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The Embodiment of Tolerance In Discourses And Practices Addressing Cultural Diversity In Italian Schools

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Final Country Reports**



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ROBERT SCHUMAN CENTRE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES

The Embodiment of Tolerance In Discourses And Practices Addressing Cultural Diversity In Italian Schools

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UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO

WP3: National Case Studies of Challenges to Tolerance in School Life

D3.1 Final Country Reports on Concepts and Practices of Tolerance Addressing Cultural Diversity in Schools

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Executive Summary

In Italy, education is managed mainly by the state, whereas there are very few private schools and these are generally Catholic schools. The Italian educational system was founded in 1859 and since this date various reforms have been implemented by both right-wing and left-wing governments. These reforms were motivated mostly by political and ideological reasons. In fact education has always been an awkward political issue in the Italian context and it has often been at the core of political debates. Nevertheless, apart from the various reforms carried out to organize the structure of the educational system and the curricula, since the '70s a fundamental principle has dominated the Italian educational system, i.e. universalism. In Italian schools an egalitarian and inclusive approach dominates: all students are considered to be equal, they have the same rights and they have to be respected equally.

The principle of universalism was also applied to students of foreign origin by the '80s-'90s. The right to be educated is recognised and guaranteed to foreign students, regardless of their citizenship, their legal status or that of their parents. Universalism ensures equal opportunities for all students regarding access to the educational system, academic performance and curriculum guidance. For these reasons, students of foreign origin are included in mainstream classes and they are treated as Italians. Nevertheless, the management of the education of children of foreign origin is not always easy. These students have in fact another mother-tongue, they are sometimes used to a different educational system, and their families have different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the Italian educational system has had to introduce some innovations specifically for foreign students. Besides language courses and short-term remedial lessons for those who do not know Italian, changes to curricula and to everyday school life have also been made. The principle behind these changes is that of *interculturalism*, a concept which became salient in the school context, discourses and official documents as early as the '80s-'90s. At that time, the Italian school population started becoming ethnically diverse because of the growing number of immigrant children.

By using the term interculturalism, the Italian educational system seeks to outline the importance of dialogue and exchange among people who are culturally different, in order to avoid conflict and to favour coexistence. *Intercultural education* is seen as the most important way of preventing racism and intolerance, of supporting democratic values and finally of favouring integration. Interculturalism has become the normal approach to teaching in schools and has been integrated into regular school programmes. It is now considered the only way to achieve integration among students of different origin at school. Other concepts, such as tolerance or acceptance are not considered, discussed or thematised among educational staff and teachers, because they alone can not favour integration. Integration can be achieved only when diversities are recognised, evaluated and exchanged. Of course, the concept of interculturalism is quite vague and generic: despite being well-intentioned, it can be interpreted in various ways. Debates and discussions therefore arise among educational staff about how to deal with the presence and the needs of foreign children. At the political level there are also debates and arguments: indeed education is a political issue in Italy. The issue is more salient in some schools and classrooms where students of foreign origin form the majority of the school population. Here the intercultural approach becomes even more important and necessary, but also more difficult to apply, because of the cultural and ethnic heterogeneity of the foreign school population.

The focus of this study

This study focuses on how the issues of intolerance, tolerance, respect and interculturalism in ethnic diversity have been thematised in Italian schools, where students are ethnically, culturally and

religiously different from each other and teachers have to deal with these diversities in the curricula and in everyday school life.

Therefore, we have chosen to concentrate on two case studies which have provoked recently heated debates in the political and public arena, and which are linked to broader issues regarding the management of foreign students within Italian schools.

The first issue is about the accommodation of diversities in school life, specifically the proposal of the North League party in 2008 to create separate classes for immigrant students. The aim was to bridge the gap between foreign students and Italians and put foreign students in mainstream classes only when they achieved the same educational levels as Italians. In separate classes foreign students could also learn about the Italian culture, customs, rules and laws, to get ready to enter the mainstream classes.

The second issue concerns the structure of the Italian educational system, which is based mostly on state schools. There are few private schools and these are mostly Catholic and they are formally recognised by the State. But, in the last few years a Muslim minority in Milan has built its own school, provoking public and political debates on their right to have their own school, with its own language (Arabic) and different curricula. After a lengthy debate and various conflicting episodes, the school was obliged to close. The example of the school in via Quaranta shows that the issue of faith schools will grow over the next few years and will become a disputed topic in the public and political agenda.

Data and methods

This report is based on desk research and fieldwork. In terms of desk research, we collected statistical data, policy documents (e.g. circulars, motions and laws) and journal articles. The fieldwork was conducted between March and May 2011 in the metropolitan area of Milan and it was based on qualitative interviews. Finally a discussion group was organized and carried out in June, in order to introduce the results of the fieldwork, to discuss them, to get feedback, input, advice, etc.

More specifically, we conducted 21 semi-structured qualitative interviews in total: 16 in the first case study, 5 in the second case study. For the discussion group, 9 people participated: 2 members of trade unions, 2 university professors, 2 school teachers (one is also the person responsible for foreign students), 2 members of no-profit organizations and a member of an Islamic association in Milan. They all work on immigration issues and 6 out of 9 work on foreign student issues (for details see Annex).

As regards the first case study, we selected various public primary and middle schools where the percentage of foreign children was high. We did not consider the private schools, where foreign children are completely absent or are very few in number. We also used a snowballing technique, asking head teachers and teachers to indicate other schools to us. Of the 16 interviews, 3 were with head-teachers, 3 with deputy head-teachers (of these, 2 are also teachers, 1 was a teacher but now he is a deputy head-teacher), 5 with linguistic facilitators (of these, 1 is also a teacher of religion and 1 is also responsible for foreign students), 3 with teachers (1 is also responsible for foreign children), 1 with a person responsible for foreign students in a school.

In the second case study the interviewees were conducted with people from different backgrounds and who had had different roles in the key event. 3 out of 5 were Italian, 2 were Egyptian. Among the former, one is a professor, one is an ex head-teacher of the Via Ventura school, one is a representative for an Italian association which supported the Islamic community of via Quaranta in defending its rights. Among the latter, one was a teacher from the Via Quaranta school, one is the person responsible for the via Ventura school. In this case the heterogeneity of the interviewees allowed us to analyze different frames about the via Quaranta school and the events that followed.

Our analysis of the interview data was based on the tradition of qualitative discourse analysis, and a critical perspective was used to analyze the main argumentation strategies adopted by different actors.

Main findings

On the accommodation of diversities in school life

The analysis of secondary sources and of qualitative interviews highlights that the proposal of separate classes is considered completely wrong from a pedagogical and educational point of view by teachers and head-teachers. The apparently protective approach of the proposal (firstly towards foreign students, who could bridge the Italian language gap through bridge-classes; secondly towards Italians, who could carry on with the learning programmes in mainstream classes without being slowed down by foreign students) actually results in separation and exclusion. By contrast, integration of foreign students could be achieved through two strategies: firstly letting Italian and foreign students be together; secondly, letting them get to know each others' differences and recognise them. This is conceived as the *intercultural approach*: the principle that has always dominated the Italian educational system and that leads teachers' work every day. *Interculturalism* implies that people engage in dialogue, consider and recognise their diversities. It is different from toleration, which is considered an inappropriate approach, because it highlights the existence of an unequal treatment and distribution of power between those who tolerate and those who are tolerated. By contrast, interculturalism is seen as the most important way of preventing racism and intolerance, of supporting democratic values and of favouring integration.

Teachers believe firmly in the intercultural approach, and they try to apply it in everyday school life and in curricula, obtaining some good - albeit superficial - results (e.g. the introduction of references to the countries of origin of foreign students in the curricula, the celebration of their festivities, etc.). Nevertheless, there are two kinds of problem. Firstly, interculturalism is a vague concept, and teachers interpret it in various ways, according to their personal experiences and beliefs, the circumstances and situations and the school's attitude. There is, therefore, broad consensus about the meaning of the concept at an ideological level, but there are differences in its practical applications. Secondly, in some situations, the teachers' behaviours are in contrast with their beliefs and principles. Some foreign families' demands are hard to tolerate because in teachers' opinions they undermine the universalistic approach of the Italian school system (e.g. the demand to pray at specific times during the school day) or they damage children's rights or well-being (e.g. fasting during Ramadan). In these cases, if teachers cannot mediate and find a compromise with families, they react with an attitude of minimal tolerance, grudgingly accepting foreign families' claims.

The analysis of the discourses that are developing around the issue of accommodation of diversities in school life and the actual practices shows that there is a discrepancy between the two. At the theoretical level, the diversities should be managed through interculturalism, which is based on recognition and evaluation of differences. In practice the application of this approach is difficult, insomuch as in some situations minimal tolerance prevails instead of interculturalism.

On faith schools

The case of via Quaranta school is representative of how different social actors construct different frames to talk about religious and cultural diversities. The mass media and politicians described the school as a Madrasah, stressing the religious character of it, so that they referred to the dangers of fundamentalism. By contrast, the Islamic community tried to deny that frame and to outline a different characteristic of the school, i.e. being an Arab school. It highlighted its instrumental nature, not its religious significance and identity: the aim of the school was to teach Egyptian students so that they could go back home knowing Arabic and with a valid qualification. A third frame, shared by some civil society actors and politicians, was that the danger that the demand for recognition by the Islamic community would be damaging for children who attended the school. The lack of Italian language skills and isolation, without any relationships with the Italian educational system was seen as

damaging for the children, who were not prepared for entering Italian secondary school if they did not go to Egypt. Since the civil society actors thought that the right to learn Arabic and to maintain the link with the culture of origin were legitimate, they supported the need to keep in touch with Italian society, albeit in a gradual way and while respecting Muslims' cultural needs.

Beyond the different frames used by the various political and civil society actors, this case study highlights how the Italian educational system is not yet ready to address the issue of private and faith schools. The hostility towards the school, the various negative reactions of politicians and civil society actors and finally the way in which the school was closed are representative of the institutions' inability to manage the possible future demands of some minorities. The general approach was based on intolerance or minimal toleration towards what is perceived by the national culture as alien and capable of creating segregation.

With regard to our conceptual framework, this study shows that the public discourses on the management of religious and cultural diversities within the Italian school system are varied, and they range from intolerance to tolerance to interculturalism. Regarding some aspects, the Italian educational system has made headway in formulating the concept of interculturalism: it seems right and nobody opposes it theoretically. It is much more difficult to put into practice, because teachers interpret it in various ways. Some superficial attempts to apply the intercultural approach have been made in the curricula (e.g. introducing references to the countries of origin of foreign students) or in schools' festivities (e.g. evaluating foreign students' traditions, explaining them to other students). But, in terms of other aspects, minimal tolerance prevails (e.g. some religious or cultural claims) or, in extreme cases (e.g. the via Quaranta school) intolerance emerges.

Keywords

Tolerance, acceptance, respect, intercultural education, school life, foreign students, private and faith schools.

1. Introduction

1.1 The history of the Italian educational system and the intercultural approach

The Italian educational system was founded in 1859, some years before the political unitarian process carried out by the Piedmont State. The Minister of Education of the Sardinia Realm Gabrio Casati planned a unitarian educational system, controlled and organized by the State. The first aim was to overcome the previous territorial divisions and to build a national consciousness; the second aim was to keep under control the education process, regardless of the Catholic Church's influence, which had been predominant in the previous centuries¹. The Casati law was first implemented in the Sardinia Reign and it was extended to the entire new Italian State only later.

In 1923 the first reform of the Italian educational system was implemented by Giovanni Gentile, who reorganized the structure of the educational system, applying sweeping measures to school and to evaluate students' performances. Gentile also promoted the private catholic schools², but it was only after the Second World War that the issue of private schools was brought up for political discussion. After the debate carried on during the drafting of the Constitution it was decided to guarantee the right of private organizations to build schools, without any tax burden for the State (art. 33 of the Italian Constitution). Consequently, in Italy most schools were public, but there were also private schools, funded and controlled by the Catholic Church in particular.

The Italian educational system did not change until 2000, when the Minister of Education Luigi Berlinguer implemented a radical reform of the educational system (Law 30, 10th February 2000). One of the most important changes introduced by the Minister was the autonomy of schools: every school was autonomous as regards its organization (art. 21, Law 59/1997): the Ministry of Education set out general national guidelines and established the core curriculum, but every school could develop its own programme and curricula, could decide how to distribute the total number of school hours, how to provide in-service teacher training and how to set up teaching programmes for groups of students. The Berlinguer reform also introduced the opportunity for private schools to receive public funding (D.M. 261/1998 and D.M. n. 279/1999)³. A clearer and more systematic regulation of this issue was introduced in 2000 by Law 62, which let private schools be considered equal to public schools and enter the national educational system. Through a specific procedure⁴ private schools could ask to be officially recognised and to be considered as public schools, also regarding their tax regime and their right to receive funding.

But the history and the changes of the Italian educational system follow the succession of various governments. Educational reform has always been an awkward political issue: every government wanted to implement some changes and to boast about its actions, but a shared solution has not been found yet. After the centre-left government of 1996-2001 (during which the Berlinguer reform was introduced), in 2001 the election was won by the centre-right coalition, which implemented the third reform of the school system (called the Moratti reform, Law 53/2003)⁵. Another attempt to implement reforms was made by the Minister of Education Fioroni in 2006, under the centre-left government. Finally, the most recent changes have been made by Minister Gelmini and they are still in progress.

¹ Traditionally education was managed by ecclesiastic institutions.

² His aim was to move bad students from public schools to private schools.

³ A D.M. (Ministerial Decree) is an administrative act promulgated by a Ministry. It provides technical rules for the application of a law.

⁴ Private schools that want to be formally recognised have to explicitly apply for legal recognition and they have to satisfy specific requirements (i.e. teachers have to be qualified; the school has to have an educational approach that is in line with the Italian Constitution, etc.).

⁵ The Moratti reform changed the curricula radically.

Apart from the various reforms to organize the structure of the educational system and the curricula, a fundamental principle has dominated the Italian educational system until now, i.e. the education and the appreciation of human beings, the respect of their differences and identities. This dominant concept follows the principles of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989), which was ratified by the Italian State in 1991. The Convention guaranteed the rights of children, regardless of their cultural, sexual, national, linguistic differences.

By adhering to the Convention, the Italian educational system reaffirmed its character of an egalitarian and inclusive system, where all students were considered in the same way, they had the same rights and they had to be respected equally⁶. The principle of universalism which characterized the Italian educational system and which was reasserted by the Convention of the Rights of the Child was also applied to students of foreign origin⁷ by the '80s-'90s.

This principle implies that the right to be educated has to be recognised and guaranteed for all students, regardless of their citizenship, the legal status of their parents and their presence or absence on Italian territory. Secondly, the universalistic approach ensures equal opportunities for all children as regards access to the educational system, schools' performance and curriculum counselling.

Consequently, the presence of children of foreign origin has been managed by including them in mainstream classes and without creating special classes for them. Some remedial lessons have been organized to support Italian language learning for immigrant children but they are usually short-lasting and they do not substitute the mainstream classes totally.

In the '80s-'90s the term *interculturalism* became salient in the school context, discourses and official documents. With this term the Italian educational system wanted to outline the importance of dialogue and exchange among people who were culturally different, in order to avoid conflict and to favour coexistence. *Intercultural education* was seen as the most important way of preventing racism and intolerance, and of supporting democratic values (C.M. 205/1990)⁸; it entailed the revision of curricula and the use of suitable teaching aids, such as bilingual texts and books (C.M. 73/1994). The attention of the Italian State and the educational system to interculturality was also pointed out in Immigration Law n. 286/1998 (the so-called Turco-Napolitano law). In the law, it was outlined that schools are the best contexts for implementing intercultural projects, whose aim is "to enhance the linguistic and cultural differences, and promote initiatives of hospitality and cultural exchange" (art. 36). In the same period (1997) the "National Commission for intercultural education" was created by the Ministry of Education (it remained active until 2001). The aim was to set up a team of experts who would analyse and address the problems regarding intercultural education. The Commission wrote a document which outlined that intercultural education had to be considered the normal approach to teaching at school and had to be integrated into the regular school programmes. To achieve intercultural education, funding was set aside for teachers who were committed to supporting immigrant students (C.M. 155/2001).

The intercultural approach is therefore seen as the only way to achieve integration among students of different origins at school. The concepts of tolerance and acceptance are not considered, discussed or thematised in Italian education policy, among educational staff, pedagogists or teachers. To be tolerant and to accept differences are not enough to favour integration but they are needed to enhance

⁶ The example of disabled is meaningful: Italian law guarantees children the right to be educated and to attend school, from nursery to university; it provides personal programmes for the disabled within the school, organized by teachers in collaboration with the family and the National Health System; finally it guarantees learning support teachers for them.

