



Intercultural values on School System The Italian case

abstract

The objective of this article is to provide a framework for reflection on the prospects of intercultural education, by taking into account the recent changes in education and teaching, based on information provided by National Ministry, but also the growth of the intrinsic sensitivity of teachers in Italy, which have oriented the choices of institutes, extolling the logic of "Autonomia" (Italian law that regulates the process of schooling system decentralization).

L'obiettivo di questo articolo è offrire un quadro di riflessione sulle prospettive interculturali della scuola italiana, prendendo in considerazione la recente evoluzione dei processi educativi e didattici, sulla base delle indicazioni ministeriali, ma anche della crescita intrinseca della sensibilità formativa dei docenti italiani, che hanno orientato le scelte degli Istituti, esaltando le logiche dell'Autonomia.

Key Words: Intercultural Education, School Reform, Italian context

1. Introduction

In this chapter we will attempt to depict the general scenery on intercultural education within the Italian context. In fact, its main trends can be outlined through four main dimensions that embrace a new vision of the notion of pedagogical approach, as follows:

- a) The dimension of knowledge and enhancement of diversity seen as an asset, leading to a descriptive vision of cultures;
- b) The dimension of exchange and reciprocal influences of cultures, that takes to a more dynamic idea of cultures;
- c) The dimension of empathy, of openness not only from an intellectual but also an emotional point of view, leading to a conception of values and ethics in line with intercultural education.

These dimensions are to be implemented through pedagogical practice. Hence, it is essential for practices to be changed: new key words and concepts should be at the basis of activities and educational innovation in Italian schools along with an intercultural approach.

The overview offered by this article aims to demonstrate that intercultural education in Italy, consistently with the international research agenda on

education, is not considered an extracurricular area of intervention, nor a specific curriculum. Interculturalism is a theme crossing all subjects promoting new ways of thinking both curricula and pedagogical practices: communication styles, management of educational relationships and guidance on learning processes. Projects can put the accent on one of the principles of the intercultural approach, according to the goal to be achieved (e.g. inclusion of immigrant students, internationalisation at home, awareness of locals, etc.) and focus on some teaching methods (cooperative learning, use of technologies). The overall idea is that an intercultural approach can be the basis for an ongoing educational shift.

Nevertheless, even when in Italy the research agenda points out the necessity of considering intercultural approach as a comprehensive and leading strategy, practices are still linked to very pragmatic conceptions. Daily activities in class, at school and with families, need to be analysed and deconstructed not only by researchers but mainly by the same practitioners (teachers) and families as well.

2. The recent past

The National Commission for Intercultural Education of the Department of Education, University and Research (MIUR)¹ first began to address the issue of intercultural education in Italian schools in the period 2000-2001. Its goal was to provide a theoretical insight into intercultural education in Italian schools as well as to analyse and catalogue the best planning practices in the sector. The political, cultural and pedagogical role of the Commission determined its two-fold approach: on the one hand it provided observations on theory, on the other hand it assessed current teaching practices in school settings².

The analysis of the three hundred projects gathered and examined by the Commission reveals a highly varied and disparate approach on the part of Italian intercultural education at the beginning of the third millennium. For instance, 21 “strategic” definitions were identified, corresponding to an equal number of different methods. The list of some of the projects, which can be found in the note

¹ *Commissione nazionale “Educazione Interculturale”, MPI 2000. The synthesis report, I tredici nodi dell’educazione interculturale [The thirteen points of intercultural education]* drawn up by P. Capitali, C. Garagnani, M.R. Lolli, M.T. Mircoli, G. Missimei, G. Papponi Morelli, A. Tosolini, can be consulted on the website <<http://www.educational.rai.it/corsiformazione/interculturalenodi/default.htm>> along with several projects contained in the CD-ROM *Educazione interculturale [Intercultural education]*, which collects the best practices chosen by the Commission in 2000. The site also offers more recent projects, developed by the teachers who took part in the first training course in 2000-2001, supervised by the Commission’s work group together with RAI-EduLab Intercultural Education section. The Commission, though not dissolved, was never convened from 13 May 2001 to 2009 May 2001 to 2009, when its composition was largely renewed.

