 and 2017, identify two main forms. The first is home-based involvement, which includes communication about school matters, monitoring, support with learning, and parental expectations. Among these, parental expectations emerge as the most influential factor on student performance. The second form is school-based involvement, which refers to participation in school activities, such as parent–teacher meetings or volunteering. However, as Erdem and Kaia (2020) note, the effects of involvement vary according to how its dimensions are defined and measured: strict control can negatively impact performance, while supportive behaviors show positive, though modest, outcomes.

In migratory contexts, collaboration becomes more complex due to linguistic and cultural differences, which can lead to mismatched expectations and hinder communication (Jeynes, 2005). While schools may require involvement through meetings or homework support, these expectations may not align with immigrant families' situation or resources (Fox, 2016). As a result, teachers often report low parental participation, raising concerns about communication effectiveness (Brabanti & Santagati, 2019).

Despite these issues, parental involvement can take different forms. Among these, parent–teacher conferences have been the focus of specific studies. They represent a crucial institutional arena for connecting home and school, fostering mutual understanding to support students' adjustment. Drawing on a study involving 431 families and 52 teachers, Oh and Pomerantz (2022) highlight key areas in PTCs: student progress, expectations about curriculum, parental strategies, and pedagogical rationales. Teachers may adopt an outcome-oriented or a process-oriented style, with the latter proving more effective in fostering engagement. The communicative dynamics of PTCs are further shaped by discursive roles such as experts, informers, critics, or supporters, which significantly influence interaction (Munthe & Westergård, 2023).

In multilingual contexts of exchange, students often serve not only as objects of discussion or self-reporters but also as language mediators. However, this role is particularly sensitive, as they are both evaluated and evaluators, speaking to and for adults while being scrutinized by authority figures (García-Sánchez, 2011). To address these complexities, professional mediators become crucial. As Baraldi (2018) argues, interpreters do not merely facilitate comprehension but actively co-construct meaning, enhance parental agency, and promote more balanced and inclusive communication.

Several studies have examined how meaning is co-constructed and responsibility is distributed within PTCs, focusing on the gradual negotiation of participant positions. Baker and Keogh (1995) conceptualize parental involvement not as a fixed set of behaviors, but as a situated and negoti-

ated discursive practice, analyzed through Conversation Analysis focusing on turn-taking, repair, mitigation, and accountability strategies. From this perspective, it is crucial to explore not only the roles adopted but also the discursive strategies used to present themselves as competent teachers or engaged parents. Pillet-Shore (2015) highlights how, during PTCs, parents actively work to demonstrate their competence by asserting prior knowledge or describing actions taken to address issues. By responding to praise or criticism, they seek to present themselves as responsible caregivers; similar strategies are also observed in teachers.

The negotiation of social roles is based on Goffman's (1981) concept of "participation framework," which describes dynamic positioning and changes in footing during interaction. Goodwin and Goodwin (2004) views participatory structure as multimodal, involving gestures, gaze, posture, and objects, emphasizing real-time co-construction even with limited language proficiency. Building on this, Antaki and Widdicombe (1998) argue that participants actively shape and make salient their roles toward specific goals, such as student success. Moreover, as Housley and Fitzgerald (2009) show, participants can activate, affirm, or contest social categories and normative expectations.

To explore these dynamics with migrant parents, the following analysis examines excerpts revealing how teachers and parents co-construct the student's image and negotiate roles.

3. Constructing the interactional setting: context and methodology

The analysis presented below is based on qualitative data collected through ethnolinguistic research conducted in the Aurora district of Turin, an area characterized by a high concentration of migrants (Capello & Semi, 2018). The study explores collaboration among immigrant parents, teachers, and educators from community centers running after-school programs, through interviews, focus groups, and audio recordings of informal interactions (Sordella, 2024). The corpus comprises about 14 hours of audio, including two parent–teacher conferences lasting 49'50" and 43'16", respectively. This article focuses on these two PTCs, held in a fourth-grade class entirely composed of students of migrant origin: twelve born in Italy and four who had recently arrived. Following a preliminary interview with a teacher on communication strategies with families, the two PTCs were observed to explore these dynamics *in situ*. These meetings feature a particular participatory structure, developed to creatively address communication difficulties in the absence of institutional mediators, often unavailable in Italian schools. Alternative solutions are often adopted, such as involving parents or pupils as interpreters. In this case, two bilingual university students, engaged in thesis research, acted as informal mediators and participant observers.

This structure enabled observation of the positioning and reception of pupils' and parents' voices in constructing shared knowledge, facilitated by real-time linguistic mediation. Pupils participated as direct witnesses of their school experiences and home activities, expressing their feelings toward the school community.

