The Multi(Inter)cultural School in Inclusive Societies

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A Composite Overview of European Countries

Edited by

Liana M. Daher, Augusto Gamuzza,
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Multi(Inter)cultural School in Inclusive Societies? An Introduction

Liana M. Daher, Augusto Gamuzza, Anna Maria Leonora

The growing amount of literature on the human sciences dedicated to the analysis of multicultural societies highlights the polysemous nature of this phenomenon which appears in scientific, social and political debates. The multicultural society is a "milieu of diversity": people with different styles of life and reference points living together in the same social space. Even though it describes today's society, multiculturalism is not easy to define; it refers to several key words and concepts describing different features and shades of meaning.

Traditionally, the public and scientific debate has stressed the integration issue, which focuses on the possible convergence of the conditions of foreigners and local people (Kincaid 1988). There are some opposing positions to this point that stress the assimilation model rather than the intercultural one. The aim of the *assimilationist* model[1] is the convergence of foreign cultures into a mainstream and dominant cultural tradition; in this case, foreign cultures will be absorbed into the host country culture (Kim 2001). On the other hand, the *interculturalism* model promotes a mixing of cultures and pluralist styles of living together based on dialogue and mutual understanding (Bouchard & Taylor 2008; Bouchard 2011; Barrett 2013).

In Italy, the citizenship issue is directly linked to the latter debate. The issue of *belonging* to Italian society is officially assessed by several conditions (Strozza, De Santis 2017), such as education, language skills, jobs, housing, and social and political participation[2]. Therefore, the Italian

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[1] This is also one of the most well-known political immigration models, implemented in France through an "assimilationist citizenship" model (Ambrosini 2013).

[2] For example, the proposals for a *mild ius soli* and/or *ius culturae*, that would allow children born and brought up in Italy to be Italian, albeit under certain

social indicators of migrants' integration are both economic and social, i.e. linked to the socialization and inclusion processes (Cellini, Fideli 2002; Cesareo, Blangiardo 2010). Moreover, the process to obtain Italian citizenship is very different from the process of *belonging* as it considers the years of residence or marriage to an Italian, apart from cultural and belonging issues. Multiculturalism is closely connected to politics of identity, difference and/or recognition, which agree on considering proper recognition of cultural diversity as a crucial step towards respect for socially devalued identities and a change in dominant social representations and communications that marginalize, or aim to marginalize, certain groups (Song 2010).

However, debates on multiculturalism, social inclusion and recognition of different identities and social groups are being held all over Europe; these could be seen as the most widespread issues in sociological theory and research approaches to migration.

The multifaceted nature of the multicultural world can be explained by critical sociological approaches: the normative issue theory, the (anti)ideology theory, and a feature of current global society. The first two approaches are widely supported by sociological knowledge: the *normative issue theory,* which stresses the recognition of difference, such as personal identity, self-fulfillment and social participation for overcoming previous injustice and exploitation of marginalized groups, and the second approach, the *(anti)ideology theory,* which sees identity and difference as the basis for the existence of the individual and the group, considered as products of continuous mediation and conflict between different possibilities—a condition that is seen to be inconsistent with the current economic and cultural globalization. The third approach considers multiculturalism as referred to some particular characteristics of current societies, focusing on the issues and constraints generated by these processes, including political and institutional praxis for dealing with them (Colombo 2014). The *Multiculturalism as a feature of current global society theory* focuses on the problems regarding managing cultural difference issues and, in our perspective, could be the right way to analyze issues concerning multicultural schools, which are dealt with in this book. The social dimension of the multicultural approach implies the recognition of diversity values and the intention to achieve social inclusion goals. This stresses the need to implement multicultural attitudes in the socialization process. Dealing with multicultural and intercultural environments—in a

conditions (schooling, integration process of the parents in the host country and number of years of regular residence of the parents) have been totally abandoned, and are discussed only by the media (Mediloro 2015).

world where the crisis of socialization and value transmission destabilizes educational perspectives— requires the practices of teaching and learning to be reset, revised and strengthened.

