Abstract: This paper tackles a complex discussion surrounding interculturalism and its translation and implementation into the context of education. The first part of the paper focuses on a critical analysis of interculturalism as a conceptual and political framework. We propose an analysis of interculturalism and its stated multilayered goals, which are often ambiguous, in tension with one another, and divergent. In the second part of the paper, we focus our analysis on the sociological, educational philosophy, and pedagogical extensions and manifestation of the intercultural framework. Here, too, we focus on problematizing the conceptual framework illustrating parallel problem dynamics. Finally, we conclude our paper with a third part, an empirical case study in Italian schools. The qualitative study we highlight was carried out in nineteen Italian schools with 87 educators (68 teachers and 19 administrators) and takes an in-depth look both at intercultural education as practiced by Italian educators.

Keywords: Education, Diversity, Responsible Citizenship, Educational Practices, Italian Educators.

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I - THE SHIFT FROM MULTICULTURALISM TO INTERCULTURALISM

Contemporary societies are increasingly culturally diverse. As Barret (2013) notes, this diversity may manifest differently in different social contexts across the globe. Some countries have an established presence of indigenous people or long-established minority groups, who may have only recently gained recognition through civil
and human rights movements. This diversity dynamic may appear different than for countries whose residents are increasingly diverse due to global migration patterns, which have brought people of different nationalities together. Regardless of the process by which countries are culturally diverse, multiculturalism is a framework that came about to respond to the challenges and possibilities of diverse communities as an alternative to assimilationism in the 1960s. Central to multiculturalism are recognizing and valuing difference and cultural diversity and championing the rights of historically marginalized peoples (Taylor 2012; Kymlicka 1995; 2007).

Criticism of multicultural policies have been present since the framework began to be implemented and operationalized, although many scholars (Kymlicka 2016) would argue they were never given an opportunity to be fully implemented to begin with. Yet, these criticisms have grown stronger and more political since the turn of the 21st century. A series of high profile terrorist attacks from the September 11th 2001 attack in the United States to bombings in Europe and uprisings of marginalized youth (termed «riots» in France 2005, for example), laid the groundwork for a political and popular discursive backlash against multiculturalism.

Vertovec and Wessendorf (2010) outline the tactics used to cement this political rhetoric against multiculturalism and offer a thematic analysis of these. One of the themes or narratives they identify is the misguided notion that multiculturalism fostered separateness. This rhetoric proposes that multiculturalism encouraged members of different cultural groups to live separately in «parallel societies», which discouraged intercultural contact and understanding among different people fomenting, among other things, ignorance, prejudice and, even, radicalization of marginalized youth. Another important theme is that which understands multiculturalism as stifling debate. This tactic, they argue, draws upon the stratagem of blaming multiculturalism for an atmosphere where speech and thought are controlled and «political correctness» prevails. Critiques using this narrative suggest that in a context such as this, it is impossible to speak frankly about and address issues related to race and immigration, for example, for fear of being offensive or being labelled a racist. Yet another prominent narrative is that multiculturalism refuses common values. This tactic draws on the rhetoric that multiculturalism weakens «collective identities» and «common values», therefore undermining «national identity». Moreover, another prominent and dangerous narrative is that multiculturalism supports reprehensible practices. This tactic draws on the rhetoric of «cultural relativism» and a narrative that multiculturalism supports a myriad of cultural practices that are morally unacceptable (such as female genital mutilation, forced marriages, honor killings, and the subordination of women). Finally, a destructive and panic-inducing narrative is that multiculturalism provides a haven for terrorists. This narrative puts forth the notion that an acceptance of cultural and religious diversity encourages Muslim youth to radicalize, embrace religious fundamentalism, and even terrorism. This narrative subterfuge, then, also serves as a smokescreen to take the focus and analysis away from systemic policies of inequity such as segregated housing for immigrants, lack of job opportunities, and inadequate and inequitable access to quality education and other social service infrastructure that may have actually contributed to the social fragmentation that critics point out.
Given, these prominent popular and political narratives about multiculturalism, the backlash against it is not surprising. We contend that because of this rhetoric, interculturalism has been gaining ground as an alternative to multiculturalism and is touted as a new way for countries to «deal» with «diversity dynamics» as evidenced by the fact, for example, that in 2008, both UNESCO and the Council of Europe, which had been proponents of multiculturalism, declared the need to change course and focus on interculturalism. The fact that several European Union Institutions such as the Commission of the European Communities (2008), the European Commission (2008), the Council of Europe (2008; 2014), have made a significant shift away from multiculturalism towards an interculturalism framework is therefore not surprising. Interculturalists propose that their approach is a system of policies for «managing diversity» based on cross-cultural interaction towards the goals of prejudice reduction. They juxtapose this framework to multiculturalists’ focus on minority groups’ rights, which they believe led to too much focus on minority communities to the detriment of integration and dialogue between new-comers and natives (Zapata-Barrero 2015). We believe this focus on community dialogue constitutes a policy to maintain «social cohesion» directly connected to ubiquitous goals of «civic integration», which are currently sweeping across European countries (Joppke 2007; Ambrosini 2014; 2016). Antonsich (2016) points out the proliferation of policies which promote the adoption of national values, learning the national language, and demonstrating political loyalty towards the goal of integrating newcomers into a socially cohesive context.

