Rita Minello, Juliana Raffaghelli

Intercultural valuer on School System
The Italian case

abstract

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

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

Key Words: Intercultural Education, School Reform, Italian context

1. Introduction

Considering general scenery, that we will attempt to depict, intercultural education trends can be outlined through four main dimensions, that meet a new vision of a pedagogical approach:

a) The dimension of knowledge and valorization of diversity as "a gift", that takes to a descriptive vision of cultures
b) The dimension of exchange and reciprocal influences of cultures, that takes to a more dynamic idea of cultures
c) The dimension of empathy, of openness not only from intellectual but also from the emotional point of view, that takes to a conception of values and ethics of intercultural education.

This dimensions are to be implemented as pedagogical practices; we emphasize hence focus on change in practices, with the emergence of key words and concepts leading activities and educational innovation within Italian schools with regard to an intercultural approach.

The ex-cursus of this article aims hence to demonstrate that in Italy, consistently with international educational research agenda, the trend is to consider intercultural education not an extracurricular area of intervention, not even an specif-

ic curriculum ones; what it can be said is that interculturalism is a theme across all subjects, that promotes new ways of thinking both curriculum and pedagogic practices: communication styles, management of educational relationship, guidance of learning processes. Projects can put the accent on one or other factor within intercultural approach, aimed to reach a particular target (inclusion of immigrated students, *internationalisation* at home, awareness of nationals, etc), and focus on some teaching methods (cooperative learning, use of technologies); but the idea is that an intercultural approach is the base of an ongoing educational shifting.

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

2. The recent past

The National Commission for Intercultural Education of the Department of *Education, University and Research* (MIUR)[1] first began to address the issue of interculture in Italian schools in the period 2000-2001, aiming to provide a theoretical insight into interculture in Italian schools, as well as analyzing and cataloguing the best planning practices in the sector. The political, cultural and pedagogical role of the Commission determined its two-fold approach, namely that of providing some observations on theory, as well as assessing current teaching practice in the school setting[2].

The analysis of the three hundred projects gathered and examined by the Commission reveals a highly varied and disparate approach on the part of Italian intercultural education at the start of the third millennium. For instance, 21 "strategic" definitions were identified, corresponding to an equal number of different methods. The list of some of the projects, which can be consulted in note[3], indicates

1 *Commissione nazionale "Educazione Interculturale"*, MPI 2000. The synthesis report, *I tredici nodi dell'educazione interculturale*, drawn up by P. Capitali, C. Garagnani, M.R. Lolli, M.T. Mircoli, G. Missimei, G. Papponi Morelli, A. Tosolini, can be consulted on the website <http://www.educational.rai.it/ corsiformazione/intercultura/nodi/default.htm> as well as several projects contained in the CD-ROM *Educazione interculturale*, which collects the best practices chosen by the Commission in 2000. The site also offers more recent projects, developed by the teachers who took part in the first training course in 2000-2001, supervised by the Commission's working group together with RAI-EduLab Intercultural Education section. The Commission, though not dissolved, had not been convened since 13 May 2001 to 2009, when its composition was largely renewed.

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

3 Italian as L2; emergency situations; cultural linguistic mediators; new technology and cross-cultural education; territorial centres, adult education, intercultural centres; human rights education; beyond racism, antisemitism, and prejudice; orientation and remediation; the various expressions of cross-cultural education through: art, games, theatre, music; language minorities; European projects, exchange, twinning; refresher courses and documen-

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

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

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

Two members of the MIUR's Intercultural Commission and leading educational experts (Papponi, Tosolini, 2001)[4] G. Papponi and A. Morelli Tosolini, provided the Pavone Canavese Education Board with a not particularly rosy picture of the official introduction of intercultural education in Italian schools[5], and identified the following stages in its development:

tation; immigrant family relations; the Mediterranean; reception, integration, interpersonal relations; gypsies; interreligious dialogue; disciplines and cross-cultural education; educating towards solidarity and growth; genre identity; democratic co-existence and new citizenship.

4 The paper drew on the conclusions of the Seminar organized by the National Commission for Intercultural Education, which had as its agenda some observations on the role, function and working methods of the commission itself.

5 What follows is a list of the dates and documents that trace the various stages of the official introduction of cross-cultural education in Italian schools. The first stages, reported by Papponi-Tosolini, have been integrated with more recent legislation:

1. *The 1980s*: the impact on schools of the first migration flows: a period of "empirical" integration, and first considerations on the concept of otherness and interaction between differences. Although few will remember this, these considerations owed a great deal to the first feminist theories on gender difference (which was also first denied by male universalism).

