The Italian Way to Intercultural Education: Innovation and Resistance

Luca Bussotti
e-mail: labronicus@gmail.com
ISCTE, Instituto Universitário de Lisboa. Portugal

Abstract: This article analyses a new phenomenon, which the Italian educational system has been facing: the growing presence of foreign students in Italian schools and the transition towards intercultural education. Even though both international and domestic factors greatly contributed to such changes, the article focuses exclusively on the domestic factors. Two issues are considered the most important. The first is the presence of «foreigners» in Italian classrooms and the second is the fall of the old political system (known as the First Republic). The article seeks to show how the Italian educational system dealt with this new challenge. We believe that it is possible to speak of an original Italian approach to intercultural education and that this model, which was introduced without any kind of planning by Italian institutions, is currently showing serious limitations. These limitations are evident when one looks at the profound differences in school performances between Italian and foreign students and at the substantially higher concentration of foreign students in vocational schools rather than general high school, which in turn leads to lower enrolment rates in academia. We use a multidisciplinary methodological approach. This approach is based on a sociological, philosophical and historical analysis of innovations and highlights the strong aversion to multiculturalism that pervades the Italian school system.

Keywords: diversity; complexity; foreign students; Italian school.

1. Introduction

«The discussions about school policies only exceptionally become adequate school practices. School systems resist to changes» (Allemann Ghionda, 2003, p. 44). This statement, which the author applied to all the main European educational systems, represents the opening questions of this article. Why is the aversion so strong and so deeply rooted? And how has the Italian school system dealt with this complex situation?

In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to take a holistic, multidisciplinary approach. The approach needs to consider relationships between

educational system and political and cultural systems as the key to understand very complex phenomena.

Italy has always been represented by its ruling classes as a homogeneous state, «una e indivisibile» (one indivisible nation): if the democratic Mazzini thought the nation was one group characterized by homogeneity and unity (Mazzini, 1835), the neo-Guelph Gioberti spoke of an «Italian genius» (Gioberti, 1843), Mancini, one of the most progressive attorneys of the time, stressed the need to build a nation rather than a simple state (Mancini, 1944). Ricasoli, another influential moderate, said it was necessary, starting with cultural and linguistic aspects, to unite and «standardize without exceptions» (Romanelli, 1979, p. 36).

Nevertheless, when the political unification was finally achieved, many observers noted that, still, substantial work had yet to be carried out. For instance, Massimo D'Azeglio used a very famous expression: «We made Italy; now we have to make Italians». In addition, Tommaseo highlighted that, among the elements lack for the construction of an Italian identity, a common language was one of the most important (Borlenghi, 1957). From the beginning of its political unification, Italy had to face enormous problems, the most important of all was the «meridional question». The Italian ruling classes considered the «meridional question» a matter of public order («banditism»), showing a very limited historical and sociological understanding of the issue (Moe, 1992; Barbagallo, 2013). Cultural traditions of Southern Italy were considered as a mere expression of an inferior, ancient society (Pieroni, 2005). One of the few who gave a different interpretation to these «diversities» was Gramsci. In his opinion, «folklore» in Southern Italy had to be red as a set of forms of expression typical of cultures of subordinated classes (Gramsci, 1996). In addition, these classes used, in their daily communication, their original languages rather than the official idiom (Gramsci, 1975).

Starting from these foundations, schooling turned out to be the most effective tool in achieving cultural unification and promoting a common national identity under the symbols of the tricolour flag, the Catholic religion and the Savoy monarchy. The First World War led many Italians to see their homeland as «Sublime Mother», for which it was worth to make the ultimate sacrifice (Banti, 2011). Nationalism and Fascism accentuated this idea as having an Italian national identity based on having the same «blood».

Following a popular and universal referendum in which, for the first time, women had voting rights, a new form of government was chosen. In 1946, Italy became a Republic. The new Italian Constitution, which replaced the Albertine Statute, came into effect in 1948. The new constitution introduced the concept of respect for human rights, regardless of race, sex or political or religious opinion. However, the republic maintained its traditional centralised structure, and the imperative was still «to make Italians». Language minorities were constitutionally recognized (Art. 6), but a law, which enacted this general principle stated in the constitution, was passed only 1999 (Bussotti, 2013).

Italian schools began to host foreign students particularly from the 1990s onwards. These students spoke different languages. They had different customs and a different faith (generally Islam). But their requests to continue to live in Italy were immediately clear. This new scenario resulted in difficulties, resistance and questions for teachers, politicians, and education specialists.

This article uses a sociological, historical and philosophical approach to reflect on this transition in the Italian school and in its social system. The use of a multidisciplinary approach is necessary, due to the angle from which this article is conceptualized. The main idea is that if one wants to fully understand a multicultural society and an intercultural educational system a multidisciplinary approach must be employed. In practice, I use some principal method. The first one is the historical method, which I use to show how Italian authorities have dealt with cultural and linguistic diversities in the educational system, from the national political unification to date. This method consists in analysing some laws and other dispositions approved by Italian authorities in three different political eras (liberal, fascist, republican), with a particular emphasis on the most recent period (i.e., 1990s onwards). In recent times, the presence of foreign students in Italian schools has been, in fact, considerable. The analysis of these laws is constantly complemented with a sociological contextualization, in order to frame the educational system and its evolutions into a more general cultural and political scenario. The second approach is philosophical; this is because the historical and sociological methodologies serve as the main instrument to discover the cultural and political approach adopted in the different periods by Italian authorities, or, to use an expression by Broccoli, the «ideologies» of (cultural) education (Broccoli, 1974). Finally, especially in the second part of the article, the analysis is carried out by also reflecting on some practical results and pedagogical experiences of the «Italian way to intercultural education». In this part we provide, as aiding tool, some descriptive statistics on foreign students who attended Italian school. In a nutshell, this article tries to answer these key question: how did the Italian educational system deal with multiculturalism starting from its traditional approach? What kind of innovations and aversion has the school system developed in response to this difficult transition?