While mediation was essential for the Arabic-speaking mother, it played a mainly relational role for the Spanish-speaking mother, who already had greater knowledge of Italian. Trust towards the Peruvian university student was fostered by previous collaboration in a linguistic workshop with Spanish-speaking pupils at this school.

The two PTCs were audio-recorded and transcribed according to conventions specified in Table 2. The analysis focuses on how participants define their roles and jointly construct shared knowledge about school experience (Heritage, 2004). Special attention is paid to the portrayal of the pupil through teachers' and parents' narratives as well as instances of reported speech. Numerous studies have examined parents' narratives and their negotiation of agency, especially in attributing or reporting others' speech to frame contexts in specific ways, a phenomenon known as "voicing agency" (Bubikova-Moan, 2019: 2). Further attention is devoted to conversational agency (Duranti, 2005), which emerges in turn-taking sequences where participants negotiate meaning and relational positioning. This includes the co-construction of meaning and dynamic negotiation of social and conversational roles (Bazzanella, 2005).

The following analysis of excerpts from the two PTCs discusses the dynamics of conversational and epistemic role distribution, as well as the co-construction of the pupil's image between school and family[2]. In the transcripts, participants are identified as shown in Table 1 below. The transcription conventions adopted in this study (adapted by Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974) are presented in Table 2 in the appendix and apply only to the original utterances, while the English translations are intended to convey meaning rather than to reproduce spoken features.

Participants (to ensure privacy, the participants' names have been altered)	Identification codes
Teacher of Italian Mara	T.MA
Math teacher Eleonora	T.EL
Support teacher Cristiana	T.CRI
Teacher of the L2 Italian language workshop	T.L2
Mother of Moroccan origin	MOT1
Mother of Peruvian origin	MOT2
Girl of Moroccan origin named Safaa	SAA

2 Transcriptions and translations from Moroccan Arabic were made possible thanks to the contribution of Dr. Meryem Erraji and Dr. Samira Ben Abdelouhab. Numerals follow the Arabic chat alphabet convention for phonemes without a Latin equivalent.

Participants (to ensure privacy, the participants' names have been altered)	Identification codes
Girl of Peruvian origin named Camila	CAM
University student of Moroccan origin	MED1
University student of Peruvian origin	MED2

Table 1: Parent-teacher conference participants and codes.

4. Positioning dynamics in interactions

The peculiar setting created for the two PTC significantly shaped the interactional dynamics from the beginning, particularly in terms of how participants positioned themselves. For example, the participation structure created by the involvement of the two university students in the PTCs shaped their role of promoting parental agency in the conversation to an even greater extent than the assignments they received. They gradually shifted from the role of researchers and translators to that of actual mediators of the conversation.

The following excerpts show how the various participants exercised agency by defining and modulating their conversational positioning during the exchanges. The first excerpt pertains to the conference with the Arabic-speaking mother and emphasizes the employment of personal pronouns to discursively delineate the positioning of the various participants, a process that undergoes an evolution, in part due to the mediating action of the university student.

CONFERENCE 1: Excerpt 1

1. T.MA: e:h, bene Safaa. cosa diciamo alla mamma?
e:h, well, Safaa. What do we say to mom?
2. SAA: boh…
uh…
3. T.MA: CO:ME BOH?
what uh?
4. T.EL: come stai andando, in questo periodo, a scuola?
how have you been doing at school lately?
5. SAA: be:ne?=
goood?
6. T.MA: =bene! mo::lto bene.
good! very good.
7. T.EL: cosa vuol dire questo "bene"? proviamo a riempirlo un po' (.) °visto che è un po' difficile da chiedere°, magari [sfruttiamo anche…
what does this "good" mean? Let's try to expand on it a bit. Since it's a bit difficult to ask, maybe we can also take advantage of…

8. MED1: [sì sì. io sono qui apposta.
yes, yes. That's exactly why I'm here.
9. SAA: posso portare qualcosa?
can I get you anything?
10. T.MA: vuoi dire ↑ prendere.
you mean take.
11. SAA: posso prendere una cosa?
can I take something?
12. MED1: sawloha kif rada lmadrasa.
they asked her how she is at school.

This excerpt shows how epistemic authority shifts among participants, from teachers to pupil and mediator, as the interaction unfolds.

In the opening of the conversation, teacher Mara addresses the pupil directly, introducing the subject *we* to build a collective perspective on her school performance (1. T.MA): "*well, Safaa. What do we tell mom?*". The pupil's reticent response prompts a rephrasing by teacher Eleonora (4. T.EL), transitioning from a collective to an individual setting of the subject *you*, and from a general question to a more specific one concerning school progress: "*how have you been doing at school lately?*". This adjustment implicitly shifts the mother's role from a primary recipient of the teachers' report to a secondary background role.

