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Cinzia Pica-Smith

*Assumption College*, [cpicasmith@assumption.edu](mailto:cpicasmith@assumption.edu)

Rina Manuela Contini

*University of Chieti-Pescara*

Bob Ives

*University of Nevada, Reno*

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## Is Diversity Enough? Exploring Intergroup Friendships in Italian Multiethnic Schools

Cinzia Pica-Smith\*, Rina Manuela Contini\*\* and Bob Ives\*\*\*

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*Abstract:* Italian schools are increasingly diverse spaces in which children of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, religious beliefs, and cultural-linguistic practices interact daily. Thus, these spaces provide fertile ground for a continuum of relational experiences from positive intergroup relationships and friendships to tensions and experiences of discrimination and marginalization. Research has demonstrated that diverse spaces can be ideal for positive intergroup contact, intergroup dialogue and the formation of intergroup friendship, which have been associated with prejudice reduction and a decrease in intergroup anxiety. Employing a theoretical framework based on intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954) and research on intergroup friendships, (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000; 2008; Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011; Lease & Blake, 2005) this article adds to a nascent interest in sociology of education research on intergroup relations and friendships in Italian multiethnic schools. A large sample (n=1314) of middle school students attending multiethnic classrooms in Southern Italy were surveyed to understand the extent of their intergroup relationships, perspectives on intergroup relations, and intergroup cooperative as well as discriminatory behaviors. Findings reveal that the majority of the children in the sample report having intergroup friendships. Native Italian children report fewer intergroup friendships while non-Italian children report higher levels of intergroup friendships. Yet, native Italian children report getting along better with peers while non-Italian students report getting along less well with peers.

*Keywords:* intergroup friendships, multiethnic classrooms, intergroup contact, middle school, southern Italy

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\* Assumption College, Worcester, Massachusetts, United States. Email: pica.cinzia@gmail.com

\*\* University of Chieti-Pescara, Italy. Email: rm.contini@unich.it

\*\*\* University of Nevada, Reno, United States. Email: rives@unr.edu

## Rationale

Intergroup relations have been a prominent focus of research in social science, specifically of social psychologists. In particular, intergroup contact (Allport, 1954) and intergroup friendships have been studied for decades, and it is clear that they contribute to prejudice reduction in both children and adults (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000; 2008; Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011) and cultural competence (Lease & Blake, 2005). Because of the relationship between intergroup contact, intergroup friendships and prejudice reduction, these friendships have recently become important to scholars and sociologists of education, whose focus is on increasingly ethnically, racially, religiously and culturally diverse student populations and promoting integration especially in schools with immigrant student populations. Because Italy, and in particular, Southern Italy, the site of this research project, is a relatively new and impactful context of international migration and its schools are currently transforming into multi-ethnic institutions, intergroup friendships, the focus of our study, are of particular importance to both scholars and educators alike who wish to support these important bonds and the associated prejudice reduction they promote between youth within a politically-charged context of migration within a sociopolitical climate of anti-immigrant, xenophobic, and racist political rhetoric that can be threatening to new students and their families moving there.

## Intergroup Friendships: Key Questions for the Empirical Study

Friendships are the contexts in which children develop social skills, learn to interact, work, and collaborate with others; they are primary sites of identity (Dunn, 2004), and schools are the primary social spaces in which children form these important bonds (Turner & Cameron, 2016). Hence, diverse, multicultural schools are potential sites of intergroup (interethnic, intercultural, interreligious) friendships, which have been linked to myriad developmental benefits for children and adolescents (Abbott & Cameron, 2014; Davies et al., 2011; Turner *et al.*, 2013). These friendships are relationships within which children learn about each other's similarities and differences across culture and context (Pica-Smith, 2009; see Pica-Smith, 2011; Pica-Smith & Poynton, 2014; Zirkel, 2008 for review).

In fact, psychological, sociological, and educational research on intergroup friendships highlights the benefit of these relationships in many domains. Most notably, in regards to intergroup friendships and the goals of equitable education, the relationship between intergroup friendships and a reduction in prejudice is irrefutable (Aboud & Sankar, 2007; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000; 2008; Pettigrew *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, these relationships

support social skills (Abbot & Cameron, 2014; Kawabata & Crick, 2008; Lease & Blake, 2005), cultural competence (Lease & Blake, 2005) defined by Scales and Leffert (2004) as a developmental asset demonstrated when youth exhibit “knowledge and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds” (p. 174). Moreover, these relationships facilitate social emotional competence (Fletcher, Rollins, & Nickerson, 2004; Graham, Munniksma, & Juvonen, 2014; Turner *et al.*, 2007), positive racial attitudes (Aboud & Levy, 2000; Aboud, Mendelson, & Purdy, 2003; Feddes, Noack, & Rutland, 2009; Turner *et al.*, 2013), and positive intergroup contact (Turner & Cameron, 2016).