According to May & Sleeter (2010), critical multiculturalism arises from decades of affirmative actions as a sort of rejection of minority group integration policy. Furthermore, critical educational conceptions attempt to overcome the limits of the different approaches in order to provide praxis for emancipatory education (May & Sleeter 2010: 33). The critical multiculturalism approach is not merely a celebration of differences, but has a central role in praxis, and provides effective tools to challenge institutionalized inequities and prejudices in an interdisciplinary perspective—sociological, pedagogical, economic and political. (Berlak & Moyenda 2001: 92).

A soft critical approach shapes our perspective in dealing with the multicultural and intercultural education issues. If we pay attention to the school environment, one of the main issues arising is how to "manage diversity" as an on-going process that produces both talents and skills, and creates inclusive environments (Rosado 2012), where differences can be seen as resources instead of marginalizing and/or rejecting factors. Recently, EU schools have been receiving more and more pupils with different cultural or ethnic backgrounds, thus becoming increasingly culturally composite. Language issues, cultural misunderstandings and so on arise out of diversity and different cultural and origin affiliations. The problematic areas that have emerged with the integration of children at school concern different aspects, above all language and culture; therefore, new tools and strategies should be devised to overcome issues emerging from the new composition of schools and societies. Furthermore, diversity at school can be played out at different levels of relationship, giving rise to diverse issues and tensions. Several social actors are involved in the collective school behavior (pupils, families, teachers and school staff), in which teachers emerge as central actors—actors who can make the difference, key agents for change (The Anna Lindh Foundation 2017).

Thus, the present "multicultural school", considered as a key institution for the promotion of living together and the creation of intercultural citizenship (Ambrosini 2008), requires the teachers to have a culturally responsive attitude and intercultural competences (Krasnoff & Basha 2016). Moreover, education plays a fundamental role in human development: it should enhance social, cultural and economic development, citizenship-building and social values, whereas primary and secondary socialization should teach young people how to live in civil societies in the present time. In particular, the essential aim of the secondary socialization process,

experienced in the school, is to transmit awareness and respect for human rights as well as the rules underlying the concept of global citizenship. In this way, "learning to live together as responsible citizens can help to reduce tensions stemming from ethnic or cultural divisions and social disparities." (Bekemans 2013: 177-8).

As already highlighted, this dynamic process of teaching and learning sees the teachers at the centre of attention and requires them to have special competences and skills.

The multicultural nature of European society shapes the teacher's role in numerous ways. First of all, the teacher should have a positive relationship with his/her own culture and be open towards other cultures; he or she should have the capacity to work with heterogeneous groups, considering heterogeneity and differences as values. The "multicultural teacher" should know how to face the challenge of diversity and deal with other cultures through an equal opportunities approach.

The chapters in the book deal with several issues regarding multicultural schools in contemporary societies, including the need to empower teachers with operative tools and practices to work with children from different cultural and linguistic environments and help them to teach children the competence of living and collaborating together.

Attending a multicultural school helps children feel at home with pluralism and complexity. The role of the teacher is to foster the learning of multicultural values and culturally different habits, traditions and perspectives in a critical way, also in order to improve solidarity among different nationalities and respect for human rights, democracy and freedom.

In short, according to Perrenoud (1999), the multicultural teacher should deal with students' heterogeneity at different levels (focusing on learning opportunities and learning progression, working in a team, tackling ethical dilemmas, etc.) and contexts (school, families and communities).

All the above features could be summarized in the *culturally responsive teaching* approach that aims to include creating bridges between students' home and school lives, and valuing and recognizing students' different cultures (Ladson-Billings 1994, 1995). It is referred to as "a teacher's use of strategies that supports a constructivist view of knowledge, teaching and learning, and assists students in constructing knowledge, building on their personal and cultural strengths, and examining the curriculum from multiple perspectives, thus creating an inclusive classroom environment" (Krasnoff 2016: 2).

This approach has found its way into the process towards intercultural education, that is aimed at promoting knowledge and respect for cultural diversity and building convergence paths among common/similar values so as to achieve a new vision of citizenship and a good level of social cohesion (Giovannini 2008, Contini, Maturo 2011).

