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The process of acculturation and integration of second generation immigrants in the Italian school context

abstract

This theorical contribute is contextualised within the debate and the heuristic paths that have and continue to deal with the topic of differences, developing a cultural perspective to be identified within the link of education/ formative intercultural approach. By means of an intercutltural approach, the practice of mediation-negotiation integrates the perspective of the differences with the capacity of empowerment expressed by the ethic of responsibility. The formative and educative value of this contribute takes its place on the front of pedagogical reflexivity/reflection on intercultural issues. The cultural scenario of reference for identity and acculturation processes of second generation of teenager immigrants, integrated in the italian school and social context, is outlined.

Il saggio si contestualizza all'interno del dibattito e dei percorsi euristici che hanno affrontato e affrontano la tematica delle differenze sviluppando una prospettiva culturale che va individuata nel legame educazione-formazione interculturale. Attraverso l'approccio interculturale la pratica della mediazione-negoziazione integra l'ottica delle differenze con la capacità di empowerment espressa dall'etica della responsabilità in ambito educativo. La valenza formativa ed educativa del saggio si posiziona sul fronte della riflessività pedagogica interculturale. Si delinea lo scenario culturale di riferimento dei processi identitari e di acculturazione dei migranti di seconda generazione adolescenti stranieri inseriti nel contesto sociale e scolastico italiano.

Key Words: Second generation of immigrants; acculturation; integration; school context; interculturalism

The term foreigner, in the definition given by Simmel, refers to a meaning that sets up the position of being inserted into society as a producer of riches, against being an outsider because of not being a citizen:

> *"He is at the same time near and far, excluded and included. He comes from outside, but now is an integrating part of a group. Within the community, he occupies a marginal but positive position, which consists in strengthening the internal role, encouraging social change, and taking on an economic function that is rejected by other members of society or is not suitable for them." (Simmel,* 1908, p. 580).

Often, when second generations are spoken of in research, intended as the children of recently settled immigrants, a historic-temporal category is being overlapped with a demographic one (Oropesa and Landale, 1997). Thus it becomes ob-

vious the improper interchangeability of the terms immigrant and foreigner, two terms without overlapping semantic areas, which are usually used as synonyms, even in legal documents.

Second generations can be constituted of foreigners without being immigrants and should not be *tout court* confused with immigrant minors since the substantial equivalence of the two definitions is destined to disappear, as soon as they reach adulthood.

The universe of the foreign adolescents is represented, above all in Italy, by youth with very diverse situations (Ambrosini, 2009). The denominator is given by the migration experience intended, not only as the movement from one place to another, but rather as a radical change which puts the ties of belonging and cultural affiliation in crisis.

In this sense, a series of vulnerability and social risk factors are outlined with which foreign minors are compelled, in one way or another, to confront themselves during the necessary process of redefining their own identity in their new residential and school contexts (Favaro 2002; Ambrosini and Caneva, 2009) .

In the current Italian reality statistics demonstrate that the number of foreign minors, born in Italy, is increasing and that the birth index of immigrants surpasses that of the natives. This gives us a glimpse of the existence of a notably multiethnic and culturally-differentiated society, of which children of foreigners will make up an essential part.

Second generations are balanced by gender within single communities, the gender imbalance appears more in the representation of the phenomenon, than in reality: Italians think of young migrants normally as adolescent males.

Second generations, in a narrow sense, born in Italy by foreign parents, increase at a sustained rate, with an almost constant progression: from 2001 to today, they have grown by about 20%. Their quota, within the youth population, is destined to grow very rapidly.

Today, in major Italian cities, about 20% of all newborns are from a foreign mother. In the North - East it is 23% (Caritas – Migrantes, 2009).

As Ambrosini notes, the same expression *immigrant minors* is incorrect in the measure that it includes subjects born in Italy, not to speak of the paradox, to consider them fully fledged migrants just like their parents (Ambrosini, 2005).

The Council of Europe (Recommendation, *L'appartenence de l'étranger à plusiers cultures et les tensions qui en résultent*, Strasbourg, 1983) considers children born in the receiving country to foreign immigrant parents, arrived with the family or arrived in the receiving country because of family reuniting, and who have done part of their schooling or professional training there, as second generation migrants.

In reality, to define the meaning of second generation poses a problem which is not only *classificatory*. This appears particularly relevant for minors born in Italy to immigrant parents who find themselves having to face the drama of perceiving themselves as Italian, but not being recognized as one, neither by their own parents, nor by the society into which they have been inserted.

Some studies highlight that many adolescents do not accept being defined as immigrants because the term recalls the idea of instability, of provisional permanence in a given territory, which is not recognized as being part of one's own life project (Chryssochoou, 2006).

Speaking of second generation immigrants makes no sense: in the verb to migrate the idea of movement is implicit as a consequence of an intentional project which is not that of the children, but rather of the parents.

The result of the attempt to homogenize individuals on the basis of familial belonging, denies their subjectivity (Costa-Lascoux J., 1989; Moulins and Lacombe, 1999) and the peculiarity of children's experiences with respect to those of their parents, which is being substantiated in the passage to adulthood.

Phinney (1990) explains that adolescents, belonging to an ethnic minority, like all migrants, can chose between four possibilities of acculturation:

- assimilation as an attempt to adopt the major part of laws and values of the dominant culture at the expense of those of their own group;
- marginalization: implies to live in the culture but feeling alien to it;
- separation: implies to feel united with the members of one's own culture rejecting the culture of the majority;
- biculturalism, is the capability to maintain ties with both the dominant culture and one's own.

Studies surmise that biculturalism is the acculturation strategy most suitable to adolescents as it allows them to maintain the norms and values of both cultures, dominant and minority, and to choose on the basis of circumstance (Phinney, 1990).