7. **empirical** stage: 1980s;
8. **pre-paradigmatic** stage: since the 1990s. The definition of the pre-paradigmatic stage depends on the fact that it was observed how in Italy the concept of intercultural education still proved to be one of a number alternative educational programmes, and above all was considered merely as one aspect of the educational environment, whereas now interculture interacts with multiple aspects of everyday life and represents the reference paradigm or horizon of understanding[6] for the establishment of a plural and multicultural society:
9. **paradigmatic** stage: the intercultural horizon in which the various sectors of global society act (economics, politics, culture, law, science, and technology) that the Italian school needs to assimilate. Today it has almost achieved its goals, aligned with public opinion in Italy, but it still has to contend with prevailing theories that follow pre-paradigmatic criteria.

As regards the intercultural predisposition of Italian teachers, in 2002 research undertaken by the Centro COME in Milan (Favaro 2002) illustrated teachers' social

2. *Circular no. 205 of July 1990*: on the one hand it provided solutions to practical problems, and on the other provided a few but fundamental, prophetic observations on the definition of cross-cultural education: "Cultural diversity enhances the meaning of democracy and should be considered a positive resource for the complex process of development in society and people". Moreover, this circular reminds us that cross-cultural education may occur "also in the absence of foreign pupils", laying the bases for the notion of an intercultural paradigm.
3. *Circular no. 73 of 1994* revised cross-cultural dialogue starting from democratic co-existence and at the same time drew attention to the challenge to bring about an interaction between "universalism" and "relativism";
4. 1996: *ministerial directive on "Constitutional Culture*: towards a new *Paideia*. Cross-cultural education assumes a framework and structural reference.
5. 1997: adult education and training: *territorial centres*. In a knowledge-based society (*Bianco Delors*) training became permanent and adult training ceased to be merely "compensatory"
6. 1999: Intercultural education in autonomous school institutions: the *13 points of intercultural education*. Experimental distance and on-line teacher-training programmes (broadcast by the RAI and RAI-MPI website) strongly adhering to the value of interaction between new types of information technology and cross-cultural dynamics belonging to the same horizon of understanding).
7. 2000: Cross-cultural education as integrating background *of the school development plan* (ministerial directive 12 June 2000 no. 161).
8. The Collective National Labour Contract for the school division 2002/2005 (art. 9) provided for incentive measures for projects relating to vulnerable areas with high immigrant density, being against school exclusion, activated following ministerial circular no. 40 of 6 April 2004, no. 41 of 24 March 2005 and no. 91 of 21 December 2005.
9. Legislative Decree no. 76/2005, concerning the duties and rights to education and training, took up and extended the concept of compulsory education (art. 68 Law 144/99), and defined the targets as "everyone, including foreign minors present on State territory" (paragraph 6 of art. 1).
10. In conclusion, in 2006 (memorandum no. 829 of 16 February 2006), the Department of Foreign Student Integration of the MIUR issued the *Guidelines for the reception and integration of foreign pupils*, providing a policy framework.

6 The reference to a paradigm touches upon the epistemological aspect (T. Kuhn and I. Lakatos), while the reference to a horizon of understanding/orizzonte di senso alludes to the hermeneutical aspect (H.G. Gadamer).

attitudes towards the concept of interculture, through the reports of the projects in which they were involved.

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

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

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

3. Current transformations

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

The challenge of a plural and polycultural society: how to design new rules for social harmony? Who are the actors involved? Which social interaction model should be adopted – the public model of the *agorà* or the private "condominium" model? Alain Touraine (*Id.*, Touraine 1977) draws a sharp distinction between a *multicultural* and *multicommunity* society. The former is a society willing to negotiate continually between co-existing different cultures. It is tolerant towards the free flow of cultural proposals. This is the republican outlook, namely, that it separates citizenship and origin, and assumes that cultural diversity should not prohibit or impede anyone's participation in the community as citizen. However, it does not assume, as does *multicommunitarism*, that keeping cultural differences intact is a value to be respected and defended. Nor does it presuppose healthy debate on the validity of proposed cultural solutions. In other words, it is consistent with the value of freedom as being the dominant. On the other hand, *multicom-*

munitarism assigns cultural difference the status of value in itself, in this way blocking *a priori* any possible communication and significant and mutually advantageous exchange between cultures, claiming that cultures should lock themselves in their own respective communitary towers. It is Bauman who stated that a polycultural society had replaced the other two perspectives: "Multiculturalism does not seem to be the most appropriate term. Indeed, it creates confusion, inasmuch as it offers contradictory meanings, which are actually incompatible. Hence, it would be better to do away with the term multiculturalism and speak instead of a *polycultural society*" (Id., Bauman, 2000:200). A society in which one learns to live together in a world made up of differences and community of meaning.

