

Introduction

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The current issue is focused on the interconnections between migrations, education and generations. Nowadays, public debate assigns a prominent role to the theme of migration. Italian research on the Sociology of Education took up the challenge of exploring this field, trying to develop theoretical and empirical work around some crucial topics: (a) education, vocational training and educational success; (b) cultural pluralism, interculture and mediation; (c) social capital, households and education; (d) unaccompanied minors' condition; (e) second generations, identity, belongings; (f) street cultures/school cultures.

There are some common elements in this research area, that are worth noting and which can be found in the contributions to this issue:

- (1) the tendency to use both qualitative and quantitative methods;
- (2) the attention given to the political implications of the studies conducted.
Several research studies deal with the creation of social observatories, political consulting, the training of educators and of non-profit operators;
- (3) the attempt to go beyond a binary methodological and theoretical distinction between immigrants and “us”, referring instead to concepts such as “in-between”, hyphenated identities, and multiple belongings;
- (4) the interpretation of migrations as a mirror, that allows us to obtain an image of our society that encompasses the specific object of our study.
In this view, research on the effects of migration on schools and education in general can provide us with a broader understanding of the way these institutions function;
- (5) the central role played by the generational dimension, with a particular interest in the process of general transformations in youth cultures;
- (6) the rise of a “colour line”, with the related increase in social tension.
Moving beyond a binary distinction does not seem to prevent research

- from dealing with a situation that approaches what Stuart Hall has defined as the colour line for Britain: a society where “race” is a synonym for “class”. A colour line that is sometimes challenged, sometimes simply replicated, some other times reproduced by the agents (youths, households, decision makers, educators, volunteers);
- (7) the proposal to go over methodological nationalism, following Beck's intuition that modern migrations help us to re-think schools, generations and society, and thus social sciences, going beyond national boundaries.

Sociological analysis aims at building languages, models, images and representations of migration, in particular those processes that relate to new generations. Research often plays a distinctive role in shaping public opinion and in modelling the targets of social and educational planning. Therefore the studies here proposed should not be abstracted from real experience. It is instead important to interpret them taking into account the actual processes, looking both at the actions set up by the agents involved in education, and at the policies implemented by the government.

From a perspective that rejects methodological nationalism, it is nevertheless interesting to point out the specific characteristics of migration pattern in Italy. The research studies conducted during last years have highlighted the following:

- only recently Italy has turned into an immigration area;
- on the contrary, we have experienced a long period of emigration, that persists among high-skilled youth and workers from the South of Italy;
- the presence of immigrants has increased at an accelerated rate, manifesting itself as an emergency. Although the process has gradually stabilized, it has not reached yet a steady state, as it is continuously changing both from a quantitative and a qualitative point of view;
- only during the last few years the “second generation” of immigrants, who were born here or had attended education in Italy from start to finish, has reached a critical mass. In 2008, 35% of the students who do not have an Italian citizenship were born here.

During last decade, in Italy as well as in several European countries, general policies on immigration have incurred many obstacles, and they

have been at the centre of several conflicts between the Government and the opposition. However, since the point in time when immigration in Italy started to be quantitatively relevant, there has been wide consensus on the idea that schools should play a central role in the integration process. This is not particular to Italy: similar attitudes might be found in immigration policies all around the world. C. Glenn, in his essay on United States that we take here as a comparison, argues that throughout the history of USA immigration policies we can find significant discussion on the role of schooling, and in particular of State schooling, in promoting integration. In this view, school does not only provide language training, but it is the place where the pluralism issue is discussed and faced.

From the early nineties, right after the arrival of students with foreign origins, the Italian school system started to react in order to face the new situation. It can be claimed that this adjustment and transformation process has evolved around some underlying principles that have shown some continuity across different governments. The document “The Italian way to intercultural schooling and the integration of foreign students” (http://www.pubblica.istruzione.it/news/2007/allegati/pubblicazione_intercultura.pdf), released in October 2008 by the National Observatory of the former Ministry of Education, points out four general principles that have inspired best practices during last two decades: the “universalism”, that recognizes every child's right to receive an education and to have equal access to opportunities; the “common school” principle, according to which foreign students should be integrated in the same schools of citizens; the “centrality of the person in relation”, that stresses the importance of taking into account every person's context and biography, together with its family conditions; the “interculture”, as a way to promote dialogue and discussion between different cultures, with the aim of accepting differences and sharing common values. It is a model that tries to combine two dimensions. On the one hand we have integration, related to educational rights, while on the other hand we have interculture, linked both to the interdependence typical of contemporary society, and to the general need for new generations to learn how to communicate with other cultures and groups.

