

A LEGAL REVIEW OF ITALIAN MODEL OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this work is to repeat in another European scientific context an overview of intercultural education in Italian school starting from the legal perspectives. Unlike Italy, in many European countries, since the middle of the 900, the issue of interculturality, in field of education, has become a real emergency. In this perspective, the Council of Europe and UNESCO, in the Eighties of the last century, have focused their attention on this issue by adopting various pronouncements and recommendations. In Italy, however, the National Council of Education (CNPI) has ruled in favor of intercultural education much later – by means of different standards and ministerial circulars that have treated this issue explicitly – and only recently has defined a national model of intercultural integration in the school. The Molise, as region with special characteristics, is trying to find its own model of integration through a research called Plism entrusted by the Region at the University of Molise.

KEYWORDS: EDUCATION, INTERCULTURALITY, INTEGRATION, ITALY.

INTRODUCTION

As already mentioned in other scientific contexts the significant presence of foreign students in Italian schools is, undoubtedly, a clear challenge to the educational institutions of our country, as they have to face the need to develop appropriate educational strategies designed to respond effectively to the needs of a social reality that, over the years, has undergone profound structural changes, until it assumed an increasingly multiethnic and

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multicultural countenance. In confirmation of this, it should be considered that, according to the estimates of the Ministry of Education, in the school year 2011/2012 there were 755.939 pupils with non-Italian citizenship in our schools. In this regard, it is important to note that "according to the ratio of foreign students to the total of the students, regarding nowadays compulsory education, 9 students over 100 are foreigners. On the whole, the pupils undergo a slight decrease (-0.1%), which is more evident in primary and secondary level (-0.3%), while they tend to increase in kindergarten and first grade secondary school (respectively 0.4% and 0.3%). "This trend is driven by the continuous decline of Italian students, as opposed to the stronger presence of students with non-Italian citizenship in any grade of study: compared with the previous school year, it has increased to 45,676 units, up to 6.4% ". In this regard, it is worth noting that "despite the increase of students with non-Italian citizenship has always been on the rise, the increase from year to year resulted descending. This year, instead, the phenomenon is in contrast, as, for the first time, the percentage change is greater than the previous year.

The overall increase of 6.4% was mainly due to non-Italian pupils born in Italy (44% of foreign students in total) rather than to the size of the migration flow (3.6%)"

ITALIAN SCHOOL LEGISLATION IN THE FIELD OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

The theme of intercultural education has revealed to be urgent not only in our country, but also in many other European nations. On this side, in fact, on several occasions the Council of Europe and the UNESCO have focused on this matter and have issued various pronouncements and recommendations since the eighties⁹⁹. On this subject, even the National Council of Education (CNPI) intervened with its pronouncements in favor of intercultural education, followed by different rules and ministerial circulars that addressed the issue explicitly. In this regard, we plan to look more closely at those which, in our opinion, provide more guidance and are aimed at all levels of school. The concept of intercultural education is introduced for the first time with the Ministerial Circular no. 205 of the 22 July 1990 on Obligatory schooling and foreign students. Intercultural education. It is conceived as a response to the new demand for a multicultural society and aims at promoting a culture of acceptance and the integration of people belonging to other cultures and ethnicities. Within the Circular in question, particularly significant are the indications concerning the educational interventions, which should aim, even in those classes where there are no foreign students, at promoting a culture of dialogue and tolerance¹⁰⁰. In particular, within this circular it was stated that: "the primary objective of intercultural education is the promotion of the ability of a constructive coexistence in a multi-cultural context. It involves not only the acceptance and the respect of diversity, but also the recognition of the cultural identity in the daily search for dialogue, understanding, collaboration, in a perspective of mutual enrichment ". With this Circular, therefore, the Ministry of Education acknowledged that "intercultural education is a structural condition of a multicultural society, and the school, exercising the role of mediator between different cultures, must also become the animator of a continuous, productive comparison between different models "(Durino Allegra, 1993, p. 67). It was also required to the teachers "not to force foreign students to follow the patterns of

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Western culture as if they were the best possible, and to remember that this ethnocentric vision should be avoided even when the class consists of foreign students only"¹⁰¹ , because the educational action is directed not only to the historical present, but also to the future.