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

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

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

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

ropean citizenship, principles on the basis of which the school curricula urgently needed to be thoroughly revised.

4. Current situation

Going back to the two-fold approach towards the teaching experience, namely theoretical and practical, it has been observed that great progress has been made in the last few years, especially since Papponi and Tosolini delivered their paper on the Commission's work, that is to say, since the phenomenon of immigration has become the cornerstone of Italian society. It could not be otherwise, judging by what the latest Caritas report on the phenomenon of immigration in Italy highlights (2006), namely: rapid demographic change due to ever-growing levels of multi-ethnic groups that settle in Italy[7]. The MIUR foresees that in 2010 the number of foreign pupils will amount to between 488 and 550 thousand, which will reach 710 thousand in 2017. The most recent official data coming from MIUR (2007/08) highlights that within national schooling system the presence of foreign students represents the 6,4% from 574.133 units.

This means that, whereas in the last two decades the Italian education system was compelled by the migration emergency to concern itself with the problem of integration rather than interculture[8], now that the emergency phase has passed it is clear that the presence of foreign pupils has evolved into a structural phenomenon, and involves the entire education system. Evidence reveals that all the school development plans offer at least one or two cross-cultural projects, while the intercultural networks linking schools together are now common and firmly established. The publication in 2006 of the long-awaited *Guidelines for the Reception and Integration of Foreign Pupils*[9] was crucial for prioritizing intercultural education on the basis of Art. 2 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), and on Art. 2 of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989). These guidelines were concerned with the intercultural factor in schools, in particular: equal distri-

7 Data Caritas-Italia 2006: 1) There are over 3.035 million legal immigrants making up 14% of the working population. Italy has become a country of mass immigration, although many still do not recognize this fact. The number of legal immigrants has almost equaled the total number of emigrant Italians world-wide (3,150,000) and the country's rate of immigration is the same as in Spain, France and Great Britain, only surpassed by Germany's massive presence of immigrant workers. 2) It is estimated that the number of immigrants will double in 10 years (2016), all the more so because a substantial number of Sub-Saharian Africans will migrate towards Italy and Spain. In proportion, the Italian immigration growth rate even surpasses the current growth rate in the USA, considering that the population in that country is five times greater than in Italy. 3) Starting from large-scale family reunification (100,000 people per year), all statistical indicators show that Italy has become a place for permanent settlement. There were 116,000 new house owners in 2006.

8 With regard to this, paragraph 3 of article 38 of the Consolidated Act concerning immigration declares(title IV): "The school environment shall accept cultural and linguistic differences as the basis for mutual respect, cultural exchange and tolerance. To achieve this it shall promote and foster initiatives in favour of reception, the safeguard of culture and language of origin, and of the development of common cross-cultural activities".

9 Through ministerial memorandum no. 829 of 16 February 2006 - *Guidelines for the Reception and Integration of Foreign Pupils* - the Department for the Integration of Foreign Pupils of the Department of Education – Schools Directorate – published a document setting out guidelines for the reception and integration of foreign pupils.

bution of foreign pupils, reception methods, custom made courses for I cycle school diplomas, Italian language teaching and other languages, specific types of guidance, presence of language and cultural mediators in schools, staff training, assessment, and study aids and material. However, there are still a number of central aspects lacking in the document, *in primis* close family participation. Nevertheless, it undeniably expresses awareness of the fact that civil education begins at school, and should focus on the concept of the wealth of diversity. Only in this way can the harmonious development of future generations be assured, by acknowledging different types of intelligence and sensitivity in order to avoid the risk of generating an educational system that remains stagnant in the face of pressing, profound change. Most of the Italian teaching bodies have already approved a reception and integration agreement based on the guidelines, which aims at sharing and making uniform administrative, communicative-relational and educational-didactic practices, such as entrance assessment, organization of classes for student integration and personal help. This agreement includes family reception. Moreover, thanks to the guidelines a tutor responsible for dealing with foreign student problems is present in each institute. In order to encourage school-family relations, on enrollment a brochure translated into different languages is given to the family, which clearly and simply explains how the school functions[10].

