



TEACHERS ATTITUDES TOWARDS STUDENTS OF SECOND GENERATION: KINDS OF CONTACT AND PSYCHOSOCIAL ASPECTS

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ABSTRACT

The significant presence of second-generation 'immigrants' is an expression of stable migration dynamics and implicates issues related to integration processes. School plays a crucial role both as a 'place' of education and of Social Identity (Tajfel, 1981) definition and re-definition and as a 'laboratory' for transformational projects (Lewin, 1935). Inasmuch as the climate underlying human relationships is also a function of foreign students and immigration teachers social representations, it seems interesting to understand this specific issue better.

This research was conducted to explore the attitudes of a group of teachers towards the migration process and second generation pupils. Specifically, it intends to test the hypothesis that simple contact is not sufficient to produce positive intergroup attitudes (Allport, 1954). The techniques used are those of classical psychosocial research. In general, the data reveal a positive representational framework regarding immigrants and warm welcoming attitudes towards second-generation students. In particular, 'direct' contact does not appear sufficient to produce positive attitudes toward them, the 'indirect contact' (Wright et al, 1997, Cameron et al, 2006), empathy and the social representation of the second generation students seem generate more positive effects.

Keywords: Immigration, Social Representations, Integration, School, Intergroup Relationships.

1. INTRODUCTION

The presence of foreign students, now a structural element of the Italian school system, records an incidence of 7.5% of the total school population (Caritas, 2010:5). Actually, the appellation 'foreign' is sometimes incorrect if you consider that nearly 4 out of 10 were born in Italy and, therefore, it would be more correct to speak of second-generation students. This definition includes migrant



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children who were born in Italy or in their country of origin, some of whom began their education here, while others did not; minors who came to Italy without parents or relatives – refugees and adopted children; or children of a mixed marriage.

The significant and growing presence of second generation carries with it a rethinking of integration policies and, in particular, of the function of school as a potential 'place' for a contact which enables diversity recognition and respect (Allport, 1954). Thus, a key role is played by teachers whose training, initial and ongoing, should be instrumental in building an open way of thinking and a 'flexible' identity (Licciardello, 1997). Of course, this implies the willingness to questioning themselves and the capacity to properly decline the "knowledge" with the 'knowing how to be' as method for 'knowing how to do' (Licciardello, 2001:136) and for build positive relationships, at inter-personal and intergroups levels.

Moreover, teachers are, at the same time, figures that have an institutional mandate, but also individuals who refer to migration as citizens. Their plural social position is the background to the complex definition of their role that may be subject to inconsistencies between opinions, attitudes and actions.

The first difficulties, in fact, arise in reading individuals needs, because the tools that a teacher habitually uses must be deeply questioned in relation to the fact that they are out of date compared to people who use other codes to think, to communicate and to act. This involves the questioning of educational practices, of attitudes and of social representations (Moscovici, 1984) that are the basis of everyday actions and that, sometimes, are responsible for both the crystallization of certain roles and the creation of stereotypes and prejudices.

Furthermore, at school opportunities of co-existence with cultural 'diversity' can represent a simple contact insufficient to improve intergroup relationships and that, indeed, may exacerbate them if conditions for a 'successful' contact (Allport, 1954): equal status, institutional support, cooperation, and opportunities for long lasting and intimate knowledge are not arranged.

Considering the relationship between contact and reduction of prejudicial thinking, empathy seems to play an important mediating role (Voices & Hewstone, 2007), especially in school settings both for the relative ease with which it could be activated, and because it avoids the emergence of emotions, such as anxiety, often negatively related to intergroup contact. With specific reference to teachers, empathy may be an ability that, if not properly managed, could result in psychic suffering. In this sense, fundamental adequate and in-depth training processes are essential for the awareness of the personal way to relate to others (Licciardello, 2001:135).

2. METHOD

The aim of the present research was to explore the attitudes of a group of teachers towards migrants in general and in particular towards second generation pupils.