Starting from the above premises, the book aims at exploring different aspects of multicultural and intercultural education in an interdisciplinary perspective; the main objective is to stress the different critical features of multicultural schools in Europe today. It proposes an exploratory reading of the European school reality, focusing on differences and critical issues. The data and new research trends aim to provide valuable input in the field of education strategy, suggesting a review of educational methods and contents to ensure high quality education and training for all children.

The book tackles several issues concerning European multicultural schools; it attempts to offer a wide range of social aspects, cases and empirical analysis in Western and non-Western settings. The sociological perspective is predominant in order to describe and highlight challenges and questions. It aims at examining multicultural approaches in teaching strategies from a critical angle, assuming the school as a social change agent. The analysis takes advantage of the three main social sciences perspectives (sociological, pedagogical and psychological) engaged in the study of multicultural education. According to Banks (1997), multicultural education is an idea, an educational reform movement and a process because its goals are ideals that teachers should constantly strive to achieve. The most ambitious dimensions of multicultural education are the following: discovering connections among culturally diverse entities; developing the need to know and find out more about other people; and realizing one's own cultural identity and accepting oneself. These strategies empower school culture and social structure, and give direction to multicultural and inclusive schools that encourage dialogue among different cultures; they stress to the groups the importance of the interactive dimension and their capacity to experience peaceful relationships, build common projects, share responsibilities and create common identities (Council of Europe 2012).

This book focuses on the issues faced by schools and teachers in the implementation of multi/intercultural changes. The perspective of school actors is prevalent, and special attention is also paid to some particular situations of students at school. Multiculturalism is specifically observed as a consequence of migration in European countries, some of which were involved in the project Erasmus+ *Multicultural Schools. Enhancing Cultural and Linguistic Treasure of Europe through Teachers* (project n.

2015-1- PL01-KA201-016963), that is one of the sources of the data presented in the chapters.

Daher, Gamuzza, and Leonora present the results of the first phase of the afore-mentioned Erasmus+ Project concerning the analysis of teachers' needs in multicultural classes. Using mixed methods, the action-research aimed at an in-depth examination of the challenges and problems encountered with the cultural integration of foreign origin children. The results were shown in comparison with the European partners (Italy, Poland, Belgium, Greece and Spain), focusing on the similarities and differences of educational systems as well as strategies and methods for teaching/learning in multiethnic and multilingual settings. The key issue of the chapter is the new challenge coming from a stable multicultural society. The study reveals some alarming signs and highlights the fact that the most urgent need for European society is mixing diversity and different cultures into a renewed idea of "host" society: a system of resources for individuals, groups, and institutions. The variety of cultures and languages in Europe is often underestimated, stressing the threats linked to the everyday coexistence of many cultures, and not pointing out the potential of such diversity.

Solid quantitative evidence supports the above considerations. In 2019, Eurostat reported the presence of 22.3 million people born outside the EU-28 living in an EU-28 Member State on 1 January 2018, while there were 21.8 million people who had been born in a different EU-28 Member State from their country of residence[3]. As a result, the EU is increasingly becoming a stable multicultural society, facing challenges on how socializing institutions cope with diversity. In addition to this, EU schools welcome more and more pupils with different cultural or ethnic backgrounds, thus becoming increasingly composite from a cultural perspective. Language issues, cultural misunderstandings etc. arise from diversity, and different cultural and origin affiliation (i.e. family membership). Some problematic areas have emerged with the integration of children at school, concerning both language and educational aspects. In particular, in educational institutions with high multiculturalism, teachers play an important role in opposing (and sometimes spreading) prejudices, stereotypes and racist discourse between students, families and civil society.

