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Researching Integration in Multiethnic Italian Schools. A Sociological Review on Educational Inequalities

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Researching Integration in Multiethnic Italian Schools. A Sociological Review on Educational Inequalities

*Mariagrazia Santagati**

Abstract: The article offers a review of the main sociological studies on school integration of students with an immigrant background, carried out in the past 15 years in Italy. Italian research on this topic is still not recognized at international level, but Italy can be considered an interesting case study due to the recent, rapid and exponential increase of immigrant students and the contradictions emerging from the attempt to turn an inclusive educational model into integration practices. The review identifies educational achievements and interethnic relationships as crucial components of school integration in multiethnic schools, highlighting strengths and weaknesses of the Italian sociological research. Finally, a model for the analysis of school integration of immigrant students will be proposed, which combines individual, relational, institutional, structural, and personal agency factors.

Keywords: immigration/immigrants, achievement, equity, sociology

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Introduction

The relationship between migration and education represents a key issue in order to understand contemporary changes in new generations, schools, and social contexts. Sociological studies consider education an opportunity to promote integration among children of immigrants, as schools are one of the most important institutions of a recipient society (Crul, Schneider, & Lelie, 2012; Heckmann & Schnapper, 2003; Kao, Vaquera, & Goyette, 2013). However, equal opportunities for students with an immigrant background are not to be taken for granted: Integration is still a fundamental challenge in democratic and heterogeneous societies, where educational systems face the classic dilemma of reconciling individual differences and equal rights in education and of finding a balance between pluralism and equality (Simmel, 1922).

In this perspective, ethnicity can be identified as the main source of social and educational inequality: It is, along with socioeconomic status and gender, the ascriptive feature that primarily affects educational pathways (Brint, 2006). Immigrant students, compared to natives, show persistent disadvantages in the learning process, higher risks of failure, and drop out (Banks & Park, 2010; Dronkers, 2010; Dustmann, Frattini, & Lanzara, 2011; Schnepf, 2004), as well as more relational problems with classmates and teachers (Agirdag, Van Houtte, & Van Avermaet, 2012; Caetano & Mendes, 2014; Thijs, Verkuyten, & Grundel, 2014). Despite these difficulties, some pupils are characterized by determination, perseverance and dedication, and obtain good academic results thanks to a remarkable ability to make the most of available educational opportunities (Brinbaum, 2005; Jonsson & Rudolphi, 2011; Kao & Tienda, 1995; Priyadharshini & Watson, 2012; Schnell, Keskiner, & Crul, 2013).

Drawing from these ambivalent elements, the aim of the present article is to analyze educational integration among the children of immigrants. Educational integration is to be considered, as Merton suggested (1968), not just a concept to be theoretically defined but rather a field to be empirically observed¹,

¹ For a theoretical discussion on educational integration, see other studies concerning the functionalistic origin of the concept and its subsequent interpretations (Janmaat, Duru-Bellat, Green, & Méhaut, 2013). Integration, in fact, is not a univocal concept, but a plural perspective

highlighting the mutual influence between the individual and the social system, improving models of analysis and research methodologies. This aim is pursued by conducting a review of the main sociological studies on multiethnic Italian schools, based on the comparison of different research themes and questions, theoretical references, methodological approaches, and main outcomes.

The attention placed on Italy is due to different reasons. First of all, Italian research on ethnic inequalities in education is still not very well known at international level. Whereas English-speaking countries are well recognized in terms of their research efforts on this issue (Duong, Badaly, Liu, Schwartz, & McCarty, 2015; Stevens, 2007; Stevens, Clycq, Timmerman, & Van Houtte, 2011; Syed, Azmitia, & Cooper, 2011), Italy and other countries are not, since most of the studies conducted are not reported in English and, in the opinion of some scholars, they do not reach a high academic profile or relevant scientific results (Stevens & Dworkin, 2014). Moreover, the Italian case has not been taken in consideration by some of the most important European and international research projects that have endeavored to offer a comparative analysis of second generation routes (Alba & Holdaway, 2013)².

The present paper seeks to improve the acknowledgment of Italian research in this area and facilitate its accessibility by the English-speaking academic community by offering a broad mapping of sociological studies conducted in Italy in the past 15 years. Secondly, systematic and comprehensive reviews of Italian research on this topic are lacking in Italy itself: We can find a few of them written just in Italian (Santagati, 2012).

Only recently has there been an effort to reach a larger audience outside national borders: The AIS (the Italian Association of Sociology) dedicated a section named “schools, migrants, and generations” in a recent issue of the *Italian Journal of Sociology of Education* (Giovannini & Queirolo Palmas, 2010). It is true that Italy, like other Southern European countries, has begun to receive consistent migratory flows only recently: Indeed, the first studies on

that interprets the relationship between host society and immigrants on the basis of different political visions and theoretical paradigms (i.e. integrative/assimilative, conflict/stratification, pluralist/multicultural, intercultural theories: Kourvetaris, 2009).

² E.g. the European projects EFFNATIS (1998-2000), TIES (2005-2008), EDUMIGROM (2008-2011), but also CIS, coordinated by the University of Albany - New York (2005-2009).

migration and education date back to the early nineties, so they are still defined as a “novelty” in social research. However, in the lapse of time considered by the review (1999-2014), Italian scholars have conducted a large amount of studies, albeit often confined to local areas and published only in Italian. Moreover, Italian researchers refer almost exclusively to the Anglo-saxon literature in their work, often ignoring Italian studies, and failing to acknowledge or consider previous research results, another reason why this article could be useful also for Italian scholars themselves.

Why Is the Italian Context Interesting for the Analysis of Ethnic Inequalities in Education?

Before reviewing the literature, it is useful to undertake an overview of the most interesting features of immigration within the Italian educational system. Italy can be considered a relevant case in the international scenario, as a country that has experienced a rapid and exponential increase of immigrant students in the last two decades. This is consequence of a recent migratory phenomenon, which led Italy, in the space of only a few years, to reach immigration levels similar to those of countries with a much older history of immigration, yet without any consolidated experience in the management of multiethnicities in education (Cesareo, 2014). At the same time, Italy remains among those European states where the percentage of immigrant students is still moderately low (less than 10%), not comparable to those nations with higher percentage levels and a significant proportion of second and third generations and naturalizations (Santagati, 2013).

Nonetheless, Italy is currently an interesting case study, since it is an important destination for international migrations and incoming migratory flows have begun to take on a structural character, despite the political and media emphasis on the emergency of migrant boat landings on its Southern coasts (Ambrosini, 2014). An indicator that migration is becoming rooted in Italy is the growing number of immigrant families with children attending school, which includes both minors born abroad and reunited with their parents and, increasingly, children of immigrants born in Italy. The Ministry of

Education estimated there to be 802,785 students with non-Italian citizenship in 2013/14 (51.7% of them native born) or 9% of total students. We are talking about a highly heterogeneous group made up of over 196 nationalities and a mixture of linguistic and cultural differences (Chini, 2013). These students are concentrated mainly in the large metropolitan areas of the North and the Centre (Milan, Rome, Turin, etc.), but are also present in some smaller and medium-sized cities, as a consequence of migration networks, local socio-economic structure and specific features of the job market – all factors that affect families' settlement choices.

Furthermore, Italy is also an interesting field in which to observe the contradictory dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that have been generated at the national and/or local level (Ambrosini, 2013; Milione, 2011). On the one hand, Italy has chosen an inclusive model of educational integration: Full inclusion in schools has been guaranteed by law for almost forty years, with newcomer pupils being admitted in ordinary education in the same classes as their native peers, even when lacking immigration papers (Bauman & Mazzeo, 2012). Moreover, since 1990, integration was also pursued with an “intercultural approach”, which places the emphasis on the acknowledgment of and openness to diversities, as applied both to curricula and to classroom relationships. For Italy the intercultural option has been the starting point in the management of multicultural classes since the Nineties, but only recently has this perspective taken hold in other European countries, where there has been a convergence of institutional discourses towards interculturalism, as a result of EU policies fostering the promotion of intercultural dialogue (Liddicoat & Diaz, 2008).