Specifically, it intends to test the hypothesis that:

- a)-simple contact is not sufficient to produce positive intergroup attitudes (Allport, 1954);
- b)-'indirect contact' (Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, & Ropp, 1997; Cameron, Rutland, Brown & Douch, 2006) produces positive attitudes towards migrants and second generation pupils;
- c)-empathy and second generation students' social representation correlate with attitudes towards migration and immigrants.

2.1. Sample

The research was conducted with a sample of teachers, 228 altogether, coming from different education levels (42.5% primary education; 21.5% middle school; 36% secondary education). The



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participants (53 males and 175 females), aged between 28 and 65 ($M=49.41$), have taught for an average period of 20.86 years (range 1-40 years) and their subject areas are: humanistic 54.8%, scientific 34.6% and both for the remaining 10.5%.

With regard to the fact that they were involved in the experience of emigration (in person or in relation to the family of origin), more than $\frac{3}{4}$ (76.8%) stated they never had this type of experience.

The school context, however, seems to be a place fairly characterized by contact with the migratory phenomenon and with its young protagonists. In fact, the presence of students who, for various reasons, can be defined as second generation migrants was significant (303 altogether, comprising nomadic, children of mixed marriage, students born abroad, students born in Italy into a foreign family, foreigners adopted in Italy) and a lot of teachers (71.9%) had this kind of pupils in their classes. Furthermore, the activation of intercultural projects has characterized just under half (48.7%) of considered schools.

2.2. Materials

The data was collected through a questionnaire consisting of:

a)-background questions (Licciardello, 1994), aimed at collecting specific data in order to draw an appropriate profile of the socio/cultural features of individuals, useful for the construction of possible research variables;

b)-a group of items (Giovannini, 2001) (range 1=least agreement, 7=highest agreement) in order to measure the representational framework related to migration at different levels and grouped into five areas: Social Distance and Stereotypes; Culture and Identity; School and Education; Immigrants Politics; Economy;

c)-the empathy scale consisting of 19 items (range 1=not at all; 5=very much) (eg. "Sorrow", "Anxiety", "Pain", "Bitterness" etc..) and grouped into 4 factors: parallel empathy, reactive empathy, cognitive empathy, distress.

d)-three Semantic Differentials (Di Nuovo & Licciardello, 1997) concerning the representation about Actual Self ("As I am"), "Italian students are ..." and "Foreigner students are ...".

2.3. Procedure

The data analysis was carried out through the support of the statistical package SPSS 15 for Windows, using MANOVA, Correlation Analysis and One test.

Specifically: a) we calculated the mean values of each item; b) in relation to the empathy scale, after the verification of the reliability by Cronbach's alpha: parallel empathy ($\alpha=.825$), reactive empathy ($\alpha=.857$), cognitive empathy ($\alpha=.833$), distress ($\alpha=.772$), we calculated the mean values of each factor; c) in relation to Semantic Differentials, after the verification of the reliability by Cronbach's alpha: "Actual Self" ($\alpha=.807$), "Italian students are ..." ($\alpha=.867$), "Foreigner students are ..." ($\alpha=.772$), considering each S. D. as a Likert scale (with 1-7 score and "indifferent point"=4) we calculated the average sum of each pair of opposite adjectives.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Overview

3.1.1. Migration representational framework

a)-Social distance and stereotypes: teachers showed disagreement with the hostile attitude that some people have towards immigrants ($M=5.27$) and they rejected the stereotypes most commonly directed toward them (they contribute to increasing crime levels ($M=3.48$), are dirty and unkempt ($M=2.86$), make people annoyed by their insistence ($M=2.89$), give the neighborhood a shabby and



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poor appearance ($M=2.98$), cause an increase in cases of AIDS in Italy ($M=2.39$), and demand our help without giving anything in return ($M=2.55$). Just above the indifference point, instead, is the agreement given to the fact that if their son/daughter marries a person of another ethnicity or white, it will make no difference ($M=4.42$); the item that immigration has brought our society more advantages than disadvantages was essentially refused ($M=3.59$).