II - DIVERSITY AND EDUCATION TOWARDS RESPONSIBLE CITIZENSHIP: COMPLEXITIES AND AMBIGUITIES

As Bekemans (2012) points out, in an increasingly interconnected world in which societies, cultures and peoples meet and interact across the globe and where the «other» becomes «neighbor», European educational systems face the critical challenge of guiding the manifestation of true plurality present among European cultures. As part of this goal, educational systems and processes must embody a commitment to equal dignity of all and educate towards an «active and responsible citizenship» (ibidem). Education concerns itself with human development and capacity building within any given context of diversity. It should, therefore, prepare people of different backgrounds, ways of knowing and being, for a life together. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) prescribes the right to an education and describes authentic education as a process that «shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms». Rights and responsibilities are bound firmly together. Education, then, embraces individual development in and of itself and in the context of its impact on society’s social, cultural and economic development, citizenship and social participation, and fundamental moral values eventually leading to responsible citizenship. In an increasingly diverse society, to be a responsible citizen presupposes a learning capacity for dialogue and intercultural exchange, which, in turn, requires the learning of intercultural (life) skills, social and communicative competencies. The Delors Report,
Education for the 21st century. Learning: the treasure within (1996), summarizes this perspective when it identifies the four pillars of the educational process: learn to know; learn to do; learn to be; learn to live together.

Learning to live with others in today’s world requires awareness of and respect for human rights and the responsibilities of local, national, and global citizenship. Moreover, learning to live together as responsible citizens can help to reduce tensions stemming from ethnic or cultural divisions. Yet the priority task of education is to help young people to become responsible citizens, providing them with knowledge, skills, and opportunities to engage, with fundamental values of peacemaking, respect for human dignity, and respect for diversity. In other words, multicultural and intercultural realities urge for an education oriented to responsible citizenship-building in a plural Europe. The notion of «responsible citizenship» is closely related to awareness and acceptance of civic values such as the value of democracy, human rights, equality, access to participation in civic life, social cohesion, and social justice. According to the Council of Europe (2008), teaching people towards becoming responsible citizens involves giving them access to those capacities and skills which they need to participate effectively in economic, political, social and cultural life.

