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Sommario

LINGUISTICA

- Effect of Different Face Masks on Speech and Singing:
Self-Perception and Acoustic Analysis**
Claire Pillot-Loiseau, Bernard Harmegnies 9
- «Siftlikom msg f tel opostitha hna rj3 l history»:
mescolanze di codice nella comunicazione mediale in Marocco**
Elena Tamburini, Gabriele Iannàccaro 29
- L1 Interference in Interlanguage Pragmatics
A Study on Requesting in Russian L2 and Italian L2**
Daniele Artoni, Anastasiia Rylova 65
- Between Time and Discourse
A Syntactic Analysis of Italian *poi***
Federica Cognola, Silvio Cruschina 87
- Primary Teacher Trainees' Intercultural Education
The Italian Case**
Elisabetta Pavan 117

LETTERATURA, CULTURA, STORIA

- Nomi, parole e stili in Proust**
Giovanni Bottioli 135
- «Der Blaue Montag». Un quadretto popolare
come possibile fonte di una scena di *Delitto e castigo***
Marco Caratozzolo 161



Reassessing Japanese American Collective Memory Through Gene Oishi's Internment Narratives	187
Nicolangelo Becce	
The Forms and Meanings of (In)Visibility	
Arab-Americans and the State of Terror in Youssef El Guindi's <i>Back of the Throat and Language Rooms</i>	213
Cinzia Schiavini	
Trespassing Boundaries in <i>Wuthering Heights</i>	
Geographical and Environmental Perspectives	229
Nicoletta Brazzelli	
The Revolutionary Intertextuality of <i>Molara</i> by Yael Farber	249
Susanna Zinato	
Furio Jesi teorico della traduzione	269
Ulisse Dogà	
Ernst Jünger's Ethopoietic Authorship	291
Mario Bosincu	
Jenseits des Sichtbaren	
Rilke's <i>Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge</i>	309
Barbara Di Noi	
<i>Snapshots: Fotografische Spuren in Félix Vallottons Roman <i>La vie meurtrière</i></i>	333
Anna Kuwalewski	
«Támbico pilar»: ¿un eco precolombino en Calderón de la Barca?	347
Antonio Sánchez Jiménez	
RECENSIONI	
Carlo Donà	
<i>La fata serpente</i>	357
Massimo Stella	
Miloš Crnjanski	
<i>Romanzo di Londra</i>	363
Enrico Davanzo	

Primary Teacher Trainees' Intercultural Education The Italian Case

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Abstract This study focuses on the importance of strengthening intercultural awareness among future Primary School teachers. Intercultural communicative competence plays a fundamental role in developing an honest and productive dialogue among people, whatever their origin, language or cultural heritage, and prospective teachers will be responsible for training the 'good interculturalists' of tomorrow. A survey was conducted among students attending a degree course for Primary Education Teachers to highlight what knowledge, practices and skills they have acquired regarding intercultural competence and whether they are able to deal with and successfully apply the notions of plurilingual and intercultural competence to their teaching practices.

Keywords Intercultural awareness. Intercultural competence. Foreign language education. Intercultural citizenship. Primary education.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 The Education System: Primary Schools in Italy. – 2.1 Primary School Students. – 2.2 Primary School Teacher's Education. – 3 Research Background. – 3.1 Data and Methods. – 3.2 Participants. – 3.3 Analysis of the Results. – 4 Conclusions and Implications.



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1 Introduction

Over the past three decades, immigration has changed the face of Italian Primary Schools. Initially most foreign pupils were born abroad and had often already started school in their own countries. The landscape was that of an emergency: the system was not ready for this new intake, and teachers were not trained for it. At the end of the last century various training courses were organised for teachers involved in teaching Italian as a second language (to foreigners in Italy), and the first Master's degree in Teaching and Promoting Italian Language and Culture to Foreigners was taught at Ca' Foscari University of Venice in the academic year 1999/2000.