Following the pupil's tentative hypothetical question, "*good?*", and Teacher Mara's subsequent emphatic confirmation, teacher Eleonora intervenes once more (7. T.EL), inviting the pupil to co-construct the meaning of performing good at school. In the same turn, she addresses the university student, effectively assigning her the role of communication facilitator, starting with supporting the pupil in expressing herself effectively in L2. The request is welcomed (8. MED1), and with this exchange (lines 7 and 8), the university student assumes the role of mediator in this context.

A brief parallel discussion ensues between teacher Mara and the pupil (lines 9-11), concerning the pupil's desire to introduce her school diary into the PTC setting. This diary contains the Italian L2 teacher's written feedback on the pupil's linguistic progress.

Subsequently, the mediator performs a rendering move (12. MED1), translating into Moroccan Arabic the question previously posed by teacher Eleanor to the pupil about her school progress. The role configuration outlined thus far is encapsulated by the mediator's employment of personal pronouns 'they' and 'her': "*they asked her how she is at school*". In this rendering move, it is evident how the initial role assigned to the mother by the teachers, as the recipient of a jointly constructed relationship, is relagated to a more marginal role of spectator. In this first phase, the teachers define the interactional frame; the mediator's next moves will gradually reconfigure it. However, the mediator's subsequent interventions in actively engaging the mother will prove crucial as the conversation unfolds, as discussed in another study (Sordella, 2025).

The initial role definition within this parent-teacher interaction is undoubtedly influenced by the mother's linguistic insecurity, stemming from her limited proficiency in Italian, which, up to this point, has prevented her from being recognized as an autonomous and agentive interlocutor in relation to her daughter's schooling.

In the other conference examined (CONF2), the Spanish-speaking mother immediately reveals a linguistic security that allows her not only to participate actively in the conversation but also to direct it towards certain topics. The conversation with Camila's mother also opens around the theme of reporting on school experiences at home, but the definition of conversational roles is different from the first context analyzed.

CONFERENCE 2: Excerpt 1

1. MED2: che cosa racconti alla mamma della scuola?=
   what do you tell mom about school?
2. T.MA: =NIENTE, perché non ha tempo!
   nothing, because she doesn't have time!
3. MOT2: è quella cosa che dicono così.
   that's what they say.
4. T.MA: (xxx).
5. MED2: ma le racconti tutto=tutto?
   but do you tell her everything, really everything?
6. MOT2: non solo lei, la sorella ↑anche parla. parlano le due insieme. "aspetta!" le dico. "una prima dopo l'altra". perché mi raccontano tutto.
   not just her, her sister too! they both talk together. "wait!" I tell them. "one at a time". because they tell me everything.
7 MED2: però è bello! così è partecipe, anche di quello che fanno.
   but that's nice! This way, she's involved, in what they do.
8 MOT2: sì. anche quando litigano con qualcuno, mi dice "no, ho fatto questo". mi dice tutto.
   yes. even when they argue with someone, she tells me, "no, I did this". She tells me everything.

In this PTC, it is the mediator who opens the school-family confrontation, by taking the first conversational turn (1.MED2), with a direct question addressed to the pupil. It would seem that, perhaps distracted by form-filling, the teacher relinquishes her authority to the university student, who effectively exceeds the boundaries of her role as researcher and mediator. However, the teacher herself quickly resumes her turn in the conversation, as the conductor of the PTC, along with her colleagues. She directly exercises her epistemic authority over the pupil's behavior: just as the pupil is always engrossed in many thoughts and activities in the classroom, she will be at home too.(2.T.MA).

In an indirect way, the mother confirms the teacher's statement, but entrusts judgment about her daughter to other generic subjects who would say this (3.MOT2).

The lack of clarity in defining roles within the PTC arises again when the mediator intervenes (5.MED2) and shifts the topic from the pupil's behavior, which the teacher and mother were discussing. She reintroduces the topic of school-family communication and selects the pupil as her interlocutor. However, the mother reasserts her epistemic authority by responding on behalf of her daughter (6.MOT2) and giving voice to the family context, in which she portrays both of her daughters. To this end, she employs direct speech to bear witness to the seamless flow between the school and home contexts.

Thus, the initial phase of the two PTCs shows some differences in the reciprocal positioning actions. At the beginning of the conference with the Moroccan mother (CONF1), the two teachers play the most active role in the conversation. They engage the pupil to provide the mother, the beneficiary, with information about the school context. They also assign the university student the role of facilitating communication. Instead, in the opening of the conference with the Peruvian mother (CONF2), agency is distributed exclusively among the adults. Despite the university student's attempts to give her a turn, the pupil is actually the object of the conversation.

Although reluctant, the pupil in CONF1 assumes the role of talking about herself and reporting her school progress to her mother. In CONF2, on the other hand, the mother herself assumes the role of informing the teachers about her daughter.

