TO INTERPRET SUCCESS: THE SUCCESS IN SCHOOLS AND THE INTEGRATION OF FOREIGN STUDENTS IN ITALY

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Abstract: Intercultural education is a very relevant topic for research in Pedagogy. Intercultural education is not spontaneous, everybody is afraid of the word "foreign". Intercultural education is something to be built thanks to projects. Fondazione Intercultura *is an institution which is trying to face these topics and trying to educate trainers. Most of the time foreign students are considered problematic, especially in high schools as they are considered a problem by families and teachers alike. Foreign students are considered as a threat in slowing things down. They are considered inadequate. The feelings create social difficulties. A lot of essays insist on the poor language training they have and that means they have to work more and this slows down the learning process of other students or creates tension between different cultures and/ or religions.* Starting from this point a group of Italian researcher that I coordinated have conducted a survey on behalf of the Foundation to answer to some questions such as: what determines the success of the foreign students in Italy and allows them to be better integrated in our country? *This essay aims at finding a way to understand problems and to acknowledge positive experiences, the so called best practice. The "evaluation" from a pedagogic point of view aims to develop the conscience of the person who is learning and it allows the trainer to verify the methods of his teaching, to ascertain the validity of its methodology. The study took in consideration the scholastic performances which are influenced by various elements: expectations of parents, self-esteem, social life, family, educational policies, relationships with teachers and classmates.*

Keywords: integration, Intercultura, education, schools, success, evaluation

1. INTRODUCTION

How do foreign students, classmates, teachers and families define it? We can assume the scholastic careers, the success and the failures of foreign students as tests to measure the capability of the schools to offer something valid in a multi and intercultural context. The evaluation is a relevant step towards the learning process; it is most probably the stage which has caused more discussions. The "evaluation" from a pedagogic point of view aims to develop the conscience of the person who is learning and it allows the trainer to verify the methods of his teaching, to ascertain the validity of its methodology. The evaluation in schools has been carefully studied in the last years; those studies have enquired into the correctness and the objectivity of this experience. (Santelli-Varisco, 2000). Try to understand that success in schools means -beyond the pedagogical studies- above all to clarify what that terminology represents for teachers, students and families. It is clear that the two concepts of: scholastic success and positive result have two different meanings, they are not equivalent. In fact positive results means to have reached an acceptable level of learning considered basic, whereas success in school means to get high profile levels.

Strictly connected to success in school is the question related to the evaluation procedure was performed by teachers. The research elaborated on a lot of data, studying them from a quality and quantity point of view. The research as a matter of fact has not only studied data and statistics fixing all those

cases where foreign students -part of the Intercultura Programme- achieved success in schools while they spent one year in Italy, but it has studied processes, modality and conditions which allow the comprehension and the evaluation of educational, managerial and didactic strategies which all concur to make a positive experience for these students.

The intent of the scholars who have acted on behalf of the Foundation was that of knowing students (males and females), namely young people who have lived a special scholastic reality insofar as it is possible, to know these young learners in the extra-school life; the intent was to reconstruct the social and interpersonal dynamics between teachers and students, and between the other people involved in the school activities. The study was an empirical one.

We gave questionnaires to teachers and students, we organized groups to understand the concrete situation lived out in schools in order to help trainers. We wanted trainers to become at the same time both observers and main actors of the educational process in school and in class. We adopted empirical techniques and one of them was this: to be actively involved in the observation. The stories we have gathered have allowed us to get information and to have a better understanding of the learning processes. The pedagogical structure was based on comparative education. The study took in consideration the scholastic performances which are influenced by various elements: expectations of parents, self-esteem, social life, family, educational policies, relationships with teachers and classmates. The study has also analyzed the scholastic programmes as stated in the various P O F in the schools attended by the foreign students of Intercultura. The time period considered was one year according to the Kerr Map known internationally. Foreign students of Intercultura have spent one year in Italian schools and they appreciate the experience because they consider it a way of growth and most of them are ready to repeat the experience.

Their presence, as witnessed by the teachers, has given an added value to their classrooms, improving the knowledge of the foreign language. Above all the experience has represented an opportunity for the school to grow and it has represented a positive step upwards the intercultural dialogue in a globalized society, improving the learning processes.

2. MEANINGS, PURPOSES AND METHODOLOGY

It is remarkable how multi- and intercultural education as well as the presence of foreign students pose two different subject fields with own characteristics together with particular developments and difficulties. Multi- and intercultural education should configure itself as a dimension that marks the school's activity per se, and should proceed according to innovative and open terms. Look at Item 45, 7th paragraph Presidential decree 394/399 CC. MM. 205/90 and 73/94 according to which:

> "Schools must arrange intercultural education initiatives, whether in the presence or in the absence of foreign students. Intercultural education must be viewed as a school's fundamental value and therefore as the main criterion for a school's program; as an interdisciplinary training process addressed to anyone with an ordinary character to be activated in order to overcome any possibility of special treatments, stereotypes or biases, ethnocentric and sectarian visions with the aim of training minds that will be "open" to confrontation, sympathy, co-operation, peace and other ground values onto which a multi-ethnic society should be founded."