Closely linked to these issues, Gogacz and Mavica stress the role of the teacher and his/her contribution to building European identity based on European values from a socio-pedagogical perspective. The paper proposes an exploratory reading of the European school reality regarding

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[3] See https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Migration_and_migrant_population_statistics

differences and critical issues. The data aim to be a valuable input in the field of education strategy, suggesting the review of educational methods and contents to ensure high quality education and training for all children. This process should be aimed at strengthening long-term socio-economic growth and stability. The socio-pedagogical dimension of multicultural thinking stresses the need to define the multicultural critical debate in a conceptual proposal of a Multicultural Training Route for teachers, underlining the possibility to share an effective strategy in future educational challenges. Multicultural education is beneficial for both students/learners and teachers. It should enhance the students' performance in class. Teachers should be adequately trained to handle students/learners from the various regions. The principal questions concern the role of the multicultural teacher in the new class setting: the fundamental question regarding teacher effectiveness requires policies of the teaching context to be addressed along with the qualities and roles of individual teachers; the issue of inclusiveness is shown to be associated with culturally responsive teaching and confidence in resolving and handling cultural conflicts. The authors agree that such change must be paralleled by a change in the culture and structure of the school in the vertical dimension, since it is here where the root problem at the horizontal level often resides.

From a multidisciplinary analytical angle, Severino, Muscarà, Aiello *et al.* define social inclusion as based on the recognition of the full participation of everyone in the life of a community and not merely integration, highlighting a fundamental expectation of the role of the teaching profession: the ability to identify and remove obstacles in learning and participation. Guided by the disengagement theory, which involves environmental and personal variables in the analysis of the dynamics of school participation, the chapter focuses on a reflection regarding the operative tools and practices that could make teachers empowered from an inclusive perspective. Assuming that the school represents the main place of socialization (formal, informal and non-formal), the authors present the *School Dropout Risk Questionnaire* (SDRQ), which was devised to detect the risk of school dropout, allowing the teachers in the multi(inter)cultural school to analyse also the role of the variables related to school participation and family in hindering educational achievement and, therefore, social inclusion of immigrant students.

From a psychological perspective, De Pasquale, Angelica, and Sciacca describe the development of the identity process in its individual and relational dimensions, also considering the importance of group interaction in determining one's identity. They stress that a good educational environment requires the reciprocal interaction of several factors: the

environment, feelings, values, culture and specific language. All individuals form part of a group of peers and want to be accepted by them, due to the need to feel that they belong; however, they also feel the need to distinguish themselves in a complex game of similarities and differences to better define their own identity. Reciprocal interaction and influence are important factors in forming a group: when a person belongs to a group, he or she tends to become isolated from other groups and to develop prejudices and stereotypes. In a globalized and multicultural society, in which individuals belong to different social ranks, their feelings of belonging to one particular social rank could create a boundary between them and others, thus becoming a symptom of conflict between one group and another. Therefore, the universal role of emotions, which pave the way for new models of education (OKness and Emotional Intelligence) for promoting multicultural integration, have been analysed.

Turning to a student-centred perspective, Santagati analyses migrant students' resiliency as a sociological challenge. She highlights the fact that scholars and policymakers have focused more on the failure of immigrant-origin students rather than their educational success, even though there is a strong presence of resilient students in educational systems. The chapter offers a review of the main sociological studies that deal with this new topic in the field of migration studies in the US and Europe. These studies explore the upward mobility of an upcoming élite of descendants of migrants, highlighting the fact that the educational success of these immigrant students questions the traditional theories of educational inequality based on family background and the transmission of social disadvantage from one generation to another. These "unexpected pathways" raise theoretical and methodological issues around the individual-society, actor-structure relationships; they represent a sort of sociological challenge in the attempt to understand atypical situations, since these successful educational routes are considered statistical exceptions or social irregularities. Resilient cases should be analysed as a specific configuration of general conditions of possibility and as distinctive sociological rules for studies in the sociology of education. The review summarizes factors emerging in the international literature associated with educational resilience among students with an immigrant background, suggesting the relational nature of resilience—that links academic success to social capital—and the collaborative nature of the educational process, involving families, peers and teachers. Subsequently, attention shifts to the Italian case, in which recent data and research results confirm the existence of resilient immigrant students and success-oriented individuals among a highly motivated, ambitious young generation from a migrant background

with specific skills that enable them to function in a multi-ethnic environment, and forge unorthodox pathways to university that require extra effort in order to attain real educational and social mobility.