On the other hand, the Italian model – defined at the legal and educational levels – faces a lot of difficulties in the attempt to transform pedagogical principles into day-to-day school practices. Italian educational institutions didn't proceed in a coordinated and organic way in the implementation of integration; these differences depends on various factors such as the attitudes of teachers and school leaders, local policies, funding availability, schools' attitude towards immigrants, etc. The intercultural perspective, in many everyday situations, seems to be put in jeopardy by schools that receive immigrant students; these schools are armed with teachers' good will, but without the

necessary professional, human and financial resources to really put it in practice. Indeed, in some cases, what prevails are approximation and improvisation – as the direct effect of the emergency of managing newcomers – as do the lack of awareness of the goals and of the routes to promote an intercultural approach (Caneva, 2012; M. Colombo, 2013).

Finally, we mustn't forget that Italy is one of the most restrictive countries in terms of citizenship concession, which is based prevalently on *jus sanguinis* (Niessen & Huddleston, 2011; Zincone, 1993). Students with a non-Italian citizenship – as they are defined by the official statistics – include almost the entire group of young immigrants, be they born in Italy or abroad, admitted in the school system, but largely still without the juridical status of citizens. Over and beyond this complex juridical issue, the presence of these students also raises several questions regarding equal opportunities. Looking at the statistics, some key features emerge:

- Immigrant students are the group with the worst school performance and there is a relevant gap between first generation immigrants and Italian 15-year-old students, especially if we compare reading skills (OECD, 2012a);

- Immigrant students show high level of retention rates and school delay, which means being enrolled in classes lower than those corresponding to age (Di Bartolomeo, 2011);

- They are concentrated in technical and vocational education, which means a preference for shorter educational careers, aimed at a quicker entrance in the job market (Barban & White, 2011);

- These students have a higher risk of dropout, which can be considered an inevitable effect of migration, together with the difficulties deriving from the transition to a different educational system and belonging to social groups that often lack the necessary resources and skills to achieve positive school outcomes (Santagati, 2014).

Italy remains one of the OECD countries with the highest ethnic inequalities in terms of school performance, which derive not only from socio-economic disadvantage, but also from the status held and the treatment received by children of immigrants in the local school system (OECD, 2014). It is true that some bright spots can be found in the educational experiences of the second generation of native-born students, who often achieve the same educational

levels of their Italian counterparts and, if compared with the first generation, improve their skill set and school performances.

Sociological research on multiethnic schools in Italy. An Overview

The present review focuses on educational inequalities and vulnerabilities of immigrant students, through an analysis of the sociological research carried out in Italy between 1999 and 2014 in primary and secondary schools, and in VET (Vocational Education and Training) centers. The review concerns, primarily, compulsory education that in Italy involves children between the ages of six and sixteen, including the whole first cycle (ISCED 1-2) and the first two years of the second cycle (ISCED 3). Primary school takes 5 years (for children 6-10 years old), while secondary school is divided in lower secondary school (3 years, 11-13 years old pupils) and upper secondary school (5 years, 14-19 years old students). In upper secondary school students can choose between: general/academic (lyceums), technical or vocational secondary education. They can also attend, in alternative, three/four years vocational training courses. These studies are selected on the basis of different criteria. First, I decided to include only studies that are based on Italy as the main research context. Second, the literature review was restricted to sociological contributions³. Third, only studies that have an explicit and primary focus on ethnicity and education are considered: Those studies that deal tangentially with this issue or where it is not the relevant focus of the paper were excluded. Finally, the review focuses on studies concerning primary and secondary school students, leaving out sociological research on families, teachers, preschool students, higher education, etc.

³ Because of the wide amount of literature that focuses on children of immigrants and educational inequality, the studies discussed in the article use a sociological approach: for the contribution of other disciplines to the debate on school integration (pedagogy, social psychology, history, etc.), see other reviews (i.e. M. Colombo, 2010).

The process of sampling research contributions involved different steps. First, bibliographical databases on Education and Social Sciences⁴ were searched using specific queries and keywords as “foreign students, children of immigrants, second generation, multicultural schools, etc.” and identifying texts that were analyzed by title and abstract. Second, the review carried out a screening of the grey literature (i.e. reports, PhD thesis, etc.) through websites, search engines and online catalogues (i.e. Opac Sbn, Google Scholar, etc.). Third, catalogues of Italian special libraries focused on migration were consulted for a full-text screening⁵. Finally, the analysis of contributions that resulted from these search activities identified additional bibliographical references in this area of interest, which were in turn included in the review. As a result of this search process, were selected forty studies, which are listed in chronological order in Table 1, by author and year of publication. The table offers a brief synopsis of each study highlighting the key aspects for ease of comparison. Specifically, these include: educational level, funding body, methodology adopted, size of the sample.

From the overall analysis, some common elements across the 40 sociological studies considered emerge. In chronological terms, we can identify three phases, differentiated by number of studies conducted and main themes. The first period (1999-2007) can be defined as the phase of the sociological discovery that Italian schools had become multicultural, as a consequence of immigration: The first few pioneering studies (9 in total) are prevalently explorative, use primarily qualitative methods and introduce many of the themes that will be developed in later research. The majority of these studies focus on compulsory education and place emphasis on immigrant pupils and their specific characteristics, that is to say on difficulties, risks and outcomes of school integration.

The second phase (2008-2012) is characterized by a relevant increase in the number of studies on school and immigration (24): It can be considered the

⁴ The review is based on the electronic resources available on the online library of the Catholic University (i.e. IBSS, ERIC, ProQuest, Scopus, etc.).

⁵ I consulted the library catalogue of Ismu Foundation (Foundation for Initiatives and Studies on Multiethnicity, Milan), of CSER (Emigration Study Center, Rome), of CIRMIB (Centre of Initiatives and Research on Migration, Catholic University, Brescia).

mature age of sociological research, with a significant research tradition on lower and upper secondary schools, carried out by the most important universities of Northern Italy (Turin, Milan, Genoa, Bologna, etc.). The inequalities and disadvantages that immigrant students face clearly emerge from these studies in terms of access to secondary education, school choice, educational progression, relational problems. Finally, in the most recent period (2013-2014) we have a phase of consolidation but also innovation in sociological research (7 studies), with the introduction of more sophisticated methodologies – trying to identify, for example, integration indexes – and the investigation of new issues such as racism, discrimination and prejudice, transition to higher education, etc. The results of the Italian research examined in the review are published prevalently in edited books (25 studies), followed by book chapters (7), research reports (5), journal articles (3). Among these, 7 out of 40 are doctoral theses. A large amount of these studies are sponsored by public bodies (32): the Ministry of Education, Universities, Regions, City Councils, using local, national or European funds (cf. Table 1). Many have considered the integration of immigrant students a public issue and have sponsored the research with the aim of developing knowledge and improving interventions. A minority of studies (8), on the other hand, are funded by private institutions, particularly foundations, research centers/institutes, and nonprofit organizations.

In terms of the school levels investigated, most of the research focuses prevalently on the second educational cycle (21), a lot of these studies were conducted on upper secondary schools (15), but sometimes also include students in initial VET (3). Rarely (other 3 cases), studies focus only on the latter, perhaps because it is typically considered a lower quality offer for disadvantaged students (Field, Kuczera, & Pont, 2007) and a ‘container’ for drop-outs, deviants and problematic youth, closer to the job market than to mainstream schooling. Significant attention is paid also to lower secondary schools (9 studies), where students are confronted with the question of future school choice, as well as with the issue of interethnic coexistence, before the differentiation of upper secondary education.

