



## L'EDUCATIVO NELLE PROFESSIONI

### Intercultural guidance for an inclusive school \*

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## Guida interculturale per una scuola inclusiva

#### Abstract

*The article focuses on intercultural guidance, drawing from the recent document “Intercultural guidelines. Ideas and proposal for the integration of students with migratory contexts”, elaborated by the Italian Ministry of Education's National Observatory for the Integration of Foreign Pupils and Intercultural Education (March 22, 2022) Intercultural guidance in school contexts aims to define an intentional project of cultural and existential promotion. The school serves as a formative space for the construction of human destinies from an inclusive and democratic perspective. Based on these premises, the article emphasizes the need for increased investment in teacher education so that they can acquire effective leadership to guide and support generative guidance processes from an intercultural perspective.*

#### Keywords

Guidance, intercultural education, Italian school, teacher leadership, inclusion

L'articolo focalizza l'attenzione sul tema dell'Orientamento in prospettiva interculturale, prendendo spunto dal recente documento “Orientamenti interculturali. Idee e proposte per l'integrazione di alunne e alunni provenienti da contesti migratori” curato dall'Osservatorio nazionale per l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri e l'educazione interculturale del Ministero dell'Istruzione (22 marzo, 2022). L'orientamento interculturale in contesti scolastici ha l'obiettivo di definire un progetto intenzionale di promozione culturale ed esistenziale. La scuola rappresenta il luogo privilegiato di costruzione di destini umani, in ottica inclusiva e democratica. Su tali premesse, l'articolo sottolinea la necessità di un maggiore investimento nella formazione degli insegnanti, affinché acquisiscano una leadership educativa efficace per guidare e accompagnare i processi di orientamento in prospettiva interculturale.

#### Parole chiave

Orientamento, educazione interculturale, scuola italiana, teacher leadership, inclusione

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## 1. Guidance and teaching in a multicultural school context

In the field of guidance and counseling, there appears to be a lack of research and interventions that provide contributions in a structured manner with regard to multicultural issues. Guidance from an intercultural perspective is associated with interesting theoretical, socio-educational, and cultural perspectives, particularly in school contexts.

Referring to *guidance* from an intercultural perspective implies the need to redefine its identity, both theoretically and practically, in order to effectively address the new requirements of a multicultural and heterogeneous school. Indeed, certain *cliches* referring to a “reductionist” interpretation of guidance in a purely motivational and/or attitudinal key are no longer applicable. Guidance and self-guided learning are becoming increasingly complex in order to meet the diverse training needs of *new* subjectivities in social and multicultural contexts. Migrant children and adolescents, in particular, should be cared for as part of an ethical-civil pedagogical commitment that calls into question the themes of democratic citizenship, justice and opportunity equality, and social and school inclusion (Sleeter, 2010; Santerini, 2017; Fiorucci 2020; Macinai 2020; Portera, 2020; Stillo, 2020; Fiorucci et al., 2021; Agostinetto, 2022; D'Aprile, 2022).

To foster a culture of acceptance and belonging, new interpretive keys and action strategies that highlight the role of guidance as a powerful change agent are required (Montesarchio, 2022). Living in the same environment does not guarantee shared values, dialogue, or harmonious individual and collective development. Discomfort or, worse, irreparable conflicts frequently exacerbate the relationship with multiple cultural realities. In this regard, we must begin with the school, which is both a micro-society and an educational institution. To make the educational system more inclusive from an intercultural standpoint, a new concept of guidance in relation to the new multicultural dimension of schools must be developed.

It should be noted that, until recently, guidance in our school context was almost purely a “practical-operational” commitment, referring to compensatory measures or welcoming practices to address the socio-cultural disadvantages of migrant students and to promote scholastic integration/inclusion. Intercultural reflection and practice arose as a “emergency” response to the presence of “foreign” or non-Italian citizenship students in our schools.

In the words of Michel de Certeau (2010), for years, we have attempted to trap differences within a network of *leveling rationalities*, ignoring the countless qualitative dimensions of identities, otherness, and belonging. Guidance from an intercultural perspective has been viewed as a ministerial and institutional response (circulars, proposals, reception protocols) to the new multicultural needs that have emerged in the Italian educational context, beginning with the 2006 Guidelines and continuing through the 2014 revisions (MIUR 2007, 2014). Due to the widespread recognition of the collective significance of the problem, these actions sought to identify a model that could focus on a set of principles, decisions, and actions related to migrant children in Italian schools and society.