Hence, faced with a potential multicultural future, which in ministerial documents is still confined to considering the coexistence of cultural diversity as a spontaneous, natural historical process to which we will have to adapt, it is reasonable to believe that in Italian schools today interculture is alive and well, and dynamic, when considering not only the historic process of coexistence among different cultures, but also the proposals for change and planning[11]. This is because the autonomous Italian school cannot seek its resources for dealing with intercultural contexts merely in ministerial legislation, but above all in the opportunities provided by an educational system which has become flexible. What opportunities for intercultural activities are provided by a flexible school "system" regarded as "support community" ? In fact, there are many consolidated opportunities:

A. *In Italy*, *educating towards diversity,* is a normal feature of current educating systems. Nowadays, society is wholly aware of this *diversity*, and requires all individuals to develop a positive attitude through creativity, flexibility, and innovation together with the ability to pool resources (Delors Report, 1996)[12]. Besides the social aspect, there are an increasing number of initiatives in the school programme

10 In this regard, the Ministry's Circular of 8 January 2010, provides instructions and recomendations to integrate foreign studens; and fixs the limit of foreign students up to 30% within the classes at school, from first grades. This document also addresses foreigners' first hosting strategies, pointing out that "A good level of knowledge of italian language, to be learnt at school thorugh integrative courses is necessary, as well as the adoption of new methodologies and professional instruments to innovate within a multiethnic class; but an equal distribution of foreigners among the several institutions on the territory is mandatory"

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

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

aiming to promote each pupils' potential and their personal growth through custom-made courses. The school system is increasingly based on flexible and diversified standards, also in relation to the development of school autonomy which is a widespread phenomenon in Europe. This new model of interculturalism in education, based on a vision of culture as dynamic element rather than as entity interacting with others, aims at educate citizens in a plural and global context. The cultural and linguistic pluralism at school is, in fact, the instrument to strengthen the openness to the difference, not only cultural, but also of gender, personality, social level, in a view of a planetary citizenship.

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

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

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

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

In terms of theory and method, at least two *planning models* have been identified: 1) *Formal-rational*: the experts adopt a scientific approach to project man-

agement, planning procedures based on scientific parameters and competences. The user is the project target who is considered separate from the project's completion. 2) *Participatory and co-developed*: the project is developed on the basis of theories shared with the target, family and supporting network. It is implemented concomitantly with activities in progressive phases in which performance goals are constantly reset in relation to ongoing processes. realizza contestualmente all'azione secondo sviluppi progressivi in cui si rideterminano continuamente obiettivi e esiti in relazione ai processi in corso. In terms of cross-cultural education it may be useful to reconcile the two models keeping the processes open, but also ensuring uniformity and stability in the expected results that can be predicted approximately, but whose definition is essential in order to guide the actions of the various actors. Indeed, the project is also a data-processing activity.

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

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

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

What does best practice in Italian intercultural education entail today? How may it be defined according to modelling principles? Within a given context, whatever ensures the achievement of a desired result, assessed for its efficiency and effectiveness and hence may be adopted as a model or metamodel, and as such may be generalized or applied to other contexts. As regards the context of intercultural education, we believe that best practice can be defined as that which questions:

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

Rather, best practice should:

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

Hence, the keys to best practice in intercultural education stress the transformational power of interculture, highlight processes and theories, and provoke reflection[13]. In Italy, a large number of best practices are addressed to teachers, so that they can apply educational methods designed to narrate their pupils' experiences[14].

Apart from best practices and individual initiatives in favour of student reception and integration, nevertheless, a well-organized structure that is capable of supporting the entire national education system is called for, beginning with a series of shared *theoretical principles*. The critical thinking process on the issue of intercultural action has led to focusing on the fundamental characteristics of pedagogical procedure. This is because we are far from the goals, from an intercultural point of view. As late as 2007 project-based teaching was still limited to the local school environment, rather than adopting a more international appraoch. (Cf.

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

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

Fiorucci, 2007;. Gobbo 2004). Moreover, as Portera claims, "Intercultural pedagogy, in Italy and in other industrial countries, lacks a clear semantic definition and epistemological insight." (Portera, 2007:289).