Sociological interest for the multicultural transformation of primary schools, on the other hand, is relatively less intense (3 studies). Perhaps this is due also

to the fact that a sociology of childhood is still in its early days in Italy (Colombo, 2012). Finally, 7 studies included data collected from different educational levels. In terms of territories covered, the majority of the studies is conducted within specific regional areas: Lombardy (the region that hosts the most of Italy's immigrants) has the lion's share of research in this sector (10 studies), followed by other areas of Northern Italy (7 in Piedmont, 3 in Liguria, 2 in Veneto, 2 in Trentino, 1 in Emilia Romagna), and only by a small number of studies conducted in the Centre (6) and in the South (2), where the presence of non-Italian students in the educational system is notably less. Moreover, 7 studies have an interregional character; the largest and most representative national study is *Itagen2*, conducted across 10 regions (Casacchia, Natale, Paterno, & Terzera, 2008).

From a methodological point of view, the research is divided in qualitative (14), quantitative (22) and multimethod studies (4). Qualitative studies are prevalently based on semi-structured or discursive interviews (ranging in number from 20 to 250) of immigrant students: Interestingly, the interviews never include a mixed sample of both Italian and non-Italian students. Other studies have also used – albeit to a lesser degree – life stories, focus groups, participant and non-participant observations. In primary school there are some case studies, based on an ethnographic approach where interviews and focus groups with both Italian and immigrant pupils are combined with observation both inside and outside the classroom, as well as with a collection of written, audio and audiovisual documentation.

Sociological research that includes quantitative methods (student questionnaires) has been conducted prevalently in secondary schools (i.e., 10 studies in upper and 8 in lower secondary schools). These studies are based primarily on a mixed sample of Italian and non-Italian pupils (that range from 334 to 20,704 participants and are characterized by a percentage of foreign-born pupils ranging between 10 and 50 percent), with only 4 cases where a sample made up only of immigrant students is utilized. In large part, the studies are based on non probabilistic samples, although sampling method is often not stated in detail.

Table 1. Sociological Research on Integration in Multiethnic Italian Schools.1999-2014

N.	Author(s)	Educational level	Publication type	Funding body	Methodology	Sample size
1	Besozzi (1999)	LS	B	Private	QT	991 IT - 164 SIB
2	Giovannini & Queirolo Palmas (2002)	LS	B	Public	QT	475 IT - 479 SIB
3	Cologna & Breveglieri (2003)	LS-US	B	Public	QL – QT	72 SIB (QL) - 334 SIB (QT)
4	Ceccatelli Gurrieri & Meister (2004)	US	B	Public	QL	20 SIB
5	Favaro & Napoli (2004)	US	B	Public	QL	20 SIB
6	Pinelli et al. (2004)	P	R	Public	QL – QT	3 months PO (QL) - 481 IT - 481 SIB (QT)
7	Queirolo Palmas & Torre (2005)	US	B	Public	QL	45 SIB
8	Barbagli (2006)	LS	R	Public	QT	1,086 IT - 2,693 SIB
9	Maggioni & Vincenti (2007)	P	B	Public	QL	47 IT - 45 SIB
10	Casacchia et al. (2008)	LS	B	Public	QT	10,150 IT - 10, 554 SIB
11	Gilardoni (2008)	LS	B	Private	QT	13,301 IT - 3,924 SIB
12	Mantovani (2008)	US	B	Private	QT	2,377 IT - 643 SIB
13	Martini & Mantovani (2008)	US-VET	A	Public	QT	1,000 IT - 300 SIB
14	Recchi et al. (2008)	LS	R	Private	QT	305 IT - 132 SIB
15	Besozzi & Colombo (2009)	VET	B	Public	QL	30 SI
16	Besozzi et al. (2009)	US-VET	B	Public	QT	1,047 SIB
17	Eve & Ricucci (2009)	US-VET	R	Private	QT	1,668 IT - 424 SIB
18	Luciano et al. (2009)	LS-US	C	Private	QT	1,848 IT - 495 SIB
19	Ravecca (2009)	US	B/T	Public	QT	272 IT - 272 SIB
20	E. Colombo (2010)	US	B	Public	QL	250 SIB
21	Ricucci (2010)	US	B	Private	QL	60 SIB
22	Sospiro (2010)	US	B	Public	QT	874 SIB
23	Barberis & Nanaj (2011)	LS	A	Public	QT	1,259 IT - 129 SIB
24	Caneva (2011)	US	B/T	Public	QL	105 SIB
25	Lagomarsino & Ravecca (2011)	US	E	Public	QL	31 SIB
26	Pattaro (2011)	P-LS	B/T	Public	QT	826 SIB
27	Santagati (2011)	VET	B	Public	QL	64 SIB
28	Perone (2010)	US	C	Public	QL	37 SIB
29	Azzolini (2012, 2014)	P	E/T	Public	QT	Invalsi database
30	Contini (2012)	LS	B/T	Public	QT	1,314 IT - 317 SIB
31	Delli Zotti & Urpis (2012)	P- LS-US	B	Public	QL - QT	FG (QL) - 567 IT - 147 SIB (QT)
32	Onorati (2012)	P- LS-US	B	Public	QT	802 IT - 214 SIB
33	Paghera (2012)	VET	C/T	Public	QL	40 SIB
34	Azzolini et al. (2013)	US	C	Private	QT	6,236 IT - 850 SIB
35	Bergamaschi (2013)	US	B/T	Public	QT	470 FR - 449 IT
36	Santero (2013)	US	C	Public	QT	5,927 IT - 522 SIB
37	Serpieri & Grimaldi (2013)	P-LS	B	Public	QL	1 month PO
38	Colombo & Santagati (2014)	LS-US-VET	B	Public	QT	627 IT - 399 SIB
39	Eve (2014)	US	R	Public	QL - QT	170 SIB (QL) - Invalsi database (QT)
40	Romito (2014)	LS	A/T	Public	QL	30 SIB

Note. Educational level: LS = lower secondary schools; US = upper secondary schools; P = primary schools; VET = vocational education and training. Publication Type: B = book; R = research report; A = journal article; C = book chapter; T = PhD thesis. Method: QT = quantitative; QL = qualitative. Sample size: IT = Italian students; SIB = students with an immigrant background; PO = participant observation; FR = French students; FG = focus group; QL = qualitative; QT = quantitative

In terms of content, the studies deal with two crucial components of school integration: On the one hand, academic achievements and learning difficulties among students with an immigrant background and, on the other hand, the relational dimension and school climate, both aspects that define the quality of students' experience in the classroom. Let us now consider the main themes and issues broached in the Italian literature, analyzing in depth the cognitive and relational dimensions of school integration.

Results

The First Dimension of Integration: Educational Achievement

In Italian studies educational achievement is considered the most important indicator of the level of integration of immigrant students at school, even though, alone, it is not able to explain the complexity of school adaptation. In other countries with a more consolidated tradition of immigration, both in North America and in Europe, children of immigrants' school results are a reliable indicator of successful integration both inside and outside school boundaries. Those studies which offer a compared evaluation of results stress the persistent disadvantage of young immigrants in hosting educational systems (Heath & Brinbaum, 2007; Holdaway, Crul, & Roberts, 2009; OECD, 2010), which has statistically been associated with two main factors: low linguistic skills and modest parental socio-cultural background (as measured by the mother's level of education: OECD, 2012b). This would explain why, in the passage from the first to the second generation, learning performances improve: Linguistic barriers are overcome, some families begin to speak the language of the host country, parents tend to improve their social position gradually increasing their income, occupational level and, in some cases, cultural capital. Numerous Italian studies have developed specific approaches and concepts for the study of learning processes, trying to identify the causes that generate inequalities in the condition of children of immigrants compared to nationals, introducing indicators and indexes of success, in an effort to understand, measure, and compare school results in the two populations. These are studies conducted primarily in lower and upper secondary schools, whereas research undertaken in primary schools has not typically

explored learning difficulties, but has concentrated mainly on the types of interpersonal relations that develop in multicultural classes.