Of fundamental importance is also the C. M. n. 73 of 2 March 1994 on Intercultural dialogue and democratic coexistence: the planning effort in the school that, as well as incorporating the issue of the integration of foreign students in schools of any grade and level, addresses the matter of the importance of preventing any form of racism and anti-Semitism and mentions the possibility of the emergence of "the intercultural value of all disciplines"¹⁰² . In this circular is also stated that it is "in the universal value of the person that the foundation of a common culture resides, and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (ONU, 1948) the expression of general consensus values is recognised "; it was also highlighted that, to create an intercultural context, the awareness of their own identity and roots is necessary as an essential basis for comparison". Unlike the previous ones, this circular made a specific reference to the role and prerogatives that should be employed in the various disciplines taught at school, "drawing inspiration from the indications in the syllabus and reading them vertically reading them," so as to extract from them some real intercultural objectives. A final aspect in this document, that we consider worth pointing out, is the one related to the theme of acceptance: "The school must keep in mind the conditions of general discomfort of the families and, in particular, the problems resulting from the eradication of the pupil from the original environment. The relationship with the families and with the community allows the knowledge of the different situations, with reference to the guidelines and ways of life of the country of origin [...]. In reference to any type and grade of school, socialization between Italian and foreign students (also achieved through recreational activities and non-verbal language) is the first prerequisite for the development of common intercultural activities and a facilitating element for learning Italian as second language by foreigners. " Precisely in this perspective, the teaching methods have been redesigned over the last two decades in order to encourage forms of dialogue and interaction between pupils able to promote their awareness that "the knowledge and the relationships (cognitive and social) are the result of a collective construction "(Frigerio, 1996, p. 257), to which every person has the duty to bring her unique contribution. Undoubtedly, the provisions in the Law no. 40 of 6 March 1998 on the regulations governing immigration and the status of foreigners are important as well. In it, the emphasis is on the educational value of linguistic and cultural differences and, as highlighted in the Art.36, "(---) in the exercise of teaching and organizational autonomy" it is necessary to promote "intercultural projects of improvement of the educational syllabus, aimed at the appreciation of differences in language and culture and at the promotion of reception and exchange initiatives" in the schools¹⁰³ . Along the same line is is the Legislative Decree no. 286 of 25 July 1998 on the "Consolidated text of provisions governing immigration and the status of foreigners". In this Decree, we may identify a particular attention to all those activities designed to promote the integration of foreigners and to make the right to education effective. With this purpose, the school should promote the teaching of the Italian as a second language, to respect the language and culture of the countries of origin, as well as provide the training to the teachers and social integration to the immigrants¹⁰⁴ .

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With regard to teacher training it is also important to remember the DPR n. 394 of 31 August 1999 on the "Implementation Rules of the Consolidated provisions concerning immigration and the regulations on the immigration of foreigners" in which, in addition to various provisions concerning the insertion of foreign students in our school system and certain indications on the division into classes, is ensured the Ministry's commitment to support the training of teachers through the realisation of projects aimed at upgrading and training, on the national and local level, regarding issues related to intercultural education. Moreover, this commitment is also reiterated in the C. M. n. 155 of 2001, in which additional funds for the teaching activities will be destined to all those schools with an attendance of foreign students and nomads superior than 10% of the members¹⁰⁵. The legislative measures mentioned are only a part of the various regulations issued in the last few years, in favor of the integration of foreigners in the context of the Italian school. Among these, we wish to point out the Ministerial Circular no. 24 of 2006 on the "Guidelines for the reception and integration of foreign students", which emphasizes the importance of paying a particular attention to the reception of minors and also provides many guidelines and suggestions to organise the teaching and to facilitate their integration and success in education and training¹⁰⁶, as well as the important Document The Italian approach to the intercultural school, edited in October 2007 by the National Observatory for the integration of foreign students and the intercultural education, established in December 2006 by the Ministry of Education. About this last document, it is particularly noteworthy what was stated in the introduction about the reasons that led the Ministry to wanting to find a purely Italian model of intercultural school. In this regard, it is stated: "The goal of identifying an Italian model derives from the need to draw attention on specific conditions, choices and actions that characterized the Italian experience; to identify the strengths that have to become "system "; to identify the weaknesses that should be dealt with new practices and resources; to give visibility to new goals and projects"¹⁰⁷. The aspiration to create an Italian model of integration can also be found in the document edited by the Immigration Committee, Observations and Proposals on the second generations and policies for the school, approved by the National Council of Economy and Labour (CNEL) on January 31, 2008. In this document, it is stated that in terms of integration, the Italian set of rules is oriented towards a different model than those of the other European countries, that is a model that is "neither inclusive" such as the French one, "nor (- -) multicultural" as promoted by the United Kingdom. According to the drafters of the document, in fact, these countries "are both dramatically proving their limits up against the diverse nature of migration, injustice and marginalization, social arrangements, new and serious problems, the international context." The model proposed by the Committee for Immigration has the ambition to pursue "a process of recognition, dialogue, confrontation" that not only promotes the respect for cultural diversity, but also takes into account the differences as a resource and a moment of enrichment for both locals and for foreigners (CNEL, 2008, pp. 9-10). In line with the project addresses presented by the Ministry therein, we will start, in 2007, the National Action of training for multicultural schools directors, oriented in particular to those schools with a strong presence of foreign students - and conducted through national training workshops and discussions among school leaders - and, in 2008, the

