Second generation, integration processes and cultural affiliations.

A study with a group of students.

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Abstract- The presence of second generation students, a structural element of the Italian school system, increased in school year 2013/14 and records an incidence of 9% of the total school population (Borrini, 2014), testifying a stable first generation of migrants' settlement in Italy. The aim of this study was to explore the representational framework that a group of second generation students has on: quality of integration processes; heritage and Italian culture; some identity and group dimensions. Results seem to delineate a moderate orientation to biculturalism.

Keywords— **second generation; integration; biculturalism; identity development.**

I. Introduction

Actually, in relation to second generation the appellation 'foreign' is sometimes incorrect if we consider that nearly 4 out of 10 were born in Italy. This social category includes migrant 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 (Favaro, 2000:63).

Although there is great diversity among this social category, second generation youth often share the common experience of being bicultural by holding both heritage and mainstream cultural identities. Even when cultural expectations are different, these individuals can typically switch between cultural identities as a strategy to avoid conflict (Giguère, Lalonde & Lou, 2010).

Certainly, the significant and growing presence of second generation carries with it a rethinking of integration policies and imposes a reflection on acculturation (Redfield, Linton & Herskovitz, 1936; Liebkind, 2001) and on identity development processes (Damigella & Licciardello, 2014).

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The first concept refers to bidirectional change that occurs when two different ethno-cultural groups come into prolonged contact, influencing each other and leading to cultural changes that involve individuals, groups and socio-cultural contexts. Regarding identity, a relevant question is related to Social Identity (Tajfel, 1981) as the self-image that derives from belonging to a group (or groups), combined with the value and the emotional meaning associated with membership.

This part of self image could be rooted in different memberships among which heritage and mainstream culture could represent foundations upon which second generation could develop models of biculturalism (Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2000) functional to maintain double affiliation without denying important group affiliations.

In this regard, data from interesting researches stated that optimal well-being seems to come from adopting a bicultural identity wherein both natal and host cultures are represented (Farver, Bakhtawar, & Narang, 2002; Harker, 2001; Lay & Safdar, 2003; Sam & Berry, 1995).

Moreover, second generations are not simply moving on a continuum between heritage and mainstream identity: they can hold and endorse both identities simultaneously (Berry, 1990; Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000).

In this framework, contact which enables diversity recognition and respect both at interpersonal and at intergroup level should not be simple contact that may exacerbate relationships. For a 'successful' contact are arranged some conditions that are: equal status; institutional support; cooperation and opportunities for long lasting and intimate knowledge (Allport, 1954).

II. Method

A. *Aim and hypothesis*

The aim of this study was to explore the representational framework that a group of second generation students has on: integration processes; heritage and Italian culture; some identity and group dimensions; the possibility to promote a positive change towards a better quality of life. Specifically, it intended to test the hypothesis that these representations are affected by the time they spend in Italy and by the overlap between cultural identity and Italian or heritage language.

B. *Participants*

Research was carried out with a group of second generation students (N. 108; M= 48,1% F= 51,9%; age range 14-45, *M*= 17.75) attending a secondary education school in a North-East Italian town.

Subjects spend in Italy from a minimum of 1 to a maximum of 26 years (*M*=10.78). Most of them (86.1%) reside with parents, the remaining part lives with one parent (7.4%) or with family from married (5.6%). Participants differed by country where they were born (Italy:22.2%; North Africa: 10.2%; China, 12%; East Europe: 33.3%; South America: 11.2%; other countries: 11.1%;) and by religion (atheist: 4.6%; Muslim: 36.1%; Christian: 43.5%; Buddhist: 1.9%; Hindu: 1.9%; no answer: 12%). With regard to Italian citizenship, 72.2% declared not having it and 27.8% has it. Half (51.9%) of those who did not have Italian citizenship thought of acquiring it in the future. Although future projects are uncertain for 9.3% they seem well-defined enough for the rest: 59.3% aims to get a job; 16.7% plans to move to another country; 12% thinks of completing studies; 2.7% imagines, generally, a better life.

C. *Materials and techniques*

Data was collected by a questionnaire containing: I) background questions aimed at collecting specific data in order to draw an appropriate profile of respondents' socio-cultural features, useful as research variables (Licciardello, 1994); II) two groups of items in order to measure one group the representational framework related to heritage and Italian culture (1=*total disagreement*; 7=*total agreement*, with 4= 'mead point') and another group the identification with different contexts (1=*not at all*; 4=*very much*); III) a self-esteem scale (1=*total disagreement*; 4=*total agreement*) in order to measure the perceived psychological well-being (Rumbaut, 1994); IV) the Inclusion of the Other in Self Scale (Aron, Aron & Smollan, 1992; Schubert & Otten, 2002) consisting of eight circular graphics symbols, each representing a different degree of overlap between cultural identity and language (1=*distant*, 8=*complete overlapping*); V) four Semantic Differentials (Di Nuovo & Licciardello, 1997) concerning attitudes on Actual Self ("*As I am*"); Future Self ("*As I will be*"); ingroup (*peers of the same nationality*); outgroup (*Italian peers*).

