

# MIGRATION AND THE ROLE OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

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**Abstract:** *Scientific research from various angles allows us to make a critical analysis of the theoretical hypotheses of intercultural education by means of empiric studies focused on educational language, social and communication dynamics. The relation between the students and the teaching staff bears upon development, permanently constructed, which implies a permanent negotiation of the personal identity. In this context, it is necessary to find out the role of the insertion of the cultural difference variable. This negotiation is achieved through language: How to balance the learning of the host country's language and the multilingual context existing in a classroom? In achieving the educational objectives, the education institutions need to take an open attitude towards changing and organizing innovative practices and not to start from a theoretical level or, worse, to take what implies the management of a school with multicultural pupils as such.*

*The paper analyzes in detail the new education needs of a new generation of immigrants who experience living in multi-ethnic social and schooling context. This theme is included in a broader context of globalisation, of the presence of immigrants facing social cohesion and belonging problems in the European Union.*

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**JEL Classification:** *J0, J4, J6, J7*

## ***Introduction***

The information society based on knowledge, technology and globalisation turned the migration theme and the dialogue on culture into an

everyday topic. International mobility has become a component and support of the global economy, where countries and companies are permanently looking for cheaper workers to improve their competitive capacity.

Migration and territorial mobility do not only mean movement across countries; it is a more complex process implying several elements and, irrespective of the mechanisms that set them in motion or influence them, produces a wide range of effects. The changes are visible in economic, political, social and cultural life. They occur both in the place of origin of potential migrants and the place of destination. On one hand, there remains a “void”, because the absence of the departed ones is strongly felt by family, and communities face major problems caused by the integration and the absorption of the new-comers.

The coherence and the complexity of the migration flows in the European Union, their level of stabilization as well as the presence of the first and the second generations of migrants in the European education system need new educational policies or options. All of them require educational strategies able to combine cultural needs and models.

The presence of immigrant pupils in the education system of many EU countries requires a primary form of social integration of young people of different origin. Statistics reveal an increasing percentage of foreign pupils, if compared to the total number of schoolchildren: in Spain the average is 8.4%, in France only 3.9% (because of assimilation), in the UK 18.7%, in the Netherlands 11.7% and in Italy 5.6%.<sup>1</sup>

The right of education is a fundamental principle of full integration, equity and participation. Therefore, the integration policies include a chapter dedicated to education as a tool against exclusion. For example, “The Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy”<sup>2</sup> approved by the Council of the Ministers of Justice and Internal Affairs, in Brussels, on 19<sup>th</sup> November, 2004, reminds us that education is fundamental for training immigrants and especially their descendents to successfully involve in the society. The same document reveals the need to develop inclusive policies to achieve the integration objective.

These words show the preoccupation of the European Union, since, in general, immigrant schoolchildren face a higher rate of failing to pass the

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Official documents of the Ministries of Education.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/common-basic-principles\\_en.pdf](http://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/common-basic-principles_en.pdf)

“national” exams and a higher rate of school drop-out (Eurydice, 2004; OECD, 2006).

In many countries the integration with the educational project is a challenge to the education systems and an objective of the European and national educational policies (Eurydice, 2004).

The intercultural education cannot develop within an empty framework. The European Union (different in every country) is a multicultural whole, affected by migration in many ways. Increasingly, the social policies assure to raise awareness of these factors, especially to correct its bad image: racism.

In 1997, the Council of Europe launched the Education for Democratic Citizenship Project (EDC). The purpose of the project was to promote the best practice and to develop new models of democratic citizenship and to provide a European common framework. Another objective was the fight against xenophobia, intolerance and nationalism. Therefore, the European Committee of the European Ministries of Education focused on the role of this project in achieving more social cohesion and increasing coexistence capacity.