While these friendships are important, research on intergroup friendship conducted through the last four decades has consistently found that children and adolescents have significantly fewer intergroup friendships than intragroup friendships (Aboud, Mendelson & Purdy, 2003; Aboud & Sankar, 2007; Braha & Rutter, 1980; Graham & Cohen, 1997; Graham *et al.*, 1998; Hallinan & Smith, 1985; Hallinan & Teixeira, 1987; Harell, 2015; Joyner & Kao, 2000; Killen *et al.*, 2010; Singleton & Asher, 1979; Wilson, Rodkin, & Ryan, 2014). Researchers have documented intragroup preferences beginning in early childhood (Ladd, 1990; Fishbein, 1996; Fishbein & Imai, 1993; Rutland *et al.*, 2005) and have noted that intragroup friendships increase while intergroup friendships decrease as children develop (Aboud, Mendelson & Purdy 2003; Graham & Cohen, 1997; Graham *et al.*, 1998; McGill, Way, & Hughes, 2012; Singleton & Asher, 1979). Children with intergroup friendships rated these as lower in quality than intragroup friendships (Aboud *et al.*, 2003) and children rarely rate these relationships as “best friendships” (Reynolds, 2007) unless the friendships last through the initial formation and maintenance phase (Bagci *et al.*, 2014).

In interracial friendships research conducted in the U.S., white children demonstrate less positive perceptions of interracial friendships (Margie, Killen, Sinno, & McGlothlin, 2005; McGlothlin & Killen, 2006; Pica-Smith, 2011) and their in-group preferences are linked to racial prejudice (Cameron, Alvarez, Ruble, & Fuligni, 2001). In Canada (Schneider, Dixon, and Udvari, 2007), the United States (Bellmore *et al.*, 2007; Kao & Joyner, 2004) and Europe (Verkuyten, 2001), white and/or dominant children have fewer intergroup friendships than children of color or minoritized children (for review, see Jugert & Feddes, 2017). Therefore, while important these relationships are not prevalent even in multiethnic contexts.

As an increasingly multiethnic society, Italy represents an important area of study as immigration is a relatively new phenomenon rapidly changing the institution of schooling and its student population. Recognizing the importance of intergroup relationships on both Italian and immigrant youth, Barbagli and Schmoll (2011) and Colombo and Santagati (2014) set out to

map the landscape of intergroup relationships in Northern Italian schools. Summarizing their extensive studies is beyond the scope of this article. However, findings related to intergroup friendships are worth noting. Congruent with the literature cited above, they found that native Italian youth reported fewer intergroup friendships than non-Italian/immigrant children. Yet, in Colombo and Santagati's (2014) study even though non-Italian/immigrant youth demonstrated an increased willingness and participation in intergroup friendships in school, these friendships rarely extended outside of the school context. In addition, the authors found differences in friendship engagement level by status related to length of time in the country as well as by school history in that when students had begun their schooling outside of Italy they were less likely to engage in relationships compared to both Italian students as well as with second generation immigrants (non-Italians). In other words, their friendship networks were restricted and their schooling integration was impacted. Colombo and Santagati (2014) also found a difference by gender with girls expressing more openness related to interethnic friendships than boys. The findings related to Italian/dominant children having fewer intergroup friendships than non-Italian/non-dominant children are not entirely surprising in light of the international literature and in the context of previous Italian empirical studies on youth's social representation of "the immigrant." In a qualitative study with adolescents, Bergamaschi (2010) found that Italian dominant youth, defined as those who are "privileged" numerically, economically, politically compared to the minority group and who have no experience with immigration, perceive understand and make meaning of "immigrant" "on the same wavelength as their respective national messages" (p. 179), which is a noteworthy finding in the context of the current negative political anti-immigration rhetoric leading to youth being influenced by racist and prejudiced notions of "the other." It is, therefore, not surprising that intergroup friendships are less prevalent, not only in Italy, but in many international contexts.

In another study conducted in Northern Italy investigating children's perceptions of interracial friendships employing a picture test technique during which children were shown either photographs of interracial or intraracial friendship dyads to rate, Italian children (children of the dominant group) preferred intragroup friendships to intergroup friendships while non-Italian children of African descent (children of the non-dominant group) favored intergroup friendships (Pica-Smith *et al.*, 2017). This finding is congruent with previous research cited above in which a child's racial/ethnic identity is a significant factor in perceptions of interracial friendship (Margie, Killen, Sinno, & McGlothlin, 2005; McGlothlin & Killen, 2006; Pica-Smith, 2011).

The present study was designed to add to our understanding of the phenomenon of intergroup relationships and friendships in multiethnic schools

by expanding our focus to Southern Italy as this is a region where the phenomenon of immigration is currently changing the institution of schooling. The following research questions guided our process:

1. To what extent do Italian students' relationships with peers, inside and outside of the school context, differ from those of non-Italian students in terms of intergroup contact and friendship? And which are the main explaining factors (both demographic-social-economic and personal-cultural)?
2. For non-Italian students, does the time of arrival in Italy as well as the geographic area of origin predict intergroup friendships?
3. Is there a relationship between in-school cooperative behavior of Italian and non-Italian students and intergroup friendships? Does the relationship between intergroup friendship and cooperative behavior with classmates vary on the basis of the student's origin (native/non-native and country of origin)? And which are the main explaining factors (both demographic-social-economic and personal-cultural)?
4. Do Italian and non-Italian student perceive discrimination happening inside and outside of the school? Does the perception of discrimination vary between groups? And is the perception of discrimination a factor impacting decreased intergroup friendships?