A project of authentic reception cannot be realized solely through ministerial obligations. It is not sufficient to implement them in the classroom by compiling forms and reception protocols. Also, the concept of bureaucratic and technical educational inclusion, primarily understood in terms of an inalienable right to education, is insufficient. Instead, it is essential to develop a “humanizing” inclusion philosophy. In this sense, a cultural paradigm shift is required in order to rethink the educational purpose of the school through a proposal that affects the various dimensions of school, including the teaching profession, teaching-learning practices, curricula, relationships, classroom life, and classroom climate.

This necessitates paradigm shift from the individualistic to the relational-dialogical, which promotes concern for the common good (Annacontini, 2017). The right to be cared for and the responsibility to care should become the focal point of school policies. In addition, the development of inclusive school communities is part of an interactive process of sense-making involving various members of the school organization through the «co-construction» of norms, values, philosophies, rules and beliefs, and knowledge. In effect, building inclusive communities cannot be limited to a single educational profession; rather, the commitment and actions of all stakeholders characterize each school as a professional community engaged in participatory planning and building professional networks. The society of inclusion is only possible if human thought is re-humanized through the restoration of attention, awareness, listening, respect, and care for the Other (Polenghi, Fiorucci, Agostinetto, 2018).

This is the unavoidable cultural challenge posed to the school institution, which serves as a safe, social, and relational space for the construction of educational destinies as well as a privileged site for the construction of one's existential planning (Hooley, Sultana, Thomsen, 2018).

Students with migratory backgrounds have a variety of cultural and educational needs. It is appropriate to promote educational strategies that are not solely based on the logic of mere assistance, but rather on the exercise of an orientative function that influences processes of integral growth and overall maturation, the development of a new life project, and the promotion of existential opportunities for self-affirmation on the levels of knowing and feeling.

In this sense, guidance can be viewed as a pedagogical metaphor for the same educational action: to orient is to educate. Guidance as a requirement for a life project is thus an integral part of each person's formative process, with a promising role in the inclusive process.

Guidance intervention must accept the new challenge and become a valuable educational resource in order to activate and empower migrant learners, expand the spaces of emancipatory possibilities, promote identity reconstruction, and design and re-design their personal, social, and professional future. Clearly, pedagogically based orientation practices that aim to promote productive change do not emerge within predetermined, standard logics of reception and support protocols based on the prompt resolution of problems (even when it requires immediate action).

The timeline for promoting training practices is not that of "immanent necessity", of the fleeting nature of an accelerated and fragmented time, but of *Kairos* (Marramao, 2020), of due time, within people's authentic identities and life stories. Instead of the temporal axis of the tyranny of «urgency,» formative practices should be subjected to a diachronic/formative time. In the complexity of reality, this time allows the subjective space of experience, appropriate action, to offer support in confronting the transitions that define the unique life project.

As result, guidance thus becomes a strategy for reaffirming one's own talent. This is a challenging task that must be met by expanding knowledge, skills, prior experience, interests, and aspirations, while also encouraging reflective learning (Cunti, Priore, 2014).

Guidance can express its poetic perspectives here, drawing on the limitless potential of generative and transformative action to promote training processes and goals in multicultural contexts.

In this instance, a greater investment in guidance from an intercultural perspective is crucial, as suggested by a recent ministerial document that expands the scope of intervention with ideas and proposals designed to generate a genuine and concrete paradigm shift.

## 2. The new intercultural guidelines for Italian schools

The vision of Italian culture is constantly oriented toward the creation of an inclusive and intercultural society. In this context, the concept of intercultural education becomes inextricably linked to the new perspective of the *Inclusive education* model (Unesco, 2009, 2017). Implementing this comprehensive transformation model (Schuelka, 2018) aims to create a full inclusion school system to promote the enhancement of the differences that typically characterize various social contexts (Lascioli, 2014). In this regard the Ministry of Education (2022) recently developed and disseminated an important document titled *Orientamenti interculturali. Idee e proposte per l'integrazione di alunne e alunni provenienti da contesti migratori*.