This article introduces the state of the art on primary education in Italy and reports the findings of an online survey, conducted in Italian, completed by 260 students of an Italian degree course in Primary Education. The survey investigated their perceptions of multilingualism, interculturalism and of their own education as future primary teachers. Nowadays, the majority of the so called 'foreign' students have been born in Italy, their families are integrated into Italian society, the landscape is no longer that of an emergency and the presence of students with different cultural heritages might offer an opportunity to train and educate the good interculturalists of tomorrow. However, has the emergency ended? Is the system ready? Are primary teachers being trained for this? These are the questions which led to this investigation.

In the Italian school system, primary education teachers are also responsible for the teaching of one or more foreign languages, and must be qualified at Master's level. The Italian degree course in Primary Teacher Education is a single cycle degree/Combined Bachelor and Master's (5 years) and has a single curriculum, with no division into options, that establishes the professional profile of a pre-school and Primary School teacher.

The increasing presence of students from different cultural heritages, the generic teacher in charge of teaching all disciplines, including foreign languages, the combined Bachelor/Master's degree and, the various Primary School reforms that have been taking place in Italy since the 1990s, should offer a favourable environment for the development of innovative teaching. Furthermore, in the last thirty years, the European Commission and the Council of Europe have published widely on issues relating to multilingualism, plurilingualism, intercultural awareness, intercultural dialogue, and have sponsored many of the conferences, dissemination events and training courses that have been organised throughout the European Union.

The aim of this study is first to ascertain whether prospective Primary School teachers perceive themselves as being ready to take up the challenge and teach in multicultural classes, to develop inter-

cultural awareness and to foster intercultural dialogue, initially in their classes and, subsequently, in their students' lives as 'good interculturalists'. Secondly, to determine whether they feel confident with the main European guidelines on this topic and, lastly, to consider their desiderata in terms of teacher training on these topics. This will open the path for a subsequent study on how an educational approach, designed to develop citizens who will become tomorrow's 'good interculturalist', could be developed.

2 The Education System: Primary School in Italy

Education in Italy is compulsory for ten years between the ages of 6 and 16. This covers the whole of the first cycle of education, which lasts eight years (five years of Primary School and three years of Lower Secondary School), and the first two years of the second cycle.

The education system is organised as follows:

- Pre-Primary School (*scuola dell'infanzia*) for children between 3 and 6 years of age;
- first cycle of education lasting 8 years, made up of: (i) Primary School (*scuola primaria*), lasting for 5 years, for children between 6 and 11 years of age; (ii) Lower Secondary School (*scuola secondaria di I grado*), lasting 3 years, for adolescents between 11 and 14 years of age;
- second cycle of education offering two different pathways: (i) State Upper Secondary School (*scuola secondaria di II grado*), lasting 5 years for students from 14 to 19 years of age. It is offered by lyceums, technical institutes and vocational institutes, organised nationally; (ii) three and four-year vocational training courses (IFP) which are organised by the Regions;
- higher education offered by Universities, Polytechnics, Institutes of Higher Education in Art and Music (*Alta Formazione Artistica e Musicale*, AFAM) and Higher Technical Institutes (*Istituti Tecnici Superiori*, ITS).

Primary School is compulsory and lasts for a total of five years and is provided for pupils aged between 6 and 11. Although they are two completely different levels of education, each with its own specificities, Primary School and Lower Secondary School make up the first cycle of education, which lasts a total of eight years. According to the Ministero dell'istruzione, dell'università e della ricerca (MIUR) and INDIRE - Unità Italiana di Eurydice (2014, 21), the aim of this level in the education system is to provide pupils with basic education and the basic tools of active citizenship, and to help pupils to understand the meaning of their own experiences.

In Primary Schools, children are organised into groups called 'classes'; pupils are enrolled into class according to their age, a class

has a minimum of 15 and a maximum of 26-27 pupils. When a new student enters the system, s/he is enrolled accordingly to his/her age, regardless of their knowledge of the Italian language. Teachers in Primary Schools are generalists; the number of teachers per class may vary according to the different timetable models adopted. The school year starts on the 1st of September and ends on the 31st of August. Teaching activities, including end-of-term assessments, final assessments and examinations, as well as in-service training activities are carried out between the 1st of September and the 30th of June; there are 200 teaching days in a year (MIUR, INDIRE 2014, 21).