In this line of thinking, in order for immigrants to access economic, political, social and cultural life, knowledge of the host country’s language is necessary. Hence, increased emphasis has been placed on language instruction. In addition to language instruction, the core of the pedagogical approach to citizenship education has been teaching and learning about social, political, and civic institutions, as well as about human rights. For all youth, whether citizens or immigrants, the Council has proposed: studying of the conditions under which people may live harmoniously together; teaching young people about national constitutions so that they are better prepared to exercise their rights and responsibilities; promoting recognition of cultural and historical heritage; and promoting recognition of the cultural and linguistic diversity of any given society; and developing positive civic attitudes and values. Specifically, intercultural education promotes learning processes that lead to a knowledge of other cultures and instills behaviour patterns of availability, openness and dialogue. The primary objective of intercultural education is the promotion of the capacity for constructive conviviality in a culturally diverse society. In short, from this educational framework education is understood as playing a key role in developing the ability to participate in intercultural dialogue as an integral part of developing democratic culture, and consequently of education for democratic citizenship. Intercultural citizenship education can then be understood as empowering and supporting people to contribute to social cohesion with respect for diversity and on the basis of equality. In order to accomplish these goals, then, intercultural educators believe it is necessary to develop intercultural competencies.

Of course, educational systems are an important driving force of interculturalism (EriCarts 2008; Commission of the European Communities 2008; European Council - Commission 2008; European Commission 2008; Eurydice 2009). Echoing the political intercultural framework, the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, puts forth two goals: first, «an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals...
and groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage on the basis of mutual understanding and respect» and secondly, «to secure social cohesion and to prevent conflicts» (Council of Europe 2008: 5). We stress that the focus on «social cohesion» and conflict prevention and resolution are clearly political ones. As one may note they are an extension of the backlash political narrative on multiculturalism as «socially divisive». Hence, it is this political narrative that is driving the pedagogical directives towards intercultural education, which are dissonant in that they propose divergent goals of «openness towards diversity» and on what Faas (2014) acknowledges as «the main emphasis of recent European level policies and directives is on fostering social cohesion through incorporating migrant students» (Faas et al. 2014: 300).

However, all EU countries have autonomy on issues of education (European Commission 2008). Therefore, what intercultural education looks like in policy and practice differs across nations (Barrett 2012; 2013; Coulby - Zambeta 2008; Perry - Southwell 2011; Faas et al. 2014). Notably, for example, in Italy, great interest and work in the field sociology of education has focus on an analysis of the framework the meaning of «interculturalism» (Giovannini - Queirolo Palmas 2002; Besozzi et al. 2009; Santerini 2010; Colombo - Santagati 2017; Cesareo 2008; 2015). Moreover, the educational policies of intercultural education (Miur 2007; 2014) have been the subject of research. As is the case in the theoretical and conceptual framework of interculturalism in Europe at large, its educational manifestation in Italy, proposes multi-layered goals that, from our perspective, may be divergent. These goals are: 1) «the ability to recognize and appreciate diversity», 2) «the promotion of the convergence toward shared values» and 3) «to strive for social cohesion» (Miur 2007: 9). Just as is the case in the larger European discourses on intercultural education, Italy has identified the institutions of schooling as the best context in which to develop intercultural competencies. La Via Italiana, for example, highlights that integration of immigrant youth is a most-important pathway to an institutionalized intercultural educational system (ibidem). Harkening European directives it focuses on the importance of intercultural education, with the two ambitions and divergent end points: «understanding and appreciation of differences» and «social cohesion» (iv: 9).

Hence, intercultural education is a philosophy of education and pedagogy that supports the development of a new citizenship framework and education for a pluralistic society. According to interculturalists and intercultural education proponents, the creation of this new citizenship of pluralism will be accomplished with the afore-mentioned goals of «openness towards diversity», «equality among students», and «social cohesion».