The article is divided into three parts: a brief analysis of the original ideological and (mono) cultural bases of the Italian school system, the «crisis» of the 1990s and the current situation with the fragilities, successes and resistances of the school system in an age of complexity.

2. The ideological and political bases of the system: a short overview

In this section, we analyse the original cultural background of the Italian school system. A particular emphasis is placed in the way in which the system dealt with the «diversity» of historical linguistic, cultural, and religious minorities. Our theory is that Italy's rich cultural mosaic was considered an obstacle to the administrative and cultural centralisation that was chosen as the conceptual model for building the new nation. Schematically, and without providing too much detail, which are out of the scope of this article (Sebreli, 1992; Cuche, 1996; Bernstein, 1996), one can state that the approach generally used was universalism, absolutizing few, general principles in detriment of a more relative perspective. This approach is the most important trait of continuity characterizing Italian history, despite obvious differences in values and principles inspiring the country during different historical periods. Starting from this dilemma, today another question has become urgent, considering the multicultural presences in Italian school: «How to avoid both particularistic-relativistic perspectives

and also universalistic-egalitarian solutions?» (Mincu, 2011, p. 83). And how to build an «equitable pedagogy», that, on one hand, avoids an excess of culturalism and (especially for the Italian case) that overcomes, on the other, the deeply-rooted Italian universalism and centralism? (Banks, 2009).

According to Sobrero, until the 1960s, Italy was a country where at least two thirds of the people used a dialect to communicate in their daily life. However, but the educational system systematically ignored this phenomenon (Sobrero, 2000). When the Italian political unification was reached, only a small percentage (estimated to be between 1% and 6%) of the new Italian citizens spoke and understood the official Italian language. De Mauro notes that the effort towards a linguistic unification was the strategy adopted by ruling classes to overcome linguistic heterogeneity (De Mauro, 1963). In juridical terms, the Albertine Statute (the first Italian Constitution) identified conceptually the existence of an official language with the very concept of being a country (Fiorelli, 1948), «assuming more and more authoritarian features» (Caretti, 2014, p. 4).

Italian independence was known as the «Moderate Revolution» (Chabod, 1961; Camaiani, 1978). The moderates' strategic vision can be summarised by two basic aspects:

1. *Cultural.* The main objective was to build a national consciousness, as Italy was a political entity only in theory. A set of philosophical and ideological positions emerged after the unification (1861). These positions were trying to create a sort of «myth» of a great Italy. Prime Minister Cavour believed that the Italian nation had to have two main traits: nobility and a common ancestry. A representative of the moderate party claimed that French, as second language, had to be abolished in some parts of the Aoste Valley (Vegetti-Ruscalla, 1861). Some Italian writers, as shown in the books *Le confessioni d'un italiano* by Ippolito Nievo (1867) *Cuore* by De Amicis (1886), or in some poetry written by Giovanni Pascoli (as *Italy*, 1904, and the *Inno a Torino,* 1911) insisted that Italians had a primitive, common language and took a «paleo-nationalist» position.
   This ideological trend was implemented by passing some laws. For instance, the Italian Civil Code of 1865 adopted *ius sanguinis* as the only principle of citizenship.
2. *Socio-economic.* The main goal was to conserve a «two-people society». The same political rights, starting with the right to vote, were based on private property ownership. This model has been defined as a «liberal dictatorship» (Romanelli, 1979, p. 43).

The school system also had to meet these criteria, which were thought as pertaining to the new Italian nation.

1. *Cultural.* School had to promote the implementation of the inspiring principles developed by the ruling political class. The shibboleth was to standardise and eliminate every possible «exception» (Morandini, 2001). The decision was therefore to extend the Casati Law, which had been

approved by the Savoy Parliament in 1859, to the entire new territory. It showed an educational politics full of «closures and fears» towards a real emancipation of low-income social classes (Covato, 1994, p. 24), coherent with the general approach that the Italian ruling classes conceptualized after the national unification: these classes had to become homogeneous from a cultural standpoint, yet there should still be a hierarchical social structure (Talamo, 1960). Casati Law had two key characteristics:

    a.   A strong tendency towards administrative centralisation and every child's right to attend primary school (Bertoni Jovine, 1959, p. 57);

    b.   Defined curricula, in which primary-level subjects had to be religion, reading, writing, arithmetic, Italian and the basics of the metric system (Art. 315), while at a higher level, other subject were: composition, calligraphy, elementary geography, milestones in national history, physical and natural sciences;

        The first revision of the Casati Law aimed at linguistic homogeneity. The Coppino Law (1867) explicitly stated that teachers had to correct «with loving patience imperfections coming from the dialect of the province» (Bettini, 1950, p. 38), as any form of linguistic disparity had to be eliminated. At the end of the first school cycle of four years, young Italian pupils had to be «wise and inclined towards good» (Bettini, 1950, p. 78). Subsequent revisions of primary school curricula (e.g. that of 1905) emphasised even more the need to be able to correctly write and speak Italian (Gaudio, 2006).

Few official manuals on cultural standardisation were formally accepted and their use was made mandatory. The intention was to eliminate pluralism in teaching and align it with ministerial directives (Porciani, 1982, p. 261). In 1849, Ercole Ricotti explained that «a single spirit and a single method had to govern both academic and secondary education», according to Schiapparelli, in «mediocre uniformity» (Porciani, 1982, p. 261). So, the time of «spontaneous teaching» came to an end. The teacher became more of a civil servant than an intellectual. The degree of standardisation was so high that the school system was reduced to three key-words: «God, Homeland and Family» (De Fort, 1974, p. 450). In 1900, a didactic poem, *Church and School*, began with the following words: «Oh child, love both the Church and school» (Fiorentino, 1900).

This intense nationalization of the masses considered two main things in Italian culture as obstacles to unity: local languages and all religions other than the Latin Catholic Church.