The presence of foreign students, their school "careers", their successes and failures should be envisioned as testing moments of the school's actual abilities to act in multi- and intercultural terms. The evaluation lies amongst the components of the training and understanding processes like the one that has produced and still produces arguments and

controversies. One first differentiation poses the evaluation beyond the meaning of measurement and control and basically intends it to simply be an assessment. This allows to view the trainee not only as someone whose performance level is being tested, but as someone who is going through a process that should provide him with the information on his own situation with the aim of easing his way through the cultural and educational process. In this perspective emerges what has been acknowledged as " the pedagogic function of evaluation" (Reuchlin, 1974), aimed at making the trainee's understanding processes easier, once he has been provided with all the information that will help him to come to terms with his own experiences.

2.1 Evaluation intended as… The research aims at spotting the school's successful cases with foreign students who attended schools in Italy for one year with the Intercultura program, at gathering information on their personal histories as well as to let emerge the educational and study choices that led to the final outcome. The main purpose of this research is to establish some good educational techniques and to help overcoming the biases that often lead to viewing the foreign student as a threat, as a burden and a slowdown to the ordinary class activities. Trying to investigate on the school success entails, first and foremost, going more in-depth on what the use of such terminology means for teachers, for the students and families, as well as on the many definitions given by previous pedagogic studies. It appears to be sufficiently clear that the terms *positive outcome* and *school success* don't have the same meaning, nor are they equivalents: with *positive outcome* one means to refer to the reaching of the understanding of basic notions, whereas with the second expression one might refer to the understanding of high-profile notions. Another matter that is strictly linked to the school success is that of the evaluation procedures that the teachers might opt for. The carried out research is rooted in quanti-qualitative factors: other than retrieving data and analyzing the matter on a statistical basis

by spotting all the school success cases of the yearly participants to the Intercultura project in Italian schools, it means to detect the processes, the modalities and the significant conditions that allow to understand and to enhance the educational and organizational study choices concurring to a good outcome of these students' school experience. The main intent of the researchers operating on behalf of the Foundation was that of getting to know all of the students, youngsters "in the flesh" in their own school reality, and, as far as possible, also in their outside reality to reconstruct the group trends, the interpersonal relationships existing between students and teachers, as well as between all of the different people involved in the many school activities. The survey has been carried out through observations on the field, through questionnaires submitted to the teachers and students, and the administering of some focus groups in order to collect some data pertaining to the actual school situations and to facilitate and encourage the school personnel to make themselves observers-researchers on the main school and class dynamics regarding the understanding processes of their students. Amongst the empirical techniques: the active observation, life histories have allowed the gathering of some informative data and the possibility to verify the adequacy and influence on the understanding processes. The pedagogic framework was built up on the basis of comparative education. The research took into account the school performance, affected by several crucial factors amongst which: parents' expectations, self-esteem, forms of socializing outside of the school context, structure of the family, educational policies, the relationships with students and classmates. In the research, The school profiles were also analyzed, as they were present in the TOP (Training Offer Program) of each school attended within a year on behalf of the Intercultura, with Kerr's Map, a valid international well-tested instrument.

2.2 Stages and instruments of the research. The research staff included researchers coming both from different

university institutions and different areas of expertise (cultural anthropology , intercultural pedagogy, language science, sociology), who brought different competences to the project in order to build a solid research group, whose individual points of view were totally unbiased from their own fields of expertise and converged in the choice of a common methodology and lexicon. (Maria Chiara Spotti, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan and Francesco Schino, Università of Bari).

The research work took place in the second trimester of the academic year 2009-2010. These were the followed steps:

- Selection of the two champion and most valuable Regions in the research (both Northern and Southern): Apulia for the South (all the provinces), Emilia Romagna for the North (7 provinces);
- Presentation of the project through an Introduction letter and meetings with all of the school Principals and the professors to the fourth year's classes, in order to present the research modalities and the sharing of useful context data helping to set up the work;
- Election of a teacher to make reference to for each school, who then followed the different stages of the research;
- Collecting of data pertaining to the plan of studies in the school through the acquisition of the TOP (Training Offer Program);
- Interviews with the schools' Principals, with literature and language teachers and an assigned teacher for the institute's intercultural activities (concerning the used methods, the contents and docimological contents), that were organized through specifically elaborated questionnaires.
- Questionnaires for foreign students aimed at monitoring their level of integration in the class, in the family, in their peer group; the questionnaire helped also in finding out some difficulties, the criticalities, the differences perceived by

them between their original school system and the one from the hosting country, the relationships with the teachers, their school "career".