² The Italian situation as regards school cross-cultural education at the beginning of this millennium is summarised well at a theoretical and practical level in the following work: A. Aluffi Pentini (2002), *Laboratorio interculturale. Accoglienza, comunicazione e confronto in contesti educativi multiculturali*, Bergamo, Junior.

below³, indicates the various issues, keywords and weaknesses, as well as the actors and specific activities, all classified as intercultural education projects. As regards the choice of methodology and time-frame of these projects, some initiatives were sporadic and occasional, while in other cases the projects were extra-curricular and could be considered as one of many educational initiatives. Yet other activities were specific and target-oriented, such as those designed to meet the language needs of recently immigrated foreign pupils. Other projects involving choices that revised or integrated the syllabus of a certain subject, or else there were inter-disciplinary experimental initiatives that involve the entire teaching staff in order to modify and improve the curriculum's contents, as well as the school's methodology and organization. On completion of its analysis, the research undertaken by the National Commission for Intercultural Education, 2000, defined intercultural education as an "integrating background" for the school development plan, and proposed to support the projects through the dissemination of keywords and exemplars, which in effect referred to the various approaches to the issue that the teachers had developed in the intervening period.

As regards working guidelines, essential in order to apply theory to the teaching practice, four possible focus dimensions or areas were outlined:

- **focus on relationships**, through the promotion of tolerance and dialogue at school;
- **focus on knowledge**, through intercultural commitment in subject and cross-subject teaching;
- **focus on interaction and exchange through the development of integrated extra-curricular activities** also funded by various bodies and institutions;
- **focus on integration through the adoption of target-based schemes** for foreign pupils.

Two members of the MIUR Intercultural Commission together with leading educational experts (Papponi, Tosolini, 2001)⁴ G. Papponi and A. Morelli Tosolini, offered the Pavone Canavese Education Board a not particularly rosy picture of the official introduction of intercultural education into Italian schools⁵ and identified the following stages in its development:

- 3 Italian as L2; emergency situations; cultural linguistic mediators; new technologies and cross-cultural education; local centres, adult education, intercultural centres; human rights education; beyond racism, antisemitism, and prejudice; orientation and remediation; the various expressions of cross-cultural education through: art, games, theatre, music; language minorities; European projects, exchange, twinning; refresher courses and documentation; immigrant family relations; the Mediterranean; reception, integration, interpersonal relations; gypsies; interreligious dialogue; disciplines and cross-cultural education; educating towards solidarity and growth; genre identity; democratic co-existence and new citizenship.
- 4 The paper drew on the conclusions of the Seminar organized by the National Commission for Intercultural Education, whose role was to provide some observations on the role, function and working methods of the commission itself.
- 5 What follows is a list of the dates and documents that trace the various stages of the official introduction of cross-cultural education in Italian schools. The first stages, reported by Papponi-Tosolini, have been integrated into more recent legislation:
 - *The 1980s*: the impact on schools of the first migration flows: a transitional integration

1. **empirical** stage: 1980s;
 2. **pre-paradigmatic** stage: since the 1990s. This definition refers to the fact that the concept of intercultural education in Italy was still only one of the alternative educational programmes available. Most of all, it was considered only one of the many aspects of the educational environment, whereas now intercultural interacts with multiple aspects of everyday life and is a reference paradigm/horizon of understanding for the establishment of a plural and multicultural society.
 3. **paradigmatic** stage: the intercultural horizon in which the various sectors of global society act (economics, politics, culture, law, science and technology) that the Italian school needs to assimilate. Today it has almost achieved its goals, in line with the Italian general public opinion in Italy, but it still has to struggle with prevailing theories that follow pre-paradigmatic criteria.
- As regards the intercultural predisposition of Italian teachers, the COME Centre

period, and first considerations on the concept of otherness and interaction between differences. Although few will remember this, these considerations owed a great deal to the first feminist theories on gender difference (which was also first denied by male universalism).