Following a brief presentation of the fundamental references and the subjects targeted by the actions, the document offers some recommendations for improving the processes of integrating subjects from diverse cultures. Above all, it guides educational institutions toward reshaping educational organizations and cultivating a complete awareness of the world's transformation. This attempts to recover the uniqueness of each human being and regenerate a new pedagogical idea that is open to the possible, the future, and the utopian.

The document "emphasizes the importance of expressing the inclusive nature of our school system" (MIUR, 2022, p. 2). It is related to the values of the recently enacted Law 92/2019 "– *Introduction to civic education teaching* and the subsequent Guidelines for the teaching of civic education (2020). It is

also in line with previous documents (MIUR, 2007; 2014a, 2014b; 2015) and the established concept of an Italian school that is in a constantly renewing itself and optimistic about the future.

According to the *Orientamenti interculturali* document, the concept of belonging has evolved: “there is now a variety of diversity of belongings and sensibilities” (MIUR, 2022, p. 8). Based on this new perspective, the National Observatory’s Intercultural Guidelines propose two precise directions: 1) the specificity of integration proposals for individuals with migratory backgrounds, and 2) the universality of intercultural education, in light of a new characteristic of multicultural and diverse school contexts (Portera, 2019).

The importance of the document is demonstrated by the comprehensive concepts it expresses, as it traces an expanding path, gathering all the new needs arising from globalization, as well as the inalienable rights, duties, and responsibilities of the human person, and highlighting the growing awareness of interconnected and global situations. In reality, it is necessary “to view individuals with migratory backgrounds not as bearers of needs, but as bearers of rights and responsibilities” (MIUR, 2022, p. 35). The document exemplifies a context in which ideas, news, and cultural identities interact at an increasing rate, encouraging a continuous integrated review of knowledge, creativity and care in the selection of effective methodologies, and an intention toward open and flexible cultural approaches, with the goal of establishing an education for global citizenship as “a sense of belonging to a larger community and a shared humanity” (UNESCO, 2018, p. 14).

Technology, communication, transportation, the value of the human person, and the manner in which education is delivered have all evolved over time. Intercultural education is an ongoing process that aims to include everyone, regardless of their personal, economic, social, or cultural circumstances. According to this new perspective, education is understood as the synergistic co-presence of these foundational dimensions, which should interpenetrate and support each other, as each of them must consider and include all the others in order to be fully implemented (Milan, 2020).

The *Orientamenti Interculturali* intend to restate the following principles and normative references from previous Ministerial documents: “the right/duty of all minors to education; [...] the need to implement common and shared measures, as well as protocols of reception and integration in all schools [...] the deliberate support of integration processes that require targeted attention and deserve effective and quality responses, as well as timely, systematic, long-term, and consistent interventions over time [...] curricula with an intercultural dimension: in Italian schools, there is still a habit of re-proposing curricular content that is little open to the global dimension” (MIUR, 2022, pp. 16-18).

Accepting and valuing diversity have emerged as the new watchwords for teachers’ inclusive school strategies. Thinking about educational-didactic design in schools geared toward inclusion implies ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to grow in community, with full access to collective life and citizenship. In this sense, guidance in the construction of life projects is regarded and experienced as an educational challenge for the knowledge society.

The social organization that thinks, plans, acts, and welcomes as a living system is linked to the quality of people’s lives. Powerful ideas that invite us to reconsider our vocabulary and the words we use automatically, as well as to modify and enhance the educational and social relationships that nourish the contaminated essence of the *human community* (Morin, 2015). Giving words their proper meaning becomes a priority in order to broaden the vision of a still one-dimensional, myopic, and territorially limited way of thinking. This allows each individual to be liberated from the narrow conceptions of their culture of origin, to deny the human being the capacity for autonomy, and to liberate the “creative spirit” (Goleman, Ray, Kaufman, 2001), but also to reaffirm that “pure cultures and identities are an invention. [...], cultures have two characteristics that cannot be ignored: plurality and variability” (Fiorucci, 2020, p. 39).