A problem dynamic we identify is the lacuna between a theoretical framework and its accompanying divergent and abstract goals and the operationalization of intercultural education. Despite the fact that the Italian educational directives clearly orient themselves towards intercultural education (Miur 2007; 2014), there exists a heated debate within the field of sociology of education on the theoretical and pedagogical definition of interculturality (Besozzi et al. 2009; Besozzi 2006; Giovannini - Queirolo Palmas 2002; Santerini 2010; Contini 2012). Furthermore there is a disconnect between
the theoretical framework and its application in practice and praxis as well as a general absence of reflexivity by educational institutions. Our data based on field research in Italian schools, point to the critical challenges of translating this theoretical frame into effective pedagogical strategies.

III - A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN ITALIAN SCHOOLS

While the previous section provided an analysis of the ambiguities within the conceptual framework of interculturalism, the critiques that multiculturalists have advanced as well as our own observations regarding the relationship between interculturalism and policies of civic integration, this section aims to address the widely criticised (Kymlicka 2016) gap between the conceptualisation and implementation of interculturalism as well as the abstract nature of the concept of intercultural education (Cantle 2015; Zapata-Barrero 2015).

The processes of integration as well as the acquisition of intercultural competencies depends largely on the educational policies and practices implemented by the host countries (Crul - Thomson 2007; Crul et al. 2012; Crul 2015; OECD 2007; OECD PISA 2006). In Italy, despite a legislation geared towards intercultural education (Miur 2007; 2014), differences exist between legislation, operational choices, implementation and teachers’ perceptions of these. These variations often depend on the number of immigrants in any given territory, the value placed on diversity by the community, and local financial investments in any given region (Besozzi et al. 2009; Cesareo 2015; Giovannini - Queirolo Palmas 2002; Santerini 2010; Colombo - Santagati 2017).

When addressing the questions of the discrepancies between the conceptualisation and the implementation of interculturalism (Zapata-Barrero 2015) and the necessity to develop the theorisation of intercultural practices (Meer - Modood 2016), it is important to go beyond the rhetoric of intercultural education and to study how educators construe it, which practices they include in this framework and which are effectively implemented and can be considered intercultural.

3.1. Research Objectives

To address the need for empirical research to go beyond rhetoric, this qualitative study was designed to enable the documentation and interpretation of Italian educators’ notions and practice of an intercultural framework in order to first capture how educators make meaning of this educational philosophy and how they transform their knowing and reflections into pedagogy and practice. In addition, we wanted to evaluate whether the practices they describe are implemented in their work.

3.2. Data Sources

Data were collected over the period of one academic year (2014-2015). The data sources focus on artifacts from 19 different schools (both primary and middle school) involving 87 educators (68 teachers and 19 administrators) who participated in the
study. The 19 schools are in the region of Abruzzo in Italy. Within the region, the schools come from four provinces: Chieti (5 schools), L’Aquila (4 schools), Pescara (5 schools), and Teramo (5 schools). These provinces and the schools within them were purposefully sampled due to population and school demographics which include a high concentration of immigrants. As per national trends, during the academic year 2014-2015 demographic data reveal 7.2% of students (13,371) in Abruzzo are immigrant or second generation non-Italians (9.4% in the province of Aquila, 8.8% in the province of Teramo, 5.8% in the province of Chieti, and 5.4% in the province of Pescara) (Miur-Ismu 2016). The national background of the immigrant student population is Romania, Albania, Marocco and China (ibidem).

All educators who participated in the study were seasoned veteran teachers with at least 8 years of experience teaching in multiethnic classes with both Italian and immigrant students.

We draw on the use of multiple data sources including qualitative surveys, document analyses, and 10 focus groups with educators (both teachers and administrators). Our data sets include survey findings, educational curricula, policy and protocol documents regarding the welcoming of immigrant students, documentation that is exchanged between schools, and descriptions of projects and initiatives related to intercultural education. Specifically, the forty-two question survey consisted of 14-items with closed answers and 28 open-ended questions. The 10 focus group interviews were conducted with three to four teachers per group and took place in the schools in which the teachers taught. Each focus group interview lasted approximately 90 minutes.