⁷ Immigrant children and children who were born in Italy to immigrant parents (the second generation) are considered foreigners and they acquire the citizenship of their parents (in Italy *ius sanguinis* is in force). In the Italian educational system they are called "students with non-Italian citizenship". Only those born in Italy and resident in Italy since birth can apply for Italian citizenship when they are 18 years old.

⁸ The C.M. (Circular Letter) is a text, issued autonomously by a Minister, which does not have to be voted on or discussed at Chambers. It provides regulations to its subordinate offices: it contains the clarifications or instructions needed to implement a rule or to guarantee its uniform application in every subordinate office.

diversities. Tolerance and acceptance are “thin” concepts, in contrast to a “thick” concept, i.e. interculturality.

Despite the various reforms of the educational system, the intercultural approach has remained a shared principle, by both the right-wing and left-wing government coalitions. Interculturalism is considered a prescriptive method to achieve integration by all political forces and opposition to it does not exist. Nevertheless, it is a vague and generic concept, which can be interpreted in various ways (for example, some people consider intercultural to be simply the provision of language courses, others see it as a process of assimilations, etc.). In spite of this, it has never been brought into question, but it has been always enhanced by the various Ministries of Education at an ideological level. In the wake of this some important documents have been presented, e.g. the C.M. 24/2006 (“Guidelines for the reception and integration of foreign students”) and the document “The Italian strategy for the intercultural school and the integration of students of foreign origin” (written in 2007). The first document provides an overview of actions and measures for the integration of foreign students. The emphasis is clearly placed on foreign students and the document has mainly practical purposes: the instructions regard administrative procedures (administrative area), relations with families (relational-communicative area), and educational approaches with foreign students (educational area). Among all the instructions, the document highlights the fact that students of foreign origin have to attend mainstream classes to be integrated, because participation in a class where there are Italian students favours language learning.

The document “The Italian strategy for the intercultural school and the integration of students of foreign origin” was written in 2007 by the “National Observatory for the integration of students of foreign origin and for intercultural integration”. The observatory – which was set up in 2006 - consists of a team of experts who usually deal with the issues of interculturality and integration, and who have developed strategies, guidelines and recommendations to deal with foreign students at school. The document is divided into two parts: in the first part some principles and values are quoted, such as universalism, the centrality and the importance of human beings, interculturality; in the second part 10 actions which characterize the “Italian model of intercultural integration” are drawn up and explained. One of these actions includes a recommendation to implement training courses for head-teachers to learn the skills required for managing foreign students at school, and to organize classes where Italian is taught to foreign students. This last proposal has been implemented recently, by the C.M. 807/2008 (“National Plan for teaching Italian as a second language”). The main aim was to help foreign students who have been in Italy for two years (or less) to learn Italian, especially those who are attending secondary schools.

Besides funding, every year the Ministry of Education gives funds to schools which are located in high-risk areas or areas where immigrants are concentrated, to avoid student marginalization and dropping out of school. However, the principles and the purposes are ambitious and the concrete actions required are difficult to carry out. There is little and inadequate investment, so the good practices tested and implemented in some schools could not be extended to other schools.

The approach adopted towards foreign students was also applied towards other types of cultural and linguistic differences, i.e. the native minorities. Indeed, these minorities are protected by law (specifically, Law 482/1999) and they have some specific rights to protect and maintain their dialect and culture⁹. Specifically, in the school context they could implement courses during the mainstream classes to teach the language and the culture of the minority, and they could also use the dialect to teach subjects to students. Native minorities receive funding to teach their dialects at school¹⁰, to enhance their diversity and identity, to promote dialogue among different cultures and remove mistrust from others.

⁹ Before law 482/99 only the Francophones in the Valle d’Aosta region, the Germans in Trentino Alto Adige, the Slovenes in the cities of Trieste and Gorizia were juridically and politically recognised (by special statutes and regional laws). The other minorities were recognised only at a local level (by a few national laws and some regional laws).

¹⁰ We could cite the recent C.M. 70/2009 and the C.M. 58/2010, which set funding aside for organizing projects to teach dialects and minority cultures.

1.2 Italian schools today

Despite many reforms, the principles of universalism and equality have always characterized the Italian educational system. The concept that all students are the same, have the same rights and have to be respected in the same way is also applied towards foreign students (as we saw in the previous paragraph), regardless of their origins, nationality, cultural differences and legal status¹¹.

Specifically, as regards foreign students, the aim of this inclusive and egalitarian approach is to enhance their differences, to consider their diversity as richness and let them have the same opportunities as Italian students. Based on these principles, Italian schools are used to placing foreign students immediately in mainstream classes. For students who have been in Italy for 2 years (or less), there are courses to learn Italian, which are attended during school time. These students attend the mainstream classes and at specific times in the school day they leave the mainstream classes and attend the Italian courses, managed by a teacher who is called “the linguistic facilitator”¹².

The autonomy of schools introduced by the Berlinguer reform let them organize curricula and pedagogy and use funding quite freely¹³. Consequently, schools could organize remedial courses based on their own decisions and needs. The autonomy is positive on the one hand, because schools are free to adapt curricula in relation to the presence of foreign students (and in relation to their nationalities, their religion, their length of residence in Italy, their number in the school, etc.). On the other hand it is negative, because it produces differences among schools: schools which are more welcoming and open-minded to foreign students will probably be the schools where most foreign students will want to go, creating imbalance between schools.

To avoid the concentration of foreign students and the formation of ghetto-school or ghetto-classes the Ministry of Education’s guidelines suggest that Italian schools distribute foreign students equally. However, it is not always possible, due to many factors. Here we would like to cite two of them: firstly, families can enrol their children in any school, regardless of their place of residence; secondly, the head-teachers can influence the distribution of students (i.e. if there are too many requests for enrolment, they can refuse to enrol children). So, despite the Ministry’s instructions and despite the fact that interviewees say that they try to distribute students equally, the research (Santerini 2008) shows that there is often an unequal distribution of foreign students in Italian schools.

In this context, private schools are even more different from public schools. Firstly, in Italy private schools are mostly Catholic schools, managed by the Catholic Church. Indeed out of all the private schools (which represent about 18% of all Italian schools in 2007/2008, according to Istat data), more than half are Catholic schools¹⁴. Apart from Catholic schools, there are very few faith schools in Italy. This fact depends on the characteristics of the Italian context: as everybody knows, in Italy Catholicism is by far the most widespread religion and the other religions are in the minority. So the demand for faith schools is especially about Catholic schools and it is very low for other kinds of faith schools (for example in the city of Milan there is only one formally recognised Jewish school). Nevertheless, Catholicism has always been part of the Italian educational system: although in the 1980s by the revision of the Lateran Treaty (1929) Catholicism was no longer considered the religion of the State and it was removed as a compulsory school subject, it remained part of the school curricula.

¹¹ Foreign children have the right to enter Italian schools even if they (and/or their parents) are illegal migrants.

¹² The number of linguistic facilitators has decreased in the last few years. For example in the Milan province the number of linguistic facilitators decreased from 1 for 50 students in 1990/2000 to 1 for 600 in 2008/2009 (Caritas/Migrantes 2009). It is interesting to note that the data are in contrast with the increase of foreign students in the last few years.

¹³ However, the recent reform implemented by Minister Gelmini has reduced funding considerably.

¹⁴ Especially nursery schools.

Private schools are mostly attended by Italians, whereas foreign students attend public schools and, among secondary schools, they mainly attend professional or technical schools¹⁵.

Generally, in the 2010/2011 academic year there were 709,826 foreign students, which corresponded to 7.9% of the student population¹⁶. Foreign students have increased notably in the last few years: they accounted for only 0.7% of all students in 1996/1997 and the increase has been seen across all the age ranges (tab. 1 and graph.1). In 2010/2011, among all foreign students, there were 299,475 (42.2%) second generation students (those born in Italy to foreign parents) and they are concentrated in nursery and primary schools¹⁷ (tab. 2).

Foreign students live mainly in the Northern regions and are of many nationalities. The largest groups are the Romanians, the Albanians and the Moroccans. These three groups represent about 45% of all foreign students.

Table 1: Foreign students per school sector (absolute values and percentage), from 1996/1997 to 2010/2011

School years	Nursery	Primary	Middle	Secondary	TOTAL
	Absolute values				
1996/1997	12,809	26,752	11,991	7,837	59,389
2001/2002	39,445	84,122	45,253	27,594	196,414
2006/2007	94,712	190,803	113,076	102,829	501,420
2010/2011	144,457	253,756	157,980	153,633	709,826
	%				
1996/1997	0.8	1.0	0.6	0.3	0.7
2001/2002	2.5	3.0	2.5	1.1	2.2
2006/2007	5.7	6.8	6.5	3.8	5.6
2010/2011	8.6	9.0	8.8	5.8	7.9

Table 2: Immigrant School Population in Italy, 2010-2011 (Miur 2011)

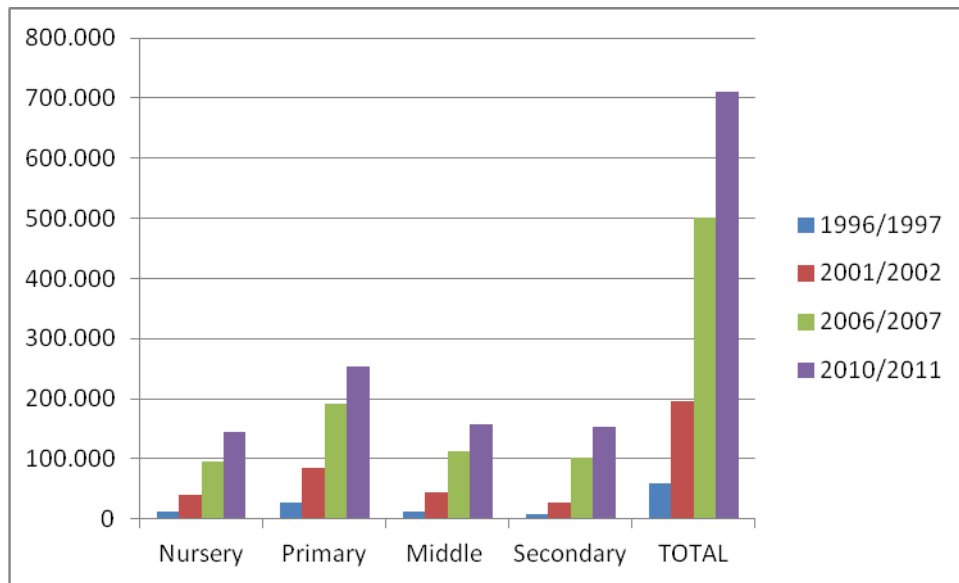
School sector	Foreign pupils (% of student population)	%	Second generation (% of foreign student population)	%
Nursery	8.6	20.4	78.4	37.8
Primary	9.0	35.7	53.1	45.0
Middle	8.8	22.3	23.8	12.6
Secondary	5.8	21.6	9.0	4.6
TOTAL%	7.9	100.0	42.20	100.0
TOTAL	709,826	709,826	299,475	299,475

¹⁵ Among foreign students enrolled on secondary schools, 40.4% are enrolled in professional schools and 38% in technical schools (Miur 2011).

¹⁶ The Ministry of Education collects data about foreign students every year. In its survey all students with foreign citizenship are counted, therefore second generations are included. In fact in Italy second generations can apply for Italian citizenship only when they are 18 years old, and if they have been living in Italy since they were born (see also note 7).

¹⁷ Second generation students are the youngest among all children of immigrant origin, they do not attend school or they are in the lower levels of the educational system. If we look at the number of immigrant children resident in Italy, the second generations represent more than half of the total (650,802 out of a total of 993,238 – Caritas Migrantes 2011).

Graphic 1: Foreign students per school sector (absolute values), from 1996/1997 to 2010/2011



The academic achievements of foreign students are worse than those of Italian students, and the differences are greater in secondary schools. The failure rate of foreign students is 18.2% in primary schools, compared to 2% of Italians, it is 47.9% in middle schools, compared to 8.5% of Italians, and finally it is 70.6% in secondary schools, compared to 25% of Italian students (Miur 2011). The differences are due to many factors, not only to foreign students' linguistic difficulties. The migration paths of immigrant families and their high mobility in the country influence the academic achievements of children. The practice of admitting foreign students into classes which do not correspond to their age is another key factor. Italian law states that foreign students have to be admitted into classes which correspond to their age, but only after verifying their academic levels. Teachers often do not evaluate students' academic levels adequately and consequently they place them in lower classes. The foreign students' failure rate is also due to this *a priori* selection. It is worth noting that this practice is applied to students who are born abroad, of whom there are many in Italian schools, especially in upper high schools (tab. 2).

Foreign students are not distributed equally among schools. In the academic year 2009-2010 26.2% of schools have no foreign students, in 47% of schools foreign students account for 10% of all students. Only 2.8% of schools have more than 30% of foreign students (Miur 2010).

Because of the number of foreign students and their unequal distribution among schools, two proposals have been made in recent years. The first was the motion of Cota (a politician who is a member of the North League Party), who proposed implementing preparatory classes for foreign students (Motion 1/00033, 16th September 2008). The second was the Circular Letter of the Ministry of Education Gelmini, which was applied in January 2010 (C.M. 2/2010). The Circular Letter made Italian schools rearrange classes so that foreign students would represent no more than 30% of all students. The motion and the Circular letter provoked arguments among politicians, civil society actors, public opinion leaders and teaching staff.

These proposals are interesting to analyze because they symbolize the current political approach to the issue of foreign students and the pedagogy applied to them. They represent the current normative approach to the management of cultural and religious diversities within the Italian educational system. They also provoke a debate which is representative of how civil society actors reacted to this normative approach. The rapid growth in the number of children of foreign origin within schools obliged teachers to deal with all the issues related to them (i.e. their arrival from abroad during the

school year, their lack of knowledge of Italian, their cultural and religious differences, their difficulties in entering a new educational system, etc.). When foreign students began to enter the Italian educational system, their presence was perceived as problematic, but then teachers tried out various strategies and practices to address the issue and equipped schools for the management of foreign students. The best practices inspired the writing of documents on interculturality, which contained instructions on how to deal with the presence of foreign students in terms of their admission to schools, the way to change the curricula, the training of head-teachers and teachers, the instruments to be used to fight against racism and discrimination, etc. Nevertheless, whereas the educational system moved towards an approach that was based on respect for and recognition of foreign students' diversities¹⁸, the political and normative approach was ambiguous and seemed to be opposed to the intercultural principles. The approach of Cota's motion seems to be based on (minimal) tolerance rather than acceptance or recognition. The concept seemed to be: "there are many foreign students, so we cannot sidestep the problem; we have to accept them and to find the best solution to resolve the problem without damaging Italian children". It is very different from the approach which has characterized the Italian educational system until now, i.e. interculturality (in its conception of heterogeneity in the classrooms). In Cota's motion, integration can be achieved by reducing the differences between Italian and foreign students, in terms of academic achievements, language, culture. This can be achieved by implementing preparatory classes for foreign students in which the gap with Italians can be bridged, by verifying their proficiencies through specific tests and assessments, by teaching them Italian laws, customs, values and principles. By contrast, according to the prevailing meaning and interpretation of the intercultural approach, integration can be achieved through cultural exchange and recognition, above all through the evaluation of cultural differences.

So, the different discourses and frames of politicians, the mass media, documents on interculturality and the interviewees allow us to understand how foreign students are perceived by these civil society actors, why/how/by whom they are or are not tolerated or recognised.

Intolerance, toleration and recognition can be analyzed by focusing on pedagogy and curricula (as in the case of Cota's motion), but also on the structure of the educational system. The increasing demands of some minorities to build their own schools (i.e. the Evangelical schools in US) correspond to the need to have educational contexts where cultural values and identities are transmitted, and where recognition can be gained in the public sphere. These needs can be met through the creation of faith schools. In Italy the educational system is based mostly on state schools and faith schools founded by minorities do not exist. The only faith schools that exist are Catholic ones and some Jewish ones¹⁹, and they are formally recognised by the state. The issue of faith schools became the subject of public and political debate when the school in via Quaranta, in Milan, attracted the attention of politicians, the mass media and educational experts. Although the school had existed for many years, it only became a key issue in the public and political arena in 2005. The school was not formally recognised, indeed it was criticized for many reasons. After a lengthy debate and various episodes, the school was obliged to close. Some months later a group of Muslim parents opened another school (the via Ventura school) to guarantee a specific type of education for their children. The examples of the school in via Quaranta and in via Ventura show that the issue of faith schools will grow over the next few years and will become a disputed topic in the public and political agenda. It will make the Italian educational system change because of the cultural and religious pluralism of Italian society in the future.

¹⁸ It should be remembered that in recent years it has been difficult to invest resources in organizing initiatives to apply the intercultural approach because of the reductions in funding for state schools.