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National Plan for teaching Italian as a second language, oriented in particular to migrant students recently arrived to first and second grade secondary schools (Ongini, 2011, p. 3). The brief discussion conducted so far reveals a significant wealth of statements of principle. However, facing a rather evolved legislation about these issues, one can not but notice the countless shortcomings in many Italian schools, where the inadequacy of the available financial resources adversely affects the possibility to carry out projects aimed at encouraging the development of language skills, the training of teachers, the realisation of language laboratories, the presence of cultural mediators and the support from local institutions, as well as the increase of initiatives to provide a better knowledge of the languages and cultures of origin and of aids from the social services in the area and funds proportionate to the needs of the projects often launched and then discontinued for lack of funds. In conclusion, one has the impression that, on the issue of the integration of foreign students, "our schools are even equipped primarily to manage the first phase of the integration of pupils with nonItalian citizenship" (CNEL, 2008 pp. 12-13).

These limits require a decisive approach that can not be left to improvisation, but, on the contrary, has to be planned carefully. In this regard, it proves essential to create a training system able to educate permanently and positively to the values and principles aimed at grasping the dignity of the human person without reserve; to consider the different - in our case the alien - as a subject of rights and duties and as a potential resource for the host country; to emphasize the importance of protecting certain inalienable rights that are proper to the human person; to realise educational interventions and initiatives of a clearly intercultural origin. In essence, the goal that should be pursued is to give life to a real cultural exchange through which stakeholders can learn to use their communication skills to interact with each other and to start a reciprocal and balanced relationship, based on active listening and respect of the differences.

THE LEARNING ACTIVITIES AND TEACHING IN INTERCULTURAL SCHOOL

In a cross-cultural perspective, the school has to educate the students to develop "a sense of belonging to humanity" (Santerini, 2006, pp.. 12-13) and a spirit of "brotherhood" capable of overcoming language and cultural barriers and aimed at enhancing the common universal principles shared by all humans. Moreover, on a practical level, intercultural education must be translated into a series of training and educational activities to promote active listening, communication, respect and the ability to interact and engage with each other on a par basis and with the awareness that the other has its own way of thinking and manage their own feelings that must be accepted and respected (Portera, 1992, pp.. 219-221). In the end, the school has to realise a series of training and educational activities aimed at promoting the processes of integration and learning, but, above all, it must focus on a solid intercultural training for the teachers. In this regard, it is essential to provide them with a valid and continuous professional training including also the acquisition of all the knowledge and the relational skills needed to effectively carry out a process of intercultural education. In this respect, acquiring the concept of intercultural means, on the one hand, promoting in the students the ability to interact and relate to the other, and, on the other hand, working on themselves, on their way to relate to immigrant pupils and to consider their cultural differences, as well as: "Rethinking