3.3. Data Analysis

We employed a thematic analysis (Boyatsis 1998). This allowed us to compare data in order to contribute to the validity of our interpretations (ibidem). Our analysis began with an identification of our data set from the larger data corpus; identifying data extracts; initial coding; collating codes into themes; constructing a thematic map; undergoing a final analysis to link our themes to the research questions (Braun - Clarke 2006).

We wanted to code inductively; yet, we were influenced by our theoretical perspective. Hence, we used both inductive and deductive thematic analysis to interpret data (Fereday - Muir-Cochrane 2006).

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Our findings revealed that educators’ conceptualization of intercultural education encompasses a large variety of practices for what constitutes intercultural education. In addition, educators’ generalities, ambiguity and often antithetical notions of what constitutes intercultural praxis mirrors the abstract, often ambiguous and multi-layered dimensions and directives in the theoretical concept of interculturalism, for which interculturalists have been criticized widely. Below we highlight the three most salient themes that emerged from our thematic analysis.
Theme 1: Intercultural Perspectives, Ways of Knowing and Cultural Competencies

Intercultural education should not simply promote awareness about the cultural «other» (Leclerq 2002). It should not simply add contributions of «minorities» or cultural content to the existing curriculum. Instead, intercultural education suggests that teachers are to mobilise towards the transformation of their pedagogy and curriculum in order to empower marginalised students (Zembylas - Iasonos 2010). Through this lens, teachers aim to promote an education that challenges power relations and promotes social change (Tiedt - Tiedt 2010). Interculturalists stress the dynamic nature of cultures, which are an «unstable mixture of sameness and otherness» (Leclerq 2002: 6) and seeks to break the essentialist view of diversity (Zapata-Barrero 2015). Intercultural education seeks to reduce prejudices (Zapata-Barrero 2014: 8), disconfirm stereotypes, and reduce the space for xenophobic discourse (Zapata-Barrero 2011). The Italian Department of Education’s document, La Via Italiana (Miur 2007), defines intercultural education as a promotion of dialogue and exchange between different cultures for all students at all educational and social levels.

We found four dimensions to this theme of intercultural perspectives, ways of knowing and competencies:

First, some of the intercultural practices mentioned by the educators were very generic and abstract. When asked to give an example of intercultural praxis, one middle school teacher noted: «Teachers’ lesson plans incorporate topics from the local as well as from the global perspective especially in subjects such as geography and history». Another middle school teacher explained «Cross-cultural themes, such as a human rights and environmental issues, are included in some subjects and contribute to the teaching of peace keeping, respect for cultural and linguistic diversity and stereotyping». Hence, one may note that teachers are thinking about what may be adding an intercultural element to the classroom curriculum, however they find it difficult to transform their goals into effective practice. As one may note these descriptions are quite general and not concrete.

Secondly, we labelled other practices «add-ons», meaning practices where a teacher, for example, added a fairy tale from one of the countries of origin of her/his students to the existing literacy curriculum.

Third, other practices that we labelled «hybrid» were the closest attempts to intercultural education in that they resembled «add-ons», yet added a dimension of dialogue and analysis of intercultural value systems that begin to approach the goals of intercultural exchange within the intercultural education framework. Regarding the teaching of Italian (as a subject) in primary schools a teacher gave a more detailed example:

The teaching of tales and myths compares different cultures and traditions. In addition, we compare characters from different countries who express their way of thinking and living and tell their personal stories about integration.

It is important to note that the teacher above underlines the use of «personal» stories. This is important as it denotes her understanding that lived experience is an
important dimension to bring into an intercultural classroom space. We understand this as her attempt to increase cultural competencies among her students toward the goal of prejudice reduction that Zapata-Barrero (2014) describes and is prominent in the *La Via Italiana* (Miur 2007).

Another middle school teacher stated:

In middle-schools we study comparative literature that focuses on different cultural realities.