¹⁹ In Milan there are three Jewish schools but the Jewish community do not define them as faith schools. The schools are formally recognised by the Italian state: they adopt the Italian curricula, they teach the same subjects as state schools, their approach is in line with the Italian Constitution.

2. Methodology and Research Design

This report is based on desk research and fieldwork. In terms of desk research we collected statistical data, policy documents (e.g. circulars, motions and laws) and journal articles. The fieldwork was conducted between March and May in the metropolitan area of Milan and it was based on qualitative interviews. Finally a discussion group was organized and carried out in June, in order to introduce the results of the first part of the research, to discuss them, to get feedback, input, advice, etc.

More specifically, we conducted 21 semi-structured qualitative interviews in total: 16 on the first case study, 5 on the second case study. For the discussion group 9 people participated: 2 members of trade unions, 2 university professors, 2 school teachers (one is responsible for foreign students, too), 2 members of no-profit organizations and a member of an Islamic association in Milan. They all work on immigration issues and 6 out of 9 work on foreign student issues.

As regards the first case study, we selected some public primary and middle schools where the percentage of foreign children was high. We did not consider the private schools, where foreign children are completely absent or are very few in number. We also used snowballing, asking head teachers and teachers to indicate other schools to us. This technique was useful and easy to apply, because a network of schools has been created in Milan in order to coordinate the actions of managing foreign students. The network was built thanks to a project implemented by the collaboration between the Milan Municipality, the Provincial Educational Department, the Regional Educational Department, the organization Ismu (a no profit organization which carries out research on immigration; it is one of the most important organizations in the Italian context which deal with migration issues) and 4 leader schools. These schools have the task of coordinating and monitoring the actions of the schools which are situated in the same area as the leader schools and which have joined the project²⁰. In every school there is at least one linguistic facilitator who teaches in the language laboratories and one person responsible for foreign students²¹. In the 4 leader schools there are 4 people responsible for foreign students who coordinate all those responsible in all the schools within the project.

Of the 16 interviews, 3 were with head-teachers, 3 with deputy head-teachers (of these, 2 are also teachers, 1 was a teacher but now he is a deputy head-teacher), 5 with linguistic facilitators (of these, 1 is also a teacher of religion and 1 is also responsible for foreign students), 3 with teachers (1 is also responsible for foreign children), 1 with a person responsible for foreign students in one of the 4 leader schools. Finally the person responsible for interculturality at the Provincial Educational Department was interviewed.

Although it was quite easy to interview head-teachers and teachers, it was more difficult to contact state actors, such as administrative staff, politicians, people who work at the Educational Departments. The school staff did not help the researcher to contact either these people or the students' parents, because of the privacy laws regarding the students. Nevertheless, the heterogeneity of the groups was guaranteed by analyzing both the frames of different social actors who work within the schools and those which emerged from the secondary sources analyzed. Indeed, the analysis of different types of secondary sources and of the interviewees who work daily in the schools and usually deal with the diversities, highlighted the discrepancies between what is said by the mass media and politicians, what is written in circulars, laws and documents on interculturality and finally what is said by teachers. These discrepancies were also outlined by people who participated in the discussion group, who stated that one of the most important issues about immigration is the role of the mass media in representing foreign people negatively, in describing events in a twisted way and in spreading fear.

²⁰ Almost all the Milan primary and middle schools joined the project.

²¹ In many cases the person responsible for foreign students is also the linguistic facilitator. Both the former and the latter can carry out these roles and at the same time work as normal teachers.

In the second case study the interviewees were conducted with people from different backgrounds and who had had different roles in the key event. 3 out of 5 were Italian, 2 were Egyptian. Among the former, one is a professor, one is an ex head-teacher of the Via Ventura school, one is a representative for an Italian association which helped some people from the Islamic community of via Quaranta to build the via Ventura school and to apply for official recognition as a “foreign school”²². Among the latter, one was a teacher from the Via Quaranta school, one is a responsible for the via Ventura school. In this case the heterogeneity of the interviewees allowed the researchers to analyse different frames about the via Quaranta school and the following events. Nevertheless, it is necessary to mention the difficulties in contacting people who were involved in the key event. We think that partly it depends on the fact that the debate and the closure of via Quaranta school happened in 2005-2006, 5-6 years ago. Besides, the events were characterized by deep conflicts within the Islamic community of via Quaranta and the local politicians. There were some demonstrations by the North League Party against the school and other demonstrations by Muslim parents in favor of the school, and finally (before the via Ventura school opened) Muslim students suffered, because most stayed at home or went back to Egypt after the closure of via Quaranta school. A sad event is also linked to these facts: during a demonstration, a young boy was accidentally run over by a car. Last but not least, the via Quaranta school was part of the Islamic community of via Jenner, which housed some terrorists who were arrested in 2006. The issue, therefore, became awkward and even now it is a sensitive topic, which can be used politically to attract (or not attract) votes. The second reason why we had difficulties in interviewing people is related to the first. The research was conducted during the months before the administrative elections of the Mayor of Milan in 2011. The local politicians and their administrative staff were busy in the political campaign and stated they had no time to be interviewed, but we suppose that there were political reasons behind these refusals, i.e. wishing to avoid dealing with this awkward issue during the political campaign.

As regards the places where the interviews were conducted, in the first case study they were carried out in the schools, in classrooms or in the head-teachers’ offices. In the second case study the places where the interviews were held were more informal: at the interviewees’ homes, in a cafe, in a park. One was held at the university, one in the interviewee’s office. Finally the discussion group was carried out at the university, in a seminar room.

Both the interviews and the discussion group were conducted in Italian, audio-recorded and then transcribed. The interview guides used for the interviews as well as the list of interviewees and of the people who participated in the discussion group can be found in the appendix to this report. The initials of interviewees are fictional, to maintain their anonymity. Some socio-demographic data (their ethnicity/nationality, gender, their job or role in the key events) are given in the list of interviews at the annex of this report. Our analysis of the interview data was based on the tradition of qualitative discourse analysis, from a critical perspective (Wodak et al., 1999, Wodak and Meyer 2001, Wodak and Krzyżanowski 2008).

3. Case study 1: the preparatory classes

3.1 The motion proposed by the North League Party

²² Besides the state schools and the private schools (which could apply to be officially recognized by a specific procedure – see note 2), the Italian law allows all types of schools to be set up. The qualifications which these schools issue do not have the same legal validity as those issued by state schools and recognized private schools. These kinds of schools are mostly foreign schools (i.e. the American school, the Japanese, the English, etc.).

In September 2008 the politician Cota, a member of the North League Party, proposed a motion²³ to the Chamber of Deputies to address the issue of foreign students in schools. In his long text, Cota described the changes in the Italian educational system due to the presence of foreign students and outlined the difficulties of schools in managing their increasing number. The problems mainly concern language learning, because foreign students have to learn Italian before studying other subjects. In Cota's opinion the language programmes slow teaching down because teachers have to teach slowly and pay particular attention to foreign students. Consequently, Italian students suffer: they are behind in curricula because of the presence of foreign students. To resolve the problem, Cota suggested implementing preparatory classes for foreign students, which were called "bridge-classes". The declared aim was to favour both foreign students and Italian students. Indeed within the preparatory classes foreign students could learn the Italian language and they could be educated in the Italian legal and social system, in civics, values and norms. So, foreign students could learn Italian in separate classes and could be socialized into the Italian culture, whereas Italian students would not suffer in their learning programmes. Furthermore, preparatory classes are temporary: after attending them and learning the Italian language, students have to pass an exam to be able to enter mainstream classes. In Cota's statement the final aim was to favour actual integration and to prevent racism²⁴.

The motion was discussed by the Chamber of Deputies, creating disagreements also among the centre-right and right politicians. Finally, the motion was approved, changing the name of preparatory classes from "bridge classes" to "induction classes". The motion provoked a wide debate and opposition from the left wing parties, Catholic organizations, and the trade unions. The President of the Republic also intervened to prevent further debate. The motion has not been made law and it has never been implemented.

Two years after the motion, the Minister of Education Maria Stella Gelmini made another proposal to deal with the presence of foreign students in schools. Specifically, the document written by the Minister Gelmini was a Circular letter²⁵ containing "instructions and recommendations for the integration of foreign students" (C.M. 2/2010). The most important recommendation was to form classes so that no more than 30% of students were foreign. The aim was to facilitate the learning process of all students²⁶ (as was the aim of the Cota's motion), but also to favour integration and to avoid ghetto-classes. The Circular Letter generated much controversy and disagreement in the public and political debate. It has also been unfeasible in many schools where the percentage of foreign students was 50% or more. Consequently, the Minister was obliged to issue postponements for schools where the number of foreign students was greater than 30%.

3.2 The findings

Cota's motion is a document where the reasons for preparatory classes are fully discussed. The subscribers (Cota and other members of The North League Party) seem to know the issue of foreign students very well: in the introduction of the motion they report data about foreign students in Italian schools, and they critically analyze the issue. Secondly, they explain the reasons for their proposal: because of the large number of foreign students in Italian schools it is necessary to address differences between Italian children and children with different linguistic and cultural traits. The preparatory classes, called "bridge-classes", are temporary: when students learn Italian and pass the language test, they will enter mainstream classes. The aim of this proposal, however, is to prevent foreign students from entering mainstream classes without knowing the Italian language and without being prepared to

²³ A motion is a proposal which is submitted at the Chamber Assembly (or at the Senate) to be discussed and voted on. Its aim is to influence and give direction to the policy of the government.

²⁴ The political orientation, the curriculum of Cota and some declarations lead us us to think that the aim was different: to protect Italian students from the slowing down of curricula caused by the presence of foreign students in the classes.

²⁵ See note 8 for a definition of the Circular letter.

²⁶ The idea is that if there are few foreign students in classes it is easier to teach and fulfil the terms of learning programmes.

adapt to Italian society and culture. Contrary to the values and claims of the North League Party, the motion suggests a “policy of positive and temporary discrimination”²⁷, to favor immigrant children and to reduce the risk of their being excluded. Besides language tests and bridge classes, the motion also suggests distributing foreign students in the mainstream classes evenly, “to favor the whole integration and to avoid the risk of classes made up of foreign students only”. The motion proposes a new way of pedagogically addressing diversity and of achieving integration: it happens when foreign students reach the same educational level as Italian students (therefore when they learn the Italian language, adapt to the school rules and when learning programmes are carried out easily), without creating obstacles to the learning of Italians.

The motion caused a debate: firstly the Centre Parties and secondly the Centre-left Parties wrote other motions. The former wanted to outline the importance of having permanent classes only - called “open classes” - “enriching the curricula with topics which refer to the cultural varieties”. The final aim is “the appreciation of pluralism, diversity and dialogue”, by the adoption of an intercultural approach (Motion 1/00049, 9th October 2008). The Centre-left parties wrote two documents in which they outlined the universalism of the Italian educational system, which has to be applied to foreign students too. They quote the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and they remind us of the values and principles of the Italian model of integration in schools: it is a model based on intercultural education, which recognizes the importance of learning Italian in order to be integrated and to communicate both inside and outside school. They point out that learning programs for foreign students have to be part of the whole learning process: foreign students attend separate classes for part of the school day and for a brief period. In their opinion the best way to achieve integration is “to favor the meeting among students of different nationalities”, because it speeds up the learning process and the removal of cultural and linguistic barriers (Motion n. 1/00050, 9th October 2008, and Motion n. 1/00051, 10th October 2008).

The motion caused a debate among politicians, but also among other social actors (scientists, no-profit organizations, trade unions, etc.) who pronounced their opinion about the “induction classes”. Some national organizations of experts of linguistics (the Italian Society of Glottology, the Society of Italian linguistics, the Italian Association of applied linguistics, the Group of Intervention and Study on linguistic education) criticized Cota’s proposal in its method: the learning process of a new language is facilitated when students are “immersed in the new cultural and linguistic context” and not when they are isolated (la Repubblica, 20.11.2008). Trade Unions accused the North League of “racial intolerance” and evoked “the ghost of apartheid”; the influential Catholic journal “Famiglia Cristiana” (Christian Family), the most important journal in the Catholic community, declared that the motion favors the birth of “continuous events of intolerance, violence and racism” (la Repubblica 15.10.2008). The Association of Italian Municipalities (Anci) stated that the proposal was an act of discrimination, whereas the aim should have been to guarantee integration and equal opportunities (*ibid.*). There were also many criticisms from politicians, not only from the left wing parties but also from the right wing parties. For example the politicians Cristaldi and Pepe (right wing party members) strongly criticized the motion, stating that “integration happens if there is mutual respect and friendship among people, not because of a law” (Il Sole24ore 15.10.2008). The Mayor of Rome, Alemanno (member of Centre Right Party Pdl), was also puzzled by the motion, saying that it was necessary to take a break to think about and to discuss the matter with the no-profit and voluntary organizations which support schools in their activities (la Stampa 16.10.2008). Even Alessandra Mussolini (the granddaughter of Benito Mussolini) defined the proposal as a “racist measure” (*ibid.*). Generally, the supporters of “bridge classes” said that they are necessary to address the issue of foreign students in schools. Cota, for example, sustained that “they guarantee equal opportunities to all students” because they help foreign students to learn Italian and to fill the gap between them and Italian students. He said the motion’s aim is only “to face the problem of teaching foreign children in our schools”, without any prejudice (Il Sole24ore, 15.10.2008). The framework is that of

²⁷ Probably the North League Party tried to hide a different aim behind political correctness: to exclude migrant children from the mainstream classes.

“integration”, although the North League’s approach has always been that of being against foreign people and immigration.

On the other side of the debate, the opponents to the motion said “bridge-classes” favor discrimination and that they are ghetto-classes. The centre-left politician Fassino for example claimed that the motion “represents a cultural regression”, “it is a contemptible proposal, which introduces discrimination at school” (Corriere della Sera, 15.10.2008).

Although the Cota’s motion was approved by the Chamber of Deputies, it did not become law and was not applied. However, two years later the Minister of Education Gelmini issued the Circular Letter about 30% of foreign students (C.M. 2/2010) and the North League Party expressed its satisfaction, stating that “the introduction of a limit to the number of foreign students in classes would be a great result” (in FLC CGIL, 24.03.2009). The Circular Letter had the same aim as Cota’s motion apparently: to favor integration of foreign students, to avoid their concentration in some schools or classes and therefore the slowing down of learning programs.

Although the North League Party’s declared aim was the integration of foreign students and the removal of the gap between them and Italian students, the motion was perceived negatively by teachers and head teachers.

Through the interviews carried out it emerges that under the declared aim of the motion (i.e. integration) a different aim was hidden: exclusion. RS, a linguistic facilitator in a primary school, says:

RS: The reason for bridge-classes was the xenophobia of the North League Party. I think that there were no other reasons; the only reason was to create ghettos. They did not want to create integration but exclusion. I’m quite sure about this.

I: The North League politicians said that the bridge-classes were an instrument to foster inclusion in mainstream classes...

RS: Yes, but I think they are inapplicable, especially for children. It could make sense for a young man, a man aged 20 years old, or for an adult, because they are already grown up, but for children....children should stay with children, they should mix with children of other ethnicities (Int. 7, RS, linguistic facilitator).

Like RS, most interviewees say that to foster integration it is important to let children stay together. The relationship between foreign children and Italian children helps them to learn the Italian language and to familiarize themselves with new rules and ways of socializing:

I: Do you think that bridge-classes might be a solution for the integration of immigrant children?

SM: We believe more in another solution...helping them to fit in should definitely be done in mainstream classes, in their class, where they were put. Naturally they do not have the instruments to understand Italian, they do not know Italian, so we have thought about an intensive laboratory, but not a bridge-class. They stay in mainstream classes in the morning, when they arrive at school, they do all the subjects they can do, i.e. gym, music, arts, games together. At 10.30 a.m. they have their morning break together with their classmates, it is a choice we have made. They have the break together, they go to the canteen together, so that they become integrated as much as possible, because play is what helps them fit in as much as possible...but, anyway, we believe that work in the laboratory could be done, intensively, for an hour. Then fitting them into the class should be done, we believe more in this (Int. 9, SM, linguistic facilitator and Religious Education teacher).

Most interviewees work in schools where there are separate classes - called “language laboratories” - where students can learn Italian and socialize within the Italian educational and social system. But these separate classes are very different from the bridge-classes proposed by Cota for two reasons. Firstly, they are attended only by foreign students who have been in Italy for 2 years or less. Secondly, they are temporary and they are attended for specific and brief periods of the school year. All the

teachers and head-teachers interviewed believe that language-laboratories are very efficient because they support mainstream classes without isolating or excluding foreign students. Language laboratories and mainstream classes work in parallel and contribute to both the integration and the education of students.