Because local dialects were considered obstacles to unity, they had to progressively disappear. The only acceptable language was Tuscan Italian. Remarkably, the first law on the protection of historical Italian linguistic minorities was approved only in 1999, long after it had been laid out in the new republican constitution (Salvi, 1975; Bussotti, 2013, 2016). Also, Catholicism was a cultural bond that united North and South and, albeit other religious beliefs were not persecuted, they were not recognised by the State. The first

Italian Constitution was the *Albertine Statute*, which was approved by the Piedmont Parliament in 1848 and applied throughout the Italian Kingdom until 1948. It indicated Catholicism as the official religion of Italy (Art. 1) and this was done despite Cavour's opposition (Madonna, 2012, p. 14). The Catholic religion was (only) formally replaced by the «Primary Principles of Duties of Man and Citizen» in the Coppino-Law (Law 3968/1877). It was only in 1923 (Gentile Law) and later with the *Patti Lateranensi* (1929) that Catholicism became mandatory in Italian schools. This helped Fascism to promote its philosophy of intolerance of all other religions, in a process that culminated with the approval of the «Racial Laws» in 1938*.*

2. *Socio-economic.* Schooling became the main tool in reproducing the highly hierarchical «society of two peoples». The results of this political option were clear. The illiteracy rate in Southern Italy after the political unity was close to 90%, whereas at national level the rate illiteracy rate was much lower: 78%. The first national census, in 1871, showed modest improvements. The illiteracy rate in southern Italy was 82.l%, whereas in northern Italy it had fallen to 62% (Semeraro, 1996, p. 29). In 1894, during a meeting of the main southern landowners, there was a formal proposal to abolish primary school because it was considered useless or even harmful (Colajanni, 1894, pp. 490-491). The educational system underwent changes trough the industrialization process in Northern Italy, even though it continued to reproduce the traditional social and economic dualism. This meant vocational school for the new working classes and *liceo* (high school) for the upper classes. Social mobility in Italian society was very low, and the school system reflected this feature. According to Sylos-Labini, between 1881 and 1921, there was, in practice, no substantial evolution in social mobility in Italy. In fact, the bourgeois class accounted for 2% of the overall population both in 1881 and in 1921. The working class accounted for 52% in 1881 and (XX) in 1921, small farmers passed from 23% to 37% (Sylos Labini, 1974). The major domestic social changes occurred with the transition from people belonging to rural classes and thus depending on somebody else, to being small farmers who were self-employed and, hence, their «own boss». In addition, some of these rural workers, albeit in much smaller proportions, were able to become industrial workers. These data help to support the idea that expanding the educational system did not contribute to substantial social changes. The program to «nationalize» popular masses partially failed. In fact, the alphabetization rate in 1911 continued to be near 50% (Dei, 1998; Genovesi, 2010). Only Fascism (in power from 1922) was able to complete this ambitious program thanks to the introduction of substantial ideological changes.

«The national community is an ancestral community in possession of its own territory and totally different from other ethnic groups» (Mussolini, 1920). Mussolini postulated that Italy had natural ethnic frontiers and that they had to be reflected in new political land subdivisions. Italy was therefore duty-bound to complete its

cultural unity by conquering territories belonging to other states in which Italian native speakers formed the largest language group. Ghisleri, an intellectual, stated, «If there is a Nation whose ethnic characteristics of language, culture, history and tradition present the greatest, most unquestionable homogeneity it is Italy» (Ghisleri, 1918). Fascism performed «an absurd linguistic operation», translating into Italian all surnames of people of German origin living in Italy and «standardising» place names in the Aoste Valley (Ballone, 1998, p. 111). In «borderline» areas such as Trieste, Slavs were now considered «a biological risk to the Italian state» (Sluga, 2003, p. 190). Therefore, Mussolini fostered hate towards foreign people in the local population.

Mussolini considered school a very serious, instrumental way of nationalising the masses. Data on illiteracy speak clearly: in 1921 illiteracy rate was 35,80%; in 1951 it had fallen to 12,90% (Genovesi, 2010). The process of nationalization of masses was carried out coherently from the fascism regime, using as educational system as all the other means of propaganda to build a new Italian identity (Germinario, 2011). One of the first Fascist legislative measures was the school reform in 1923, also known as the Gentile Law. The main idea of the law was a mix of authoritarianism, classism, centralisation and some liberal ideas typical of the Giolitti government (Semeraro, 1996, p. 60). Gentile assigned to the school system the task of «national education», which had to result in the construction of an «Ethic State» (Gentile, 1918), with a clear distinction between lyceum (for the elite) and professional schools (for the future workers). It was a project, which socially reproduced the dualism promoted since the beginning of national unity by the liberals. To this vision, Gramsci, from jail, theorized a unitary school directed to educate popular masses, which would have helped to transform Italian society (Gramsci, 1949). In particular, the new law created greater centralization. The figure of the teacher had to be used to achieve the regime's new goals: discipline and great respect for authority and the hierarchy. The fascist motto («believe, obey, fight») was regularly written on «blackboards of all Italian schools» (Galli, 2008). So, if it is true that the program «From Dialect to Language», conceptualized and set forth by the pedagogue Lombardo Radice was still part of Gentile's Reform, this method saw local dialects not as «foreign» languages but as quasi-Italian languages. Beginning with the dialects that students already knew, students would progressively learn the Italian language. This method was difficult to implement, especially in the southern regions. For this reason, it was never applied in practice. This drawback in the method paved the way to an explicit policy of linguistic standardization and nationalization. The progressive distancing of Lombardo Radice from fascism confirms that the pedagogic principles he had tried to introduce did not find a concrete application. This tendency to standardization, which resulted in an oath of allegiance and obedience to the state was extended, in 1931, to university lecturers. School syllabuses underwent a «fascistisation» process and compulsory schooling was extended to the age of 14. Classical studies were considered as the «elite» of the Italian educational system, while technical school was considered as of lesser importance. But only in 1935-36, the final step in what is called the «Fascist domination of school» was taken. The new minister, De Vecchi, introduced the concept of military culture into fascist school,

foreign literature was also banned. Roman history became the reference point for the history of humanity and for the shaping of an Italian identity as the one of a new «empire». «The Fascists regarded teachers as missionaries of their faith» (Ostenc, 1981, p. 144). The primary school textbook published in 1929 became the only one allowed in Italian schools (Charnitzky, 1996). The Fascist educational system tried to introduce an acritical and unconditional acceptance of what constituted morally harmful and ridiculous rituals (Tomasi, 1969). However, especially after the 1938 racial laws, many teachers explicitly opposed the imposed fascist measures (Tomasi, 1987; Graziani, w.d.; Isenghi, 1979), including teachers inspired by Catholic principles (Canestri & Ricuperati, 1976; Spreafico, 1989).