Again, here we stress the teacher’s use of «realities», in the plural. The teacher acknowledges and brings into the classroom the notion of different ways of being, of knowing, of experiencing the world, which is an important aspect of creating intercultural dialogue.

Another primary school teacher gave the following example:

We compare the various religious festivities and traditions present in the school making posters which even new immigrants can understand.

In the excerpt above, one may note an attempt to bring in different cultural traditions into the classroom to challenge a culturally homogeneous classroom space for young children.

Finally, our fourth dimension were other practices that may be better understood as «civic integration» and reflect the same ambiguities and tensions within the theoretical framework whereby civic integration is somehow positioned under the large and ambiguous umbrella of interculturalism.

For example, one middle school teacher stated:

After having done projects regarding the Constitution and The Universal Declaration of Human Rights to promote a sense of citizenship, some school trips to important institutional buildings such as Montecitorio [Parliament] and Palazzo Madama [Senate building] were organized.

As one may note, this teacher’s practice introduced the Italian Constitution to immigrant youth in the context of Human Rights. This may be considered a practice of civic integration and one more in line with a neo-assimilationist framework than one that should promote cross-cultural dialogue about culture-specific values. Instead, we contend that an intercultural approach to studying the Constitution might include an analysis of what rights immigrants and non-citizens have/don’t have and how these realities affect the students within the classroom (Zembylas - Iasonos 2010) and in the community at large. Bringing an analysis of power and the status quo (a multiculturists approach to intergroup dialogue), and possibilities for social change (Tiedt - Tiedt 2010) within a discussion that includes the students’ lived experience to the classroom curriculum would be more in line with an education that promotes critical and systemic thinking towards social change. An introduction to the Italian Constitution and visits to important Italian institutional buildings, instead, may be a practice more related to civic integration.
As one may note from the description of intercultural education goals in the literature cited throughout, all of these practices fall within the intercultural education framework as it has not been concretely defined neither as theory nor pedagogy. The umbrella of what constitutes interculturalism is so vast, that it is no wonder that educators name all of their attempts even remotely related to «culture» and «integration» as interculturalist practice. This may not be surprising in light of the ambiguities, abstractions, and contradictions within the theoretical framework of intercultural education itself.

**Theme 2: Saliency of Language and Literacy**

We found two dimensions to the theme surrounding the saliency of language and literacy: 1) Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in Classroom Spaces, and 2) Learning the Language of Instruction. In light of the European guidelines on intercultural education and language, this is not surprising. *The Green Paper* (Commission of the European Communities 2008) accents two contradicting aspects of language instruction. On the one hand, it affirms the promotion of the heritage language as a way of respecting diversity, and, on the other hand, it underscores the importance of learning the host nation’s language as a means to create social cohesion.

**Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in Classroom Spaces**

Studies on multilingualism have shown that strengthening of the mother tongue helps learning a second language and, therefore, aids academic success (Cummins 2000; Gaudet - Clément 2005; Portes - Hao 2002; Zhou 1997). Despite this knowledge, the teaching of multilingualism and the preservation of students’ mother tongue, are not effectively implemented in schools. This is in line with a decreased emphasis on its importance, which can be observed in the Document from the Council of European Union (2004), which purports to support «full respect for the immigrants» and their descendants» own language and culture (Council of the European Union 2004: 20), but that does not go beyond this position in that it leaves its interpretation and implementation to the discretion of individuals and not as pursuit of the state. In other words, this respect for the heritage language is not protected by the state but merely encouraged. This de-facto decreased emphasis on the heritage language’s importance denotes a significant reorientation of European states towards immigrant integration policies. This is in contrast to previous programmatic statements by European states, which were much louder in affirming the integrity of immigrant cultures and way of life. In fact, some states – most notably Sweden and the Netherlands – went even further in protecting and supporting them institutionally (Joppke 2007).