At primary level, the curriculum is defined through the *National Guidelines for the Curriculum* edited by MIUR. The purpose of primary education is to enable pupils to acquire the fundamental knowledge and skills to develop basic cultural competence. According to the new guidelines (MIUR 2012), the general aim of school is “the harmonious and comprehensive development of the individual, according to the principles of the Italian Constitution and European cultural tradition, to be achieved through the promotion of knowledge, respect for individual diversity and the active involvement of students and their families” (MIUR, INDIRE 2014, 25). The reference for these new guidelines is the Framework for Key Competences for Lifelong Learning established by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union through the Recommendations of 18 December 2006. The *National Guidelines for the Curriculum* (MIUR 2012) safeguard freedom in teaching and suggest some basic methodological approaches, such as, taking advantage of pupils' experiences and knowledge, promoting exploration and discovery activities, encouraging cooperative learning, developing awareness of one's own learning method, carrying out in-lab learning etc. (MIUR, INDIRE 2014, 26).

The subjects taught during the 5 years of primary school are: Italian, English, History, Geography, Mathematics, Science, Technology, Music, Art, Sports Science (also called 'body, movement and sport'), Citizenship and Constitution, and Catholic religious education as an optional subject (alternative activities may be offered instead of Catholic religion). At primary level, there are no specific subject timetables; only English and Catholic religious education have a specific timetable: one hour of teaching for English in the first class, two hours in the second class, three hours in the third, fourth and fifth classes, amounting to a minimum compulsory total of 396 hours throughout primary education.

2.1 Primary School Students

For more than two decades, the Italian school system has been facing the challenge of having to assist an increasing number of students from other cultures to integrate into Italian culture in school and in society. When compared to other European countries, this influx of non-Italian students is a fairly recent phenomenon: in the school year 1983/84 there were 6,104 such students (0.06% of the total Italian school population), their numbers rose throughout the 1990s, in concomitance with the accelerating flows of migrants leaving Africa, Eastern Europe and Asia; in the school year 2004/05, there were 371,000 non-native students in Italian schools, 630,000 in 2008/09 and in 2015/16, 814,851, 9.2% of the total school population (MIUR 2017, 8).

The growing number of children born in Italy to immigrant families accounts for the fact that currently primary schools have the highest percentage of non-native students, even though overall Primary numbers are falling. In 1995/96, 47.7% of the non-native students in Italian schools were in this, Primary, sector; by 2006/07, this percentage had already fallen to 38.1% and dropped further to 36.5% in school year 2015/16. However, the percentage of non-native students in Primary schools (10.6%), more than 297,000 children, is still higher than the percentages in Middle and Upper Secondary education (MIUR 2017, 10).

At the regional level the number of non-citizen students is, obviously, higher in areas where migrants are concentrated for reasons of work. Lombardy has the highest number of non-native students (203,979), almost one quarter of the entire 'non-Italian' school population, while the region itself has only 15% of the total national school population. Conversely, the Campania Region has 12% of the total Italian school population but only 2.7% of these students are non-Italians. The other regions with high percentages of immigrants in their school systems are: Emilia Romagna (11.8%), Veneto (11.3%), Lazio (9.5%), Piedmont (9.3%).

In the school year 2014/15, students with non-Italian citizenship, but born in Italy, constituted 55.3% of the total population of students with non-Italian citizenship. In Primary Schools, the percentage of foreign students born in Italy was 84.3% and the total of new entries in to the education system (compared to year 2012/13) was +10.218%.

It should be remembered that students who enter the Italian (or any) education system for the first time have different and more urgent needs than second-generation students (students who were born in Italy) do. Last, but not least, comes knowledge of the Italian language: students are enrolled in a class according to their age and level of study and, if necessary, they receive welcoming, teaching and language support (Santagati, Ongini 2016, 32).

With such a varied reality and students coming from different cultures, the Primary School could offer a perfect laboratory to train the good interculturalists of tomorrow.