- *Circular n. 205 made on July 1990*: on the other hand it provided solutions to practical problems, and on the other provided a few but fundamental, prophetic observations on the definition of cross-cultural education: “*Cultural diversity enhances the meaning of democracy and should be considered a positive resource for society and people’s complex development process*” [our translation]. Moreover, this circular reminds us that cross-cultural education may occur “also in the absence of foreign pupils”, laying the bases for the notion of an intercultural paradigm.
- *Circular no. 73 /1994* revised cross-cultural dialogue starting from democratic co-existence and at the same time drew attention to the challenge to bring about an interaction between “universalism” and “relativism”;
- 1996: *ministerial directive on “Constitutional Culture: towards a new Paideia*. Cross-cultural education assumes a framework and structural reference.
- 1997: adult education and training: local *centres*. In a knowledge-based society (*Bianco Delors*) training became permanent and adult training ceased to be merely “compensatory”
- 1999: Intercultural education in autonomous school institutions: *the 13 points of intercultural education*. Experimental distance and on-line teacher-training programmes (broadcast by the RAI and RAI-MPI website -RAI, the Italian national television-) strongly adhering to the value of interaction between new types of information technology and cross-cultural dynamics belonging to the same horizon of understanding).
- 2000: Cross-cultural education as integrating background of the school development plan (ministerial directive 12 June 2000 no. 161).
- The 2002/2005 National Collective Labour Contract for school workers (art. 9) aimed at preventing exclusion at school, provided for incentives for projects on vulnerable areas with high immigrant density; it implements following ministerial circulars n.40 made on 6 April 2004, n.41 on 24 March 2005 and n. 91 on 21 December 2005.
- Legislative Decree no. 76/2005, on the rights and duties of education and training, resumed to and extended the concept of compulsory education (art. 68 Law 144/99), and defined the targets as “everyone including foreign minors present on State territory” (paragraph 6 of art. 1).
- In conclusion, in 2006 (memorandum no. n. 829 on 16 February 2006), the Department of Foreign Student Integration of the MIUR issued the *Guidelines for the reception and integration of foreign pupils*, providing a policy framework.

in Milan (Favaro 2002) conducted a research in 2002 on teachers' social attitudes towards the concept of interculture based on their reports on the projects in which they were involved.

In the words of the teachers who were interviewed, four aspects of intercultural education were defined, which corresponded to four different pedagogical approaches:

- The **aspect of knowledge and the acknowledgement of cultural contribution and difference**, which alludes to a rather static and descriptive vision of culture;
- The **aspect of exchange and mutual change and contamination, which refers to the dynamic and porous nature of culture** instead;
- The **aspect of empathy**, in which the – also emotional – approach, is to combat all types of discrimination and racism, which points to a value-based and ethical view of interculture;
- The **aspect of the approach to the subjects and curricular improvement**, which refers to a cognitive vision of interculture.

In 2004 the findings of the Intercultural Commission's research activities, together with an increase in on-going intercultural needs, provided strong incentives to set up network-based local intercultural centres in Italy, which had already existed in many Northern regions. Yet, there were few generic studies on the Italian situation that could be consulted. Indeed, from a methodological standpoint, what was required was a study on the same lines as action research. What can be inferred on the role played by such intercultural centres is that their mission was to develop cross-cultural dynamics, aiming to raise citizens' awareness on key issues such as peace, human rights and International solidarity. Pioneering centres were to be found in Tuscany and Emilia Romagna, already equipped with their own space, headquarters and a number of professional workers.

3. Ongoing transformations

Compared to the situation in 2000, today a radical redefinition of intercultural education in Italian schools appears necessary, in the light of potential challenges to education, communities and notions of identity. Some of the top-priority challenges are (Papponi, Tosolini, 2001):

The challenge of a plural and polycultural society: how can we design new rules for social harmony? Who are the actors involved? Which social interaction model should be adopted – adopted: the public *agorà* model or the private apartment-building model? Alain Touraine (*Id.*, Touraine 1977) draws a clear-cut distinction between a *multicultural* and *multicomunity* society. The former is a society willing to continually negotiate between different co-existing cultures; it is tolerant towards the free flow of cultural proposals. This is the republican outlook, i.e. the one distinguishing between citizenship and origin and assuming that cultural diversity should not prohibit or impede anyone's participation in the community as citizen. However, it does not assume, as *multicomunitarism* does, that keeping cultural differences intact is a value to be respected and defended. Nor does it presuppose healthy debate on the validity of the cultural solutions proposed; in other words, its predominant value is freedom. On the other hand, *multicom-*

munitarism assigns cultural difference the status of value in itself, thus immediately preventing any *a priori* possible communication and significant and mutually advantageous exchange between cultures, claiming that cultures should lock themselves up in their own community towers. It is Bauman who stated that a polycultural society had replaced the other two perspectives: “*Multiculturalism does not seem to be the most appropriate term. Indeed, it creates confusion, inasmuch as it offers contradictory meanings, which are actually incompatible. Hence, it would be better to do away with the term multiculturalism and speak instead of a polycultural society [our translation]*” (Id., Bauman, 2000, p. 200). In a world made up of differences and communities of meaning, such society should teach to live with others.

