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**INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN ITALY AND IN
THE UNITED STATES: THE RESULTS OF A
BINATIONAL INQUIRY**

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Intercultural Education in Italy and in the United States: the Results of a Binational Inquiry

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Abstract

The consistency and the complexity of the migration fluxes towards Italy, their degree of stabilization, as well as the increase of migration families and the presence of first and second generations in the Italian scholastic system, require new educational policies and choices on behalf of the decision makers. The characteristics and the specificity of the migration fluxes and of the different persons and families that are oriented towards Italy, involve educational strategies that are able to combine needs and cultural models that are quite articulate.

The United States, throughout its history, has also experienced similar societal transformations which continue to be the driving force to the creation of new policies that can respond to a new multicultural society.

The paper presents a thorough analysis on the topics of the new educational needs expressed by new generations that live and make experiences in multi-ethnic social and scholastic contexts. Such a theme is framed within the wider context of globalization processes, of the widening of the European Union, of the presence on the territory of the Union of people and citizens originally immigrated and the questions on belonging and social cohesion.

In specific, the study discuss the school policies for intercultural integration adopted in Italy and with reference to educational policies implemented in other European countries and in bilingual schools in the United States: welcoming practices for immigrant students in the schools; relationship between immigrant families and schools; practices of learning/teaching Italian as second language; promoting multilingualism approach; promoting social relation between students in the classroom,

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to prevent discrimination; team work between teachers; school networks; network between schools and local entities; intercultural education.

Keywords:

Multi-ethnic Schools, Social Cohesion, Educational Policies, Intercultural Education.

1. School and migration

School is placed at the heart of the question of the quality of the future living together in a multi-ethnic society, as a key institution for the promotion of social cohesion and for the acquisition of competences necessary to economic and political integration of the citizens of tomorrow (Ambrosini, 2008). Through the formative and socializing processes in the educational system, it is anticipated that the access to public spaces and social resources. In other words, in school we build citizenship and social identity of people: school is therefore the symbolic place where to concentrate evolution paths of complex societies; to study school means to study society. Literature on migrations sets as central the role of the scholastic institution in the perspective of integration (Besozzi, 2006).

The importance of school when facing migrations is evident also when considering the increase of the presence of foreign students in European scholastic systems, and in specific, in the Italian one. The scholastic institution is characterized even more by a plural experience: the presence of foreign minors has a significant impact on education systems, as in the classes there are differentiated levels, a plurality of languages and different cultural backgrounds. School is placed at the core of the question of meeting of different cultures, as it welcomes, in a universalistic way, all the children of immigrants according to the right of education and formation, that goes beyond orders, frontiers, States and nations (Besozzi, 2001). The European Union regulations are based on universal criteria for the recognition of the rights of children. The Italian regulation adopted in 1991 the regulation suggested by the International convention on the rights of the infants, approved in 1989 by the ONU, and conceives the right to education as a fundamental right of each child independently from the social and juridical situation.

If we consider the foreign presence in the Italian scholastic system, we notice that the phenomenon of stabilizing the migration processes is reflected also in the data from the Ministry of Education. In other words, the presence of “foreign” students is a structural data of the Italian scholastic system, even if relatively recent compared to other European countries, and it implies a transformation of the demographic and social basis of the scholastic population (Giovannini, 2006; Ambrosini, 2008). In the school year 2012/2013 in the Italian schools there was the enrolment of 786.630 “foreign” students, that is 30.691 more than the year before and a threefold quantity compared to the school year 2001/2002. A tendency that is now consolidated is the increasing presence of foreign students that are born in Italy: they are almost 50% of the total. It is the “second generation” that for language and personal history are not different from their Italian peers. It is the primary school to welcome the higher number of “foreign” students (more than 276 thousand) but it is in secondary school that the most critical questions are registered: a choice of addresses mainly oriented towards the technical and professional formation and only relatively towards grammar schools, particularly the scientific address; 38,2% of the total of “foreign” students that attend the Italian school are in a situation of scholastic failure. With the increasing of age the scholastic discomfort: the “foreign” children in primary school in a tardiness condition are 16,3%, the percentage increases to 44,1% in the secondary school of first degree and to 67,1% in high schools (percentage that does not reach 24% for the Italian peers) (Caritas-Migrantes, 2014).