Three studies focusing on primary education, however, have sought to explore cognitive experiences. The first is an exploratory questionnaire-based study conducted on pupils with an immigrant background enrolled in primary schools in Rome (Pinelli, Ranuzzi, Coppola, & Decarli, 2004). These pupils consider “achieving good grades” a valid strategy for successful integration in their classroom. Two other case studies based on qualitative data, conducted in two primary schools in Central Italy (Maggioni & Vincenti, 2007), present a large group of children of immigrants with a positive school condition, where the best achievers are assimilated to natives, critical situations are few and derive from a deprived socio-economic condition rather than immigrant background as such.

The scarce availability of data on school achievements referred to each pupil has, to date, limited the study of performances of immigrant children at the national level. Only recently has a more systematic study on educational success in Italian primary schools been conducted, which falls into the so-called “political arithmetic” tradition, which offers the opportunity to analyze the relationship between family background and educational outcomes (from the English tradition, see: Stevens, 2007; from the Netherlands: Stevens, Clycq, Timmerman, & Van Houtte, 2011; from Belgium: Van Praag, Stevens, & Van Houtte, 2014).

Azzolini, in particular, has begun analyzing the achievement gap in Italian and mathematics among native and migrant pupils in primary schools, on the basis of micro-data gathered by Invalsi [Italian institute for the evaluation of the educational system], that comes from a national survey of academic achievements in Italian and Mathematics conducted across all educational levels.⁶ In his doctoral thesis (2012) and in subsequent articles (2014), Azzolini demonstrates that the children of immigrants achieve significantly lower results compared to their native classmates, both in Italian and in mathematics, also when controlling for a set of family and school characteristics. The family dimension, however, remains crucial for an understanding of the phenomenon: Parental education and occupation explain up to a third of the learning differentials

⁶ The Invalsi data have shown a certain coherence with the results of the IEA-PIRLS study on primary schools, but also with the research which has sought to measure learning among students at later school levels (IEA-TIMSS, OECD-PISA).

between Italians and non-Italians in primary school. This is a relevant contribution, albeit slightly inferior to what has emerged in other migratory contexts (Heath, Rethon, & Kilpi, 2008; Schnepf, 2004). Moreover, considering also direct indicators of family resources in terms of support for children's schooling (language spoken at home, the number of books at home, ICT tools, help with homework, etc.), the explanatory power of family background rises to 70%. What has already become evident in other countries (OECD, 2006) is proving true for Italy: Second generation children tend to achieve better results than their first generation peers. Whereas the second generation's advantage is clear cut with regards linguistic skills and achievements, it is much less marked for results in mathematics. Even when they are born in Italy, children of immigrants are not able to equal the achievement levels of their Italian peers.

Unlike the literature on primary education, the sociological research on lower secondary schools is characterized by an ample and consolidated tradition of enquiry on school results. The study *A School in Common* (Giovannini & Queirolo Palmas, 2002) can be considered the first study conducted in Italy on this topic, and is still one of the best pieces of research in the field, in terms of both the theoretical and empirical analysis of immigrants' educational success. The study, carried out by various universities and funded by the Ministry of Education, was conducted in 1998 in nine cities of the North, Centre and South of Italy. Using a questionnaire administered to a sample of 945 students attending the last grade of lower secondary schools (479 foreign-born and 475 native pupils), the study offers an analysis of educational success that includes structural, relational and attitude-based variables (Besozzi, 2002). This approach overcomes an overly deterministic vision of educational attainment that considers some elements – such as status – in terms of direct causality (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970; Shavit & Blossfeld, 1993). The most significant result can be considered the emergence of a set of similarities between young Italian and non-Italian students: Their school results – measured with an “index of educational attainment” based on an objective indicator, the number of school years repeated, and a subjective measure, students' perception of school success – are influenced by the same variables. The study suggests that the relative “weight” of ethnic origin ought to be reconsidered, given the influence which derives from a positive school climate, from significant relationships with teachers and classmates,

from remarkable family and school support, from high expectations and faith in the future.

Subsequent studies have added further details, exploring the influence of students' migratory history on school success. In the wake of Rumbaut's (1997) numerical classification of generations, there has been a tendency to suggest that being born in Italy or arriving at a young age create more chances of a regular educational path, reduced school delay, better school results, a greater chance of choosing lyceums and continuing on to higher education. These aspects, which emerged clearly in a quantitative study conducted on 3,779 students in Emilia Romagna (Barbagli, 2006), have been reported also by the aforementioned study *Itagen2* (Casacchia, Natale, Paterno & Terzera, 2008; Minello, 2014; etc.), which aimed at highlighting similarities and differences among Italian and non-Italian students in ten Italian regions. This study can be considered the first one carried out at the national level with a broad and representative sample: It included 20,000 lower secondary school pupils, equally divided between Italians and non-Italians, via a questionnaire based on the model used by Portes in his study on the second generation in the USA (*CILS - Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study*; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, 2005), which testifies to the influence of this research project on Italian studies.

The length of stay in the recipient society, from the *Itagen2* study onwards, has represented the key variable in explaining the differentials in educational attainment between non-Italians and nationals. A follow up of the same study in Lombardy introduces other factors to explain school failure (Gilardoni, 2008): gender (male), intense mobility at the national or international level, recent arrival from abroad, South American origin, all represent further biographical elements of educational disadvantage. Moreover, this latter element represents the main similarity between California/Florida (*CILS*) and Lombardy (*Itagen2*): Both studies point to the under-achievement of Latinos, which is linked to the risk of "downward assimilation" (Gilardoni, 2011; Portes, Fernández-Kelly, & Haller, 2009). This vulnerable condition is to be connected directly to the relevant influence of the family of origin, especially when it is not able to integrate school notions with help with homework and with cultural stimuli which are in line with what is requested at school. Therefore, it is not surprising that immigrant students are those with the lowest social capital, which would be useful to achieve better school results.

If, on the one hand, *Itagen2* identifies in Latinos a disadvantaged group in the Italian school system, on the other hand, a quali-quantitative research carried out in three cities (Bologna, Ancona, Catania) within the EC-funded *Goete* research project (Barberis & Nanaj, 2011), underlines that students from East-Central Europe experience an ambivalent condition. Although they are at an advantage in terms of learning Italian more easily and their first impact with schools seems non-problematic (this is especially true for Albanians and Romanians) with good school results, they are not immune from relational experiences of stigmatization and isolation.

Unlike other countries where sociology had a consolidated research tradition on the role of guidance practices in the reproduction of social and ethnic inequalities (Becker, 1952; Boone & Van Houtte, 2013; Gillborn, 1997; Lareau, 2003), in Italy only recently has Romito (2014) – in an ethnographic study conducted in two lower secondary schools in Milan – begun considering the influence of teachers' guidance counseling on non-Italian students. Teachers typically advise these students to make lower educational choices, directing them towards less ambitious training options, considering immigrant students inadequate for the more prestigious lyceums. This group of students is often represented by the teaching staff as unable to make it in schools that require high language skills, also because they often lack the support of families believed to be particularly deprived – a widespread stereotype among teachers that isn't always an accurate reflection of reality.