This is obviously based on the key role of education in the struggle against racism and xenophobia against a new citizenship. But the weakness of this starting point is the inability to deal with the questionable content of what was proposed: What is citizenship? What does it mean to be a citizen in a multicultural context? Since they are not only theoretical questions, it means there is no harmony between these factors, which severely hinder the effectiveness of an educational policy. It is the distance between a statement of principles and the reality of the context. In many European countries, the immigrant schoolchildren face the highest rate of school drop-out. In this context, we ought not to talk about democracy and equal opportunities and anti-racism if we ignore this problematic issue.

Audrey Osler (researcher at the University of Leeds) evaluated this project showing that the attention paid to a specific life of the schoolchildren and their involvement in decision-making was fundamental for a change and a different approach to cultural differences.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Osler, A., “Multicultural schools and classrooms: Using the voices of the children and the youth to inform about policy and practice”, in *Education and Intercultural Narratives in Multicultural Classrooms*, Roma, Officina edizioni, 2006.

In the United Kingdom, we find excellent data on the inequality of the scores of different ethnic groups. Tikly *et al.* (2002) showed that in towns where local authorities involved the immigrant communities in discussing the problem of the schoolchildren's career, the impact was positive. The voice of the schoolchildren is very useful for improving the public practice and the policies in education units facing the severest inequality in the learning scores and a disproportion between the teaching staff diversity and the schoolchildren.

The intercultural educational project assumes the risk of remaining a Kantian "void" concept unless it is based on the relation between schoolchildren and the school actors (teaching staff, administrators, families).

For dealing with this situation, the education and research policies traditionally formulated by countries with great experience in immigration (U.K., France, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden) as well as by the most recent host countries (Spain, Italy, Portugal, Denmark) focused on cultural belonging issues, on learning the host country's language as well as on the relation between different anthropological and religious customs. Moreover, they paid more attention to the learning performance of immigrant children and on the formation of foreign-dominated schools, which ended in "ghetto" schools.

All these specific aspects are based on at least three theoretical approaches: Anglo-Saxon multiculturalism; the French model of ignoring differences; and intercultural education based on a concept of dynamic culture looking for a fruitful interaction between differences, so that they should not be ignored or remain as never fitting puzzle pieces.

### ***Methodology***

For finding out what happens in a school, we should look inside and become only another actor by participative observation. This was experimented by Elena Roussier-Fusco, a French researcher. She made her research in the Paris area (Île-de-France) in two primary schools for two years. The research topic was the interaction between pupils and teachers.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Roussier-Fusco, E. (2006) "Adjusting the French Model of Integration to Deprived Suburbs: The Example of Interethnic Relations in Two Primary Schools", in *Education and Intercultural Narratives in Multicultural Classrooms*, 67-82, Roma, Officina edizioni.

For this type of research she contacted actors of the school life, in places where such interactions occurred; classrooms, canteen, playground. This is a characteristic shared by the research presented in our paper.

It approaches the way a researcher can be integrated with the research domain: Is he/she a factor distorting reality or can he/she open a new window with a view to a single public space like a school?

Our research work reveals two possibilities: good or bad relations between the researcher and the school where he/she works. We should take into account the variables: the school's attitude towards welcoming or rejecting the researcher both by the institutional actors (administrators and managers and by the actors working in the field (teaching staff, pupils and families). The experience of the French researcher was different: in a school, she was welcome and received signs of interest in her work; in another school, the situation was more difficult because of the unfriendly relations between the school staff and research team.

On the other hand, there is a new way of thinking, ranging from the empiric research to a theoretical approach and aiming to reveal the positive role of a researcher becomes a new key, with a new vision and also new ears that can analyse without prejudice the social reality, establishes new relations and sees what happens around in a positive freedom.<sup>1</sup>

The methodologies applied consist of methods and tools allowing face-to-face contact, observation of specific cases and interaction and relations that change continuously. The tools used on large scale are the following: detailed interviews, participative observation, research-action, selection of a thematic group and analysis of conversations in a classroom from an ethnographic or micro sociological perspective. Besides the methodological limits and features of any social science used for studies on school, I want to reveal here the philosophical basis. It is a matter of identification of the epistemological basis of such a varied qualitative methodology.