Knowledge of the language of the hosting country and a self-conscious and valued ethnic identity are elements of positive acculturation. Other factors reinforcing the acculturation process are family support and **positive insertion in the school context** (Liebkind, 1994, 2001; Phinney and Chavira, 1995, Wentzel and Feldman, 1996).

The acculturation process involves, in reciprocal ways, although different, both minority ethnic groups and the societies hosting them. Acculturation is taking the shape of a process of social change and of individual development in which cultures of origin are reinterpreted and rebuilt through negotiation based on comparison of the ethnic-cultural components of identity, between one's own group and that of the hosting culture (Chryssochoou, 2000, 2004; Bourhis et al., 2006, 2007, 2008).

Identity elements, subject to negotiation processes, are represented both by the maintenance of one's own culture of origin, and the adoption of other cultures, and, in particular, that of the hosting context.

Such changes occur in relation to the social, economic and political sphere (Chryssochoou, 2004; Esses, Dovidio, Semenya & Jackson, 2005; Ryder, Alden & Paulhus, 2000).

Berry (1980, 1992, 1998), Furnham & Bochner, (1986) argue that, when changes can be managed in a welcoming context, acculturation becomes a learning experience as a positive consequence of adaptation, and determines cognitive and behavioural changes that are neutral or positive on social interactions.

The complex and systemic articulation of multiple and overlapping belongings, documented by the most recent literature, is outlined in this way.

The overcoming of the concept of a cultural identity *tout court* is foreseen in favor of a more fluid vision, repetitively built, buildable and rebuilt, a compound and modular product to preserve, reinvent, develop, and change through countless negotiations of intercultural identities.

Migrants derive their identity sense from the group they belong to through this bidirectional relation, which determines approaches and oppositions, openings and closures, assimilations and differentiations, and, as a consequence, can establish a positive distinctiveness facilitating dialogue and intercultural integration (Chryssochoou, 2006).

Adolescents are *self-builders* through two processes that are universal and interact over time:

- assimilation/adaptation of cultural identity
- evaluation of the contents of cultural identity

To positively face changes, new identities, and threats in the school context, the identity process will have to be anchored in practices of:

- continuity: despite changes, the self is always the same over time
- distinctiveness: to feel unique, separate, distinguished from others
- self-efficacy: a sensation of capability to perform, competency, control
- self-esteem: to feel worthy of oneself

If one doesn't manage to reach or maintain adequate levels of self-efficacy, self-esteem, distinctiveness or continuity, the identity feels threatened and strategies of contrast will be developed in the school context.

Only an intercultural identity, considered as a natural identity *tout court*, allows, in the complexity of contemporary Western societies, to include the multiple original forms of belonging that outline the specificity of each one and enrich the original sense of self (Bauman, 2003; Elster, 1995).

Identity is inflected inter-culturally in the school context by practicing:

- the dialectic of diversification/cohesion: only intercultural identity is the place of forming social ties as it is built by an interactive process of assimilation and of differentiation in relation to others, starting from plural, through a bidirectional movement of integration/refusal;
- the dialectic of particular/universal, of personal/ communitarian: it is an intercultural exercise to the difference and, at the same time, to the likeness;
- the dialectic of result/process: the intercultural identity implies a permanent act of identification which presumes both the identity patrimony, bequeathed by birth or through life cycles, and the freedom to express diversity and individual ethical choices.

Literature asserts that integration is the acquisition of bicultural identity and represents the best way of acculturation because, by maintaining one's own identity and adopting important features of the hosting community, one is moved toward cultural pluralism (LaFromboise, Coleman and Gerton,1993; Berry, 1997; Sam, Virta, 2003).

This strategy allows a positive image of the Self, to develop satisfactory social relations and to find a personal way to enter into a new reality, even if remaining tied to the community of origin, which functions as support and keeps alive an enhancing perception of belonging (Quintana, Chao, Cross, Hughes, Nelson-Le Gall, Aboud, Contreras-Grau, Hudley, Liben, and Viete, 2006).

Integration through biculturalism proposes the contemporary valorisation of one's own ethnic values and adaptation to the new hosting society (style of alternation of identity) thus permitting to open up to the new culture, to its knowledge,

and to aspire to a possibility of promotion, while recognizing oneself in the cultural context of origin.

Through the construction of a *double identity* (Schimmenti 2001), the adolescent integrates values of different cultures and, above all, shapes a double sense of belonging. In general, it has been brought to light that adolescents with an integrated identity obtain better results in psycho-social adaptation and in self-esteem, when compared to subjects with a marginal identity, and have a more successful school record.

Ambrosini (2005) identifies at least three different approaches regarding the integration of second generations:

I. structural or the approach of the permanent discrimination, tends to underline, especially in Europe (US, Canadian and Australian contexts are proven more welcoming with regard to the permanent settlement of immigrants; Sweden is an exception in Europe) the persistent discrimination of the children of immigrants in the work environment and the environment of education and training.

Second generations aspire to social roles and positions coherent with their education and training paths. Assimilation, as acculturation behaviour, implies the choice of not maintaining one's own culture of origin and to favour frequent contact with the hosting culture, and other groups that are in the environment.

As Dubet (1994) has highlighted, with reference to new generations of immigrants in France, the process of cultural assimilation, sustained in the name of common republican values and of citizenship, has been substantiated in a laicization of religious practices and in a more general homologation to the aspiration and likings of one's own age group and of the dominant social group.