2.2 Primary School Teacher's Education

The Italian degree course in Primary Teacher Education is a single cycle degree/Combined Bachelor and Master's (5 years) and has a single curriculum, without division into options, that delineates the professional profile of a Pre-School and Primary School teacher. Every year the Italian Ministry of Education establishes the number of students who should be enrolled in such courses in those Universities where such courses are taught. In the academic year 2018/19, the total number of places offered was 6,789, divided accordingly to regional requests between 33 Universities (for the Veneto region, 200 students at the University of Padua, 100 at the University of Verona).¹

The pre-requisites for enrolment are a state examination secondary school leaving qualification (or a valid foreign qualification); adequate knowledge and competences (literature, socio-historical issues, geography, mathematics, scientific culture, language competences for text comprehension and production, logic and critical thinking). Prior to enrolment candidates must pass an admission test.

The degree course comprises 30 exams and various training activities, subdivided into (i) basic, (ii) characterising, (iii) freely chosen by the students. Attendance is compulsory for some courses/laboratories; direct and indirect in-field training are compulsory components of the course.

English language is a compulsory topic throughout the first four years: in the first year 2 ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System), B1 receptive skills; in the second year 2 ECTS, B1 productive skills; in the third year 2 ECTS, B2 receptive skills; in the fourth year 4 ECTS B2 productive skills. In the fifth year the course unit Didactics of English as a foreign language, 2 ECTS, is held.

The European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe - 2017 Edition*, describes the main policies for teaching and learning languages in the European Union, with a focus on foreign languages. Here, important information on the different European education systems is collected, and the initial and continuing education of foreign language teachers is also

¹ Ministerial Decree of 17th of May 2018 - Places available in the degree course in Primary Teacher Education 2018-2019 (http://1.flcgil.stgy.it/files/pdf/20180525/decreto-ministeriale-398-del-17-maggio-2018-posti-disponibili-scienze-della-formazione-primaria-2018-2019_2.pdf).

addressed. In Italy, the compulsory learning of a foreign language starts at the age of 6 and lasts 13 years, throughout the whole period of compulsory education; furthermore, from the age of 11 a second foreign language is compulsory (European Commission, EACEA, Eurydice 2017, 34).

Following the recent influx of migrants, more European schools and teachers are responding to the challenge of integrating such students, from migrant backgrounds who may not speak the language, into the education system. Consequently, more teachers need to be able to work in multi-cultural and multi-lingual settings. This requires specific skills which, in principle, should be acquired during initial teacher education and then, subsequently, developed further through continuing professional development. However, evidence shows (OECD 2014) that 37.9% of lower secondary teachers expressed a moderate to high need for professional development in this area, whereas only 13.3% had undertaken training activities in this field in the 12 months prior to the survey. Beyond the normal qualifications, in Italy, as well as the basic qualifications, those who intend to teach L2 are recommended to participate in L2 and in other continuing professional development activities (OECD 2014).

3 Research Background

The primary education system, the presence of students without Italian citizenship and teacher training are three elements that come together in the background to this research. The new national curriculum framework for Primary Schools was published in 2012 (MIUR 2012), and it encouraged children, parents and teachers to work together and to learn from each other, supporting the individual attention required so that all children may fulfil their capacity. The chapter dedicated to new citizenship (MIUR 2012, 6) highlights how the school must represent a community where, beyond teaching to learn, the issue is 'teaching to be'.

The aim is to valorise the uniqueness of the cultural identity of every student. The presence of children and older students with diverse cultural roots is a structural phenomenon and can no longer be considered episodic: it must be transformed into an opportunity for all. It is not enough to merely recognise and conserve pre-existing diversity, with their pure and simple autonomy. What must be done is to actively support their interaction and integration through imparting knowledge about the host culture and their culture in a meeting of cultures that does not omit important factors such as religious and cultural beliefs, the role of the family and gender questions. The promotion and development of the individual mutually stimulate and promote both the promotion and development of the other: each learns

how to relate to others. It is not enough to live in a society, the society itself must be continuously updated and recreated (MIUR 2012, 6).

