Holistic In-between Triangulation: Understanding Intercultural Relationships and Social Inclusion at School

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Holistic In-between Triangulation: UnderstandingInterculturalRelationships and Social Inclusion at School

Liana Maria Daher*, Anna Maria Leonora** and Augusto Gamuzza***

Abstract: The increased presence of foreign origin students has changed the face of school in Italy, giving rise to several questions as regards their inclusion and intercultural relationships. Drawing upon an extensive mixed method study conducted in a sample of schools in a Mediterranean city (Catania, Italy), this research puts forward the use of different methods 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 school relationships helps us to know more about the degree of implementation of the multicultural education dimensions. The article aims at highlighting the benefits of holistic triangulation in investigating social relationships in multicultural schools and society, assuming that a pluralistic approach better explains the complexity of an increasingly pluralistic society.

Keywords: mixed-methods, foreign origin students, school inclusion and integration

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Reading diversity through relationships at school: introduction and research questions

Today, European schools welcome more and more pupils with different cultural or ethnic backgrounds. The Sicilian city of Catania is no exception, and schools here could learn from the situation in Northern Italy, where schools have been called on to face diversity—and have been managing to do so—for a long time (Colombo, 2009). However, there should be specific regard to its condition of a border region as this could influence relationships inside and outside the school.

Over the years, the presence of foreign origin students has profoundly changed the educational scenario and given rise to several issues (and concerns in some cases), particularly regarding social inclusion dynamics, intercultural relationships, and diversity management strategies (Daher, Gamuzza & Leonora, 2019). Mechanisms of reorganization of relational and teaching strategies are still being developed[1], also involving psychological and behavioral feedback with important consequences on the lives of young foreigners.

The last official data confirms that the population of foreign origin students enrolled in the institutional edcational system in Italy doubled, jumping from 370,803 (4.2% of the student population) in SY 2004/05 to 826,091 (9.4%, of whom 60.9% were born in Italy) in SY 2016/17 (MIUR 2018).

However, the data do not always provide sufficient empirical support for advanced investigation into the integration and inclusion processes[2] of foreign children in Italian schools, especially in the southern regions of Italy (IS-MU-MIUR, 2016). A large number of questions regarding relationships with peers and teachers, the role played by families, the re-definition/construction of identity, and the exclusion practices in the educational context remain unanswered, making it difficult to reconstruct a definite and shared framework. What is clear is that an effective inclusion process, involving students with a migrant background, is a multifaceted interplay between personal, private,

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[1] Since 2016, after the implementation of law 107/2015, all teachers working in the public sector are required to be enrolled in "compulsory, permanent and structural" retraining programs (MIUR, 2016, p. 5)

[2] Even if in everyday language there do not seem to be significant differences in the meanings of the terms 'inclusion' and 'integration', social sciences and institutional contexts highlight several meaningful nuances to explain the two different processes. In particular, the concept of inclusion refers to the idea that "everyone should be able to use the same facilities, take part in the same experiences, etc."; in addition to this, inclusion reminds us of the opposite—exclusion, an emotional and intrinsically social concept. Integration could be defined in a more general sense as the "process of successfully joining or mixing with a different group of people" (see Cambridge Dictionary). In this paper—and in the proposed investigation— inclusion processes can be seen as an inseparable part of the integration process of the subjects involved, where the integration process is the final goal.

and institutional aspects. The main social actors involved in this process (teachers, school heads and administrative staff, students and their families) are relevant *hic et nunc,* affecting and influencing this multifaceted process in different ways and degrees. The way these elements influence each other and their interrelationships have to be taken into account; moreover, the above actors' opinions and experiences are fundamental factors.

As shown by several studies in Italy (Colombo, 2009; Dalla Zuanna et al., 2009; Caneva, 2011; Santagati, 2011; 2012) carried out in a highly inter-cultural context, peer relationships are often influenced by diversity. The migrant status brings a certain degree of relational isolation both in school and outside; moreover, a certain degree of distress has emerged concerning the relational well-being of children (Santagati, 2016).

A particular situation can be found in Sicily where the number of foreign residents at the end of 2001 was 40,399, and after fifteen years, in 2016, this number had increased to 183,192 units, comprising 3.6% of the local population. The number of foreign children born at the end of 2001 totalled 916, while at end of 2015 this number had increased to 2,228. As shown in Table 1, the number of foreign students in Sicily in SY 2016-2017 was 25.536, about 3.3% of the Italian school population. The city of Catania has the second largest number of students of foreign origin resident in Sicily after Palermo (MIUR, 2018).

Table 1. Children of foreign origin resident in Sicily by School and Province.

Province	School Level				
	Total	Nursery School	Primary	First level secondary school	Second level secondary school
Palermo	5 241	738	1.654	1.306	1.543
Catania	4.682	775	1.632	1.072	1.203
Messina	3.611	615	1.154	795	1.047
Ragusa	4.156	919	1.481	939	817
Trapani	2.325	424	655	544	720
Agrigento	2119	393	726	502	498
Siracusa	1.827	298	569	406	554
Caltanissetta	1.118	214	411	244	249
Enna	457	59	139	136	123
Sicily	**25.536**	**4.435**	**8.421**	**5.944**	**6.736**

Source: MIUR, 2018

Diversity at school can be played out at different levels of relationships: both with teachers and with peers (Daher, 2014). Relationships with teachers are a very significant factor for both school and social inclusion, along with the influence of the transnational family. Parents often still live according to the customs of a different culture and preserve strong ties with their original community. Conversely, teachers (and the peer group) are bearers of the host society culture. Therefore, children of foreign origin find themselves embedded in a web of relationships that are sometimes in conflict. This produces several consequences regarding children's everyday lives and their inclusion in an educational sense.