The challenge of citizenship: what does becoming citizens of a plural and polycultural society mean? How should they be received? What are the new rights and duties? What type of setting should be implemented for this new citizenship (Id., Geertz, 1999; Habermas, 1999)?

The challenge of constructing a new identity: what does experiencing multiple identities mean? How can one reconcile these differences? What are the methods for building relationships and interactions? What type of education? According to Morin, the plurality of identities as reference point from our perspective is related to local, national, European and global identity (Morin, 1994). Such identities are complementary and are linked to intercultural issues that make up the new *paideia* of plural societies, namely:

- The recognition and development of the feeling of belonging to a homeland ensures the growth, through multiple channels, of a feeling of unity and solidarity that is essential for civilizing human relations and making globalization more humane.
- The concept/idea of homeland implies safeguarding different origins in order to contribute to the education of Italian citizens and to raise awareness on the meaning of “nation”.
- The notion of citizen should be extended to peoples from places which do not have fully-developed institutions yet (Europe) or from those that have none whatsoever (the world)
- Solidarity and responsibility do not stem from pious exhortations but from a feeling of matri/patriotic affiliation that has to be fostered in each local community, in each nation, in Europe, on Earth. (Morin, 1994).

The 2002-2005 ministerial guidelines substantially continued to propose education towards civil coexistence as a synthesis of school educational policies as defined by law, namely: educating towards citizenship, health, social relations, road safety, environment and nutrition. No explicit reference was made to intercultural education, education towards a culture of peace, growth and difference. This left many teachers and tutors perplexed, and created difficulties as well. Nevertheless, drawing inspiration from the guidelines laid down in article 36 of Law 40 made on 6 November 1998 – which never expired – school teachers began to put the principles of teaching autonomy into practice, in order to offer all pupils “extra-curricular intercultural projects aimed at acknowledging linguistic and cultural differences, as well as providing initiatives aiming at mutual tolerance and respect” (Cf. L 59/97 and DPR 8/3/99). However, the ministry felt the need to re-examine the crucial issues of intercultural education, to reflect on its pedagogical foundations

and also on the possibility of an Italian path towards European citizenship, principles on the basis of which the school curricula urgently needed to be thoroughly revised.

4. The Current situation

Great progress has been made in the last few years regarding the two-fold (i.e. theoretical and practical) approach on teaching experience, especially since the phenomenon of immigration has become the cornerstone of Italian society. It could not be otherwise, judging by what the latest Caritas report on the phenomenon of immigration in Italy highlights (2006), namely: rapid demographic change due to ever-growing levels of multi-ethnic groups that settle in Italy⁶. MIUR foresees that in 2010 the number of foreign pupils will amount to between 488,000 and 550,000, which will reach 710,000 in 2017. The most recent official data coming from MIUR (2007/08) shows that the presence of foreign students in the national school system is 6.4% out of 574,133 units and growing consistently.

In the last two decades the Italian education system was compelled by the migration emergency to be concerned with the problem of integration rather than intercultural⁷. Nowadays it is clear that the presence of foreign pupils has evolved into a structural phenomenon, and involves the entire education system. Evidence reveals that all school development plans offer at least one or two cross-cultural projects, while the intercultural networks linking schools together are now common and firmly established. The publication in 2006 of the long-awaited *Guidelines for the Reception and Integration of Foreign Pupils*⁸ was crucial for prioritizing intercultural education on the basis of Art. 2 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), and on Art. 2 of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989). These guidelines were concerned with the intercultural factor