b)-Culture and identity: data showed a moderately positive agreement ($M=4.70$) with the idea that the presence of immigrants entailed a cultural enrichment; nevertheless the idea that the best societies are those that have many ethnic groups had a very low appreciation (the score is below at the "point on indifference": $M=3.94$). Basically there was rejection of the options about the fact that because of immigration customs that do not belong to us are spreading ($M=2.76$) and outdated ways of life ($M=2.65$) and that the possibility that children born in Italy to Islamic parents will be able to vote once they are eighteen can be an obstacle for our religious freedom and political independence ($M = 2.67$).

c)-School and education: teachers showed a fair agreement about the fact that the presence of foreign students culturally enriches the class ($M=5.04$) and, to a lesser extent, that it is a good thing to have immigrant students in the class ($M=4.81$); this attitude decreases when it refers to pupils without residence permit ($M=4.37$). The item that the inclusion of immigrant students in the classroom is likely to worsen the quality of our school was rejected ($M=2.16$). Basically were rejected the options about the fact that because of immigration are spreading customs that do not belong to us ($M=2.76$) and outdated ways of life ($M=2.65$)

d)-Immigration policies: the sample revealed disagreement about the fact that Italy has closed its doors to immigration ($M=2.10$) and that the government spends too much money on immigrants ($M=2.95$). When the policies relate more explicitly to work and to civil rights, attitudes changed a bit. In particular, teachers expressed disagreement in relation to the possibility that companies should reserve a percentage of places for immigrants ($M=2.95$). Moreover, they did not seem to take positions for or against to: grant Italian citizenship to those living and working in this country continuously for at least three years ($M=4.05$); repatriate the immigrants who do not have a regular work contract ($M=4.06$); and help immigrants to settle in Italy with their families ($M=4.21$).

e)-Economy: the data seem to outline a fair agreement on the need to solve the serious problems of unemployment and material and spiritual poverty in our Country before thinking about foreigners ($M=4.55$); the agreement on the fact that immigrants give an useful contribution to our economy was just above the indifference point ($M=4.27$). Clear disagreement was expressed about the item that immigrants take jobs away from Italians ($M=2.68$).

3.1.2. Empathy towards migrants

Considering the data of the empathy scale, teachers seem to experience in a fair way all three forms of empathy towards immigrants: parallel ($M=3.82$), reactive ($M=3.41$), cognitive ($M=3.37$). Statistical analysis shows that parallel empathy is experienced to a greater extent than the other two forms of empathy (in all cases $p<.001$). Distress, however, takes scores significantly lower than all types of empathy ($M=2.86$) (in all cases $p<.001$).

In addition, from the analysis of correlations between the considered dimensions it is possible to note that all three forms of empathy were correlated positively with the distress (parallel: $r=.557$; reactive: $r=.642$; cognitive: $r=.612$; in all cases $p<.001$). This result would suggest the hypothesis that teachers could make 'use' of empathy not functional to 'take the role of' without the risk of falling into situations of psychological unease.



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3.1.3. Semantic Differentials

In general, the data showed a fair Actual Self representation ($M=5.20$) and a scant evaluation of both kinds of students (Manova with 3 Within factors $DF= 2.452 F= 441.42 p<.001$). In particular, second generation students and Italians were assessed with scores respectively above ($M=4.21$) and under ($M=3.73$) the indifferent point (One sample test $p<.001$). Interestingly, the difference between these last two mean values was statistically significant ($p<.001$), that is foreign students were assessed better than Italian ones.

3.2. Effects of intercultural projects on attitudes towards migration and migrants

With regard to the items considered, the activation of intercultural projects, realized in the schools where teachers of our sample work, affects in a statistically significant way ($p=.001$).

In particular, teachers who have participated in such projects, compared to colleagues who have not done such experience, have showed the following differences, specifically for every field considered.