In the case of CONF1, teachers believe that the Arabic-speaking mother's limited knowledge of Italian prevents her from fully participating in the conversation. They attribute a limited discursive agency to her and resort to mediation by the daughter or college student. In contrast, in CONF2, Camila's mother's greater linguistic confidence allows her to take an active role in the interaction from the beginning. Despite her resourcefulness, her use of Italian still has gaps, which her daughter corrects as a more proficient speaker.

5. Creating a positive narrative: representations of the pupils as a bridge between home and school

The meeting between teachers and parents can be a valuable opportunity for both parties to present and promote a positive image of themselves and the educational context they represent, be it the school or the family. This shared image serves as a basis on which it is then possible to encourage or request alignment from the other party. This could be the first step towards establishing collaborative actions; however, it could also cause the other party to withdraw if they perceive this approach as

a threat to their social face. By building a positive image of the pupil in dialogue, both parties can demonstrate their educational and didactic work and indirectly promote themselves.

5.1 *Emotional alignment and mediated agency*

In the conference with the mother of Arabic language (CONF1), teachers staged the image of a student with good will, who has made much progress from initial linguistic difficulties, even overcoming her fear of making mistakes. However, during the conversation itself, these academic advances, which are appreciated by adults, are perceived negatively by the pupil as the reason for her reduced attendance at the Italian L2 workshop. The subsequent excerpt primarily focuses on her emotional difficulties.

CONFERENCE 1: Excerpt 2

48. T.MA:	ma non ce la fai a leggerlo tu? (.) dai, leggilo tu! *but can't you read it? come on, read it!*
49. T.EL:	senza timore! *without fear!*
50. SAA:	"Saafa, sei una bambina bravissima, e sei migliorata tantissimo. in questi mesi=so che ti piace avere delle lezioni in cui ti senti speciale, ma Safaa, tu lo sei sempre in ogni classe e in- con ogni maestra (xxx)." "Saafa, you are a very good girl, and you have improved so much. in these months. I know you like to have classes where you feel special, but you, Safaa, you are always in every class and in- with every teacher." ((reading, hesitantly))
51. T.MA:	ha proprio ragio:ne! sei proprio così, Safy! *she's right! you are really like that, Safy!*
52. T.EL:	e stai riuscendo veramente tanto. e non solo in italiano, mamma. in tutte le materie. (.) perché quando le riesce meglio a comprend- a capire, poi riesce anche meglio, per esempio in matematica. vai un po' a prendere il quaderno di matematica, che facciamo vedere quel problema che hai fatto da sola. (.) la prima a risolvere, vero Safaa? and you're doing really well, not just in Italian, mom. But in all subjects. Because when she understands better, when she comprehends things more easily, then she also does better, for example, in math. Go get the math notebook so we can show that problem you solved on your own. the first one to solve it, right, Safaa?
53. SAA:	sì. *yes*.
54. T.EL:	la prima a consegnare. e giu:sto! e con la sua strategia. *the first to hand in. and correct! and with her strategy.*

55. MED1: hta fdar katbki 3la hsab lmadrasa
does she also cry at home about school?
56. MOT1: chwiya… bhal ila chi ostada bara tamchi
a bit… as if a teacher were going to leave.
57. MED1: ah rah hakak, db hiya, hit galou liha, raha kemlat
ah, that's right, now she, because they told her, has finished.
58. MOT1: heya katwalf behom hata ila ja xi wa7d 3ndna fdar katwalfo o kat3ala9 beh o makatbghehx ykhroj.
she gets attached, even when someone comes to our house, she gets used to them and becomes attached, and she doesn't want them to leave.
59. MED1: ha detto che si è affezionata molto alla maestra. e anche a casa, quando va qualcuno a visitarli- a trovarli, lei si affeziona tanto e non vuole più che vadano via.
she said that she was very fond of the teacher. And also at home, when someone goes to visit them- to see them, she becomes very close to them and does not want them to leave anymore.
60. T.EL: è una bambina che si affeziona molto.
she's a little girl who becomes very fond of people. ((addressing mother))
61 T.MA: che fa fatica all'inizio. fa fatica all'inizio, e poi invece quando si abitua, si affeziona tanto.
she struggles at first. she has a hard time in the beginning, but then, once she gets used to it, she becomes very attached. ((addressing mother))

In the opening of this excerpt, the teachers invite the pupil to read a message written by the Italian L2 teacher (48.T.MAR and 49.T.EL). Previously (*cf*. turn 9.SAA, in excerpt 1 of CONF1), the pupil had made a request, namely to introduce her personal diary into the conversation. Once the teachers confirm what their colleague wrote about the progress made by the pupil, we observe (52.T.EL) the change of interlocutors in teacher Eleonora's transition from the pupil to the mother, using the allocative "mom". She is asked to provide a direct explanation to the mother about the mechanisms underlying this progress, and then turns again to the pupil with a request to show the mathematics notebook to the mother herself, using the collective subject "we", referring to the teachers and the pupil. In this context, Saaafa's mother seems to occupy a marginal role, as the teachers do not interact directly with her.