Integration, therefore, can be achieved when students stay together and share everyday life at school. Through their relationships with their peers they can keep in touch with those who are different, they can mix and interact, they learn that differences are positive. Teachers try to teach this value, which is a fundamental principle of the Italian educational system (as we illustrated in the introduction), by modifying and enriching the curricula with new contents:

FC: In the fifth year of primary school we dedicate 40% of the geography lessons to talking about the countries where the children in the class come from. It is the right thing to do, I think

I: Did the school choose to do this?

FC: Yes, some projects are thought up and then carried out. So in history, in geography, in the new curricula...when we teach them about ancient times, i.e. ancient China, we also talk about Buddha, about Buddhism. So, if there are Thai children in the class, or children from those countries, they are involved too. Secondly, we talk about Islam, because when we speak about the birth of Christianity there is also the birth of Islam. So, we can involve almost all the children. We have found a *modus operandi*. In Italian lessons, we also look for stories, folk tales and myths about the countries of origin of the students...the children say "yes, I remember this, yes! Someone told me this!" (Int. 11, FC, teacher).

To enrich the curricula and to encourage the exchange of information and knowledge, teachers try to involve foreign children. By telling them something related to their countries of origin or culture teachers put students' differences in a positive light and let other students know about them. Religion is a topic that is well-suited to this purpose:

SM: In the fifth year we talk about all the religions of the world...the five main religions, the religious education teachers have done a project, with the authorization of parents, to let all the children attend this ...this path, this process of knowledge about the other religions. And this is very nice because children interact with the teacher. When a teacher is explaining Islam to students, children help the teacher to explain. They interact with the teacher. And in this way they do not feel different from others. "You are of this faith so you could tell us why you have some of these customs"...it is very interesting work (Int. 9, SM, linguistic facilitator and Religious Education teacher).

The interviewees recognised that it is not always easy to change curricula due to the presence of foreign students, especially because an intercultural approach is not applicable to some subjects, such as maths, chemistry, etc. Because it is sometimes difficult to change curricula and to outline the links between cultures, teachers also use other strategies to let students know about each other's cultures of origin. Festivities are usually used for this purpose: all students celebrate not only the Italian festivities but also the festivities of foreign students. The strategies used to do this change over the years, based on the characteristics of the school population and on the successful practices done previously:

CB: We organize the school Christmas party in various ways, based on the different situations. Generally we compare the festivities of the various countries. For example last year we organized a joint celebration where we intentionally highlighted typical festivities...not so much of the countries but of the social and religious orientations of those countries. We spoke about social orientation, so the Jewish Saturday has been explained, the Arab festivity has been explained, our Christmas has been explained, the Italian New Year's Day, that is shared. This work has been done, because we Italian...but we...Christmas...I really insist on this because I want to let students understand that we consider religion as a process not of catechism, but of

social culture. Italy is a country that does not forget 2000 years of Christianity, not because it was the site of the Pontificate but because Christianity is part of daily life. This year we have done some work on Mother Teresa of Calcutta and we gave to students a pencil²⁸, a picture of Mother Teresa and a prayer about humanity. We were undecided about giving them the pencil: “Do we give them it or not?” But it was very much appreciated, because we depicted her as an historical figure, as a social figure. We will consider other historical people, i.e. San Francesco who is also recognised by the Islamic culture, other historical figures are respected by both the cultures. They do not deny the existence of Jesus Christ, we have to be clear about that. We definitely have to be careful not to create any clashes. (Int. 5, CB, head-teacher).

Even when foreign festivities are not celebrated or shared (for example because the number of students of a certain nationality/origin is small), they are respected. A case in point is the end of Ramadan or the period when Arab students have to do exams at their Consulate to obtain a foreign educational qualification²⁹: on these occasions foreign students do not go to school for a few days, but teachers know that and they do not tell the students off. Their absence is justified in some way. By contrast, when students come back to school, teachers sometimes ask them to tell other students how they have celebrated their festivities.

Besides the fact that all festivities are celebrated or described to other students to explain and share them, Catholic festivities are often celebrated without giving them a religious significance, but rather outlining the universal values they are connected with or emphasizing their historical significance:

TE: Our school has many students of different religions, but it respects the religious festivity of Christmas, we celebrate Christmas. We celebrate it because we are Italians, but we give a more general connotation to it, we outline not only the birth of Jesus Christ but also the values of peace and brotherhood. There are all the families at the Christmas celebration, all the families come and eat traditional Italian food with us quite happily. Nothing has ever happened, they respect us as we respect the fact that they do Ramadan (Int. 10, TE, linguistic facilitator and responsible for foreign students).

Although the teachers believe it is important to emphasize universal values more than the religious significance of festivities, they also outline the fact that it is necessary to celebrate them and not to forget them. In fact they are part of the Italian tradition and culture, of the Italian cultural heritage and they are essential to understanding Italian society:

DA: From my point of view, it does not make sense to abolish our festivities. I know that some people think “don’t celebrate Christmas because it could offend the Muslims”. I think...it is part of our tradition, of our culture...if we were in a Jewish country there would be “the Feast of Tabernacles”, or the end of the Ramadan and we would be part of that world. We should find a way to celebrate festivities which is not annoying or offensive (Int. 2, DA, linguistic facilitator).

In the interviews it appears that teachers and head-teachers are very open-minded and willing to appreciate cultural and religious differences. In Italian schools every student can choose his/her diet, Muslim girls can wear the headscarf, and the festivities of foreign students are celebrated. But in some teachers’ opinions the possibility for foreign students to appreciate their culture and to practise their traditions should only be allowed to a certain extent.

For example an interviewee said that making children fast during Ramadan is a violation of their rights and it should not be allowed:

²⁸ The head-teacher explained that Mother Teresa defined herself as “the pencil of God”, and for this reason he decided to give a pencil to all students.

²⁹ The custom of making children obtain an educational qualification from the country of origin is common among Egyptian families.

RS: As regards Ramadan I would be not tolerant, because in my opinion the right of the child is damaged. Firstly, the Koran says that until 14 years old, until there is a conscious choice, fasting is not compulsory. So, I think I would tell the family to look for another school, because I think that I would be severe about that. I would not allow a child to remain at school from the morning to the evening without eating and drinking. I would have a problem with that, but it has never happened to me.

I: Some schools have opted for letting the children go home at lunchtime...

RS: Yes, perhaps they have. But it is also true that children stay at school until 12 a.m., 12.30 a.m. and then they go home. Then they come back at 2 p.m. but I know that the child has not been drinking since the morning...there might also be some problems, health problems (Int. 7, RS, linguistic facilitator).

In RS's opinion some cultural demands could be satisfied at school, but only to a certain extent: she would allow children to wear the headscarf but she would not allow headscarves which cover the face, she would ban fasting before the age of 14.

Others state that they accept some cultural practices (i.e. the fast during Ramadan) but do not allow other practices (i.e. prayers during the school time), apart from specific reasons or for a limited period of time:

CC: There was only one case of a Muslim family which sent the children to school in headscarves...but it was a special situation because these two girls came here after the closure of via Quaranta school, in a period of transition while they were waiting for via Ventura school to open. They enrolled and they asked if they could come to school in their headscarves, to go home during Ramadan when the other children had lunch, and to pray at 1 p.m. in a classroom we set aside for them. I let them do this in a period of transition, because I knew it was a transition period. But this fact caused unrest among teachers and parents, they began to say: "But if they have decided to come here, to a state school, they have to adapt to the school's rules, so we do not understand why they can wear a headscarf, they can pray at 1 p.m....". There were also people who were more open-minded, who tolerated the situation.

I: Anyway, her behaviour was...

CC: I said "Let's make things easy..." I do not want to bang my head against the wall. I know that in other schools the head-teacher said: "No, if children come here, they have to accept, to accept that they have to pray at other times"; whereas I know that the exemption from lunch is very common (Int.1, CC, head teacher).

Finally, others forbid some practices because of the school's values and orientation, which are based on the equality of all students:

TE: The child should do Ramadan, well, we respect that...The only thing that we never allow is prayer, but we don't allow anybody to do this. They asked us to put a carpet down and pray. We told them that we have neither the space nor the staff to manage it. Absolutely, nor can Catholics, who have a Convention with the Church to teach the Catholic religion, which I am contrary to, because I think that every religion should be practised privately. The parents did not oppose this and said ok. In this school diversity is experienced through mutual respect (Int. 10, TE, linguistic facilitator and responsible for foreign students).

Consequently, children can carry out some cultural customs but not others: they can practice the traditions that do not undermine the characteristics of the Italian school and that do not influence its organization (i.e. the arrangement of time or spaces); by contrast, they do not practice those traditions that would make the school change its approach: that of protecting and guaranteeing the demands of minority groups in spite of its universalistic values (that are based on equality among all students). For

example the fast during Ramadan does not affect the organization of the school and most interviewees agreed that it has to be respected because it is a child's right; also the children's absence during their festivities is allowed because children have the right to celebrate them and it does not affect the class's routine. But the request to pray during school time is seen as something involving a minority which also requires the school to reorganize its timetable and space: if prayer was permitted for a minority, it would have to be permitted to all the minorities for equality's sake.

Another reason why certain cultural practices are not allowed or are opposed by teachers is the need to protect the children's rights and their education. The common frame of reference is "the right of the child": in the teachers' opinion if this right is not respected, they have the duty to make it be respected.

Therefore the difficulties in managing cultural and religious differences and in listening to immigrants' demands arise when these demands influence and affect children's rights, their education or their well-being. Teachers believe that the demands of parents sometimes negatively influence children, who cannot go through their school life happily because of their parents' wishes and rules. These wishes are culturally founded, such as the restrictions regarding girls, which are typical (from the teachers' point of view) of Muslim families:

SM: The swimming pool for girls could not be...it is not really accepted. We got a definite no for this girl, who took it all very badly...very badly, doing very bad things, terrible things against her classmates, because of this anger she had inside her. On that occasion we were facing a brick wall.

I: Was it a single case or were there many cases?

SM: There are not many cases. But for example make up for...make up for a Halloween party: the children made hats and cloaks, and my colleague put make up on them, some had moustaches, someone dressed up as a cat, etc. It was a disaster, because this thing was inadmissible.

I: Was it inadmissible to put makeup on the girl?

SM: Yes, the girl couldn't. Absolutely not. Terrible suffering for this girl who was very happy to do it. And the father came to school saying "never again! It should never happen again because this is going too far". And my colleague: "I did not think I could not! The girl had accepted..." Cases like this are few and far between, there aren't many but there are a few. And the experience teaches us, because now the teacher tries to be more careful, if there is a party she does not put makeup on the girl. In the end the people who are affected are the children, they are the children (Int. 9, SM, linguistic facilitator and Religious Education teacher).

When possible, teachers do not directly address parents' demands, but rather they try to bypass the issue, as in this case:

FC: This boy did not eat during Ramadan. It happened that I pasted some pictures of Jesus Christ on his exercise book. He told me that he could neither look at these images nor touch them: "I won't do it, because I can't!"...really fundamentalist.

I: So, what happened?

FC: Nothing, because I had other pictures for the same purpose.

I: And what was the purpose?

FC: The purpose was to teach the soft "g" sound. I had other pictures, so...but when there are fundamentalist Muslims, especially in fifth year, boys usually –girls less – boys usually do Ramadan (Int. 11, FC, teacher).

Managing of cultural diversity in school is done by teachers trying to mediate, to arrange solutions that do not damage the children's well-being and rights. Inside the classroom teachers can smooth out any difficulties arising from children's cultural differences (by changing curricula, by sharing children's cultural traits and festivities with all the students, etc.). By contrast, there are some problems in their

direct relations with parents. The difficulties of interacting with parents often depend on the parents' attitudes towards teachers. For example some problems arise between Muslim fathers and women teachers:

TE: If a boy treats me badly, because he is a Muslim boy, I tell off him, I speak with his father and I tell him: "if you behave with your wife and with your children in this way, ok, but...I am an Italian woman, I am the teacher and so, if you decide to send your boy to school, you should do what I say. Muslim men are quite snobbish but personally I don't give a damn about their snobbishness. They should get over it. I tell him: "If you do things differently at your house, well ok. But here, that's the way it is. If you don't like it, tough" (Int. 10, TE, linguistic facilitator and responsible for foreign students).

Another type of problem regards the parents' concept of teaching and training children. Some families ask teachers to adopt a severe educational style, which is considered normal within both families and school. Nevertheless, teachers do not approve of this type of educational style and in their opinion it is sometimes taken to such extremes that it requires school involvement:

CB: The Arab educational style is very strict. I had to intervene in some cases because families are...let's say...aggressive. So in this case we intervene to remind them that we are in Italy, that, here, Italian law is in force...which does not accept children being beaten. But, I have to say, they are extreme cases. Generally, behaviour...especially the Arabs quickly acquire the Western mentality, contrary to what people think (Int. 5, CB, head-teacher).

Apart from these cases, which are few and far between in teachers' opinion, the difficulties of interacting with parents regard the concept that parents and teachers have about the school, about the attitude to school and its rules, about the relation between families and school. These differences sometimes produce misunderstandings, so that some schools have decided to employ cultural mediators to resolve the issue. As a teacher says:

SM: We tried to ask for the support of some cultural mediators, there are some NGOs that collaborate with the school, because we realized that for some people being at school, the culture, the mentality of the school is completely different from our perspective. For example Arab mothers tell me: "Beat him! Beat him if he does not listen to you!" This is a thing...it is impossible for me, really, I have never thought about it for many years! For them it is very normal, as it is normal to give boys very few rules. So we tried to get support from these cultural mediators, so that they could explain our way of seeing school to them and they explained what the problems were to us. We maybe fight desperately for something for the children's sake, whereas at home parents talk to them in a completely different way. The cultural mediator is important because he/she helps them to adopt a different point of view, to understand the meaning of some behaviour. There was a Peruvian mother who never came to a parents' evening to talk with me about her son, she never came. But later we found out that for her it was normal, she entrusted her son completely to us, she entrusted her son's education to us, even though we needed to work with her. The mediator explained this to us and explained to her that we needed her collaboration (Int. 9, SM, linguistic facilitator and Religious Education teacher).

In the interviewees' opinion, in order to resolve misunderstandings it is important to talk with families, to interact and try to understand each other's points of view. Through positive relationship, based on openness and dialogue, people can recognise cultural differences and can mediate.

3.3 Conclusion

Cota's motion has never been applied but it highlights a specific approach towards the integration of foreign students and the management of their cultural diversities. The bridge-classes are useful because by attending them foreign students can learn Italian and be spared from being suddenly put into mainstream classes. The classes allow them to fill their Italian language gap and get ready to enter the mainstream classes. Integration is achieved when foreign students learn the Italian language and culture.

By contrast, the opponents to the scheme claim that the aim of bridge-classes is to isolate foreign students, to create ghettos and to discriminate against them. Among the opponents, the teachers and head-teachers interviewed explain the reasons for their opposing the motion based on pedagogical and educational grounds. The protective approach of the motion (firstly towards foreign students, who could fill the Italian language gap through bridge-classes; secondly towards Italians, who could carry on with the learning programmes in mainstream classes without slowing down because of foreign students) actually results in separation and exclusion. By contrast, integration could be achieved through two strategies: firstly letting Italian and foreign students be together; secondly, letting them get to know each others' differences and recognise them.

Because Cota's motion on preparatory classes has never become law and because teachers considered it a completely inappropriate proposal from a pedagogical point of view, they discussed the issue very briefly in the interviews. But, since its aim was to propose a way of managing diversities in schools, it was the starting point for discussions with the interviewees about other ways of managing diversities. The focus of interviews, therefore, moved inevitably from Cota's motion to the actions or proposals of teachers as an alternative to the motion to deal with the cultural and ethnic diversities of students.

The approach to managing the cultural and religious diversities that in the interviewees' opinion is adopted (and has to be adopted) within schools is that of recognition, not of toleration. They think that toleration is an inappropriate approach because it implies that some people tolerate and put up with others, although they do not like them. They do not like the term "toleration" and they refuse to use it because it implies that the tolerator has the power to tolerate or not, he/she can consciously refrain from interference or exercise his/her power (Preston King 1976, McKinnon 2006, 14 in WP2). The term "toleration", therefore, highlights the existence of an unequal treatment. By contrast, recognition is the right approach to fostering relations and integration. Recognition means both accepting and appreciating the diversities: through acceptance and mutual recognition people can interact, keep in touch, and get to know each another. So, the management of diversities in school is based on recognition and exchange between people, not on toleration which, by contrast, implies a negative attitude towards the differences.

