Abstract

In Italy, the rapid increase of foreign students has represented a test for the traditional tendency of the Italian school to inclusion. The Italian regulation on migration shows a model of school that is integrative and intercultural. The intercultural dimension involves all the school, which has the duty to create equal possibilities to learning, justice and equity. Interculturality, as a specific objective of a school undergoing transformation, requires the complementarity of action lines that include the integration of immigrant students and intercultural exchange in scholastic and extra-scholastic relations, in the knowledge and the competences.

The study investigates - through the analysis of the results of an empirical research carried out through the administration of a questionnaire on a sample of over 1300 Italian and foreign preadolescents attending the second and third year of secondary schools of first degree in Abruzzo, in the centre of Italy - the experience of preadolescents in a transforming society and school, that are characterized in growing measure by a multiple living together, with the intention to deepen inclinations that are being shaped among new generations as regards integration and the formation of social bonds.

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Keywords: Immigration; Integration; Social Bonds; Interculturality.

1. Immigration and integration

Globalization and international migration processes have been one of the main social transformation factors (Bauman, 1998; 2000). The importance of migrations seems to increase further in the 21st century, because people’s mobility increases in volume and takes on new expressions (Ambrosini, Abbatecola, 2009).

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +39-0871-3556465; fax: +39-0871-3556465.
E-mail address: rm.contini@unich.it
The multiethnic character of global societies leads to questions on interethnic living together and integration (Featherstone, 1996; 1998; Geertz, 1999). Nations face the challenge of developing strategies to promote integration and living together of heterogeneous groups in terms of orientation, cultural background, behavior (Cesareo, 2000; Tolminson, 2001; Contini, 2013; Contini, Maturo, 2012).

School is a key institution in: obtaining human and social capital; the development of necessary competences for economic and political integration of the future’s citizens; promoting intercultural competences (Besozzi, 2006; Contini Maturo, 2010b; Contini, 2012a). Through formative and socializing processes in the educational system, the access to the public space and social resources is foreshadowed (Zhou, 2000; Fuller, Hannum, 2002; Ambrosini, 2008). Literature remarks how scholastic success is a factor that is able to influence the integration process and the working life (Zhou, Bankston, 1994; Zhou, 2005; Portes, Rumbaut, 2001; 2006; Water et al., 2010). In other words, in the school citizenship and social identity of people is built. The educational challenge is set in the ambit of a general objective of social cohesion, because the failure of the scholastic pathway of the “new generations” can produce difficulties in the integration and impede the development of feelings of belonging and social bonds (Bloemraad, 2006).

In Italy, the rapid increase of students of immigrant origin has represented the test-stand of the traditional tendency of the Italian school to inclusion (Santerini, 2010). The Italian regulation on migration shows a model of school that is integrative and intercultural. The intercultural dimension invests all the school, that has duties to create same possibilities to learn, to justice and equity. Interculturality, as a specific objective of a school undergoing transformation, requires the complementarity of action lines that include the integration of immigrant students and intercultural exchange in scholastic and extra-scholastic relations, in the knowledge and the competences (Miur, 2007). Italy has developed an intercultural education in an inclusive framework, characterized by its history of progressive openness to all social classes, by absorbing the great migration from southern Italy after the war, to the integration of disabled students in ordinary classes (Santerini, 2010). The perspective of intercultural education is seen as central also within European orientations, being aware that: the scholastic institution is the privileged place where to carry out the intercultural dialogue; that in multi-ethnic societies social cohesion can be activated if in the educational processes conditions for the development of intercultural competences are created, that is to say the ability to dialogue with people from other cultures with the respect of values and fundamental rights of the receiving societies (Commission of the European Communities, 2008; Council of Europe, 2008).

2. The aim of the empirical research

School is for all students an important job of interclass and intercultural socialization and integration (Miur, 2007). Scholastic institution offers the underage a privileged place for integration, as it is inspired by universal values and it is carrier of the traditional vocation to welcoming (Besozzi, 2006). In his research on private religious and public schools in the US, Coleman (et al., 1966) noticed the importance of the social capital acquired in the scholastic field in favouring a good scholastic success. In the Italian context Giovannini and Queirolo Palmas (2002) have highlighted the influence of the class atmosphere, that is to say the group of relations among students and teachers, on students’ scholastic performances.