- Questionnaire for the Italian students who were present in the classes hosting the foreign student from Intercultura (mirror group) to monitor their interaction skills with the foreign student, their intercultural competences;
- Open-answer questionnaire (in Italian or in English) to be taken at home or during classes, on behalf of the foreign students from Intercultura;
- Identification of the foreign students from Intercultura to be involved in focus groups;
- Carrying out and analysis of the focus groups, during approximately one hour and a half each, on behalf of one or more members from the research group;
- Analysis of the school profiles through specific table forms based on Kerr's map, so as to be able to compare the results from the different institutes either in a regional and national context;

The research sample was based upon 328 students distributed in 57 secondary schools; 72 foreign students from Intercultura (34 in Emilia Romagna, 38 in Apulia) plus the mirror group.

2.3 Analysis of the Training Offer Programs by the schools that were involved.
From the brief analysis of the TOP (Training Offer Programs) by the 57 2nd degree high schools involved in our research – having hosted in the academic year 2009-2010 the foreign students that have arrived to Apulia an Emilia Romagna the Intercultura Association – it has emerged in an evident way that intercultural pedagogy strictly in terms of didactics, concrete interventions and programs, may not be a widespread approach – especially in Apulia – which does not exclude though that the single institutes took very great care to the well-being of students (so, being the interculture a relationship with a foreigner, to the interculturalness implicitly). As we have noticed, often, the support given to the

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Intercultura foreign students is in the facts merely linguistic. The presence of many project with an intercultural feature may result in being far less significant if compared to the various areas of intervention and the amount of the offered projects. It emerges that the conditions which facilitate understanding are others.

The protocols for the management of the students are not widely spread, although they would be necessary, perhaps in co-operation with the Intercultura local Centres (the teachers often talk about useful materials coming from the Foundation itself, though they also complain about the absence of any kinds of contacts with it), as well as with the training of the teachers and classmates that are about to welcome the Intercultura student in their class.

2.4 School success and evaluation: the Intercultura students' point of view. The question related to school success was posed both in the questionnaires and in the focus groups. The definition of school success given by the foreign students may sometimes turn out to be an overall judgement on their year abroad and they often refer to their personal inner growth and the satisfaction for having confronted several challenges. For many students school success is the school's success refers to the school succeeding in its mission to involve and motivate/thrill to attending classes and studying.

> "I think that the word "success" in school means that in the school environment the students reckon the school to be suitable for them. By giving the students the right motivation to make them study and be fond of school."

It also is a multi-generation school, whose younger and older teachers may give different but fundamental contributions:

> *"In a "successful school" there are either young and old teachers. This is a very important thing as no one is too old in their experience. The presence of young people is important as in 2010 they might be able to generate new ideas and avoid therefore to stay anchored to the old study methods."*

The request for improvement, passion, vividness in order to motivate to studying also refers to the theme of the lacking motivation and a series of other problems, amongst which school waste. In general, the answers given by the foreign students make reference to many factors that characterize school success. Amongst the main ones, besides the motivational one, the relational dimension emerges and regularly becomes the main focus. Many of the answers given in Emilia Romagna can be sum up in the expression "to fit well". Here's what a Chilean girl says:

> " … for me success in school means having schoolmates that… become your friends. That make you feel like a fellow student and not "just the foreigner", to whom you may ask for help without any fear. Success with professors, for me, means being treated like the others and not believing that you're retarded just because you still can't speak well."

And here's the witnessing from a Hong Kong girls whose ending evaluation was negative:

> "It means that he or she fits well in school that the others se him/her as one of them. Has friends in the school. Gets pretty good grades (7 and such), studies, is committed and has fun in school."

Being/ feeling part of the class group, and moreover of the school despite the linguistic difficulties, is considered, by the great majority of the participants to the program, to be the very sign of success. "Fitting well" also implicitly includes the reaching of numerous learning objectives and the development of highly complex transversal competences to be reached within a rather limited manner of time. In other words the foreign students wish to be able to follow and take part to the studies more or less in equal conditions as the other students. As S. (Guatemala) affirms, success is

"seeing the world of studies in a different way, being able to to fit oneself in another studying environment despite the linguistic difficulty…"

In this statement one can read the necessity to rapidly overcome to moving, the anxiousness and the struggle that accompany the first period so as to fully and joyously take part to the school fervor. Fitting happily into the group is part of the success as it is a conquest – it is not always easy to relate oneself to people of the same age – but it is also the key to overcome the early difficulties in communication and of course in studies. As a matter of fact the interest from the schoolmates is a strong motivational factor to the linguistic progress and the overcoming of obstacles in the single disciplines. It is a fact anyway that "successful" experiences in Emilia Romagna as well as in Apulia were characterized bay a good and rapid phase of initial integration (within the month of October). Even those who had some travels at their arrival to the school, e.g. for a wrong program choice with a subsequent change of institute, have then carried on happily, by finding a quick solution to the problem. It is likely nonetheless that the quickness in responding on behalf of the teachers and volunteers might help the students to feel listened and understood in their needs, and it also helps maintaining the motivation to the program vivid as well as the capability to rely on the Association. Some of the more articulated and descriptive definitions of school success make the reference to the learning and the study more explicit. Here's an account by a participants whose school experience fully satisfactory and with excellent results also in terms of evaluation:

F. (Sweden): [school success] means that the foreign student was able to integrate himself in the class, to follow the subjects and learn the language well. Sometimes it is hard to manage school as well as in one's own country, so it can be said that… all that matters is what one has learned and the effort made in order to learn it".