3.2.1. Social distance and stereotypes

a)-believe more that immigration has brought to our society more advantages than disadvantages ($M=4.03$ vs. $M=3.21$) ($p<.001$) and that it would make no difference if their son/daughter were to marry a person of another ethnicity or white ($M=4.73$ vs. $M=4.13$) ($p=.026$);

b)-are less in agreement with the fact that immigrants annoy people by their insistence ($M=2.61$ vs. $M=3.15$) ($p=.037$) and the item that states they have contributed to increasing the cases of AIDS in Italy ($M=1.93$ vs. $M=2.82$) ($p<.001$);

3.2.2. Culture, identity and education

a)-believe most that the best societies are those that have many ethnic groups within them ($M=4.27$ vs. $M=2.62$) ($p=.007$) and that this will lead to a cultural enrichment ($M=5.16$ vs. $M=4.26$) ($p<.001$);

b)-express less agreement about the fear that because of immigration customs that do not belong to us are spreading ($M=2.41$ vs. $M=3.10$) ($p=.004$) and that the new Muslim citizens will be a danger for religious freedom and Italian political independence ($M=2.22$ vs. $M=3.09$) ($p<.001$);

c)-consider that is a good thing for a teacher to have in class second generation students ($M=5.24$ vs. $M=4.39$) ($p=.001$) and that they should be admitted in schools even when they have not a resident permit ($M=4.78$ vs. $M=3.97$) ($p=.007$);

d)-are less in agreement that the presence of foreign students in the classroom is likely to worsen the quality of school ($M=1.93$ vs. $M=2.38$) ($p=.025$);

3.2.3. Immigration policies and economy

a)-express less agreement that illegal immigrants should be repatriated ($M=3.58$ vs. $M=4.52$) ($p=.001$) and that the government spends too much money on them ($M=2.49$ vs. $M=3.38$) ($p<.001$);

b)-are more favorable to the possibility of granting Italian citizenship to immigrants who live and work continuously for at least three years in Italy ($M=4.45$ vs. $M=3.68$) ($p<.001$);

c)-believe more that immigrants give an useful contribution to the Italian economy ($M=4.66$ vs. $M=3.91$) ($p=.002$);

d)-are less in agreement about the fact that we must deal with the material and spiritual problems of Italians before thinking about foreigners ($M=4.00$ vs. $M=5.08$) ($p<.001$) and that immigrants take jobs away from Italians ($M=2.23$ vs. $M=3.11$) ($p<.001$).



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3.3. Effects of the correlation between variables

The development of the analysis by correlation highlighted significant effects.

3.3.1. Correlation between empathy and items

The different forms of empathy (parallel, reactive and cognitive) correlates:

3.3.1.1- About Social distance and stereotypes

a)-positively with the idea that it would make no difference if their son or daughter were to marry a black person or a white (parallel: $r=.306$, $p < .001$; reactive: $r=.229$, $p = .001$; cognitive: $r=.215$, $p=.001$) and disgust at the hostile attitude that some people have towards immigrants (parallel: $r=.351$, $p<.001$; reactive: $r=.178$, $p=.007$; cognitive: $r=.229$, $p<.001$);

b)-negatively with the idea that immigrants are dirty and unkempt (parallel: $r=-.173$, $p=.009$; reactive: $r=-.170$, $p=.010$; cognitive: $r=-.184$, $p=.005$);

3.3.1.2. About Culture, identity and education

a)-positively with the thought that the best societies are those that have many ethnic groups within them (parallel: $r=.308$, $p<.001$; reactive: $r=.285$, $p<.001$; cognitive: $r=.252$, $p<.001$) and that this would result in a cultural enrichment (parallel: $r=.281$, $p<.001$; reactive: $r=.177$, $p=.007$; cognitive: $r=.157$, $p=.018$); with the belief that foreign students enrich culturally the class (parallel: $r=.353$, $p<.001$; reactive: $r=.248$, $p<.001$; cognitive: $r=.232$, $p<.001$), are a positive presence for a teacher (parallel: $r=.342$, $p<.001$; reactive: $r=.288$, $p<.001$; cognitive: $r=.255$, $p<.001$) and should be accepted also when they do not have the resident permit (parallel: $r=.299$, $p<.001$; reactive: $r=.217$, $p=.001$; cognitive: $r=.208$, $p=.002$);

3.3.1.3. About Immigration policies and economy

a)-negatively with the belief that Italy should close its doors to immigration (parallel: $r=-.220$, $p=.001$; reactive: $r=-.179$, $p=.007$; cognitive: $r=-.217$; $p=.001$);

b)-positively with the belief that immigrants give an useful contribution to our economy (parallel: $r=.278$, $p<.001$; reactive: $r=.239$, $p<.001$; cognitive: $r=.182$, $p=.006$).