There are a number of issues concerning the concrete process of inclusion/exclusion of pupils on the basis of the preceding data and considerations.

The first analytical field concerns the relational milieu of school in daily life. Knowing more about the concrete behaviour inside the class is the first goal. Research purposes have developed around the following issues: relationships/concrete interaction with migrant families and children, discrimination and/or aggressiveness toward migrants (*information about the context*); and strategies and experiences with migrant families and children (*information about relationships*).

The above information aims at describing everyday life in school contexts, but also at showing us the opinions and behaviour of the school staff towards foreign children, and the way they solve problems regarding the new composition of the classes. However, this description emerges from an institutional perspective and must be compared with the migrants' point of view.

This gives rise to the second analytical field, which investigates relationships among migrant families, school and children by seeking the views of migrants and more information about their inclusion/exclusion in the host society. Questioning their identity points of reference, experiences and relationships is useful to highlight their cultural position, and to acquire information about their experiences in the school environment, but also to obtain knowledge about the intra-family relationships outside their children's secondary schooling and socialization.

Finally, the third analytical field specifically concerns the children, focusing on the school experiences of foreign and Italian students, the school environment, and relationships between pupils and teachers. Analyzing the relationships of migrant and Italian pupils with the school involves exploring it as a relational space, by looking at the school's influences on the daily lives of the young people, the various configurations in terms of comfort or discomfort, and the contribution of school to the definition of the future educational and professional expectations of pupils. It means understanding

the features of their satisfaction/dissatisfaction related to different spheres of the school experience. Besides, it also implies understanding how, beyond the structural constraints defined by the social status and cultural position of parents, the school climate can contribute to the construction of the self and help them form a plan with regard to their future.

Considering this, we will investigate the conditions related to the childrens' daily lives: their socio-economic status, geographic mobility and gender/age memberships, their well-being and distress levels, the congruence or divergence from the school and parental pressures, the meaning of school as investment or consumption, and the central values of their lives. These conditions/dimensions have been investigated as the boundaries of the children's paths of redefining themselves between current experiences and future expectations.

By finding the answers to the above questions, we should obtain a detailed description of the relational environment in which the child is embedded. Moreover, it will allow us to understand how the networks influence his/her social inclusion path. The data and results will be compared and merged in order to highlight networks, particularities and issues; this represents the focus of the mixed-method research question[3].

Given these premises, the research questions focus on three kinds of relationship inside and outside the school: relationships with the teachers, relationships with the family, and relationships with the peer group (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Relationships at school involving foreing origin students integration
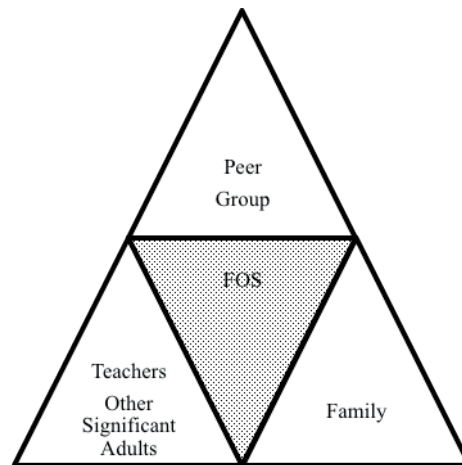
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Focusing on the above-mentioned analytical fields, an analysis was made of the ways through which relational processes oriented to managing cultural diversity at school are put into operation. To this end, a specific mixed-method research question was phrased as follows: 'Which relational processes/modalities are put into operation in the everyday life at school in order to deal with the inclusion/integration of students of foreign origin?'

Drawing upon an extensive mixed method study conducted in a sample of schools in a Mediterranean city (Catania, Italy), this research puts forward the use of different methods in order to capitalize on the specific advantages of a multifaceted approach to the study of the integration and inclusion processes of children of foreign origin inside (and outside) the school.

Moreover, studying relationships at school helps us to know more about the degree of implementation of the intercultural education dimensions.

Charting a theoretical route for Intercultural Education

The complex and multifaceted process of inclusion of migrant populations into host communities is a crucial issue for the future of the whole European Union and requires a more comprehensive and long-term approach (Ambrosini, 2016), to replace the national solutions that prevail in individual European countries (Magri, 2016). To this regard, according to Zanfrini (2015), the EU approach to international migration fluxes is characterized by a sort of schizophrenia created by the contemporary presence of two opposing tendencies: the economic approach that rules the system for admittance, and the solidaristic approach intended as equal opportunities for every individual (id. 2015: 4). In addition to this, due to widespread concerns about security following terrorist attacks in Europe, the host communities perceive migrants as a threat and a form of problematic and unpredictable change. As a consequence of this, intercultural education and inclusive educational practices—aimed at promoting mutual respect among all actors of the educational systems of the host communities—seem to be the core elements of a renewed process of understanding diversity without eliminating differences among cultures but focusing on mutual recognition and respect for the positive value of difference (Banks, 2007).

Intercultural dialogue was placed at the very center of the political and social debate by the European Union in 2008, underlining the strategic importance of intercultural education as a bridge between the educational needs of immigrants and the internationalization agenda of the EU regarding cooperation on education (COE, 2008). Following this line, teachers (and the school context in general) play a vital role in this process: they work daily with inclusion processes, and schools represent a safer environment where youths experience good and peaceful relationships (Colombo, 2013).