Nevertheless, the interviewees' statements are sometimes in contrast with the behaviour they adopt in some situations which they told us about. On the one hand they state that respect and recognition are the most important values that have to guide teachers in managing diversities, on the other hand they have difficulty in positively accepting some kinds of cultural or religious claims by minorities. Specifically they do not accept those demands that undermine the universalistic approach of the Italian school system or that damage children's rights or well-being. To satisfy the demands of some minorities (i.e. praying during school time) is to recognise them and not others, to treat them better than others and not to respect the universalistic values of the Italian educational system whereby every student is the same. Other claims are not accepted positively because they come from foreign children's parents who do not think that their demands can damage children's well being or rights. For example their refusal to allow their daughters from going to the swimming pool is criticised because the girls feel different from their peers and they suffer because of their parents' demands. In the same way overly severe or aggressive educational styles are not accepted because they damage children's rights. But in the first case teachers try to find a compromise with parents and try to reconcile their demands with the educational programmes of the school, or they try to persuade them to do the best thing for their children, even though it might be against their cultural demands. If teachers cannot mediate, they accept the parents' claims: the attitude is that of minimal toleration and foreign parents' claims are

grudgingly accepted. As Walzer would say, there is, on the part of teachers a “resigned acceptance of differences for the sake of peace” (1997). Teachers try to find a balance between the two components of toleration, objection and acceptance (King, 1976, 44-54). To do this they suspend and ignore some considerations because of the fact that their attention has shifted “from the object of disapproval to the humanity or the moral standing of the subjects before them” (Heyd 1996, 12). By contrast, in the second case, because children’s rights are damaged, the normal reaction is that of intolerance. Toleration cannot be applied because the parents’ claims harm children, who are protected by rights (McKinnon 1996, ch.5).

In summary, teachers and head-teachers have learned the intercultural approach, based on recognition, and they use it on some school life occasions, i.e. the festivities. But, like an expert in interculturality said in the discussion group (SC, responsible for interculturality), it is used especially in the vocabulary of teachers, and it is interiorized at a theoretical level, whereas in many everyday situations they cannot act by referring to recognition but only to (minimal) toleration. In the opinion of some participants in the discussion group (SC, responsible for interculturality; DV, responsible for immigrant office) the intercultural approach has not yet been interiorized at all by teachers, who swing along a continuum, from resignation to enthusiasm (Walzer, 1997), or from permission to esteem (Forst, 2003, 42-48) in their educational style. Some participants in the discussion groups propose implementing permanent training for teachers, to teach them not only the contents but also the educational style of the intercultural approach, based on respect and recognition.

To do this it is necessary to invest resources in order to deconstruct stereotypes, to teach teachers to interpret foreign children’s behaviour based not only on cultural explanations. The support of cultural mediators or peripatetic teachers can be useful. Although they already work in collaboration with schools, in recent years their employment has been reduced because of the lack of funding. By contrast, their work could be useful in supporting teachers and in helping some of them to deconstruct their stereotypes. Indeed it is important to abandon an ethnocentric approach when explaining and justifying children’s behaviour, but also when teaching them. Despite the fact that the Ministry of Education gives instructions on how to draw up curricula and teachers consider them in their daily school life, their approach continues to be ethnocentric: they continue to enhance Italian traditions and to use textbooks which have a Western European point of view. As one participant in the discussion group states (MC, academic), it is not only the teachers’ fault, but also the teaching materials have not yet been created to support teachers in managing the diversities of students. To manage the diversities of students it is not enough to enhance and recognise their differences. It is also important to teach universal values and to outline their importance. Universal values represent a shared basis and they can be the starting point for teaching children that every human being has to be respected and valued.

The enhancement of cultural and religious differences can only be achieved within mainstream classes and through mutual recognition and exchange. For this reason Cota’s motion has been considered completely inappropriate and far removed from intercultural education. Teachers have been pleased that the motion has remained inapplicable and has not become law, and they state that the language laboratories are effective in helping foreign students to fill the educational gap between them and Italians. Secondly, because they are temporary and are attended at specific times during the school day, they allow students to stay together and they avoid the formation of ghetto-classes. Third, the research highlights that the academic achievements of students improve when they are in a heterogeneous context whereas they deteriorate when they are in a homogeneous context. The school mix makes teachers plan heterogeneous lessons and forces them not to concentrate their expectations only on the good students. Finally, the heterogeneity of people positively influences identities. The school mix, therefore, is desirable and necessary. Although schools try to achieve this, it is not always easy, for many reasons, such as the urban and socio-economic characteristics of the catchment areas or the excessive autonomy³⁰ of the schools. In order to avoid the formation of ghetto schools and classes, therefore, it is necessary to support the schools: families enrol their children in the school nearest their

³⁰ The autonomy of schools was introduced by the Berlinguer’s reform (see the Introduction).

homes. The socio-economic characteristics of the families who live in the neighbourhood therefore influence the composition of the school population. To prevent schools situated on the outskirts of the city becoming ghetto schools it is necessary to formulate local territory development plans in collaboration with all relevant parties, including the local municipality, to jointly address the problem of immigrant communities becoming concentrated in only certain areas. These plans have to be formulated by local networks, which include the schools, no-profit organizations, the local organizations which organize leisure time activities, and the Municipality. This network can work towards avoiding creating areas densely populated by immigrants and can support the schools, whose autonomy is partly criticized because it allows head-teachers broad power in terms of the enrolment of students.

Finally the documents which have been written about interculturality should be distributed and implemented practically. These documents are produced from above, usually by a team of experts, and the contents are liberal and advanced, therefore they can be easily shared. Nevertheless, they are not applied everywhere and in the same way, or sometimes they are not well known. This is a typical approach of the Italian educational system: educationalists work a lot on principles and values, and they write excellent documents; but they devote less effort to how the documents can be implemented, how to distribute them and make them known to teachers. There is a gap between the ideal and theoretical level on one the hand, the practical and real level on the other hand.

There is a lack of training for teachers on how to implement these documents, there are no practical instructions, the fundings are insufficient and there is no actual support and involvement at a political level. A clear example of this discrepancy between the ideal and the real is the document “The Italian strategy for the intercultural school and the integration of students of foreign origin”. The document was written in 2007 by a team of experts in education and interculturality³¹. It is very important because for the first time the Italian educational system worked on writing a document which pinpointed an “Italian model of intercultural integration”. The document described the principles of the model (universalism, the centrality of human beings, interculturality) and the actions needed to implement it. These actions are described in detail and practical instructions are given on the enrolment of foreign students, the learning of Italian, the appreciation of foreign languages, the relationships with the families, how to fight against the racism and discrimination, the review of the curricula, the training of head-teachers and teachers (but also of the administrative staff which work within the schools) in managing the cultural diversities of students, without falling into the trap of excessive universalism (which leads to an excessive homogenization) or of excessive relativism (which emphasises the diversities in an extreme way). The document is very important and should always be considered as the main guide for educational staff. As some participants in the discussion group outlined, it is a sort of handbook which has to be considered and kept in mind in everyday school situations. Nevertheless, this document (like all documents on interculturality) is not sufficiently well-known and teachers do not know how to implement it practically. Except from some courses for teachers on interculturality and on teaching Italian to foreign students within language courses (which are organized locally and only for some groups, i.e. in Milan), generally there are no specific teacher training courses which cover practical situations and diversity management in schools. Consequently, teachers act autonomously, based on their own experiences and on the specific situations they have to deal with.

In conclusion, the training for permanent teachers on interculturality, the support of training aids, the development plans of the local territory - which should involve the schools, the no profit organizations, the Municipality, etc. – and finally specific instructions on how to manage the cultural and religious diversities, all emerged as key points to be taken into account in order to improve the management of diversities within Italian schools.

³¹ See the introduction for more information on this document.

3. Case study 2: the Egyptian school

3.1 *The debate around the Egyptian school of Milan and its closure*

The school of via Quaranta was founded in the '90s by an Islamic community living in Milan in order to teach the Arabic language and culture to foreign children who were living in Italy. The Islamic families were mostly Egyptian and they wanted their children to learn Arabic, study Egyptian educational programmes and obtain the Egyptian educational qualification³². The aim was to prepare children to go back to Egypt.

The school had been open for 15 years, but in 2000 it began to attract the attention of the Municipality, politicians, educational experts and academics. The school was not formally recognised by the institutions. It was located in a building that did not meet building standards and there were also educational issues: students only studied Arabic and Egyptian programmes, without learning Italian or being integrated in the Italian context. If they did not return to Egypt they would have to enter Italian secondary schools (the via Quaranta school was only a primary school and a middle school) without knowing Italian³³. All these problems attracted the attention of the institutions and the school became the subject of intense public and political debate. In the meantime some Italian organizations tried to help the Islamic community and the school: the Catholic University of Milan organized courses for foreign students to teach them Italian in their free time. The courses were held in some Italian schools, to put foreign students in touch with Italian school contexts. Students were also helped to study for exams to get qualifications. But these interventions were stopped because of the public and political debate that arose around the school, the lack of funding, and disagreement among the civil society actors involved in the issue.

In 2005 the Milan Municipality decided to close the school, because of the inadequacy of the building and the lack of hygiene. Although the Muslim families protested publically, the school closed and the children had to go to state schools. Some of them were sent to their countries of origin by their parents, others stayed at home and did not attend school at all. After the closure of via Quaranta school, an Italian no profit association, the "Associazione Insieme" (Association Together) in collaboration with some of those responsible for the via Quaranta school, tried to open another school in via Ventura, on the outskirts of Milan, in December 2005³⁴. The aim was to build a school where there were Italian and Egyptian programmes, where students could learn Italian and Arabic, where the teachers were qualified to teach. The aim was to obtain official recognition as a "foreign school". But the new school, called Naghib Mahfuz School, encountered many difficulties in opening: there were bureaucratic problems (i.e. the permit to use the spaces for educational purposes or the official certification stating that the building could be used) and the process for obtaining the permit was lengthy. In 2006 it started its activities. In January 2011 it was transferred to another building, where there is still an Italian state school too. The interesting thing to note is that this state school has been at the centre of debate for the last few years because its students are mostly foreign students.

3.2 *The findings*

The school in via Quaranta had been at the centre of political and public debates for a long time, until its closure. After the closure, the debate moved over to the via Ventura school, but within a few months the issue was put aside and forgotten. The event and the debate around it are very important

³² The Egyptian educational qualification can be obtained by taking exams at the end of every school year at the Egyptian Consulate in Italy.

³³ This is what happened to many children: they have never gone back to Egypt but they have gone to Italian schools or the via Ventura school.

³⁴ In 2005 the school opened as an after-school centre but it obtained the recognition of "foreign school" only in November 2006 (for a definition of "foreign school" see note 23).

because they highlight an issue which will very probably become a controversial topic in the Italian political and public agenda, i.e. the issue about private foreign and faith schools, and about cultural and religious pluralism.

Coming back to the event, the discussions about the school focused on many different aspects. The Milan Municipality focused on the inadequacy of the building and the lack of hygienic conditions and it justified the school's closure based on these grounds.

But other civil society actors claimed that the closure was based on issues of integration. Some academics and experts in pedagogy and education (i.e. experts who worked at the Catholic University of Milan) supported a gradual move of Muslim children from the via Quaranta school to Italian state schools. Because the most important thing was the education and the integration of children, in their opinion it was necessary to put them in Italian schools. Through experimental classes and programmes, these experts wanted to teach children using Italian school programmes, without excluding the study of Arabic. In short, they thought that children had to be bilingual, to maintain their origins but also to be integrated into Italian schools and society.

Among politicians, opinions were varied. The centre-right parties wanted the closure of via Quaranta school because in their opinion the best route to integration was to attend Italian state schools. A more extreme approach was that of the North League Party which talked about legality and integration: firstly, the school was illegal because it did not observe basic hygiene conditions, so it was necessary "to re-establish legality" (as the North League's Davide Boni said, in *Corriere della Sera*, 22.09.2005); secondly, integration was possible only by sending foreign children to Italian schools. Significantly the North League leader at the City Council Matteo Salvini declared: "The law is the law. It has to be applied to Italians. It has to be applied to Muslims. There are many schools where Egyptian children can study. Obviously, their parents do not want their children to become integrated" (in *Corriere della Sera*, 10.09.2006). It is an interesting declaration, which mixes the discourse on legality with the discourse on integration, and which confuses Muslims with Egyptians.

Among centre-left politicians the views were quite different. Some agreed with the closure of the school, declaring similar reasons to those of the centre-right. For example the Province's Chairman Penati said that "the need to achieve integration is right, but it has to be achieved through state schools and not through private schools which actually encourage separation. The via Quaranta school has to be closed because it favours exclusion and not integration" (in *la Repubblica*, 08.09.2005). By contrast, others defend the right of families to choose how and where to teach children.

Among people of foreign origin there were also some who were opposed to the via Quaranta school. The most critical was Magdi Allam, an Italian citizen of Egyptian origin, who heavily criticized the school. He wrote critical articles in Italian newspapers, accusing the school of being extremist and describing the children as "excluded and disadvantaged because of preacher-teachers. He called the school a Madrasah and warned the Italian State not to grant the Muslim community permission to build Islamic schools and Mosques because "national security would be undermined" (in *Corriere della Sera*, 30.08.2005).

The term Madrasah was often used by the mass media to speak about the school. Although the representative of the school pointed out that the aim was not to teach Islam but to teach Arabic and to maintain the link with the culture of origin in order to be able to go back home in the future, the mass media always talked about "the Islamic school" or "the Koranic school", stressing the orientation towards religion.

In the opinion of the interviewees, this common frame is completely wrong. Both those who defended the aims of the school and those who proposed better solutions for the children agree that the school was not a religious school or a fundamentalist school. YG, an Egyptian teacher who taught many subjects (also religion) in the school, says:

YG: It was an Arabic school, but, since it was inside a mosque, since it was nearly a mosque, it was called "Islamic school". But, to tell the truth, we taught the Egyptian programmes, also the religious education text book was the one used in Egypt, it was requested by the parents. There was also a request to teach students more religious aspects, because the Egyptian book was

quite short. So parents asked for more teaching, i.e. the Koran. But it was optional, it was not compulsory. For those who wanted this, there was an hour of in depth teaching. Those who did not want this, ok, they were not obliged to.

I: Did you agree with the choice of families to send their children to the via Quaranta school?

YG: I do not know. I cannot say that I do not agree, because everyone is free to choose, because for example a Jewish parent chooses to send his/her child to a Jewish school...if he/she chooses....there are many schools, there is the Chinese school, the Japanese school, the German school, so....they are here, in Milan. So if a parent of Arab origin wants to send his/her child to an Arab school, there is respect, he/she has the right to do this. Then I have the right to do what I think (YG, Egyptian teacher).

The interviewee says that the school offers the possibility to study Islam in depth but he stresses that it was not compulsory. In this way he tries to point out that it was not a religious school, but an Arab one. Nevertheless, its name was meaningful: it was called “Fagr Al Islam”, i.e. “the dawn of Islam”, a name that produces ambiguity and may make people think it was a religious school, contrary to what YG says.

A different point of view is expressed by another interviewee, an Italian man representative of an association that kept in touch with the school to organize remedial lessons and support activities for students. Since the man helped the responsible of the school to organize their activities and to transmit the image of a good school, at the same time he admits that the school was orthodox:

MZ: There were the needs of the families who have children here, the necessity to make them follow a double programme³⁵. Firstly via Jenner³⁶ did it, then people from that community argued among themselves, and via Quaranta was opened, the school was moved to via Quaranta along with the entire way of thinking of those people...who are not fundamentalists but are certainly very orthodox...therefore with quite an aggressive way of preaching and teaching (MZ, representative of an Italian association).

A third representation of the school is that of a professor who tried to let Arab children attend Italian schools in their free time to learn Italian. He clearly explains the difference between a religious school and an Islamic school, two types of school that, by contrast, were considered to be the same thing by the mass media and newspapers. RA agrees with those who say that the school was an Egyptian school, but he outlines that it had a religious approach:

RA: The name of the school was “Fagr Al Islam”, i.e. “the dawn of Islam”, so it was denoted religiously although it was not a Madrasah, as some people said, because the Koranic school, where the Koran is studied, where catechism is done, is different. So there was ambiguity on the part of the media, and this was done deliberately. Actually, it was an Egyptian school but with Islamic overtones (RA, academic).

RA accuses the mass media of spreading false representations of the school and of immigrants in general, and he warns against paying attention to these misleading images, which negatively influence the public’s perception of the events. Although the image that the mass media give of the school stresses its religious aspects, it is also necessary not to minimize the special characteristics of the school, i.e. the fact that it was attended by mainly Egyptian children, who did their final exams at the Egyptian Consulate every year, and who studied Egyptian from books. RA’s advice, therefore, is that

³⁵ He is referring to the need for students to follow both the Italian and the Egyptian programmes.