For such an extended presence in qualitative terms there is an extended presence in terms of citizenships surveyed. Most of the totality of the countries of the World has one of its representatives in the Italian school, even if in recent years the tendency of increasing of students coming from Europe has been registered. An ulterior element of heterogeneity is represented by the different distribution in schools in the national territory.

To face the migration phenomenon, the regulation designs a model of school that is integrative and intercultural.

2. The intercultural project school

Research highlights the complexity and multidimensionality of the scholastic integration process, that regards not only the acquisition of

abilities, competence and knowledge, but also the richness of social exchanges with adults and peers, at school and out of school (Giovannini, Queirolo Palmas 2002; Besozzi, 2005).

Integration is an intentional project, that does not occur occasionally with the passing of time, but requires that institutions activate shared strategies with the subjects of the territory in which they are located, that form a link between the scholastic policies and social integration policies (Ambrosini, 2013). Scholastic integration is only an aspect of the whole integration (European Commission, 2008; European Council and Commission, 2008).

The perspective of intercultural teaching is central within the European orientations and Italian regulations. The scholastic institution is the privileged place to develop intercultural competences, that are at the centre of cohesion in the multi-ethnic society: the ability to dialogue with people of other cultures; the respect of values and fundamental rights of society of the receiving country. Migrations can represent a precious resource on the cultural and educational level only if integrated in an intercultural exchange process, aimed at promoting on one side the respect of diversity, on the other the convergence towards common values in a new vision of citizenship suitable to the current pluralism (Council of Europe, 2008; Contini, 2012; 2012a).

Interculture, as a specific objective for a school in transformation, implies the complementarity of action lines that include: integration of non-Italian students; intercultural interaction (Miur, 2007). The former – the welcoming practices and scholastic integration, the learning of Italian as L2, the valorisation of plurilinguism, orientation – are strategies aimed at granting resources for the right to study, participation in the scholastic life, the equality of educational paths and they are oriented at students of non-Italian citizenship and their families. The latter, actions for intercultural interactions, are ascribable to relations at school and in the extra scholastic time, to discriminations and prejudice, to intercultural perspectives in knowledge and competences.

3. Research methodology

The research was carried out between the months of April-November 2014 and analysed some schools through the methods of case studies, studying the experiences and educational, learning and organizational strategies.

The empiric collection of data was based on:

- Interviews to Head of schools, program coordinators; teachers
- Documentary analysis (Plan for the Formation Offer - POF -, Welcoming Protocols, Networks Pacts, Project for Interculture);
- Mini focus groups.

The phases of the research dedicated to the study cases are:

- individuate ten scholastic institutions situated in the Abruzzo Region, in the Center of Italy, selected: a) in the degree of primary and middle; b) with a high number of students with a migration background; c) according to the presence of an intercultural project within institutes;
- collection of data on the field in the 10 schools through documented analysis, interviews and mini focus groups;
- analysis of the data and formation of synthesis matrixes.

To individuate the dimensions to analyse, the action lines described in the ministerial document *La via italiana per la scuola e l'integrazione interculturale* (Miur 2007; Santerini, 2010; Favaro, 2011) have been used:

- Integration actions (strategies that have as recipients the students with a non-Italian citizenship and their families);
- Actions for intercultural interaction (strategies applied to all students, Italian and non-Italian);
- The actors and the resources.

The objective of the research has been to detect which actions have been undertaken by the scholastic institutions to promote integration and intercultural dimension. As intercultural becomes part of the project of the formative offer and of the scholastic life. We have tried to comprehend which strategies and resources allow school to face positively the challenge of new citizenship in plural and multi-ethnic context.

4. Research results

4.1. Integration Actions

4.1.1. *Welcoming practices in the schools*

The Italian school has avoided from the beginning the formation of separate places of learning for foreign students and it has been oriented towards the integration of the latter in normal scholastic classes. Such a choice is a concrete application of the principle of Universalism and it is based, at the same time, on the recognition of a positive function carried out by socialization among peers and by comparing diversity (Giovannini, Queirolo Palmas 2002; Ongini, 2011).

As for the practises of scholastic integration, the regulations that regulate enrolment and the integration modalities - DPR n. 394/1999, C.M. n. 24/2006, C.M. n. 93/2006 – declare that the enrolment of foreign minor in Italian schools of every order and degree can be requested in any period of the scholastic year, that the foreign minors are enrolled in the class that corresponds to their age, unless stated differently by the governing bodies. Italian regulations suggest an equilibrate distribution of enrolments between an understanding network of schools and a cooperation with the local entities.