Of course, every actor in this process needs the right tools, resources, and competencies (McKiernan et al., 2013; Chen & Starosta, 2000) to create the basis for the development of a new intercultural dialogue built on the values of respecting each another, learning from each other's culture, and becoming enriched with each other's differences (Deardorff, 2011). Intercultural education aims to enable students to live in culturally differentiated communities (Leeman, 2003), and the mission of schools has to take into consideration the promotion of key values, such as independence, equality, fostering inclusion and social justice (Bhatti, 2007). Considering this, the intercultural approach underlines the need to strengthen relationships between individuals and groups, overcome assimilationism and multiculturalism, and see cultures as separate entities that can co-exist (Gundara & Portera, 2008). In practice, intercultural education processes comprise school activities oriented to meet the particular learning needs of students with different cultural backgrounds. It is undoubtly true that students with an immigrant background face several challenges at school: they need to bridge the gap between themselves and native students, adapt to different educational expectations, learn a new language, and re-shape their identification processes under conflicting pressures from family and peers (Gamuzza, 2009). The large variation in performance differences between immigrant and non-immigrant students across countries suggests that policy can play an important role in eliminating those disparities (OECD-PISA, 2018).

As highlighted by Santagati (2016), since the 1990s Italy has adopted a non-systematic approach to the intercultural integration of non-Italian students. The Ministry of Education, University and Research (henceforth MIUR) has defined the 'Italian model' for intercultural education with several documents and *memoranda* oriented to create an 'Italian' path for inclusive education, even if this model has been implemented asymetrically in different parts of Italy, with a marked difference between the North and the South (Landri et al., 2012).

The challenge that Italian schools face—in different socio-territorial contexts—is to develop feasible inclusion strategies aimed at the ideal of European citizenship. These strategies should include training teachers in intercultural skills and competences (Arvanitis et al., 2019), encouraging effective interaction with families of children of foreign origin, overcoming the obstacles of limited liguistic skills (Daher et al., in press), and designing effective tools for the specific educational needs of children of foreign origin (Romito, 2016; Santerini, 2010).

To this end, it would be useful to ask for the Italian school curricula to be re-designed, following a more flexible and open model. In order to do this, it seems necessary to orient the school organisation bearing in mind the following four dimensions of intervention (Gogacz et al., 2017):

- the need to educate citizens about social justice and make them aware of other realities than their own, leading to the understanding of the complex reality of the world today, and giving impetus to the development of values, attitudes, knowledge and skills that enable them to live in the global world today;
- the promotion of contact between different cultures, encouraging the active and critical contribution of every individual;
- the need to stimulate students and teachers to reflect and to work together on issues related to the composite diversity of different cultures through innovative education tools and practices;
- the acceptance of the physiological diversity of others. The main objective here is to encourage flexibility of attitude as a pre-condition for an inclusive society.

Crossing from Quality to Quantity and vice-versa: the research design

The research design was carried out in several steps, crossing from a quality to quantity approach, and vice-versa. The first step consisted in a statistical overview of the phenomenon, with a specific focus on Sicily and Catania concerning foreign children and their schooling. The second and third steps consisted in qualitative tools aimed at obtaining feedback, impressions, and useful information derived from the daily life experience of school heads, teachers and parents through focus groups and in-depth interviews. Finally, going back to a quantitative approach, a paper-and-pencil questionnaire was administered to a judgment sample of Italian and foreign pupils to find out more about their integration and mutual acceptance (see Figure 2).

The choice of the approach and methods acquires specific meaning in reference both to the object of investigation and the questions outlined above. Even the sampling strategies take into account all the above premises and purposes.

The preference for the mixed method approach emerged from some preliminary considerations and the aim to use the right approach to resolve the research problem. Mixed method research appeared to be well suited to producing the best answers to our questions for several reasons: firstly, the need to consider the perspective of all the actors and to do it using the best method, regarding both the site and the type of person involved in the research project; secondly, the goal of analysing problems that would remain vague if examined only with the one or the other method; and thirdly, to get in-depth information. In other words, in order to achieve a more complete picture of the case, qualitative and quantitative information should be mixed during the interpretation phase.

Figure 2. The Research Design
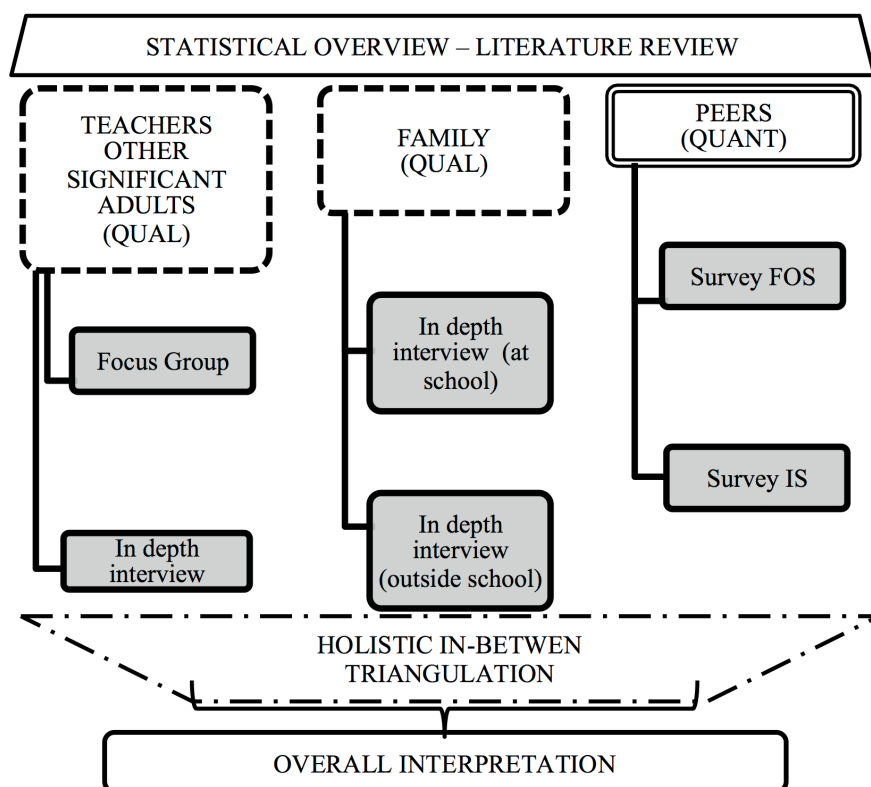
As widely debated in the literature since the early 1980s, even though qualitative and quantitative paradigms differ in several aspects, it is useful and pragmatic (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005) to exploit their complementarities, recognizing the intimate connection between the qualitative and quantitative aspects of social phenomena seen as a continuum (Newman & Benz, 1998). In the following research design, they were used concurrently and with equal priority, trying to exploit the specific advantages of every approach rather than focusing on their complementarity. The mixed method strategy is put forward as a feasible and useful approach to obtain the best knowledge of the integration paths, and to get a complex and comprehensive picture of the case.

