

SCHOOL SUCCESS AND THE INTEGRATION OF INTERCULTURA FOREIGN STUDENTS IN ITALY



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INTRODUCTION

Educational research has given special attention to Intercultural education in recent years. Many associations and cultural and research centers have given high priority to the issue and in Italy and abroad, and there are a growing number of contributions to the research.

The reasons for this are clear. We are in a world where the circulation of things, ideas, and people (the order is intentional) continues to grow and the increasingly common rapid travel is leading to wide-ranging and varied contacts between people from different cultures. Interculturalism is certainly not an automatic response. Indeed, diffidence or out-and-out fear of the other can be the automatic responses. Interculturality is something that needs to be built and supported based on knowledge and social, ethical, educational, and political beliefs that are deepened through well-defined, rigorous planning.

The Intercultura Foundation may be the institution that has most sought to equip itself to handle these issues and reflect on why and how we can achieve them, giving attention to our staff's skills and keeping them up to date. We should, however, note that the presence of foreign students in the daily life of schools is quite often perceived as a problem. This is less true in pre-school and the early years of primary school and more markedly so in upper secondary school. It is seldom perceived as a problem by students, occasionally by families, and most often by teachers. Their concerns range from discomfort with unexpected newness to concern about possible slowing down or gaps in the teaching plan, and total rejection of unfamiliar differences that are not accepted or understood. These mindsets are influenced by a type of journalism that treats the presence of foreigners (not only immigrants) as an emergency and only discuss these issues when problems arise in social or educational realms. Many newspaper articles specifically stress that a lack of language skills by foreign students make teachers have to do extra work and slows down normal school activities, or they write about tensions because of different cultures and religions.

Starting from this situation, a group of Italian scholars conducted research commissioned by the Foundation to answer questions that have long needed further study.

What determines "school success" for foreign students who come to spend a year in school in Italy? What allows them to integrate well in our country and in their host families and schools?

The research sought to help discern difficulties as well as opportunities. It sought in particular to recognize positive teaching/learning experiences, and "best practices" as seen by and for foreign students who spend a year in Italian schools through Intercultura's exchange programs.

It is a point worth stressing the Intercultura's exchange programs involve immersion in family and schools in order to form a deeper, more direct contact with different cultural contexts of the host country. School takes up at least half the day of a high school student, and for many students, it is the only chance to get to know their peers. The exchange year with Intercultura is only a true success if the foreign students are fully immersed in the family and school life, as volunteers are well-aware and as the stories of the young people who took part in the study showed, especially those who had various types of difficulties at school.

According to surveys, 83.8% of students evaluate the exchange year as highly positive or positive. But does this evaluation correspond to a positive school experience – i.e. motivating and rewarding – and so necessary successful? The experience of volunteers suggests that it is not always the case and that school can present numerous difficulties for foreign students, including frustration, difficulty being included in the class group, and misunderstandings or objective difficulties with teachers leading to low motivation to study. During this research, we heard many voices critical of Italian schools. So, what does school success mean? How is it defined by foreign students, classmates, teachers, and families? Starting from these different

experiences and perspectives, the Association can draw some important conclusions about the strengths and weaknesses of the year-long exchange program and make improvements as possible.

“Schools are required to organize intercultural education initiatives even if there are no foreign students. Intercultural education as a fundamental value of schools is a key criterion for academic planning. This is an interdisciplinary educational process for everyone, as a regular part of education to help overcome stereotypes, prejudices, and parochialism as well as ethnocentric and self-interested attitudes, helping prepare minds to open to dialogue, solidarity, cooperation, and peace, the values on which a multi-ethnic society is based.”

The presence of foreign students, their school careers, and successes and failures should be taken as opportunities to verify the school’s real capacity to work in multi- and intercultural terms. Of all the educational and learning processes, evaluation may be the issue that has led to the most discussion and controversies. At first glance, evaluation appears as a judgment beyond its meaning of measuring and verifying.

MEANINGS, AIMS, AND METHODOLOGIES

We should note that multi- and intercultural education and the presence of foreign students in the class bring up two areas of inquiry with different traits and specific trajectories and difficulties.

Multi- and intercultural education should come to form a dimension that defines the school’s activities as it commits to working with an open, innovative approach. See art. 45, paragraph 7, Presidential Decree 394/99 and CC.MM. 205/90 and 73/94 on the basis of which:

“Schools are required to organize intercultural education initiatives even if there are no foreign students. Intercultural education as a fundamental value of schools is a key criterion for academic planning. This is an interdisciplinary educational process for everyone, as a regular part of education to help overcome stereotypes, prejudices, and parochialism as well as ethnocentric and self-interested attitudes, helping prepare minds to open to dialogue, solidarity, cooperation, and peace, the values on which a multi-ethnic society is based.”

The presence of foreign students, their school careers, and successes and failures should be taken as opportunities to verify the school’s real capacity to work in multi- and intercultural terms. Of all the educational and learning processes, evaluation may be the issue that has led to the most discussion and controversy. At first glance, evaluation appears as a judgment beyond its sense of measuring and verifying.

We can see the person being educated not as someone to be scrutinized to ascertain their level of performance but rather to see their educational process to give them information about their situations, so they know how to best proceed on their educational and cultural paths. From this perspective, we can look at the emergence of what has been recognized as the “educational function of evaluation” (Reuchlin, 1974), suited to making sure that learning processes are experienced by the individual with awareness, and that they get something from this information that allows them to orient themselves in their experiences.

EVALUATION SEEN AS...

This study aims to research cases of school success of foreign students who spent a year in the Italian schools on Intercultura’s program and reconstruct their personal stories to highlight the educational and teaching choices in the school and classroom related to these outcomes.

The study's interest is in identifying best practices and helping to move past the image of the foreign student perceived as a problem, a difficulty, something slowing down the class. Investigating school success means first specifying what is meant by this term by teachers, students, and family as well as the definitions given by educational studies. It seems clear enough that positive outcome and school success are not the same thing. Positive outcome suggests achieving levels defined as basic, whereas school success means high-level learning results. A matter that is closely tied to school success pertains to the evaluation procedures that teachers use. The research was set up in quantitative and qualitative terms. In addition to collecting data and posing the question starting from statistical bases. In addition to identifying all cases of school success of foreign students on Intercultura's year program in Italian schools, it also sought to survey processes, modes, and important conditions that helped understanding and adding value to educational, organizational, and teaching choices that support the success of these students' school experience.