Examining the student position, Bertozzi, Arvanitis, and Armaos define student intercultural competence as foundational to 21st century skills; it is regarded as an important intangible asset for those living and working in pluralistic democratic societies. They stress that obtaining intercultural competence is a lifelong process, closely associated with one's formal and informal intercultural experiences and contacts. The chapter presents the results of a research project that aims to investigate and compare the intercultural sensitivity of a group of students in Italy and Greece. The chapter highlights how critical reflection on intercultural competences becomes a powerful tool in the process of developing intercultural competence, and how it can help in the definition of new educational goals. The importance of intercultural competences for collaboration and dialogue in culturally diverse classes, both for teachers and students in contemporary societies, increases the need for attention to this topic. The analysis and assessment of these competences could enable schools to reflect on the generic value of diversity and to direct training towards the achievement of specific skills, attitudes and behaviours. Chen and Starosta's threefold model of intercultural communication competence and the related Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) form the reference point of the study, the purpose of which was to empirically replicate Chen and Starosta's Intercultural Sensitivity Scale to see if it was valid in Italian and Greek contexts. The findings of this survey will be an important reference for pre-service teacher education and curriculum design framework in universities in both countries. This is timely as both countries have received a very large number of refugees, and the citizens' sensitivity to their reception is being severely tested. Meanwhile, the mixing of people from diverse cultural backgrounds is a structural fact for both countries. Therefore, educational and social professionals are at the forefront, and the possession of intercultural competence is an essential requirement. It would appear that Intercultural Sensitivity (IS) in education should be investigated before any curriculum decisions are taken. This could be particularly important when training future teachers. Proper and rigorous assessment of intercultural competence could enable education professionals to critically reflect on the generic value of diversity, and to obtain specific affective, cognitive, behavioural and moral dimensions of such competence.

The last pedagogical contribution, by D'Aprile, poses several questions regarding the multicultural/intercultural capacity of today's Italian school system to effectively support the inclusion process of non-Italian origin

students. To what extent is the Italian school prepared to fully accept the challenge of multiculturalism and the heterogeneity of the new educational contexts? Apart from paying lip service to the notion of acceptance, to what extent can the institution of school create real conditions for the integration and education of all pupils? Even if curriculum design in an intercultural perspective and the educational organization of the school are the most important aspects for children with a migrant background, it is extremely important for students to feel that they truly belong in order to be included in a welcoming and culturally responsive environment. The contribution stresses that greater investment in intercultural teacher training is needed to provide teachers with the knowledge and skills required to create a culture of inclusion as a mark of respect for diversity and intercultural exchange.

The last chapter bring us back to the fundamental questions put forward by the first issues of the introduction of this volume: Is the Multi (Inter)cultural School possible in global society? Is European society already truly inclusive? How far, and following which directions, do we still have to go?

In order to be implemented, intercultural education needs a new world perspective; this must be focused on human rights, democratic participation and legal guarantees. As stressed by the Council of Europe in 2003, there are three founding principles: "values-oriented education", "citizen competencies for all", and "direct practice of democracy." This threefold recommendation seems to go in the direction of improving intercultural competences at school and in the communities. This should to be clear for all the people working at school and in an educational context.

As shown by the presentation of the chapters, this book offers a broad view on the above issues that would be of interest to a wide public, from academics to educators, and practitioners working in the third sector. It is important to deal with teachers; they are the strategic actors in the educational institution, bringing their ideas about education, society and the future for the new generations into the process of socialization. They are the actors (and directors) of the everyday realization of integration of foreign students. Moreover, this book does not deal with the issue of multicultural/intercultural education in general terms, but takes a specific perspective with regard to several critical issues of the different school actors involved in the social change processes, and their relationships; it aims to implement new teaching and behaviour strategies in the classes, in the schools and, more generally, in contemporary society.