3.3.2. Correlation between empathy and semantic differentials

Parallel empathy correlates positively with the Actual Self ($r=.171$, $p=.010$), while reactive and cognitive empathy correlate positively with the assessment of Italian students (respectively $r=.157$, $p=.017$ and $r=.231$, $p<.001$). This result could be a confirmation of empathy as a mediator of positive intergroup relationships (Voci & Hewstone, 2007).

3.3.3. Correlation between semantic differentials and items

A better assessment of foreigners students correlates:

3.3.3.1.-About Social distance and stereotypes

a)-positively with the item that immigration has brought to our society more advantages than disadvantages ($r=.196$; $p=.003$), with disgust at the hostility that some people have toward immigrants ($r=.194$; $p=.003$) and with the thought that it would make no difference if their son or daughter were to marry a black or a white person ($r=.144$; $p=.030$);

b)-negatively with the belief that immigrants have contributed to the increase in the crime rate ($r=-.160$; $p=.016$);



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3.3.3.2. About Culture, identity and education

a)-positively with the thought that the best societies are those that have many ethnic groups within them ($r=.171$; $p=.010$) and that this fact enriched them culturally ($r=.161$; $p=.015$); with the item that second generation students enrich culturally the class ($r=.208$; $p=.002$) and that they are a positive presence for a teacher ($r=.210$; $p=.001$);

3.3.3.3. About immigration policies and economy

a)-positively with the items that companies should reserve a percentage of places for immigrants ($r=.168$; $p=.011$) and that they should be helped to settle in Italy with their families ($r=.192$; $p=.004$); with the belief that immigrants give a useful contribution to our economy ($r=.183$; $p=.006$).

4. CONCLUSIONS

In general, the research data seem to highlight a positive immigrants representational framework, characterized by a rejection of the stereotypes most commonly directed toward them. It is interesting to note that when it refers to a more intimate contact or to job and civil rights, teachers seem to not take positions for or against.

These data lead us to hypothesize that teachers could have an aversive or reluctant racism (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; Licciardello, 1995), which refers to those who adhere to liberal and progressive attitudes of tolerance, equality and openness towards members of groups different from the ingroup, but that, under specific conditions (for example, insufficient normative organization, conflict etc.), bring out discriminatory behavior, a legacy of negative representations that are culturally inherited.

In particular, the results of this study seem to confirm our hypothesis.

Specifically, simple contact does not in itself entail an improvement of intergroup relationships (Allport, 1954). In fact, the school context seems characterized in a significant way by the presence of second generation students and a consistent part of teachers had this kind of pupils in their classes, but this co-existence does not affect the migration representational framework, empathy toward migrants and Actual Self, Italian and Foreigners Students representations. This result seems to highlight the importance to concur to create the condition for a 'successful' contact functional at a mutual respect of 'diversity' and, thus, a reduction of prejudicial thinking.

Moreover, the data reveal the efficacy of 'indirect' contact (Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, & Ropp, 1997; Cameron, Rutland, Brown & Douch, 2006) in improving attitudes towards migrants and second generation pupils. We speak about this kind of contact in relation to school projects functional to integration. Specifically, their activation seems to concur to a better respect and recognition of the 'other' and to reduce stereotypes and social distances towards immigrants. It is as if these activities represent an opportunity to re-read in a different way the immigration dynamics and those related to foreign students. Similar results are obtained when there is a better assessment of second generation students.

In relation to empathy, it is interesting to note that the more empathy teachers felt, the better are their attitudes toward immigrants, the second generations and Italian students. In other words, these data seem to support the role of empathy as a mediator of positive intergroup relationships (Voci & Hewstone, 2007). However, empathy is not always effective if we consider that our data highlight a positive correlation of all three forms of empathy (parallel, reactive, cognitive) with distress, that is a state of emotional upheaval.

Concerning the results of this research, it seems that training is crucial, to enable teachers to be more aware of themselves, especially in relation to others, and to manage their emotions and a



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constant ability to plan in terms of integration. It is a challenge that requires teachers not as passive spectators but actors of change.

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