- 6 Data from the 2006 Caritas-Italia report: 1) There are over 3.035 million legal immigrants making up 14% of the working population. Italy has become a country of mass immigration, although this is not acknowledged by everybody. The number of legal immigrants has almost equaled the total number of emigrant Italians world-wide (3,150,000) and the country's rate of immigration is the same as in Spain, France and Great Britain, only surpassed by Germany's massive presence of immigrant workers. 2) It is estimated that the number of immigrants will double in 10 years (2016), all the more so because a substantial number of Sub-Saharan Africans will migrate towards Italy and Spain. In proportion, the Italian immigration growth rate even surpasses the current growth rate in the USA, considering that the population in that country is five times greater than in Italy. 3) Starting from large-scale family reunification (100,000 people per year), all statistical indicators show that Italy has become a place for permanent settlement. There were 116,000 new house owners in 2006.
- 7 With regard to this, paragraph 3 of article 38 of the Consolidated Act concerning immigration declares (title IV): "The school environment shall accept cultural and linguistic differences as the basis for mutual respect, cultural exchange and tolerance. To achieve this it shall promote and foster initiatives in favour of reception, the safeguard of culture and language of origin, and of the development of common cross-cultural activities".
- 8 Through ministerial memorandum no. n. 829 on 16 February 2006 – *Guidelines for the Reception and Integration of Foreign Pupils* – the Department for the Integration of Foreign Pupils of the Department of Education – Schools Directorate – published a document setting out guidelines for the reception and integration of foreign pupils.

in schools, in particular: equal distribution of foreign pupils, reception methods, custom-made courses for I cycle school diplomas, Italian language teaching and other languages, specific types of guidance, presence of language and cultural mediators in schools, staff training, assessment, and study aids and material. However, there are still a number of central aspects lacking in the document. *In primis* close family participation. Nevertheless, it undeniably expresses awareness of the fact that civil education begins at school, and should focus on the concept of the wealth of diversity. Only if we acknowledge different types of intelligence and sensitivity can the harmonious development of future generations be assured and the risk of generating an educational system remaining stagnant in the face of pressing and profound change be avoided. Most Italian teaching bodies have already approved a reception and integration agreement based on these guidelines, which aims at sharing and making uniform administrative, communicative-relational and educational-didactic practices, such as entrance assessment, organization of classes for student integration and personal help. This agreement includes family reception. Moreover, thanks to the guidelines there will be a tutor in charge of dealing with foreign students' problems in every institute. In order to encourage school-family relations, a brochure translated into different languages is given to the family upon enrollment; this provides explanations on the school rules in simple and clear terms⁹.

Hence, faced with a potential multicultural future, which in ministerial documents is still confined to considering the coexistence of cultural diversity as a spontaneous, natural historical process to which we will have to adapt, it is reasonable to believe that in Italian schools today intercultural is alive and well, and dynamic, when considering not only the historic process of coexistence among different cultures, but also the proposals for change and planning¹⁰. This is because autonomous Italian schools cannot expect to find solutions to the problems caused by intercultural contexts only in ministerial legislation. Rather, they should make the most of all the opportunities provided by a now flexible educational system. What opportunities for intercultural activities are provided by a flexible school "system" regarded as "supporting community"? In fact, there are many consolidated opportunities:

A) *In Italy, educating towards diversity* is a common feature of current educating systems. Nowadays, society is fully aware of this *diversity*, and requires all individuals to develop a positive attitude through creativity, flexibility and

9 In this regard, the Ministry's Circular on 8 January 2010, provides instructions and recommendations to integrate foreign students; and sets the limit of foreign students in each class to a maximum of 30%, starting from primary school, from first grades. This document also addresses foreigners' first hosting strategies, pointing out that "*students are required to have a good knowledge of the Italian language, which can be acquired at school by means of integrative courses; new methodologies and professional tools to bring innovations to multiethnic classes are also necessary. Also, an equal distribution of foreign students in the several institutes throughout the country is mandatory* [our translation]".

10 As observed by A. Nanni (1998), *L'educazione interculturale oggi in Italia*, Bologna, EMI.

11 The work undertaken by the UNESCO Commission in 1996 on teaching issues was completed on 17 January 1996 in New Delhi, India, with the adoption of the Final Report, also known as the *Delors Report*. Italian publication: Unesco (1997), *Nell'educazione un tesoro. Rapporto all'UNESCO della Commissione Internazionale sull'Educazione per il Ventunesimo Secolo*, Rome, Armando.

innovation together with the ability to pool resources (Delors Report, 1996)¹¹. Besides the social aspect there is an increasing number of initiatives in the school programme aiming to promote each pupil's potential and personal growth through custom-made courses. The school system is increasingly based on flexible and diversified standards, also in relation to the development of school autonomy, which is a widespread phenomenon in Europe. This new model of interculturalism in education, based on a vision of culture as a dynamic element rather than as an entity interacting with others, aims at educating citizens in a plural and global context. The cultural and linguistic pluralism at school is, in fact, the instrument to strengthen open-mindedness towards not only difference related to culture but also gender, personality and social status, in a view of planetary citizenship.