After the fall of Fascism, a people's referendum in Italy opted for a Republican system of governance. The new Italian Constitution expressed a new spirit of freedom, tolerance and acceptance of differences. The Catholic religion was now separated from the Italian State, and vice-versa (Bolognini, 1981).

Although the philosophy expressed in the new Constitution was based on important principles of equal opportunities, specific rights for cultural, linguistic and religious minorities were neither recognised nor promoted. Specific protections for linguistic minorities were absent during the debate that led to the text, and thus, in the text of Italian Constitution, this issue was tackled only during the discussion on the autonomy of some «problematic» regions. Firstly, Alto Adige, which menaced the *Anschluss* towards Austria (Caretti, 2014). The same provisions were made for other regions which manifested similar tendencies. Sicily, for example, was included in the five regions having a special status because of the threat of a political separation from Italy (through the separatist movement of Finocchiaro Aprile) rather than for a clear strategy directed to give value to the rich cultural and linguistic mosaic of this isle (Paci & Pietrancosta, 2010; Battaglia, 2013). So, the cultural and linguistic question was transformed in administrative concessions to the five regions (besides Trentino Alto-Adige and Sicily, Friuli Venezia-Giulia, Aoste Valley and Sardinia). These concessions were trying to solve politically a very complex issue.

Where culture was concerned, the ideas of the Italian republican school were very similar to those that had prevailed during the liberal and Fascist periods. The principles were completely different, but the function of the educational system was the same. No radical reforms were implemented. School became compulsory and tuition free, and this was an important innovation. The literacy rate felt down: if in 1951 it was almost 13%, today it is about 1% (Genovesi, 2010). Catholicism was maintained as a curriculum subject at public schools (Semeraro, 1996). Italian public schools had to be «open», balancing social inequalities and hosting different cultural, political, linguistic and philosophical approaches (Catarci, 2010). Universalism and nationalism were the two main focus areas, whereas historical linguistic and cultural peculiarities were ignored. Despite these principles, education practices were still influenced by absurd, rigid prejudices. For instance, in the 1950s, teachers generally banned the use of the left hand for writing and forced left-handed children to write with their right hand (Gelmini, w.d.).

Only in the late 1970s the Italian Parliament approved a law, «Norme sulla valutazione degli alunni e sull'abolizione degli esami di riparazione nonché altre

norme di modifica dell'ordinamento scolastico», which established (art. 2, Law 517/1977) the principle of inclusion for disabled students in elementary and junior-high schools. The inclusion would be implemented by employing special teachers to support them. Deaf and mentally challenged youth became object of a particular attention (art. 10).

Nevertheless, no special attention or resource was aimed at implementing the same principle of inclusion for students who were linguistically and culturally different. Finally, the form of organisation remained unchanged for a long time, despite the approval of schools' autonomy in 1997. The main idea was for the «Italian school system to remain centralised» (Dei, 2007, pp. 21-22), with few openings embracing the principles of acceptance or promotion of diversity or minorities.

This historical overview of the Italian educational system leads us to conclude that the function of the school system in the Italian politicians' vision has caused historical resistances, at least at two levels. In structural terms, the «other» has never been formulated or thought of as an autonomous subject, but confused and neglected within the idea of «school for all». As Catarci underlines, multiculturalism in Italian schools should be considered only «a dimension of that vast cultural and linguistic diversity that has constantly characterised them since Italy's unification» (Catarci, 2010, p. 113). On the contrary, failure to recognise diversity did nothing to prepare the Italian school system for the arrival of foreign students in its classrooms. In pedagogical terms, the absence of any idea of diversity has resulted in rigid, traditionalist and sometimes Eurocentric learning practices supported by a centralised organisation and, for a long time, the exclusion of any possibility of special initiatives by schools at local level (Melis, 2012). For instance, the way in which the teacher, especially at the elementary level, was conceived alongside the 19th century and for a part of the 20th, revealed that he/she had to be the depositary of the Italian national cultural tradition, which had to be transmitted to the students trough formal teachings (Moscato, 2000).

In the subsequent section, I will try to highlight how this cultural, political and pedagogical legacy affected the formulation of an original and effective way to intercultural education in Italy.

3. Italy's approach to intercultural education: the «crisis» of the 1990s

Italy has had a positive migration rate since 1973. However, the phenomenon was neglected at least until the 1990s. In 1970 only 143,838 foreigners resided permanently in the country (Caritas, 2005). In 1970, the lion's share of these few permanent residents came from the USA (18%) and rich European countries, such as Germany, the UK and France. The Italian educational system was aware of the European unification process under way at the time and so Middle School Programmes (1979) spoke of contacts between Italian students and colleagues of different nationalities and cultures, with explicit reference to the European dimension (DM, 1979). In 1985, the presence of migrants from Eastern and non-European countries began to make itself felt (Bettin & Cela, 2014). The first census of foreigners in Italy was conducted in 1981. At that time, Italy had 321,000 migrants, only about

1/3 of whom were permanent. The others were temporary workers (Baldi & Cagiano De Azevedo, 2000).

An open-door policy for migrants was introduced. In fact, in 1986 the first law passed in this field set out that non-European workers had the same rights as their Italian counterparts (L. 943/86). Only in 1990, the Italian Parliament approved the first organic law on migration, known as the Martelli Law (L. 39/90). It regulated migratory flows and legalised about 220.000 foreign workers, basically of Northern African origin, who were living in Italy at the time (Briguglio, 1995; OIM, 2011).