As per the teachers’ reports, this is because there are not enough language courses in the schools. Despite the lack of funding and available language courses, teachers report that they attempt to create a multilingual environment as best they can. For example, one primary school teacher noted:

The teachers try to promote the cultural and linguistic diversity that is present in the classroom through the teaching of stories and tales from different cultural backgrounds… posters with
the translation of names, objects, greetings… the different traditions of the immigrant students’
countries, and the appreciation of different food from around the world.

Another teacher added:

We promote cultural and linguistic diversity in the classroom by making iconographic posters
regarding the immigrant students’ countries.

Learning Language of Instruction

The teaching and learning of the language of instruction, is another practice which
cannot be considered as intercultural but is an integration measure, which can be
included in civic integration-neo-assimilation policies (Ambrosini 2014; 2016; Joppke
2007). Following the current Council of Europe guidelines which affirm the impor-
tance of the acquisition of the host language as an essential part of integration (Nesse
Network 2008; European Council - Commission 2008; Council of Europe 2008; 2014)
Italians schools, in line with other European Union members (Eurydice 2004; 2009),
have implemented specific measures for teaching the language of instruction even
though their resources are very limited.

Teachers in our sample highlighted teaching and learning L2 was an important
pedagogy to adequately serve the immigrant student population and expanded on the
strategies used to teach Italian: «to intensify the effectiveness of the didactic interven-
tions the work groups are differentiated according to their level of linguistic compe-
tence» (Middle School Teacher). Yet, while important, language acquisition of the
host country is considered a «civic integration» policy, it also falls within intercultural
practice demonstrating the erroneous conceptualization of what constitutes intercul-
tural education. Intercultural practices, instead, should concern all students alike and
encompass social interaction and the development of cultural exchanges to stimulate
critical thinking in order to combat prejudice (Miur 2007).

Theme 3: Welcoming Practices

Welcoming practices in and of themselves cannot be considered intercultural,
even though they may aid in the positive interaction between children, especially in
primary schools, where teachers pay close attention to a welcoming classroom environ-
ment and creating a classroom community. Italian educators interviewed believe that
a welcoming program is an essential procedure in every school which receives migrant
students. Italian schools are oriented toward the inclusion of immigrant and Italian
students alike into the same classroom, which is not a consistent practice across all of
the European countries (Eurydice 2009; Allemann-Ghionda 2008). Most of the educa-
tors who were interviewed indicated welcoming practices as essential procedures for
the effective socialization of migrant children in schools. They believe that welcoming
practices allow immigrant students to overcome the initial difficulties that they face
and help achieve better academic results. Furthermore, they believe the practice of
placing immigrant and Italian students in the same classrooms accelerates the socializa-
tion process, reduces the stigma of students feeling «different» and, at the same time,
helps migrant students learn Italian faster. As one may note, this important dimension of social development is in line with the imperative in intercultural education to reduce prejudice, de-construct stereotypes, and create social exchange (Miur 2007).

Results from the interviews and the focus groups also revealed that in most schools the following communication strategies are implemented and are essential components of welcoming practices: welcoming guidelines and welcoming committees that are reviewed and revised frequently; multilingual application forms to facilitate communication between the schools and the immigrant families; and information about the educational system available in different languages.

Many schools have welcoming committees composed of teachers, who have experience in dealing with migrant students and who are able to explain the school’s curriculum and its objectives to the immigrant families. These committees also gather information about the families and assess the students’ academic levels in order to place them in the appropriate classes. One teacher provided some examples on the practices she implemented in her classroom:

I encourage the children to welcome the new student who arrives in class; we create posters with welcoming phrases in the student’s language of origin. I also create lessons about the student’s country utilizing maps and themed lessons to familiarize all the class with the new student’s cultural background.

Another teacher indicated that Peer Tutoring was a new praxis and as part of his welcoming program, he selects peer tutors to help new migrant students settle in:

Peer tutoring helps immigrant students learn about school times, planning, activities, and the school environment. This facilitates the organization of school life.