In a context such as that described in the former chapters, where the presence of students without Italian citizenship is a solid reality, where in 2012 a new national curriculum framework for primary education was published, and a relatively new degree course has been established, I have conducted a survey among students attending a degree course for Primary Education Teachers to highlight what knowledge, practices and skills they have acquired regarding intercultural issues, and to assess whether they will be able to deal with the notions of plurilingual and intercultural competence. Furthermore, I tested their knowledge regarding some of the main documents published by the European Commission and the Council of Europe.

As stated above, in the last thirty years the European Commission and the Council of Europe have widely published on issues related to multilingualism, plurilingualism, intercultural awareness, intercultural dialogue. There are plenty of documents, national and European, which aim at the development of intercultural competences and skills; I selected the following eight documents and checked what future primary teachers know about them.

1. *National Guidelines for the Curriculum* (MIUR 2012);
2. *The Key Competences for Lifelong Learning – A European Framework* (European Parliament, Council of Europe 2006);
3. *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (Council of Europe 2001a);
4. *The European Language Portfolio* (Council of Europe 2001b);
5. *Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe: From Linguistic Diversity to Plurilingual Education* (Beacco, Byram 2007);
6. *Plurilingual and Intercultural Education as a Project* (Cavalli et al. 2009);
7. *CARAP/FREPA A Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures* (Candelier 2013);
8. *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue. "Living Together as Equals in Dignity"* (Council of Europe 2008).

I have not considered the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Companion Volume with New Descriptors* since it was published in February 2018.

The final aim of the wider research project is to analyse the challenges of multilingualism in Primary Schools and suggest how an educational approach, designed to develop citizens who will become tomorrow's 'good interculturalist' could be developed.

3.1 Data and Methods

In January-February 2019, prospective Primary Education teachers who were attending the fourth and fifth year of the single cycle Master Course Degree in Primary Teacher Education (5 years) were invited to fill in an online questionnaire. The questionnaire was structured in 47 questions organised in two main sections, each one comprising specific research objectives such as prospective teachers' knowledge and skills. It was written in Italian, to allow the respondents to use their native language. Most of the questions (42) relied on the Likert scale, some questions (5) were open. For the purpose of the data analysis presented in this paper, the questionnaire and the respondents' answers were translated into English.

The data were analysed mainly using a thematic analysis; although several data collection tools have been used in the wider project, such as the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, in this study I have referred only to some of the data collected by means of an enquiry conducted through the online questionnaire. In terms of data processing and interpretation techniques, a content analysis methodology, based on a predominantly qualitative approach, has been developed: data were read and coded in successive stages accordingly to the different sections and to the year of attendance of the students, since the unit courses are held in different years and this may influence the content of the answers.

In this paper I will focus on a selection of questions chosen from the two sections, to highlight prospective teachers' perception about the knowledge, practices and skills they have acquired regarding intercultural competence, and whether they will be able to deal with, and successfully apply, the notions of plurilingual and intercultural competence to their teaching practices.

3.2 Participants

The questionnaire was presented to students attending the five-year degree course in Primary Education, and to students who had recently graduated. 210 students filled in the questionnaire, but only 65 questionnaires have been considered in this study, those returned by students either attending the fifth year or already graduated (respondents: 60 female, 5 male). Even though it is recognisable that this is a rather limited number of responses, it roughly corresponds to one third of the students enrolled in the fifth year. All the students had attended the following course units, in which I deemed/considered that the issues related to intercultural issues, multilingualism and plurilingualism would have been dealt with: Childhood and Adolescent Education and Children's Rights; Intercultural Pedagogy

and School Legislation; Methodologies, Didactics and Technologies for Teaching; Developmental and Educational Psychology; Didactics of Reading and Writing - Didactics of Italian as a Second Language; Inclusive Pedagogy and Teaching for Inclusion; Educational Research, Educational Innovation and Cooperative Practices; Teaching English as a Foreign Language.

3.3 Analysis of the Results

The questionnaire administered to the students was in Italian, to allow them to express themselves more freely in the open questions. For the purpose of this paper it has been translated into English and a sample of answers were analysed, some have been combined to offer a more elaborated reflection.