The second wave of migration changed this scenario completely. In 1994, 51.7% of permanent migrants in Italy came from the South, while in 1970 they represented only 15.9%. The quality of migration also changed considerably. In the 1980s and 1990s people coming from North Africa (especially Morocco and Tunisia), Sub-Saharan Africa (Senegal, Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroun, etc.), Eastern Europe (Romania, Ukraine, Albania, etc) and China presented a vast range of diversities that Italian society could no longer ignore or approach with generic human solidarity (Caritas, 2005). A more complex society was shaping up.

The 1990s were also an important turning point, because it was in 1991 that, for the first time, Italians witnessed a great, chaotic wave of migration, this time from Albania. The Italian government solved the issue by negotiating a bilateral agreement with the new Albanian government in light of the fact that it was unwilling to deal with a hard blow to this mass of desperate people looking for a better life (Pastore, 1998).

Italian schools also began to realize that a very significant change was occurring. As shown in point 1, the Italian educational system's objective had always been to standardise the Italian people. Multiculturalism was not part of the country's cultural legacy or tradition. Therefore, the introduction of an intercultural approach at school was not a priority for the political class completely engrossed in its own destruction (Vannucci, 2009; Barbacetto, Gomez & Travaglio, 2012).

At the international level, three elements played a very important role in the introduction of a new perspective. First of all, in 1989, thirty years after the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, the United Nations approved the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was ratified by Italy in Law 176/1991. This Convention underscored the concept that a child had the right to go to school regardless of his/her nationality, language skills or legal status. It meant that foreign children, legal immigrants or not, had to attend Italian schools and study with their Italian classmates. Secondly, migration was becoming a new, mass phenomenon all over Europe. One of its consequences was a large number of foreign students. Finally, concrete experiences in Britain and France were showing innovative avenues for handling this new phenomenon.

At a domestic level, the approach to intercultural school was introduced in ministerial circulars and other orders issued by the CNPI (National Public Education Council), a consultative body at the Ministry of Education. The process was designed to deal with an urgent situation that required quick, pragmatic responses. There was no time to reflect on the concept, the idea or the space that diversity should have occupied in Italian society and schools. It was impossible to fill the gap of over a century in just a few years. This urgency explains the mass of documents on multiculturalism and inter-culture education in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Voluntarism and a lack of political guidance characterised the Italian educational system's transition towards a multicultural approach (Perticari, 2008; Serpieri & Grimaldi, 2013; Crocetta, 2016).

According to Favaro (Favaro, 2010), this transition can be divided into three distinct periods:

1. *Hosting*. The main idea was to accommodate foreign children, especially in primary school. The approach towards them was of «openness and curiosity». Attention to their culture of origin «was sometimes expressed in quite a folkloric, stereotyped manner» (Favaro, 2010, p. 2).
2. *Integration*. The key forms of intervention were compensatory, especially regarding improving foreign students' command of the Italian language.
3. *Inclusion*. Multiculturalism at school was regarded as «normal» and foreign students were considered subjects for inclusion rather than people who were lacking in some way.

Favaro's subdivision can be rethought from a less optimistic point of view. New subdivisions might consider the resistances developed by the school system in the age of complexity.

1. Ingenuous universalism phase – humanitarian hosting
2. Mixed principles phase (universalism + relativism + individualism) – specific interventions for foreign students
3. Italian diversity rediscovery phase – cherishing traditional regional Italian languages and cultures.
4. Complexity phase – resistances and innovation

These four phases are not necessarily in chronological order. In fact, each of them prevailed for a short time, albeit the other principles were also present.

During phase 1, the priority was the placement of foreign students into Italian schools, as demonstrated by CM 301/1989, the first Italian institutional document on this issue. It dealt with the placement of foreigners into compulsory education. The right to study depended on equal schooling opportunities, so it was necessary to establish an «interactive climate». The focus was on foreign students and it suggested a maximum per class of four or five belonging to the same language group and at the same scholastic level. They were supposed to be tutored by teachers specialising in the education of students with learning disabilities. These new students had to be placed in class level above the last one attended abroad.

The principles characterising this first, important document were based on universalism, with some dangerous fluctuations between ghettoisation of troublesome students to equality of foreign students. CM 301/1989 reiterated the universal principle stated by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, the Italian Constitution also contained very similar principles. Community law was also invoked in the form of Directive EEC 486/1977, regarding «schooling for all». Finally, two general national laws, 517/1977 and 270/1982 were remembered, especially for training teachers with foreign students in their classes. One of the few

laws regarding the school system passed in this period was the Elementary School Reform (Law 148/1990). Universalism prevailed in this case too. Article 1 set out that education had to be provided with «respect for individual, social and cultural diversities». So, rather than being ignored, «cultural diversities» were included in a universalistic perspective, with no special consideration for the reality of migration.

In the second phase, universalism was accompanied by other, important principles. Once more, conceptual uncertainty prevailed. Only one year after CM 301/89, for the first time CM 205/1990 addressed intercultural education as the key for dealing with multiculturalism in the Italian educational system. CM 205/1990 considered intercultural education to be «a structural condition of multicultural society». Differences were valued, starting with the students' individual and cultural identities. The concept of «acculturation» was invoked, though «without ethnocentric prejudices», in order to prevent «conformation» to Western models. In the absence of foreign students, teachers still had to prevent prejudice by introducing intercultural education as a new, necessary perspective. Italian as a second language for foreign students and positive recognition of native cultures represented the two most important aspects. Relativism was promoted, as Western culture was now considered just one of the many cultures of the world. Educational paths had to focus on each student's peculiarities. And so, these two dimensions: relativism and individualism, joined universalism in the Italian approach to intercultural education.