This type of assimilation, when associated with the consciousness of differences and of the attribution of such differences, from the hosting context, still can lead to situations of discomfort, due to the absence of identity anchorages. As the riots occurred in the French banlieues in November 2005 have brought to light, "*this absence of anchorages may lead to situations of anomy if not of conflict"* as the historian Jacques Le Goff, interviewed by Pietro Dal Re for the Italian newspaper "La Repubblica" (7-11-2005), argued.

> *"Beurs, in the jargon of the suburbs, which has become common language, is what the children or grandchildren of the immigrants are called, those who aren't authentic Maghrebis, because they are born in France and studied in laic schools of the République, but who don't feel like authentic Frenchmen, although often having the nationality, because they know that they aren't accepted as true citizens. A passport isn't enough to be one, to take advantage of all the rights, enumerated and exalted from the official republican rhetoric learned at school desks, most of the time deserted, for refusal or lack of affection. "*

II. Neo-assimilationist approach, which highlights how the processes of assimilation between the immigrants' children are produced through the learning of the language of the country where they have settled, making easier progress in their studies, employment outside of the ethnic specializations, and mixed unions.

The social process of assimilation is implicit, not wanted, and invisible. It affects the social-economic sphere opposing marginalization and segregation.

Neo-assimilation abandons the most naive and normative aspects of the old assimilation, according to which immigrants should have had to mutate cultural

styles and traditional systems of value to adhere to the language, to the culture, to the traditions of the host society.

Brubaker (2001) points out two important aspects: the first affirms that assimilation is a social process that happens at an aggregate level, not intentional and invisible, consequence of individual actions and choices; the second holds that assimilation should be pursued normatively, not in the cultural field, but rather at a social-economic level to oppose segregation.

These research hypotheses find theoretical and empirical confirmation in the extra-European contexts most open to immigration (Canada, Australia, and United States).

III. Intermediate approach introduces the concept of *segmented assimilation*. It consists of putting under investigation, the generic concept of assimilation by inquiring in which environment, and for which aspects, and with which components of the native population, the second generations tend to assimilate. It is understood that different outcomes are verified on the basis of different immigrant minorities, and on different levels of education of the parents.

The dissonance between an implicitly succeeded cultural socialisation and a socio-economic exclusion caused by a discriminating society, especially regarding access to work, can cause the concurrent presence of a cultural assimilation and a social non-integration.

Such a situation may tend to produce phenomena of *invention of ethnicity* as a symbolic oppositional identity with regard to exclusion and non-integration. If schools don't offer opportunities to minors, but are discriminatory on the basis of race and socio-economic class, young males, deprived of positive models, without job perspectives and, as a consequence, of the role of supporting a future family, suffer much more marginality and acquire border-line behaviours; at the same time the number of young single mothers increases (Zhou, 1997). In social exclusion and economic deprivation an oppositional cultural is rooted, and is anticipatory of lives of loss of self-esteem and failure. Studies have shown how cohesion in the community of belonging and investments in education by the family of origin, even if in an urban context of exclusion, produce different levels of integration in the school and the job context of the minors.

Most recent research demonstrates that many minorities foster correct and fluent learning of the language of the hosting country, while maintaining their mother tongue and the passing on of the respect of norms, values and culture of their origins.

Portes states that such an acculturation strategy leads to a more effective integration through the usage of the social capital of the community of belonging as a vehicle to enhance opportunities of the children towards educational and professional success. An assessment of this thesis demonstrates that fluently bilingual students have more self-esteem, higher aspirations, and above average school results.

Selective acculturation is deemed the most suitable strategy to strengthen family and community values, and protect second generations from external discrimination and from the threat of *downward assimilation*.

Selective acculturation associates bilingualism with a low generational conflict. It permits an effective integration without implying a cultural fragmentation.

The conservation of communitarian identity and cultural features, re-elaborat-

ed and adapted, is a resource for an integration capable of keeping balance between belonging and strangeness, between adaptation and integrity, and represents a resource for school and work success of second generations thereby facilitating the integration path and reducing risks of external discrimination.

Its flexibility makes this strategy look like the one toward which the political-integration efforts of educational institutions of European, and more advanced extra-European countries, can be more fruitfully addressed.

To best adapt to the school context of the hosting society, adolescents swing in a flexible manner between different modalities of acculturation modulating and selecting them in a subjective way. They waver between belonging and strangeness, defining social spaces in which new definitions of multiple belonging find meaning (Andall, 2002). This demonstrates that there are not universal solutions, but each individual responds in a personal manner to one's own needs and requests of the hosting society.

The quality, the modality of handing down, the rooting, the consistency, the democraticity of the culture of the hosting country affect the strategies of acculturation and the modalities used by adolescents to reach their own psycho-social well being (Portes, 2003). School is the privileged context where strategies of acculturation pass through and where the premises for a positive integration are at stake.

The problematic articulation between the dimension of post-schooling socio-economic integration and that of cultural assimilation, represent an unsolved question in the contemporary reality of pluricultural societies determining the pathways and the acculturation strategies of second generations of migrants, such as shown in the following table (Zucchetti, 2002).

SOCIO- ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

CULTURAL ASSIMILATION

	low	high
low	Downward assimilation	Selective assimilation
high	Illusory assimilation	Classic linear assimilation

- Downward assimilation (downward assimilation in life styles, towards the oppositional minority culture, is characterised by low cultural integration and low socio-economic integration, by the assumption of a reactive ethnic identity, opposed to values and institutions of the receiving society, typical of urban ghettos and historically discriminated minorities). Assimilation of the youngsters occurs in the framework of communities characterised by deviation and marginality, within ghettoized urban areas where immigrants and natives belonging to the most disadvantageous classes live. The chances of exiting from exclusion conditions are scarce and second generations experience a worsening of marginality and unemployment.
- Anomic or illusory assimilation (is characterised by good assimilation in life styles, but by low socio-economic integration). It resides in the acquisition of

Westerner life styles, even in situations that lack the necessary instruments to access corresponding standards of consumption, based on exterior and consolatory models.