The objective of the research - carried out, through the administration of a questionnaire, on a sample of over 1300 Italian and foreign preadolescents attending the second and third year of middle school in Abruzzo, in the centre of Italy - was to study the experience of preadolescents in a society and a school in transformation, that are characterized in an increasing measure by a multiple living together, with the intent to investigate the tendencies that are being outlined as regards to integration and the formation of social bonds.

School has for all students, and in particular for the immigrant ones, a role of mediation, socialization and of social capital production in the group of peers. The social capital obtained in the scholastic space influences positively also the scholastic performance of the students (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2001; Besozzi, 2005; Giovannini, 2006). For this reason, the Italian regulations are orienteered clearly towards the integration of foreign students in common scholastic classrooms, on the basis of the principle of Universalism.

To investigate the aspect of school as a place of social capital production in the group of peers, the preadolescents have been asked where they had met their friends. Besides, horizontal and vertical relations in school and the perception of attitudes of discrimination in class have been investigated. The theme of associating with friends and
the level of “ethnicity” of these has been dealt with through some specific questions, regarding having or not friends with a different citizenship from their own, the priority associating with boys/girls with the same citizenship and relations with peers.

3. Socializing places and friend associating

As for the dimension of school as a place of social capital formation (Coleman, 1988; Giovannini, Queirolo Palmas, 2002; Zhou, Kim, 2006), from the answers to the questions that were aimed at detecting which are the socializing places it is possible to notice that the majority of preadolescents interviewed (73,5%) has known their friends aboveall at school, 15,3% in the area where they live and 4,6% in recreational activities. Among the Italians there is the highest amount of those who declared to have made friends mainly at school (76,4% of the Italians interviewed and 66,1% of foreigners). In the group of foreigners there is a significant percentage of preadolescents - about 10% - that met their friends mainly among boys/girls of the national group of the family (Contini, Maturo, 2010a).

Declining the datum for macroareas of provenience (Portes, Rumbaut, 2005; Wieviorka, 2002), we notice that aboveall the preadolescents from Asia are the ones that have made friendship mainly among the boys/girls in their national group (31,1%, compared to 6,1% of preadolescents of African origin and 5,6% of the Eastern Europeans). While the eastern Europeans are closer to, in percentage terms, the Italians regarding the fact that they have made friends mainly within the scholastic environment. Considering the migration age variable (Rumbaut, 1997; Ambrosini, Molina, 2004) it is evident how the students that arrived in Italy after the age of seven are the ones that met friends in extrascholastic environments and, in particular, among the boys/girls of their same national group. In the interpretation of this datum, it is necessary to remember that a good number of preadolescents that arrived in Italy after the age of seven are of Chinese origin and the literature on the theme highlights the closure of chinese communities in their ethnic group.

To the question “do you associate with boys/girls with a different citizenship to yours?”, 72% of the students interviewed answered affirmatively, a percentage that increases to 85,5% in the foreigners case. Furthermore, to the question that was aimed at detecting the priority associating with peers with the same citizenship, almost the whole of the Italians interviewed (94,2%) answered yes and also a high percentage of foreigners - 50% - declared to associating aboveall with boys/girls with the same nationality (Contini, Maturo, 2011).

Breaking up the datum for macroarea of provenience (Table 1), it is evident how the group that is mostly different from the rest of foreigners is the one of the Asians, that shows an inclination to develop friendship more with non Italians (53,1%) and to associate with boys/girls from same citizenship (83,9%). This inclination can be ascribed to the fact that the most numerous of the Asian group is the Chinese one and it is well-known, in literature, the “group closure” of Chinese communities and the tendency to associate with peers from the same community. The closure of the ethnic group of young chinese is evident also compared to the inclination of these to feel better with non Italian peers: 30,6%, a percentage definitely higher than the eastern Europeans (9%), but also than the Africans (17,6%).