Not differently from other countries, in Italy the discussion about educational policy has mainly focused on non-Italian students' access to schooling and on their educational success and choices. Their condition has usually been compared to that of Italian pupils, while only recently there

has been increasing attention to the effects of mixed classes on educational quality. Several of the papers published within this issue are centred on these topics, with a particular focus on adolescents. Some of them take their start from empirical research studies carried out in different areas of Italy, that have provided new evidence on the complexity of these processes, supporting the thesis that they cannot be interpreted only in terms of ethnicity.

In his contribution, Andrea Ravecca explores with the help of a survey the relation between gender and educational performance in high school students of Ecuadorian origins in the city of Genoa. Although a wide international literature supports the thesis that females student with a migrant background succeed better than other students of the same cohort, the author did not find evidence of a strong correlation in this context.

Colombo M.-Santagati M.' paper is based on data collected in a region in the North of Italy which counts the largest number of foreign students residing in Italy. The sample is composed of young immigrants attending several types of secondary educational institutions. They pay specific attention to the question of identity and to the individual and familial life project in the host society.

A different method, based on qualitative analysis, has been employed in the research on schooling conducted by Ricucci R. in Turin. The author gives a central role to expectations and cultural attitudes, and suggests that we can appropriately describe young immigrants using the image of "half-Italians", that is, people who share values and lifestyles both with their Italian peers and with their parents and ethnic communities.

A research based on school experiences can be also be carried out with the purpose of discussing more general topics. Benasso S., Cortellesi G. and Villa A. analyse students' conditions in two different cities high schools, not from the point of view of their educational performance, but from that of their identification and of their relationship with public sphere. They conducted a survey, interviewing 1200 students, half of which were immigrants, in order to shed new light on the relationship between self-perception and the perception that others have of a person, and on the importance of local dimension in promoting new schemes of integration.

In Guia Gilargoni's paper there is a shift to focus towards the field of social capital, both individual and familial, with a special attention paid to mixed

couples' children. Using empirical evidence from a sample of 17,225 pre-adolescents (aged 11 to 14), the author argues that this youth cohort tended to show a good propensity to intercultural attitude, particularly noticeable among the children of mixed couples. It was also found that the mother usually plays a central role in the construction of belongings and identity.

The school is also studied as the place where intercultural attitudes can be built, through planned educational strategies. This question is not limited to the immigrants coming either from the South of the World or from Eastern Europe. Onorati's paper describes, with the help of empirical evidence, the development of the intercultural competences of students involved in European exchange and lifelong learning programmes, and discusses the most important social determinants. His interpretation suggests that the ability of looking at the "other", in order to assume its difference in ordinary daily life, should become a learning priority in all European educational systems, for all students.

However, in the medium and long term, it is in this field that the most difficult problems arise, particularly because they are related to complex choices on pluralism, cultural relativism, religion (as it is well argued in Ottaviano's paper), and on personal and collective identities. We should nevertheless avoid addressing these questions through a culturalistic perspective alone, because they are related to socio-economic, legal and power structures.

Following Colombo E., we can argue that it is nowadays crucial to look at the possibility of becoming a citizen not only as an identity issues, but as the primary access to the opportunity to exert social and economical rights. As a matter of fact there is, in Italy, an open political conflict, with the current Berlusconi's government, that is related to the introduction of new policies aimed at strengthening the control on the migrations. The implementation of new restrictive measures, and the growing emphasis on national (and local) identity, may have some side or direct effects on educational policies, changing the path that has been followed until now.

Sayad taught us that those who consider themselves as natives often see the children of immigration as an "inconvenient posterity", and a troublesome presence that is incomprehensible from their point of view. Anyway, these undesirable guests are endowed with the right characteristics to become a citizen, and feel at home.

The debate on safety, extremely popular in different countries, artificially assigns ethnic characteristics to conflicts; creates fear and finds new convicts; spurs belligerent attitudes; multiplies borders. Ahmed Djouder, son of French Republican mythology, in his autobiography effectively describes the weight of this pervasive rhetoric: “When will you stop to look at us as immigrants, foreigners, thefts, terrorists? Try to think of a world where you are always described as a percentage of integration, of immigration, of socially excluded, of crimes, of insecurity? Do you manage to think of such a world, you, supporters of human rights?” This is the securitization, a reproduction of an internal border within and amongst various places (schools, hospitals, register offices, factories), a phenomenon which is clearly exemplified by the recent introduction in Italy of the crime of illegal presence, and by the persistent denial of citizenship to those who are born here from foreign parents.

A young Italian-Congolese, Aline, that we meet during our researches, says: “It is hard life for my generation. Our parents had to fight for a job, we must fight to live”. This is the issue at stake: the clear perception of the colour line imposed by securitization (us/them as a new social stratification) and the desire to go over it, taking back our lives that are more than work, as they are love, projects, idleness, studies, words and expressions.

The functioning of educational spaces, and of meetings between generations that takes place there, is at stake in the key moves for overcoming, or establishing, the colour line.