The final objective was to start a structural exchange between the methods, aiming at providing additional elements to the research problem. In Italy, particularly in the southern regions, the intercultural issue at school has conflicting aspects that have not yet been resolved. The above-mentioned actors contribute to holding on to these conflicts and contradictions within an unclear institutional framework which lacks everyday integration poli-

cies on migration, also corroborated by mistrust on the part of migrants due to their culture and experience. In fact, the information basically concerns issues relating to intra-curricular activities and interactions. The research question aimed mainly at investigating the particularities of the process of mutual integration between Italian and foreign students, and, in short, identifying traces of interculturalism.

Obtaining an in-depth and detailed framework that allowed us to connect the different voices into a single framework seemed possible only through the use of various methods, each with its own specificity, which recomposed in a single research design.

Therefore, as synthesized in the last part of Figure 2, qualitative and quantitative methods/tools were used equally (*weight*) and in parallel (*timing*) to compare the corresponding data (*merging*) to understand the problem (Cresswell & Piano Clark, 2007). The combination of qualitative and quantitative results provides a more complete picture by noting in-depth knowledge of the participants' perspective, as well as trend and generalization (even if within a case study).

The qualitative exploration aimed at investigating the most important agents of socialization (family, teachers, peers, and other significant adults). Therefore, each method was selected in consideration of the analytical fields and actors involved.

In-depth interviews seemed to be the best method to gather opinions and experiences, as they allowed the inteviewer to calibrate questions and obtain more detailed information. Moreover, the empathic relationship gives the interviewer the opportunity to know more than what the respondent wants to reveal, particularly in an institutional framework. Even the focus group appears to be a crucial tool when investigating in-depth opinions, motivations and expectations that are not likely to emerge when using quantitative methods of study. Through the interaction, participants can often express hidden orientations and positions (*group effect*) because of an informal and democratic environment based on mutual understanding and exchange among peers (Zammuner, 2003; Carey, 1994)[4].

Interviews with parents were much more complex; they were carried out by exploring three fundamental dimensions: identity, experience, and prejudice, and also by investigating their future life projects compared with those of their children.

The qualitative interview proved to be the best way to communicate with the foreigner because it can capture nuances and expressions that could be

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[4] 12 in-depth interviews were held with the school heads, and there were 9 focus groups with the teachers. The schools were chosen following the same sampling rationale of the survey described below in footnote 6, considering the level of the school and the concentration of students with an immigrant background.

missed in a questionnaire, not only because of the obstacles due to the different language, but also because of the problems relating to the impersonal way on which standardized interview relationships are based. On the other hand, the empathic base of qualitative interviews allows a number of migrant difficulties to be overcome, including their fear of giving wrong answers and their desire to conform to social desirability, thus avoiding getting unreliable results (Janu, 2010)[5].

Last but not least, quantitative tools had the goal of hearing the voice of children concerning their experiences at school, relationships with peers, and future plans[6]. The technique (short paper and pencil questionnaire) was chosen for different reasons related to the age of the interviewees (9 to 14 years old): a) to meet the need to use very simple language so as to facilitate the child's comprehension; b) to avoid the asymmetrical adult-child relationship of the face-to-face interview; *and* c) to overcome the difficulty for the child to understand the interview relationship and the short duration of the child's attention span (Bailey, 1985).

The holistic triangulation research design aimed at looking for new methodological stances and words in order to capture a more detailed and comprehensive description and understanding of new social (multicultural) worlds[7], by using both varieties of the same method (*within-method*) or multiple methods to investigate the same research issue (*between—or across— method*). Considering the above description of the research design and bending Denzin's (1978) terminology to our aim, the approach has been named *holistic in between-method triangulation*. The cross-culture environment in which the research was carried out and the actors involved in the investigation provide the reasons for using this unconventional expression.

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[5]　In this case, even the site played an important role. In the first phase, a sample of parents (33 subjects), contacted through the mediation of the school staff, were interviewed at the same school. In the second phase, having detected a certain apprehension on the part of migrants to provide critical statements regarding the school institution, a new series of interviews was conducted without the mediation of school and located in neutral sites or migrants' homes (32 more subjects, making a total of 65).

[6]　Structured questionnaires were administered to a purposive sample of Italian (981) and foreign (275) students (from 9 to 14 years old, 1,256 units in total) in primary and secondary schools of the city of Catania. As already mentioned, in Sicily the percentage of foreign students is just over 3%; in Catania the number of foreign-origin students is 2506 – 444 in nursery school, 839 at primary school, 526 at the secondary first level, and 697 at secondary second level (*Ministero del Lavoro*, 2016; ISMU-MIUR, 2016). The sampled schools numbered 29 out of 83 in the area, of which 20 were primary schools (out of 49), and 9 were first level secondary schools (out of 34). The selection parameter was mainly the "high" or "medium" concentration of students with immigrant background enrolled in every school; for the same reason, classes with at least one student of a different nationality were also selected.

