

Intercultural perspectives and vocational training between challenges and resources

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Some statistic data to start

- The latest report of Ismu foundation shows that in Italy **foreign students choose vocational education** (39.4% of total non-Italian students enrolled in higher s.y. 2011/12) and technical (38.3%), rather than high school education (22.3%) (MIUR - Ismu, 2013).
- This results in a “**channeling training**” that can become factor of inequality (ibid.) when ***there are not the same opportunities of choice and the same level of quality education*** for all students.

The role of vocational training

- Young foreigners find in the vocational training centers **a chance** of training and social/work placement.
- Training is closely with **heterogeneous realities** and require renewed strategies.
- The education system plays a vital role in **promoting an interculture** that knows how to support students in achieving the learning objectives, educational success, against school dropouts.

So...

- It is necessary **to ensure access to different educational chances**, with an action of **school guidance** that supports decision-making processes of adolescents looking for a place/definition of identity.

What happens in the reality?

- An example of **research experience-training** in some vocational training centers in Piedmont
 - **72** trainers from **6** vocational training centers
 - The course ***“Intercultural and training. Elements of training and research perspectives”***
 - **summer 2012** – **2** identical courses structured in modules of **28** hours carried out in **4** days, like an *intercultural summer school*.



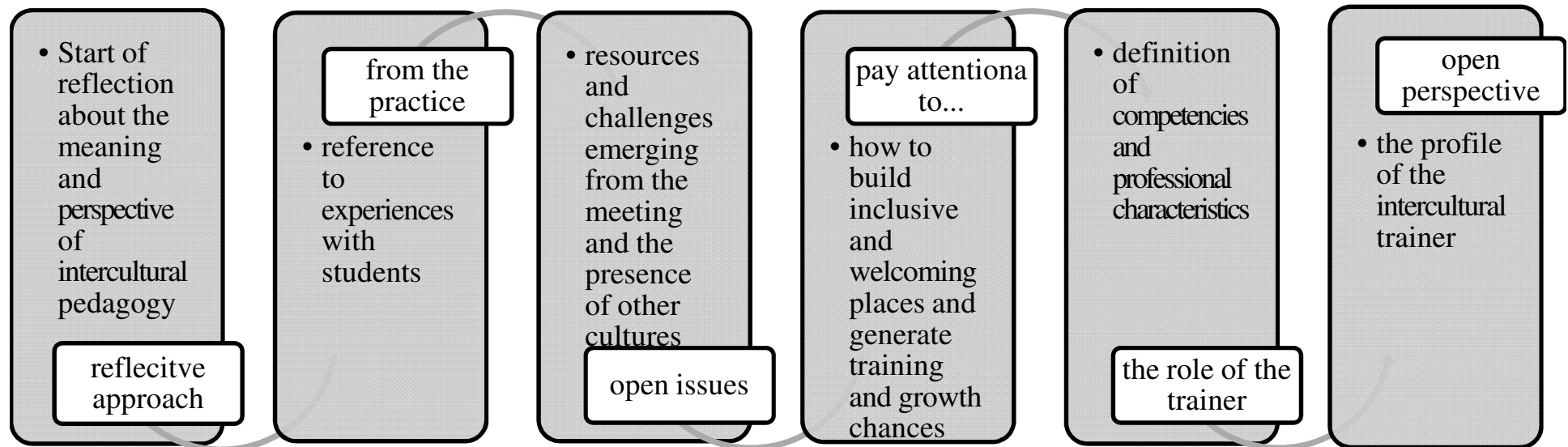
Some data from the centers

- **foreign students 18%** (from 9.1% to 33%).
- **1.604 pupils: 1314 Italian and 290 foreign-born.**
- Backgrounds/origins most represented are: **Romania (89), Morocco (56) and Albania (44)**. Followed by Peru with 14 minors, Brazil and Senegal with 11 subjects, China with eight students, India and Egypt with seven and five. The presence of 45 other adolescences is diversified between: Moldova and the Dominican Republic (four for each), Cote d'Ivoire, Ecuador, Philippines, Macedonia, Nigeria, Tunisia, Ukraine (three for each), Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Colombia and ex Yugoslavia (two for each), Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Czechoslovakia, Congo, Cuba, Ghana, Mali, Turkey (one for each).