There's also those who give their priority to learning Italian as a sign of success or those who talk about personal growth and maturity. A few others match success with intercultural learning and the capability to operate the change of perspective as required from experience and to open up to another context:

M. (Japan): "For me it lies in having become friends with as many people as in one's own country , in having learned about oneself (as well as one's own country) from the point of view of people from another culture, and most of all in having enjoyed and liked it."

Very few definitions of school success mention evaluation, saying that it is important not to fail, or having low grades, whereas only one student talks about high grades. Even in the focus groups the participants declare to be careless about the result. From the statements of the second questionnaire, the grades obtained in the Italian school result as dropping but the personal satisfaction factor stays strong and balances out an apparently less brilliant result. In fact the students feel to have confronted additional difficulties compared to other students of the same age. Not only did they have to fit in the school, but they have also given proof of being able to pass a hard test, that is to make themselves independent and able to live abroad for a whole year.

M. (Dominican Republic): "Though it was difficult, I'm very content because i made it. It went well."

N. (Thailand): "I'm very happy about this experience, because all the good and the bad things are experiences that helped me growing. Even the friends and teachers are really nice, they made me feel good and helped me a lot".

Somebody else was surprised about the achieved results, as they were expecting lower grades and admit having committed themselves scarcely:

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A. (Germany): "Even though I hadn't studied I had high grades… A real miracle… Since I had higher grades than some Italians in my class…"

It is certified then that the evaluations, despite suffering from a decrease compared to the initial ones, seem to keep into account the confronted difficulties as well as the motivation and commitment on behalf of the students.

2.5 Comparison between the initial and final evaluations. In Emilia Romagna on 21 out of the 32 questionnaires that were expected to be released from the teachers, it emerges that the final evaluations are coherent in 50% of the cases with the initial ones. 4 students have even maintained a "very positive" evaluation. In 5 cases no judgement was ventured as a result of some lackings in the admission documentation, 2 were given a positive evaluation with some differences and only 3 have a rather negative evaluation. Amongst the particularly successful cases, 4 students are to be reported. 2 of the students are central-American, 1 is Japanese and 1 is Swedish. Besides from their origins and a major or minor facility for learning Italian, the four seem to have in common not only a strong motivation for integration but also the fact of having met strongly strongly inclusive environments and a great disponibility on behalf of the school to personalizing the programs and to value the competences of the students.

2.6 Italian lifestyle, in the school and outside. From the point of view of the Intercultura foreign students the Italian school experience has generally produced rather positive results. **71% claims to go to school in Italy with pleasure.** The "new" data, compared to the question asked in the previous paragraph, is the appearance of unsatisfied students certified to 11.3% together with 17% of partially unsatisfied. By asking directly to the Intercultura foreign students to assess data on the school achievings as compared to their "home" ones, it is confirmed that 79,0% is aware that the results are average-good; whereas 14.5% considers them to be far worse. Only 4.8% reckons them to be better. Certainly this one major issue that leads to a more thorough consideration, based on the outcome of questionnaires aimed at "our" foreign Intercultura students. The challenge was also that of finding plausible explanations to this anything but simple phenomenon and, rather, very complex as it merges together several variants related to the different school system, to the many teaching strategies, to the different cultural origins, to the many life histories. Even for the unwillingly studied subjects on behalf of the foreign Intercultura students, as well as for the more appreciated ones, the motivations are on one hand related to the teachers' capabilities to plan the didactic activities so as to help the foreign Intercultura students, seeing as how 17.7% claims not to understand the explanations and 10.5% utters that the teachers are unable to help them; on the other hand they are disliked (21,8%). This last data matches with what was said previously (on the liking of Math as studied in their own country) only if underneath such disliking lies a different appreciation between the Italian teaching methods and the foreign ones. A 26.6% of unanswered questions has also been detected. In order to close the analysis strictly related to the school aspects it is important, however, to point out that 62.9% of the foreign Intercultura students have generally perceived a good acceptance of the cultural diversities. The "critical" ones on this issue are certified to be 9.7%.

2.7 Mirror group and school success. The definitions of schools success provided from the mirror group are connotated with a certain extention and make reference to multiple factors, especially to the occupation and the evaluation, almost completely absent in the foreign student's questionnaires. It is almost as if they lived in the present time as entirely focused on their amazing experience, whereas the Italian ones who are their same age manage to envision a continuity between their present and their future. Aside from this, the definitions from the two groups have many things in common. Even in the mirror

questionnaires, in fact, the relational dimension is a vital component:

> "School success is getting along with your schoolmates and professors" – "For me, school success is being committed to the greatest extent in order to achieve good grades, to relate to the schoolmates and to bond with everyone".