Next (55.MED1), the mediator attempts to promote the mother's conversational agency by asking her directly if similar emotional reactions occur at home, particularly if the pupil also cries over school-related events. In response, the mother provides her own interpretation (56.MOT1), drawing a parallel between the school context, defined as "similar to when a teacher wants to leave," and her daughter's behavior at home when guests

leave: "she gets attached, even when someone comes to our house, and it's like she gets used to them, gets attached and doesn't want them to leave."

Following the mediator's move of rendering (59.MED1), the teachers (60.T.EL and 61.T.MA) acknowledge and validate the image of the pupil and the interpretation of the facts provided by the mother.

In the following excerpt, we can observe the mother's increasing agency in providing an explanation of the pupil's emotional reactions.

CONFERENCE 1: Excerpt 3

82. MED1: galt lik flbdya makat9drch bzf w hta lkhouf makaykhlihach dir lhwayj mzyan.
she told you that at the beginning she's not very capable, and fear also prevents her from doing things well.
83. MOT1: heya bhal xkal diali db ana kan9ra o mle ki9ol leya oustad dere xi haja makan9derx maxe khankhaf wlkn kanhxam.
she's like me right now. I'm studying, and when the teacher asks me to do something, I can't do it. It's not that I'm scared, but I feel shy.
84. MED1: iwa, sah, hiya l7amda.
yes it's true, is the embarrassment. ((addressed to mother))
85. MED1: ha detto che anche lei adesso sta facendo un corso di italiano. spesso quando le chiedono di rispondere…
she said that she is now taking an Italian class. Often when she is asked to answer…

In this exchange, the mother offers teachers the key to interpreting her daughter's behavior at school (83.MOT1), through the mediator's translation. However, while in the previous discourse she referred to the family context, now the mother introduces another school context, namely the Provincial Centers for Adult Education she is attending. She redefines her role, not only as a mother but as a student, who has undertaken this training path both to help her daughter with homework and study and to eventually find a job outside of home, and who, because of this, is able to understand the emotional difficulties manifested in school by her daughter. In outlining a shared image of pupil, the mother being also a student has increased her empathic ability towards her daughter and, therefore, improved her parenting skills.

5.2 *Narrative authority and linguistic competence*

In contrast, establishing common ground in the conference with the Peruvian mother (CONF2) proves more substantial challenge, despite the calm and playful tone of the conversation and the relatively high level of mutual understanding between her and the teachers, which renders linguistic mediation unnecessary.

CONFERENCE 2: Excerpt 2

22. MOT2: […] ogni tanto, prende anche *la* carta e mi fa delle [spiegazioni
from time to time, she even grabs the paper and explains things to me
23. T.MA: [uno schema. eh, certo!
an outline. oh, sure!
24. MOT2: come si chiama quella piccola, come questa? *pizarra*.
what's the name of that little one, like this? pizarra ((spanish word)).
25. T.EL: lavagne:tta.
small chalkboard.
26. MOT2: lavagnetta. c'è una piccola in casa, che si mette a fare- anche le insegnanti.
small chalkboard. There's a little one at home, she also pretends to be like the teachers.
27. T.MAR: è brava!
she's great!
28. CAM: un giorno che mia mamma non c'era io ho fatto la maestra per i miei gatti. cioè miei gatti più di me.
one day when my mom wasn't home, I played teacher to my cats. That is, my cats more than me.
29. MED.2: ah ecco ((risate)). ma Camila, ma adesso ti piacciono un po' i dettati? mi ricordo che non ti piacevano così tanto.
oh, I see ((laughter)). But Camila, do you like dictations a bit now? I remember you didn't like them that much.
30. CAM: le doppie.
double letters.
31. RIC2: ah le doppie, com'è con le doppie, adesso?
oh, the double letters, how's it going with the double letters now?
32. CAM: meglio=
better
33. MED2: =meglio? ti piacciono un po' di più?
better? do you like them a bit more?
34. MOT2: dille: la parola doppia, *y* lettera doppia.
tell them: the double word, and double letter.
35. MED2: sì, esatto.
yes. exactly.
36. CAM: bene.
good.
37. T.EL: […] ma i gatti come sono messi con le frazioni decimali? ((risate)) a che punto sono?
but how are cats with decimal fractions? ((laughter)) where are they?