[7]　The holistic triangulation research design is based on the idea that each method gives the researcher specific information about the investigated case (Denzin 2012).

Evidence and challenges from the Mediterranean area/south of Italy

As shown above, the principal aim of the research design was to put forward a mixed method exploratory concurrent design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007) based upon a holistic triangulation between different methodological strategies and tools (Turner et al., 2017) to better understand the integration paths and experiences of foreign-origin students (henceforth FOS) in the everyday educational environment. In order to do this, the analytical model considered three different kinds of relationships (as indicated in figure 1) that inform the process of integration of FOS at school: peer native students (henceforth NS); teachers and other significant adults (school staff and school heads), and family. As highlighted, the heuristic inputs from background research unveiled a complex process of integration involving individual resources in the relational processes in everyday life at school.

Taking into consideration the purpose of this work, this part presents three examples (translating the analytical model dimensions presented above) through which the overall interpretation gained a 'heuristic plus' thanks to holistic triangulation between qualitative and quantitative data (Denzin, 1978; 2012). In this way, a feasible methodological option is highlighted that pays special attention to the relational *milieu* surrounding the daily life paths of integration of the FOS into the school contexts of Mediterranean societies.

Relationships with teachers and other significant adults

The first analytical relational frame was designed to understand FOS integration, and considers how the FOS experience their relational *milieu* with the first institutional figures they interact with: the teachers and other significant adults. Even in this case, holistic triangulation (Denzin 2012; Turner et al., 2017) between quantitative and qualitative evidence enables us to "develop more complete understandings of a given phenomenon through the use of multiple methodologies" (Turner et al., 2017, p. 244) in order to offer "a more complete, holistic, and contextual portrayal of the unit(s) under study" (Jick, 1979, p. 603).

In this case, the triangulation strategy reveals several 'relational misunderstandings' made by teachers regarding integration of FOS, such as: interpreting low performance as existential or integrational failure of the student; applying exaggerated benevolence and 'special conditions at any cost' for the disadvantaged student; following a teaching program based upon a deep interculturalism approach; and starting bilingual education programs without a clear needs analysis of the cultural context in the the class. These misunderstandings could marginalize the FOS and cut him or her out of participation in social life (Glenn, 2004).

The relevance of the personal approach to diversity management in class is linked to the idea that teachers are specific professional figures working in a specific interactive context and, more importantly, they carry into their professional role their specific *Weltanschauung* and competences (Reggio & Santerini, 2013). It has emerged that teachers play a strategic role in the process of school inclusion of foreign students: they have an institutional task, but they are also individuals and Italian citizens with a personal interpretation of immigration as a social phenomenon. As highlighted by one of the interviewees: "at first, it is important that children [FOS] are accepted by the teachers, and then the other children [NS] will definitely accept them" (T47, M, Primary School).

Regarding inclusion in the school class, the triangulation perspective envisages a series of problems. For example, the practice of placing foreign children in classes with younger native-born children, even though they had already attended school in their country of origin, can significantly limit their relational skills. On the other hand, the relationship with teachers can be controversial if the teacher underestimates the FOS potential, assuming a soft overindulgent attitude that restrains their dedication for knowledge.

Teachers showed an ambivalent attitude towards immigration and FOS. On the one hand, they are inclined to use a universal model of reception and believe in the right of access to schooling regardless of cultural origins; on the other hand, they fear an increase in their workload, some changes in their teaching routine, and lack of certainty if they have no previous professional experience with migrants. Considering this, teachers stressed that the presence of FOS complexifies class management both regarding everyday relationships between students and teachers and learning dynamics: "*The teacher has to do double the work. Going ahead with the class, assigning homework, but at the same time the teacher needs to pay close attention to the foreign child, he (or she) must follow him with care and constancy, he (or she) must start with an elementary program and step by step go further. It is also important for the child to get involved in activities with the class, to feel part of it*" (T46, F, Primary school). Teachers are often left alone to face problems related to the integration of FOS with very little experience to help them find solutions, despite their strategic role. Consequently, even if the official document *Diversi da chi?* (MIUR, 2015) indicates an intercultural attitude in the Italian school, the actual behavior of teachers (and head teachers) often clashes with the official purpose and public image of the school in Sicily (Daher, 2010).

In connection with these problematic elements, a teacher reported that "*The school head has put her* [a young FOS] *in the 4th grade class, because she* [the teacher] *is doing extra-curricular French courses. At first, only French was spoken, now the child has forgotten the French language and speaks and writes in Italian*" (T55, F, Primary School). These elements benefit from a very interesting and complementary heuristic angle if we triangulate them with the

results from the students' survey. The relational misunderstandings are not reported by students that define relationships with teachers in positive terms (65% 'extremely well' and 24% 'very well', see Figure 3). Moreover, 73% of FOS affirm, at the same time, that they did not have any kind of support by linguistic mediators or other figures acting as facilitators, stressing that teachers have to deal with every necessity during their classes. In line with this, 23% of FOS report that their parents did not have any meeting with teachers, and 24% had only one meeting with them during the school year. The remaining part of the FOS respondents (51%) declared that their parents meet teachers several times during the school year. Bearing in mind these elements, the relationships between FOS and teachers seem to be limited to their formal role in the school setting, underlining that the main characteristic of relationships between FOS and teachers (and other significant adults when involved) is oriented to school success and educational outcomes.