The materials were administered by the researcher in a face to face setting.

D. *Procedures*

Data analysis was carried by SPSS 20 for Windows, using MANOVA and Pearsons's "r" for correlation analysis. We calculated the mean values of each item for the data obtained with the questionnaire. Regarding the Semantic Differentials, we calculated the: 1) reliability with Cronbach's alpha: Actual Self (α=.750), Future Self (α=.826), ingroup (α=.869), outgroup (α=.870); 2) and the average sum of each pair of opposite adjectives scores.

III. **Results**

A. *Attitudes on heritage and Italian culture*

Regarding the Inclusion of Other in Self Scale data, participants revealed little overlap between cultural identity and Italian language (*M*=4.41) and moderate overlap between cultural identity and heritage language (*M*=5.09).

They (MANOVA with 3 Within factors DF=2,214 F=1.14 *p*<.001) approved moderately both the item on a close feeling with heritage culture (*M*=5.37) and on the preference to maintain some heritage culture aspects in family context and the Italian culture in the relationships with peers (*M*=5.20). Slightly lower score was given to the tendency to select and include aspects of the two cultures that are more similar to personal way of thinking (*M*=5.12).

These data seem to be confirmed by those on identification with different contexts (MANOVA with 5 Within factors DF=4,428 F=5.94 *p*<.001). Specifically, participants identify fairly themselves with parents' country of origin (*M*=3.15) and with a lesser extend with the town where they live (*M*=2.84), Europe (*M*=2.76) and Italy (*M*=2.75).

Moreover, participants (MANOVA with 4 Within factors DF=3,321 F=33.28 *p*<.001) approved moderately the item on improvement and maintaining the two cultures (*M*=5.11) and rejected both options on preserving exclusively the Italian (*M*=3.05) or the heritage (*M*=3.61) culture.

Specifically, in stating the reasons of heritage culture importance (MANOVA with 5 Within factors DF=4,428 F=19.54 *p*<.001), second generation students approved with medium low scores the fact that it is the basis of personal identity (*M*=4.44) and, to a lower extent, that it is not fair to abandon the course showed by ancestors (*M*=4.39). Rejected items: *it is important to strive to fit in with the other culture in order to reduce, as much as possible, integration problems* (*M*=3.43); *I never arise this question* (*M*=3.36); *It is not a relevant question* (*M*=2.79).

B. *Selves and groups representations*

In general, participants (MANOVA with 4 factors Within DF=3,321 F=14.45 *p*<.001) seem to have a Self representation near to mead point (Actual Self *M*=4.10 and Future Self *M*=4.21) and similar evaluation was assigned to peers belonging to the group of origin (*M*= 4.13). Italian peers were valued significantly less (*M*=3.97) than other dimensions (in any case *p*<.001).

Seemingly in contrast with Self evaluation, participants revealed a reasonable level of self-esteem, recognizing to be able to do things as well as most of other people (*M*=3.38); to believe they have a positive attitude towards themselves (*M*=3.25); to identify themselves as people of value in comparison with other people (*M*=3.25); to feel they possess a number of good quality (*M*=3.19); to be satisfied of themselves (*M*=3.09). The good level of self-esteem is confirmed by the low level of agreement with items such as: *Sometimes I think I am not good* (*M*=2.33); *I wish I could have more respect for myself* (*M*=2.32); *Sometimes I feel useless* (*M*=1.99); *I feel I have nothing to be proud of me* (*M*=1.72); *I am inclined to think that a I am a failure* (*M*=1.71).

C. *Changes for a better quality of integration*

We asked participants what kind of changes they should bring in the reality in which they live. Data revealed that 38.9% didn't answer to this question; 12% would not change anything; 22.2% would like to change some political and economic problems; same percentage (22.2%) would eliminate episodes of bullying, racism and discrimination; 4.6% would like to solve personal problems.

In relation to real possibilities in making desired change, nearly half of participants thought to have enough (30.6%) or many (17.6%); the remaining part thought to have few (30.6%), nothing (9.3%) and 12% didn't give answer.

Participants highlighted possible obstacles in achieving desired change. Specifically, despite 39.8% did not answer to this question, 28.7% referred to indifference and prejudice, 10.2% to economic crisis and to political system, 13% to personal problems (8.3% did not see obstacles).

Moreover, in a bottom-up perspective we asked participants suggestions on possible useful integration politics. As pointed out in a study with first generation of immigrants (Licciardello & Damigella, 2011), half of participants proposed activities oriented to real integration processes (44.4% dialogue and encounter; 7,4% cultural and sport events). The remaining part referred to institutional actions (12%) and did not answer (36.1%).