Even here the priority seems to be that of "getting on well" with both students and teachers, that of feeling fully accepted in the class. For someone, it is important for this to happen no matter whether the results are positive or negative, that is outside of a competitive context and a relationally exclusive one. A quiet life amidst the school and class group in its ensemble seems to be generally desirable or one reality in which to be truly happy. This is what two satisfied student utter on the importance of the relationship with the schoolmates just to learn that this is, by far, the general standard procedure.

> "In my class the activities are articulated in group researches, presentations, etc. which may determine the grades. Thus, it is necessary to create an active teamwork atmosphere and, luckily, this is possible in my school." – "In my opinion, school success does not only result from frontal school lessons, but also from the classmates, through discussions and argumentative themes".

Even the students from the mirror group seem then to appreciate the two didactic modalities in favour of the group trends and entailing interaction, in total synchrony with the majority of the Intercultura students complaining, instead, about its lack in their original country. At the same there is a strong desire for a school where learning is set aside from the performance, but it is rather linked to the pleasure and the interest for the contents. In this context arises then a need for recognition and appreciation on behalf of the teachers, which foreign students sometimes complain about not obtaining.

"Success is achieved when you go to school every day wearing a smile, fearless of being considered as a grade from 1 to 10" – "For me school success is both being rewarded from the professors, with votes or any such thing, and the interest for certain subjects that lead to student to delve into them also outside of the school environment".

Recognition, interest, pleasure in the Exchange are closely linked to the dimension of motivation towards studies which is sometimes hard to find. Hence the teaching figure seems to be essential in order to involve the students:

> "To me, school success is managing to get high grades given from the interest and the passion that the professors should be able to convey to each and every single one of us".

It strikes though that the school success definitions are so close between the two groups as are the critics more or less concealed under a school system into which it is not always pleasant or amusing to find oneself in and often lacking in truly involving and motivating situations and/or modalities. Thus, some delay the commitment to the university years, when the subject will be far more inherent to one's own interests, and settle for the option of surviving to an absolutely unappealing daily routine.

2.8 Success as viewed by the teachers. In the definitions provided by the teachers, as much as enriched with a great deal of facets, school success coincides essentially with the success of an educational project pertaining to the person in its entirety. The developments of a student's potential along with its individual growth are therefore considered as a priority. Studying is then linked to one's own maturity, of the developing of an independent thinking, of the acquisition of instruments that will help to confront life in its variety of aspects.

> "Naturally school success does not entirely identify itself with a final high evaluation; it is on the contrary much more than this. In my opinion a student is to achieve school success

whenever he absorbs notions that allow him to elaborate a personal vision of the world with broader horizons and to acquire competences that will allow him to confront life by achieving positive outcomes. It is an ambitious goal that the teachers for one should challenge themselves with, although it's not easy".

Many definitions insert the single person in a relational dimension. In these cases the school burdens itself of the civil-ethical training of young people and the concept of school success embraces a much wider horizon than the local schools by projecting itself in the society. Many, in fact, point out the importance of the training of *"citizens that should be able to manage their own life project"*. Only a teacher makes explicit reference to the sense of belonging to the national community and focuses thus on the school being a fundamental means of values' and cultural transmission of a historically and geographically defined community. The teachers seem to implicitly respond to the motivation and commitment drop, following to the scarce appreciation for the Italian school on behalf of a high percentage of participants to the gathering of data. A discrepancy also detected between the intentions and viewpoints of one part of the teacher's personnel and the reality detected with Intercultura by the students in Italy and their schoolmates. The pedagogic project as expressed in these definitions seems not to keep into account, at least in words, the dimension of motivation and involvement of the students in building their own learning pattern. In fact lessons are not always appealing and the teaching methods do not always seem to be coherent with the goals that the interviewed teachers originally intended to achieve. If the atmosphere in the class group is considered to be important, it is also true that the adopted teaching methods (frontal lesson, oral questionings and individual written tests) rarely tend to favour the creation of a group. The use of appealing teaching methods such as *problem solving* issues, group activities, field researches, other than the effort to value

individual knowledge, aimed at delving into and discovering new notions, is quite frequent. The prevailing of a frontal teaching that is more addressed to the single individuals rather than to groups together with the harshness of part of the teaching personnel and the School Councils in planning the contents' programming seems to impede at least one part of the Italian school in the project of creating responsible and active citizens, whereas it often manages to make them lose their motivation, as the definition of the mirror group have testified.

2.9 School success as viewed by the families. According to the carried-out research, the role played by the host families in easing the Intercultura students' integration process in the school life and in guiding them through the critical phases that they might go through. Family plays a major mediation function in letting understand the "game rules" and in encouraging and motivating them to the reaching of the defined goals. Without the essential aid of the families, many foreign students would not find a way to overcome the inevitable frustrations and difficulties in order to live a happy school experience. How do host families define the school success? The families highlight on the multiple factors that contribute to its achieving. They also highlight the importance of the relational dimension and make school success coincide with a good integration in the class group.