- Selective assimilation (school success and economic progress favoured by community ties and distinctive cultural codes, marked by low cultural integration and good socio-economic integration). The young migrant maintains or develops a defined original ethnic identity, strong but open to dialogue, reaching scholastic success and economic enhancement thanks to maintaining the ties with the ethnic communities of belonging, and giving value to distinctive cultural codes. A young migrant conscious of belonging to an intercultural society and economy. The preservation of minority identity features, re-elaborated and adapted to the new context, becomes a resource for the processes of inclusion, particularly for the scholastic and professional success of second generations.
- Classic linear assimilation (through the socio-economic progress the initial cultural identity is progressively abandoned and a good cultural integration and high socio-economic integration are reached). The socio-economic advancement corresponds to the acculturation within the receiving society and this, in turn, implies the progressive abandonment of the identification with ethnic minority belonging and with distinctive cultural practices.

Italy, although offering economic opportunities to migrants, especially in certain areas of the country, proposes a model of subaltern integration, conditioned by the issue of safety that is linked to the risks of radicalization of immigrated Islam, and of imported criminality (Frisina, 2007).

Schimmenti (2001) argues that the migratory experience is characterized by a series of phases:

10. the *impact* of the new reality, characterized by a period of initial euphoria due to the sensation of reached freedom and relaxation;
11. the *rebound*, often accompanied by feelings of disillusion, rage and diffused unhappiness;
12. the phase of *coping* that is the reaction to difficulties encountered;
13. the phase of *regression* or *emotional recharge*, which occurs through a symbolic contact with one's own country of origin.

If the young immigrant is capable of attributing value to his/her own belonging, the sense of ethnic identity can represent protection and be one of the factors that contributes to favouring good strategies of coping. If the group he/she belongs to is strongly stigmatized, the ties with one's own culture can interfere with the sense of self-esteem and of self-efficacy becoming a jeopardizing element. This seems relevant especially for those youngsters born in Italy to immigrant parents, defined as the *sacrifice generation*. They perceive themselves as nationals of the receiving country without in fact being recognized as such, neither by their own parents, nor society, school, and other institutions.

Second generations experience the tension between poor social image, connected to the marginal jobs of their parents, and the acculturation to lifestyles and the image of job hierarchies acquired through socialization in the context of receiving societies.

The second generation is no longer perceived as temporary immigration for work reasons, but as settlement immigration, lasting and definite, therefore mak-

ing the attitude of acceptance of the immigrant uncertain, based on the assumption of temporariness (Sayad 2002, Baldassare et al. 2005).

Family reuniting, birth of children and their schooling, increase the relationships between immigrants and the institutions of the receiving society, producing a progressive citizenship process that is *"a process which brings one to be a member and subject of the city intended in the broadest sense of the term"* (Bastenier and Dassetto, 1990; Bastenier, 2004; Saulini, 2006).

> *"From this perspective, the problem of the second generation arises, not because youth coming from an immigrant background are scarcely culturally integrated, but quite the opposite, because, being raised in more economically developed environments, they have assimilated tastes, aspirations, and consumption models from their native peers. Being young, because of the risks of non conformism, of common condition, of suspicion of not accepting the status quo, of foreign origins, therefore not fully accepted as a member of the society, determines a social condition in which factors that elicit fears, distrust and prejudice in the onlookers (scholars, public authorities, teachers, employers…) are revealed. The school and the society respond with caution, explicit or implicit, of the consolidated organizations, but at the same time experiment with new forms of social cohesion and unknown cultural identities, fluid, composite, negotiated daily, in a incessant jumble of antique and recent, of traditional and modern, of given and acquired, of elements passed down through one's upbringing and elements learned through socialization outside the family"* (Ambrosini, 2005).

Some of the scholars that have dealt with the comparison between the two different migratory waves, have put in evidence the increased difficulties of the integration of today's second generations, so that they come to speak of *second generation decline* (Gans, 1992). In this regard Rumbaut e Portes (2003) underline the incidence of two types of factors:

I. transformations of the economy towards a post-Fordist socio-economic structure *(hourglass economy)*, in which stable industry jobs are disappearing, as well as the rungs of traditional hierarchical careers, which used to offer immigrants, and especially their children, chances to enter into the middle class, and eventually to aim at higher levels of professional hierarchies, with future generations (the typical path *from peddler to plumber to professional*).

II. ethnic difference, such as it is perceived and stigmatised by the receiving society. The racial characteristics inevitably are passed on to second generations, given also the incidence of homogeneous unions (that is with partners belonging to the same ethnic group), and continues to effect their destinies, even when linguistic and cultural assimilation has reached advanced levels.

Part of the analyses on second generations takes up again the structuralist framework of the approaches which move from the assumption of systematic discrimination of immigrants: also children of immigrants are permanently disadvantaged and condemned to exclusion from the best jobs. School failure ratifies social discrimination.

In literature, there are relevant studies on anomic and oppositional behaviours of youth from urban districts, deriving not from extraneousness to prevailing social models, but, from the success of the process of acculturation which fails to find, firstly in the school context, and then in the socio-economic one, opportuni-

ties of fulfilment and reflects itself in internalization and in the practice of antagonist models, like the cultural and religious integralist one.

Young migrants are committed to the acquisition of their own personal, social and gender identity and, at the same time, to the exploration of their ethnic-cultural identity (Phinney, 1990).

To face the double transition the immigrant minor can draw from various resources. Amongst these, the role of linguistic competency is relevant. It is a fundamental skill during the process of acculturation as it permits one to express one's own capabilities (Ward et al., 2001).