These research questions were informed by the literature on intergroup friendships (extensively reviewed and cited above). The variables we chose to focus on were informed on the literature on how gender impacts the experiences of integration of pre-adolescent and adolescent immigrants (Barbagli, 2006; Besozzi, 2003; Giovannini, 2006; Contini, 2012) as well as the literature on the impact of time spent in a host country and its impact on integration (Ambrosini, Molina 2004; Barbagli, 2006; Dalla Zuanna, Farina, & Strozza, 2009; Contini, 2013; 2014; Colombo & Santagati, 2014; 2017). We excluded parent work history as the majority of our sample (over 96%) had at least one working parent, but because socio-economic resources impact relational integration into the classroom and linguistic practices, which have been shown to influence horizontal amicable relations (Colombo & Santagati, 2014), we studied the effect of parental education on intergroup friendship. We also examined the role of Italian language proficiency among non-Italians on intergroup friendships as this relationship is well established in the literature (Barbagli & Schmoll, 2011; Colombo & Santagati, 2014).

## **Methods and Dataset**

This paper reports findings related to Italian and non-Italian students (N=1314) attending 16 schools in the Abruzzo region of Central-Southern Italy during 2009 (Contini, 2012). In Abruzzo, foreign students account for

over 7.2% of the student population (3.8% are born in Italy while 3.4% are born outside of Italy). The highest number of immigrant children enrolled in schools are in the provinces of Aquila (9.7%), followed by Teramo (8.8%), the province of Pescara (6.0%), and the province of Chieti (5.1%) (Ismu-Miur, 20167). Using Istat (2008) statistics, municipalities with the highest number of foreign residents, within these provinces, were identified and a short demographic questionnaire was sent to each middle school in these municipalities asking for the number of Italian and foreign students in the school. Based on these data, schools with the highest percentage of foreign students were identified for the study. In the end, nine schools in the province of Teramo and seven schools in the province of Pescara were chosen. It is important to note that while there was a higher percentage of foreign-born students in some of the schools in the province of Aquila, because of a significant earthquake during April 2009, it was impossible for research to be conducted in this area. Equally important to note is that each of the four provinces in the region with the highest number immigrant populations in reflect the national trends that see the largest presence of Romanians (25.4%), followed by Albanians (22.5%), Moroccan (10.9%), and Chinese (5.3%) (Fondazione Ismu, 2017).

Within each of these provinces in the region, both large urban middle schools as well as small schools on the periphery of urban centers were sampled. The sampling technique for the schools chosen was not a randomized sample. However, the sample attempted to capture larger and smaller-sized middle schools in large, medium-sized, and small cities as well as schools on the periphery of cities in order to provide some generalizability. Hence, while each region in Italy is different in relation to immigrant settlement and Italian/non-Italian school and class composition, this sample attempts to provide a varied picture of these demographics.

### **Sample**

Of the total sample, 881 children were Italian (67% of the sample), 317 were non-Italian citizens (24.1% of the sample), and 116 were children with one Italian and one foreign parent (8.8%). The high percentage of non-Italian (24.1%) and children with one foreign born parent (8.8%) are not representative of regional demographic trends. Rather, researchers oversampled foreign-born students in order to have the capacity to carry out more robust analyses. Of the total 1314 sample, 575 (43.8%) youth were in their second year of middle school and 739 (56.2%) youth were in the third year of middle school. The overall sample consisted of 633 girls (48.7%) and 668 boys (51.3%). About 51% of the non-Italian students were of Eastern European provenance, 11.8% came from African countries and 20.9 % from China. 16.3% of the non-Italian sample self-identified as “other.”

Table 1: Demographics of participants.

Nationality	Male		Female		Total	
	n	%	n	%	N	%
Italian	450	51,7	421	48,3	871	100,0
Non-Italian	165	52,5	149	47,5	314	100,0
Non-Italian (with one Italian parent)	53	45,7	63	54,3	116	100,0
Total	668	51,3	633	48,7	1301	100,0
Total= 1301, missing 13						

Demographic data were collected about parents' education level as well as occupation. Among Italian children, 11.4% did not know/did not answer the question what level of education their parents achieved, 26.1% of their parents completed compulsory education only, 44.6% completed secondary school, 17, 9% completed a university degree. Among non-Italian children, 24% did not know/did not answer the question what level of education their parents achieved, 28.7% completed compulsory education only, 28.7 completed secondary school, 18.6% completed a university degree.

Overall, 96.1% of the overall sample of children reported that their father is employed and 63.7% of the overall sample of children reported their mother is also employed. Of the non-Italian students 95.3% reported their father was employed while Italians reported 96.6% of their fathers were employed. Of the non-Italian students, 57.6% of their mothers were employed, while Italian mothers were employed at a rate of 66.4%.

### **Measure**

The study surveyed these 1314 students through the use of a 63-item questionnaire. Standard demographic questions surveyed variables such as age, gender, nationality, ethnic identity, citizenship status, country of origin, years in Italy, parental education level, parental occupation, languages spoken in the home. Overall, the students were asked about their real-life experiences with intergroup friendships in their multiethnic classrooms. Questions answered included whether children had friendships outside of their own ethnic group, whether children engaged in friendly behaviors such as sharing and intimate communication, whether these in-school friendships extended outside of school, and whether and how children perceived discrimination in the classroom towards immigrant children.

Questions covered a variety of topics related to youth's adjustment and wellbeing in school. Questions pertaining to this study on intergroup friendship included 18 questions to ascertain whether young people had intergroup friendships as well as the behaviors demonstrated towards classmates and friends. For example, one question asked students to identify whether their



friends were Italian, non-Italian, or both Italian and non-Italian. Another question asked students whether the friends they frequent outside of school contexts are primarily of the same or different nationality. Survey questions also assessed quality of youth's relationships in school by assessing young people's friendly behaviors such as sharing, with questions such as "Do you find yourself sharing/borrowing CDs, DVDs, videogames, beauty products, posters of athletes or artists with your classmates?" and perceptions of discrimination and presence of discriminatory behavior in the youths' classes with questions such as "In the group(s) you frequent are there youth who are teased or isolated/marginalized?" (Contini, 2012).