Figure 3. How well do you get along with your teachers? (% on total)
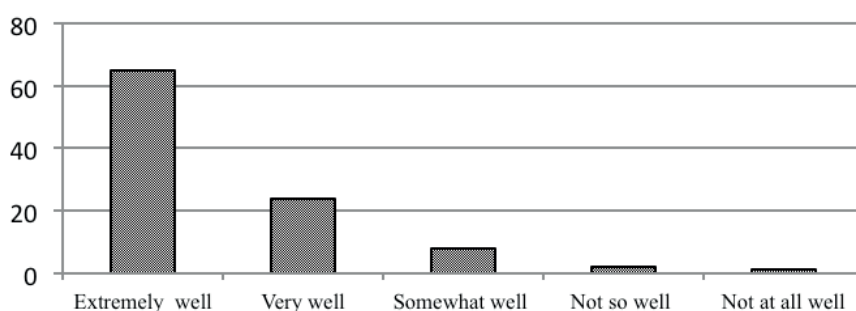
Several teachers underlined the importance of a 'peaceful assimilation' (the most reported example), the acquisition of the L2 even if, as recently highlighted in comparative studies (Kristen et al., 2016; Van Tubergen & Mentjox, 2014), contextual conditions associated with efficiency, exposure, and incentives are decisive in acquiring language proficiency. This is probably influenced by FOS families, as reported by school heads: "*sometimes they* [the parents] *prefer their children to repeat the school year because, for them, the acquisition of language is essential, and they are focused upon this*" (SM16, F, Primary School).

Even in this relational context, the holistic triangulation approach enabled us to obtain a heuristic plus in the overall interpretation, thanks to the insights provided by focus groups with teachers. Creativity and adaptability are (in the words of respondents) the key factors for successful integration into the school environment for FOS. In addition to this, there are four intervention areas related to class activities: a) targeted L2 language support in the initial phase of school inclusion; b) support and help with schoolwork carried out in

a continuous manner; c) the involvement of FOS families and collaboration with territory stakeholders for a good integration even in extra curricular activities; *and* d) a structural intercultural approach for teaching.
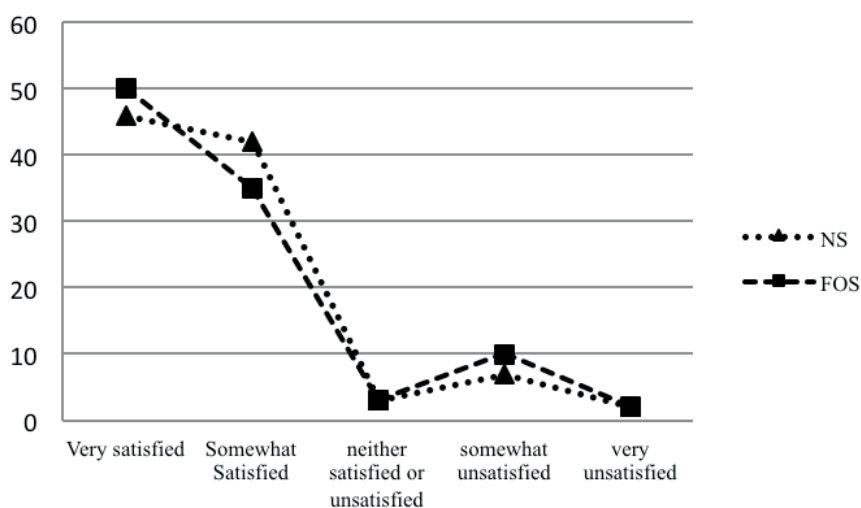
Relationships with families

The second relational frame considered the process of FOS integration through the role of family—and their participation—in everyday life in the educational environment. Within FOS families, the ordinary generational conflicts often worsen because of bilateral defense and protection mechanisms. Many FOS parents cannot be completely integrated in the host society; most of them turn in on their own traditions, precisely when their children need their support (Daher, 2011).

In this light, the first critical element that influences the quality of relationships with families—highlighted by the in-depth interviews with parents inside and outside the school—is proficiency in the Italian language. School, as an institution, requires specific competences that sometimes parents of FOS do not have. As reported by a teacher: *"Parents do not even speak Italian well. Every time it is a difficult task to explain, for example, trade-union assemblies. If you speak about concrete objects it's easy but if you speak in the abstract …"* (T10, F, Comprehensive school). The FOS family, on the one hand, overestimate the opportunities in the host society because parents are sure that the school and professional success of their children can make amends for their personal failures; on the other hand, parents become suspicious because of the gradual alienation of their children from the belonging culture to a new one based on values that they do not share, even though they hope that their children can benefit from this integration. To this regard, it is interesting to report the position of a parent who blames herself for the loss of cultural roots, represented by the language of the country of origin: *"They speak Italian very well. They were born in Catania. With my children we speak Italian while my husband and I speak in French. Unfortunately, my husband and I were wrong in not speaking French when they were children. Now they are not interested in knowing French, they only know and speak Italian and I'm so sorry about this."* (40, F, Mauritius). This process seems to involve the whole relational dynamics with school; as reported by a school head: *"Families of foreign origin are unlikely to attend meetings when they are convened, and they have less group-level dialogue. Does the school do something for these families? It happened more in past years—now times have changed—when there was a need to create exchange and knowledge among host and foreign cultures, such as bringing the objects of your country, your religion, your way of dressing, just to get to know each other. Food education courses have been done; they were done over time, and the goal was achieved; families enrolled their children in the school, knowing that this is a school attended by a very high number of foreign children, so we did not repeat*