Bilingualism helps in the process of acculturation, but it is not a determinant in the adolescents' process of social and emotional adaptation (Aronowitz, 1984). The relation between individual, culture of origin, and receiving culture, determines the polarity within which the adolescent development of youngsters, who have to face the *double transition* (the passage towards adulthood and the one towards the receiving society), is put into play.

In fact, on one hand, immigrant minors have the same needs and demands as fellow age group members of the hosting country, and share the same tasks of development and growth rhythms. On the other hand, the migratory experience brings them to face specific challenges, such as the learning of a new language, the insertion in a different school system, the reorganisation of daily times and spaces, the comprehension of new social rules, the definition of a specific ethnic-cultural identity, contemporarily to the redefinition of one's own personal identity and to a renegotiation of social roles and of individual values.

Culture, which ensures the migrant adolescent a sense of stability and certainty, becomes a less certain reference point, and the comparison with peers often puts self-image under deep discussion (Schleyer-Lindenmann, 2006).

Several studies speak of conflicts generated from belonging to two cultures. The generation of youth, finding themselves in such a conflict, would adopt values, and behaviour norms, that seem more advantageous, more useful, and more convenient (Camilleri, 1979).

Malewska-Peyre and Zaleska identify another choice criterion: there would be the tendency to preserve values and behaviour norms that are central and essential to their identity, even if maintaining them could bring disadvantage (Malewska-Peyre and Zaleska, 1980; 1984).

The presence of an unsolved dichotomy between original cultural values and those of the hosting society, can affect personal experiences of young adolescent immigrants determining different behaviours: there is the tendency to swing between values (*cultural commuting*), or, through passive acceptance or the acquisition of a negative identity, the culture of origin and the upbringing models are refused, or, through cultural mimetism (*hyper-adaptation*), one's own origins are ignored, and what the new country proposes is acquired.

Adolescent immigrants, that live the double transition, show a strong commitment in searching for personal solutions to the challenge of the migratory experience, trying to give value to experiences, especially the scholastic one, and to the interpersonal relationships they are having in the new society. Therefore it is the daily experience that favours integration as an identity strategy, which moves within the bi-cultural experience (Camilleri, 1998; Boubeker, 2003; Bosisio et al., 2005; Patuelli, 2005).

Daily multiculturalism (Colombo, 2002, 2009) is the stage of taming the differences in which there is room for change where social actors take the opportuni-

ties, by expressing small acts of resistance which often don't have long-lasting pragmatic consequences. Only those who have several resources at their disposal, try out longer term strategies of emancipation.

If foreign adolescents are not successful at school and cannot find room in the qualified labour market, they fuel a potential pocket of exclusion, of opposition to receiving society, and to its institutions.

Through identity tactics and strategies, adolescents deploy processes that anticipate the possibility of passage from one path to the other in diverse contexts, and over time.

Such processes of co-inclusion, together with wider processes of social insertion, characterize adolescent experience marked by the differentiation of pathways, not only in virtue of the family origins, but also of the quality and typology of everyday relations, and of the integration into the school system (Palmonari, 1993; Gasperoni, 2002; Larson and Wilson, 2004).

Such strategies cross over, partially being confused with the processes of acculturation. They can be identified, as such, by schematizing them:

- tactics of visibility: one's own ethnic-cultural identity is strengthened by taking pride out of the social stigmatisation through the occurrence of extremisation of the culture of origin;
- individualistic social promotion: typical of the market multiculturalism. New cultural products which find room in the market of the big urban centres are invented and an inter-culturality out of courtesy is improvised, doing folklore in schools, and attending initiatives to promote the value of difference;
- strategies of inclusion at a local level: when youngsters enter into public space recognised as bearers of positive diversity, for instance they are called to participate in intercultural initiatives and of interreligious dialogue, but once entered into a network with other youngsters committed at a local level, they move within scenarios of active citizenship, and contribute to a normalisation of foreign presence within the civic space;
- post-national strategies of inclusion: they put identification with one's own culture and being Italian into wider perspective: it is preferred to feel European or Mediterranean or citizens of the world. It is not only a matter of being included into a specific, and taken for granted model of society, but of being placed into a view of social transformation as individuals who feel part of a global civil society.

Second generations, educated in European schools and acculturated by media and television, show interests, life styles and consumer desires, that copy those of the same age group. Forms and ways of subaltern integration experienced by the previous generation are not considered acceptable.

Attendance in school induces acculturation to values and practices common to the age group with whom dual and group relationships are activated.

School is an influencing institution. It can represent the main context of assimilation and social promotion, or the reality where premises for marginalisation of children of immigrants are laid thereby denying opportunities of effective integration into hosting societies. Tribalat (1995) has assessed a certain social mobility of the second generations, in spite of not very successful school paths

The relation with the educational system appears to be articulated and it does not always confirm optimistic ideas of assimilation, or structuralist ones which are more sensitive to the issue of discrimination.

Some recent research, also European based, tends to differentiate the panorama of second generations, noticing different school outcomes depending on the receiving countries, and national components (Crul and Vermeulen, 2003).

Processes of internal differentiation and of polarization emerge with the formation, on one hand, of educated elites, and on the other, of layers at risk of social exclusion. The canonical explanations based on the human capital, that is on the lower scholastic success of children of immigrants, are contradicted: not only does equality of opportunities not statistically correspond to an identical level of education. Also the perception of a discriminatory treatment affects the motivation to study and the availability to education.