The hermeneutic perspective, considered to be the basis of our methodological approaches, implies that the pupils are competent social actors. They intervene actively and constructively in everyday interaction in

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<sup>1</sup> In this respect I cite the work of F. Fava called *Banlieu de Palerme. Une version sicilienne de l'exclusion urbaine*, l'Hartam, Paris, 2007, and the epistemologic reflection upon the role of the social researcher and on his ethical and political value.

the classrooms, so they build the culture of their age group and also contribute to the construction of the society as a whole. Moreover, childhood and adolescence are periods of transition implying many changes.

We must consider the complexity of the communication processes for a proper empiric research. Observing the communication means identifying the theoretical distinction for producing sociological knowledge.

Communication can be divided into three parts:

1. The mode of treating and observing the participants (as people or by social role).
2. The mode of manifestation of mutual expectations (at cognitive, regulatory and emotional levels).
3. Semantic distinction when dealing with different subjects.

After this analysis, we may reveal three fundamental aspects of the research work in a classroom.

1. The positive role of the researchers coming from outside, which can provide new experience fields in the context of the study.
2. Raising awareness that the attitude towards profound listening is the core of a qualitative hermeneutical approach. Not because it has a magic virtue that reveals the knowledge we are looking for, but because it is the best approach which truly observes the phenomenon in view, in our case the classroom: a field full of tension, always on the move, dynamic and, of course, complex. That is why we need enough time for our study to share contexts and activities in order to actually enter the study area.
3. It is worth mentioning that we need access to investigations by different disciplinary approaches. Once again, this is a check for the necessity of convergence of various human sciences, *i.e.* carrying out coordinated works for at least two tasks: first, improving the understanding of phenomena which affect the contemporary human condition or the social level for constructing more accurate theoretical models and, second, evaluating the public policy projects and practice more accurately.

### ***The relation between pupils and the teaching staff***

The relation between pupils and the teaching staff was analysed by means of two research studies. First, I present the results of an empiric research study made in France<sup>1</sup>. There is a specific feature of the French context: the principle declaration on which all public policies of this country are based. This declaration is called the republican ideology. It is a model of constitutional state developed during the Third Republic (1870-1940) that stresses the role of knowledge and reasoning for having access to a national, but universal, citizenship<sup>2</sup>. This take shape through individual participation in the political life, separation of public life from private life, leading role of the institutions and, especially, of the school.

The principle declaration regarding the compulsory (at primary level), secular, free, republican school suggest integration by disseminating the national culture among schools and labour integration based on the individual merit. The teaching staff members are called *instituteurs* because their mission is to institute the republic by means of transmission of the national culture.

This model easily becomes a way of integrating foreigners. After World War II, the immigrants came from former colonies (especially from Maghreb and Central Africa). These immigrant groups concentrated in peripheral urban areas and their children went to schools in the districts where they lived in large numbers. This caused segregation. In the 1980s, Priority Education Zones (PEZ) were created, *i.e.* the urban zones were considered to have special educational needs. One of the criteria defining a PEZ was a certain percentage of foreign schoolchildren in a certain quarter. But this model of educational policy did not improve the schooling of deprived children or immigrant ones. As Lorcerie<sup>3</sup> (1995) pointed out –

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<sup>1</sup> Roussier-Fusco, E., “Adjusting the French Model of Integration to Deprived Suburbs: The Example of Interethnic Relations in Two Primary Schools”, in *Education and Intercultural Narratives in Multicultural Classrooms*, Roma, Officina edizioni, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> In “We and the other”, Todorov analyses, on the basis of Rousseau’s approach, the contradictions causing tension between Man and Citizen. The former represents the universal level and the latter represents the national specific level. See Todorov T., *Nosotros y los otros*, Siglo XXI Editores, Madrid, 1991, p.21.