B) *The set of laws concerning school autonomy ensures the implementation of the following "flexibility systems", already provided for by the normative system, regardless of specific norms concerning intercultural impediments, but nevertheless extremely useful for any type of intercultural education programme:*

- Modular framework for the total annual number of teaching hours for each discipline and activity;
- The designation of courses of study that do not coincide with the lesson timetables;
- Implementation of custom-made courses of study;
- Flexible organization of groups of students of the same or different class;
- Grouping together of disciplines into areas and fields;
- Diversified use of teachers according to choices and methods adopted by the school development plan.

C) *Curriculum flexibility planning and methodology is now an educational resource in schools.* One of the tools used to implement curricular flexibility is the project. Projects are the most recent forms of teaching in which research is expressed at school level. Indeed, intercultural teaching-based methods are adopted, which rely on an analysis of initial data, constant *self-correction* and *productivity*, as the project also entails transparency as regards the results which need to be effective also on a communicative level. The project also entails *collective cooperation* and integration amongst the various components and includes pedagogical, organizational and economic cultural aspects. Hence, functional action planning is not the only concern, as working towards intercultural integration also implies research, development and participation. In addition, the projects play a supplementary *organizational* role, makes use of represent an *innovation strategy* that is widely practiced because they:

- act in a limited and specific environment, thus involving partial sectors;
- operate within temporal and spatial restrictions that facilitate the confirmation of results;
- enable educators to design and implement courses on diversity and integration.

In terms of theory and method, at least two *planning models* have been identified: 1) *Formal-rational*: the experts adopt a scientific approach to project management and planning procedures based on scientific parameters and competences. The user is the target of the project and is not directly linked to its

completion 2) *Participatory and co-developed*: the project is developed on the basis of theories shared with the target, their family and supporting network. It is implemented concomitantly with activities divided into progressive stages, in which performance goals are constantly reset in relation to ongoing processes. In terms of cross-cultural education, it may be useful to reconcile the two models keeping the processes open, but also ensuring uniformity and stability in the expected results that can be predicted approximately, but whose definition is essential in order to guide the actions of the various actors. Indeed, the project is also a data-processing activity.

D) *Integration projects are developed at the level of:*

- *the Institute*, built on an action and resource framework;
- *the "class system"*, built on given common goals, actors' roles and tasks for each discipline and assessment methods;
- *the student*, built on recognized personal and contextual resources and potential; the consistency between the different project levels must be guaranteed by an effective monitoring and assessment system, to be implemented with diversified tools.

Hence, like in the past, it is still essential to identify best planning practices - which are now diversified-respecting the school development plan and autonomy. These are also supported by local bodies and other institutions which interact together to achieve the goal of integration on the territory.

What does best practice in Italian intercultural education entail today? How may it be defined according to modelling principles? Within a given context, anything that proves efficient and effective and that ensures the achievement of a desired result can be adopted as a model or metamodel and, as such, can be generalised or applied to other contexts . As regards the context of intercultural education, we believe that best practice can be defined as that which questions:

- the concept of integration and notion of the school itself: integration that is not intended as assimilation, tolerance or inclusion, a practice of mutual dialogue and exchange, in which otherness is seen as a potential resource and wealth;
- the notion of intercultural education: culture as the nature of knowledge (cognitive aspect), a set of values, laws, regulations and shared rites (normative aspect) and as organizational knowledge (administrative aspect).

Rather, best practice should:

- provide a precise context for analysis and assess impacts and outcomes of intercultural education activities in relation to the school context and hence an assessment of the transformational capacities of teaching practice and of the system of relations in and out of the school environment;
- apply a methodological framework corresponding to the principles of acknowledgement: an assessment founded on an analysis of the key features and elements in the project in relation to the idea of intercultural education as communication.