As a matter of fact, the *paradox of the three A's* burdens on the destiny of the children of immigrants: accent, ascendency, appearance. Accents reveal the foreign inflexion in the pronunciation of the language, the ascendency of the surname points to the place of origin; appearance, in the case of youngsters of colour or those with somatic features, even only slightly exotic, incites racial stereotypes. It has been observed that if these teenagers manage to insert themselves into the education path they obtain school results in line with the average (Favaro, Napoli, 2002). It seems that family motivation for continuing studies, and the time process of advancement, are the main reasons for the improvement of results, and the convergence toward the performance of other students.

The insistence of the importance of education by families can be noted, and is demonstrated by the length of schooling undertaken (Casacchia, Natale, Paterno, Terzera, 2008).

Family can positively influence the scholastic and professional success of children through the value given to the investment in school, for the realization of the family migration project, and the recourse to devices that allow children to overcome barriers associated with their status of immigrant (language courses, support courses, complementary courses,…).

Expectations and hopes, that immigrant families place on the educational system, are important leverages for the school assimilation process: immigrant families express more intense desire to engage in lengthy studies and more ambitious demands of career guidance than those expressed by native families of an equal social level (Vallet, 1996).

It has been observed that immigrant parents aspire to have their children do longer schooling as an important means of social mobility and therefore of social emancipation, and that such a propensity is not compromised even in the presence of possible negative results on the part of their own children (Cologna and Breveglieri, 2003; Giovannini, 2004; Giovannini, Queirolo Palmas, 2002).

On the basis of available research, it can be stated that the level of education of parents, despite the difficulties due to the linguistic differences and to the diffused depreciation of educational credentials, in the context of immigration, represent, also for the children of immigrants, the most important predictor of school success, no different than what happens for the native population (Besozzi, Tiana, 2005; Pagani, Robustelli, 2005; Vedder, Boekaerts & Seegers, 2005; Ravecca, 2009).

Admission programs of new immigrants, based on the preference for subjects with a high level of education and professional qualification, present as an extra advantage, the higher probability of quality integration of their children in the educational and professional systems.

However, schools appear as spaces lived in a diversified manner, given that each class is a social microcosm which produces variable relations of inclusion/ex-

clusion, of metissage or separation, chosen or suffered (Fravega, Queirolo Palmas, 2003).

The greater stability of the migratory phenomenon and, in particular, the institute of the family reuniting, have had a direct consequence on the increase of foreign students in secondary school in our country.

The welcoming and insertion of a pre-adolescent/adolescent to school, in fact, must take into account: the previous study path embarked upon in one's own country of origin, the greater difficulties in the acquisition of the new language (the so called L2), and the *identity earthquake,* which these children must face at the same time (Favaro, 2005).

In this scenario, the scholastic institution undertakes a fundamental role as an instrument of integration, even through active participation of local institutions which, with a networking action, support policies of integration of immigrant children. These policies entail the development of educational services.

The problems of integration that confront local institutions and schools are even more important with regards to foreign minors not accompanied, for whom the network between school and local institutions is more relevant. It is not an insignificant part of foreign children (more than 13%) who are beyond compulsory school age (15-17 year-olds).

Amongst problems detected at a national level regarding students of immigrant origin, the delay of schooling and repeating years, are continuing to emerge, prevalent in secondary schools, where 19.6% of foreign registered students are more than 18 years old, and have therefore gone beyond the age by which the secondary schooling would normally have been completed.

Overall, the Ministry of Public Education speaks of 42.5 % of foreign pupils not in compliance with their studies.

Taking a closer look at the difficulties encountered by immigrant students, it can be said that it is not a problem of school attendance, which is proven regular and stable, but of the delay of schooling and repeating years.

Delay of schooling is to be attributed to the enrolment of these pupils in grades lower than their registered age, a phenomenon common especially in secondary school, and which almost never implies an irregularity in the course of study at a later stage.

To mark the real gap between those who are successful at school and those who are not, is cultural proximity.

Among those that have repeated school years, more than 90% were born abroad, whereas these difficulties are not to be found among those born in Italy.

The current picture maintains numerous critical issues, but it shows how the progressive numerical growth of children of immigrants born in Italy predicts a possible overcoming of such problems, if they will be addressed with adequate intercultural educational measures. Headmasters and teachers responsible for functions linked to the integration of foreign pupils, seem to consciously adopt the intercultural perspective, promotion of dialogue, and cultural comparisons.

It is not only limited to the organization of integration strategies of immigrant pupils or special compensatory measures, but there is an attempt to activate projects and training processes in an intercultural perspective.

However, it is noted, that the impact on the overall school structure is not homogeneous, because, resistance remains in the opinion of interviewees, from some teachers and, sometimes, from families of Italian students, to assume diver-

sity as the paradigm of identity of the school, as a privileged occasion to be opened to all differences. It emerges that adolescents, and girls in particular, despite the complexity of being second generations in Italy, are conscious of their plural identity, and bearers of fundamental innovation for the practice of negotiation within hosting societies.

In our country a specific model of integration is proposed for several aspects different from those prevailing in Europe, based on urban polycentrism and on the centrality of the relation between work, community and family, as premises of citizenship. However it is only partially transferred within school where structural, normative and also cultural deficiencies are as such to prevent the taking over of a leading role in determining the complementarities of educational policies, at a local, national and European level with the territorial policies (social, housing, economic, etc.)

School has the unavoidable task of fostering intercultural relations of mutual enrichment, combating the coming out of radicalisms and of imagining a democratic system, stable in its fundamental values and, as inclusive as possible. It is the fundamental place of learning and aggregation, but it tends to reproduce differences. This process among foreigners is favoured by measures that send them towards short and vocational paths, those that, in fact, majorly tend to perpetuate differences. Technical schools, in the Italian experience, represent a choice of empowerment within training paths, represent the opening to future choices more oriented to self promotion, represent the area of transition to scholastic training open to higher and university education (See: Metropoli, 04.03.2007. We, children of immigrants. Dreams of Generation 2, *La Repubblica*; Farina, Terzera, 2007, 2008).