<sup>3</sup> Lorcerie, F. “Scolarisation des enfants d’immigres. Etats de lieux et etat des questions en France », *Confluences*, 14, printemps, pp. 25-60.

although the PEZ was quite innovative in pedagogical mobilisation – it remained at the same level and did not become an effective national public policy. But the pedagogical and teaching changes and experiments take place even now owing to the teaching staff. We shall see, by means of Elena Roussier-Fusco's work<sup>1</sup>, how the teaching staff may help or block the integration because of their expectations and educational style.

The first style seems to be a neutral one as regards ethnical diversity. According to this approach, the relationships between teacher and pupils are very dependent on formal aspects imposed by the teacher. This clearly defines the academic field and non-academic one, just as republican ideology distinguishes between private life and public life.

Another style could be called "informal style". This one takes into account the ethnical differences by references and jokes throughout the school year, without caring about effects.

The researcher evaluates the informal style as follows: "In my opinion these allusions impacted on pupils, which, of course, is difficult to measure, but makes me think that pupils got accustomed to revealing their origin (...) in a rather negative than positive way"<sup>2</sup>.

We have to deeper understand why revealing cultural differences plays a negative role. Again we quote the French researcher: "This is a teaching style in which strong classification and flexible framing are doubled by underlining the ethnical origin of the pupils by alternating reproaches and jokes with the ethnical characteristics as subject, used sometime to establish order and, sometimes, to relax tensions. This style seems to lead to negative ethnic belonging at a formal level, which was considered as normal at the formal level with the relationships among pupils."<sup>3</sup>

The results of this observation show that neutrality in difference causes a negative perception of the ethnic difference, and further to insults among pupils but not to conflicts outside the classroom. On the other hand,

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<sup>1</sup> Roussier-Fusco, E., "Adjusting the French Model of Integration to Deprived Suburbs: The Example of Interethnic Relations in Two Primary Schools", in *Education and Intercultural Narratives in Multicultural Classrooms*, pp. 67-82, Roma, Officina edizioni.

<sup>2</sup> Roussier-Fusco, E., *op. cit.*, p.77.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p.77.

when a teacher reveals the ethnical difference in an inappropriate way, this causes difficult relationships both inside and outside the classroom.

The French researcher reveals a third relational style: the teachers clarify the ethnical relationships in a positive way, but without hiding a critical presentation of the interethnic problems. But this style causes the consolidation and politization of the conflicts among pupils.

None of these styles positively support the school as an actor of social integration: we should create new practices so that the education institution can meet the social goal, without losing autonomy as education agent, but rather by strengthening it.

### ***Intercultural narratives: The construction of identities in multilingual environments***

One of the experiences found in a classroom is meeting, interaction and relationship among children of different territorial and cultural origins.

What do pupils think about ethnic identity and belonging? How do they build the migration experience in building the identity in the classroom? In what terms do they discuss this topic? How do they experience the richness of the language difference when it is evaluated? How can we support the communication process in the classroom? We try to answer these questions taking into account the results of the research work carried out in Italy, Spain and Scotland.

The environment where Sabina Rapari conducts her research is very special in includes schools from Central Italy<sup>1</sup>. This is due to the spreading of the immigrant population does not exclusively concentrate in large metropolitan areas, but also on smaller towns.<sup>2</sup> It means that the relationships between a population which usually does not have the same resources as a large city faces a completely new phenomenon that requires careful analysis.

The governmental statistical studies show vague and polycentric scenes. Moreover, the multicultural scenario of the Italian school reveals

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<sup>1</sup> Rapari, S., "School and migration: A view on the two scholastic multicultural contexts in Central and Northern Apennines" in *Education san Intercultural Narratives in Multicultural Classrooms*, in Officina edizioni, Roma, pp. 127-146.

<sup>2</sup> As it happens in the Netherlands, where citizens of other nationality concentrate in the four main cities of the country.