L.M.D, A.G., A.M.L.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE UNDERESTIMATED TREASURE: TEACHERS FACING DIVERSITY AT SCHOOL

DAHER LIANA MARIA, LEONORA ANNA MARIA, GAMUZZA AUGUSTO[1]

Introduction

The way in which European social systems deal with diversity—represented by the growing presence of foreign-origin groups—in everyday contexts has sparked the heated political and public debate on migration fluxes all over Europe. Political controversies aside, effective diversity "management" could have an enormous impact on the economic and social well-being of all members of the communities, whether they have an immigrant cultural background or not (COE 2008; Ambrosini 2016). Seen in this light, difference is a core issue in interpreting (and imagining) our societies, and the school is a privileged context in observing the link between the processes of socialization and social change dynamics (Santagati 2016; Magri 2016). In other terms, the increasing heterogeneity of today's globalised world and rapidly evolving societies deeply impact the educational system and the school context, presenting a growing number of challenges—but also opportunities—that re-define the roles of all the actors involved in this process of social change. Diversity in school takes different forms: special needs, problematic socio-economic backgrounds and gender-related issues; however, the most connotative element of contemporary EU educational system is the need

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[1] Although this chapter is the result of a common reflection among the authors, Liana M. Daher wrote the Introduction and the sixth paragraph, Augusto Gamuzza wrote the second and the fourth paragraph, Anna Maria Leonora wrote the third and fifth paragraph.

for innovative approaches (and operative strategies/praxis) in dealing with an increasingly complex mosaic of cultures (Daher 2014; Gamuzza 2016). On the one hand, this situation seems to provide the individuals involved with opportunities for cultural exploration and exchange; on the other hand, this situation puts into practice a concrete challenge in order to overcome inequalities and discrimination at all levels. In other words, the issues of social inclusion and effectively managing diversity as a resource for integration are becoming crucial and inescapable issues which could be addressed by transnational cooperation at a global level. As Jaques Delors stated, "education is above all an inner journey whose stages correspond to those of the continuous maturing of the personality" (Delors 1996: 86). Taking into consideration the role of the education process, its mission in contemporary times can be identified as raising the opportunity, motivation and capacity for learning. Nevertheless, the afore-mentioned characteristics—opportunity, motivation and capacity—have been profoundly challenged by the multicultural society itself. In fact, the relevance of the migration phenomenon and the consequent presence of students with a migrant background in the educational systems of the hosting countries reinforces the idea that diversity should not be seen as an unusual state of affairs.

The optimistic approach to multiculturalism started to develop during the 1970s thanks to several studies carried out in countries with a long-standing history of immigration that tried to sustain recognition and respect for minorities, promoting equal rights and opportunities for a different cultural group (Taylor 2013). However, until now multiculturalism—referred to the socio-relational contexts of the EU—has expressed the principle of non-conflictual coexistence between different social groups within a range of diversity for ethnicity, religious or cultural identity but affirming equal opportunities and recognition (Kymlicka 2010). The multicultural school context represents a live testing field for researchers, all developing new predictive signals for integration dynamics (Santagati 2011), promising an exit strategy to avoid the clash of cultures (Huntington 1993). Nevertheless, dialogue between cultures requires a great deal of time and experience. As a consequence of this *de facto* situation, scholars and politicians started to criticize multiculturalism both as a concept and model that could lead to a more divisive society (Massouri 2015). In recent decades, given the limits of the multicultural approach and its contradictions, the term "interculturalism" has been preferred instead of multiculturalism (Santagati 2016: 9). Moreover, the development of intercultural approaches depends not only on people's openness but also on the capacity of institutions to be open-minded, implementing measures aiming at facilitating the process of integration.

Setting aside the terminological issues, it is clear that teachers play the fundamental role of managing and mediating among different cultural perspectives; they can use several tools to fit educational practices (and related curricula) to students with a migrant background but, at the same time, teachers need to transfer not only notions but also social skills and capabilities. As a consequence of this, the roles of teachers and school leaders have to be re-imagined; they should deal with the everyday needs of their students, as well as expectations about work and competences.