It is not surprising in the global context to recognize the relevance of the concept of global citizenship education, which brings together many of the compelling values in contemporary education (interculturality, human rights, inequalities, environment, civic education), all of which are interconnected. A vision for the future of education aimed at raising citizens’ awareness of their ability to imagine alternative solutions to positively affect the planet through the exercise of their rights and duties in a highly interconnected, ever-changing world (UNESCO, 2018). Global citizenship education from an intercultural perspective is thus a difficult task that necessitates a rethinking of current school knowledge. It is not a new discipline,

but rather a fundamentally different lens through which to interpret the knowledge currently taught (Fiorucci, Tomarchio, 2021).

Guidance is important from a multidimensional and inclusive perspective because it is closely related to people's life projects and the systematic nature of interventions. Guidance is recognized as a permanent right of every individual, which is exercised in various and specific forms and modalities based on needs, contexts, and situations. Indeed, it is no longer viewed solely as a tool for managing the transition between school, training, and work, but as a permanent value in each person's life, ensuring development and support in decision-making with the goal of promoting active employment, economic growth, and social inclusion for all.

Guidance assumes a strategic role that requires all institutions involved to work together consciously in order to integrate interventions that have a growing impact on the entire society and, most importantly, on the life project of each individual. As an existential project, guidance refers to the possession of a continuous and flexible capacity for decision-making and choice, while also being responsible and capable of coping with the complexity of the situations that require such a multiplicity of choices (Loiodice, 2012; Formenti, Vitale, Luraschi, Galimberti D'Oria, 2015).

In terms of school guidance, the Ministry of Education's 2014 guidelines, which emphasize some key concepts such as lifelong learning, lifewide learning, lifelong guidance, and career guidance, define guidance as "a set of activities that empowers citizens of any age, at any time in their lives to identify their skills, competencies, interests (Traverso, Pennazio, Parmigiani, 2014); to make informed decisions about education, training, and employment; to manage their personal life paths". As a result, the school plays an important role in guidance processes, which can and must be developed through teaching for the development of basic skills. Teaching becomes an activity that aids in individual planning and teaching activities are carried out in response to specific needs of individuals or groups.

According to official reports, school guidance cannot be structured solely on predefined paths marked by regular transitions from one school order to another. Rather, it can encourage choices that are shaped by constant accompaniment, including reorientation actions. These actions may necessitate unexpected course changes and path changes, as they may provide new meanings and opportunities. As a result, guidance action serves as support for a process that unfolds gradually and steadily over time as a result of choices and circumstances. Teachers seek to comprehend their students' desires, passions, and aptitudes during this process, guiding them to make conscious and independent decisions (Ricciardi, 2021).

Guidance is thus a shared responsibility for all, no longer entrusted to episodic initiatives, but to systemic, structured, and coordinated initiatives capable of generating educational value as a shared, networked, and co-designed process with the local context (MIM, 2022). The distinctive feature of pedagogical competence is educational planning, which should be reflective and critical and aids the individual in the process of developing himself and his own life project (Brambilla, 2023). It is defined not only as the planning of formative moments, but also as a space in which a person can experience his potential and resources (Sidoti, 2020), the ability to set goals for himself, as well as the ability to cope with crises, difficulties, and potential failures. This encourages the development of a mindset characterized by the constant discovery and possibility of something previously unseen. A mindset that encourages and confidently supports anyone, emphasizing potential rather than difficulties, because each person's condition is changeable and exists in the constant interplay of personal characteristics, dreams, aspirations, and contextual reactions that may be hindering or facilitating.

The recent Ministry of Education document aims to condense the sense of a necessary shift in perspective in the way of thinking, acting, and implementing interventions to improve the linguistic and cultural heritage of all students, recognize plurilingualism, and promote religious pluralism. This viewpoint seeks to overcome the "misunderstood intercultural education" that has been conditioned by a folkloric, essentialist, and relativistic view of cultural difference exaltation. In this sense, intercultural education «is essentially a framing concept, a concept capable of giving unified meaning to a set of different issues that are enhanced by an ethical and political direction capable of harmonizing them. It is concerned with the social, civic, and, above all, political functions of education and is not contained within any specific teaching framework" (Tarozzi, 2015, p. 80). As a result, we must support and promote privileged educational spaces that foster innovative relationships, mutual encounters, intercultural mediation, reflection, and activities. Intercultural education should address the entire school population as global citizens in order to

facilitate the transition from multiculturalism, which is simply the coexistence of different cultures, to an authentic situation of interaction, enrichment, and shared growth.