191 nationalities which indicate a significant cultural and language diversity.

But the results of this investigation reveal how children with migratory experience receive a positive image of themselves; sometimes they find out that they have experience not very different from that of their fellows. But this is not the only perception. There are cases when problems occur with children with migratory experience related to socioeconomic shortages.

It is surprising how the students participating in discussions about the perception of their own identity reveal a network of models of identity resulting from the tension existing between the places of origin of their parents and the country where they live and study at present, as well as the complexity and the development of their personal and cultural identity.

The discussion within target groups shows a positive image of the classroom context: the stress is laid on the role of the school environment in learning languages and new things. The relationships with their fellow seem to be troublesome.

The reception experiences in the country were different: there are experiences determined by religious differences, for example, between Catholics and Muslims; some of them received help and were properly hosted, while others did not receive any support.

The students' perception of the school environment is often very positive; but the institutional level of school organisation does not properly take into account the presence of students with migratory experience and does not take advantage of it in the everyday school life.

A remarkable contribution to the analysis of the multicultural and multilingual dimension was made in a study conducted by Luisa Martín Rojo and a large research team; they made an investigation in educational centres of Madrid Community for two years, from an interdisciplinary perspective, based on linguistic and anthropological specialization. The theoretical framework of research work is based on sociolinguistic and ethnographic elements<sup>1</sup>: for investigating and understanding the language difference in classrooms, they evaluated this and then examined how this evaluation or the absence of it affected the learning performance. This

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<sup>1</sup> The study is based on a very strong theoretical approach, which very accurately led to an empiric research. See Martín Rojo, L., "Asimilar o integrar? Dilemas ante el multilingüismo en las aulas", CIDE, 2003, pp.31-58.

approach is focused on a critical analysis of the speeches, *i.e.*, on the effective dynamics developing in the school.

The legal and political frameworks of education leave the public policy management in the Autonomous Communities' charge. The situation presented in the study is that "the regulatory framework refers to a concept of integration that seems to respond to a vision compatible with an ideology and an intercultural model that lead to 'the respect of the difference, which implies a mutual recognition of expressiveness and plural coexistence required in the Madrid Community for setting a balanced social interaction' (Regional Plan of Educational Compensation: 12-13). But this term has different or even contradictory meanings".<sup>1</sup>

Even the Principle Declaration refers to the adoption of an intercultural model: a model involving all actors in the proposals for maintaining the "compensation education", although they are only provided for "the sector of the students considered to need compensation and not for the entire educational community; therefore, forcing the intercultural education into this framework shows that it is not understood as development implying changes of various dimensions in the school life".<sup>2</sup>

The result of these case studies in the language teaching field shows that classrooms remain fundamentally monolingual in spite of the students' multilingual abilities. Native born students are often interested in languages, but there is no way to channel their interest to a curricula or extra curricula activity. In other cases they feel excluded when other languages are used in the school. On the other hand, the students of foreign origin make effort to assimilate the teaching language which is excessively considered utilitarian. Those showing interest in the host country's language blame the assimilation pressure. There is a risk to lose their mother tongue.

Luisa Martín Rojo concludes: "keeping the mother tongue contributes to integration, not only owing to the role in building an identity, but also to its utility and the social capital implied. As long as there is a balance, it protects bilingual capabilities and the dynamic multiple identity of the persons who are capable to act as a *bridge* or *link*".<sup>3</sup>

The research of the strategies for revealing the value of the multicultural and multilingual classroom and the mode of promoting the

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 233.

communication dynamics, their linguistic and cultural origins is what stimulates the research work of John Corbet from the Glasgow University, in the micro ethnography field.<sup>1</sup> This research consists in analysing interviews with TV, movie and entertainment celebrities to properly see the communication processes taking place in the multicultural classroom, where there is an intention to be intercultural. First, we should note the importance of taking care of some communication instructions: the role of the participants, the division of the speech facts, the participation and the negotiation related to what is important in a conversation, to what is serious or a joke and the awareness raising with regard to what seems sincere and spontaneous; this is based on the involvement of the public in the present discussion. According to Corbet, we may carefully use the different social construction of the entertainment show in different contexts. But the most useful resource for an intercultural classroom, derived from the micro ethnographic approach, is the *role games*. This tool is a valid learning aid which allows people to build a public identity in a context created by various mediations. It also allows us to use role games as a form of integration of the traditional direct methods of teaching in the classroom.