In upper secondary education, numerous studies explore the issue of educational attainment, which is connected also to problems of access to and choice of secondary school. Firstly, some qualitative studies report the difficulty of subjects who have recently arrived from their country of origin for entry in secondary education. Often the educational institution doesn't recognize their previous school experience and, consequently, constructs a delay through the habit of enrolling the student in grades lower than those correspondent to age. This creates, for instance, among young Latinos interviewed in Genoa, a symbolic degradation of the student position (Queirolo Palmas & Torre, 2005). Arriving as adolescents in the Italian educational system – on the basis of the results of a qualitative study focused on young reunited immigrants in Milan (Caneva, 2011) – thus creates negative effects on academic careers, on self-esteem, on the evaluation of their abilities and translated into fragmented educational paths at risk of drop-out and failure.

Secondly, sociological research on secondary education explores the phenomenon of the segregation of immigrant students in vocational training routes. Italy is among those countries who have a particularly differentiated educational system, a characteristic which in the international literature is associated with higher levels of inequality of educational opportunities in relation to social class and race/ethnicity (Van de Werfhorst & Mijs, 2010; Weekes-Bernand, 2007). According to the OECD-PISA data, Fornari and Giancola (2011) have suggested that, in Italy, the effect of an educational tendency which tend to group students of similar status within the different educational routes appears stronger, generating an over-representation of the upper classes in lyceums and their under-representation within vocational schools, with the consequent effect of an horizontal inequality among the different educational routes.

A study focusing on immigrant adolescents in the professional and technical institutes of Bologna (Mantovani, 2008), confirms the influence of the migratory experience on school choice and on the risk of school delay and failure, over and above family status. A qualitative study conducted in Piedmont (Eve & Ricucci, 2009) also highlights the greater chances, among newcomers, of enrolment in vocational training courses, even if among them there are students with a higher cultural capital and more likely to perform at the top of their class compared to their Italian peers enrolled in similar courses. The majority of immigrant students enrolled in vocational training courses, however, represents a “new weak group”, because their educational experience is characterized by learning problems which are partly similar to those of their Italian peers of the same social status, also with scarce family resources in terms of economic, cultural, and social capital (cf. the 64 interviews with immigrant students in the VET system of Turin: Santagati, 2011). This condition is made worse by the direct experience of migration, which leads to biographical discontinuity and instability, to the acquisition of an almost “permanent” status of foreigner, and creates non-standard educational trajectories generated by the transition from the school system of the country of origin to that of the host country, with all the problems and challenges that come with migration (Cf. also the qualitative study on VET in Veneto: Paghera, 2012).

From the point of view of specific studies on success in upper secondary schools, in one of the first qualitative studies conducted in Florence (Ceccatelli Gurrieri & Meister, 2004) we can find the distinctive element of

immigrants' contradictory experiences, already well documented in the international literature (Brinbaum, Mogu rou, & Primon, 2010; Jonsson & Rudolphi, 2011). Despite learning difficulties, these students and their families consider secondary education not only a necessary and inevitable option but show a greater investment in education. In Ravecca's (2009) study on Italian and Latino adolescents in Genoan schools, often Latino students attribute more importance to and continue to invest more in education compared to natives, independently of immediate outcomes, which are not always positive. Academic success appears correlated to different factors: For Italians the significant element is the family's social and economic capital, whereas for non-Italians it is age at emigration and the quality of relations within the family unit. The migratory experience seems to interfere with one's socio-economic condition, rendering it inadequate to explain, alone, school results. For both groups, however, success is correlated with school climate, defined as the quality of relations with teachers and peers, and with gender (Ravecca, 2010). Moreover, many of these young people show remarkable abilities in the strategic use of difference, managing to capitalize on the linguistic, cultural and disciplinary skills obtained in their home country (as emerged also in other studies, e.g. in Naples, Perone, 2010; in Milan, E. Colombo, 2010)

Other parallel and subsequent quantitative studies have further explored the issue of educational achievement, identifying profiles of students using different multivariate analysis techniques: One such profile is that of the *low profile* young foreigners – predominantly male, disadvantaged, with scarce resources and expectations – characterized by educational failures, at high risk of downward integration (cf. the Piedmontese case: Luciano, Demartini, & Ricucci, 2009) and biographical discontinuity (Ricucci, 2008, 2010). In contrast with this profile, that brings to mind the idea of immigrant offspring as “the generation of sacrifice” (Sayad, 2006), research has also identified success-oriented types, characterized by a remarkable ability to adapt pragmatically to Italian schools in exchange for good future job prospects (*realistic achiever type*), but also characterized by an ideal and positive vision of the future, exemplified especially by brilliant and ambitious female students that aspire to improve their condition (*explorative achiever type*), who invest in training towards professionalization and personal fulfillment (cf. the Lombardy case: Besozzi, Colombo, & Santagati, 2009; M. Colombo & Santagati, 2010; cf. the Marche case: Sospiro, 2010).

Among these aforementioned studies, the one undertaken in Lombardy and based only on immigrant students (Besozzi, Colombo & Santagati, 2009), draws from the multidimensional explicative model of school achievement, and adopts a broad conception of educational success, which brings together the objective element of school results with the subjective element of self-evaluation of the educational experiences, considering the full development of the individual's potential in relation to the needs of the educational institution and of the job market. With the aim of identifying the predictive factors of high perceived achievement, a regression analysis presented in this study highlights the prevalence of attitude-based variables (lack of problems at school, satisfaction for the subjects studied, positive relationships with teachers, desire to continue education), of educational-biographical aspects (mastery of Italian, knowledge of other languages, arrival in Italy during adolescence) and of gender. The results of the study suggest that early entry in Italian schools not always implies less difficulties and the moment of arrival in Italy is only one of the many factors involved in determining or hindering educational success.

A recent contribution is represented by Azzolini's approach (2012), which offers a systematic analysis of the educational gap between immigrants and natives in secondary schools, using national and international statistical data. For non-Italians, the high risk of drop-out and educational segregation in professional schools is confirmed, despite an improvement in the second generation, where the distance with natives is significantly reduced. Azzolini focuses on some structural characteristics in order to achieve a precise quantification of the influence of social class on school choice and on the risk of drop-out in upper secondary schools. Here, social class explains approximately half of the educational gap between immigrants and natives and 70% of the distance between the second generation and natives (Azzolini & Barone, 2013). Differences with natives, therefore, are no longer as significant if one is born in Italy and belongs to the same social class. Therefore, achievement is considered less the result of positive school adaptation processes and more the byproduct of parents' successful socio-economic integration. Indeed, the influence of socio-economic background in determining levels of schooling in Italy is among the highest of all European countries (Azzolini, Cvajner, & Santero, 2013).

In conclusion, the last studies we will refer to offer an appraisal of immigrants' school experience in upper secondary schools. In a survey of

the post-diploma perspectives in Piedmont, Santero (2013) identifies a group of immigrant students that reached the final year of secondary school and “survived” school selection. Unexpectedly, they manifest an interest in higher education similar to natives: Indeed, they know more languages and are more open than their Italian peers to move abroad for work purposes. Non-Italian students appear better equipped to enter an increasingly international and qualified job market and react to their parents’ low occupational integration (as highlighted also in Sweden: Urban, 2012).

The vast quanti-qualitative study *Secondgen*, conducted by a network of Piedmontese universities and research centres, which compares Southern Italian immigrants in the 60s with the children of contemporary foreigners (Eve, 2014), also emphasizes the attitude of immigrant families that tend to encourage children to undertake ambitious educational projects and continue studying. Highlighting some structural conditions connected to mass migrations, the *Secondgen* researchers identify poor quality schools that do not promote a high level of learning as the most potentially damaging factor to immigrant children’s future. The study is also preoccupied with offering elements for policy-making: The priority is to foster general actions to counter the educational inequalities that affect students who are at a disadvantage, be it as a result of a deprived and/or an immigrant background (Perino & Allasino, 2014).