The intent of the researchers who worked for the Foundation was to meet young men and women "in the flesh and blood" in their school settings as well as

outside of school, as much as possible, to reconstruct the group dynamics, interpersonal relationships between students and teachers, and between the different people involved in the school's operation. The study was conducted through on-site observation, questionnaires given to teachers and students, focus groups to survey data about the actual teaching situations and facilitate and support school staff to be observers/researchers of school and class dynamics and their students' learning. The empirical techniques included: participatory observation, life stories for collecting information and ascertaining their consistency and impact on the positive development of learning processes. The pedagogical framework consisted of comparative education. The study considered school performance, which is affected by key elements including: parent expectations, self-esteem, forms of extracurricular socialization, family composition, educational policies, and relationships with teachers and classmates. The research also analyzed the school curricula in the different Educational Plans¹ of the schools attended for a year by Intercultura foreign students using Kerr's model, an internationally established tool.

RESEARCH STAGES AND TOOLS

The research team consisted of researchers from different universities and different disciplines in the humanities (cultural anthropology, intercultural education, language sciences, and sociology). They brought to the project diverse skills and experiences to form a composite research group, whose individual perspectives converged in the choice of a common method and vocabulary.

The research was conducted in the second quarter of the 2009/2010 academic year. These were the phases:

¹ The Educational Plan is the school's calling card, illustrating the school's defining traits, the cultural and educational inspiration driving it, curricular and extracurricular planning, and educational and organizational planning of its activities. The schools' autonomy is manifested in the Educational Plan in its description of:

- disciplines and activities freely chosen in the part of the curriculum reserved for them;
- options available to students and families;
- disciplines and additional activities in the curriculum's optional part;
- continuity, orientation, support, and remediation based on the students' specifically identified needs.
- breakdown by module of the total annual hours of each discipline and activity;
- breakdown by module of groups of students coming from the same or different classes;
- methods and criteria for evaluating students and recognizing credits;
- organization adopted to achieve general and specific teaching goals;
- research and experimentation projects.

- selected two representative research regions (North/South): Puglia for the South (all provinces), Emilia-Romagna for the North (7 provinces);
- introduced the project through an introductory letter and meetings with individual school administrators and teachers from fourth-year secondary school classes, presenting research methods and sharing data to help orient the project;
- chose a teacher representative for each school who was involved in the various research phases;
- collected data about educational planning in schools by acquiring Educational Plans;
- interviewed school administrators, literature and foreign language teachers, and contacts for the schools' intercultural activities (about methods used, content and testing aspects) by giving a questionnaire prepared for the purpose;
- gave a questionnaire to Intercultura foreign students with the goal of surveying their level of integration in the class, family, and peer group. The questionnaire also served to highlight the difficulties encountered, weaknesses, and differences they perceived between the school system of their home country and that of the host country, the relationship with teachers, and their school careers;
- gave a questionnaire to Italian students in the Intercultura's foreign student's host class (mirror group) to survey their ability to interact with the foreign student and their intercultural skills;
- gave an open-answer questionnaire (in Italian or English) to be completed in the class or at home by the group of Intercultura foreign students;
- gave an open-answer questionnaire (in Italian or English) to be completed in the class or at home by the group of Italian students in the Intercultura foreign students' host classes;
- chose Intercultura foreign students to be part of the focus group;
- conducted focus groups, lasting 1.5 hours each, led by one or two members of the research group and analyzed results;
- analyzed school curricula with charts created with Kerr's model to compare results from different schools and make a regional and national comparison.

ANALYSIS OF THE EDUCATIONAL PLANS OF PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

A summary analysis of the Educational Plans of the 54 upper secondary schools participating in our study – having hosted during the 2009/2010 academic year 62 foreign students who came to Emilia-Romagna and Puglia through the Intercultura Association. It was clear that intercultural education in the strict sense of teaching, tangible projects and planning, was not a wide-spread common approach, especially in Puglia. However, this is not to say that little attention was given to the relationships and wellbeing of the students in individual schools (and, implicitly, to interculturality as relationships with others).

It often emerged that support for Intercultura foreign students was limited only to the language issue. Intercultural projects were few in relationship to varied areas of action and number of projects. It appeared that there were different situations actually facilitating learning.

Generally, in spite of the large number of projects (in terms of teaching and a psychological and relationship support offered by the school), we often noted that the Educational Plans do not reflect what actually happens in school. The students often have trouble feeling engaged, despite the plans' clear references to integrating and welcoming foreign students. The focus

groups rarely mentioned such projects.

Protocols for managing host students are not well disseminated, which is needed, possibly in cooperation with Intercultura's local centers (many teachers referred to useful, effective material from the association, whereas others complained about a lack of contact with the association), as well as training for teachers and classmates who are going to host an Intercultura student.

As a result, the Educational Plan's guidelines and the projects they contain need to be verified in each case and should not be taken as the only factor in the selection of schools by Intercultura's local centers.

STATISTICAL SUMMARY OF SURVEYED SCHOOLS

Schools surveyed in Emilia-Romagna: 27

Intercultura actions or projects in the in Educational Plan:

YES: 16 school, including:

- 6 schools with a specific intercultural project;
- 10 schools with specific instructions for intercultural education.

NO: 11 schools, including:

- 7 schools, which, despite not having a specific project in their Educational Plans, set intercultural educational aims;
- 4 schools that mention nothing on the subject in their educational plans.

Schools surveyed in Puglia: 27

Intercultura actions or projects in Educational Plan:

YES: 6 school, including:

- 5 schools with a specific intercultural project;
- 1 school with only general mentions in the 2008/2009 Educational Plan.

NO: 13 schools, including:

- 12 schools mentioning nothing in the Educational Plan about expanding educational options;
- 1 school (downloadable only for the 2008/2009 school year) includes nothing about expanding educational options.

Data / information not available: 7 schools, including:

- 2 schools whose Educational Plans are not available online;
- 1 school with an Educational Plan online that could not be downloaded;
- 4 schools whose Educational Plans are not available online;

<i>Intercultura actions or projects in the in Educational Plan</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Emilia Romagna		
YES	16	59.3
NO	11	40.7
Total	27	100.0

<i>Intercultura actions or projects in the in Educational Plan Puglia</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
YES	6	23.1
NO	13	50
Information not available online	7	26.9
Total	26	100.0

SCHOOL SUCCESS AND EVALUATION: POINT OF VIEW OF INTERCULTURA FOREIGN STUDENTS

The question about school success was asked both in the questionnaires and in the focus groups. The definition of school success that foreign students gave sometimes seemed to get confused with their overall opinion on their year abroad. They often reference the maturing process and satisfaction associated with having overcome many challenges. For many students, school success is the success that the school has when it achieves the goal of engaging and motivating/exciting students about attending school and studying. "I think that 'success' at school means that students in the school think that the school is suited to them. Stimulating students to make them study and get excited about school."