Seminars, formal courses aimed at bringing teachers up to date, and other activities were first organised in the 1990s. For instance, in 1992 an Intercultural Dialogue Week (CM 632/1992) was organized. Regions allocated funds for extra-curricular activities by local Non-Governmental Organizations, focussed especially on Italian language courses for migrants. CM 155/2001 published by the MIUR (Ministry for Education, Universities and Research) stated that in the 2000-01 school year, 70% of these funds had to be allocated to schools where foreign students accounted for more than 10% of the student body.

The most advanced CNPI document on intercultural education, dated 23/04/1992, represented the culmination of the second phase. The CNPI performed a profound, analytical reading of the social and cultural situation in Europe. «Schools, not only those in our country, which for centuries have been based exclusively on national cultures, are experiencing the need for a new balance between the certainty and force of national identity (…) and the intercultural and transnational dimension». The new lines of intervention for intercultural education were now very ambitious. They seemed to pose a challenge for politicians and for the Parliament. Measures such as reformulating school programmes, increasing funds for more European and international education, providing teachers with intercultural training, preparing new teaching tools and introducing experimental intercultural education initiatives were suggested as necessary for modernization and openness of the schooling system. But the document did not limit itself to provide simple recommendations. It also lamented the lack of laws and suggested that legislation on the right to study should be updated on the base of the new challenges of intercultural education. In an uncertain political situation, in 1993, the CNPI released a new document, «Racism and anti-Semitism today: the role of schools» (CNPI, 24/03/1993). Here, the CNPI pointed out the need for Italy and the rest of Europe to respond to «deplorable episodes of

violence and intolerance». Faced with this unprecedented situation, the CNPI played both a political and cultural role. Education was placed at the centre of this challenge, which was described as an «extraordinary intellectual and moral adventure» (CNPI, 24/03/1993). The main issue was understanding the new complexity.

The last phase was complexity. The aim of the CNPI's perspective of intercultural education was to re-interpret Italian history and the educational system's shortcomings. The question of linguistic minorities was reconsidered. For instance, in a document dated 1993, the CNPI considered linguistic minorities as new cultural groups (CNPI, 15/06/1993). The international debate on transcultural studies and intercultural education was helping the CNPI to take these firm positions. Welsch had already written his essay on trans-culture (Welsch, 1992). Meanwhile a new philosophical approach, the one of inter-culture was taking its first steps. This approach relies on the idea of a «de-culturalised» culture (Fornet-Betancourt, 2006). Italy took no part in this debate, and only at the end of the 1990s did some Italian researchers, especially educators like Tassinari, Favaro, Ceccatelli Gurrieri, Giusti, Cambi and Cesareo and social psychologists like Callari-Galli introduced in the field these important concepts. Somewhat limited philosophical reflection on this issue was later conducted for instance by Pasqualotto (Pasqualotto, 2008). All these cultural and political limits resulted in the CNPI implementing or suggesting new approaches to intercultural education in Italy and stressing the idea of national society and school as structures that are not only complex but also multicultural.

4. What did not work: Italian schools' current resistance to the complexity of multiculturalism

In this section, we address the current situation in intercultural education in Italy. After the turning point in the 1990s, Italy underwent many political and demographic changes. Some involved the presence of migrants in the country and, particularly, in schools. These changes led to a deep reflection regarding a new intercultural approach to education. As a result of this new situation, the CNPI published a new document, expressing both concerns and a spirit of innovation.

According to descriptive statistics, in 1999-2000 Italian schools hosted about 120,000 foreign students. In 2004-2005 the number was 361,576 and in 2014-2015 it was 814,187, which was 20.9% higher than in 2009-2010. Meanwhile the number of students of Italian origin decreased by 2.7% when compared to the same period. Foreign students today represent 9.2% of the whole school population and 55.3% of the foreign students were born in Italy (Santagati & Ongini, 2006). At all levels of Italian school the Romanians represent the dominant group of foreign students, followed by Albanians and Moroccan; then, Chinese and Philippine students (Santagati & Ongini, 2006). Foreign students born in Italy represent today 51,7% of the whole foreign students body attending Italian school. This percentage decreases at highest levels of education. At elementary school level (in 2014-2015), foreign students are 288.620 whereas at high school level, they are 185.877. High school shows a substantial difference between foreign students born in Italy or abroad. In fact, in classical, scientific and human sciences high schools, there is a considerable majority of foreign students born in Italy; vice-versa, in technological and, especially,

professional high school the majority of students is Italian and born in Italy. (MIUR, 2015). These data show a new complexity, which should induce the educational system to adopt models of education. Models that are less standardized than what Italian institutions are accustomed. The maximum result reached by educational system in Italy in this field was the «individualization» concerning the achievement of the objectives defined by general curriculum. Nevertheless, the Italian educational system never adopted a strategy of «personalization», whose philosophy is an adaptation of contents and objectives considering the initial attitudes, skills, talents or focus areas of each student (Baldacci, 2006; Valgimigli, 2008).

Why did Italian educational system experience these difficulties to react to this new complexity? And how did Italian educational system try to build an «equity pedagogy», starting from this complexity?

Before answering this question, we need to provide the reader with a brief explanation of what this term means when applied to education. The concept is related to contemporary multicultural society. Intercultural education is no longer considered appropriate as a response to the challenges of complexity. It is necessary to foster a new perspective of education considering the new student as a multidimensional individual and not the representative of a certain culture. For example, McCall referred to «intersectionality» (McCall, 2005). Appadurai spoke of the deconstruction of the concept of culture and the need to formulate a new idea of cultures (in the plural) as fractal configurations, without frontiers or predetermined structures (Appadurai, 1996). Glissant theorised the «creolisation» of cultures and spoke of «culture du metissage» (Glissant, 1993). Rattansi proposed a «balanced» analysis of multiculturalism that should tend towards an intercultural approach (Rattansi, 2011), Levinas pointed out that an analysis of culture has to go beyond an exclusively cultural approach, as each individual uses culture in a pragmatic and practical way (Levinas, 1991). A new philosophy of education was formulated on the basis of these perspectives. Its main goal was to look for new ontological characteristics of inter-culture (Cambi, 2004), or, in the most radical of applications, to apply the new concept of a deconstructed culture to the emergence of a multidimensional individual. The concept of culture «est estatique, donc inopérant» (Pretceille, 2011, p. 93). For this reason, it should not be the fulcrum of complex education, as individual human experience should be understood in accordance with its various, heterogeneous dimensions. This would be the only way to reach universalism.