The Second Dimension of Integration: Interethnic Relationships and School Climate

Schools represent a key element for the analysis of integration processes not only in terms of academic achievements, but also from the relational point of view: For immigrant students, classroom relations are crucial for the dynamics of exclusion and inclusion in school, in local community, in informal networks, and they impact on the shape and organization of social networks following migration (Eve, 2010). In Italy, the research interest concerning this topic is less consolidated compared to work on educational achievement: This focus has developed mainly as a consequence of the recent increase of immigrant students within specific territories, schools and classes, a sort of segregation that, according to the international literature, is considered a risk factor for the educational and social inclusion of both native and immigrant pupils (Cebolla Boado & Garrido Medina, 2011; Coleman et al., 1966; Van Zanten, 2011). Young people spend a lot of time together at school where, more than elsewhere, they have the

chance to meet peers with different ethnic backgrounds, even though this does not necessarily imply interethnic friendships. The ethnic composition of classrooms and of the whole institute determines the opportunities for students to develop intergroup relations; moreover, the chance to mix with members of other groups varies on the basis of group size (Blau, 1994). Scholars from different disciplines have focused on the consequences of such increased ethnic diversity: Several authors support the premises of “contact theory” and its variants (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998), suggesting that contact between people from different ethnic backgrounds can erode out-group prejudice, at least when the necessary conditions – such as similar status, and collaboration toward attainment of a common goal – are fulfilled (Moody, 2001). But forcing people from different backgrounds to share the same space does not, in itself, make educational contexts inclusive (Slavin, 1995): Studies have shown that two classmates from different ethnic groups have less of a chance of becoming friends than two classmates from the same group (Vermeij, Van Duijn, & Baerveldt, 2009).

In Italy, interethnic relationships in primary schools have been analyzed by some explorative research: A set of qualitative studies carried out in Central Italy (Rome: Pinelli, Ranuzzi, Coppola, & Decarli, 2004; Pesaro, Urbino, Bologna: Maggioni & Vincenti, 2007) observed the presence of prejudice and other forms of discrimination and marginalization, that affect children of immigrants, often perceived as invisible or treated with indifference. At this educational level, the risk of racism is also present, particularly in disadvantaged contexts such as those of the old city and outskirts of Naples. In these areas teachers tend not to recognize racist episodes, which nonetheless reveal themselves in an unequal distribution of power among different ethnic groups (Serpieri & Grimaldi, 2013). This interpretation can be linked to the “conflict perspective” (Blalock, 1967; Blumer, 1958), which states that increased ethnic diversity exacerbates in-group/out-group distinction and fosters conflict, especially when resources are limited.

The effects of discrimination and interethnic violence emerge also in a study conducted in schools of Northern Italy (Delli Zotti & Urpis, 2012), within an EC-funded project involving five different countries (Austria, Cyprus, Italy, Slovenia, United Kingdom). The results show that, despite the fact that peer violence is a fairly common problem, pupils generally see schools as safe places since the violence mostly takes place outside school

grounds. Comparing the perceptions of teachers with those of students, what transpired was the underestimation, on the adults' part, of the ethnic-racial motivations for bullying and other acts of prevarication, as well as the role of gender and social class as catalysts for episodes of school violence.

With reference to lower secondary schools, one of the first studies conducted in Milan highlights the importance of the experience of diversity and similarity in developing identity in multiethnic classes, where Italian and non-Italian students experience a marked social distance, despite the proximity they live in the classroom (Besozzi, 1999). The study by Giovannini and Queirolo Palmas (2002) – already mentioned with reference to the analysis of the learning process – also focuses on school climate – using the number of interethnic friendships and conflicts that take place in a given school context as the measure of choice (Van Houtte, 2005) –, arguing that the quality of relations between classmates and with teachers affects personal wellbeing, motivation to study and educational success. Indeed, the international literature has long since emphasized the strong relationship between a positive relational climate and school achievement, and between a large social capital and the increase in human capital (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). The national survey coordinated by Giovannini and Queirolo Palmas further confirms that, in the Italian context, the level of relational wellbeing at school follows a similar distribution pattern for both Italians and immigrant students, confirming that good relationships at school, whether they emerge spontaneously or whether are the result of educational interventions, are able to neutralize the learning gap that comes from different backgrounds. School climate, according to Flemish sociologists of education who have been examined this topic in depth (Agirdag, Demanet, Van Houtte, & Van Avermaet, 2011), is the variable that has the biggest impact on the overall wellbeing of native and non-native pupils, generating self-esteem, a lower risk of victimization, greater belonging and attachment to the group, etc., compared to structural variables such as ethnic composition or heterogeneity within a given school (Agirdag, Van Houtte, & Van Avermaet, 2011).

Some more recent studies aim at further understanding the characteristics of immigrant students' relational system. The aforementioned *Itagen2* study stresses that the breadth and heterogeneity of the relational network depends on students' age at arrival and number of

years of residence in Italy (Casacchia, Natale, Paterno, & Terzera, 2008), which supports Portes and Rumbaut's thesis (2001). Isolation is more evident for students that have been in Italy less than 5 years, whereas, as their stay lengthens, there is a correspondent increase in friendships with natives. This feature also recalls, in some ways, the "constrict theory", proposed by Putnam (2007), which states that ethnic diversity in a certain context does not result in more relations between individuals from different ethnic groups, but on the contrary, in fewer relations in general.

Other Italian studies, contemporary to the *Itagen2* survey, continue to emphasize the deficit of sociality that characterizes the immigrant condition. A network analysis conducted by Recchi, Baldoni, and Mencarini (2008) in some lower secondary schools in Tuscany, confirms that immigrants are significantly less popular compared to their Italian classmates – pupil popularity is calculated on the basis of the number of friends in the class and being chosen as best friend. There appears also to be a tendency towards a "partialized" relational integration of immigrant students: that is to say that the interethnic exchange that takes place within school boundaries is not extended outside. However, although schools offer immigrant students peer relationships which rarely extends outside this environment, they still remain the crucial context within which young people can access wider relational circuits that can generate exchanges, trust and participation (Maccarini, 2010). In fact, Pattaro's survey involving immigrant pupils and parents in Veneto (2011), identifies in compulsory schools an important place for the increase of social capital across different generations.

In continuity with previous considerations, qualitative studies conducted in upper secondary schools, for example those carried out in Lombardy and based on adolescents' life histories, also stress that newcomers tend to have a lower social capital and to be more isolated in the school environment (Favaro & Napoli, 2004). Many of these young peoples' experiences have much in common with those of the children of Italian internal migrants, as highlighted by the survey coordinated by Eve and Ricucci (2009), based on 2,000 Italian and non-Italian students. This study reveals that migratory processes, be they national or international, have long term consequences: They create a restricted sociality which derives from territorial mobility, and cause disadvantages that are hard to compensate and overcome. From the recent evolution of this line of research comparing internal and international migrations (Eve, 2014), what emerges is that relational

integration among immigrant students today is more difficult, because young migrants, unlike their Southern Italian counterparts arriving in the North in the 1960s, do not find roads and courtyards filled with children to socialize with and extracurricular life seems to take place mostly at home. Martini and Mantovani's study (2008) on upper secondary school students in Trento, Northern Italy, moreover, highlights, the influence of gender, even more than citizenship, on adolescents' ability to build relationships in the classroom micro cosmos. In the reconstruction of the friendship structure using a network analysis, low family status also appears relevant in influencing the size of the school network among immigrant students.