Consequences and challenges

- The multicultural classes have required the trainers to **reformulate methods** of communication and training to build positive and participatory group dynamics, response to the challenges that the presence of different cultures can result, as well as the variety of resources due to the encounter between the differences.
- The training-research has focused on several issues:
 - the definition of intercultural issues in relation to the context,
 - the development of educational/training paths aiming at receiving and inclusion of all,
 - the design of intercultural actions,
 - the definition of pedagogical guidelines starting from the practice,
 - the definition of intercultural spaces
 - **and professional identity of intercultural trainer.**

The profile of intercultural trainer: hearing the voice of the professionals



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- 1. *Be welcoming* - **every person is a bearer of culture and brings his wealth of belonging, identity, plans and prospects that intertwine the temporal dimension (past-present-future) and the relationship between dreams and needs (Deluigi, 2012).**
 - an open approach towards the differences, in support of a climate (of class and training environment) aimed at creating meaningful interactions and places of cooperative learning (Lamberti, 2010).
- 2. *Know how decentralize* - **it means being able to put in the center the relationship and not so much the cultural affiliations in an absolute and static way, overcoming ethnocentrism (Santerini, Reggio, 2007).**
 - the ability to relate different and growing identities, feeding the mutual dialogue between different references (cultural, values...), taking into account that each subject will express and demonstrate uniquely his/her own self, as original and unique mystery.

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- **3. *Attention to prejudice about the stranger* - it means not to act for stereotypes and fixity, but enter in the particularity of experience, to give it a plastic form, ready to stay in changing situations.**
 - At the same time it requires training to be lever of change (Bonetti, Fiorucci, 2006) and place in which to develop options for social integration and employment, which means that each student is accompanied and supported in his/her project of life, in synergy with the family and other educational agencies, so that it has the tools to be fully realized.
- **4. *Know how to observe and notice the other* - «notice means that you are attentive to details, when we step aside you can leave space to another, notice of the changes, makes a difference in training».**
 - Pay attention to the people we work with and work for, allows you to highlight the importance of receiving, know and understand the identities and differences, plotting time and space in which to generate meetings, reciprocity and belonging.

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- **5. *Get involved creatively* - means not only align the routine of everyday life, but innovate research and the testing models and methodologies that facilitate the integration of foreign students, increasing dynamics of participation of the whole class.**
 - The trainer has to change posture in face of new situations, continuing to search the best way to promote interculturality. «The trainer is a person capable of wonder [...] and arouses curiosity in students»; he/she is a reflective practitioner (Schön, 1993), ready to be brought into question and innovate work's strategies, from the point of view of learning/teaching and of educational relationship.
- **6. *Recognize identity, differences and common perspectives: «we are so different but we have some things in common: being people, with 'mutant forms' that can get involved and change».***
 - This means that the trainer «should not spread the fear of difference», but encourage the desire to know each other. Finding common issues and generate strategies for meeting among adolescents means to form and educate towards the achievement of shared objectives and consolidation of the sense of identity and belonging that, in this period of life, oscillates between the personal dimension, the family roots and belonging to a peer group (Valtolina, Marazzi, 2006).

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- **7. Know how to mediate - the trainer has the task of mediating relations between cultures and, therefore, the interactions between students in the context (Fiorucci, 2000, 2004).**
 - The meeting between the differences can give rise to conflicts and misunderstandings that create distance between the parts and that often emphasize the question of culture as an element of strong contrast. It is important that the trainer will facilitate the resolution of conflicts, from the identity (not just cultural) of subjects and, therefore, of teenagers who often manifest the same needs and desires (Ambrosini, 2009).
- **8. Attention to the overall growth of the individual subject - «every time the trainer who knows the adolescent knows that there is always something new to discover», «every child will have his experience [...] and write his life, we are only a small piece», «it is for the trainer to mature the potential of each».**
 - The prospect of development and growth of the subjects closely affect the role of the trainer, entering into a relationship with a class of students through the learning objectives and the relational style, seeks to give form to a group of students who can develop their competences for professional achievement and personal development (d'Aniello, 2011).