the same actions". In consequence of this, the "double cultural proposal" often becomes a complex issue for the FOS, who is part of the above conflicting model. Conflicts increase because of mismatches due to the different cultural and behavioural references of FOS and their families: different rates of acculturation, inversion of roles—adolescents become family spokespersons because of their parents' lack of proficiency in the host language and lack of understanding of the host culture—lack of guidance, etc. (Dinh, Sarason & Sarason, 1994; Nguyen & Williams, 1989; Rosenthal et al*.,* 1996; Rick & Forward, 1992). Sometimes, FOS families are too rooted in their original culture and less open to start the integration process, causing difficulties for their children who feel they are "unquestionably" Italian and plan their future in a country where they grew up and where they feel they have put down significant roots. This dynamic is particularly evident in the FOS leisure time management by the family (Daher, 2013). As reported during the family in-depth interviews *"We can be open to the outside world, we can be people who respect other traditions, but in our culture the behavior of women is different from that of men. On Saturday I. [his daughter] doesn't go out with her friends because I love her too much and I'm scared to let her go out alone. However, if I say these things I do not want to be seen as a stern father. We still have a good relationship. I think my daughter also thinks like me."* (P03, M, Morocco). Even in this case the process of holistic triangulation enables us to better frame the horizon of reference around this issue. In fact, despite these conflicting elements highlighted by the qualitative research results, a considerable quota of FOS and NS—over 80% (see figure 4) of respondents (FOS and NS) to the quantitative surveys—report that families are satisfied with their children's performance at school.

Figure 4. Are your parents satisfied with how you go to school? (% on total)

Even this issue can be counterbalanced if we take into consideration the fact that almost 80% of respondents (FOS) do their homework without any direct involvement of other family members. The data regarding the relationships between families of foreign origin and FOS about their everyday life at school reveal that FOS seem to perceive the school as a 'personal affair' without any kind of influence of the family in the educational path.

Relationships with peers

As widely debated in the literature (Besozzi et al.*,* 2009; 2013), the whole process of FOS integration is informed by educational paths and experiences with positive (or negative) outcomes. National studies have shown that also those who arrive at preschool age are disadvantaged in educational pathways compared to their Italian peers (Ammaturo et al.*,* 2010; Azzolini et al., 2014). The schooling of FOS is often more fragmented and discontinued than that of NS. Furthermore, it seems useful to remember that although the educational levels of FOS are increasing, there are some problematic areas to consider: a) the relevance of a negative gap between the educational performance among FOS and NS; b) in certain areas and institutions, the growing visibility of different ethnic backgrounds seems to act as a barrier, causing conflicting interactions between NS and FOS; *and* c) in some educational contexts characterised by a high presence of FOS, the concentration of social problems threatens the concept of anti-discrimination and liberal school (Colombo, 2014).

In this case, the possibility to holistically triangulate different sources of data gives the overall interpretation some interesting nuances which deserve to be discussed in detail. The quantitative tools—FOS and NS surveys (N=981; N=275)—described the relational climate among peers as generally perceived to be positive. The classroom is considered to be the most important relational context for friendship relationships (over 50% identified 'peer group in the classroom' as the most important place for making new friends) with no significant differences between NS and FOS. This tendency is confirmed by the positive perception of the quality of the daily life relationships with classmates in surveys (*I feel very good with my classmates* 61% FOS, 69% NS). In addition to this, the relevance of the neighbourhood for friendship relationships is indicated by a significant quota of the NS (39.7% - *My friends live in the same district where I live*). However, the situation is much more complex than it appears, and the holistic triangulation reveals very interesting points to take into account. Thanks to the teachers' focus group data, it is possible to observe a different dynamic involving FOS and NS "*Often, however, foreign children show great unease when they arrive at school. They tend to close up or stay with pupils from the same country of origin, speaking exclusively in their mother tongue. And also, very often, Italian children use*

terms like 'the Chinese boy', 'the Chinese girl', 'the friend of the Chinese' to call their classmates. This is because in primary school children, especially those in the first class, are not used to it … to relate with foreign children" (T37, F, Elementary). As exemplified by the previous quotation, the semantic area of the 'sense of unease' recently highlighted by Colombo (2013) in relation to the teachers' dilemma in handling their own attitudes towards migration and their role as mediators of intercultural relationships seems to extend to the peer group. Like the teachers, even students as peers (both FOS and NS) seem to "generally deny most of the diversity that occurs in the classroom, by applying an assimilative model of diversity management" (Colombo, 2013, p. 22). Moreover, the triangulation with in-depth interviews with the school heads unveiled a very interesting complementary vision in order to get a comprehensive picture of the subjects under analysis "[the presence of FOS in school] *is experienced so naturally and spontaneously that we do not even notice it, in the sense that they are guys just like everyone else … just like everyone else! They have never been a problem from this point of view; while it may be a problem for other reasons, such as integration of disabled students.* […] *they are perfectly integrated, integrated with their classmates and the teachers*" (SM3, F, Comprehensive School). As we have seen, it seems that the denial of problems related to the presence of FOS in the school is closely linked (and confined) to the children's desire to integrate. An example reported by one of the teachers shows that the main problem that seems to involve FOS integration is the economic disadvantage: "*in some cases foreign children are taken as models to imitate, for example, the Chinese pupil of the III year* [first level secondary school], *last year failed for absenteeism … I have never seen anyone of the family. He dresses well, the latest fashion, he is a model for others.* […]. *If we talk about China, he is very gratified, he is perfectly integrated with the class. He wants to be called Marco*" (T72, F, Secondary school I level). This quotation is in line with the position highlighted by Garcia and Delgado (2008) about *aporophobia* (literally, fear of the poor) as one of the main *explanans* of the present "migration panic" (Bauman, 2016) or, rather, the fear connected with the presence of a subject that is "outside the market" (Garcia & Delgado, 2008, p. 92) and suffers exclusion processes. This process is transversal as regards age, as reported by one of the teachers: "*I have a Romanian* [student] *in the classroom. She is 14 years old, she is a phenomenon, brilliant at school… her problems are out of school … a sad family economically disadvantaged. The class did not accept her at first, she was marginalized, she felt different … especially for economic reasons. Now she is more involved. She trusts her classmates. She has high marks on her report, many capabilities but diversity is felt at an economic discomfort leve*l" (T13, F, Secondary School first level). Furthermore, the teachers recognized the strategic importance of adaptability to the interactional context of the class