Multiculturalism—as a founding principle for activities at school—is much more than a celebration of ethno-cultural diversity: with regard to the specific role of teachers at school, multiculturalism is a tough challenge for encouraging acknowledgement and citizenship, as it merges customs, traditions, habits, beliefs and opinions. In fact, a critical multicultural perspective has to consider social rules, the principle of tolerance, social cohesion and minority/diversity recognition at the same time (Daher, Gamuzza, Leonora 2017). For this reason, multicultural education, or any other kind of education realised in a multicultural context, cannot be understood without referring to the socio-political context including the laws, regulations, policies, practices, traditions, and history of a specific region. Since 2012, Kymlicka has underlined a modest strengthening of multiculturalism policies (MCPs) together with an increasing number of requirements in civic integration, implying that: "Civic integration emphasizes the importance of immigrants integrating more fully into mainstream society and advances a number of core principles, including the following: 1. The key role of employment in integration; 2. Respect for basic liberal-democratic values, such as liberty, democracy, human rights, equalities (such as gender equality), and the rule of law; 3. Basic knowledge of the host society's language, history and institutions; 4. The need for anti-discrimination laws and policies." (2012: 18).

Following this line, education must be considered the first tool of dialogue between the construction of national identity and the diversity of incoming cultures; however, various obstacles could arise from the relationships inside the school, particularly between students with a migrant background and teachers. There is an increasing awareness of the key role that education and a good school context can play for children's development, learning and experimenting good relationships. This is particularly true for individuals from disadvantaged cultural and socio-economic backgrounds (OECD 2017). The problem is that the teaching staff are not effectively trained to provide experienced solutions to these new dynamics of integration in the school. Naturally, the best form of

integration is a multicultural approach to education. In this perspective, the school model is based on the guarantee of plurality, through the reciprocal enrichment that comes from the confluence of different cultures. Communication, cooperation, exchange and solidarity between students become fundamental in this case. Therefore, the multicultural school approach does not try to hide conflict, but to assume it dialectically for a better understanding of social life.

Drawing upon an extensive mixed-method study carried out in five European countries investigating teachers' needs in the edu-multicultural context, the following sections of this work put forward an epistemological proposal (and related method) in order to capitalize on the specific advantages of a multifaceted approach to the study of the integration and inclusion processes of foreign origin students inside (and outside) the school. The study of the needs of teachers working in a multicultural environment enables us to acquire better knowledge of the degree of implementation of the multicultural education dimensions recalled above.

Multicultural schools and Multicultural teachers: observing the needs to understand the contexts better

The Multicultural Schools project—Enhancing Cultural and Linguistic Treasure of Europe through Teachers— (henceforth MCS)[2] was funded under the Erasmus+ framework between September 2015 and February 2018. The main aim of the project was to carry out activities that help teachers acquire new skills, competencies and materials to work effectively with culturally diverse students between 6-13 years old. In other terms, the wider operative target of the project was to address the lack of appropriate skills and competencies of teachers on how to deal with multicultural classes, strengthening the professional profile of the teacher by helping them to solve difficult situations with children coming from different religious and ethnic minorities.

The intellectual outputs of the project, that were produced through action-research based activities, offer open education resources (OER), innovative tools and useful materials[3]. Even the project consortium was

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[2] See http://www.multicultural-schools.eu.
[3] First of all, an on-line Repository of Activities for Teachers; a Teacher's Handbook on Culturally Inclusive Education; a list of Good Practices of Cooperation among Schools and Parents; Online Networking & Learning Platform designed to share experiences through discussion groups; and a Problem-Based-Learning (PBL) e-Course for Teachers facing challenges of multiculturalism in class.

built taking into specific consideration both the geographical position of the countries involved and the different national situations regarding the presence of foreign-origin children at school. It is interesting to note that in this way the consortium aimed to cover the different migratory contexts in each country of the partnership (Italy, Poland, Greece, Spain and Belgium), facing particular "multicultural conditions" and specific/composite school contexts.