### ***Procedure***

The survey measure was piloted twice. The first iteration was administered in one school to assess quality of questions, students' comprehension of questions, and appropriate time allocation for the measure. The measure was adjusted and a second iteration was piloted. Finally, the measure was finalized for use with the large sample.

The survey was administered anonymously. The researcher entered each classroom and provided information and instruction prior to administration of survey. The majority of the 1314 students who completed the survey did so independently using paper and pen after hearing the instruction by the researcher and having opportunities to ask questions about the measure. For non-Italian youth (especially new immigrant youth) participating in the study, the researcher consulted with the classroom teacher to assess the youth's language capacity. Youth who would not have been able to complete the survey independently were offered language assistance through a cultural-linguistic counselor. In the case where a student needed such assistance the counselor explained questions and assisted the student in recording her/his response as necessary. Students had 1.5 hours of time to complete the survey.

### ***Variables***

Responses to the items in the survey were coded into a spreadsheet for statistical analyses. All of the variables used in the statistical analyses were based on participant responses to items in the survey.

**Origin:** One survey item asked participants whether or not they were born in Italy. This item was coded as a dichotomous variable in the spreadsheet (0 = not born in Italy, 1 = born in Italy).

**Intergroup Friendships:** One survey item asked participants whether or not they had friends outside of their own nationality/citizenship. This item was coded as a dichotomous variable in the spreadsheet (0 = no intergroup friends, 1 = intergroup friends).

**School History:** The school history factor is based on a single item asking if students have received their education exclusively in Italian schools or not. This item was coded as a dichotomous variable in the spreadsheet (0 = not exclusively in Italy, 1 = exclusively in Italy). As expected, this factor was very unbalanced among the Italian students, with very few reporting any schooling outside of Italy, and also among the non-Italian students, where very few reported having all of their schooling within Italy.

**Italian Proficiency:** Four items in the survey asked about Italian language proficiency. Each asked for responses on a three-point Likert scale ranging from *Little* to *Very Well*, with one item each asking about proficiency in understanding, speaking, reading and writing (1 = Little, 3 = Very Well). For example, one of the items asked, "Do you read Italian?" Responses from these four items were summed to create our factor for Italian language proficiency. Italian language proficiency data were only collected for non-Italian students. The sum was treated as a continuous variable.

**Father's Education:** Father's education was coded based on responses to an item asking students about the highest level of education completed by the father of the student. Students chose from four options: No School, Primary School, Secondary School, and College Education. The options were coded as 1, 2, 3, and 4 respectively so that higher codes reflected higher levels of education.

**Years in Italy:** We calculated a new variable to indicate how many years students had been in Italy by using an item indicating the year they were born, an item indicating their age when they came to Italy, and the year the data were collected. The difference between the year data were collected and the year data were collected yielded their age at the time data were collected. This age, minus their age when they arrived in Italy produced the number of years they have been in Italy. Years in Italy was treated as a continuous variable.

**Get Along:** One item on the survey asked how well students got along with their classmates. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale. Responses were coded from 1-5 (1 = I don't well at all, 5 = I get along very well). Get Along was treated as a continuous variable.

**Geographic Area:** We created a variable based on the country of origin of each student. These countries were divided into six geographic areas – Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Central and South America, Western Europe (excluding Italy), and Italy – and used to create a categorical variable to identify six geographical areas.

**Cooperative:** Eight items in the instrument asked how often students engaged in a variety of cooperative behaviors in class. For example, one item asked, "In class, you help others or are helped by your classmates with academic tasks." Another item in this group asked, "Do you engage in sharing of

CDs, DVDs, video-games, beauty products, posters/objects related to sport figures and entertainers with your classmates?" We used these items to create a new variable called Cooperative, which was a sum of responses to the eight items on the survey. Each of the eight responses was based on a three-point Likert scale: Often, Sometimes, Never. Responses to positive behaviors, such as helping others in class, were scored as 3, 2, and 1, respectively. The scores were reversed for negative behaviors, such as being involved in fights. These sums were treated as a continuous variable.

**Recommended Treatment of non-Italians:** The students were given a forced choice between non-Italian students being a reason to 1) attend to them and provide help, 2) keep them at a distance or treat them badly, or 3) be indifferent. These responses were coded as a categorical variable.

**Teacher Treatment of non-Italians:** One item in the survey asked all students to report their views of how teachers interacted with non-Italian students. This was a forced choice item for which students chose between three options: teacher dedicated most of their time to non-Italian students, treated non-Italian students more negatively, or treated Italian and non-Italian students the same. These responses were coded as a categorical variable.

**Gender:** One item on the survey asked students to report their gender. Responses were coded dichotomously (Male = 0, Female = 1).

### **Statistical Analyses**

Four different statistical tests were used for analyses. Pearson correlations were used to test the strength of relationships between pairs of variables that were considered continuous. Analyses of variance (ANOVA) were used to test the differences between means when outcome variables were continuous but predictor variables were dichotomous or categorical. Pearson chi-square was used to test differences in patterns of responses for two or more variables that were either dichotomous or categorical. Linear regression was used to test how much variance in a continuous outcome variable is explained by each of multiple predictor variables, include moderating variables.