And it's an intergenerational school; teachers who are younger and older can make different key contributions. "In a 'successful school' there are both young and old teachers. It is important that they not all be old with all their experiences. The presence of young teachers is important because in 2010, they can bring new ideas and avoid staying stuck in old study methods."

The need for enthusiasm, passion, and vibrancy to motivate students to study ties to the issue of a lack of motivation and a number of related problems, such as dropping out.

The answers given by foreign students generally related to many different aspects of school success. One of the most fundamental aspects, in addition to motivation, is in relations, regularly put in the forefront. Many of the answers given in Emilia-Romagna can be summed up by the expression "feeling comfortable." In the words of one Chilean girl: "... For me success at school means having classmates who... become your friends. That make you feel like a classmate and not 'just the foreigner,'... who know who you are and help, and you can ask for help without worrying. Success with the teachers, I think that it's about being treated like the others and that they don't think that because you don't speak well yet that you're slow."

These are the words of a student from Hong Kong who gave a negative end-of-year evaluation: "It means having a good experience at school, having the others see them as one of them. They have friends at school. They get pretty good grades (like 7s) and study and work hard and have fun at school."

Being part of and feeling part of the class group, and especially in the school despite the language difficulties, was considered a sign of success by the large majority of program participants. "Feeling comfortable" implicitly includes achieving learning objectives and developing highly complex, cross-disciplinary skills in a quite limited amount of time. In other words, foreign students want to be able to take part in and follow the teaching with a situation more or less equal to their classmates. As S. (from Guatemala) says, success is "seeing the world of school in a different way, being able to fit into another school environment even if there are language difficulties..."

The questionnaires also showed that it is important to be comfortable "quickly," "after not too long." A girl from Guatemala said that she had come to Italy with the idea of taking a year of

vacation after high school in her country. Her experience at school was difficult: “Of all my friends here, only a very few like school and felt comfortable right away. I think it means that they were comfortable after not very long and made friends quickly and adjusted well.”

We can see in this statement the need to quickly overcome the disorientation, anxiety, and stress of the first period to be able to fully and happily take part in school life. Fitting in well with the class group is part of the success as much as it is something achieved. It is not always easy to get to know peers, but it is key to overcome early difficulties in communication and, of course, studying. The interest of classmates is a very strong motivating factor for making language progress and overcoming the difficulties of individual subjects. It is true that “successful” experiences in Emilia-Romagna and in Puglia involved a rapid, positive early inclusion period (by October). Even those who had problems with school at the beginning, because, for example, they chose the wrong type of high school and so changed schools, could still go forward successfully if they found a quick solution to the problem. The speed of response from teachers and volunteers likely make the foreign students feel listened to and their needs responded to, keeping their motivation for the program high and encouraging trust in the Association.

Some of the most descriptive, developed definitions of school success explicitly reference learning and studying. These are the words of a participant whose experience at school was fully satisfying and who got excellent results, including their evaluation: F. (Sweden): “[school success] means that the foreign student was able to integrate in the class, follow the subjects, and learn the language well. Sometimes it is hard to stay on top of school like in your native country and so you can say that what matters is what you learned and the effort you made to do so.”

Many respondents focused on knowledge of Italian as a sign of success, and others talked about personal growth and maturing. Others equate success with intercultural learning and the ability to make the change in perspective that the experience demands, opening up to a different world: M. (from Japan): “For me it would be having made as many friends as you had in your country, being able to understand yourself (and your own country) from the perspectives of other people who have a different culture, and especially having fun and being liked.”

Very few definitions of school success mentioned evaluations, saying that it is important to not fail the grade, or to have not many bad grades; only one student talked about good grades. In the focus groups as well, the participants said that they don’t care about evaluations. According to the answers of the second questionnaire given, their grades got worse in the Italian school, but personal satisfaction stayed high, compensating for seemingly less than excellent results. Students felt that they overcame extra difficulties compared to their peers. Not only did they integrate into the school, they overcame a very difficult challenge of becoming autonomous and living a year abroad.

M. (from Dominican Republic): “Because it was really hard, but I’m glad because I did it. It went well.”

N. (Thailand): “I am very happy with the experience, because all the good things and all the bad things are experiences that made me grow. And the friends and the teachers are really nice. They made me feel happy and helped me.”

Some were surprised by the results they achieved, expecting worse grades and admitting that they hadn’t worked very hard: A.

(Germany): “I didn’t study, and I got good grades ... A miracle... Because I had better grades than the Italians in my class...”

We can see that evaluations, though lower than when they came in, seemed to keep into consideration the difficulties faced, and the motivation and commitment shown by many students.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INCOMING AND OUTGOING EVALUATIONS

In Emilia-Romagna, of the 21 questionnaires returned out of the expected 32, in 50% of the cases the outgoing evaluations were consistent with the incoming ones. Four students even maintained a “very positive” evaluation. In 5 cases, a very positive evaluation was given because of the lack of incoming documentation; in 2 cases, positive evaluations were given with some reservation, and only 3 had a markedly negative evaluation.

Four students were among the particularly successful cases. There were two central American students, one Japanese student, and one Swedish student. Regardless of their origins or different levels of ease with learning Italian, the four students seemed to share strong motivation to be immersed and they found highly-inclusive environments and schools that were very open to tailoring the programs to give value to the students’ skills. M. gave Japanese lessons at school. M. and S. took part in Spanish classes and helped often in the classes, telling their classmates about the history and culture of their home countries. S.’s Italian classmates translated the explanations in English for him, at least at first. The Righi di Bagno di Romagna high school encourages peer education with highly positive results, involving returnees² in welcoming and supporting new students. Though these students were especially interested and motivated, the experiences had in common the great care taken in the initial reception phase and valuing the students as well as their high consistency in managing the project and tailoring the educational plan. There also seems to have been an excellent relationship with the local Intercultura centers in these cases.

On the other hand, it is interesting to look at the reasons given to explain the negative outgoing evaluations, in at least two of the three cases. The two students were said to have been little involved and motivated in their individual study. One of the two had already completed her studies in her country of origin. In one case, the student had difficulty fitting into the class group. In both cases, it should be noted that not all the teachers or even the entire class council took the steps needed to welcome the students and create an educational plan for them. Though in the first two cases, the negative assessment was related to the low level or inconsistent participation of the students in the learning process, in the third case, “the language difficulties made it difficult to achieve highly positive results,” and so the positive incoming evaluation was not confirmed.