38. MOT2: io penso che- che uno non sa tanto le frazioni, perché-, perché è la quarta o quinta volta che *si è andato* su- noi abitiamo [al secondo piano] no, *ha caduto*
I think that it doesn't know fractions very well, because it is the fourth or fifth time it went up we live on the second floor no, it fell.
39. T.MA: [sul balcone…]
on the balcony…

In this excerpt, we can see that the teacher's initial observations regarding the pupil's scattered interests and lack of time to pursue them (CONF.2, EXC.1, 2.T.MA) are reinterpreted by the mother as a strength. In order to effect a change in this perception, the mother offers everyday anecdotes in which the pupil takes on the role of a teacher, thereby bringing elements of the school environment into the home setting. This is further emphasized through the evocation of symbolic objects from the school context, such as the paper on which she creates concept maps (22. MOT2) and the blackboard (24.MOT2; 26.MOT2).

Later, teacher Mara reinforces the pupil's positive image by affirming that she "she's great!" (27.T.MAR). This affirmation probably encourages the pupil to contribute to the conversation, as she shares a domestic anecdote with herself in the role of the teacher and her cats in the role of pupils (28.CAM). This is followed by collective laughter and an attempt by the university student, who in this context acts more as a researcher than as a mediator, to restore the girl's role as a pupil, specifically in the face of some spelling difficulties in the Italian language. The teaching situation to which she refers is that of the language laboratory she had conducted with a group of Spanish-speaking students at the school, focusing on the interlinguistic comparison between Italian and Spanish.

Even the attempt of the teacher of mathematics (37.T.EL) to bring the speech on critical issues to be discussed together is not successful. Her ironic reference to cats struggling with decimal fractions, a topic on which she would like to probe the ground, is perceived by her mom as an opportunity to steer the conversation away from school-related topics.

The following discussion seeks to identify salient differences between the two conferences, in terms of how they seek to build common ground between parents and teachers. During the conference with the Moroccan mother (CONF1), the foundations for collaboration were laid through the mother's identification with her daughter as a student. However, during the conference with the Peruvian mother (CONF2), the identification with the daughter did not result in establishing common ground with the teachers.

CONFERENCE 2: Excerpt 3

79. MOT2: però quando lo vedo così bollito, come insalata… no, neanche a *mi* piace davvero. perché non *li* mettono tanto gusto.
but when I see it all boiled like that, like a salad… no, I don't really like it either. because they don't add much flavor.

80. MED2: ma dato che a scuola è così sveglia, così attiva… quando magari lei o suo marito, quando qualcuno a casa non capisce, magari una parola in italiano, Camila traduce?
but since she's so sharp and active at school… when maybe you or your husband, or someone at home doesn't understand, maybe a word in Italian, does Camila translate?

81. MOT2: eh, ma hai sentito che ha detto un sacco di-
but did you hear she said a whole bunch of-

82. MED2: sì, ho sentito che corregge. fa la maestra. anche con voi a casa?
yeah, I heard she corrects. she acts like the teacher. Does she do that at home too?

83. MOT2: sì lei mi aiuta tan-. lei e anche l'altra, mi aiutano tanto. ma, più di tutto lei.
yeah, she helps me a lot. she and the other, they help me a lot. But specially her.

84. MED2: okay.

85. MOT2: e penso che… non… che *me* spieghi tutto. *sobre* tutto, e lo *dici*. perché quando parlo *malo*- male lei mi *corrige*.
and I think that… not… that she explains everything to me. Especially, and she says it. because when I speak wrong… she correct me.

86. CAM: corregge.
correct.

87. MOT2: *correggio*.

88. ((general laughter))

89. MOT2: e fa così. io non l'ho studiato. io imparo ascoltando tutto. ma lei mi fa così, io sono contenta. le ho detto anche *nel* lavoro, se parlo male, dimmi che sto parlando male. così non sembro una ta- tanto ignorante.
and she does it like this. I haven't studied it. I learn by listening to everything. but she does this for me, and I'm happy. I even told her at work, if I speak wrong, tell me I'm speaking wrong. So I don't sound too… too ignorant.

In this excerpt, we can see how the Peruvian mother shows empathy towards her daughter (79.MOT2), aligning herself with her food preferences to counter any criticism from teachers.

Subsequently, to demonstrate to the teachers the pupil's competence and helpfulness, the mother puts herself in the role of spontaneous learner of

the Italian language (89.MOT2) and thus legitimizes the correction interventions by the pupil during the conference (86.CAM).

To highlight her daughter's strengths and abilities, Camila's mother minimizes her own mastery of Italian, stating that her daughter, more than her older sister, helps, explains and corrects her mistakes.

5.3 *Comparing interactional trajectories*

Despite their differing levels of knowledge of the Italian language, both mothers employ strategies to promote a positive image of their daughters: in one case, by demonstrating resilience in overcoming common challenges, in the other, by showing the pupil's linguistic competence as superior to that of the mother.

One specific topic on which teachers and parents seek common ground is that of homework and studying at home. In CONF1, after highlighting the increased self-confidence acquired by Safaa, one of the teachers raises the question of studying at home and questions the possibility of supporting her study activity.