Descriptions of the statistical analyses are organized here by research question.

1. *To what extent do Italian students' relationships with peers, inside and outside of the school context, differ from those of non-Italian students in terms of intergroup contact and friendship? And which are the main explaining factors (both demographic-social-economic and personal-cultural)?*

The data allowed us to explore this question in several ways. First, we investigated whether Italian students were more, or less, likely to have friends outside of their own nationality/citizenship, compared to non-Italian stu-

dents. We addressed this question using a Pearson Chi-Square statistic to analyze the results from these two dichotomous items.

Next, we considered four factors that might explain this difference: school history, Italian language proficiency, parental education, and gender. Using these four factors, as applicable, we ran separate linear regressions for Italian and non-Italian students, respectively, to determine how well these factors predicted whether or not students had friends outside of their own nationality/citizenship group. For the non-Italian students, Italian language proficiency, school history, father's education, and gender were used to predict intergroup friendships. For the Italian students, school history, father's education, and gender were used to predict intergroup friendships.

2. *For non-Italian students, does the time of arrival in Italy as well as the geographic area of origin predict intergroup friendships?*

First, we ran a one-way ANOVA to determine if the mean number of years in Italy was significantly different for students with intergroup friendships compared to those without intergroup friendships.

Second, we investigated whether non-Italian students who have been in Italy longer, get along better with their classmates than those who have been in the country for less time. To address this question, we ran a two-tailed Pearson correlation between the variable for how well students got along with their classmates with the variable we created to indicate how many years non-Italian students had been in Italy.

Third, we ran a chi-square test to determine if the pattern of having intergroup friendships varied across different geographic areas of origin.

Fourth, these geographical area groups were also compared for mean scores on the cooperative behavior variable using an omnibus ANOVA test and follow-up pairwise Tukey tests.

3. *Is there a relationship between in-school cooperative behavior of Italian and non-Italian students and intergroup friendships? Does the relationship between intergroup friendship and cooperative behavior with classmates vary on the basis of the student's origin (native/non-native and country of origin)? And which are the main explaining factors (both demographic-social-economic and personal-cultural)?*

First, we used a two-way ANOVA to determine the extent to which the means for cooperative behavior scores is predicted by gender, Italian birth, and the interaction between these two variables.

Next we tested whether students who have friends outside of their nationality/citizenship were more likely to engage in cooperative behaviors with other students. We ran separate one-way ANOVAs on the Italian students and non-Italian students to determine whether students with friends outside of their own nationality/citizenship had a higher mean for cooper-

ative behaviors than students who did not report having friends outside of their nationality/citizenship.

Finally, we tested the relationship between cooperative behaviors and getting along well with classmates separately for Italian and non-Italian students, using two-tailed Pearson correlations.

4. *Do Italian and non-Italian student perceive discrimination happening inside and outside of the school? Does the perception of discrimination vary between groups? And is the perception of discrimination a factor impacting decreased intergroup friendships?*

First, we determined whether Italian and non-Italian students held different views about having non-Italian students in their classes, using a chi-square test on the data from the recommended treatment of non-Italian students variable.

Second, we tested whether the views of Italian students differed from the views of non-Italian students on their beliefs about how teachers treated non-Italian students, using a chi-square test.

Third, a two-way ANOVA was used determine the extent to which the means for getting along well with classmates was predicted by gender, Italian birth, and the interaction between these two variables.

## Results

Inferential statistics were applied to the data to address four research questions.

1. *To what extent do Italian students' relationships with peers, inside and outside of the school context, differ from those of non-Italian students in terms of intergroup contact and friendship? And which are the main explaining factors (both demographic-social-economic and personal-cultural)?*

Intergroup friendships were reported by 68.8% of the Italian students, compared to 84.4% for the non-Italian students. This difference was statistically significant (Pearson Chi-Square = 25.27,  $p < .001$ ).

The table below summarizes the results of the binomial logistic regression for predictors of intergroup friendships reported by Italian students. None of the three predictors explained a significant amount of the variance in intergroup friendships for the Italian students (every  $p > .05$ ). The Hosner & Lemeshow test of goodness of fit was not significant (Chi-square = 2.932,  $p > .05$ ), indicating that the regression model is a poor predictor of whether Italian students have intergroup friendships. This conclusion is supported by the Nagelkerke R-squared of .001. Further, the model predicted 68.1% of the cases, which is not much better than chance.

Table 2: Factors predicting intergroup friendships among Italian students by binomial logistic regression.

	<b>B</b>	<b>S.E.</b>	<b>Wald</b>	<b>df</b>	<b><i>p</i></b>	<b>Exp(B)</b>
School History	.189	.400	.223	1	.637	1.208
Father's Education	.034	.069	.245	1	.621	1.035
Gender	-.081	.140	.339	1	.560	.922
Constant	-1.000	.450	4.931	1	.026	.368

The table below summarizes the results of the binomial logistic regression for predictors of intergroup friendships reported by non-Italian students. For the non-Italian students, Italian language proficiency was added to the four factors in the binomial logistic regression for Italian students. Father's education was a significant predictor of intergroup friendships for the non-Italian students. None of the other predictors were statistically significant (every  $p > .05$ ). The Hosner & Lemeshow test of goodness of fit was not significant (Chi-square = 7.359,  $p > .05$ ), indicating that the regression model is a poor predictor of whether non-Italian students have intergroup friendships. The Nagelkerke R-squared of .135 indicates that this model is somewhat better than the model for model for Italian students in predicting intergroup friendships. Further, the model predicted 84.4% of the cases, which is somewhat better than chance.