Table 1. Associating with boys/girls with different nationality (percentage values relative to only foreigners for macroarea of provenience).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Macroarea of Provenience</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Europe</td>
<td>92,5</td>
<td>7,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>100,0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>59,7</td>
<td>40,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>88,9</td>
<td>11,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>85,8</td>
<td>14,2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Taking into consideration the immigration age, we notice that the seniority of migration acts in favour of more often relations with Italians and with boys/girls with a different nationality, but the percentage of foreign preadolescents that associates above all with peers with the same nationality is still very high even among those that live in Italy from a longer time or from birth (Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citizenship - Foreigners for age of immigration</th>
<th>Mostly Italians</th>
<th>Mostly non Italians</th>
<th>Both Italians and non Italians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under six years of age</td>
<td>42,2</td>
<td>10,3</td>
<td>47,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over seven years of age</td>
<td>28,1</td>
<td>21,9</td>
<td>50,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italians</td>
<td>64,7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>35,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed couples children</td>
<td>64,7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>35,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>57,6</td>
<td>4,2</td>
<td>38,2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As for gender differences, it is evident that girls (77%) have met their friends within the scholastic environment more often than the boys (70,4%); boys more than girls in the area they live in and in recreational activities. Besides, there is a higher inclination of girls to intercultural openness in the terms of a higher association with Italian and non Italian friends (41,6% among girls compared to 35,5% among boys). Also the number of girls (81,5%) that declared to associating above all with peers with the same citizenship is some percentage lower compared to the boys (85%).

4. Relations at school

As highlighted by Giovannini and Queirolo Palmas (2002) the amount of relations between friends and teachers also influences scholastic success of students. Coleman (et al., 1966; Coleman et al., 1982) remarks that social capital favours a positive formative path. To investigate horizontal and vertical relations within school I asked the pupils: “How do you feel with your classmates?”; “In general, how do you feel with your teachers?”. As for the former question we can observe that more than half of the preadolescents interviewed declared to feel “very good” and almost 30% to feel “quite good”. The numbers of preadolescents that affirm to have difficulties is contained (3,4%) or to not feel well with others at all (4,5%). It is above all the foreign preadolescents that state to have some difficulty (6,1%) ot to have had difficulties at the beginning (14,1%) (Table 3). As for relations with teachers, a few more than half of the interviewed stated to have a good relationship (52,6%) and 28,7% to have a very good relationship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In general, how is your relation with your classmates?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Citizenship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreigners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed couples children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Breaking up the datum for only the foreigners according to the area of provenience, the group that mostly differentiates itself from the others is once again the Asian one both in horizontal relations and with teachers: a halved percentage compared to the one of other groups states to have a “very good” relation with classmates.
(20.6%) and a higher percentage than other groups affirm to have difficulties (14.3%) and do not have “very good” relations (12.7%) (Table 4). The difference is more detailed in vertical relations: among the Asians there are inferior percentages compared to those of other groups as regards the answers “very good” (27.4%) and “quite good” (40.3%), percentages definitely higher in the answers “at the beginning it was difficult, now a little less” (17.7%), “I have some difficulties” (11.3%).

Table 4. Relations with classmates (percentage values relative to only foreigners for macroareas of provenience)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citizenship - Foreigners for age of immigration</th>
<th>Very good</th>
<th>Quite good</th>
<th>Difficulties at beginning now better</th>
<th>Some difficulties</th>
<th>Not good at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Europe</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With the increase in time spent in Italy the percentage of immigrant preadolescents that declare to have “very good” relations with classmates increases (from 40.6% of immigrants that arrived in Italy after the age of seven to 53.4% of those born in Italy or that arrived in the first years of their lives) and the amount of students that affirm to have “quite good” relations (from 32% to 26.7%), to have had difficulties at the beginning (from 14.9 to 11.2%), to have some difficulties (from 6.3 to 5.2%) and to not have good relations (from 6.3 to 3.4%). As for vertical relations, there is not the same marked inclination to feel better with time spent in the welcoming country.

As concerns gender difference (Besozzi, 2003), girls have a higher inclination to have better relations (32.5% of girls answered “very good”, opposed to 25.5% of boys) with teachers compared to their male peers, while there are no noticeable differences between boys and girls concerning horizontal relations.