D. *Correlation analysis*

The correlation analysis between how many time participants spend in Italy and dimensions previously examined revealed that the longer the time they stay in Italy:

a) less they speak in origin language with their parents (r=.-245; *p*=.011) and with their friends (r=.-233; *p*=.015);

b) less they feel close to heritage culture (r=.-190; *p*=.048);

c) more they identify themselves with Italian context (r=.290; *p*=.002);

d) more is the overlapping between cultural identity and Italian language (r=.255; *p*=.008).

Moreover, the correlation analysis between the Inclusion of Other in Self Scale (cultural identity and Italian language) and the Self-esteem Scale revealed that more is the overlapping between cultural identity and Italian language:

a) more they feel themselves as a person of value (*r*=.355; *p*<.001) and they think to possess a number of good qualities (*r*=.260; *p*=.007);

b) less they believe to have nothing to be proud of (*r*=.-224; *p*=.020) and to want more respect for themselves (*r*=.-228; *p*=.017).

The correlation between the Inclusion of Other in Self Scale (cultural identity and parents' language) and the Self-esteem Scale and items revealed that more is the overlapping between cultural identity and heritage language:

a) less they think they are not good (*r*=.-244; *p*=.011);

b) more they feel close to heritage culture (*r*=.291; *p*=.002) and more they select and include aspects of the two culture that are more similar to personal way of thinking (*r*=.191; *p*=.048);

c) more they agree with the idea both that it is not fair to abandon the course showed by ancestors (*r*=.398; *p*<.001) and that culture of origin is the basis of personal identity (*r*=.364; *p*<.001)

IV. **Conclusion**

Results seem to delineate a framework with some elements of complexity.

In particular, data seem to highlight a moderate trend among respondents towards integration of the two cultures, rejecting both the hypothesis to preserve only one of them or to consider one superior to the other. In fact, they expressed a close feeling with heritage culture and a good level of agreement with the preference to select and include aspects of the two culture that are more appropriate to personal way of thinking or to the specific context.

This could be referred to the concept of frame-switching (Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2000) that occurs when individuals alternate between different cultural interpretive frames as a function of the cues in their environment.

It is in line with the concept of biculturalism that postulates: "a culture is never internalized as an integrated and general structure [...] but it is rather an interrelated 'network' of knowledge and structures [...] so individuals can acquire more than a cultural system, although these systems contain contradictory theories and structures" (Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2000:713).

If culture is considered in these terms it would be possible to avoid the risk of thinking second generations as hybrids, representation that will negatively affect both

processes of identity development and relationships between different cultural groups.

Moreover, we have to point out that a prevalent part of participants are in adolescence age and, therefore, they are in a phase of identity 'testing' and definition that could be more complex because of their dual cultural affiliation.

In this regard, data from an interesting research revealed that second generation adolescents who are being engaged in both their heritage culture and in the larger society are better adapted than those who acculturate by orienting themselves to one or the other culture (by way of assimilation or separation) or to neither culture (marginalization) (Sam & Berry,1995).

Moreover, Dual identity has been related to the psychological and social adaptation of immigrant minorities and was found to facilitate their well-being and to foster harmonious intergroup relations (Berry, Phinney, Sam & Vedder, 2006). Simon and Klandermans (2001) argued that dual identification with both the minority group and the wider polity is required for minority members to become politically engaged.

Data from our study revealed a Self (Actual and Future) representations near to mead point and a reasonable level of self-esteem. These results, seemingly conflicting, could be expression of Self ambivalence or they could be related to materials used: implicit (Semantic Differentials) to evaluate Selves dimensions; explicit (Self-esteem Scale) to evaluate perceived psychological well-being.

However, correlation analysis revealed that: more is the overlapping between cultural identity and Italian language more they valued some aspects of self-esteem; the more is the overlapping between cultural identity and heritage language the more they give importance to heritage culture and the more they agreed with biculturalism. These results could lead us to hypothesize that first identification is based overall to a normative conformism, that is individuals adhere to norms in order to obtain social acceptance from which could derive a positive self evaluation; the second to a positive sense of belonging to heritage culture as the basis to real integration processes.

Moreover, correlation analysis between how many time participants spend in Italy and dimensions previously examined revealed that the longer the time they stay in Italy more they adhere to assimilation strategy.

Certainly, the complexity of several issues related to second generations addresses socio-political and civil society interventions that, following a bottom-up approach, put into action the real needs and proposals of people involved.

Specifically, educational processes have an important role in promoting a cognitive and relational change in favour of positive intercultural attitudes. School, in fact, could be a 'potential place' to a positive contact in which it is desirable to support biculturalism, to improve intergroup relationships and to reduce ethnic prejudices and stereotypes. Concerning this aspect, a key role can be played

by teachers in relation to their daily activities (Damigella, Licciardello & Bisicchia).

With regard to this issue we could anticipate some future research developments. It would be interesting to investigate the role played by teacher and by their attitudes and social representations in educational transformation processes.

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