"I would define school success the ability to participate and interact in class activities, although with a strict link to their own competences and abilities, as well as the possibility to socialize and to be involved in the schoolmates' initiatives, whether inside or outside of the school."

In this definition, one might implicitly read that the foreign student can, or rather must feel "a part of" from the very beginning, despite the limits in one's skills which are destined to increase during the stay. As the family itself affirms:

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"Certainly the guys must be particularly motivated to learning and to the constant improvement of their Italian language skills, whereas the professors must devote themselves to define a specific and adequate program continuing throughout the whole year"

2.10 School and Intercultura's foreign students: positivity and criticality. Foreign students testify to a very reassuring data for the Italian school: cultural diversities are viewed in a positive way and Intercultura's foreign students don't complain about feeling excluded in no way. Cultural stereotypes and biases are present in the early phase of the arrival. Many questions that the students are puzzled about and that show a great deal of ignorance of the country of origin are a significant symptom to this. But through the "contact" and interaction among students a great ability to being open and flexible, such stereotypes were then torn down, one would say rather "spontaneously" as a result of an intention that was programmed by the Class Council through well-targeted interventions. The Italian students' mentality appears to be rather ethnocentric and the study programs do not contribute to modifying it by only dealing to a low extent with the geographical areas outside of Europe. In this situation, the arrival in class of a student from a different country is nonetheless a changing factor towards a multi-perspective vision of life. An adequate preparation of the class at the arrival might facilitate going more in-depth on relevant issues also under a didactic profile and might drastically broaden the cultural horizons of the Italian students. From a more methodological-didactic point of view, the foreign students complain about the italian school's scarce ability to motivate. As a negative example they report the teaching procedure of frontal lessons, the few lab activities and the mnemonic learning methods. Foreign students also report the teacher's scarce ability in the use of spoken English, which may represent an initial obstacle for many as well as a general difficulty in understanding lessons, entirely oral and not unenhanced by a written support,

such as keywords written on the board or written summaries from the lesson and or the textbooks. Many appreciate, on the other hand, the fact that one can learn to give oral speeches in front of others thanks to oral tests, which has a remarkably positive effect on learning the Italian language. For a minority of students coming from eastern Europe and Asia the relationship with the professors is very positive as it's run in a horizontal way whereas for students of other origins the professors are viewed negatively as they are quite distant. The professors, on their account, highlight on the advantages given by the presence of foreign Intercultura students. In fact, with their choice to confront the many obstacles in order to open to new realities, they represent a great stimulus and encouragement for Italian people of the same age to believe in their strengths and potentials. In concrete terms, they contribute to their opening to the world and to new realities. But the presence of foreign students is stimulating for teachers as well. The colleagues are brought together to work in groups in order to achieve the pre-established goals in a more synergic way. Furthermore, by confronting with different needs and goals, they are brought to refine the preparation work and to focus on a more detailed programming.

3. EVALUATION OF THE EXPERIENCE

Overall, the experience of the foreign Intercultura foreign students is definitely good (83,8%). Only for 5 students it turned out to be negative.

The key to success: good school practice. It has been observed that the experiences referred to as positive have often got an initial integration phase in common into which several positive action are accomplished, in order to reduce the initial drawbacks towards many foreign students and to lay the foundations for a happy development of the relationships and the learning process. Naturally, before all of this, it is assumed that every single Intercultura Local Centre, supported by a sufficiently informative documentation on the program and the areas of

interest, plans the insertion of a non-Italian Intercultura student in an adequate Institute. It would be of great use for teachers not only to know the material gathered by Intercultura "Educating to the world", but also to be thoroughly informed on the student's original school system, on the didactic modalities and on anything that might be useful to rapidly compile a didactic and educational project. Once this choice is made by the Intercultura Local Centre, everything else is up to the students and teachers.

The key elements to this insertion phase are enlisted in the following order:

• The presence of a reception protocol in order to deal with the arrival of the student, despite in many institutes such insertion procedure takes place even in the absence of a protocol;

• The assignment of a tutor who's able to communicate in a foreign language (generally English), even better if well informed on the Intercultura program and in contact with the Local Centre. The tutor seems to be one the figure that the foreign students appreciate the most. In fact, he has a great function of mediation between the **foreign student and the institution.**

Generally, he defines the didactic patterns, the selection of the classes to attend, coherent to a previous agreement by the Class Council. He listens to the specific needs of the single students and manages to find personalized forms of insertion in the school reality. Moreover he has a similar function to the *counselor*, available to listen to the foreign student and his problems and to provide guidance in his school path;

• The assignment of a study program coherent with the previous and future school studies, that also keeps into account of the student's interests;

• The assignment of an adequate class in terms of ability to welcome, include and co-operate with the new student; the same function should be performed on behalf of the teachers, or at least from the majority of them; an option is the insertion of a student in the tutor's class so as to be followed more carefully;

• The preparation of the class at the arrival of a new student (e.g. through timely information gathered from the Local Centre);

• The preparation by the Class Council of each and every single teacher to the reception of the new student;