Table 3: Factors predicting intergroup friendships among non-Italian students by binomial logistic regression.

	<b>B</b>	<b>S.E.</b>	<b>Wald</b>	<b>df</b>	<b><i>p</i></b>	<b>Exp(B)</b>
School History	-.946	.575	2.708	1	.100	.388
Father's Education	-.462	.166	7.712	1	.005	.630
Gender	.530	.395	1.803	1	.179	1.699
Italian Language Proficiency	.107	.083	1.666	1	.197	1.113
Constant	-1.926	1.333	2.088	1	.148	.146

2. *For non-Italian students, does the time of arrival in Italy as well as the geographical area of origin predict intergroup friendships?*

Non-Italian students who had no intergroup friendships had been in the country an average of 12.417 years, while those with intergroup friendships had been in the country an average of 13.155 years. However, this difference was not significant and the effect size was negligible ( $F = 1.208$ ,  $p > .05$ ,  $d = .194$ ).

For non-Italian students, the correlation between getting along well with classmates, and years living in Italy was not significant ( $r = .060$ ,  $p > .05$ ). This

relationship was negligible, accounting for less than one half of one percent of the total variance ( $r^2 = .004$ ).

The following table reports the percent of students within each geographical area who reported having intergroup friendships. In all geographical areas, students were more likely to have intergroup friendships than to not have intergroup friendships. This pattern was statistically significant (Pearson Chi-Square = 49.688,  $p < .005$ ). The low numbers of students within each geographical area, other than Italy, make more specific inferences unreliable.

Table 4: Students reporting intergroup friendships by region by Pearson Chi-Square.

Geographical Area	Percent Reporting Intergroup Friendships (N)	
	Yes	No
Africa	100% (17)	0% (0)
Asia	57.4% (31)	42.6% (23)
Eastern Europe	91.9% (125)	8.1% (11)
South/Central America	87.1% (27)	12.9% (4)
Western Europe	88.2% (15)	11.8% (2)
Italy	68.9% (713)	31.1% (322)

Table 5: Mean cooperative behavior scores across geographical areas by ANOVA and post hoc Tukey tests.

Geographical Area	Cooperative Behavior Scores	
	Mean	Significant Contrasts
Africa	17.471	
Asia	15.291	Lower than Western Europe ( $p = .034$ ) and Italy ( $p < .001$ )
Eastern Europe	16.862	
South/Central America	16.133	
Western Europe	18.235	Higher than Asian ( $p = .034$ )
Italy	17.624	Higher than Asia ( $p < .001$ )

These geographical area groups were also compared for mean scores on the cooperative behavior variable. The omnibus ANOVA was significant ( $F = 5.698$ ,  $p < .005$ ). The mean scores for cooperative behaviors, in descending order, were Western Europeans (18.235), Italians (17.624), Africans (17.471),

Eastern Europeans (16.862), South and Central Americans (16.133), and Asians (15.291). Follow-up Tukey tests determined that Italians reported significantly more cooperative behaviors than Asians reported ( $p < .001$ ), and the other Western Europeans also reported significantly more cooperative behaviors than Asians reported ( $p < .05$ ). No other pairwise comparisons were statistically significant.

3. *Is there a relationship between in-school cooperative behavior of Italian and non-Italian students and intergroup friendships? Does the relationship between intergroup friendship and cooperative behavior with classmates vary on the basis of the student's origin (native/non-native and country of origin)? And which are the main explaining factors (both demographic-social-economic and personal-cultural)?*

The mean for cooperative behavior among the Italian students (17.639) was significantly higher than the mean for non-Italian students (16.672) ( $F = 15.613$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The mean for cooperative behavior among the female students (17.500) was significantly higher than the mean for male students (17.811), ( $F = 7.915$ ,  $p < .005$ ). The interaction between gender and Italian birth was not significant ( $F = .348$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

Table 6: Two-way ANOVA Predicting Cooperative Behavior from Gender and Italian Birth

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	398.897 <sup>a</sup>	3	132.966	10.559	.000
Intercept	247625.004	1	247625.004	19663.346	.000
Italian	196.622	1	196.622	15.613	.000
Gender	99.680	1	99.680	7.915	.005
Italian x Gender	4.386	1	4.386	.348	.555
Error	16295.637	1294	12.593		
Total	411133.000	1298			
Corrected Total	16694.534	1297			

The mean cooperative behaviors score for Italian students with intergroup friendships (17.774) was higher than the cooperative mean score for Italian students without intergroup friendships (17.303), but this difference was not significant, and the effect size was negligible ( $F = 3.462$ ,  $p > .05$ ,  $d = .125$ ). Among non-Italian students, the mean for cooperative behaviors was higher for those who reported having friends outside of their nationality/citizenship group (16.869) than it was for other non-Italian students (15.756).



This difference was significant with a small effect size ( $F = 6.749$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $d = .437$ ).

Among Italian students, the correlation between getting along with classmates and cooperative behavior was significant ( $r = .089$ ,  $p < .005$ ) but the effect was negligible, accounting for less than one percent of the total variance. For the non-Italian students, the correlation between getting along with classmates and cooperative behavior was not only significant ( $r = .303$ ,  $p < .001$ ) but the effect was substantial, accounting for almost ten percent of the total variance.