It is no revolutionary method of education, but rather one of integration of the varied roles of language into curricula. It helps to raise awareness of how public and private identities of each student are constructed and negotiated (or rejected, in exchange) by means of verbal language (and along with the principal mother tongue or the second one, learnt from hosts) and non-verbal language.

We gradually see that the relationship between students and the teaching staff is very important. Another research, conducted by Dieneke de Ruiten from the Utrecht University<sup>2</sup>, evaluates this aspect in depth. In the Netherlands, there are four main immigrant groups: Turks, Moroccans, Suriname people and Dutch Antilleans. In the Dutch education system, the gap between the students of foreign origin and the Dutch ones is deep, as regards both the performance in primary schools and high schools, and the drop-out rate. It explains why the gap is linked to foreign students:

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<sup>1</sup> Corbet, J., “Celebrity, Culture, Language and Learning” in *Education and Intercultural Narratives in Multicultural Classrooms*, Officina Edizioni, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> De Ruiten, D., “The teacher’s opinion on students pertaining to ethnic minorities: Sources of inclusion or exclusion?” in *Education and Intercultural Narratives in Multicultural Classrooms*, Officina edizioni, 2006.

individual characteristics, socioeconomic origin and cultural resources (language). But a factor not sufficiently described is the relationship between teachers and students and, to a great extent, the teachers' opinion on the students. From 14 interviews (a small number but it tells something about a possible and real attitude of the teaching staff), we find out that the teachers' opinion on foreigners in general influences the educational activity in a negative way.

First, we take into account the teachers' opinion on foreign students. The prevailing opinion places the condition of being a foreigner among the depriving ones: first, because the new language of the host country is not used; second, because the family environment does not support the minors to adopt new cultural customs. These opinions may cause exclusion in the classroom; moreover, these opinions are based on stereotypes or prejudice derived from monocultural criteria. The impact of this type of opinion causes lack of the learning motivation of the students pertaining to ethnic minorities.

Another possible source of exclusion is the superficial attention paid by teachers to culture as a topic to be discussed in every class. Therefore, students cannot involve in critical debates concerning the relationship between ethnical and national identities and power position, so that they distinguish between the strong dependence on the existing structures and the assimilation processes.

The second case analysed is the influence of the opinions on the teaching practice. All teachers make changes on the basis of the opinions on the language and culture stock of the students. Most of the teachers focused on the fact that learning becomes slower and the specific objectives diminish to a more basic level "The curricula and the scheduling do not change, and culture as a topic for one or more classes is not considered. Briefly speaking, there is no proactive dialogue with families.

The third aspect includes the teachers' observations on the teaching practice, after witnessing slow progress made by students of other nationality in learning. The teachers' opinion is that, in spite of their efforts, it is increasingly difficult to fill the gap between native born students and foreign students. Unfortunately, none of the interviewed teachers looks critically at their responsibility for the limited success in learning. This results from the fact that they think that educational disadvantages are

mostly caused by cultural and socio-economic factors and does not consider them variables, but something hardly changeable.

Instead of negative comments on these results, we may underline the leading role of the teachers as possible agents of cultural and social changes; this role should be supported by institutional educational policies.