In Italy, this approach has never been officially used by institutions. And it has been only in recent years that educationalists have tried to adopt an approach based on complexity. For instance, Zoletto considered the specific biographic characteristics of a student as a whole, without separating cultural from other personal features (Zoletto, 2007, 2014). He also invited the Italian educational system to think long and hard on diversity as the implementation of possible different plural avenues in terms of available educational paths (Zoletto, 2014). In his opinion, avoiding a simple multicultural approach would help overcome the idea of «us and them», involving the use of terms like «foreigners», «migrants», «locals» and so on.

A quick analysis of the documents published by the Italian institutions in regards to complexity in schools, clearly shows the distance that divides the new frontiers of

education from what is done in practice. It is evident that intercultural education is exclusively intended as «emergency approaches addressing only foreign students» (Catarci, 2010, p. 118).

Of the documents produced by institutional stakeholders, a CNPI ruling on «Intercultural Issues» dated 19/12/2005 seems to be the most representative. There is clear ambiguity in the definition of this new approach. For instance, the language used is contradictory. It sometimes uses «politically incorrect» expressions, such as *clandestino* – illegal, *alunni stranieri* – foreign students, etc. Meanwhile it gives the general idea of an urgent need for adequate structure, philosophy and teaching methods in Italian schools in order to adapt to a more complex society.

The Italian situation has been described as «alarming», due to the continuous flow of migrants. They come mainly from Africa and are mostly «illegals» who are causing an «unprecedented situation» (CNPI, 2005, pp. 4-5). Forty percent of foreign students attend vocational schools and demonstrate very low educational attainment, right from their first year. The CNPI has been trying to «wake up» institutions and political organisations from their apathy and rhetoric regarding the integration of young migrants in Italian schools. It has invited them to see first-hand the difficulties of the processes that have to be managed and the limits experienced so far (CNPI, 2005, p. 7).

In light of all these reasons, the CNPI is calling for the start of a «new phase». The challenge consists in pursuing in-depth integration in schools and in a society «shaken to its core» (CNPI, 2005, p. 7): The struggle against new racist stereotypes, shortages of human and financial resources and the need to increase all Italian institutions' commitment to intercultural education are the new frontiers of the Italian educational system.

The universal principle of intercultural education for foreign students in Italy is showing serious weaknesses. The concept of hosting has been the subject of severe criticism. It is necessary to go beyond the simple relationship with the schooling structures and invest in many other institutions, especially at local level. There should be a cultural mediator as a bridge connecting foreign families, school and society. In theory, schools have been autonomous since the approval of the Berlinguer Law (1997) and allowed to include special didactic support for foreign students in their POF (Education Plans). A new, systematic vision of intercultural education therefore has to be formulated and implemented. The idea emerging from the CNPI ruling is that Italian schools cannot deal with this era of complexity by themselves. When faced with a complex challenge, we need to respond with a structurally developed vision and action. This requires new, extraordinary human and financial resources, starting with the systematic introduction of cultural mediators (CNEL, 2009).

This «alarm bell» from the CNPI does not seem to have been taken seriously by the most important institution, the Ministry of Education, which continues to use rhetorical and empty language in an effort to hide the real problems. Complexity in education is being handled too superficially, based on the illusion that the Italian road to intercultural education can continue on the basis of voluntarism and «good will», with just small adjustments to its traditional standardized method of teaching.

In a 2007 report, the Ministry of Education summarised the principles on which multicultural education had been based in the last few years: universalism, «common

education», inter-cultural approach, the centrality of the person in relationship to others and the exaltation of relativism. All these concepts were proudly recalled in this document as the pivotal aspects of the Italian way towards intercultural education (Ministero Pubblica Istruzione, 2007).

Nevertheless, in a document of 08/01/2010 addressed to schools and local institutions, the same MIUR showed that its approach to complexity was still too superficial. It started by considering that the presence of foreign students was and would be a «structural element» (MIUR, 2010, p. 2). However, the main effects of overcoming traditional teaching models and techniques were:

- Foreign students would be placed in different schools to avoid extreme concentration in each class, with a limit of 30% of foreign students per class.
- They would have to improve their knowledge of Italian.
- They would have to get socially involved in school life, with the help of the recently introduced subject «Citizenship and the Constitution».

The Italian road to intercultural education in this current phase of complexity is based on the principles set out in the above-mentioned 2010 MIUR document. Four years later, amid growing concerns, MIUR documents continued on the same course of action being followed in 2010. The course of action was and still kept on being: avoiding high concentrations of foreign students, involving families and teaching «Citizenship and the Constitution» as a basic subject to achieve better integration of foreign students.

At the same time, MIUR noted a new phenomenon: a growing presence of foreign students in high school. It was recorded also a high number of failures and dropouts, which caused serious concerns. Drop-outs and failures of passing to the next level in school, were possibly caused by their inclusion in classes lower than their age, due to poor command of the Italian language and lack of guidance from their schools.

Some interesting qualitative research showed how school stakeholders, namely teachers, perceived the presence of foreign students (Direzione Generale, 2000). The majority of the teachers interviewed had a positive impression of having these students in their classrooms. However, they said that the ideal number for each classroom was two. Otherwise their work would be too difficult, especially because of a lack of specific teaching tools for their work. Once more, here in the age of complexity, «teachers intuitively adapt their own didactic and psycho-pedagogic skills to the new needs, inventing and improvising encounters, change, games and situations» (Direzione Generale, 2000, p. 34). «Good will» cannot make up for a «lack of a central action», as a very important tool (Direzione Generale, 2000, p. 34). The research team's final comment spoke volumes. Teachers «tend to 'reduce' the complexity of the multicultural issue to a simple matter of linguistic knowledge» (Direzione Generale, 2000, p. 36).