CONFERENCE 1: Excerpt 4

166. T.EL: forse se c'è una cosa da migliorare, Safaa, un pochettino- ma poi ci lavoriamo ancora un po' adesso, e poi tutta la quinta, è lo studio. perché lei riesce a scuola, però forse a casa da sola… non so se lei riesce… tu riesci a studiare a casa da sola?
maybe if there's one thing to improve, Safaa, just a little bit- but then we'll work on it a bit more now, and then all through fifth grade, it's studying. Because she does well at school, but maybe at home alone… I don't know if she can… can you study at home alone?
[turns 167-177 not reported]

178. MED1: wach kay9ra fdar
does she study at home?

179. MOT1: ma kayqra f dar.
at home does not study.

180. T.MA: sì, tu.
yes, you.

181. SAA: un po'.
a bit.

182. T.MA: e un po' li fai gli schemi. devi abituarti a farli sempre di più, Safaa…
and you do some outlines. you need to get used to doing them more and more, Safaa.

183. MOT1: dayman b telephone.
she's always with the phone.

184. MED1: ma tu le dici qualcosa?
but do you tell her anything?
185. MOT1: ila golt liha chi haja katgoul liya Safi salit.
if I tell her, he tells me that she's finished.

At the beginning of this excerpt (166.T.EL), we can observe a comparison between the school context, where "*we'll work*" on the construction of study skills, and the domestic context, against which the expression "*alone*" is used, implicitly reducing the agency of the mother. The indirect request "*I don't know if she can…*", to obtain mother's collaboration, reveals the teacher's lack of confidence in the mother's chances of success in this endeavor. The low degree of agency attributed to the mother corresponds, in fact, to a sudden change of interlocutor, that is the pupil itself. In this case, the form is no longer a negative statement left pending, but a question statement, "*can you study at home alone?*", with the possibility of a binary response, which assumes the absence of the mother.

Following a discussion with the pupil on the most effective strategies for independent study, the mediator elicits the mother's viewpoint (178. MED1), simultaneously with the exchange between the teachers and the pupil (180.T.MA; 181.SAA; 182.TMA). Upon confirming that she does not control her daughter studying at home (179.MOT1), the mother raises the issue of managing her daughter's mobile phone usage during homework and study sessions (183.MOT1) expressing her difficulty in verifying whether her daughter has completed her school assignments (185. MOT1). This conversational sequence can be interpreted in two ways: on the one hand, it may serve as a justification for her own difficulties in assisting her daughter with schoolwork at home; on the other, it could be a strategic attempt to delegate disciplinary authority to the teachers, thereby reinforcing her own educational role by enlisting their support in admonishing the pupil.

The issue of mobile phone management also emerges as a potential area for educational collaboration during the conference with Camila's mother.

CONFERENCE 2: Excerpt 4

153. MOT2: ah sì, fa tutto. *con* quello sono contenta. *l'unico* che non mi piace è quando dorme tardi e… che le piace andare tardi *tanto*.
oh yeah, she does everything. I'm happy with that. the only thing I don't like is when she stays up late and… she likes going to bed really late.
154. T.MA: ehm:::
155. MOT2: non so se lo sanno- lo sapete voi- però c'è un gruppo di=
I don't know if they know, you do, but there is a group of

156. T.MA: =compagni.
schoolmates.
157. MOT2: che si chiamano sempre=
they always call each other.
158. T.MA: =al telefono.
on the phone.
159. CAM: tutto il gio:rno.
all day long.
160. MOT2: e parlano ta:::nto.
they talk so much.
161. T.MA: no, no, ma lo sappiamo. e infatti stavamo anche pensando di- se riusciamo…
no, no, we know. in fact, we were also thinking about- if we can…
162. T.EL: adesso vediamo il prossimo anno.
now we'll see next year.
163. MOT2: però parlano di la- di compiti, parlano di giocare. parlano *de-* parlano di cose…*lo se-* non brutte.
but they talk about- about homework, they talk about playing. They talk about- they talk about things… not bad.

As mentioned, the CONF2 is dominated by the mother's anecdotes, which portray the pupil as interested and proactive, a portrayal confirmed by teachers. The events reported by the Peruvian mother in this extract concern her educational difficulties with regards to her daughter's time management (153.MOT2). Even if acknowledging this difficulty may seem like asking teachers for help, it actually serves as an opportunity to disclose information about cell phone use among classmates that the teachers may not be aware of (turns 155-160). Ultimately, Camila's mother seeks to assert her epistemic authority not only within her family domain but also regarding the educational interventions directed at the class group, which would typically fall under the responsibility of the teachers. For their part, however, the teachers complete the picture provided by the mother compared to telephone exchanges between peers, in which the pupil is also inserted, showing not only that they know the situation but also that they have already identified educational strategies to adopt. Perhaps fearing negative consequences for the daughter, the mother tries to soften the initial negative image of these telephone exchanges between peers.