A question in the first section is about the knowledge of the eight documents formerly listed in the section Research Background. The question was: "I know the following document well". The Likert scale was: strongly disagree, not completely disagree, agree, strongly agree.

The results regarding the *National Guidelines* (MIUR 2012) are good, those regarding the knowledge of framework documents such as *The Key Competences* (European Parliament, Council of Europe 2006) and the *CEFR* (Council of Europe 2001a) are satisfactory. This may be explained by the fact that these documents are widely used to fill in syllabi and descriptors regarding everyday teaching practice. Nonetheless, some results are not reassuring: some of the pillars of intercultural education are mainly unknown to the students. Only one student said they knew the *Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe* (Beacco, Byram 2007), and none knew about *Plurilingual and Intercultural Education as a Project* (Cavalli et al. 2007) and *CARAP/FREPA* (Candelier 2013). The latter opens ways for implementing pluralistic approaches in classrooms to develop the plurilingual and intercultural competences of learners of all subjects. Pluralistic approaches are described in the document as didactic approaches which involve the use of several varieties of languages and cultures during the teaching process. Considering what has been described above, in terms of the Primary Education teacher being a generalist, teaching different subjects, amongst which are English as foreign language and Italian as a second language, and in terms of the presence of children with a non-Italian heritage and, also, in terms of the *National Guidelines* referring to the "respect for individual diversity and the active involvement of students and their families" (MIUR, INDIRE 2014, 25), a Primary School is indubitably the environment where to use the *CARAP/FREPA*.

In a subsequent question, students were asked to say in which course they had learned about plurilingual and intercultural edu-

cation. As formerly stated, in the degree course there is no specific course unit dedicated to intercultural education, multilingualism, plurilingualism, or to intercultural competence. Students ranked the didactics of reading and writing – Didactics of Italian as a Second Language, Italian Literature and Linguistics, Intercultural Pedagogy and School Legislation as the three top courses where, mainly, they learned about the topics.

Intercultural education was dealt with from a practice point of view with questions about their ability to promote intercultural education and intercultural competence. The first question, slightly more theoretical, received a 62.2% of agree/strongly agree answers, while the second, more practical, received a 49% of agree/strongly disagree. Considering the homogeneity of the responses, it can be inferred that the Italian education system is still more theoretical than practical.

Two questions dealt with plurilingual competences, one was about promoting the development of plurilingual competences, and the other about the ability to coordinate the teaching of a foreign language with other languages, studied or known. These questions received a high percentage of disagreement: about 89% of the respondents declared they cannot promote the development of plurilingual competence, while 68% declared they cannot coordinate the teaching of a foreign language with other languages studied or known. A third question was considered, one with a different description, but with the same objective as the former two. The aim of the questions may be considered the same, the development of plurilingual competence, nonetheless the answers tend to be more positive in questions 2 and 3. This is in some way inducted by their linguistic explicitness and by the fact that in the Veneto Region most of the population speak both Italian and Veneto dialects, and that some students come from bilingual families. As a consequence, it is easier for them to think in practical terms, referring to their personal knowledge and experience rather than speculating and using scientific categories and definitions.

Some questions referred explicitly to some key definitions, such as multilingualism and plurilingualism. When the two concepts were treated singularly, the majority of the respondents declared they could not define the concepts. This negative response is recurrent in most of the questions where the knowledge of a specific academic term is requested.

Some questions referred to the need of the students to know more about some key issues, such as language education, plurilingualism, interculturalism. The responses were very positive, confirming the necessity to develop such competences.

The *National Guidelines* (MIUR 2012) contain references to some key issues, such as plurilingual competence and education, intercultural

tural education, linguistic repertoire, and the use of a foreign language to promote situations in which the foreign language is used as the language of instruction to promote, and convey, learning related to different disciplines. Since I predicted students should have known the document, some survey questions directly referred to these issues. As for their ability to promote a way to develop plurilingual competence, 95% of the answers were negative, and as to their ability to integrate language teaching in order to develop plurilingual education, 96% of the answers were negative. However, as regards the tools, skills and competences required to encourage the development of intercultural education, 66% of the answers were negative, whereas assessing their knowledge of the linguistic repertoire, only 44% of the answers were negative yet for the use of a foreign language to promote and convey learning related to different disciplines, 62% of the answers were negative. Once again it can be seen that the negative percentage diminishes when the issues are more practical.