The major obstacle reported by these adolescents in the approach with the school system, is the knowledge of the language, an essential condition to successfully adapt to the new society.

The learning of the language of the hosting country to communicate in daily life is carried out quite quickly, but the learning of language skills necessary to study, of disciplinary terms and concepts, requires considerable effort on behalf of the foreign students, as well as attention and specific didactic competence on behalf of the school and teachers.

Numerous studies have uncovered the difficulties of teachers in managing situations of the insertion of adolescents already educated in their country of origin (Eisikovits et al., 2001). The impossibility to communicate and express oneself, in an adequate manner, is a source of discomfort, frustration, anxiety, and depression. Children who have brothers or sisters already educated in the country of origin are proven advantaged. Very often foreign parents do not establish contact with teachers, with the world of school. Reasons are referred as to different social, cultural, economic aspects. They might be overloaded with work, assume an attitude of delegation regarding the institution they entrust, or encounter language difficulties in the communication with teachers. Moreover, they may perceive distance between themselves and teachers, of which, often they put under discussion adopted ways of relating with children, or simply deem inopportune their participation on the basis of the diverse consolidated habits of the country of origin (Giovannini, 2004; Pomicino, Paci, Romito, 2008). If parents consider school as an opportunity to exit from isolation, and to build new social relations, opportunities of contact and collaboration increase, also facilitating learning. The importance of making the most of parent-teacher communication, and of promoting participation of the reference figures of foreign children in their education is, on the other

hand, stressed by most authors on these topics (Arayici, 2003; Giovannini, 2004; Rich et al., 1996).

The strategies of adaptation to the school experience, exercised by immigrant adolescents, are to be found in the strategies of acculturation, mainly in the following areas:

- cultural resistance, characterized by closure to language, culture of the hosting society, and the development of relations with peers of fellow countrymen, and the resultant antagonistic position in the relational school context;
- assimilation and adhesion to the models and to the hosting culture, with concurrent refusal of language and customs of one's own tradition, and the resultant position of sought neutrality and invisibility in the relational school context;
- marginality, characterized by feelings of not belonging to either of the two cultures and the resultant passive position in the relational school context;
- biculturalism, characterized by feelings of belonging to both of the cultures and the resultant active position in the relational school context. In this case, school turns out to be the privileged context to successfully adapt, a sort of laboratory, within which to carry out experiences with peers and teachers

On the basis of the different degrees of openness towards pupils with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, of investments in supporting their insertion, and of the practice of intercultural education as a value, different school outcomes are determined.

The possibility to legally enter, the recognition of educational credentials acquired in the homeland, the modalities of insertion into the labour market, the incidence of bias and discrimination, intervenes, to forge the chance of insertion and social promotion of immigrants, affecting children, and their school career.

Therefore, what should be insisted upon is an endeavour of mutual recognition. On this basis, a collective elaboration, and an identity co-evolution, become more readily achievable objectives, on a path of intercultural training undertaken in the school context.

This doesn't imply elimination of existing cultural conflicts, but their elevation to a useful resource to explore the sensitive zones of identity interactions: an added value to the deconstruction of stereotypes (Gardner, 2001).

The concept of integration in school is multi-dimensional. It involves aspects that go beyond the specifically linguistic ones and/or those related to academic performance. It is placed on the level playing field of relations and exchanges, with adults and with peers, inside and outside the school context (Favaro, 2005).

School is the primary place for social inclusion or exclusion and therefore, it is within school itself, that the institutions must start to intervene to counter attack discrimination and devaluing stereotypes.

School integration concerns the rights, the economic, linguistic, cultural, political and relational sphere of people.

The school, which is the education, training and acculturation agency par excellence, is assigned the task of representing the *genius loci* of the construction of the life in common, between people belonging to different ethnic-cultural groups, according to democratic principles of respect for diversity (Bocchi, Ceruti, 2004).

The modalities, with which each country defines and safeguards the right of second generation immigrants to access education systems, anticipate the attitude of the entire society toward the reception of foreigners.

Public policies of reception are important for the construction of social cohesion in contemporary realities characterized by towns, more and more multifaceted from the ethnic, social, economic, cultural and religious points of view, as they can offer an alternative to the absence of shared, and unifying values, through participation in political and civil life, and set premises for relationships of mutual recognition for respective differences (Crespi 1996).

Integration is pursued, in today's complexity, in an *intercultural perspective*: this means to practice a model, which is articulated along conceptual and action lines, recognizable in the intercultural educational paradigm.

The school system in our country has undergone, in an original way, the evolutionary phases of intercultural education, as experienced by European and Western schools in the last decades, and can be summed up as follows:

- phase of assimilation in which the insertion of minority cultures is observed with little or no attention to the culture of origin;
- phase of the multiculturalism which takes into account pluralism, but in a scenario marked by the risk of the relativism of cultures;
- phase of intercultural relations, still in progress, that shows itself with approaches and models, not always consistent, in which it is necessary to achieve integration of culture in reciprocity.

Migrants in the Italian schools have lived, in the last decade, on a course that can be sub-divided in two time periods:

- **the first period** stretches out, starting from invisibility, soon transformed into a bigger issue, which determines the understanding of the needs of foreign students, as an expression of marginality to be confronted, as a disadvantage to be overcome, only, through compensative pedagogy.
- **the second period**, is characterized by the perception of diversity, implying an intercultural approach to training, and to didactics, proposed to all pupils, foreign or not.