5. Perception of discrimination attitudes within the classroom

I set also some questions aimed at investigating if students perceived discrimination attitudes in the classroom towards foreign students (Besozzi, 1999; Dalla Zuanna et al., 2009). The preadolescents were asked two questions, an indirect one for all students and a direct and specific one for foreign students. The first question: “In general, do you have the impression that for the majority of your classmates the fact that some of the students are foreigners is:” “a reason to help them more”, “a reason to keep them at a distance and mistreat them”, “indifferent”. The second question: “In general, do you have the impression that for the majority of your classmates the fact that you are a foreigner is:” “a reason of major attention and reason to help you”, “a reason to keep you at a distance and mistreat you”, “indifferent” (Contini, Maturo, 2010).

As concerns the first question, from the reading of the data we can see that fundamentally citizenship - Italian and non Italian - does not influence the perception of discrimination attitudes from Italian students towards foreign ones. By consent over 40% of Italians and foreigners interviewed declares to not perceive discrimination attitudes in the class towards foreign students. Contained (under 10%) is the number of preadolescents that perceive discrimination attitudes towards foreign students. At the question that aimed to detect if foreigners perceived discrimination attitudes towards themselves (the second question) about 63% of the foreigners interviewed answered no and only quite small percentage (7.2%) replied yes. With the increasing time spent in Italy the percentage of foreigners that feel treated like the Italian ones increases (from 62% to 66%) (Table 5). Gender difference does not affect the perception of discrimination attitudes from Italian pupils towards their foreign classmates.
Table 5. Perception of discrimination attitudes towards yourself (percentage values relative to only foreigners and mixed couples children).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citizenship</th>
<th>Reason for more attention and help</th>
<th>Reason to keep you at a distance</th>
<th>Indifferent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non Italians</td>
<td>29,6</td>
<td>7,2</td>
<td>63,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed couples children</td>
<td>14,0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>86,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27,0</td>
<td>6,0</td>
<td>67,0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questions aimed at detecting the perception of different attitudes from teachers towards the foreigners have been set. First of all the students were asked: “in general, do you have the impression that the majority of your teachers:” “dedicate more attention to the foreign students than the Italian ones”, “treat your foreign peers worse than your Italian ones”, “treat your foreign classmates like the Italian ones”. Secondly, foreign students have been asked if they perceived more attention from teachers, discrimination attitude or equality of treatment. From the answers it is evident that by consent over 70% of the Italian students and the foreign ones perceive an equality of treatment from teachers towards Italian students and foreign ones, at the same time more than 20% of students of both groups perceives attitudes of more attention from teachers towards foreign students. Relatively small is the percentage of Italian students (4,5%), foreign ones (6,9%) that declare to perceive discrimination attitudes. As concerns the perception of discrimination attitudes towards one’s self, it is noticeable that three quarters of foreigners perceive equality of treatment, 18% perceives more attention (probably due to the fact that they require more help because of linguistic difficulties) and almost 8% feels they are treated worse than their Italian peers.

Considering only the group of foreigners, we notice that with the increasing of time spent in Italy the perception of discrimination attitudes from teachers towards foreigners and the attitudes of more attention decreases instead the perception of equality of treatment increases (Table 6).

Table 6. Perception of discrimination attitudes from teachers towards non Italian mates (percentage values relative to the whole sample for citizenship).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citizenship - Foreigners for age of immigration</th>
<th>Give too much attention to non Italian students</th>
<th>Treat non Italian students worse than Italian ones</th>
<th>Treat non Italian students the same way as Italian ones</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under six years of age</td>
<td>19,6</td>
<td>2,7</td>
<td>77,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over seven years of age</td>
<td>22,4</td>
<td>8,8</td>
<td>68,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italians</td>
<td>21,3</td>
<td>4,5</td>
<td>74,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed couples children</td>
<td>15,3</td>
<td>3,6</td>
<td>81,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20,8</td>
<td>4,8</td>
<td>74,4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even when considering the second question - relative to the perception of discrimination attitudes towards themselves - the same propensity to perceive more equality of treatment with the time spent in Italy. It is above all the students from eastern Europe and those under the voice “other” to perceive equality of treatment towards foreign students and themselves; while the Asians are inclined for a higher perception of discrimination attitudes towards the foreign students (11,9%).