### 3. The role of the teacher as intercultural leader

In addition to subject teaching, teachers are now entrusted with a variety of responsibilities. Some of their primary responsibilities include guidance and counselling (Baugh, 2018). From an intercultural perspective, teachers play a critical role in the development of competencies related to 'knowing' (knowledge), 'doing' (skills and abilities), and 'being' (attitudes and responsibilities). Teachers promote autonomous learning from both a personal (the student as a 'person' with expectations, skills, interests, and so on) and academic (the organization of studies) perspective.

Guidance encompasses both the relational spheres of welcoming, active listening, and recognition of the other, as well as the didactic dimensions of assessment, promotion of metacognitive processes, sense of self-efficacy, and appropriate motivational attitudes.

Teachers, especially for migrant children and adolescents, play an important role in assisting students in identifying and developing their potential. The teacher's role is to help students channel their energy into the various learning opportunities available to them (Mutie, Ndambuki, 2000) and to educate them in constructive tolerance and dialectical relationships with people from other cultures.

The preparation of the teacher for cultural mediation is thus a complex activity, precisely because it aims to foster mutual understanding and communication between people or groups from different cultures. Teachers promote future destinies and hopes at the level of existential planning. As a result, teachers bear a great deal of responsibility for bringing out the best in each student, in accordance with Freire's "ontology of being" (1970).

A reflection on the teaching profession from an inclusive and intercultural perspective cannot ignore the need for the development of a dynamic network of integrated skills, abilities, and knowledge, that serves as the foundation of professional action. When confronted with the reality of a multicultural and diverse educational context, it is common to approach the teaching profession from an individual perspective. Indeed, the constitutive complexity of this function must account the need for continuous adaptation to changing demands arising from the broader social and economic context, laying the groundwork for the development of a new competency capable of managing organizational and community dynamics, as well as pedagogical and subject-related issues (Leeman, Ledoux, 2003).

Consequently, a model in which the teachers are viewed as leaders can reflect this intercultural challenge (Lambert, 2003; Harris, Jones 2019; Bond, 2022). Indeed, effective educational change require appropriate leadership roles being played. According to Crippen (2010), once one assumes the role of teacher; one becomes a leader in the classroom, then in the school and learning community. Furthermore, teacher leaders can influence, encourage the sharing of best teaching practices, assist students, collaborate with others, and take on leadership responsibilities in order to influence the entire school community. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) define teacher leaders as: "teachers who are leaders within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others towards improved educational practice" (p. 17). In a more expanded view, Crowther, Kaagar, Hann (2002) define teacher leadership and its contribution as "action that transforms teaching and learning in schools, that ties schools and communities together on behalf of learning... teacher leadership facilitates principled action to achieve whole-school success" (p. 17).

The theoretical-conceptual core of this view lies in the principle of guiding or leading in the broadest sense of education. As a result, the reflection on leadership allows for an interpretive cross between the foundations of *educere* and *cum-ducere*. When one connects the leadership process to the nature of the educational relationship, one can consider its primary element of direction and guidance (*ducere*). The educational relationship can be directed in a dirigiste, coercive, and authoritarian manner, but it can also be directed in a humanizing and authentically pedagogical way. The genuine nature of accompaniment and guidance can thus be emphasized, as suggested by the particle *cum* (*cum-ducere*). This reflection can produce a different reading of leadership, not coercive and authoritarian, but humanizing and educational, rediscovering its authentic nature of accompanying and guiding in respect of the uniqueness of the Other,

which becomes a modality, posture, and willingness to care. In this view, teachers play a critical role in determining and guiding educational processes and practices based on the principles of inclusive and intercultural leadership. Specifically, teacher leadership for inclusion refers to a concern for the relational dimension of the teacher (mediator and facilitator) who is committed to promoting fruitful processes of encounter with otherness and diversity, transforming the classroom into a laboratory for experimenting with inclusive practices. Within his or her own classroom, a teacher leader can foster a sense of belonging, recognize differences, practice listening to others, manage conflicts, promote participation, establish rules, and create an authentically intercultural community (Bufalino, 2018; 2020).