### ***Theorizing intercultural education***

Taking into account these results of empiric investigations, it is useful and interesting to review the consequences in view of the conceptual proposal for interculturality. First, we analyse the main levels at which the intercultural model is developed: on one hand, personalized attention is proposed, on the other hand, it is intended to fulfil the task of mediation between cultures. These two levels may be conceptualized as follows: intercultural education is intentionally destined to educate a certain person (families, teaching staff, other professionals, students, institutions) with regard to mutual knowledge of cultural differences; intercultural pedagogy approaches this issue theoretically. Intercultural pedagogy assumes, as a basic requirement, the dynamic construction of culture and intends to develop the empiric practice of intercultural education.

Intercultural education has two basic tasks: first, knowing host country's language without affecting the mother tongue; the second, we should show respect to cultural differences.

For both tasks, the relationships established and the forms of communication used play a leading role. The best method to favour intercultural education is dialogue. The second one should guarantee an effective junction of the cultural forms, conditions for mutual openness that should allow the participants to build new cultural symbols together. Two basic conditions should be provided for dialogue; the first one is equal distribution of the opportunities for active participation and mutual understanding. The second condition includes empathy, *i.e.*, the capacity of the parties to the dialogue should depart from their one perspective and assume the opinion of the other one.

What are the effects of the dialogue dynamics we found at the beginning of this paper? At a conceptual level, the effects can be the following: intercultural learning is neither adaptation nor assimilation, as it represents the application and the new construction of knowledge, *i.e.*, a

shift from assimilation to creativity, including active participation, respect and empathy. Dialogue is the cultural foundation of intercultural learning.

The final result of intercultural education or dialogue-based education, along with intercultural capacities and a positive sensitivity to differences, represents a multicultural identity, also defined as intercultural identity or *transculturality*.

Multicultural identity was defined by the following concepts: flexibility, reflexivity and autonomy. According to the research presented in this paper, these concepts are not enough and even they contain a hidden concept of ethnocentrism, since it makes identity look multicultural only when the autonomous being is built by joining several parts. On the other hand, a multicultural identity, in its most profound and richest sense, is a personality who combines his/her own originality with the socio-cultural belonging interdependent with his/her origin. Moreover, originality and autonomy, on one hand, are phenomenologically given without empiric existence and, on the other hand, they take shape by reviewing all experiences with various social and cultural realities.<sup>1</sup> Now, the present debate concerning this topic can be confined to the following question: Are there viable alternatives to the intercultural education model in a school in order to build a multicultural citizenship? An alternative suggested by sociologists is intercultural mediation.<sup>2</sup> We notice that in some classrooms, the issue about relationships, dialogue and participation is central for the development of the dynamics, corresponding to the school context and the educational function. Intercultural mediation is a concept serving for a better definition of practice, an intervention in case of conflict due to inequality and/or discrimination of the cultural minorities. Intercultural mediation, unlike a simple mediation, clearly and properly implies a mutual learning opportunity, starting from various cultural positions. It is a concept based on the empowerment of the actors involved in communication and education. In fact, the purpose is to build, by a common and equal plan, a new way of dealing with communicational and cultural symbols. Therefore, the intercultural forms of education are not easy to convert into attempts to impose the vision of a dominant group. To prevent such risk, Pearce (1989)

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<sup>1</sup> See Ricoeur, P., "The Model of Text: The Significant Action Considered as a Text", PDF, 1979.

<sup>2</sup> This idea coincides only partially or is equal to the cultural mediation practice taking place in public spaces, including the school.

proposes a new concept for defining this paradigm of confrontation-mediation: cosmopolitan mediation. This concept implies an intercultural dialogue as a form of coordination of several very different cultural forms, which are considered incommensurate and *a priori* accepted as correct; moreover, it is a matter of management of conflicts by means of a dialectal comparison in various social spaces.

The most significant difference related to transcultural approach is the rejection of the proposal for *combination* in favour of the proposal for *coordination*: maintaining the differences but concluding agreements for satisfying the needs and wishes of the participants in the social game.