The link between climate and educational success appears evident in Ravecca's (2009) study of upper secondary schools, where the index of educational success correlates with the classroom climate, both for Italians and for non-Italians. However, only for the former does climate correlate with aspects that influence educational careers: The existence of positive environmental conditions has a fundamental role – especially for natives – whereas immigrants have educational destinies which are negatively conditioned, especially by their status as migrants and the life conditions this implies.

Subsequent studies, nevertheless, report a positive evaluation of immigrant students on the relational dimension – emerging from interviews –, emphasizing, on the one hand, a good degree of satisfaction with their educational experience, especially in contexts that stimulate the development of collaboration and cooperation (such as in VET courses in Lombardy: Besozzi & Colombo, 2009). On the other hand, these studies pinpoint some pockets of disadvantage and critical areas. In general, students with an immigrant background place greater importance on the cognitive dimension of educational institutions, whereas they are less concerned with schools as an arena for socialization; for this reason they often tend not to declare relational difficulties within the classroom (Besozzi, Colombo & Santagati, 2009). Among immigrant adolescents, in fact, some have difficulties explicitly mentioning racist episodes, considering this a necessary price to pay in the first phase of adaptation.

Other studies underline also that ethnic and cultural memberships tend to be reproduced within friendship networks, among both natives and non natives: This happens, for example, among the adolescents of North and Central Italy, involved in a questionnaire-based survey (Onorati, 2012). Choosing friends among compatriots, however, is not always synonymous

with an absence of integration, but can depend on the different structure of opportunities available to young people (classroom composition, area of residence, distance between home and school, etc.). This analysis is confirmed also by a longitudinal research carried out in Trentino among a mixed sample of 7,086 students (Azzolini, Cvajner & Santero, 2013), which reveals that Italians tend to prefer each other more than non-Italians, as a result both of limitations and of preferences, as well as a stronger effect of gender preferences over ethnic preferences. Some studies further highlight a form of open hostility among young Italians towards foreigners, connected to a degree of uncertainty and worries for their own future. Compared with young people from other European countries (e.g., France, cf. Bergamaschi, 2013), Italian adolescents feel immigration to be more of a threat, in terms of competition in the job market, in welfare costs, and in terms of security issues.

In conclusion of this review, we can mention a study that has attempted to offer a summary of the dimensions of school integration – achievement and school climate – analyzing classes with a high percentage of immigrant pupils (Besozzi & Colombo, 2012; Besozzi, Colombo, & Santagati, 2013; M. Colombo & Santagati, 2014). The study, based on a survey conducted on a sample of 1,040 Italian and non-Italian students from lower secondary schools in Lombardy, developed an index of school integration that brings together the main components of integration in multiethnic classrooms: peer relationships in the classroom, the relationship between students and teachers, peer conflict (participation in fights, racist episodes, prevarications), academic achievement (average grades), level of “academic” Italian. The index presents a positive association with the following variables: gender (females are more integrated than males); citizenship (Italian students are the most integrated, followed by second generation and first generation students); high socio-economic status and cultural capital; high parental satisfaction with their children’s school experience; an intrinsic and expressive motivation to learn; wellbeing at school; the adoption, on teachers’ part, of measures to foster the integration of immigrant students. What is particularly relevant is that the level of integration, from the point of view of positive academic results and good interethnic relations, does not seem to diminish with an increase of immigrant students in the classroom, but presents a positive association with other variables.

As other foreign scholars state (Demanet, Agirdag, & Van Houtte, 2012), when conflicts and relational problems arise as a result of a greater ethnic diversity in the classroom, this appears to be due especially to the school's socio-economic composition, given that it appears to be economic disadvantage that characterizes the users of these institutions rather than different ethnicities, which explains the scarce inclination towards interpersonal contact. The latter study (M. Colombo & Santagati, 2014) summarizes, in itself, some of the limitations of Italian research in this area (undertaken in local contexts and not always comparable), but also some positive results achieved in research on immigration in Italy. It can be classed as a study on integration indexes, which considers integration as a dynamic, multidimensional and bidirectional phenomenon, based on the degree of social relations and exchange between immigrants and natives.

Discussion

Strengths and Limitations

At the end of this review, it's possible to highlight some strengths and weaknesses of the Italian research tradition, and some key areas which may pave the way for future research perspectives.

We have already mentioned that the Italian literature on immigration and education is prevalently represented by studies funded by public and private institutions focused on policy-oriented research investigating the impact of migrations on the educational system. The origins of funding are at the basis of the weaknesses of many studies, that remain relegated to the local dimension. In order to get a picture of the entire national context – highly differentiated in terms of migratory flows – it would be useful to conduct more nationwide representative studies, which would enable us to include the Italian case in the European and international arena. A further weakness concerns methodology. Indeed, studies do not always provide an in-depth presentation of the methodological approach adopted (i.e., objectives, hypotheses, data-gathering methods, etc.). Often, in quantitative studies the sampling method is not stated, although probabilistic or list-based sampling is rare, and more commonly samples are not probabilistic. The need to render methodological procedures increasingly more transparent becomes paramount in order to ensure greater comparability between studies and a real accumulation of scientific knowledge. Finally, in

terms of subjects and areas investigated, we find that: qualitative studies rarely compare Italian and non-Italian students' point of view; studies on primary schools are limited; there are few analyses that explore schooling among specific national groups. Developing research in these directions would enable us to explore uncharted areas and further expand on the issues and themes to pursue in the future.

Turning to the analysis of the two themes explored in the previous sections, with regards to educational success, the majority of Italian studies highlight that the worst performances among immigrant students are due primarily to immigrant background versus socio-economic status. This is because Italian research, in the 1999-2014 period, considers a majority of students who have direct experience of migration and who need time to learn the host language and integrate in the new school system. The existence of a large group of first generation students explains why many scholars focus on the importance of age of arrival in Italy, drawing upon the distinctions used in the US case, as a key variable to explain differences in academic results. In line with these interpretations, Italy shows an improvement among second generations which is common to many, but not all, OECD countries – considering that there are countries that have seen no educational progress between first and second generation students or have, indeed, witnessed worsening conditions (OECD, 2012b).

Improved academic results among second generations suggest the existence of a problem relative to the treatment of new arrivals in Italian schools, which has negative effects on the academic careers of these students, marked by failures and delays, low profile choices geared towards VET and low expectations. These tendencies are not only conditioned by individual or familial factors, but rather the school effect becomes relevant in the construction of underachievement and educational lag among children of immigrants. The way the school system is organized, but also the quality of schools, teaching and evaluation methods become fundamental elements to ensure equal opportunities.

If the influence of migratory background is relevant for the first generations, family status becomes increasingly important among second generations – a finding which is consistent with the Central and North European literature, which assigns a primary role to families' socio-economic background in explaining the gap in education between natives and non-natives, despite differences relative to country of origin/settlement (Brind, Harper, & Moore, 2008). The measure of status in Italian studies,

however, is problematic not only because it is often based on students' – who are not always fully aware of their parents' profession – self-reports, but also because it is based on the contradictory condition of immigrants in Italy, often employed in scarcely qualified professions even when they hold moderate-to-high qualifications. Immigrant students appear over-represented in lower status positions compared to natives, but often students of vocational institutes have parents with higher educational levels than their Italian counterpart. In fact, those educational channels traditionally preferred by more disadvantaged subjects (VET) tend to enroll young immigrants who perform better and display more determination than their peers, thanks also to the support of families with higher cultural capital. For this reason, many studies in Italy have chosen to separate the measure of socio-economic condition from the level of family education, an essential differentiation to further understand the Italian case. Moreover, research has highlighted that family background plays a crucial role during the integration process, not only in an ascriptive sense (status), but by shaping significant daily experience and the quality of living relationships influenced by descending/ascending mobility tracks due to migration; providing the set of resources (economic, social, linguistic, of support to education) which can shape part of the new generation's destiny; providing the set of values oriented to sacrifice and redemption which are a great motivational support for young immigrants (Brinbaum, 2005; Sikkink & Emerson, 2008).