4. *Do Italian and non-Italian student perceive discrimination happening inside and outside of the school? Does the perception of discrimination vary between groups? And is the perception of discrimination a factor impacting decreased intergroup friendships?*

About 43.4% of Italian students reported that having non-Italian students in the classroom was a reason to attend to them and provide help, while 44.0% of non-Italian students felt the same way. There was no significant difference between the frequencies of responses across the two groups (Pearson Chi-Square = 1.344,  $p > .05$ ).

The table below reports that Italian and non-Italian students had very similar views about how teachers worked with non-Italian students. Non-Italian students were somewhat more likely to report teachers spending extra time with non-Italian students, and also more likely to report teachers treating non-Italian students more negatively. However, these differences were not statistically significant (Pearson Chi-Square = 5.480,  $p > .05$ ).

The mean for getting along well with classmates among the Italian students (1.098) was significantly lower than the mean for non-Italian students (1.260) ( $F = 49.646$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The mean for getting along well with classmates among the female students (1.207) was significantly higher than the mean for male students (1.151), ( $F = 5.930$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The interaction between gender and Italian birth was not significant ( $F = 3.528$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

Table 7: Percent of students in each group expressing views of teacher

Teacher treatment of non-Italians	Italian (N)	Non-Italian (N)
Most of teachers' time	20.5% (206)	23.1% (59)
Treated negatively	4.4% (44)	7.5% (19)
Treated the same	75.2% (757)	69.4% (177)

Table 8: Two-way ANOVA Predicting Getting Along Well with Classmates from Gender and Italian Birth

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	5.918 <sup>a</sup>	3	1.973	18.105	.000
Intercept	1154.413	1	1154.413	10595.690	.000
Italian	5.409	1	5.409	49.646	.000
Gender	.646	1	.646	5.930	.015
Italian x Gender	.384	1	.384	3.528	.061
Error	140.220	1287	.109		
Total	1795.000	1291			
Corrected Total	146.138	1290			

## Summary of Statistical Results

*To what extent do Italian students' relationships with peers, inside and outside of the school context, differ from those of non-Italian students in terms of intergroup contact and friendship? And which are the main explaining factors (both demographic-social-economic and personal-cultural)?*

- Non-Italian students were significantly more likely to have intergroup friendships than Italian students;
- School history, father's education and gender do not predict intergroup friendships for Italian students;
- Father's education was a significant predictor of intergroup friend for the non-Italian students;
- School history, gender, and Italian language proficiency do not predict intergroup friendships for non-Italian students.

*For non-Italian students, does the time of arrival in Italy as well as the geographical area of origin predict intergroup friendships?*

- Time of arrival in Italy does not predict intergroup friendships among non-Italian students;
- Time of arrival is not significantly related to getting along with classmates for non-Italian students;
- Across all geographical areas, students are more likely to have intergroup friendships than to not have them;
- Western European and Italian students are more likely to engage in cooperative behaviors.

*Is there a relationship between in-school cooperative behavior of Italian and non-Italian students and intergroup friendships? Does the relationship between intergroup friendship and cooperative behavior with classmates vary on the basis of the student's origin (native/non-native and country of origin)? And which are the main explaining factors (both demographic-social-economic and personal-cultural)?*

- Cooperative behavior among Italian students was significantly higher than for non-Italian students;
- Cooperative behavior was significantly higher for females than for males;
- There was no significant interaction between gender and Italian birth in predicting cooperative behaviors;
- For Italian students, those with intergroup friendships were not more likely to engage in cooperative behaviors than those who did not report intergroup friendships;
- For non-Italian students, those with intergroup friendships were more likely to engage in cooperative behaviors than those who did not report intergroup friendships;
- For Italian students, the relationship between cooperative behaviors and getting along with classmates was negligible;
- For non-Italian students, the relationship between cooperative behaviors and getting along with classmates was substantial.

*Do Italian and non-Italian student perceive discrimination happening inside and outside of the school? Does the perception of discrimination vary between groups? And is the perception of discrimination a factor impacting decreased intergroup friendships?*

- There was no significant difference between Italian and non-Italian students in their views of how non-Italian students should be treated in the classroom;
- There was no significant difference between Italian and non-Italian students in their views of how teachers treat non-Italian;
- Non-Italian students were significantly more likely to report getting along well with classmates than Italian students;
- Female students were significantly more likely to report getting along well with classmates than male students;
- There was no significant interaction between gender and Italian birth in predicting how well students got along with classmates.

## **Data Discussion and Conclusion**

Several important findings are worth consideration and further reflection. First, the majority of Italian and non-Italian youth reported having intergroup friends; yet there are statistically significant differences in intergroup friend-

ship patterns with non-Italian students forming more intergroup friendships than Italian students, who are more likely to form intragroup friendships. This finding is congruent with the literature on intergroup friendships from various parts of the world (Mendelson, Aboud & Lanthier, 1994; Mendelson & Aboud, 1999; Aboud & Mendelson & Purdy, 2003; Harell, 2015; Joyner & Kao, 2000; Margie *et al.*, 2005; McGlothlin & Killen, 2006; Killen *et al.*, 2010) and in Italy itself (Barbagli & Schmoll, 2011; Colombo & Santagati, 2014). In these research studies children of the dominant group (usually also the numeric majority) have far more intragroup friendships and this is related both to opportunity (there are more opportunities for intragroup friendships if children are in the numerical majority) and because of outgroup prejudice (for review, see Cameron *et al.*, 2001; Turner & Cameron, 2016; Jugert & Feddes, 2017). Hence, it is important to note that the Italian youth, who had more intragroup friendships, in this study had both the opportunity to form more intragroup than intergroup friendships and may have been influenced by outgroup prejudice.