• The assignment of a personalized didactic program, including eventually a reduction on the schedule, the exclusion of certain subjects (e.g. latin), the enhancement of some others (e.g. English or other foreign languages);

• An open-study program with the insertion in two classes in order to follow personalized patterns and to expand relationships; for some student, switching classes can be less pleasant but this procedure is generally viewed as positive;

• Adopting every possible strategy in order to help the student to expand his/her relationships (e.g. by getting involved in extra afternoon activities with other groups of students);

• insertion of the new student and generating the need for support on their behalf (e.g. supplementary explanations, group homework, delivering notes, etc.);

Involving of *returnees,* if present in the school, for a presentation to classmates and class groups; involvement in extra afternoon activities; involvement in well-known foreign languages' lessons(e.g. English/Spanish); lessons in the student's native language (e.g. activation of a Japanese language course); presentations on the single disciplines' issues in agreement with the teachers;

• in general, it is important to give a certain value to the competences of the foreign students in order to allay the frustration feeling, especially in the initial phase;

• support to the learning of Italian language through a *well-targeted* teaching, the individual studies on specific material, the regular correction of the written works, etc.;

• showing interest to the person and the original cultural context by asking questions,

by asking for information and by helping to eliminate the stereotypes related to the original country, so as to promote the exchange and mutual knowledge;

As regards didactic programming, schools are suggested to:

- establish the main objectives to be reached in the single disciplines through a previous agreement with the Intercultura student

- simplify the concepts in order to allow a better understanding of the Italian language and make a presentation on traditional values and the national culture:

1. to express oneself orally and put something down on paper in Italian
2. knowing the Italian school system
3. knowing the main aspects of the Italian culture
4. socializing and communicating with classmates and teachers
5. allowing the student to talk about the uses, costumes and habits of his/her own country;
6. moreover, every involved teacher has elaborated a program with the main goals to be achieved in his/her own discipline as well as the notions and competences to be acquired;

As regards didactic programming, schools are suggested to:

- analysing the needs
1. planning on the general aims and goals
2. planning on specific objectives (for each discipline)
3. research-action of the adequate means and instruments
4. synthetic planning on the contents (for each discipline)
5. monitoring, verifying and evaluating (before, during and after)

As for the evaluation it might be adviseable to:

- define evaluation modes and times in complete agreement with the Intercultura student; contents and modalities of the verifying tests might differ from the class group ones;

- illustrating to the intercultural students the evaluation criteria

- use standard language for preparing written tests and the consequential double evaluation (e.g. English + history)

- postpone oral tests to the moment when the communicative competence is sufficiently good.

As for didactics it is generally important to:

- value the knowledge and competences of the Intercultura foreign students by involving them in lessons on well-known issues or that can be delved into through research;

- selecting the studying materials for the single issues according to the student's skills in oral speech; using eventually middle school books, to be integrated with additional information whenever scarce;

- visualizing the explanation clues and keywords on the board; more in general adopting every possible strategy so as to make explanations more easy to understand;

- verifying on the understanding of the explanations and give further details if necessary; taking care, in general, of the learning process;

Giving good value to the desire to learn by arousing the student's interest; ability to motivate all the students, not just the Intercultura foreign ones.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In order to be able to "measure" the school success of the non-Italian student's experience who came to our schools in the previous academic year, one should make reference to the specific indicators that may result, in this case, result to complex and difficult to define. In fact, one may confront with a multidimensional concept towards which the Department of Education, despite avoiding to provide a possible conceptualization, has since long ago shown a great priority interest to the ends of improving and increasing the value of the educational system – especially since, after

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the launching of the Lisbon strategy in 2000, the value of competences has become of primary importance in the concept of school success. Within a policy that is aimed at creating the conditions for a lifelong learning process, amongst the strategic goals there is that of improving the learning level, to ensure the access equity, to grant the mastery of basic and transversal competences, even with actions on the reference context, so as to improve the school system's appeal and to contrast school dispersion. A fundamental objective for the personal development of all the boys and girls lies in the improvement of the education level, to be intended as the main instrument to the country's social and economic growth. School, as many ministerial documents quote, must give its contribution to the well-being of the society that one lives into, by training active and responsible citizens who must be able to demand on their rights and to contribute in a conscious way to the resolution of problems. The school-time becomes then a fundamental component although one's own individual motivation, the social context that learning takes place into, the technical-didactic instruments at one's disposal and the teacher's ability to keep up to date, must not be forgotten. Recovering the student's basic and transversal competences is also useful to contrast school dispersion, a phenomenon for which many actions were taken, and several specific projects were financed, especially for southern regions referring to the PON projects 2007-2013 could be enough. First of all, the school of training success does not coincide with the school of easy pass, which would entail a lack in the didactic contents and methods. The school of success aims at creating, for all and in the classroom, the conditions that may help each student to be successful in the learning process. However, what the many OCSE-PISA or INVALSI surveys do not measure is the boredom and indifference for certain disciplines which are the same that underwent the analysis. Such teachings are reckoned to be difficult and/or boring by the Intercultura students as well, whom in questionnaires or