³⁶ This Islamic community is based in via Jenner, a street in Milan. Although the site is not a mosque, it is known as “the mosques of via Jenner”. It is often at the core of the public and political debate, especially because of the arrest in 2007 of some terrorists who attended it (among them there was also an imam).

on the one hand we shouldn't fully believe the mass media, but on the other hand we should realize that it was an unusual school. MZ explains the families' needs and claims very well:

MZ: The reason for this school's existence was not because of a problem of integration in Italy, but because of a problem of integration in Egypt. It was just opposite, the need was that many families made children come back to Egypt after the third year in middle school, they made them study in Egypt, because it costs less to study, there university costs less. By contrast, those who decided to stay here went to Italian schools maybe as early as the third year of middle school (MZ, representative of an Italian association).

So, in the opinion of some interviewees the aim of the school and the choices of the families were not the teaching of religion. The reason why Arab families send their children to this school was instrumental: to teach children Arabic culture and language in order to go back to Egypt with a valid qualification.

After the closure of the school, Via Ventura school was set up for the same reason. Indeed when the via Quaranta school closed, Egyptian families did not send their children to Italian schools, which did not satisfy their requirements. To avoid children dropping-out of school some people from the Islamic community, with the help of the Italian association "Associazione Insieme", decided to build the via Ventura school. This school was different from the previous one, because both Italian programmes and Egyptian programmes were taught. Secondly, its representative declared that it was secular. Thirdly, it was set up thanks to the support of the Egyptian Consulate too. Finally it wanted to obtain recognition as a "foreign school", so it began to follow the procedure to do it. But it encountered many difficulties, due to the opposition of the institutions and some politicians.

For some interviewees, the reason for the existence of these two schools was not only an instrumental one, but there was also a more abstract reason, to transmit cultural and identity values to children, to bring them up based on an Arab educational style:

RA: I can understand, people care about the education of their children and...they see some Western models that they do not like, especially female models, because girls, even when they are very young, they maybe dress in a certain way, they are defiant, they swear, they smoke and...so in that school there was moral preservation...for the same reason why we send our children to Catholic schools. The families often chose to do this, not only because of the better quality of teaching but also because they say: "I know that there are certain values, certain principles are respected". There are also Muslims who send their children, especially girls, to private schools managed by nuns, because they say: "I can relax, because my girl does not come back home swearing, dressing in a certain way, behaving in a certain way, which I do not like". There is this reason, surely, and it is as important as the preservation of a language, of a certain qualification. And also this seems right to me, because it could happen in some state schools that classmates offend your sensitivity a little (RA, academic).

The school, like other private or faith schools, is seen as a context in which children are protected, where specific cultural values and rules are transmitted to them, and where they cannot meet deviant peers who might influence them negatively. The interviewee outlines that this need is shared by Italians and foreign parents: stopping their children from becoming defiant and rude is a common objective.

The importance of transmitting a certain educational style is linked to the cultural background of these families, as LA, a teacher who began to collaborate with the via Quaranta school and then filled the position of head-teacher at via Ventura school for a brief time says:

US: They took their children there because they were sure that they would be taught...like in some of the more closed Catholic schools...a choice like this...they were sure that all the values... I understood many things because I saw that most families came from two Egyptian

areas, the Fayoum and the Nile delta, which are farming areas. So, they have a rural mentality. So this attachment to...it was not a problem of...as I can say...of orthodox Islam. It was a problem of tradition, of tradition, like our Sicilian women, who dressed for many years in black clothes and with a headscarf. This type of closure, of attachment, which seems to be like armour...but it is cultural armour, absolutely, linked to tradition (US, ex head-teacher of via Ventura school).

It is interesting to note the discrepancies between what the interviewees say and what was written in newspapers about the reasons for the school's existence. The former outlined the need of families to teach Arabic, to make students do the Egyptian exams, to transmit their culture and identity; the latter outlined that the aim was to remain isolated, not to be integrated, to build a ghetto-school and, in the extreme, to bring up fundamentalist people (in *Corriere della Sera*, 16.07.2004). Probably the self segregation of minorities is seen as an attempt not to be integrated: in public and political opinion, integration is achieved when minorities become similar to the majority, when they abandon their cultural and religious traits to become assimilated. Their desire and need to preserve their identity is perceived as an obstacle to the process of integration (or rather, of assimilation).

In 2005 the local institutions began to be opposed to the school and ordered inspections to verify the school's conditions. Because the hygiene and health conditions were inadequate, the school was closed. The interviewees say that the school should have been closed just because of these problems, but for other reasons that concerned education and the well-being of children:

RA: The American school, the French school could also make sense, like an Arab or Islamic school. But the condition is that it should provide a good education, it should be as good as a state school. So, I saw poor and inadequate provision in via Quaranta, rather than just a monocultural and monoreligious ghetto – which could be a risk. It was not a good school (...). Teachers were all mother tongue, they said they were qualified to teach, but I have never seen their qualifications. Someone studied pedagogy, or went to University, but most spoke only Arabic. We saw that when the journalists went there, the children had to interpret for their teachers. And this is not positive because if your teacher has been in Italy for years and he does not know Italian, he is not a good model of integration for you. You are in a school where only Arabic is taught, why should you have to learn the local language, if you have these models? I think that teachers were chosen from those who were not well integrated, who had not learnt Italian very well, who preferred to live in an Arab context...in a word, models of unsuccessful integration, without accusing them of extremism or fundamentalism (RA, academic).

In RA's opinion, the reasons why the school had to be closed were linked to the education of children and their integration. These reasons seem to be more important than the condition of the building and they allow the interviewee to better justify his position in favour of closing the school.

Nevertheless, what we would like to stress here is the discrepancy between the frame used by the interviewees and those used by institutions and politicians. They are all opposed to the school but their reasons are based on different frames: the former justify their opposition in terms of integration, the rights and the well-being of the children, the latter cite hygiene and security reasons (the inadequacy of the building but also the fear that fundamentalist people would be brought up there)³⁷.

Two interviewees say that rather than for reasons of hygiene, the institution was opposed to the school because of the fear of terrorism:

YG: In my opinion there were two reasons. Firstly, some years before, there were the events of the 11th September. So they were worried, they were worried about Islam, about Muslims, and they were checking...then they found some people who were part of...I do not know...of some

³⁷ It is interesting to note that the hygiene and security reasons are the frame on which the discourses against the school are built but they are not the actual reasons: the main worries concern the integration of immigrants.

secret organizations, i.e. Al-Qaeda – I heard – so...they did not find other secrets, but they found the via Quaranta school and... (they said): "we'll let people know that we are checking everything"...but the school existed before their checks, and nobody said anything, the school was in the city. So they checked and they closed the school, because they said that it was an Islamic school where extremist children were brought up

I: Magdi Allam also said this...

YG: Yes, but he did not come to the school, he did not come to see the programmes, how teachers taught. We were all normal teachers. When I left the school, I worked in Milan's schools, in various projects, with the University, with the Provincial Educational Department. I always taught as a teacher... We are all ordinary people (YG, Egyptian teacher).

Terrorism influences the relation between the Islamic community and the host society, and consequently Muslims are treated differently from other minorities.

In US's opinion the difficulties of tolerating Muslims depend on the power of political forces:

US: At the beginning the situation was paradoxical, because when via Quaranta was irregular, the Milan Municipality provided money and financed projects. When via Quaranta began the procedure to become legal...a person should say: "Institutions are happy". They were officially. They also said there was an available building in via Zama to open the foreign school. Then the political parties...I am sure the North League partly....the political parties within the Municipality stopped everything when Muslims obtained visibility through official recognition. Because there should be no visibility of this minority. Look at what is happening to the mosques. In your opinion is it possible that a European city has no place...it does not permit...it does not build?...they have created local regulations intentionally which make the Municipality take charge of giving a permit to open a place of worship. It is only to stop them (US, ex head-teacher of via Ventura school).

US outlines the paradoxical behaviour of the Milan Municipality. At the beginning it supported the school and it even gave financial and material support. But then, when the issue went to the core of public and political debate, the Municipality got worried about its political support and about the reactions of the North League party. So it changed its attitude towards the school radically and the Muslim minority, also by bringing in some regulations to impede Muslims' claims (i.e. places of worship). Opposition to minorities' demands emerges in the case of Muslims but not in the case of other minorities. As regards schools in particular, the interviewees quote the case of Jewish schools to explain the discrepancies of treatment between minority groups. As MZ says:

MZ: Up to three years ago I lived opposite a Jewish school, that orthodox...there you cannot enter... And when I entered, it seemed like seeing something similar to via Quaranta school: a person meets you and you don't see anything, anybody. In my opinion it does not work. It is a ghetto, isn't it? Via Quaranta is a ghetto, sure, there is the danger that these things become....but, I want to say, I often go to Argentina, and there are some neighbourhoods that started out as ghettos and they were the Italian ghettos, so it is quite understandable that this happens, they are social processes so...the issue is delicate...it is the exploitation and contamination of fundamentalism, this is the problem (MZ, representative of an Italian association).

Since the Jewish school is a ghetto like the via Quaranta school, it did not provoke a debate and, in MZ's opinion this depends on the issue of fundamentalism. Both are the result of typical processes: the need to stay with people who are perceived as similar, who have the same needs and demands, who want to grow up in a specific cultural and/or religious context. Nevertheless, the Muslim school is linked to fundamentalism in the public's opinion, and for this reason it frightens people.

For other interviewees the Jewish and the Muslim school are not equal, but they provide students with an education that is qualitatively different:

RA: After 2000 years of diasporas, the Jewish know very well that their future, also their professional future, depends on good education, too. So, since from the religious or normative point of view the Jewish school could seem...I 'm not saying fundamentalist...but very very traditional, Italian is taught there, English is taught, it is a high quality school. So, the problem is that a school could have a rigorous approach - like certain Catholic schools - but it cannot be a shack. There (i.e. in via Quaranta) the problem was two-fold: the school was strict about some aspects, but it was also a poor quality school. If you are in a paramilitary school you leave with an excellent education and you say "ok". I would not send my son in a school like this, with a rigorous discipline, but...what an education! Anyway, there are some people who believe in this discipline and they say "it's character-forming, they make a man of you!". There could be pros and cons. They are high quality schools, so this rigor is balanced. Have you seen films like "Full metal jacket"? There you can see this aspect, of the discipline, and the feeling of being part of an elite, like in "An Officer and a Gentleman, Top Gun...", here this aspect is romanticized, but there is the idea of the private school as an elite school (RA, academic).

In RA's words the Jewish school is compared to some Catholic schools or paramilitary schools, where the common characteristic is to teach children through severe discipline. By contrast, the Muslim school is a poor quality school, although there is a severe and strict approach towards students. Although RA is not completely against private schools, and specifically religious schools, he outlines the risks of these kinds of schools:

RA: The risk is the ghetto, in particular when the school has a strong religious orientation because if you don't mix with others it might be because you don't want to be contaminated. Maybe the old Catholic schools also had this idea, i.e. the single sex schools. Surely, for those religions with a strong normative orientation, such as Judaism or Islam, closure refusal to mix is stronger, partly because they are a minority, partly because there is the entire issue of ritual purity, of things which are permitted and not permitted. And I cannot exclude the fact that children grow up in such a monochrome context that during their life they could have difficulties interacting more openly and clearly with people who have other traditions (RA, academic).

The risk, therefore, that a faith school becomes a ghetto is stronger for some kinds of schools, such as the Judaic or Muslim ones, for two reasons: firstly because of the perception of them as a minority, which leads people to emphasize and reinforce their differences, also through the creation of their own schools; secondly because of the characteristics of their faith.

A different point of view is that of YG, who states that religious schools are not good because they educate children differently:

YG: I am against private schools, religious schools, I do not agree because one child is educated in one way, another child in a different way, another child has not been educated so....I am against private religious schools. These things could be resolved in another way, with other solutions, in state schools. For example, there could be the religious education lessons, some could attend lessons in Catholicism, some in Islam, some....then, as I said before, some lessons could be attended together, shared together. Because there is not so much difference between religions, if a person believes in God, he/she wants to be good, he/she wants to behave well and to love others. All the religions teach these things. So, if there is not a religion that teaches people to be fundamentalists, to go and fight, to kill women and children. These people are non believers, they are not religious. So, when we were in via Quaranta school and people said: "it is an Islamic school", I always said: "No, it is an Arab school. It is an Arab school, an Arab

school". Because we did not create a religious school, we did not. We wanted to build an Arab school, for all the Arab, not for all the Muslims (YG, Egyptian teacher).

It is interesting to note that the interviewee is a teacher in the via Quaranta school, which was criticised for being a religious school. We wonder if YG stated that religious schools are bad in order to defend the via Quaranta school: if it had been a religious school he would not have taught there!! However, in general, in the opinion of the interviewees, religious schools are not the best solution for guaranteeing the freedom of religion, but this right could be guaranteed in other ways. They agree that the secularism should characterize state schools and the freedom of religion should be guaranteed in everyone's private life. Although one's own faith could and should be practised in the private sphere, it oversteps the mark when people ask for places of worship to be built and recognised. For example, in YG's opinion the freedom of religion could be put into practice in two ways: the possibility to build mosques where people can pray and the ability of the Muslim community to keep in touch with Italians:

YG: We need many things from the Italian state, but we also need many things from the Islamic community. The Islamic community should show...I do not know...citizenship, it should be integrated more and more, it should show that Muslims are citizens...and they try, but the Islamic community in Milan is poor, and the community has no funding. When they have some money, they will be able to interact with Italians, to be more open and helpful. Now they are a little more helpful, I saw, they speak with the mass media, they try to participate as citizens. But I see other difficulties...the media are quite opposed to Muslims, to the Muslim community. Some TV channels, some newspapers...(YG, Egyptian teacher).

After affirming the right to build places of worship, YG tries to balance this assertion with the concept that Muslims also have to commit themselves to participating in Italian society. Integration can happen if both parties collaborate.

MZ also thinks that to foster freedom of religion it is necessary to build places where Muslims can pray, but he also points out that the Imams' training and the control of the State are important:

MZ: In other countries mosques have been built. Mosques should be built, they are also works of art, there are modern and wonderful mosques in Great Britain, etc. and I cannot understand why we have horrible gyms as places of worship. I say: "let's build a nice place of worship. Let's make an agreement with the University of Cairo or those in Saudi Arabia, and they send us an imam, not just any old imam, but one who really knows how to preach. Of course, I insist that not controlling the religious aspects, not controlling the way they are managed is a risk...it is a risk because controlling preaching is not guaranteed, there is no control (MZ, representative of an Italian association).

In MZ's opinion, freedom of religion should be respected but only if strict control is guaranteed both by the institutions of the immigrants' countries of origin and by those of the host countries.

The most open-minded interviewee is RA, who proposes a radical change in Italian schools, pointing out that secularism should characterize the educational system:

RA: In my opinion religious schools cannot - and must not - be the solution, they are legitimate but the idea that Italian schools are divided based on religion seem mad to me. It is not part of our DNA. You should send Christians to Christian schools, Shiites to Shiite schools...Paradoxically, in Italy there are some politicians, and maybe also some bishops, who said that, because of the increasing number of Muslims, it will be necessary to teach Islam in state schools. In my opinion it would be a terrible defeat, because Catholic religion lessons are anything but catechism. So, why should we maintain a denominational approach opening to the followers of other religions who will do the lessons? On the contrary, we should change the

contents and do a lesson about the religion in general and we could also consider it compulsory, since it would no longer be denominational. It would be an advantage if the Christian religion were also compulsory, but from a cultural and historical point of view, not a denominational one. If you do not know the Holy Bible, you do not know anything about the arts, about music, about philosophy...15% of Muslim children in Milan schools do not ask to be exempted from Catholic religion lessons. Firstly, because they know very well that the child will never convert to Catholicism after attending these lessons; secondly, they think that because they live in a Catholic country, the child has to know something about the Catholic religion. And then the child does not feel different from the others, so he/she does not want to go out during religion lessons (RA, academic).

Without neglecting the importance of knowing the Christian religion, which is part of the Italian heritage and is useful for understanding the developments of other fields of knowledge, SM sustains that it is enough to teach it from an historical and cultural point of view. In this way it could be taught to all students as part of the national heritage. SM's ideas are very similar to those of many of the teachers interviewed: all the aspects of Italian culture and tradition should be shared by all students but based on their cultural significance. The strategy of not highlighting their religious significance is considered effective in respecting foreign students' diversities and at the same time including them in Italian civil life.