Previous research conducted in Italy documents the impact of gender on behavior towards peers and horizontal friendship relationships (Colombo & Santagati, 2014). Therefore, we analyzed the role of gender on intergroup friendships. While gender and length of time spent in host country were important variables in Colombo and Santagati's (2014) research with girls demonstrating more openness and acceptance towards interethnic and intergroup relationship than boys, and time spent in Italy impacted quality of relationships, these variables were not statistically significant in our analyses on intergroup friendships but were on cooperative behavior and on getting along with classmates overall.

Next, we considered three factors that might explain the differences in intergroup friendship choices: school history (whether all of a student's schooling had been conducted in Italy), Italian language proficiency, and parental education. School history and time of arrival in Italy have been significant factors identified in previous research in Italy (Barbagli & Schmoll, 2011; Colombo & Santagati, 2014). We found these variables to have no statistically significant impact on neither intergroup friendships nor on students' perceptions of their wellbeing and positive experiences in the classroom. Italian proficiency, congruent with Colombo and Santagati's (2014) study did, in fact, result as a significant finding. In fact, it was the strongest predictor of intergroup friendships for non-Italian students followed by father's education. By contrast, however, father's education was not a significant predictor of intergroup friendship for Italian students.

While Italian students report having higher cooperative behaviors than non-Italian students do, they do not have higher rates of intergroup friendships. And, among Italians who have intergroup friendships, rates of coop-

erative behavior are neither higher nor are they related to getting along well with classmates. On the other hand, among non-Italian students, for those with intergroup friendships, cooperative behavior is related both to these friendships and to getting along well with classmates. Therefore, we can surmise that Italian students, who are both the numeric majority and represent the dominant group (in terms of power), and feel good in class and get along with classmates, close ranks within their ethnic ingroup circle. Research has shown this dynamic to be more closely related to outgroup prejudice than ingroup favoritism (for review, see Cameron *et al.*, 2001; Rutland, Killen, & Abrams, 2010). This dynamic, then, could be examined taking into account Bergamaschi's (2010) seminal work on Italian youth's perception of "immigrant" and meaning making of ingroup and outgroup.

Consistent with this finding is that Italian children perceive that they get along well in the multiethnic class context more than non-Italian children perceive this to be the case. This is an interesting finding in and of itself as well as how it may relate to the previous finding on the differences in intergroup friendships between Italian and non-Italian youth. In and of itself it is important to note that youth's perceptions of how well they get along with classmates differs by nationality/status. A youth in the dominant group perceives relations to be more positive than youth in the non-dominant group. Is it possible, then, that young people in the dominant group, who are less likely to have intergroup friendships, are unable to de-center their experiences to notice, understand, and empathize with the experiences of others across identity groups? Harrel (2015) asked similar questions and found a similar pattern in a study of interculturalism in Canadian schools whereby white students and visible minority students had different patterns of intergroup friendships (visible minority students having more intergroup friendships than white students). Furthermore, Colombo and Santagati (2014) found that an overall sample of children in Italian classrooms who perceived that the classroom climate was positive and that they were generally well in the classroom differed in their perception by identity group with Italians and non-Italians born in Italy rating their experiences as more positive than non-Italians who were born outside of Italy. This pattern may be indicative of what Ambrosini & Queriolo Palmas (2005) named as "superficial" school friendships in the multiethnic Italian school context. In other words, while students may be cordial to one another, meaningful intergroup friendships that shift perceptions of "other" are not being formed. We note this pattern in our work as evidenced by the lower percentage of Italian children reporting the formation of intergroup friendships, and the discrepancy between the ways in which Italian and non-Italian children perceive being well in the classroom. Thus, we note the perceptions and experiences of immigrant and dominant youth in multiethnic schools are divergent.

Findings revealed no significant differences between Italian and non-Italian students in their views of how non-Italian students were treated in the classroom both by students and teachers with 43.4% of Italian students and 44% of non-Italian students reporting that having non-Italian students in the class is a reason to provide them help while the majority of students reports that it is neither negative nor positive. Just as Giovannini & Queirolo Palmas (2002) found in their seminal work many years ago, we also found that the integration of immigrant youth in “regular education” classrooms has not registered a phenomenon of overt discrimination. Still, we find it noteworthy that an absence of overt discrimination is not comparable to a positive climate of positive intergroup relationships that reduces prejudice.

In light of Intergroup Contact Theory, then, (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew et al., 2011), simply attending multiethnic schools and interacting with peers across the dimension of ethnicity is not sufficient to create intergroup friendships nor prejudice reduction. To the contrary, it can have detrimental consequences when unsupportive contact situations are in place (Pettigrew et al., 2011). Allport (1954) stressed the importance of the four “optimal” conditions, which must be in place to ensure positive contact (youth must experience equal status while working collaboratively towards common goals with support of those in positions of authority). Among these conditions, *equal status* emerges as an important classroom dynamic among youth in light of intergroup friendship formation and prejudice reduction. As Zirkel (2008) found in a meta-analytic study of multicultural education, the discourses of race, power and privilege has to be in place for the pedagogy impact prejudice reduction and positive intergroup relationships. Therefore, attending to the dynamics of power, dominance and status between youth emerge as an important area of study.

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