The Italian road to intercultural education revealed problematic results in this era of complexity. The Italian school system is aware of facing a new situation in the last few years, but it seems unable to find effective answers to the various new problems. New delays have been added to the old resistances, such as theoretical

formulation of the concept of diversity and what this formulation could mean in daily school activities. The pending questions in this «diffuse, polycentric scenario» (Ongini, 2001, p. 93) are, in short:

1. *Paradigmatic resistance*. The main characteristic of the Italian path to intercultural education has been the need to integrate foreign students. Despite this practical, comprehensible approach, intercultural education had to accept the idea of diversity, in spite of no significant presence of foreign students in the classroom. The Italian historical institutional but not cultural legacy has played a very important role in shaping this approach. It is difficult to completely reverse an educational paradigm based on homogeneity.

2. *Pedagogical resistance.* Italian education continues to have serious problems with educational attainment among foreign students. In the last few years, this situation has been partially overcome at the lowest school levels, but it has been accentuated in high school. Here, the fact that foreign students fall behind, drop out or have to repeat years shows an uncomfortable scenario, as explained below. Insistence on considering approaches, which rely only on cultural issues may have oversimplified the problem because other dimensions of each student's personality were neglected. Some of the consequences are:

    a. The number of foreign students falling behind has generally decreased. In fact, it affected 40.7% of their total in 2010/11 and 34.4% in 2014-15. On the other hand, 10.9% Italian students fell behind in 2014-205. Despite this decrease, the phenomenon is still extremely important (Bertozzi, 2006, p. 82), and tends to increase with school progression. For instance, it affects 62.7% of 15 years-old foreign students (Bertozzi, 2006, p. 83). It means that foreign students born in Italy experience less difficulty of integration in school than the first generation or foreign students with a short «career» at Italian schools. The fact of being born in Italy and following an entire academic «career» in the Italian school system is a decisive success factor for foreign students;

    b. Far more foreign students drop out of school, especially in the first generation (Colombo, 2014, p. 164);

    c. Local strategies consider foreign students to be at a disadvantage and they are placed in a class inferior to their age, mainly due to language problems. Instead of helping new students, this approach generally results in demotivation and causes them to drop out;

    d. Ethnically based social resistances result in dualism between Italian and foreign students at secondary school. Indeed, foreign students tend to go to vocational schools, while the Italians prefer high school, which prepares them for a solid academic career. This scenario reveals «the persistence of social inequities and structural inequalities» (Colombo, 2014, p. 88);

e. The gap between foreign students living in Italy and the rest of Europe in higher levels of education is clear. In Italy, only 10.1% of them completed at least high school, while the rate in the rest of the EU is 25.5%;

f. The gap between Italian and foreign students is confirmed by the INVALSI tests, in which the former perform constantly better than the national average, while the latter's' results are below the national average (Barabanti, 2006);

g. Finally, this gap is visible also considering foreign students attending courses at Italian university. First of all, Italy issues 6% of its total visas to students: the EU average is 21,8%. Consequently, in Italian universities, only 4% of the students are foreigners. This is the lowest percentage among the most developed European countries (EMN, 2013). The most numerous groups are represented by Albanians, followed by Chinese, Cameroonians, Iranians, and Peruvians (EMN, 2013). Although statistics are not clear in regards to foreign students coming from Italian high schools and students coming from abroad, one of the characteristics of foreign students attending Italian universities is that the vast majority returns to their countries of origin. It can mean that foreign students coming from Italian high school, whose tendency is to remain in the country, represent a minority of this population. In this case, although the policies of Italian government and the same universities have been the promotion of internationalization of university, bureaucratic barriers (annual visas instead of visas based on the whole duration of an academic course, a ratio of 2,8% of beds in university residences and so on). Continue to greatly hinder internationalization, confirming that Italian institutions are not yet ready to carry out a deep process for an intercultural educational system.

5. Conclusions

This article has analysed the resistances of the Italian school system to multiculturalism and the current complex society. It has pointed out different forms of resistance in a multidisciplinary approach that has touched on sociological, historical and philosophical perspectives. We agree with Santerini, when she states that the transition of Italian education to interculturalism has yet to be achieved (Santerini, 2003). The challenge that the era of complexity poses for Italian schools should probably be more serious than the transition from a universal to a multicultural approach. Current students, including second generation students, are multidimensional individuals, who cannot be «reduced» to be considered a simple cultural or ethnic identity. The level of integration is growing deeper, as the research carried out by the *Direzione Generale per l'Istruzione Elementare* clearly showed. None of the students interviewed claims there are any negative aspects in regards to the presence of foreign classmates in their classes (Direzione Generale, 2000).

Outside the educational system, the numbers of mixed couples are steadily increasing s in Italy. In the mid-1990s they represented less than 5% of all couples in Italy. Today they account for over 10%, and 13% of children have at least one parent with non-Italian origin. This is also an example of complexity, which schools should carefully consider (Saraceno, 2007).

When one compares the complexity of Italian society with the situation of confusion in schools, he cannot find difficult to foresee a cloudy future. Italian schools have been constantly reformed over the last twenty years. These reforms have changed their original structure without solving some basic problems. The first is teachers' professional stability and adaptation of their skills to the new complexity. In many cases, the new approach towards multiculturalism has continued to characterise Italian schools. The arrival of unaccompanied minors from countries in desperate conditions is, today, a frequent phenomenon in Italian schools. These minors are bringing new situations that are completely different from those experienced so far. In addition to cognitive and language delays, they display serious socialisation problems, conflicts with children from the same country, a lack of study methods and great difficulty with intellectual concentration (UNIFI, 2015). In short, in the last few months the Italian educational system has being confronting a new crisis. This is yet another challenge for a system that is still not totally organised to respond to the old issues coming from «normal» migration wave. It is difficult to say if and how it will be able to respond to this new emergency, proposing an «equitable pedagogy» based on inclusiveness, interculturalism and personalization of pedagogic path.

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