In any case, although state schools should maintain their universalistic and secular approach, freedom of religion is a fundamental right of the individual and for this reason it has to be respected:

RA: Freedom of religion is guaranteed by the Constitution, apart from the Agreements. You, as a human being, resident in Italian territory, you have the right to express your faith. But what happens? This wonderful principle is addressed in every local regulation so the local administrations – especially right wing administrations or North League ones – create obstacles: “have you opened this cultural association and then have you transformed it into a place of worship? Well, that means you've changed its allocated use, so I'm going to stop you, because you are trying to bypass the law”. And clearly people are worried after the terrorist attacks and do not have a good opinion about Islam, so there are these mad proposals of the North League: to organize a referendum in the areas where the mosques should be built. It goes against the Constitution, obviously, because my right to pray must not be influenced by the majority of the population of the area where I live. But surely, a mosque near my home is like a dumping ground near my home, it is like a Roma camp near my home, so everybody says “yes, but it has to be far from my home” (RA, academic).

In this abstract RA outlines the right to express one's own faith and the difficulties faced by the Muslims in doing so. Terrorism has influenced public opinion and the political arena, it has caused the hostility towards Muslims and the desire to limit their freedom of religion. Although it is a right of all human beings, the North League Party tries to block certain religious practices, in the name of Italians' rights, their well-being and security. It is interesting to note that the frame of the North League Party works well: the Italians feel threatened by immigrants and by their claims, so to limit their freedom of religion (by impeding the construction of mosques and of private schools) is a good strategy to control them, to guarantee and protect Italians' rights before satisfying minorities' demands.

3.3 Conclusion

The case of via Quaranta school is representative of how different social actors construct different frames to talk about religious and cultural diversities. The mass media and politicians described the school as a Madrasah, stressing the religious character of it, so that they referred to the dangers of

fundamentalism. There may be two reasons why they highlighted the religious character of the school and they are interrelated: firstly, concerns about Islam and Muslims; secondly, the usefulness of the religious topics to carry out a certain political campaign.

By contrast, the Islamic community tried to deny that frame and to outline a different character of the school, i.e. being an Arab school. It highlighted its instrumental nature, not its religious and identity significance: the aim of the school was to teach Egyptian students so that they could go back home knowing Arabic and having a valid qualification. Moreover, through this frame more information was given: foreign children would have come back to Egypt, immigrant families would have left Italy, and this frame reassured Italians.

A third frame, shared by some civil society actors and politicians was about the danger that the demand for recognition by the Islamic community would be damaging for children who attended the school. The lack of language skills in Italian and isolation, without any relationships with the Italian educational system was damaging for the children, who were not prepared for entering Italian secondary school if they did not go to Egypt. Since the civil society actors thought that the right to learn Arabic and to maintain the link with the culture of origin were legitimate, they supported the need to keep in touch with Italian society, albeit in a gradual way and while respecting Muslims' cultural needs.

Based on the ACCEPT framework, it can be said that this case study is representative of how the issue of cultural pluralism within the educational system has not yet been fully addressed. Although the management of cultural and religious diversity within state schools has already dealt with the subject and it continues to be at the core of public and political debate (as we saw in the first case study), the issue of private and faith schools has not yet become a main topic on the Italian political agenda. The case of via Quaranta school is representative of how Italian institutions are not prepared to manage the possible future claims of some minorities. The way public institutions faced the issue was characterized by liberal intolerance, which "reflects a principled concern with the neutrality or universalism of the public realm" (Dobbernack and Modood, 2011), and particularly in this case of the educational system. The demands of minorities, such as the demand to build a faith or private school and to have it recognised formally, highlight what is alien in the national culture. Besides, these claims are seen as a three-fold threat: firstly, by some they are seen as instruments to defend their own cultural identity and to reinforce self segregation, thus leading to the failure of integration; secondly, they are seen as a threat to public security; finally, they are seen as a threat to integration and the well-being of pupils, even by well-meaning people who usually defend the demands of minorities. All these fears lead to the adoption of an intolerant approach, which is also used by the government to gain political consensus: it can be an effective strategy to reassure the citizens that it is possible to keep minority groups and their claims under control.

While in the political arena the main attitude was one of intolerance, among civil society actors the attitudes were different. But generally, even among those who were more in favour of defending Muslims' claims, the common attitude was one of toleration: since there are some demands made by Muslims and it is not possible to ignore them, the best thing to do is to satisfy the minimum requests they make. In this case toleration "does not come because people 'resolve their differences'" (Creppel 2008, 322) but simply because they decide to suspend their power not to tolerate, and they assume a position of resignation along the continuum between resignation and enthusiasm (Walzer 1997) which characterized toleration.

Nevertheless, we think that neither intolerance nor minimal toleration can be useful in resolving the issues of private and religious schools. The Italian educational system is traditionally based on universalism and equality, and it consists mostly of state schools. Besides, the foreign population (and consequently the composition of foreign students)³⁸ in Italy is very heterogeneous so it would be difficult to satisfy the demands of all the minorities (both introducing measures to satisfy immigrants' demands in state schools and controlling all the private schools that might be set up). Therefore, in

³⁸ For an overview of the main immigrant national groups resident in Italy see "Tolerance and cultural diversities in Italy" (<http://www.eui.eu/Projects/ACCEPT/Research/ProjectReports/NationalDiscourses.aspx>, 2011).

order to guarantee cultural pluralism it is necessary to protect the right of minorities to build their schools; by contrast, minorities' schools have to adhere to national regulations and educational programmes. Otherwise, other solutions can be applied, such as that of making children go to state schools and at the same time allowing them to attend courses in their free time when they can learn their mother tongue, culture and religion. This practice is already applied by some Muslim families, as various teachers told us. These courses could become more structured and those who teach them could begin to interact and collaborate with state schools, in order to accommodate their work and to avoid overloading children with too much information and subjects to study. This could be a solution: to make children attend state schools but also to satisfy their parents' needs to teach them something related to their culture of origin.

However, regarding the management of cultural and religious pluralism in the educational system, Italy still has a long way to go and the goal of going "beyond toleration" is still a long way off. But the case of the via Quaranta school can be the starting point to reflect on the issue of private and faith schools. Spreading concern and encouraging intolerance - as the public and political discourses do - do not resolve the problem, whereas at the same time minimal toleration is not enough. The case of via Quaranta school has proved that the minorities' claim to build their own schools will increase in the near future and the public and political institutions will have to think more systematically about it.

4 The management of cultural and religious diversities in the Italian educational system

The two key events are useful in understanding how cultural and religious diversities of foreign students are managed within the Italian educational system. The frames built by the politicians, by the mass media and civil society actors are very different and they swing from one position to another, assuming different shades of meanings between intolerance and respect for diversities.

As regards the presence of foreign children in schools and the accommodation of their diversities in everyday school life and in the curricula, the findings highlight that teachers and head-teachers share the Italian educational system's approach, i.e. the intercultural approach, and they try to put it into practice. Based on this approach, diversities have to be appreciated and cultural exchange has to be favored. This aim is achieved quite easily in the curricula and in the celebrations of festivities: multicultural recognition seems to prevail during students' religious and cultural festivities, and their origins are covered in the curricula. In practice, the schools where the interviewees work organize special activities and celebrations for the end of Ramadan, for the Chinese New Year, etc. or, if this is not possible, students are asked to talk about their festivities and to share them with others. Nevertheless, the celebration of the various festivities is not enough, and it is necessary to go beyond a sort of a "multiculturalism of consumption" (Colombo, 2002) which sees differences as something curious, strange or attractive esthetically. Indeed, as one of the participants in the discussion group said (SC, responsible for interculturality, Fondazione Ismu), teachers must reflect on their idea of the concept of "interculturality" and on how they try to put their idea into practice. In fact, the risk of "multiculturalism of consumption" is to evaluate differences based on their appeal, without actually recognizing them.

However, the recognition and the celebration of foreign students' festivities is a good practice on the part of schools, even more so if we consider that all these initiatives are organized by the individual schools and teachers. In fact there are no clear practical instructions from the Ministry of Education on this issue. So, there are good practices from below, but there are no clear positions from above. Besides that, although different festivities are celebrated during the school year and within the regular school activities, the fact that immigrant children might wish to follow different customs and festivities does not seem to be thematized at all within the Italian educational system or by teachers. The existence of different festivities may not be easily compatible with the Italian school year

timetable/schedule, but the possibility of changing or adapting it to immigrants' needs remains remote in the Italian context.

As regards curricula, teachers talk about the countries of origin of the students, they use fairy tales known by all the children, they talk about different religions, etc. In this case there are some practical instructions in some of the documents on interculturality issued in recent years. First of all the document "The Italian strategy for the intercultural school and the integration of students of foreign origins" (2007), the first document which gave systematic and practical instructions to deal with the presence of foreign students in schools and described an Italian model for foreign children's integration. Nevertheless, the document only contains instructions and suggestions and its implementation is not required by law. Besides, its dissemination has not been through and it is not known to everybody. Teachers, therefore, have introduced concepts and knowledge which refer to different cultures, but at the institutional level in-depth discussion on how to broaden curricula has not yet been carried out. Specifically, the adoption new textbooks which represent everybody, the inclusion of foreign authors in the curricula and the study of subjects from different points of view have not yet been considered and discussed. On the contrary, a Western and ethnocentric point of view still prevails today in the curricula and in the teachers' approach to education.

Among those who know about the documents on interculturality and who are sensitive to the issue of foreign students, toleration is a shared frame of reference, although mostly on an ideological level.

Teachers share the concept of interculturality and in their vocabulary there are many terms linked to the idea of interculturality: they often use the words "cultural exchange, appreciation of the differences, respect, recognition, etc.", but if we look at their actions and behavior, it is clear that it is more difficult to put into practice all these excellent concepts. If minorities demand anything other than the celebration of festivities and changes to the curricula, the teachers' attitude swings from intercultural acceptance to toleration and more rarely to an attitude of closure or resistance. The former is put into practice when foreign students ask to practice their cultural or religious traditions: they could be absent at lunchtime during the Ramadan, they could wear a headscarf at school, and they could be absent during their festivities. Generally, there is intercultural acceptance when students' cultural and religious practices do not affect the organization and the pace of school life. Toleration prevails when some demands from families of foreign origin are tolerated³⁹, although these are considered wrong by teachers. The Muslim parents' attitude towards their girls is a case in point. The prohibition to go to the swimming pool with classmates or to go on a school trip is not acknowledged as a reasonable demand but it is tolerated. In these cases teachers try to persuade parents that their claims damage children well-being; if they cannot reach a compromise with them, they have to accept parents' claims. Minimal toleration and a sort of resignation are adopted "for the sake of peace" (Walzer 1997). To apply the intercultural approach is more difficult when teachers have to deal with some practices which come from cultural and/or religious prescriptions and rules, and which are in contrast with the principles of the Italian pedagogic culture (e.g. gender equality, the value of PE lessons or school trips).

Finally, an attitude of closure or resistance emerges when students' rights are not respected due to their parents' demands, wishes and attitude. For example, the severe educational style of some parents is tolerated (although criticized) as long as it does not damage children's rights and well-being. In some rare extreme cases excessively aggressive behavior is condemned and drastic measures are taken by teachers against the parents.

It is also interesting to note that teachers and head-teachers are inclined to mix the issue about the management of cultural diversities with the issue of academic achievement. This is partly due to the fact that up to a few years ago most foreign students in the educational system were children born abroad and who arrived in Italy during their infancy or adolescence. So, the schools paid particular attention to the language learning process of these students, overlooking the management of their diversities. Now schools have implemented some strategies and good practices to address the arrival

³⁹ Demands of minorities are made informally and locally, even by individuals and in single schools. There are no official demands by the minorities and there are no official instructions by the institutions on how to manage them.

of foreign students, who are no longer seen as an emergency to cope with. Nevertheless, the attitude of mixing the issue of academic achievement with the issue of cultural diversity still exists and the former are sometimes explained and justified based on the latter.

The attitudes of teachers are culturally constructed and they are used unintentionally by the social actors to understand the behavior or attitude of some migrants. For example teachers often say that immigrant children are more diligent than Italians because in their culture school is a very important institution and it has to be respected (teachers also have to be respected). Besides the fact that this consideration is contradicted by the data about the academic achievement of foreign students, national and international research outlines the fact that for immigrant families school is seen as a way of getting away from disadvantaged social positions and of social mobility. So, children's commitment to school is due to the representation of it as an instrument to improve the social position of their families, not to a culturally founded assumption that educational institutions have to be respected. Teachers sometimes say "They do things this way, they behave in this way because it is in their culture", and based on this consideration they explain or justify children's behavior, without considering that their explanations could be influenced by their culturally given thoughts and opinions. Some children's habits, i.e. to slouch while they are having lunch, to belch, not to respect women teachers (we are referring to Muslim boys), are explained culturally, and other types of explanations are overlooked (i.e. the need to attract attention for many reasons, the lack of rules for social behavior, etc.)⁴⁰.

Regarding the via Quaranta school, the approach to diversity is stricter. We believe that this fact depends partly on the actors involved: the Islamic community. While in the first case the managing of diversity regards all foreign students without distinction, here the social actors are Muslims. The term "Muslims" brings to many people's minds a religious community that is different from the Christian one, moreover a community which is linked to Islamic terrorism. So, there are many positions and disagreements, also among those who usually put themselves forward in defense of immigrants' rights or who are usually more open-minded. In the political arena intolerance often emerges, partly to obtain the electoral consensus: through this, the political forces answer the Italians' worries about immigration. Among civil society actors there are differences of opinion and there is no a general consensus about how to manage religious and cultural pluralism. Generally among these the attitude is of toleration: because it is not possible to ignore minorities' claims, the best solution is to accommodate them reducing to the minimum the negative effects, especially on foreign children. So, the solution to manage their claims can be to support their school organizing remedial lessons (i.e. to learn Italian, to do homework, etc.) or helping them in the process of formal recognition of the school. To summarize, the two cases belong to two different frames. In the first case a progressive approach is shared by the social actors who work in the schools: separation, exclusion and ghettos are rejected, and cultural or religious diversities can be treated with toleration or, in the better cases, with intercultural acceptance. Interculturality is in fact the normative principle which in teachers' opinions all educational practitioners should apply in order to achieve integration. Nevertheless, as we can note through the data, interculturalism is interpreted and applied differently by teachers, according to their personal evaluations, situations and the school contexts. In some circumstances they try to apply their interpretation of the intercultural approach, favoring cultural exchange and making the differences interesting. But, in other situations it is more difficult, and teachers apply a sort of minimal acceptance. This attitude allows teachers to preserve the balance in their relationships with foreign students and parents, but it does not favor a positive recognition of differences, including, most importantly, integration.

The progressive approach described above is shared (almost theoretically) by all teachers and head-teachers, but there is some disagreement at the political level. In the motion and in the following

⁴⁰ The culturally constructed explanations are used to justify children's behaviours positively and negatively. For example their good manners towards teachers are explained by some supposed cultural traits of immigrant children who, in teachers' opinion, are taught to respect adults more than Italian children.

debates, foreign students are considered as a problem. Their integration, therefore, is possible only if they can become similar to their Italian schoolmates, i.e. if they assimilate to the majority.

In the second case, the approaches are different, and also among the civil society actors who usually promote and defend immigrant's rights and demands, a progressive approach is not shared. Indeed some of them defend immigrants' rights and demands indistinctly, others are mainly worried about three aspects. Firstly, they stress the importance of the secularism of the Italian educational system; secondly, they are worried about the Muslim communities, which are perceived as very different culturally and religiously; finally, they think that the risk of supporting Muslim schools is that it can produce self segregation and exclusion. So, opinions also differ among the "pro-immigrants" social actors, whereas the political arena is characterized by an intense fight between the supporters of the school in the name of pluralism and the opponents, who defend the respect for the rules and who criticize the minorities' self-exclusion.

The management, therefore, of cultural and religious diversity is a new issue in the Italian context, and one which raises many questions and problems. We think that this depends partly on the history of Italy. Before the unitarian process was carried out, the Italian territory was divided into many small States, with their own history, language and culture. Political unity was achieved only 150 years ago, but at that time there was still no national consciousness. In this sense the words commonly attributed to Massimo d'Azeglio, a leader of the *Risorgimento*, is meaningful: "Once Italy is made, we have to make Italians". The process of creating a national consciousness among Italians was very long and it has not yet been completed today, insomuch as social and political movements which defend local and regional demands are successful among the population. For example, the North League Party, besides its fight against immigrants, was created to defend the interests of some areas of Northern Italy. Italy has completed its unitarian process only recently and it is a young nation, without a strong national consciousness. Also for this reason it has difficulty in managing and tolerating diversity, even more so when diversity involves many aspects (i.e. religious, cultural, ethnic, etc.). But, it is necessary to distinguish between the institutional level and everyday life. As regards the former, there is an oscillation between intolerance, toleration and some attitudes of intercultural acceptance. The increasing power of the North League Party⁴¹, whose campaigns are anti-immigrant, influences the entire political approach towards cultural and religious diversity: intolerance encourages actions and initiatives against immigrants, among which the most important is the "Security Package", a package of severe measures which affect immigrants in particular, especially illegal residents⁴². Other intolerant and discriminatory measures taken by the North League are those issued by some local administrations: they try to exclude immigrants from social and civil rights by enacting certain local policies (i.e. more restrictive rules for opening places of worship, limitation of housing policies for immigrants, etc.) in the name of giving priority to Italians' rights. But the North League also sends a specific cultural message, declaring itself the defender of the Catholic religion. Catholicism is the symbol of shared cultural traditions, which cannot be undermined by the demands of other religious minorities. Religious and cultural toleration, which, all things considered, was common in the Italian context, has now taken a few steps back, especially because of the North League approach, which is now shared by all the centre-right coalition (and has also influenced some centre-left administrations). Consequently, at the institutional level, one of the few more accepting approaches to diversity is that of the education system. Indeed, in the school context an approach that is characterized by

⁴¹ We should highlight that while we were writing this document, administrative elections were underway in some Italian provinces and municipalities. In those elections (May 2011) the power of the North League Party (and also of all the Centre right parties) decreased notably.