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their teaching methods through a review of the contents and methods; adopting attitudes in favour of the establishment of a 'scholastic climate' of openness and dialogue in the classroom and to the development of a perception of diversity as an enrichment; and as a mutual access to new knowledge to be able to manage this complexity; adopting critical-reflective attitudes related to the experience in the teaching practices and an attitude of research in collaboration with groups of teachers and with the help of external experts, aiming at the realization of a project of research-action, which constitutes an active method of in service education and continuous updating" (Fiorucci, 2011, pp. 79-88). In the end, when relating to foreign students, we must always keep in mind that each of these students has his own life history, with its experiences, and a particular way of perceiving changes related to the migration experience and to the adaptation to the social reality and the culture of the host country. Furthermore, the barriers that immigrant students must face are many: just think about the difficulty of communicating and interacting with their classmates because of the lack of knowledge of the language and the inability to decode the implicit cultural system of the new society. This last difficulty, moreover, often causes a number of misconceptions and misunderstandings in the relationship with their colleagues and with the teacher him/herself and can give rise to a strong sense of disorientation due to the fact that, in addition to the ignorance of the new system of implicit cultural rules, immigrant students already "carry with them a parallel system of implicit rules relating to their own culture of origin, which in most cases are not known or are even subject to opposite interpretations in the culture of the host country" (Pinto Minerva, 2002, p. 44). In order to transform these communication barriers into an opportunity for growth and mutual understanding for the students, the teacher must be able to recognize and be aware of the symbolic meanings and values of the cultures of the children in that class in order to understand their needs and promote common rules of coexistence (Demetrio, Favaro, 1997, p. 88).

As for the training and educational activities, if you want to realise a real transformation of the school in an inter-cultural sense, a radical revision of the programs, the organizational structures of the school, the languages and the relationship between the school and the area, as well as a rethinking of the teaching methods and the criteria of orientation, evaluation and selection, is more necessary than ever. In short, the goal that we must pursue is to implement a concrete renewal of the school on an intercultural basis. Rethinking the teaching in an intercultural logic, therefore, means to cultivate also on a practical level those concepts of complexity, of otherness and of identity that are at the basis of the intercultural reflection. In general, the commitment of intercultural education should not be limited to the mere transmission of that notional knowledge already set within the curricula. It should, instead, promote a relational climate of openness and dialogue and - through the trial of specific educational activities - lead the students to discover the differences and similarities, the respect for diversity and ways of thinking other than theirs, removing those prejudices that hinder the realization of a constructive dialogue.

The intercultural approach should also include the development of teaching methods designed to encourage the active participation of all pupils and to create, especially in the native students, a genuine interest and curiosity about everything related to the culture,

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the traditions and the customs of other countries, particularly those countries from which their foreign classmates come from.

CONCLUSION

Considering the results of the short close examination of the ministerial measures aimed at promoting the integration of immigrant pupils and an intercultural education in Italian schools at all levels, it seems important to pause and reflect on the primary objectives of the intercultural approach, which proposes, first, to overcome all those cultural patterns related to old stereotypes and prejudices, as well as the consequent fear of losing their security, or even their own cultural identity. Obviously, intercultural dialogue does not claim to be as the solution to all problems related to immigration and integration, and doesn't either pretend to give answers to all the questions that may arise in this regard, however, it can definitely provide a valuable contribution "to the development of democratic stability and to the fight against prejudice and stereotypes, both on the social and the political level, and facilitate the development of alliances between cultural and religious communities, thus helping to prevent or mitigate conflicts, including in post - conflict or 'frozen conflicts'"108 . To exit the logic of closure and individualism to get closer to the others also requires the effort to understand their needs and the innumerable difficulties related not only to the problems and misunderstandings that come from belonging to a different culture, but also the feelings of insecurity and inadequacy that the lack of reference points can arouse in an individual who finds himself living in a reality that does not belong to him and that, especially in the beginning, he is not able to handle. The intercultural relations require, in fact, not only the willingness to learn about other cultures and to recognize and accept differences, but also a commitment to put in the middle of the relationship the individuals themselves, bearing a specific cultural identity, with their life experiences, their hopes and their specific needs.

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