According to the information given by the teachers, the results were satisfactory when not decidedly good. When the evaluation was negative compared to the incoming one, mention is made of difficulty fitting into the class and low or inconsistent personal motivation to participate. Of course, the obstacle of communicating in Italian is a point of disadvantage that may affect progress to some extent and, as a result, the final evaluation. The negative evaluations, however, tend to be occasional and teachers report having given evaluations considering the objectives set and the progress made.

TABLE 1 SELF-ASSESSMENT OF SCHOOL PERFORMANCE IN HOME COUNTRY		
<i>At school in your country you are:</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Very good	23	37.1
Good	30	48.4
Average	8	12.9
Not always good	1	1.6
Total	62	100.0

TABLE 2 LEVEL OF SCHOOL SATISFACTION IN HOME COUNTRY		
<i>At home you like going to school:</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Very much	16	25.8
A lot	33	53.2
Somewhat	11	17.7
Little	2	3.2
Total	62	100.0

TABLE 3 FAVORITE SUBJECTS IN HOME COUNTRY³ (2 ANSWER OPTIONS)		
<i>Favorite subjects in home country</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
No answer	6	4.8
National language	18	14.5
Mathematics	19	15.3
Physics	4	3.2
Foreign language	10	8.1
History	25	20.2
Geography	15	12.1
Law	6	4.8
Music	1	0.8
Art	3	2.4
Physical education	8	6.5
Philosophy	1	0.8
Other	2	1.6
None	6	4.8
Total	124	100.0

TABLE 4 LEVEL OF SCHOOL SATISFACTION IN ITALY		
<i>Do you like going to school?</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Very much	5	8.1
A lot	19	30.6
Somewhat	20	32.3
Little	11	17.7
Not at all	7	11.3
Total	62	100.0

³ The table lists all the items that the responding students marked, though the corresponding numbers of attendance and percentages are very low. There are two reasons for this: a) to inform the reader of the different types of answers provided, and b) because it is impossible to group under a single item ("Other") a quite large number of items, which would together make that item statistically significant.

<i>At school in Italy, you are:</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
No answer	1	1.6
Very good	1	1.6
Good	21	33.9
Average	27	43.5
Not always good	8	12.9
Not at all good	4	6.5
Total	62	100.0

LIFE IN ITALY: IN AND OUT OF SCHOOL

From the perspective of Intercultura foreign students, the Italian experience in school in general brought strongly positive results. 71% say that they were happy to go to school in Italy. The new factor, compared to the same question in the previous section, is that there are now 11.3% unsatisfied students, along with 17.7% of partially unsatisfied students.

Directly asking Intercultura foreign students to evaluate school performance in Italy compared to that of their home school, 79.0% say that they considered the results medium-good, and 14.5% considered them decidedly worse. Only 4.8% considered them better.

This is certainly one of the major themes for consideration that came out of the structured questionnaires given to our Intercultura foreign students. One challenge of the studies was to try to find plausible explanations for this far from simple phenomenon, and especially complex because putting together multiple variables correlated to different school systems, different teaching methods, different cultural orientations, and different life stories.

<i>Why school evaluations in Italy are different than those in your home country</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
No answer	38	31.4
School in Italy is more difficult and stricter	21	17.4
I found the teachers prepared to have a foreign student in class.	5	4.1
I found students in Italy prepared to welcome foreign students.	3	2.5
Foreign If I work hard, I can get positive results in everything.	16	13.2
School in Italy is less strict.	5	4.1
School in Italy is not well-organized.	17	14.0
I found teachers not prepared to have a foreign student in class.	14	11.6
I found students in Italy not prepared to welcome foreign students.	2	1.7
Other	3	2.5
Total	124	100.0

TABLE 7 WHY DO YOU LIKE CERTAIN SUBJECTS IN ITALIAN SCHOOLS? (2 ANSWERS ALLOWED)		
<i>I like certain subjects because:</i>	Number	Percentage
No answer ⁴	24	19.5
They are subjects that I have already studied	8	6.5
I understand the explanations	18	14.6
I enjoy them	40	32.5
The textbooks are easy to understand	2	1.6
The teachers know how to help me	9	7.3
I like the teachers	16	13.0
Other	7	5.7
Total	124	100.0

TABLE 8 WHY DO YOU NOT LIKE CERTAIN SUBJECTS IN ITALIAN SCHOOLS (2 ANSWERS ALLOWED)		
<i>I do not like certain subjects because:</i>	Number	Percentage
No answer ⁵	33	26.6
They are subjects that I have already studied	7	5.6
I don't understand the explanations	22	17.7
I don't enjoy them	27	21.8
The textbooks are complicated	4	3.2
The teachers don't know how to help me	13	10.5
I don't like the teachers	10	8.1
Other	8	6.5
Total	124	100.0

TABLE 9 THE MOST NEGATIVE ASPECT OF ITALIAN SCHOOLS⁶		
<i>The most negative aspect of the Italian school</i>	Number	Percentage
No answer	3	4.8
Not knowing Italian	2	3.2
My class is not close	1	1.6
The teachers	2	3.2
The teachers don't demand respect	3	4.8
The lack of extracurricular activities like clubs/societies	8	12.9
The school is dirty	4	6.5
Teachers don't understand that we can't do the same things	2	3.2

4 The sum of those who gave no answer (very few) and those who chose to give only one answer instead of the two allowed (the majority).

5 The sum of those who gave no answer (very few) and those who chose to give only one answer instead of the two allowed (the majority).

6 Intercultura students' favorite subjects of – according to the students – the reasons are similar to those for the favorite subjects, having to do with not understanding the explanations (18.4%) and just not enjoying them (19.9%). Note the 33.6% of answers not given.

Classmates talk to each other and exclude me	1	1.6
There is no park.	1	1.6
Feeling stupid in class because I can't follow the lesson	2	3.2
Wasting a lot of time studying subjects I have never studied	1	1.6
A lot of things	1	1.6
Few written exercises	1	1.6
Teachers talk for hours and no one pays attention	1	1.6
Students study too much	1	1.6
Too much theory, not enough practice	11	17.7
Students talk too much to each other during classes	1	1.6
Staff organization	5	8.1
Some teachers are not happy to have an Intercultura foreign student	1	1.6
I don't have books, and I can't study	1	1.6
Students and teachers aren't very prepared to host Intercultura foreign students	1	1.6
Hard to get to school	1	1.6
Going to school all the time, even on Saturdays	3	4.8
Some teachers are not at all interested in us	1	1.6
Many study by memorization	1	1.6
None	2	3.2
Total	62	100.0

TABLE 10 HOW ITALIAN SCHOOLS PERCEIVE CULTURAL DIVERSITY

<i>Cultural diversity in Italian schools</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
No answer	1	1.6
It is valued	39	62.9
It is much valued	16	25.8
It is not valued	6	9.7

For the Intercultura students' least favorite subjects, as for their favorite subjects, they are based in part on the teachers' ability to plan teaching taking into consideration the Intercultura foreign student, as 17.7% say that they can't understand the explanations, and 10.5% say that the teachers are not able to help them; others because they just don't like the subjects (21.8%). This last point matches what was said before (about enjoyment of math studied in their home country), though in this dislike we see a different appreciation of the teaching methods used in Italian schools compared to those abroad. Note that 26.6% gave no answer.