⁴² The Security Package introduced regulations that refer to a widespread idea of urban safety in which aspects of combating crime are extended to include protection of urban standards and the repression of behavior that can disturb or annoy citizens (i.e. restrictions that obstruct the freedom of worship for Muslims or sanction the use of veils that hide their faces). The main areas of intervention regarded prostitution, alcohol abuse, vandalism and begging. In this way the Security Package directly or indirectly targeted the poorest and the most disorderly components of the immigrant population. Recently the Constitutional Court repealed the law giving excessive power to the Municipality mayors.

intercultural acceptance is promoted and specified in some institutional documents. We are referring to the various documents about interculturality written since the 90s', where attention began to be paid to diversity in schools. In these documents, diversity is conceived richness, and has to be appreciated through mutual understanding and cultural exchange. The intercultural approach follows the traditional approach of the Italian school system, i.e. respecting differences and identities and the appreciation of human beings, based on a universalistic principle.

This is the frame which teachers and head-teachers refer to. They describe and represent a school life that is characterized by good practices and based on intercultural acceptance. Some difficulties in arranging relationships emerge, especially between teachers and foreign children's parents, because of the differences in perception of the school system and the role of the school, the relationships between teachers and parents and between teachers and children. But, in their opinion, it is possible to address these problems and to strike a balance with foreign families by developing the ability to approach others, understanding their reasons and needs, finally accepting them even if there is no appreciation.

Nevertheless, this shared positive representation contradicts other aspects, i.e. the lack of funding invested in projects aimed at foreign students or the data about the foreign students' drop-out rates. Indeed there is little investment, it has been reduced in the last few years and it is sometimes inadequate. The reduction of the number of language skills facilitators is a case in point (Caritas/Migrantes 2009). Secondly, the data about the academic achievement of foreign students are unsatisfactory: their drop-out rate is more than that of Italian students (Miur 2011, Casacchia et al. 2008) and as regards secondary schools, they are concentrated in technical and professional schools more than Italians.

The intercultural approach, that is emphasized and appreciated by teachers, seems not to be confirmed by the data about students' academic achievements. Surely, the academic achievement depends on many factors, and it is not correct to think that good academic achievement is the result of a positive acceptance of diversity. Nevertheless, they highlight the fact that some elements of the educational system do not work and have to be improved; they lead us to hypothesize that there are also culturally founded difficulties in dealing with all the students equally, apart from their diversities.

It is a common belief among educational staff and teachers that they have already implemented an intercultural approach and they can use it in everyday school life. Nevertheless, the data highlight that every school and every teacher forms its own conception of interculturality and applies it in his/her school context. Good practices are not shared among teachers and communicated to those who are not familiar with interculturality. They do not circulate within the educational system, so any approaches and solutions that are adopted successfully in some contexts are not applied in others.

As regards the via Quaranta school, the frame is not only of intercultural acceptance, but there seem to be three representations of the civil society actors. Firstly, some social actors represent the school in a linguistic way. This frame is shared especially by the Islamic community and by the interviewees of Egyptian origin involved in the event. Secondly, the representation shared by many politicians, institutions and mass media was about the school as a religious and fundamentalist context. Finally, the frame shared by some Italian and foreign civil society actors is of the school as a foreign school. Based on this representation they began the process of gaining formal recognition and they obtained it for the via Ventura school (by changing some aspects of the curricula and of the organization of the school). Despite this, the via Ventura school could be compared neither to a faith school (such as the Catholic ones) nor to a foreign school. In public opinion and in the political arena it is treated differently and it is not fully recognized (although it has obtained formal recognition), unlike other foreign schools (such as the American, English, Jewish schools, etc.).

Despite the fact that the Italian educational system has developed an idea of integration which can be achieved throughout interculturality, almost at a theoretically level, there are key messages arising from this study for educational staff (head-teachers, teachers, linguistic facilitators, etc.) and policy makers.

Firstly, there is no shared concept of interculturality among teachers. The vocabulary on interculturality has already been acquired, but every teacher and school has built up its own idea of

interculturality and applies it in the individual school context. Teachers are not supported in understanding whether or not they are applying interculturality appropriately, whether their practices are sufficient, whether their work is intercultural at all, in part or not at all. They are not trained to understand whether some behaviour of immigrant families depend on their cultural backgrounds or on other reasons (e.g. their economic condition, their levels of education, the lack of cultural instruments to understand the Italian society). It would be useful, therefore, to share good practices, e.g. by organizing meetings to compare different practices, providing teachers with permanent training on interculturality, making them abandon an ethnocentric approach. This is another important issue: to abandon the ethnocentric approach both in curricula and in practices. In the curricula this can be achieved by introducing foreign textbooks and authors, teaching students subjects including different points of view, transmitting the concept of a plural national identity. As regards practices, teachers have to reflect on their culturally constructed attitudes and actions, because these often lead them to explain migrants' behaviour misleadingly. They have to put aside stereotypes and to go beyond culturally based explanations.

The second key message is directed specifically at policy makers. School and the Italian educational system is a deeply politicized topic, which has been at the core of political debate for at least 15 years. But the conflicts are external to the school context rather than internal, they come from within the political arena instead of from social actors who work in the schools (who, as we saw, share a clear approach). There is, therefore, still a big gap between the ideological discourses held in the national debate and the local practices carried out in everyday life. Neither is there any discussion between the two levels on how to form guidelines and criteria to refer to, so schools and teachers often manage diversity based on their own models of integration. When there are some debates, they are especially about the rights of the majority instead of the demands of the minorities. The minorities have not yet made any cultural requests (such as the headscarf for their girls, single sex gym classes, etc.), whereas the majority group demands respect for Italian traditions and customs, such as the Christmas festivities or the presence of the crucifix in the classrooms. Policy makers, therefore, should be more in touch with educational practitioners and with the organizations which deal with the leisure time of young people (e.g. NGOs, voluntary organizations). They should go beyond the ideological discourses on education and develop concrete instructions for practising interculturality, through their collaboration with head-teachers, teachers, pedagogists, experts in the educational field and, last but not least, with educators who work in youth organizations. Together with these groups they can produce documents, favor their widespread circulation and make them operative. Finally, they should avoid indiscriminate funding cuts, which particularly affect support activities, they should organize intercultural activities for students and families, arrange language courses for students who do not know Italian very well and train teachers in broadening curricula and educational styles. They have to go beyond their political and ideological views of the educational system, because if they do not find a shared approach it will be difficult to improve it and to offer a better education for all students, both Italians and children of foreign origin.

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Annex I

List of interviews⁴³

- No 1, CC**, head teacher, Milan, 08/03/2011
- No 2, DA**, linguistic facilitator, Milan, 08/03/2011
- No 3, OM**, teacher and coordinator of linguistic facilitator, Milan, 15/03/2011
- No 4, IA**, head teacher, Milan, 15/03/2011
- No 5, CB**, head teacher, Milan, 30/03/2011
- No 6, RI**, linguistic facilitator, Milan, 4/04/2011
- No 7, RS**, linguistic facilitator, Milan, 4/04/2011
- No 8, CO** deputy head teacher and teacher, Milan, 6/04/2011
- No 9, SM**, linguistic facilitator and Religious Education teacher, Milan, 6/04/2011
- No 10, TE**, linguistic facilitator and responsible for foreign students, Milan, 7/04/2011
- No 11, FC**, teacher, Milan, 12/04/2011
- No 12, ZA**, teacher and responsible for foreign students, Milan, 14/04/2011
- No 13, DR**, deputy head-teacher and teacher, Milan, 14/04/2011
- No 14, NE**, deputy head teacher and responsible for foreign students, Milan, 18/04/2011
- No 15, AB**, teacher, Milan, 19/04/2011
- No 16, EM**, responsible for interculturality at the Provincial Educational Office, Milan, 6/05/2011
- No 17, MZ**, representative of an Italian association, Milan, 28/04/2011
- No 18, RA**, academic, Milan, 29/04/2011
- No 19, YG**, Egyptian teacher, Milan, 3/05/2011
- No 20, OM**, Egyptian responsible for the Via Ventura school, Milan, 10/05/2011
- No 21, US**, ex head teacher of via Ventura school, Milan, 11/05/2011

⁴³ Where the nationality it is not indicated, the interviewee is Italian.

List of participants to the discussion group – 15 June 2011

LT, trade unionist, Anolf Lombardia (CISL) – trade union

SF, school teacher and trade unionist, CISL – trade union

RP, trade unionist, CGIL Milano – trade union

AM, school teacher and responsible for foreign students, state school

DV, responsible for immigrant office, Caritas Ambrosiana – no profit organization

IN, civil servant, Associazione islamica di Milano – Islamic association of Milan

SC, responsible for interculturality, Fondazione ISMU – no profit organization

PB, academic, Università Cattolica of Milan - University

MC, academic, Università Cattolica of Milan - University

Annex II

Key study 1 on preparatory classes: interview guide

1. Characteristics of the school

- How many students attend the school?
- How many are foreigners?
- How many were born in Italy to foreign parents?
- What are the most represented nationalities?
- How many foreign students are there compared to the total number of students per class?
- Has the number of foreign students increased, decreased or remained constant over the years?
- Are there differences between sections, i.e. foreign students are more concentrated in some sections and not in others, or is there equal distribution among sections and classes?

2. Ways to handle the presence of foreign students

- Are there any problems / obstacles / difficulties related to the presence of foreign students? If so, what are they?
- How did you resolve them? What steps have you taken?
- Did the solutions take the form of specific practices and rules to handle the cultural and religious diversity in the classroom? If so, which ones?
- How were rules constructed / practices adopted? What processes did you use to define some practices / rules?
- Did all teachers positively welcome practices / rules adopted?
- And the parents?
- Are they an integral part of your plans and your teaching approach or are they used only on specific occasions, in some classes by some teachers?
- When we talk about these practices / rules, which come immediately to your mind?
- Taking the example of Christmas, how do you handle the issue of Christmas in the classroom and at school, in the presence of pupils from other faiths?
- Have they been successful? If so, in what terms? If not, why not?
- Would you like to adopt better solutions or do you feel that the methods that your school has adopted are effective?
 - If you believe that there were better solutions, why have you not adopted them? Why, in your opinion, were they better than those that you have implemented?
 - If the methods used are effective, what are, in your opinion, the reasons for their success?

3. Issue of preparatory classes and the regulation of the 30% limit

3.1 Preparatory classes

- How do you evaluate the bill made by Cota on the need to introduce admission tests for foreign students and preparatory classes for those who do not pass the test?
- Do you consider that proposal positive or not? Why?

- What were, in your opinion, the principles and values underlying that proposal?
- In your opinion, was it an applicable bill? Feasible? Why?
- And, in your opinion, what could be a better solution than that proposal? Why?
- Following the proposal, did you in any way change your approach to the management of foreign students? Did anything change?

3.2 Limit 30%

- What is your assessment of the Circular Letter 2010 on the limit of 30% in classes and even among schools?
- Do you consider this letter positive or not? Why?
- What are, in your opinion, the principles and values underlying this decision?
- What have been, in your opinion, the consequences of the letter, both in your school and at a more general level?
- Did the tension and controversy arising from this letter find a solution or not? Why?
- In some schools it was not possible to apply the limit of 30% and Minister Gelmini issued dispensations. In your school did you comply with the letter or did you ask for a dispensation? If so, why? If not, why?
- In general, how has the letter been acknowledged in your school? And by you in particular?
- Did anything change in your school after the Ministerial letter on the management of foreign students?
- Does your school agree with the decision taken by Gelmini or not? Why?
- Is the concentration of foreign students in some schools and classes, in your opinion, a real problem or not?
- If so, do you think there is a better solution to the decision of the limit at 30%? What? Why?
- In general, do you have ideas / suggestions / opinions on how to manage religious and cultural diversity of foreign students in the schools?

4 Intolerance, tolerance, acceptance, respect / recognition

- In your opinion, what does tolerating cultural diversity at school mean?
- In your opinion, what types of diversity are tolerated at school?
- And what types are not tolerated? Why?
- What do you mean by “tolerance”?
- In your opinion, what types of diversity are respected and recognized at school?
- What do you mean by “respect” and “recognition”?
- What values and rules, in your opinion, promote tolerance in schools?
- And which ones do not promote it?

Key study 2 on the Egyptian school: interview guide

1. The key event: the Egyptian school of via Quaranta

- What are, in your opinion, the salient events related to the founding-development-closure of the school in Via Quaranta?
- What are, in your opinion, the main events related to the founding-development-final solution proposed of the school in via Ventura?

2. Evaluation of the event

- What is your opinion about the events related to the Egyptian school?
- How do you evaluate the decisions that were taken by the institutions over time?
- And how do you evaluate the choices made by those in the Islamic community involved in the event?
- In your opinion, what are the principles and values underlying the decision of this part of the Islamic community to create a school in Milan?
- And, in your opinion, what are the principles and values underlying the decision of the institutions to close the school?
- Do you think that the issue has been resolved and that the tensions arising from it have finished or not? Why?
- What are, in your opinion, the results and consequences of the choices made?
- Do you think it was possible to adopt a better solution? What? Why?
- In your opinion how was the issue of the Islamic school received in general by public opinion and civil society?
- And by the Islamic community involved in the matter?
- The aim is to capture the interviewee's opinion on the ways the issue of the school was handled, both from institutions and other social actors involved.

3. General evaluations regarding the management of cultural and religious diversity in the Italian education system

- Do you think that in general in Italy the opportunity to exercise religious freedom is guaranteed? If so, how? If not, why?
- And in Italian schools, is the opportunity to exercise religious freedom guaranteed? If so, how? If not, why?
- Concretely what should we do to guarantee the religious freedom of individuals?
- And to guarantee that of children and their families at school?
- Consider the case of Christmas: In your opinion what should we do at school, how should we behave in the presence of non-Catholic students of religion?
- In relation to religious schools, do you think that they can be an effective way of guaranteeing religious freedom?
- Might there be alternatives to religious schools to guarantee and promote the practice of their religious diversity? What? Why?
- Does the establishment of a religious school, in your opinion, have other purposes and / or needs in addition to the purely religious ones? If so, what?
- What would you recommend to a family of foreign origin, to send their children to a public school or to a religious school?
- Do you think that all religious minorities have equal rights?
- In Milan, for example, there are Jewish schools, however, they haven't caused an uproar like the via Quaranta school. Why, in your opinion?
- In generally do you have ideas / suggestions / opinions on the educational management of religious and cultural diversity of foreign students in schools?
- The aim is to investigate what the interviewee thinks about religious schools, and investigate whether they are an effective way of guaranteeing the freedom to profess a belief. We also want to investigate whether, in the opinion of the interviewee, there are differences in the rights of various religious minorities to establish schools and if there are differences of treatment between them by the institutions.

4. Intolerance, tolerance, acceptance, respect / recognition

- In the international debate and in the European project ACCEPT, we adopt the term “tolerance” to indicate openness to religious and cultural minorities. What do you think?
- When we talk about tolerance, we can speak of tolerance towards minorities but also of internal tolerance among groups within the same minority, the community itself - in the case so far examined, of the Islamic one. How do you assess internal tolerance?
- In your opinion, what does tolerating cultural and religious diversity at school mean?
- In your opinion, what types of diversity are tolerated at school?
- And what are not tolerated? Why?
- What do you mean by “tolerance”?
- In your opinion, what types of diversity are respected and recognized at school?
- What do you mean by “respect” and “recognition”?
- Which values and rules, in your opinion, promote attitudes of openness in the school?
- And which do not promote them?
- In the case of the via Quaranta school how do you judge the attitude of the institutions? Tolerant or intolerant? Or would you call it otherwise? Why?
- And that of civil society? Why?