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- 9. *Know how to cope with fatigue on multiple levels* - **requires the trainer to achieve learning objectives, in close connection with the development of the subject, with the dynamics of the group of students, in collaboration with the team of reference.**
 - The hard work is revealed in pursuing simultaneously multiple and complex educational objectives in contests in which the team that teaches/learns in reciprocity (Quaglino, Cortese, 2003) can become difficult to manage if the goals are not shared.
- 10. *Be a team for the group* - **is a skill closely related to the previous one, as it expected to create a team of professionals which works for more student's groups to support «the adolescences in the world of work and the world of life»;**
 - to achieve this goal, the team of trainers working for the autonomy of each person, whether through the sharing of collective knowledge (Milani, 2013) that can better orient the educational/training intervention.

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- 11. *Kindness, friendliness and firmness* – are elements that have emerged in close connection with the Salesian pedagogy (Braido, 1965) to which the training centers involved in the research refer.
 - The trainer is an authoritative and welcoming adult, a person and a professional who knows how to build a family atmosphere where young people can feel welcomed and experiment in different contexts, where the shared experience becomes an incentive for people to become open to otherness. Taking care of students is to be found in intervention's contests, not to shirk the challenges and provocations of adolescents and propose ways of sharing and relationship that can promote continuous dialogue.
- 12. *Be oriented by ideals* - in this case the reference to Don Bosco is clear; in its education system we reads: «young people must not only be loved but they must feel that they are loved».
 - For trainers means that the style of training becomes a vehicle for transmission of a way of being and thinking that promotes respect for the person and the “educational bet”. It is not enough that it remains a model, but it is necessary that declines in the concrete and it becomes a way of promoting the co-habitation of common areas that, with the contribution of all, can become inclusive communities.

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- 13. *The dream*: «each of us has a dream, a project, with his eyes turned to the departure of the students, the time it takes to train them and raise them to reach a goal», «it is a dream into test: different cultures who meet and trying to communicate, to dialogue and to build something».
 - The dream is not illusion but rather opens the borders of their ability to make growth paths, ensuring chance of success and feasibility. The dream of intercultural pedagogy requires the awakening of education, where the two fields of reflection and practice continue to intertwine on behalf of children and their families (Deluigi, 2012b).
- 14. *Know how to stop and evaluate* - is essential to understand the trend of educational processes in progress, to recalibrate their structure, to devise alternative proposals, to share in team successes and failures of the strategies implemented.
 - It is necessary stop and restart, without losing sight of the dynamics involved in the specificity of the experience and to redesign successfully new interventions (Castoldi, 2012).

Perspectives and open questions

- Intercultural trainer is a complex and dynamic role: «from the contexts of experience that guard, in the silence of fatigue and educational successes, a wealth of practices and projects that give voice ***to regenerate the pedagogical thinking ready to support the operationalization where they cross the stories of people and professionals.*** In this sense, reflective thought and strategies of practice can and should meet in paths where shape to the ideas and recognition of the multiplicity of experience» (Deluigi, 2013, p. 178).
- We consider it essential **to continue to encourage reflection on practice by social workers**, starting by the approach of intercultural pedagogy as a transversal vision and guidance for education and training (Portera, 2013, 2013b).

Perspectives and open questions

- If school environments become spaces where young people can learn, communicate and make experiences of community, it will be possible to find the differences, know each other, create proximity and give life to laboratories of democracy, in view of a more inclusive and dynamic social solidarity.
- In this sense, **the trainers become facilitators of interactions**, not only through the content and disciplines of learning, but also in the construction of welcoming and active group dynamics.