Continuing with the issue of measurement of complex concepts, a further problem is connected with the index of achievement, measured in Italian studies with both objective indicators (average grades across different subjects, exam results, delays, repeat-years, etc.) and subjective indicators (self-perceived achievement, degree of satisfaction, effort level, etc.), which contributes to make research results scarcely comparable. The recent use of longitudinal and comparative studies on achievement (Invalsi, TIMSS, PIRLS, PISA, etc.) finally offers the opportunity to evaluate the impact of individual and contextual variables on academic outcome among Italian and non-Italian students.

In terms of the analysis of the relational experience in the classroom, the studies conducted in Italy pose mainly methodological questions. The relational system is more difficult to observe, describe and measure compared to academic achievement/outcome, albeit crucial given that in its horizontal (peer relations) and vertical (student-teacher relations)

dimensions it defines the climate and the overall wellbeing of students at school. Studies use indexes of wellbeing/distress and other indicators of classroom climate (e.g., evaluation of relationships with peers and teachers, degree of satisfaction, importance of classmates and out-of-school interactions, school problems, friendship structure in the classroom, student popularity, etc.), variably constructed, in order to investigate different aspects and measure the quality of school relationships in a differentiated fashion.

In terms of results, the research supports the idea that a positive classroom climate is at the basis of greater group integration and cohesion. It is easy to appreciate that the challenge for the children of immigrants is not only academic achievement but also the development of good relations with peers and teachers, albeit confirming the correlation between a positive classroom climate and better achievement. On this issue, we are still far from a consolidated research tradition, even though the conclusions reached in Italy are the same as elsewhere (Burgess, Wilson, & Lupton, 2005; Goldsmith, 2004): Immigrant pupils suffer from limited social relations, especially if male, if they belong to lower status families, if they have recently arrived in the host country and if they have an insufficient knowledge of the native language. Despite this, in the classroom immigrants show a greater inclination towards interethnic contact compared to natives. This attitude, however, does not seem to correspond to real integration, defined as significant interactions for the individuals involved and not merely an opportunity for contact and coexistence (Hewstone & Voci, 2009). Moreover, this interethnic socialization often remains confined within the school boundaries and doesn't generate an improvement of interethnic relations outside the educational context. Ethnicity, however, is not the only criteria that explains how (power) dynamics between equals operate and it is necessary to go beyond the main effects of difference, combining them with other factors that intervene at the relational level (Thijs, Verkuyten, & Grundel, 2014).

No doubt, in this area, it is useful to undertake more studies on the impact of ethnic school composition on school relations, a widely researched issue in Northern Europe (Van Houtte & Stevens, 2009; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). Similarly, there is space for more studies on discrimination, racism, and interethnic violence; all areas where Italian research is still in its early days. These phenomena are often minimized and underestimated by teachers, and ascribed to variables such as gender or

social class but rarely explained in ethnic terms. The oscillation between openness and closure towards foreigners, which has characterized Italian local policies (Ambrosini, 2013), is also an issue which should be pursued and explored in educational research.

A Model for the Analysis of School Integration of Students with an Immigrant Background

In conclusion and drawing from the dimensions of integration that has emerged from the review, I would like to propose a model for the analysis of the integration of students with an immigrant background in the educational system. This model – based on the approach of Cesari Lusso (2001) – accounts for three distinct levels (Table 2).

The *personal/subjective level* expresses the point of view of the immigrant student with her characteristics (age, gender, citizenship, etc.) and the role she takes on in the integration process, which is strictly connected with the way in which she perceives and evaluates her life experience (be it migratory, familial, or educational), giving it meaning and value, and including the development of specific affiliations and a sense of belonging to the class/school.

Table 2. Model for the Analysis of School Integration of Students with an Immigrant Background

<i>Dimensions of integration</i>		
<i>Individual variables</i>	<i>Relational variables</i>	<i>Institutional variables</i>
Migratory experience	Peer relations	Ethnic school composition
Family experience	Relations with teachers	Educational achievement
School experience	Relations with other significant adults	Interventions for immigrant students
Identity and belongings	School-family relations	Interventions for all the students

The *relational level* concerns the quality of relationships within educational institutions; in short, it refers to one’s overall relational wellbeing and the classroom climate. Within this dimension, integration is influenced by the quality and frequency of relations with classmates, the level of communication, and attitudes and behaviors that emerge in interaction. The relationship with teachers, moreover, includes the degree of support offered to students, the expectations they have towards students, educational style (cooperative, competitive, etc.), and attitudes towards differences. We cannot underestimate the role of other adults that operate in educational contexts (headmasters,

educators, tutors, mediators, etc.) and that interact with immigrant students and can contribute to the creation of the relational wellbeing.

Finally, the *institutional level* refers to the educational offer, in more or less explicit and conscious terms (the so-called “school effect”), and the practices of the educational institution, be they specifically developed for students with an immigrant background or not. The role of the educational institution in the integration process is influenced by its specific characteristics (level, user type, locations, ethnic composition), but becomes relevant with reference to the activation of measures to foster equal opportunities for immigrant pupils (or lack thereof), which translate into regular/irregular school careers, as well as in native and non-native students’ different academic achievements. The indicators of the integration process at this level are related both to the activation of specific interventions for children of immigrants (e.g., welcome measures, courses of Italian as a second language, disciplinary support, intercultural teacher training, use of mediators and other experts, etc.), and to the development of actions for all pupils (e.g., curricula revision, individualized educational plans, flexible programs, afterschool and tutoring opportunities, promotion of extracurricular activities, improvement of the school climate, etc.).

These multiple levels of analysis lead to an interpretation of children of immigrants’ educational careers, combining subjective, relational, institutional, structural and personal agency factors. This perspective enables us to consider the differences that come together daily in the school sphere (citizenship, status, gender, etc.) not merely in terms of the reproduction of predestined outcomes but rather in a dynamic fashion, where students (in relation with each other, with parents and teachers) with different expectations and representations, are part of a complex set of process that may no doubt reproduce inequalities (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970), but are also largely able to contrast its effects. Albeit conditioned by their specific status as immigrants or children of immigrants, this group also enjoys and makes use of life chances (Dahrendorf, 1979), which are shaped as a result of the blend of different individual and social dimensions that define the process of integration, connected to the subjects’ opportunity to seize and utilize rights, goods and options offered by the host society, on the basis of ties and connections that enable meaning-making and steer choices. Young immigrants, according to this perspective, cannot be considered merely as “sacrificial victims” or passive subjects in the migratory movement, whose fate, in terms of integration perspectives, is troublesome, permanently

suspended and never completely fulfilled (Sayad, 2004). Rather, they are first and foremost persons that manifest a will and ability for choice, albeit constrained by limits and challenges, characterized by a certain degree of freedom from family and social expectations and preordained destinies, and with a desire for an autonomous development of their own projects and life aims, independently from both family and their host society. This model can represent a contribution to the European literature on this topic, which has recently turned to the “super-diversity” perspective. Super-diversity offers a new lens with which to tackle the integration debate by defining the conditions required for a scenario of hope for today’s large multiethnic cities (Crul, Schneider, & Lelie, 2013). The international comparison shows how an optimistic view of the future is dawning in those countries where the second generation is receiving educational opportunities and equal treatment, developments are underway that will lead to a powerful and visible emancipation movement among a successful second generation. At a time where Italy is involved in the construction of a ‘good school’ – the title the Renzi government has given to a document with proposals for the reform of Italian school, currently being discussed – the perspective is that of finding, among the second generations, young people with successful academic careers who can represent the most progressive forces within their own communities and a resource for the future development of our societies.

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