Conversely, teachers re-establish their epistemic authority over their pupils, thereby demonstrating not only their awareness of the situation but also their prior identification of the educational strategies to be employed (161.T.MA; 162.T.EL). It is possible that the mother's attempt to mitigate the initially unfavorable impression of these telephone conversations between peers (163.MOT2) was driven by a concern for the potential negative repercussions for her daughter, who had previously expressed support for her position (159.CAM).

6. Concluding remarks

This section summarizes the main findings of the study, which explored how teacher–parent communication, especially in migrant and multilingual contexts, is shaped not only by institutional roles but also by the dynamic construction of meaning and positioning within interaction.

Conventional parent–teacher meetings are characterized by the co-construction of the pupil's image, who usually does not participate directly. At the same time, the conversation is oriented toward the pupil and each party articulates actions, intentions, or recommendations (Caronia & Dalledonne Vandini, 2019). In the two PTCs examined, however, the pupil's presence is significant, as he is not merely the topic of talk but also gains a certain degree of epistemic authority over her academic performance and time management at home.

Within this participatory structure, the mediating role of university students is crucial, especially for the Moroccan mother, who does not speak Italian well, even though this intervention might represent a loss of her role as primary recipient of the information. Yet, the mediators' interventions help reintegrate her as an active interlocutor. Initially perceived as insecure and marginal, she begins to offer interpretations, drawing on both home and school contexts. By sharing her experience as a learner of Italian as a second language, she establishes a new identity: not only as a parent but also as a student. This shift strengthens her connection with her daughter and reframes her linguistic difficulties as a shared experience.

In contrast, the Peruvian mother shows confidence in Italian from the outset, taking an active role. As the conversation progresses, she constructs a narrative of involvement, portraying herself as informed and engaged. She uses anecdotes and reported speech to show how her daughters talk to her about school, reinforcing her image as an attentive and responsive caregiver.

Although the pupil is responsive, the mother dominates the conversation. Even when the teacher tries to redirect the discussion, she introduces new anecdotes, maintaining control and affirming her competence.

In both cases, the way parents are positioned, and position themselves, varies. Safaa's mother regains agency through mediation and by presenting herself as a learner. Camila's mother utilizes her language skills to build a strong narrative of involvement. Interestingly, Safaa's mother draws on her own learning path to contextualize her daughter's challenges, while Camila's mother downplays her own competence to highlight her daughter's role as a linguistic helper.

These strategies illustrate how migrant parents can negotiate their agency and educational roles through storytelling and self-positioning. Teachers and parents mobilize the pupil's image to promote their educational identity and affirm their contexts. These positive representations create relational space but also reveal participation asymmetries.

The Peruvian mother uses anecdotes and humor to affirm her knowledge, while the Moroccan mother regains presence through mediation and the redefinition of her experience.

The role of mediators emerges as central, not just as translators but as facilitators of parents' voices and contributors to the interaction itself. Their presence helps reveal multiple perspectives and enables forms of agency that might otherwise remain invisible.

At the same time, their position is never neutral: they negotiate between institutional expectations and parental narratives.

In conclusion, fostering effective school–family collaboration in multilingual and migratory contexts demands both institutional openness and close attention to the microdynamics through which alignment, agency, and shared understandings are co-constructed. The participatory structures analyzed here demonstrate the potential to strengthen collaboration by mobilizing both professional and community-based resources.

Creating space for multiple voices and competencies entails acknowledging parents' educational roles, validating their contributions (Sordella, 2023), and supporting them through culturally and linguistically responsive mediation. Where professional resources are not structurally embedded in schools, it is only by fully engaging all available human resources and sustaining an authentic dialogic commitment that schools can achieve truly inclusive and equitable partnerships.

Appendix

SYMBOL	MEANING
(.)	A micro-pause, typically less than 0.2 seconds
(0.5)	Timed pause in tenths of a second
-	Cut-off or self-interruption
:	Sound is stretched or prolonged
.	Falling intonation, possible turn completion
?	Rising intonation, possible question
,	Continuing intonation
Underlining	Indicates emphasis or stress
CAPITALS	Louder speech or shouting
°word°	Soft or quieter speech
>word<	Faster than surrounding speech
<word>	Slower than surrounding speech
↑	Rise in pitch at the beginning of the utterance or word
(xxx)	Unintelligible or inaudible segment
(( ))	Transcriber's comments or non-verbal actions
=	No gap or latching between utterances
"Quotation marks"	Reported speech
Italicized words	Code-switching to Spanish Translations into English
word	Ungrammatical forms as uttered by the speaker

Table 2: Transcription conventions.

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