In conclusion, from the data it is evident that generally Italian and foreign pupils interviewed have a good or quite good relation with the teachers and with the classmates, nevertheless some initial difficulties highlighted by the foreigners, difficulties that are more marked between students from Asian countries. Moreover, on a whole, preadolescents do not perceive substantial discrimination attitudes in the classroom towards foreign peers.

Therefore it seems that - as detected by Giovannini and Queirolo Palmas (2002) - the inclination to insert foreign students in the “common school” and in normal scholastic classes has fundamentally a positive value for the
socialization of the peers. To this matter, in the ministerial document *La via italiana* (Miur, 2007) the importance to continue on this road and mixed classes is remarked, agreeing with the principle of Universalism.

6. Conclusions

The analysis of the data confirms what was detected in other researches carried out considering the Italian context, that is to say that the school is the main place where to produce social capital in the group of peers (Besozzi, 1999; Giovannini, 2001; 2006; Queirolo Palmas, 2003). Another interesting datum is that almost a third of Italian preadolescents interviewed does not associate with peers with a different nationality than their own. As regards the priority or not association with peers with the same nationality we notice that half of the non Italian students associates aboveall with boys/girls with the same nationality.

Considering the influence of the factors of immigration age and macroarea of provenience (Besozzi, 2001; 2005; Besozzi, Colombo, 2006) we observe that above all it is the foreigners who came to Italy after the age of seven that met their friends in extrascholastic environments and, in particular, among the peers in their national group. The migration age is a factor that acts in favour of more frequent relations with Italians and with boys/girls with a different nationality, however the number of foreign preadolescents that mainly associates with peers with the same nationality even among the ones born in Italy or that arrived here in their early years is still high. Breaking up the datum into the macroarea of provenience, among the foreigners there is an evident isolated position of the Chinese students, that show that they are more inclined than other groups to associate with boys/girls from their own national group. The tendency to closure in their own ethnic group of young Chinese is known in literature (Barbagli, 2006; Dalla Zuanna et al., 2009) and it is evident also when compared to the inclination of the latter to have better relations with Italian peers. As for gender differences (Besozzi, 2003), a major openness of girls compared to boys in starting a friendship within the scholastic environment and the association of Italian and non Italian friends is detected.

Therefore, school is for all students, and in particular for immigrant ones an important socializing role and of social capital formation in the group of peers (Coleman et al., 1966; Coleman 1988; Bourdieu, 1980; 1986; Kao, 2004), but at the same time - as already highlighted in literature (Giovannini, Queirolo Palmas, 2002; Contini, 2012) - it is evident that not always social relations that are started at school are extended to extrascholastic areas. Ambrosini and Queirolo Palmas (2005) underline how often that “school friends are hello and that is all”. Besozzi (2005) has spoken about a “fragmented integration”, that is to say integration that is realised in a non continuous manner in space and time.

Another interesting result is given from the fact that substantially, preadolescents have a very good or quite good with their classmates. On a whole, students have a quite good or very good relation with teachers. Besides, generally Italian and foreign students do not perceive attitudes of discrimination towards foreigners from Italian classmates or teachers.

For this matter, Giovannini and Queirolo Palmas (2002) have already detected that common life at school, or in the classroom, does not produce substantial phenomenon of reject or of discomfort, but it is translated in a general appreciation, between Italian and foreign students, for an open educational space to all cultural, ethnic-national, religious traditions and substain the need to continue on the road of mixed classes and schools, avoiding the shortcuts of educational ghettos. On the other hand, the Italian scholastic regulations (Miur, 2007) affirms the importance of “common school” as an inclination to include non Italian students in the school for everyone and in normal scholastic classes, avoiding the formation of separate learning areas in the vision of the concrete application of the general principle of Universalism, but also the recognition of a positive virtue to the socialization of peers and the daily comparison with diversity. Moreover, researches carried out on the scholastic integration of immigrant students in Italy (Giovannini, 2001; 2006; Besozzi, 1999) underline the complexity and multidimensionality of the process of scholastic integration, that regards not only the acquisition of knowledge and abilities, but also the richness and intensity of relations with peers and adults, scholastic and extrascholastic relations.
References