Hence, the keys to best practice in intercultural education stress the transformational power of intercultural, highlight processes and theories, and invite to reflect¹². In Italy, a large number of best practices are addressed to teachers, so that they can apply educational methods designed to narrate their pupils' experiences¹³.

Apart from best practices and individual initiatives in favour of student reception and integration, a well-organized structure capable of supporting the entire national education system is called for, beginning with a series of shared *theoretical principles*. The critical thinking process on the issue of intercultural action has led to focusing on the fundamental characteristics of pedagogical procedure. This is because we are far from our goal, from an intercultural point of

12 For instance, from an analysis of the projects undertaken in the province of Milan show the features that characterize quality teaching:

- Ensuring quality guidance to foreign pupils (and their families) by allocating specific resources, in particular plurilingual material and the assistance of language and cultural mediation;
- Designing courses and tools for intensive teaching of Italian L2 before and during the period of induction to the school system; creating learning courses that can be repeated over time and that are also specifically target- and subject- based;
- Outlining personal development plans and in the initial stages adopting learning facilitation strategies such as: program adaption, school-text simplification, contextualization of content;
- Monitoring each student's tuition, supporting his/her projects, fears, disappointments, also relying on positive tutor and reference figures (university pupils, older foreign pupils who are well-integrated, mediators ...);
- Improving acquired competence and knowledge, recognizing, for instance, the knowledge of L1, as provided for community languages;
- Acknowledging competence in specific subjects through a course credit system (e.g. English, Mathematics ...) acquired in the school of the country of origin;
- Promoting extra-curricular activities for study assistance and personal tutoring, in addition to peer socialization;
- Advocating in schools and classes a climate of exchange, mutual understanding, cultural recognition, in order to avoid conflict, isolation and exclusion, and *ultimately* to build a common project and horizon founded on different roots and experiences.

13 The issues currently favored by education are the following: reception and integration, cultural anthropology, visual, expressive artistic communication, oral cultures and traditions, prejudice and racism, Europe and interculturalism, the family and school, multi-ethnic literature and society, teaching and learning Italian as a second language, foreign literature, "new literature" and so on. See a case in point: 1) Project "Not one less" in the province of Milan for the positive integration of immigrant youths (Triennio 2005-2008) <http://www.istruzione.lombardia.it/formazione/contesti_multi/carta.pdf> 2) *Best Practices for Interculture and Reception 2008-2009* in the Council of Ravenna, Local Immigration Authority. These address: a) *Teacher training*. To provide information, skills and tools to further linguistic and social integration, cross-discipline cooperation, and learning to deal with conflict. b) *Reception*. Aimed at teachers and pupils, to promote expression of self and encourage recognition of self as individual with important life experience: development of self-esteem; consolidate previous skills and knowledge; facilitate future cognitive and social-emotional development. c) *Interpersonal and cross-cultural* approach in order to teach pupils to cope with diversity through emotional self-awareness; ability to live within a social context governed by rules, cooperate, and interact without prejudice.

view. As late as 2007 project-based teaching was still limited to the local school environment, rather than adopting a more international approach. (Cf. Fiorucci, 2007; Gobbo 2004). Moreover, as Portera claims, “*Intercultural pedagogy, in Italy and in other industrial countries, lacks a clear semantic definition and epistemological insight*” (Portera, 2007, 289).

5. The Italian way to Interculturalism in Education

The idea of shifting to intercultural education in Italy stems from the important document “*Observatory for the integration of foreign students and for intercultural education*¹⁴,” that is entirely structured on another document, “*The Italian way for an intercultural school and the integration of foreign students*”¹⁵.

The four pillars that shape this document could be expressed as follows:

1. Universalism: education is a right that every child has, independently from their citizenship; children are considered as rights holders not only as being part of a family, but also as autonomous individuals.
2. The School as common good for everyone: the school is asked to host and retain foreign students within normal classes, avoiding building separated classes or educational activities that take the form of a classrooms as “ghettos”.
3. School projects based on students’ centrality and otherness: it is pointed out that diversity is reduced to assimilation or efforts of homologation of cultures.
4. Intercultural Projects: the school attempts to adopt an intercultural perspective across disciplines and didactics, rather than teach different things to foreign students.

The goal of the intercultural school is the promotion of dialogue, discussion and exchanges among cultures. Implementing an intercultural approach means to integrate diversity within a paradigm of identity connected to the identity of the school applying it.