as a key factor for successful management of peer relationships: "*We strive for the strategies as well as we can, as we go on with the knowledge of these children, also because in a specific case we also had children who did not speak the Italian language. They did not know the Italian language and therefore did not even understand what we said, so as we learned from them, as they spent their days, they learned something from us and we learned something about them. We do not have a real strategy … strategies arise with the children, because every child is different from each other, every case is unique, whether they are of foreign or Italian nationality*" (T23, F, Comprehensive school). In order to close the circle of the holistic triangulation regarding peer relationships, it seems useful to merge these elements with the contribution expressed by parents. Parents' opinions about the relational dynamics of FOS at school are generally positive, and several interviewed parents stressed the fact that their children "*do not tell us at home of any racist event at school...they are more Italian than me …*" (P33, M, Mauritius) but in some cases, especially the North African parents report *"cases of racism … not so much … but only outside the school"* (P10, F, Morocco). In this sense, the family position can be represented as a 'present but not integrated' element of the FOS relational *milieu* in the school environment.

Integrating Methods to obtain knowledge of Social Inclusion: concluding remarks

The brief analysis presented above allows us to draw two main kinds of conclusive considerations. The first follows the methodological purpose of this work; the second one is focused upon the heuristic outcomes of the holistic in-between triangulation.

The choice to use the holistic triangulation approach emerged from the research topic—youth integration dynamics in intercultural contexts—and it can be considered as a reliable methodological option in order to comprehend and analyze complex relational contexts where the level of researcher intrusiveness is perceived as a potential obstacle to obtain a good quality of data from the research activity. Questioning social inclusion of diversity often puts the subject on the defensive, leading to unreliable results (Daher, 2006). From our perspective, the triangulation between different tools/data helps to avoid the above obstacles, allowing us to increase data quality by merging different results in a more contextual (holistic) form of knowledge about the social units under investigation. Triangulation helps to obtain a wider vision of the research object, bringing different aspects into the whole picture, and presenting a significant, complex, interpretation of social reality. The application of a pluralistic approach helps to explain the complexity of an increasingly pluralistic society, as we show in the previous parts

of this work. In the research we reported qualitative and quantitative tools were used concurrently: neither approach dominated over the other; indeed, the specific advantages of each approach rather complemented the other. Quantitative tools offer a solid overview regarding the condition of NS and FOS at school; however, triangulation with qualitative insights enabled the exchange of opinions and beliefs of students with the other actors involved in their everyday relationships. For example, surveys provided information about relationships with peers and teachers: these elements were useful to describe the gap between the normative model of inclusion at school and the real implementation of the integration process (Banks & McGee Banks, 2010). On the other hand, qualitative tools give more in-depth information about the role, perceptions and feelings of the actors involved in inclusion/exclusion processes and integration dynamics, recognizing the inherently subjective nature of social relationships. Moreover, in-depth interviews and focus groups with the actors involved in these processes enabled us to observe the implementation of the bi-directional process of integration (Blangiardo & Cesareo, 2013), showing the institutional and cultural backdrop of this process. As clearly indicated in the literature, holistic triangulation—recognizing the inherently subjective nature of social relationships (Denzin, 1978; 2012)—provided, in our case, in-depth knowledge about the subjects involved in the integration process of the FOS at school, unveiling different complexity nuances to be considered.

As regards the second kind of conclusive consideration concerning the process of FOS social integration at school, the case presented above highlights the effects of the admission policies on a definite educational context (Catania area). The implementation of an idealistic model of intercultural school that allows the integration of FOS comes from the confluence and dialogue of different cultures (COE, 2008). Nevertheless, the close contact between different cultures is not a guarantee of a successful intercultural relationships that avoids assimilation and segregation and shows a path to accept diversity by ensuring plurality through reciprocal enrichment. Social and cultural diversity can shift to social inclusion without participation in the social context (Gamuzza, 2009). Schools are the institutions in which the basis for the segregation/inclusion of FOS is defined, leaving them at the border of real integration in the host community and, consequently, excluding them from opportunities and participation in social life. The efficiency of the educational system of the hosting countries can be measured through the degree of openness towards FOS. In this way, it is possible to define the resources for their inclusion. Intercultural education can be seen as an added value as indicated in the Migrant Integration Policy Index but not yet fully implemented by the Italian educational system (Santagati, 2012; 2016). As highlighted by a recent comparative study, Italy shows a double tendency

in its educational system in times of economic crisis: a combination of resilience and inclusiveness that coexists with the presence of a relevant effect of boundaries created by belonging to different social classes (Colombo & Santagati, 2016). This double tendency emerges in our case with clear distinctive elements. However, a successful educational and social inclusion process is also influenced by family resources, as well as the ability and determination of parents in encouraging their children's education. The relationship between FOS and their families is often problematic, as the family is perceived as an example of obsolete cultural competence. For this reason, FOS are often protagonists of intercultural struggles, suffering the conflict between different cultures and generations (Daher, 2011).

Finally, this work aims to contribute to the ongoing debate on citizenship from a Mediterranean perspective, taking into account the fact that—as highlighted by many authors (Santagati, 2015; Ricucci, 2015; Zanfrini, 2007)—the Italian case comprises a wide array of different microcosms. Moreover, the methodological choice for an integrated approach helps to understand the complexity of an increasingly pluralistic society (Greene & Caracelli, 2003), stimulating the emergence of further research questions (Fusch et al., 2017).

Acknowledgements

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