To complete the analysis of the aspects specifically about school, we should note that 62.9% of Intercultura foreign students perceive that cultural diversities in Italy schools are appreciated on the whole, as opposed to 9.7% who consider this aspect problematic.

MIRROR GROUP AND SCHOOL SUCCESS

The definition of school success given by the mirror group are quite broad, referencing many factors, especially evaluations and careers, almost completely absent in the questionnaires of the foreign students. It suggests that the foreign students are more in the present, completely focused on their exceptional experience, whereas their Italian peers see a continuity between their present and their future. Apart from that, the two group's definitions have many points in common. The mirror questionnaires also highlighted the relational aspect as key: "School success means being comfortable with your classmates and teachers. "For me, school success means working your hardest to get good grades and relate to your classmates and connect with everyone."

Here too, the priority seems to be on "feeling comfortable" with classmates and teachers, feeling fully part of the class life. Some consider it important that this happen regardless of positive or negative results, i.e. not in a context of competition or group exclusion. A positive experience in the class and school overall seems to be a common wish or a situation that they are really happy about. Two students noted with satisfaction how important working with their classmates was for learning, which was a common practice in their class. "In my class, we work a lot in groups to do research, give presentations, and so on, part of some of our grades, so we have to create an active working team, and in my school, fortunately, this is possible." – "From my perspective, school success is not just from lectures in class but from classmates too, from discussing and debating issues."

The students of the mirror group also expressed appreciation for teaching methods that foster group dynamics and involve interaction, like the majority of their Intercultura classmates who complain when it is lacking compared to their home country. We also see a parallel desire for schools where learning is separate from performance, linked instead to pleasure and interest in the subject. In this context, we see the need for recognition and appreciation from the teachers, which foreign students also sometimes complain about not receiving. "It's success when you go to school every day with a smile without being afraid of being judged by the teachers on a scale of 1 to 10." – "I think school success means getting appreciation from the teachers, which can be in grades or other things. It's the student's actual interest in certain subjects that inspire them to learn more about them beyond school."

Recognition, interest, the pleasure of exchange are closely connected to the motivation to study, which can be hard to find at times. The figure of the teacher is key here for involving students: "For me, school success is being able to get good grades because of the interest and passion that teachers should be able to cultivate in each of us."

It is noteworthy that the definitions of school success are so similar among the two groups, as are the criticisms, direct or otherwise, of a school-system that is not always pleasant and fun and where there are often inadequate methods and situations that are actually engaging and motivating. Some students, therefore, put off working hard until university, when the subjects will be more in keeping with their interests, and they settle with getting through a not-very-stimulating day-to-day school life.

Unlike for Intercultura students, the theme of grades recurred often in the definitions of school success. The students in the mirror group look to the future and the need to get the credits needed to get admitted to university faculties, which makes getting good grades more important. A high grade point average is not, however, considered an end unto itself but as a tangible sign of hard work and progress made, to be looked at in terms of personal growth, not just "knowing more." "For me, school success is just a necessary aspect of a student's life. It's true that it's also satisfying but often we realize that it seems useless for any other purpose. It is a tool for being able to choose a future profession, if later you decide to go to certain type

of faculty with limited enrollment, but I think that it's absolutely not a fair way to evaluate a student's knowledge or aptitudes in particular fields."

At any rate, there are generally many definitions of school success in which we see the image of the school as a place to shape a person as a whole, especially in terms of relationships and culture. The humanistic heritage of the Italian school comes through very clearly in the words of students in the mirror group: "Some people only care about grades, others come just because they have to, some to make their parents happy, but ultimately school is meant to shape us as people in all aspects." – "Getting good grades, but only because this means you studied and so know all the topics covered, which makes you grow and mature."

To sum up, the definitions of success given by students both in the Intercultura group and in the mirror group reflect a shared desire to have a happy experience at school, as a place to develop the whole person within class groups in which there are satisfying relationships. They all want to have a positive relationship and mutual recognition with teachers who can stimulate them and motivate them to learn with engaging lessons and activities that make space for critical independent thinking and an exchange of opinions with their classmates.

SCHOOL SUCCESS AS SEEN BY TEACHERS

Though the definitions given by teachers had many facets, school success essentially coincides with the success of an educational project pertaining to the person as a whole. The development of the students' potential and their individual growth are considered priorities. Study is a fundamental part of maturing, developing independent thinking, and gaining tools to bring to the many facets of life. "Of course, school success is not simply about good final grades. It is much more. I think a student achieves school success when they take on the content of the subjects to let them develop a personal broad perspective on the world and gain the skills to handle life and achieve positive results. "This is an ambitious goal that we teachers should be the first to set ourselves even though it's not easy."

Many definitions situate the individual in the relational realm. School takes on the ethical and civil education of young people in these cases, with the concept of school success encompassing a realm far beyond the classrooms, coming into society. Some stress the importance of educating "citizens equipped to manage their life plan." Only one teacher makes explicit reference to belonging to a national community, saying specifically that the school is one of the main means of transmitting the culture and values of a historically and geographically defined community. "From my point of view, school success is personal growth in terms of knowing oneself, one's potential and limitations, and relating with others, with their knowledge, respect, and sharing experiences. In this, simple academic knowledge helps to develop these skills and abilities that foster a positive development of the self and a knowledge/sharing of the founding values of our being Italian."

School success should generally coincide with the young person's well-being. Significantly, many of the definitions referred to the ability to relate to others with mutual respect, whether classmates, teachers, or the wider community. "Knowing facts and concepts help them appreciate life and improve themselves and helping others to improve so that happiness is created based on tolerance and interaction with others." – "A combination of acquiring skills in and across disciplines of at least a decent level, constructive participation in the educational dialogue in class, a relationship of trust and cordiality with the teacher group, a positive relationship in terms of reminds as well as positive leadership in the class group."

Like Intercultura students and many Italian students, the teachers also considered grading simply a tool for surveying progress made and considered it of less importance than attention

to content and planning. According to most of those interviewed, grades are a factor to consider in school success but not the priority. The progress made and the development of a conscious attitude about it are much more important. “Growth and personal maturity; acquiring skills and abilities; improving interpersonal relationships, evaluating each aspect depends on the starting point of each student.”