Literature on the integration processes highlights how the integration moment in the school is crucial for the integration of foreign students, because the basis for a positive scholastic path are set.

The quality of school depends on the measures put in place to welcome immigrant students, and on the criteria of distribution of students in the classes.

Generally in the investigated schools the following are available:

- ‘Welcoming committee’;
- ‘Welcoming protocol’;
- Modules for parents in different languages;
- Practise of “welcoming friends” that support the students that has just arrived.

Moreover newly immigrated students generally are inserted in classes corresponding to their age.

4.1.2. *Learning/Teaching Italian as second language*

As for the teaching of Italian as a second language, in the ministerial document (Miur, 2007) the importance is focused on the knowledge of the national language and the culture it conveys for the

process of integration, because the linguistic competence is a basic requisite for scholastic success, to participate in the scholastic and non-scholastic community. In the European context it is highlighted how the acquisition of the language of the destination country is an essential component to take part in the economic, social, intellectual, political and artistic life of the welcoming country (European Commission, 2008; Nesse Network, 2008).

The states of the European Union have grasped the centrality of the linguistic question and have adopted specific measures aimed at favouring linguistic competence. Also, the Italian school has individuated intervention models and has put in place inclusive and to facilitate strategies.

The linguistic alphabetization is the field that focuses the majority of the intervention of the scholastic institutions that have activated Ital2 laboratories to offer the new arrived students the opportunity to fill their linguistic gaps.

The schools studied adopted specific measures aimed at favouring linguistic competence, like:

- Functional and cultural literacy courses;
- Identification of internal and external resources, and appropriate places for the activation of linguistic labs of Ital2;
- Personalised learning plans;
- Hours of co-teaching.

4.1.3. Conservation of the language and culture of origin

In the ministerial document (Miur, 2007) it is highlighted how linguistic and cultural diversity can be a precious resource for intercultural education. The actions to promote plurilinguism regard on one hand plurilinguism in schools, and on the other individual plurilinguism. Even the European Commission has underlined that linguistic, cultural or religious diversity sets a challenge, but it can contribute to European integration and to intercultural dialogue. The situation of plurilinguism represents an educational opportunity not only for foreigners, but for all students. In the documents divulged by the European Commission it is required from the European Union to promote the proposal of a personal adopted language, according to which every citizen should be encouraged to choose a distinctive

language. For the immigrants, the personal adoptive language should be in general the one of the country where they are living.

The schools investigated adopted the following strategies to favour the conservation of the culture of origin:

- Initial attention is reserved to the management of the class with the implementation of posters and productions that refer to multicultural topics.
- Promotion of an inclusive learning environment through respecting everyone's identity, promoting cultural differences as incentives for the formation of each student.
- Linguistic-cultural Projects.
- Sharing of stories, fairy tales from different cultural traditions.
- Studying different traditions.
- Provision of specific material of different cultures: stories, poems, films, music, etc.
- Realization of projects on linguistic-cultural diversity.
- In some of the schools interviewed, cooperation of relations with linguistic mediators (Chinese, Albanian, Arabic) is set up.

In the Italian scholastic system the teaching of the mother tongue is more problematic, because Italian immigration is characterized by 191 nationalities, with at least 60 languages used, even if the number of students coming from Europe is increasing and that have cultural, religious and linguistic affinities with the Italian scholastic population compared to other continents.

4.1.4. Bilingual schools in the United States

Primary and middle schools serving non-U.S. born and immigrant students in the state of Arizona, (United States) belong to three types:

- Public schools with English immersion model--in which English learning is emphasized four hours a day and there is no support for mother tongue development.
- Publish schools with bilingual curriculum, in which all content area subjects are taught in two languages. (Spanish/English or Navajo/English). Both languages are developed simultaneously. Bilingualism and Biliteracy in Spanish and Navajo is stressed

because a large majority of students belong to these language speaking groups.

- Charter Public Schools--these schools place different curricular emphasis (e.g science and technology; language learning and translation; math or the arts). Most content area lessons utilized English as the main language of instruction.

