

FOREIGNERS' INTEGRATION PROJECT, FINAL REPORT

An intercultural perspective beyond the emergency.

(Introduction by reading a passage from the book)

GENERAL NOTES:

In our province, city and school peoples belonging to nationalities, cultures and non-native ethnic groups have increased significantly in a short time. Our school, due to the strong increase of family reunification in migrations, has become the one with the largest number of foreign immigrants and, according to a Province Economic Surveying, Headmistress Maria Antonia Moretti and Regional Committee's study, the one which will receive the largest wave of immigrants coming from Junior high schools.

The CSA and Region's planning typology points out a significant extension of the remark in schools and a different conceptualization of issues related to integrations and interculturalism where the word intercultural indicates an intention, whereas the word multicultural already stands for planning.

From an interest focused on the language problem, actions operated selectively take place towards a more comprehensive and articulated approach focusing on concrete procedures relating to the integration of the whole person: long delicate and difficult process of cultural identity. Nowadays building up a supporting path for the involvement guarantees in the future a proper exercise of citizenship rights by foreigners.

We, too, at the Giorgi School, have felt the need to build a common strategy in order to make any interventions more effective for an intercultural education allowing us to read the real phenomena and develop our knowledge by using reading's multiple codes, however considering our work a cell of a bigger and complex entity.

As Integration Foreigners' Network Headmistress' representative and as orientalist, I took charge of the directives suggested by the CSA (former Local Education Authority) seeking to integrate the student not only linguistically but on the whole.

It is now pointed out that the linguistic integration is only the first emergency - an emergency that POF cannot be given up to - but if a person's global integration does not coincide with the linguistic integration, nothing can be obtained. Positive results in a language knowledge do not ensure a positive integration which also greatly depends on the attention paid to reception and classroom's atmosphere.

An efficient and effective education system must therefore strive for a new ethic's construction in relationships amongst people belonging to different cultures that sets not theoretical but practical bases: respect, consideration, ability to decentralize, equality both in rights and obligations, needs' recognition, co-existence and cooperation.

All this avoids the risk of a social structure's break-up in a multiplicity of social identity groups closed in their selves and potentially in conflict amongst them.

Therefore we have prepared ourselves for integration both preparing a support 's and reception's form system for users - with translations in 8 different languages of all bureaucratic backup -, and opening a reflection's space, dialogue and integration thanks to the 'Tell me about yourself' project.

This project took shape, however, both from the general considerations above mentioned and school specific needs, because social and behavioural integration issues had arisen at the Giorgi' s, unsustainable by the CIC.

In autumn 2003, the aims that we set out while preparing the project were targets of considerable size and, in addition to matching with the notes described above, further ones were added to fill the lack of information, get more respect and see youth as origin's point of a new race, the human race, thinking proactively, trying to overcome struggle and enemy's concepts, finding the greatest number of meeting points.

Among specific objectives, the project also wanted to turn to two opposite directions:

- Those Italians who do not want to see that the world is now a global village (and in our school there are still many!)
- Those foreigners who complain about western society probably because they are lacking of too many data to understand it better, and those foreigners who hardly the word is given to to introduce themselves and talk about themselves.

DIFFICULTIES:

Although much has been implemented, a part of the project has clashed with some practical difficulties, especially

- Overlapping meeting group's hours with other compulsory school ones (third area) or other school activities previously agreed. Thus the number of participants is fluctuated over time, lower than expectations as for quantity, but certainly not as for the outcome's quality which actually was higher than all expectations.
- Another difficulty was that Giorgi School is divided into three branches, which has not facilitated students to get interested in the project because they had to travel and eat at their own expenses one more day and all this without seeing or feeling a mark or an immediate result. I emphasize this because we are used to measure the results as 'expertise' immediately acquired and not as an overall education, unfortunately not well measurable.
- Some of my colleagues had requested clarifications on why I had hung posters stating immigrants' rights rather than immigrants' duties.

I have to reply to it. Firstly as a matter of principle, I find that that mentality is an 'old colonies' one that is pretending that the inferior does not know his rights and therefore does not have to rise against it; secondly teaching them the rights means talking about our civilization, behaviours, rules, letting new citizens in to a series of ruled behaviours whose respect is an advantage for the Italian citizen too. When migratory movements are seen as forms of aggression to defend from, forms of intolerance, racism, separatism and the inability to communicate occur. Small and big conflicts deriving from them fall on all civil society.

- **COLLABORATION:**
The cultural mediator Sanja Masic, the technician Piro and ATA staff Palmira and Doriana.
- **METHOD:**
The development of this project was divided into several parts to give pupils a diversified chance to express themselves.
The metaphor used was of a flower: a seed is planted in the earth (foreign one?) and with teacher's help (the stem), through difficulty (thorns) and commitment (leaves) a flower is born whose petals represent what we have been able to create.
- **OUTCOMES:**
a small multicultural library, an audio CD of world mixed music brought up by students, recall posters of the project - some of those with laws - , the

book with stories in original version, students' translations, brief reflections and comments arose during our meetings.

Other petals have been added on the way: an initial grid of questions, personal and boys' pictures, press opinion.

The Library, or better, a multicultural shelf did not require any money but it was born with books given away by foreigners taking part of the project and books written in various languages. It 's a concrete action to talk about their identity so that it does not disappear being assimilated into Italian culture because every language is a great source of etymological and overall enrichment.

- Questionnaire and book. We have been straightforward towards foreign students by asking specific questions and they were concise and lapidary in replying about stories that made us shudder, - *in itinere* – and 'forced' to modify a bit the path that should have lead to the overall targets. The proof are the short and untrimmed sentences- only syntactically and orthographically arranged – full of hatred and obscurantism.
- The book, which will be available in the Institute Library, tells about myths or personal histories aiming to reconstruct their own past. Far from all of our rhetoric towards extraneousness and all our good availability towards foreigners, beyond all our studies on migration and all our concepts about integration, these students have managed to surprise us not with their talent but with fears and conflicts within themselves indicating once again how much these participations generically defined as 'integration' are topical as well as needed.

But what surprised us was - as opposite to 'full' i.e. the works that I can show here- the 'empty' i.e. what is missing, thoughts that foreign students asked to take part of the project did not want to reveal, disillusioned before the chance to change the society's racist conception in which they are, determined not to waste any time in works which would throw light on them pointing out that they are foreigners.

At this point a consideration is needed.

Why a student does not want to let people know about his place of origin. Is he ashamed of it?

The purpose of the discussion on the cultural identity research has started.

- AUDIO CD. To get used to music of others so students could talk about themselves through music.

BILLBOARDS: They have been useful as a reminder and as a glue for the group itself.

Naturally the project itself has become just a beginning of the journey that each and everyone should do to find himself (and here objectives would broaden up dramatically).

But just asking the question about 'extraneousness' and 'identity' has placed each student at the beginning of a research path and places us too in the need to travel a new road.

Not only information and mutual understanding are the bases of an opening but dialogue amongst human beings is crucial for a multicultural and multi-ethnic society as the Italian civil society is becoming one. The migration process also determines to a great extent dense conditions of social and psychological implications which lead to changes in the forming paths of cultural and social identities of all , of those who emigrate and those who welcome.

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