– “Being aware of results in relation to the starting level and the effort made.”

From what emerged from the definitions of school success given by teachers involved in this study, attention to well-being and positive growth in the community reflects the needs of the young students. The teachers seem to respond implicitly to the drop in motivation and effort caused by the low enjoyment of Italian school by a high percentage of those surveyed. However, there is a discrepancy shown between the teaching staff’s intentions and perspectives and the reality perceived by the Intercultura students in Italy and their classmates. The pedagogical project reflected in these definitions seems to take little into account, at least verbally, the dimension of the motivation and engagement of students in building their own learning path. The lessons are, in reality, not always exciting, and the teaching methods generally used do not seem to fit the objectives expressed by many of the interviewed teachers.

Though the atmosphere in the class group was considered important, it was also true that the teaching methods used (frontal lectures, oral quizzes, and individual written tests) rarely foster group formation.

Unfortunately, there also appeared to be little use of stimulating teaching methods, such as problem solving, group activities, field research, and drawing on individual knowledge, the ability to infer and discover new content.

In Italian schools, the prevalence of lectures directed more at the individuals than the group and the rigidity of some teaching staff and class councils in managing the content planning seems, at least partly, to get in the way of in the project of creating responsible, active citizens and often manages to demotivate them, as the reports of the mirror group show.

SCHOOL SUCCESS AS SEEN BY FAMILIES

In this research, the role of the host families emerged as key to facilitating the process of Intercultura students integrating in school life, by supporting them in the challenging moments they faced. The family serves as mediators to help foreign students understand the “rules of the game” and encourage and motivate them to reach the goals they’ve set. Without the essential contribution of the families, many foreign students would not find the way to overcome the inevitable frustrations and difficulties and have a positive school experience.

How do host families define school success? Families emphasize the multiple factors that contribute to achieving it. They also stress the central importance of relationships and equate school success with being well-integrated in the class group. “I would define school success as the ability to participate in and interact in class activities, despite the limits to their abilities, such as being able to socialize and be involved in their classmates’ projects in school and outside of school.”

Implicit in this definition is that foreign students can and should feel a sense of belonging from the start, within the limitations of their abilities, which will grow throughout their stay.

The same family continues, “Of course, young people must be particularly motivated to learn and keep on improving their Italian, and the teachers must be able to create a special appropriate program that is continuous throughout the year”.

But the motivation of Intercultura students must always stay high, and likewise the care

must continue to be taken by tutors and the class council in defining objectives, which rarely coincide with those of their classmates, and the teaching plan. Just as Intercultura students' knowledge of Italian will improve (and more quickly the more motivated they are to take part in life in school and outside of school), the class life will also quickly find a new balance that will be more satisfying and less laborious for everyone. Families generally reported good integration in school life, describing as fairly positive, if not excellent, their relationships with their classmates and with the teaching staff as well, with some exceptions.

On the subject of evaluation, the families agree with the views of the students and teachers. They see grades as a sign of recognition for efforts made, but not as the key factor of school success. It is generally accepted that grades are lower than at their home school, with the exception of individual students who are particularly "ambitious," competitive, or have a deep sense of duty. Generally, the foreign students recognize the validity of the evaluation and accept it, while well-aware of the higher degree of difficulty they face. Many see Italian schools as stricter and more demanding than their home schools, which makes the results significant and satisfying even if lower than in their home country. In many cases, the families note an increase in self-esteem in the students, as they become aware of the difficulties they have faced and overcome. But as school success is a continuous process, it is key to know how to value differences. The families are quite critical about this aspect. A host family of a U.S. girl writes: "The teachers have told me that L. had a positive experience, achieved good results, participated in the school trip with interest and so from an educational perspective, I would say that 'school success' was achieved. But, for me, 'school success' means giving and receiving more, learning in school not just theoretical notions but so many other things about the host country and leaving a mark of your home country's culture. Unfortunately, I think that this aspect was neglected."

In the context of the general satisfaction expressed, according to the families, the schools did not always prove able to give value to the specific qualities of the students, not going beyond planning a process within the ministerial program. There seems to be a lack of willingness or ability to integrate the teaching approach with intercultural education practices.

SCHOOL AND INTERCULTURA FOREIGN STUDENTS: POSITIVE ASPECTS AND PROBLEM AREAS

The foreign students report a point that is quite reassuring for Italian schools, that cultural diversity is experienced positively; Intercultura students do not complain of any kind of exclusion. There are cultural stereotypes and prejudices in the early incoming phase. The students are surprised by many of the questions that show a degree of ignorance about their home country. But through contact and interaction with students who show high capacity for openness and flexibility, the stereotypes were broken down, more "spontaneously" rather than through a planned intention of the class council through specific actions. However, the mentality of Italian students seems to be quite ethnocentric. It does not help change the study programs that only marginally deal with geographic areas outside of Europe. In this situation, a student of a different nationality coming into the class is certainly a factor of change to encourage a multi-perspective view on life.

Preparing the class adequately before their arrival could help deepen important knowledge, including in terms of teaching and dramatically expand the cultural horizons of the Italian students.

In terms of teaching method, foreign students criticize Italian schools for their poor ability to motivate students. The teaching practices of frontal lectures, few workshop activities, and

rote memorization were given as negative examples. Foreign students also complained of the teachers' lack of ability in spoken English, which was an obstacle for many in the early stage due to the general difficulty of understanding the lessons, entirely oral and not supported by writing, such as key words on the blackboard or prepared summaries of the lesson outline or the textbook. But many students do appreciate that they learn to speak in front of others through the oral quizzes, which has a markedly positive effect on learning Italian. A minority of students, those from Eastern Europe and Asia, considered the relationship with the professors very positive, experienced as being on an equal level, whereas for students from many other countries, it was experienced negatively because the teachers are seen as detached.

For their part, the teachers emphasize the advantages of having Intercultura foreign students in their class. These students' courageous choice to face many obstacles and open to new worlds is a major spur and encouragement for their Italian peers to believe in their power and potential. It also tangibly helps open them to the world and new realms. The foreign students are stimulating for the teachers as well. The teachers are brought to join together and work in groups to achieve the set educational objectives. Facing different needs and objectives, they are led to hone their preparation work and focus on more detailed planning.

EVALUATION OF THE EXPERIENCE

On the whole, the experience for Intercultura foreign students is very positive (83.8%). Only 5 students considered it a negative experience.