This process appears to be linear. But, reality shows evidence of non homogeneousness with regards to both the temporal and the spatial dimension: different phases overlap in national school system, alternating, often randomly, methodological approaches, which are negligent of diversity, and the adoption of perspectives mindful of differences.

The itinerary, covered by Italian school system, started in the 1989-90 school year, with the first ministerial circular letters on the insertion of Extra-communitarian pupils containing general norms, and the receipt of the Recommendation of the Council of Europe of 1985 in the matter of the teaching of human rights.

The regulations, based on educational practices and principles referring to intercultural pedagogy, aim at the reception of all foreign minors, independent of their juridical situation, in full implementation of the right to education.

The Italian school system, regarding the problem of immigrants, has intervened with limited measures on the didactic organisation, intended mainly as quantification of the number of foreign students per class, or on modalities of identification of interventions, anticipating, as a matter of fact, an organic project from the State.

Integration, more than elsewhere, has been demarked by emergency and necessity to urgently solve language and learning problems.

Didactics have been renewed in a partial and fragmentary way, without influencing the overall school structure through spaces allowed by school autonomy.

In Italy special classes for foreign pupils have never been implemented, in line with the choice, made in the seventies, of abolishing special needs classes and special schools for pupils presenting learning difficulties or physical handicaps.

Two models can be identified that refer to intercultural pedagogical interventions in the Italian school system (Lostia, 2001):

- the first one, typical of the Central-North, in which, besides school, local institutions and associations of the private social sector play a fundamental role
- the second one, prevalent in the South, in which the school institution operates on an exclusive basis.

The Italian school system has never solved the imbalance between North and South, and today, to this historical problem, the issue of second generation migrants is overlapping.

In both models, it is evident the absence of the Ministry of Education which doesn't appear amongst the promoters of initiatives activated within the school system in any of the territorial realities. Integration of foreign pupils in Italian schools is almost exclusively assigned to the school operators and to local Public Administrations.

The promotional nature of the Italian model emerges from Article 6 of the Italian Constitution where safeguard and constitutional validity is recognized for all linguistic minorities. The Italian juridical model, unlike the French one, offers the possibility to single students to express, at school, their belonging to a certain religion. The request of establishing Islamic classes, as well as the debate on the crucifix, have begun to uncover, also in the Italian model, potential conflicts which can occur between requests of various religious diversities in a school environment regulated by the Concordat of 1984 between the State and the Catholic Church (P. Bonetti, 2004)

The case of the crucifix, not raised by immigrant parents, but by an Italian citizen, who is a practitioner of the Islamic religion, represents an example of potential collision between diversities.

The case of Islamic classes in Italy represents a controversy amongst the safeguard of the right to education, such as a universal principle, the integration of immigrant minors, guaranteed by the Italian law, the principle of laity of the State and, the potential segregation, detrimental to the nature itself of the Italian constitutional model, which is a democratic model for the promotion of universal rights.

There is a high number of Islamic students, especially girls, who are denied the right to education, because their parents, interpreting in an orthodox manner some of the principles of the Islamic religion, regard Italian schools, as they are currently structured, a danger to the integrity of their faith and the faith of their children, and consequently, decide not to enrol them in Italian schools.

The issue of the relation between new diversities and traditionally recognized diversities remains an open juridical problem. The Italian model, even if it has given implementation to a policy of integration of foreign minors in the school system, which departs from integration through assimilation, puts under discussion the nature of the promotional model of universal rights, in the absence of a structured and consistent state regulatory framework. As a matter of fact, the balance between the safeguard to the right to education, the rights of equal opportunities of the constitutionally affirmed differences according to Article 3 of the Constitution and sovereignty of the State, enters into crisis.

It is evident that there is a need for a careful rethinking of the relationship between school laws and immigration laws, to avoid dangerous deviations and dis-

crepancies at the level of effectiveness and certainty for what is promoted by the school law, if limited by the application of laws on immigration.

With difficulty, the cultural, social, and professional structure of the Italian system is flexibly capable of being broken down and being reassembled, adapting, in due time, to the quantitative and qualitative dynamics of students, and to the changing scenarios which presuppose plural linguistic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds.

Giovanna Zincone (2003) underlines, in fact, that every action of assimilation and every design of functional integration in school, are destined to fail, if the reference framework is not entirely redesigned, innovating it through the intercultural education paradigm.

The contraposition between the diversity of Italian students and those of second generation migrant students are numerous and, in turn, various. As a consequence, they can be the cause of discrimination and acts of racism or social exclusion. The universality of the right to education (Article 8 of the Treaty on European Union, signed in Maastricht on 7 February, 1992 and ratified by Italy with the Law no. 454 on 3 November, 1992), becomes effective only if the national order presupposes answers which really assure integration.

The answer of institutions to the entrance of increasing groups of foreigners to Italian society has not been immediate: from inattention and undervaluation of the phenomenon, in the early 80's, it has been moved to urgency and to sectoral measures, relegated to the work context in the 90's, and only afterwards, to the acknowledgement of the presence of second generations of migrants in the social structure.

Between the end of the 80's and the beginning of the 90's, the presence of foreign students in Italian schools is strongly delineated: in the 1999-2000 school year, immigrant numbers exceeded 100 thousand. It is the turning point year and, from then on, the data is in a growth trend (data source: Ministry of Education, University and Research).

Students coming from third countries are the protagonists of the integration and cultural contamination of Italian schools. Second generations are the bearers of plural and innovative identities (G. Favaro, 2002).

The method by which the school system will be able to include second generations will be crucial for fulfilling the conditions of conscious, transformative, and creative access to knowledge in contemporary pluricultural societies.