Focus groups have clearly stated their opinions. It only takes to think about the low ratings towards Mathematics, which instead they study with great pleasure and great results in their own country. Some important pedagogues, such as J. Dewey, A. Patri, M. Montessori, C. Freinet, M. Wagenschein, have laid, in the schools where their ideas were implemented, the foundations to a successful learning process on behalf of all the students, including the physically disabled ones. Their lessons are anything but overrated and, today, they may be summarized like this: when the students are involved in well-targeted activities, they think, ask questions, identify the problems and pose different issues, to which the teacher had not thought, this is the school of success. This school is far different from the traditional one, which used to outline a strict and where the teacher is the only one in charge of transmitting knowledge. In the school of success the students are the protagonists of the building of their own knowledge. The school of success is based, to a large extent, on Socrates' ideas. The teacher asks questions, but leaves to the students the task of planning some adequate investigations in order find the answers. Thus, Socrates' ancient didactic mode sets the mode for the students to be curious, to think on their own thoughts and to keep asking questions to which they will have to find some answers in order then to compare their thoughts with their schoolmates' and the teacher's. Moreover, self-esteem, family and social relationships definitely affect school success. More specifically, a vast international literary corpus proves the strict relation between some of the so-called temperamental characteristics – dimensions named as "task orientation" – and school success. Such characteristics are perseverance, level of distraction and level of activity. A high activity level or the scarce perseverance to bring the task to its accomplishment are all elements which might compromise one's ability to focus and pay attention and might therefore affect the performance, as well as the reaching of a goal, in a negative way. But the factor that might

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help the most in foreseeing the outcome of the performance is the self-esteem level that the student possesses in relation to his "school" skills, as it may strongly affect the grades in every subject. Those with an essentially good self-esteem present themselves as optimist people, confident of what their possibilities might be, has ambitious goals to achieve and easily confronts with the negative experiences. On the other hand, the ones with a low self-esteem tend to be pessimistic and become depressed, their potential stays on a low-profile. But there's more to it. Several researches have proved that each and every one of us possesses an inborn tendency to self-improvement. And it's just through such mechanism that the individuals tend to obtain a positive response about themselves from the surrounding environment and to avoid the negative ones, to overestimate their own successes and to forget about their failures. These tendencies to self-improvement seem to have a strong adaptive value as they help the individual to live more peacefully. The points of reference that a student may need in order to increase his self-confidence also have a remarkable importance and they can either be internal factors (feeling competent in one particular activity or interpersonal ability) or external factors (family, teachers, schoolmates). Self-evaluation is so strongly affected be the judgement of others, as to be named "self mirror image". It is therefore fundamental that the parents or the educators manage to convey to the students a positive idea on his skills and to confide deeply in their potential. Let's try then to apply all this to "our" foreign Intercultura students who have lived a school (and life) experience outside of their affective-relational-psychological and socio-cultural daily context and let's briefly consider some elements that have emerged from our research. It seems evident that many Intercultura foreign students were inserted in school institutes that hardly include intercultural pedagogy among the educational expedients of their TOP and that have often received the student without going through a preparatory phase of the class group. The

interviewed internal teachers themselves admittedly view as a drawback the fact that there was no specific didactic-educational program referring to the new foreign Intercultura student – together with their own lacking in the knowledge of a foreign language. The persisting presence of the frontal didactic at the expense of the lab experience, generates in many students who were already used to it in their country of origin (with the exception of the Asian students) some difficulties and a certain level of underachievement in school compared to their country of origin. Whether we consider school success in terms of disciplinary achievements or in terms of the student's own well-being, the results of our research appear to be generally good despite posing the necessity to activate a good practice for a further increase of the positive aspects. The analysis itself has let emerge some important positive factors on the Intercultura students' school experience. Their presence – according to the interviewed teachers – has often brought the class students closer to each other, has improved the knowledge of the foreign language as it has "forced" the classmates to express themselves in a non-Italian language,; but more than anything else, it was unanimously acknowledged as an opportunity for the school to grow, an invitation to the intercultural dialogue in our global society, to the questioning of one's own perspectives, of the teaching-learning techniques. The school personnel involved in the survey has acknowledged to the Association a relevant added value in pursuing and in bringing this process forward. The foreign Intercultura students: bring the local class students closer to each other, prompt to the use of foreign languages, oblige to cross-cultural dialogue, question the teaching-learning techniques, stimulate the school to improve itself! It is for sure, several things must still be activated in order to stimulate the school institution towards a higher awareness of the relevance of the transversalness and unrenounceability of intercultural cross-cultural pedagogy in the training offer, but some factors testify to its

undeniable success: the extremely positive evaluation expressed by the Intercultura foreign students as well as by the Italian students who have welcomed the new unexpected schoolmates, along with the great availability provided by the Italian host-families, that soon became a second home for these non-Italian youngsters, who now dream (or have planned already) to come back as soon as possible.

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