<i>The experience is:</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Very positive	26	41.9
Positive	26	41.9
Normal	5	8.1
Negative	4	6.5
Very negative	1	1.6
Total	62	100.0

KEY TO SUCCESS: BEST PRACTICES AT SCHOOL

We have observed that the experiences evaluated positively often have in common a good initial phase of integration in which certain positive approaches are adopted, aimed at reducing the starting disadvantage compared to many other foreign students and laying the foundations for a successful development of relationships and learning. Of course, this requires first that each Intercultura local center plans the integration of a non-Italian Intercultura student in an appropriate school, based on a school records that adequately show curriculum and areas of interest. For the teachers, it would be highly useful to be familiar with the materials produced by Intercultura, "Educare al mondo," as well as to know in detail about the home school system, about the teaching methods and anything that could help quickly devise an educational plan. Once this has been done by the Intercultura local center, teachers and students come into play. Key elements of this stage of integration include:

- having a welcome protocol for the new student's arrival, though in many schools there is

an established integration practice even if there is no protocol;

- choosing a tutor who can communicate in a foreign language (generally English), preferably well-informed about the Intercultura program and in contact with the local center. The tutor seems to be one of the factors most appreciated by the foreign students. They are a link and mediator between the foreign student and the school. They generally help set the educational plan, select the subjects to take in agreement with the class council. They listen to the specific needs of individual students and help them find personalized ways of integrating into the school world. They also serve as a counselor available to listen to the foreign students and their problems and support them on their school trajectory;
- choosing a direction of study consistent with their past and future school curriculum, considering the student's area of interest;
- choosing a suitable class for its ability to welcome and include students, with good internal cooperation dynamics. This same welcoming capacity should be in the teaching staff as well, or at least the majority of them. The foreign student may be placed in the tutor's class in order for them to get the best support;
- preparing the class for the arrival of a new classmate (such as through prompt information from the local center);
- preparing the class council and teachers to welcome the new student;
- formalizing a personalized educational plan that may involve reduced hours, exclude certain subjects (e.g. Latin), and increase others (e.g. English or other foreign languages);
- an open study plan with placement in more than one class to follow personalized courses and expand the relationship network; for some young people, moving between classes may be less welcome but this practice is generally found to be positive;
- implementing all possible strategies to help the students expand their relationship network (e.g. involvement in extra-curricular afternoon activities with other class groups);
- classmates and peer education strategies: giving responsibility to classmates for the inclusion of the new student and the need for their support (e.g. extra explanations, group assignments, sharing notes, etc.); involving returnees, if there are any in the school, to make a presentation for the classmates and class groups; involvement in extra-curricular afternoon activities; involvement in the lessons of the foreign languages they know (e.g. English/Spanish); classes in their native language (e.g. starting a Japanese language class); presentation of topics agreed upon with the teachers in individual sections;
- generally, it is important to value the skills of foreign students to reduce the very high sense of frustration during the initial stage;
- support for the learning Italian through special teaching, individual study for specific subjects, regular correction of written assignments, etc.;
- showing interest in the individual and home cultural context by asking questions, asking for information and working in class to break down stereotypes about their home country in order to promote exchange and mutual knowledge.
- In terms of educational planning, we suggest schools:
 - set minimum objectives for the individual disciplines in agreement with the Intercultura student;
 - simplify concepts to allow a better understanding of Italian and introduce aspects of national tradition and culture
 1. express themselves in spoken and written Italian;
 2. understand the Italian school system;
 3. understand the main aspects of Italian culture;

4. socialize and communicate with classmates and teachers;
 5. tell about the customs and values of their country;
 6. each teacher involved has developed a plan of the goals to be reached in their subject and the knowledge and skills to be developed.
- Evaluating needs
 1. planning general aims and objectives;
 2. planning specific objectives (for each subject);
 3. finding and implementing suitable tools and methods;
 4. concise planning of content (for each subject);
 5. monitoring, checking, and evaluating (start, in progress, end).

For evaluation, we suggest:

- defining evaluation methods and time frames in agreement with the Intercultura student; methods and content subject for testing may differ from those of the class group;
- communicating the evaluation criteria to Intercultura students;
- making use of a mediating language to take the written tests, resulting in a dual evaluation (e.g., English + history);
- postponing oral tests until their communication skills are sufficient.

For teaching, it is important to:

- give value to the knowledge and skills of Intercultura foreign students by involving them in lessons on topics they know or can study through research;
- select study materials for individual topics based on how clear explanations are; possibly using middle school textbooks and supplementing them with additional information if they are insufficient;
- write on the blackboard the outline of the explanation and key words; in general, make use of all possible strategies to make the explanations easier to understand;
- verify understanding of explanations and give additional explanation if necessary; give attention to the learning process;
- boost their desire to learn by arousing interest; being able to motivate all students, not just Intercultura foreign students.

SUGGESTIONS FOR INTERCULTURA

The school success of foreign students depends on many factors. The Association and its volunteers have achieved significant encouraging results, as shown by the high degree of satisfaction with the the program and appreciation for Intercultura students in the classroom by the teachers involved in the study, who could have been “biased” but were still very satisfied. It is always important to take great care in the choice of school and orientation to set the best path for each student. The school should not be chosen based on the content of the Educational Plan but rather on knowledge of the local situation, considering the school’s ability to integrate students and especially that of the individual class and its class council. It is important to ensure there be a tutor and that their integration is planned.

The “Educare al Mondo” manual was considered useful by teachers, though many complained that they had never received it or considered it inadequately “focused” on individualized

planning. It is important for the Association to keep in mind that much of the work teachers do is voluntary, and it would be best for everyone to have practical material that is easy and quick to apply to integrating individual students. In this phase, it is key that there be a school contact person who can help formulate the plan and give information about the student's home setting.

It was shown that the success of the Intercultura student's experience at school is closely linked to the initial period of time spent at the school, the first month, generally speaking. For this reason, great care should be taken to ensure that students are very involved in class life and made responsible for setting learning objectives. This is particularly true for students who have completed their studies at home, who are more likely to suffer a lack of motivation at school. For these students, personalized study plans should be made with agreed-upon goals, probably connected to their future university studies. Motivation for learning and engagement, without which the overall experience could be compromised, should be strongly supported in all cases.

Preparation for the foreign host student's arrival is important for teachers, the class council, and students. If time is short, it is better to postpone their arrival in class by a few days to avoid bringing the foreign student into an unprepared school.

The welcome/reception phase was key to very positive school experiences both for creating a climate of trust and mutual attention that the students often form spontaneously, and for launching a strong educational partnership. The hosting plan by the class council and classmates also translates to the foreign students as an expectation of their commitment and motivates them.