Thus, teachers noted the importance of these practices for welcoming immigrant students and creating an environment conducive to positive socialization and learning, which is essential to intercultural dialogue and education. However, while necessary to promote future intercultural relations, welcoming practices such as welcoming guidelines, welcoming committees, and multilingual school application forms, are integrational practices, not intercultural pedagogy per se, or instructional practices that teachers use within the classroom that «transform» the curriculum. In this light, welcoming practices are similar to «add-ons», in that they are necessary but not sufficient or transformative.

V - SCHOLARLY SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This paper represents the first attempt at critically analyzing and contextualizing the intercultural framework and its pedagogical extension while using both an analytical and empirical approach to the questions posed about the conceptual frameworks and their potential operationalization and implementation. We situated intercultura-
lism and intercultural education within a socio-political and historical narrative that explains the backlash against multiculturalism and provides the reader with an understanding of how the intercultural framework has come into its current ubiquitous presence across European institutions. Furthermore, we conduct an analysis of interculturalism and intercultural education relating these two to «governmentality». Moreover, we focus on intercultural education and point out similar problem dynamics noted in the conceptual framework of interculturalism. We also note these in the translation and extension to the practice of intercultural education. We note that the tensions, abstractness, and ambiguities of the model appear in its potential to be implemented. In this vein, our empirical research project found these dynamics reflected in educators’ generalities, ambiguity and often antithetical notions of what may constitute intercultural praxis. Educators’ responses, then, mirror the often ambiguous and multi-layered dimension s and directives in the theoretical concept of interculturalism.

The data from our field research underscore the challenges educators face as they attempt to translate intercultural education into praxis. The interpretations and conceptualizations along with the attempts to implement this model in education reflect the multidimensionality, abstractness and ambiguities of the conceptual framework. Some of the educational practices cited by educators were so general that it was difficult to understand how they were being understood as intercultural education and translated into its practice. Other findings demonstrated how educators ascribe a wide variety of educational practice to the intercultural framework. For example, those practices we labeled «add-ons», did not transform the curriculum, but, rather, added some cultural content from immigrant youth’s background to the traditional euro-centric curriculum. Those practices we labeled «hybrid» represented attempts towards the central tenants of intercultural education such as prejudice reductions. These practices attempted to add a dimension of intercultural dialogue and cross-cultural exchange of values (Miur 2007). Lastly, we highlight the pedagogical strategies towards «civic education» such as teaching and learning the Constitution of the host country, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, learning the host country’s government institutions, are not surprisingly associated with intercultural education by the educators we interviewed. We underscore that this association is not surprising because important European educational initiatives (Council of Europe 2008; Commission of the European Communities 2008; Miur 2007; 2014) have called for education to promote active citizenship and social cohesion as a central role that intercultural education can play. In fact, these practices can be understood as the connection between interculturalism and civic integration. Another example of this is the importance educators placed on the teaching and learning of the language of instruction, which echoes its importance in the European documents (Commission of the European Communities 2008; European Commission 2008) as well as the Italian educational policies (Miur 2007; 2014) and constitutes a practice of integration closely related to civic integration.

In the end, our research project highlights the importance of analyzing and problematizing intercultural education in its conceptual and practiced dimensions. Going beyond rhetorical discourse to understand, contextualize and analyze interculturality is key if we are to reflect deeply upon its implementation in educational settings. This work is the first
of its kind and seeks to inspire further studies which could contribute to looking deeper into so-called intercultural policies and practices in order to inform educational practice and further theoretical analysis and reflection by educators charged with operationalizing theoretical concepts and turning them into intercultural education practice.

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CANTLE T.  

CESAREO V.  
EDUCATION AND DIVERSITY


(2014) Recommendation CM/Rec 3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the importance of competences in the language(s) of schooling for equity/quality in education and for educational success, https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=2180653-Site=CM-BackColorInternet=C3C3C3-BackColorIntranet=EDB021-BackColorLogged=F5D383.


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