5. The Italian way for Interculturalism in Education.

The perspective of shifting in intercultural education in Italy come out from the important document "*Observatory for the integration of foreign students and for intercultural education*[15]," that has build entirely on another significant document "*The Italian way for an intercultural school and the integration of foreign students*"[16].

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

1. Universalism: education is a right that every kid has, independently of its citizenship; the children is considered a rights' holder not only as being part of a family, but also as autonomous individual
2. The School as common well for everyone: the school is asked to host and retain foreign students within normal classes, avoiding building separated clases or education activities that take the form of a classrooms as "ghettos".
3. School projects based on centrality of the student with regard to the other: it is highlighted that diversity is riduced to assimilation or efforts of homologation of cultures.
4. Intercultural Projects: the school attempts to adopt an intercultural perspective across disciplines and didactics, rather to teach differencialy to foreign students

The intercultural school has as goal the promotion of dialogue, discussion and exchanges among cultures. The option of an intercultural approach means to assume diversity within a paradigm of identity connected to the same school's identity.

The italian way of interculturalism is based hence on the capacity of appreaciate and conoscere the differences, on the base of social cohesion in class, envisioning a new citizenship adapted to current pluralism and the continuing research of convergencies towards common values.

With regard to the relationships with foreign students' families, it is clear and explicit the invitation to school authorities and local government to give hospitality to the foreign family accompanying it in a smart way within the difficult "trip" into the hosting culture. It is mentioned also the new problems linked to the "clash of cultures" resulting from living in a different cultural environment, at the beginning; being a critical example, the frequent crisis afforded by families in intergenerational relations, among parents and sons/daughters brought up in the hosting culture. Particularly the school must contrast antisemitism, islamophoby, and other forms of resistence to diversity, through a consistent work on prejudices, that are distorted images against a person or group of people.

15 *Osservatorio per l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri e per l'educazione interculturale*, established from the Ministry Fioron basing on previous experices, the 6 december 2006.

16 *"La via italiana per la scuola interculturale e l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri"*

The teacher is called to change the way of teaching, getting used to read the difference as part of the school context. Some years ago, the teacher represented a national society, closed inward, which curriculum was tailored on the bases of decisions made at a political top from an envisioned model of society and individual. Nowadays, the society has profoundly changed and it highlights the necessity to change in order to meet the complexity that characterizes social tissue. It is also mandatory to live behind improvisation within the class: the teacher is no longer allowed to just know about the matter he/she teaches, but he/she is obliged to open dialogue with diversity in class.

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

In Italian schools nowadays, as in Italian society, intercultural education can be viewed in terms of comparison/collision/encounter. According to Borrelli, precisely from the "interconnection of these three categories emerges the hoped-for intercultural self, the self that has succeeded in transcending itself and thus the linguisticity of its cultural ghettos, which puts at stake its possible repossession of a new identity (post-modern, post-national, whatever)- in other words, it risks, more important, its re-equilibrium with itself, with others, and with otherness. The new form of identity is self-hermeneutic" (Borrelli, 2006:5). Hence, the contemporary Italian education environment may provide a whole series of self-educational alternatives aiming to shift the hegemonic paradigm towards new perspectives: "The difference between the hegemonic and intercultural education paradigm […] is immense. After all, the two paradigms are conflictual.

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

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

The true intercultural school makes a choice for a visibile and unique identity; it also claim for pluralism, as a strengh rather as a critical point; it is committed with five key concepts that synthesize the process of intercultural education: curiosity, knowledge, emphaty, integration and friendship; it enacts hospitality and participation at the center of all activities. Through this conception, this new brand school encourages empowerment of school community as a complex network in order to improve the quality of education, and further, the quality of life.

In fact, to the school institutions belong the possibility and responsibility to enact processes of empowerment at the local level, linked to other public and private institutions. These processes consist on the tentative of acquiring positive modes of social organization (rather of control) that aim to understand critically the social process, being active builder of a social and cultural space. The results of empowerment are to be connected with the constitution of grounded networks that sup-

port open participation, continuing learning and governance of educational processes. This can be considered the springboard of educational shifting and innovation at all school levels (Putton 1999).

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

Teachers, clearly are the first level of this process, since teaching is not a cold, mechanical activity, but something where the teacher puts his/her mind and soul, where his/her entire identity comes to play.

From the other hand, the capacity to undertake dialogue, counseling, participation, make the parents (and other adults) become *joint venturers* in the process of bringing up young people as part of that complex, new tomorrow that will be completely different of what adults live today, and of what they can even imagine.

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