The peer education practices that have been shown to be effective should be studied and implemented by the schools.

for example, at the Liceo Righi in Bagno di Romagna, both during the incoming phase and during the first months when their knowledge of Italian is very limited. This could be of great help to the teachers as well, once the project has been started, they would be faced with fewer problems.

Much effort should be made to organize intensive Italian courses and make them accessible to help students overcome the language barrier as quickly as possible. If more support for learning Italian is not possible, it will be the rapid involvement in the class activities that will foster even faster learning than has been achieved so far.

CONCLUSIONS

In order to “scientifically gauge” the school success of the experience of non-Italian students who came to our high schools during the previous school year, we would need to refer to specific indicators, which would be difficult and complex to determine in this case. School success is a multidimensional concept. Even the Ministry of Education, while avoiding giving it a possible conceptual framing, has long focused on improving and adding value to the educational system, especially since the importance of competencies became part of the concept of school success since the launch of the Lisbon strategy in 2000.

Within a policy aimed at creating the conditions for lifelong learning, one of the strategic objectives is to raise learning levels, ensure equal access and that key competencies are gained through effective actions for boosting basic and cross-disciplinary skills, including actions in the school setting, such as increasing the attractiveness of the school system and combating dropping out. A key goal of the personal development of all the young men and women is raising the level of education as a value for the country’s economic and social growth.

Many ministerial documents repeat that school should contribute to the wellbeing of the society in which we live, educating active, responsible citizens who can exercise their rights and contribute in a conscious way to solving problems. School time is a fundamental variable, though we must keep in mind individual motivation, the social context in which learning takes place, the technical and teaching tools available, and the continuing education of teachers. Recovering basic and cross-disciplinary competencies for the students is also key for countering school drop-out rates, an issue on which many actions have focused with specific financing. Especially for the southern regions, the PONs 2007–2013 suffice as evidence.

First of all, a school for educational success does not mean a school that passes students easily, which leads to an impoverishment of educational content and methods. A school of success for everyone seeks to create the classroom conditions that enable every student to succeed in the learning processes. However, what the many OECD-PISA or INVALSI surveys do not measure is the feeling of boredom and lack of interest in certain subjects, which are the same ones being analyzed. The approach to that these teachings are today discourages most young people. The lessons are considered difficult and/or boring, including by Intercultura students, who expressed their opinions clearly both in the questionnaires and focus groups. Example suffices in the low enjoyment of mathematics, whereas in their own countries it is often studied with pleasure and excellent results.

Some great educators, such as J. Dewey, A. Patri, M. Montessori, C. Freinet, and M. Wagenschein, applied their ideas in schools, creating the conditions for all students, including those with disabilities, to learn successfully in schools. Their teachings, far from outdated, can be summarized as such: when students are involved in targeted activities, they think, ask questions, identify problems, and bring up other problems, which the teacher had not considered. That is a school for success. This school differs greatly from traditional schools, which have a rigid curriculum and the teacher in the position of the only source of conveying knowledge. In a school for success, the students are the key players in building their own knowledge. A school for success is based to a great extent on Socrates’ ideas. The teacher asks questions and leaves it up to the students to develop the right investigations to answer the questions.

The ancient teaching method that Socrates invented places students in the positive condition of being curious, reflecting on their own thinking and constantly asking questions to which they seek the answers and then comparing their thinking to that of other students and the teacher.

In addition, self-esteem, family relations, and social relations decisively influence school

success. Specifically, extensive international literature has shown the close relationship between certain “temperamental characteristics” – those termed “task-orientation” – and school success. These are characteristics such as perseverance, distractibility, and activity level. A high level of activity or a lack of perseverance in completing a task compromise the ability to pay attention and focus and, therefore, negatively affect performance and goal achievement.

But the factor that can predict the school success more than any other is the level of self-esteem that the student has about their “school” ability, which seems to strongly influence grades in all subjects. Those with a mainly positive self-esteem are seen as optimistic, confident in their abilities, and set ambitious goals and face negative experiences with equanimity. Those with low self-esteem tend rather to be pessimistic and become depressed, and their potential is underutilized. But there is more to it than that. Many studies have shown that each of us has an innate tendency to self-enhancement. Through this mechanism, individuals tend to receive positive responses from the environment with respect to their self and avoid negative ones, overestimate their own success and forget and devalue their failures. These tendencies towards self-enhancement seem to have a strong adaptive value as they help people live more happily and easily.

The factors on which student can rely to achieve confidence are of high important and may be external or internal factors (feeling competent in a particular activity or interpersonal skills) or external factors (family, teachers, and classmates). Self-evaluation is strongly influenced by the judgment expressed by others, so much so that it is called “one’s image in the mirror.” This makes it essential that parents or educators succeed in giving the young person a positive idea of their abilities and show deep confidence in their potential.

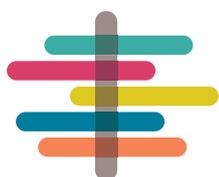
Let’s apply this to “our” Intercultura foreign students who have had a school (and life) experience outside of their psychological-affective-relational context and daily social-cultural settings and consider some factors that came out of our study.

It is clear that many Intercultura foreign students were placed in schools that are unlikely to include intercultural education among the educational planks of their Educational Plans, and that they often received students without preparing the class group in advance. The teachers in the schools recognize this weakness, as well as their stated lack of knowledge of the foreign language, and that on a few occasions they produced specific educational planning based on the new Intercultura foreign student.

For many students, the regular use of lectures rather than seminars as they are already used to in their home countries (with the exception of students from Asia), creates difficulties and a level of school performance often lower than that in their home country. Whether we consider school success in terms of academic performance or student well-being, the overall results of our study seem to be good, but they present the need to foster good practices to further strengthen the positive aspects. The study also highlighted important strengths of the school experience had by Intercultura foreign students, primarily in the personal realm. Intercultura foreign students recognize such high value to their growth that the vast majority of them would do it again. According to the teachers interviewed, their presence often brought the class together, improved knowledge of a foreign language by “forcing” the classmates to speak in a language other than Italian; most importantly, it was almost unanimously recognized as a growth opportunity for the school, an invitation to intercultural dialogue in our global society, a questioning of one’s perspectives, and of the teaching-learning dynamics.

The school staff involved in the study asked for better coordination with local Intercultura representatives but recognized the Association as an important value to pursue this coordination. There are, of course, still many things to put into action to spur these schools towards greater awareness of the importance of the cross-disciplinary and essential

importance of intercultural education in their educational plans. It is a great encouragement to see extremely positive evaluations of Intercultura foreign students and the Italian students who welcomed the new, different classmates and the Italian host families' great openness and responsiveness, making Italy a second home for these young non-Italians where many dream (or have planned) to return as soon as possible.



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