According to Baraldi, in a functionally differentiated society the cosmopolitan mediation is surely less popular than the intercultural proposal.<sup>1</sup> The condition to accept that the cultural forms are incommensurate is considered a social risk. But we should clarify that cosmopolitan mediation will not abandon the harmony of various symbolic cultural forms; on the contrary, a positive coordination is to be found by dialogue in order to build a multicultural citizenship.

Could this type of citizenship be achieved along with the cosmopolitan proposal instead of intercultural education? The latter is now facing a crisis: declarations are very clear in papers, but not in specific practice.

The experience presented in this paper may have an extremely important theoretical contribution: the initiation of intercultural education not only in its systematic aspects (at communicative level) but as involvement and engagement of some persons who speak and act. This implies that the cultural systems do not automatically and completely reflect in every person in a certain cultural context, but rather the fact that every individual is an original synthesis of a new unique cultural origin and personal development.

The task of education, old and new at the same time, is to be voiced among unique, equal and different persons. To know yourself by the contribution of the others from the public space (like a classroom) means to be aware that there is no monopoly over the opinions on the world. It means to resize the cultural context, to be aware of personal individuality and to

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<sup>1</sup> Baraldi, C., "New Forms of Intercultural Communications in a Globalised World" in *Gazzette*, 68(1), pp.53-69, 2006.

look for a way of living together in order to respect more the human beings with whom we share the world and especially the classroom space.

By respecting the private life and constantly checking our own early position and sharing experience, we may get a form of education which is ever more personal, open and free of prejudice.

### ***Conclusions***

We see the limitations and difficulties (in many European countries) in providing a recognized positive and adequate role (in cultural and social practices) for the multicultural classrooms within the educational units.

Moreover, it is possible to reveal the gap between the social policies (especially in relation to principle declaration and theoretical works that inspire them) and the daily practice.<sup>1</sup>

Among the conclusions based on the empiric studies on the reality of multicultural classrooms, we may identify in the public policies that the theoretical development does not provide us with a magic formula to clarify the new problems in the classrooms; it is an empiric research that teaches us by experience how to improve the political practice.

Integration has not yet become a reality in the classroom. This conclusion is not based only on statistical data that reflect the scholastic success, failure or drop-out. Social integration is rather understood in relation to the ordinary life in the classroom, *i.e.* in the processional dimension (*in itinere*), with the strongest influence on the social profile.

This paper focuses on the importance of the relationship between student and teacher. Quality improvement should aim at reforming the teachers' professional training to ensure that the persons involved in education have theoretical and practical tools for working in psycho-social multicultural context. We need a new approach to the forms of relationship.

The research work presented above underlines the positive role of the participation and narratives of each student and what he/she takes at home. This can be done in many ways. The ethnographic approach suggests the *role games* as a way of discussing the building of cultural identities by the interaction students and taking advantage of the idiomatic differences.

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<sup>1</sup> An expected task is the evaluation of the real impact of the regulatory framework and the educational policies on the EU's intercultural direction. We could say that forms of Eurocentrism persist in real practice.

Narrative, a common instrument in all cultures, is a key resource for intercultural practice. Finally, we should reveal the positive role of the students' decision making in the school life. All these factors imply recognition by the educational policy makers.

Institutional frameworks and political decisions should be based not on the distant theoretical model of the reality, but on what happens in practice. Therefore, a good option of the public policy is to investigate, to examine and to systematize the good practice in intercultural education.

A multicultural and intercultural school is the result of the daily constructive dialogue. The authors involved represent a multitude of voices and people. Unfortunately, public policies have lost a characteristic: personal attention. An institution is not a neutral organisation; it is made up of people working for people who are also citizens.

For taking advantage of the human and institutional potential of the educational unit, we should acquire good practice, which is essential for favouring a virtuous circle of political decision-makers, sociologists, students and teaching staff. A virtuous circle that cannot work without implying that human communication and coexistence should develop as much as possible the listening, the readiness to recognize in the others or in the experienced phenomenon a discussion partner who is worth our attention: in this process, the formation of new multicultural citizenship is at stake.

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