On this basis, teachers can be viewed as activists whose primary goal is to assist their students in achieving their life objectives. Picower (2012) specifically defines “teacher activists” as “educators who work for social justice both inside and outside of their classrooms” (p. 562). She identified three “commitments” that empower teacher activists to advocate for social justice on behalf of their students (p. 564). The primary commitment is teachers’ conviction that education can simultaneously liberate and oppress students. Teacher activists pursue two additional commitments in order to resolve this contradiction. First, they organize their classrooms as caring learning environments, employing place-based and culturally-appropriate instructional strategies to empower their students. Pantic (2017) defines this as teachers having a vested interest in ensuring their students’ “wellbeing” and “access to equal opportunities for learning” (p. 229).

The intercultural perspective requires mutual recognition of diverse cultures within a given cultural space, as well as dialogue-readiness via co-construction processes. Culture is a symbolic system that organizes social life around common knowledge, values, and practices. In fact, co-construction establishes reciprocity and the possibility of developing novel forms of comprehension. Co-construction and reciprocity highlight the significance of conceptualizing knowledge as relational, or “inter-knowledge” as Santos (2014) defined it. Perspectives on contemporary social constructionism echo the logic underlying an ecology of knowledge(s) and intercultural dialogue. In dialogic education, a process of awareness results from the dialogue between teachers and students, all of whom are thought to have substantial knowledge. This knowledge can lead to decisions and alternatives that are critical to the success of the unique project (Lai-Yeung, 2014). This perspective allows us to see the teacher leader as a construct of knowledge that can lead and support the orientation and guidance process.

#### 4. Conclusion

Interesting theoretical, socio-educational, and cultural perspectives are linked to the concept of guidance that employs a formative approach in an intercultural perspective to bring the subject with migratory experience to awareness (Domenici, 2009). The challenge of guidance in multicultural contexts is thus viewed from two perspectives, that is a search for balance between two seemingly opposing and irreconcilable instances: stability and change. If stability is associated with security, certainty, continuity, predictability, memory, and roots, change in a transformative sense is synonymous with progress, development, and generativity. For a learner from a migratory background, living in an “other” context frequently represents a situation of emotional and cognitive fatigue. Indeed, loneliness and inadequacy, difficulty valuing one’s actions in accordance with a life project design, and life systems that differ from those of one’s home country are all intertwined. Understanding the dimension of change entails giving meaning to experience and reconstructing a life project, in the face of numerous difficulties. According to this perspective, guidance from an intercultural perspective entail placing the learner in a state of self-awareness and potential, activating the evolutionary process of personal development and emancipation, and continuously constructing and reconstructing the personal “life project” between the past, present, and future (. An intriguing set of implications emerges from this context, recalling the concept of intercultural orientation as a transformative and generative tool for promoting educational inclusion. It is not only the responsibility of the school system to promote guidance practices; synergies and alliances with the larger context are also necessary. To truly promote the human, civil, and social progress of communities, the school, as a context that is inextricably linked to others, will need to collaborate with the family, the territory, and the third sector. Community Educational Pacts, for example, aim to establish a network of social and educational garrisons capable of enhancing the educational offer and combating school dropout and abandonment.

Building effective educational alliances with the goal of influencing student learning outcomes calls into question contexts and forces them to engage into collective reflective processes, thereby encouraging collaborative networking and inter-institutional co-design (Bianchi, 2020; Castaldi 2020; Locatelli, 2022).

The guidance processes are interpreted from a generative perspective, which means that they are not only an educational practice, but also an existential practice that allows the subject in training to constantly re-construct and re-determine his or her own life project (Biagioli, 2023). Thus, generative guidance is positioned within a paradigmatic vision of change and the conscious construction of one's own identity path. Guidance enables subjects to discover their own talents from a perspective that allows the boundary to be explored dynamically and existentially (Mannese, 2019; 2021). The boundary becomes a constant demarcation between possibilities in orientation practice: the boundary between the self and the choice, or the boundary between the possibility of choosing and the ability to decide through actions.

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