According to the diverse historical and socio-political characteristics of the consortium, these conditions can be clustered in three modalities of multicultural integration at school: a) high presence of foreign origin children (henceforth FOC) and long-term experienced integration dynamics (Belgium and Spain); b) medium-term presence of FOC and new/short-term experienced integration dynamics (Italy and Greece); and the small presence of FOC and no experienced integration dynamics (Poland). The transnational dimension of the MCS project represents an added value in observing different ways and levels of the EU integration process.

Taking a closer look at the consortium, some useful insights can be identified in order to better understand the context of the research.

Belgium is a federal state with three linguistic communities (French, Flemish & German). On 1 January 2014, there were 1,214,605 foreigners living in Belgium (10.9% of the population). The management of multiculturalism in schools is the priority of education. The local councils are responsible for culture, education and language, but migration is a federal responsibility. The federal Incentive Fund for Migrant Policy, created in 1991, provides projects that target the foreign-born and newcomers, preventing discrimination and increasing intercultural dialogue. Belgium signed the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities on 31 July 2001. In 2004, the federal government created a Commission for Intercultural Dialogue to improve the social cohesion of cultural diversity. In 2005, the Commission's final report acknowledged Belgium as a multicultural country and advanced recommendations, including the creation of an Institute of Islam, the opening of a Museum of Immigration, and the Interuniversity Observatory on Migration and Ethnic Minorities. Mother tongue tuition in Belgium has been available at ISCED levels 1, 2 and 3 since 2008. In the Belgian francophone region, educational policy recommends a multicultural pedagogy which takes students' different cultural origins into account. Partnership agreements with the foreign-origin students' countries of origin allow schools to benefit from a foreign teacher for mother-tongue language and cultural courses. In the Flemish part of Belgium, multilingualism receives less

attention than cultural aspects. Using the mother tongue is viewed as an obstacle to integration at school. Since March 2016, in some schools, children have been allowed to speak their mother tongue in the schoolyard. In the German-speaking Belgian community, additional teacher resources are allocated to immigrant children, and students are invited to consider the history and lives of their classmates from foreign countries (OECD 2015).

In Italy, FOC integration at school is a core issue for the public sector. Since 2001, the Ministry of Education has drawn up official reports on the distribution of foreign students in primary and secondary schools, considering different school levels and geographical location. Moreover, Italian research is very advanced on this issue, particularly on the quantitative level through the systematic publication of migration reports (IDOS-UNAR 2018, ISMU 2017). At the beginning of the MCS project in 2015, the Caritas-Migrantes national report showed a permanent and increased presence of foreign pupils: the number of children enrolled in Italian schools in the school year 2013/14 was 802,844 compared to the 755,939 of 2011/12. Immigrant background pupils represent about 9% of the young school population compared to a decrease of -2,0% in the number of Italian pupils. The highest presence of foreign students can be observed in the northern regions of Italy, even though since the s. y. 2011/2012 the increase has been much more evident in the south (+20,5% in Basilicata, +14,3% in Campania, +12,8% in Sicily and +10,3% in Calabria). As regards the nationalities of these pupils, the last data (s. y. 2013/14) show Romanians to be the most numerous group (154.621), followed by Albanians (107.847), Moroccans (101.176), Chinese (39.211) and Filipinos (24.839). The number of female foreign students is 385.365 (48%), which is very similar to the Italian number (48.3%). The number of foreign origin students in Italian schools in s. y. 2016/2017 was 826,091— an increase of 1.30% compared to the s. y. 2015/2016. The presence of FOC in the classrooms is an integral part of the national school population, making the Italian school more and more multi-ethnic and multicultural (MIUR, 2018). The primary school has the highest percentage of foreign students, with 10.8% of FOC in total, whereas the percentage of first-grade secondary school foreign students is 9.7% (MIUR 2018). In the s. y. 2016/2017, foreign origin students comprised more than 200 nationalities. However, almost 70% of the total came from a small group of countries (10): Romania, Albania, Morocco, China, the Philippines, India, Moldavia, Ukraine, Pakistan and Egypt. The presence of foreign origin students in class poses different needs and criticalities; first of all, these students must deal with the problem of knowledge of the Italian language.