The Italian way to interculturalism is based hence on the ability of appreciate and know about differences, on the basis of social cohesion in class, envisioning a new citizenship adapted to current pluralism and the continuing research of convergences towards common values.

School authorities and local governments are clearly and explicitly invited to give hospitality to foreign families and see them through the difficult journey in the hosting culture. The new problems linked to the “cultural clash” resulting from living in an initially different cultural environment are also mentioned. An interesting example is the frequent crisis faced by families in intergenerational relations, i.e. those parents whose children grew up in the hosting culture. Particularly, the school must contrast antisemitism, islamophobia, and other forms of resistance to diversity, through a considerable work on prejudices, which are

14 *Osservatorio per l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri e per l'educazione interculturale*, e-founded by Minister Fiorioni on the basis of previous experiences, 6 December 2006.

15 “*La via italiana per la scuola interculturale e l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri*”.

distorted images of a person or group of people.

Teachers are called upon to change their way of teaching and to learn to look at difference as part of the school context. In the past, teachers were a closed community and their curricula were designed on the basis of political decisions coming from the top, envisioning a specific model of society and of individual. Nowadays, the society has profoundly changed and requires to make a change in order to meet the complexity that characterizes the social fabric. It is also necessary to leave improvisation behind: not only should teachers know about the subject they teach but also be able to deal with diversity in class.

A new intercultural school is a desirable aim only if it includes all students at all levels. It's crucial to revisit curricula in order to understand which prejudices are delivered through it and which areas need to be deconstructed towards a new European identity. If interculturalism is the best investment for the construction of a culture of peace, then it is also a strategy to prevent war. The cleverest actions include teachers' education for intercultural pedagogy and also the ability to understand how to shape key competences for a lifelong learning society. (European Commission, 2006).

Nowadays in Italian schools, as well as in Italian society, intercultural education can be viewed in terms of comparison/collision/encounter. According to Borrelli, "the hoped-for intercultural self, the self that has succeeded ... ghettos makes exactly these three categories emerge. Such self puts its possible repossession of a new identity (post-modern, post-national etc.) at stake; in other words, it puts its inner balance, the balance with others and that with otherness at risk. This new form of identity is self-hermeneutic" (Borrelli, 2006:5). Hence, the contemporary Italian educational environment may provide a whole series of self-educational alternatives aiming to shift the present hegemonic paradigm towards new perspectives: "The difference between the hegemonic and the intercultural education paradigm [...] is immense. After all, the two paradigms are conflictual.

The hegemonic paradigm proposes the subjectivization of the self within cultural-national parameters, whereas the intercultural paradigm proposes a re-subjectivisation of the self as self-reconstruction in the confrontation with itself, with its being-other-than-self, or rather, in the mutual hermeneutic self-experiencing when dealing with otherness.

The Self and the Other are no longer antinomies, but two sides of the same coin" (*Id.*).

Truly intercultural schools choose to have a visible and unique identity; they also claim for pluralism, as a strength rather than a weakness; they are connected to five key concepts that synthesize the process of intercultural education: curiosity, knowledge, empathy, integration and friendship; they promote hospitality and participation at the center of all activities. Through this conception, this brand new type of school can empower the school community as complex network in order to improve the quality of education, and further, the quality of life.

In fact, the possibility and responsibility to start out empowerment processes at local level – in collaboration with other public and private institutions – belongs to school institutions. These processes attempt to implement positive examples of social organisation (rather than control) aimed at critically understanding social processes, as they are active builders of a social and cultural space. The results of empowerment are to be connected with the constitution of grounded networks

that support open participation, continuing the learning and governing of educational processes. This can be considered the springboard for a shift in education and innovation at all school levels (Putton 1999).

The intercultural school is not alone: it needs to encourage participation of all stakeholders, allowing them to bring along hope, expectations and fears; unburden the many prejudices and misconceptions that prevent people from understanding otherness.

Clearly, teachers are the first stage of this process; teaching is not a cold, mechanical activity but rather something into which they put their mind and soul and where their entire identity comes into play.

On the other hand, the ability to enter into dialogue, counsel and participate helps parents (and other adults) to bond in bringing up young people. In fact, these will be part of that complex, new future that adults can now only imagine.

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