While American educational systems--(in particular--in Southwestern states characterized by growing numbers of students from immigrant origin) offer various choices in terms of curriculum and program models; the “English immersion” program--that promotes the learning of “English only” is the most popular of all three models and it has more financial resources than the other schools mentioned. Currently, there are only a handful public bilingual schools in the state (less than 15 schools). However, given their educational success, more bilingual schools are being open throughout the state. Bilingual schools require well-trained teachers who are not only equipped with the latest instructional methods, but also practice close and frequent collaboration with colleagues and fellow teachers. In a bilingual model, students learn lessons in 2 languages--therefore, teachers need to plan lessons together and remain in continued collaboration. In the end, state assessments are demonstrating that even when these schools tend to be more costly, they produce better academic results than the subtractive “English Only” schools.

4.2. Actions for intercultural interaction

4.2.1. Actions and strategies to prevent discrimination and prejudice

Relative to the actions of intercultural interactions, the Document *La via italiana* (Miur, 2007) highlights how intercultural education implies two complementary dimensions: relational and cognitive.

The relational dimension of the intercultural education is placed on the emotional and relational level and it can be activated through contact, cooperation and sharing of experience. The class can become effectively a place of exchange only if defined as an intercultural class, that is to say if it is a communication space (Contini, 2014).

In the school studied the following practices are in place:

- To promote respect and solidarity among the students;

- To promote the right of everyone to be involved, respected and integrated.

4.2.2. Intercultural Perspective in the knowledge and skills

«Adopting the intercultural perspective, that is to say the promotion of dialogue and the contrast of cultures, means to not limit only the organization of integration strategies of immigrant students [...]. Teaching in an intercultural perspective means to assume diversity as a paradigm of the same identity in the school of pluralism» (Miur, 2007: 3-4).

The cognitive dimension is aimed at promoting the ability of decentralization to show the variety of point of views and developing critical thinking. The intercultural education in school is conceived as transversal and interdisciplinary, but at the same time as a specific curricular space that is defined as education to plural citizenship and shared in view of social cohesion.

In this case scholastic subjects - history, geography, literacy, numeracy and other – constitute an occasion for the formation of diversity. Particularly, the teaching of history allows recognizing the contributions and values of different cultures and it can go beyond ethnocentric and Eurocentric settings. At the same time history can open up to problems relating to the pacific living together of populations, face the themes of racism and migrations, as a recurring historical happening. The teaching of Italian allows an inter-cultural consideration on the events of language and a consideration on the relation between European and extra-European cultures. In the same way, artistic and musical education allow an approach to other cultures and their relations. On the same level, the learning of foreign languages can be linked to a different way of organizing thought and approach the culture expressed by every language. Geography shows a strong inter-cultural value for its progressive openness from a local reality to a national one, from a European context to a worldwide one. Scientific-mathematical subjects can promote a coherent reasoning ability and the appreciation of exchanging ideas. The lessons dedicated to a civic education can allow the description of the principles of the Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

To create an inter-cultural sense means to recognize the other in its diversity, without creating “ethnic-cultural cages” and creating

communication channels (Miur, 2007). The difficult task of the school is the one to be an excellent laboratory where to build cohabitation. In such a vision, the idea of citizenship is reviewed with the aim to conjugate universal values and individual rights.

Actions to the intercultural education developed by the schools studied are:

- Use of language in social and communicative purposes through listening and speaking, offering situational contexts related to daily life;
- Organization and implementation of intercultural days in the territory at the end of the school year;
- Implementation of intercultural projects.

4.3. The actors and the resources

Networks between educational institutions and territory are an essential expression of school autonomy with the aim of the development of human resources, professional, structural and financial. The ministerial document (Miur, 2007) underlines that they are principle part of integration: the diffusion of actions put in place, in terms of: modality of inter-institutional cooperation (protocols between local entities and schools, operational vademecum); the resource integration; the elaboration and diffusion of materials and instruments; the involvement of cultural mediators; the formation of operators and teachers. School networks are an efficient instrument of diffusion of practices, of organizational modality and forms of forms of inter-institutional cooperation. The cooperation between school and territory is a valid instrument to prevent phenomena of concentration of non-Italian students in some scholastic institutions too.

Some of the schools investigated activated:

- Networks of schools and universities for research and training;
- Network with schools and institutions for the exchange of best educational practices and the implementation of specific projects;
- Collaborations with other training agencies in the area, such as Provincial Library, State Archives, local museums, local authorities;
- Collaborations with cultural associations and communities of migrants in the area.