Most students declared their desiderata which can be divided into three main fields: the first is related to the request of more practical courses and laboratories related to intercultural education, intercultural communicative competence, plurilingualism; the second refers to the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language, seen as a means to reflect on such issues as plurilingualism, intercultural communicative competence and the intercultural dialogue. Students also highlighted the interest in attending English taught course units, as a means to experiment what their non-native Italian students feel when attending Italian taught classes. The third refers to the possibility of integrating the basic knowledge offered on intercultural issues by some course units with adequate bibliographies and case studies, so that the prospective teachers could feel ready to deal with real issues in authentic situations. Some students say they have been taught about intercultural communication, but do not know what intercultural and plurilingual education mean.

In their desiderata, students highlight the importance of being better prepared to face their multicultural classes by attending more practical course units and laboratories, where they can deal with issues related to intercultural education, intercultural communicative competence and plurilingualism. They also emphasise the importance of teaching and learning English as a foreign language, both as a subject and as pedagogy of foreign languages, and would like the opportunity to attend courses held in English, as part of an immersion program to feel what their future students might be experiencing as, certainly, they will have forgotten how they once felt.

4 Conclusions and Implications

The Italian education system, as far as Primary Education is concerned, has been described in terms of the composition of the Primary School population and of Primary School teacher training..

Nowadays, the presence of students without Italian citizenship is a solid reality in the Italian educational context. In 2012, a new national curriculum framework for the Primary School was published, and previously a five-year degree course for Primary Teachers had been established. The school context is not that of an emergency, as it was thirty years ago, and a survey among students attending a degree course for Primary Education Teachers has been conducted, to highlight what knowledge, practices and skills prospective Primary teachers have acquired regarding various issues related to intercultural communicative competence, and whether they are able to deal with the notions of plurilingual and intercultural competence.

This study is part of a wider research project that is still in progress, which aims to analyse the challenges of multilingualism in Primary Schools and suggest how an educational approach, designed to develop citizens who will become tomorrow's 'good interculturalists' could be developed. The aims of the project are: (i) diagnosing the knowledge, practices and skills future Primary teachers have acquired regarding intercultural communicative competence and intercultural issues in general; (ii) understanding whether they are able to deal with the notions of plurilingual and intercultural competence and apply them in class; (iii) providing some guidelines and promoting the development of a course unit dedicated to the issues raised by the research.

The results selected and presented in this article refer to the first two aims, and they highlight the general lack of knowledge regarding the main European documents in which issues, such as multilingualism and plurilingualism, are presented and discussed. A very practical document, such as the *CARAP/FREPA (A Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures: Competences and Resources)*: is mainly unknown. Even though the document dates back to 2012 and is an instrument to be adopted and adapted in Primary School, only a small minority of prospective teachers know about it.

The emergency that occurred thirty years ago with the arrival of the first immigrants has passed but, as the survey shows, less than 10% of future Primary teachers know about this and the other documents that deal with intercultural approaches. Nonetheless, students demonstrated they can deal with practical issues related to the development of language awareness and plurilingualism, mainly because they belong to a bilingual environment.

Thanks to a degree course where attention is paid to pedagogy and practical issues in teaching, the future teachers feel they could

deal with such issues, even though it appears they cannot clearly define the meaning of some key definitions and they might not be aware of what they are doing.

In their desiderata, students highlight their need for more practical courses and laboratories relating to intercultural issues in general; they also refer to the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language, seen as a means to reflect on such issues as plurilingualism, intercultural communicative competence and the intercultural dialogue.

The results discussed in this article are not intended to assess the actual organisation of the course of study, rather it aims to achieve a deeper understanding of the prospective teachers' awareness and perceived competences, and of the implications for teaching intercultural education and awareness, intercultural communicative competence, promoting plurilingualism in multicultural classes and developing plurilingual/pluricultural students.

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