5. Conclusion

Social integration and intercultural education are two distinct but complementary aspects:

- Social integration is the opening of the school through specific measures reception of students of non-Italian origin.
- the intercultural dimension relates to all pupils and involving the whole school in its work to provide all students equality of education and equity.

In the scientific literature "second generation" interculturalism is mentioned (Santerini, 2010). The concept of intercultural education of "second generation" is tightly linked to the concept of school of citizenship in its function to give all students, of any origin and social and ethnic provenience, the equality of formative paths/ the equality of opportunity (Contini, 2013).

The concept of intercultural education appears from the Nineties in the European Documents, with the studies of the European Council. The Eurydice report *L'intégration scolaire des enfants immigrants en Europe* (Eurydice, 2004) shows the first European synthesis on integration in the school and allows to compare the teaching modalities of the L2. The report *L'éducation interculturelle dans les écoles* (Allemann-Ghionda, 2008) shows a synthesis of questions linked to intercultural approach. In Italy, intercultural education started to be discussed in the Nineties. For intercultural education it is intended a "transversal approach" aimed at: integrating the immigrant students; developing methods and teachings adequate to cultural pluralism.

In the European countries plurality is given not only from immigration, but all the phenomena of globalization inside and outside the territory. As for intercultural education of "second generation" we intend a teaching that gives up a mono-cultural vision centred on the nation and we adopt an intercultural and international vision. Such a vision considers the linguistic and socio-cultural plurality on an organizational level, on teaching topics and methods, on relations between teachers, students and families (Allemann-Ghionda, 2008). Specific measures for immigrant students start to enter a complex framework of attention to the differences. Thus, intercultural education of "second generation" is defined as an answer to a plural society that faces the problems linked to a stable immigration in the vision of social cohesion.

Italy has developed intercultural education in a basically inclusive framework. The application of the principles of the International Convention on the rights of minors has been oriented towards the assumption of universal criteria and recognising the same opportunities for all. Such inclination is highlighted in the ministerial documents. In particular, the document *La via Italiana* (Miur, 2007) remarks the contemplarity of actions for integration and intercultural actions.

International experiences show that the key question resides in the wider integration policies at a working and social policy level.

The work of the network *Developing Intercultural Education through Cooperation between European Cities* (DIECEC) (Green, 2000) shows two key points: the necessity of an integrated relation (school/community/family) and the complementarity between the intercultural perspective and the scholastic success research.

The experience of the city of Leeds, in England is interesting. With the association *Education Leeds* the English city has reformed the scholastic policies through an approach that places appreciation of the diversity next to the high standards achievement for children of immigrants, with the objective of equality of opportunities. The evaluation system measures success on the basis of efficiency, but also through the cohesion of students, teachers and students, schools. School is considered a community that represents an integration factor, while L2 programmes are put in place, peer tutoring (*Leeds Mentoring*), involvement of families, extra-scholastic cultural and sports learning centres.

Looking at the scene beyond Europe, the Canadian city of Toronto through the initiative “Equitable Schools” evaluates schools according to the concepts of inclusion and antidiscrimination. The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) organizes a welcoming system that considers different needs; realizes a sophisticated teaching system of L2; organizes the curricula according to the history of immigrants. The “Model Schools” present innovative practises, involvement of communities and families, services for physical, social and emotional wellness of the students, to ensure inclusion and equity without underestimating other expectations of the students. In Zurich, the pilot programme QUIMS comprehends the project for quality of the multicultural schools that then became cantonal. The project contemplates linguistic support, individual learning support, cooperative learning together with intercultural activities, used by mediators.

In Arizona the bilingual schools enhances bilingualism and literacy in two language and employs natively teachers from around the world. All students obtain literacy in English and a second language through a full immersion model. Learning another language helps students learn about other cultures and become more sensitive and aware of differences. The ability to communicate with people in multiple languages broadens ones' confidence and aspirations to understand others (Espinoza-Herold, 2013).

As emphasized by Santerini M. (2010), the current challenge of the Italian school system is to go beyond a mere social integration model to achieve "second generation" interculturalism model. The intercultural issue in the Italian school is closely linked to issues of social inclusion. The school takes part of a more comprehensive process that goes through the educational success of students of non-Italian origin, the employment and social integration of families and the value given to cultural difference in society.

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