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## INTRODUCTION"

It is quite an honour to be invited to write the introduction of such a timely and interesting book that invites the reader deep into the daily life of multicultural classrooms in different places in the world. Surprisingly the readers will feel at home in all these places, even when they could not have expected to, because the authors have succeeded in joining their efforts to describe processes that are likely to take place everywhere, even if in different ways.

The consideration of learning within the more general landscape of societies growing evermore multicultural gives this book its present relevance. The study of social interactions in learning via the minute observations *in situ* of the teaching and learning processes opens fruitful new ways of understanding the dialogical nature of learning and the qualities of classroom management. Social interactions in the classroom do not happen in a social vacuum: schools are institutions with traditions and political mandates that structure the field of interactions; students come into the schools with their life experiences framed by another major institution, i.e., the family and its own social nesting in the wider (ever more global) society. Only a better knowledge of the interdependence between these micro and more macro processes can help design pedagogical situations fruitful both for the integration of minority students in the local schools and for the enrichment of the members of the other social groups.

The general bet of the book is that this can be a “win-win” situation. But the authors are not naive. They also know (and show empirically) that in some places in society, schools are not invested as instruments for personal development of the multitude, social inclusion, cultural and economical sustainable development, peace, mutual understanding and equity. Where knowledge and cognitive growth is appropriated (... like petrol!) for the sake of a few privileged groups who perceive themselves in competition with one another in a “win-lose” situation, then the general process of knowledge creation and transmission in an “open society” (to use Popper’s term) becomes distorted by procedures of social selection and exclusion. Knowledge creation and transmission can be unlimited resources – but only if societies care.

The contributions of the studies gathered in this book are in search of the levers for more inclusive approaches for all members of a classroom, especially when they come from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds and hold different life motives and time perspectives. In doing so, the authors shed some light on the educational challenges that societies have to meet when transformed by migrations and globalization. But they also force into reconsideration general questions about teacher-student relationships and learning activities that classrooms have always

had to face, but that might be forgotten in a period where a lot of attention is placed on the supposedly purely “cognitive” aspects of learning irrespective of their social and emotional components. Knowledge expansion in individual development and in society can only be achieved through caring attention to delicate processes of mutual attention, joint efforts in communication, respect of the others, openness to share one’s understanding, capacity to argue and convince, and trust in the mutuality of efforts between teachers and learners, or experts and novices (Perret-Clermont, Pontecorvo, Resnick, Zittoun, & Burge, 2004; Rijsman, 2008). It requires generativity in the elders towards nurturing the next generation. Reciprocally, the young have to identify to some extent with their elders in order to appropriate their previous experiences. If not, why would the adult make efforts to reach in what Vygostky (1934/1962) called the “zone of proximal development” of the child? And why would the learners wish to coordinate their actions with those of the experts to join in complex activities that are not theirs?

As Piaget, another of the forefathers of cognitive psychology, made clear: thinking requires also reciprocity between partners, their actions and co-actions; this is a condition for the co-construction of logical operations. Taking part in peer interactions that foster autonomy, initiative and reciprocal confrontations is important for cognitive growth and in turn contributes to the development of personality by offering ways to coordinate and equilibrate feelings and understandings with *values* and not only with the fear of authority and power (Piaget, 1947/1972). In order to develop an understanding of the world, the person has to engage in meaning making activity and, contrary to what Piaget might have suggested, this is not only a matter of “logics”, as Bruner well shows (Bruner, 1986, 2001). Pañ (1989) suggests that in fact the confusion between logical and symbolic processes can severely hinder both cognitive and affective development. Youngsters experience transitions (from childhood to adulthood), adults also (e.g. into parenthood, in employment shifts, etc.), and migrants face major changes. All these transitions require from the person not only the development of new competencies but also of symbolic resources that can help her to preserve a sense of integrity and that allow her to develop an understanding of the present, within a time perspective that includes past and future (Zittoun, 2005, 2006b; Zittoun & Perret-Clermont, 2002). How are these processes at stake in multicultural classrooms and how can the pedagogical design of the pedagogical settings sustain both learning and identity?

#### LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE CLASSROOM

In Switzerland, as in many European countries, most of the classrooms have always been multilingual because rare are the totally monolingual areas. For instance, in large regions the dialects are very present and, as a consequence, when children come to school they are invited to speak another language than the one they share at home or even on the playground of the school. In urban schools, migrations have brought together Swiss and foreign students of diverse linguistic origins. An interesting case, among many, is the observation in a vocational school

of Samedan that offers its training to an area of Graubunden, in the Alps of South-Eastern Switzerland, with disseminated populations speaking different languages (Willemin & Perret-Clermont, 2004; Willemin, Perret-Clermont, & Schürch, 2006). The teaching is officially said to be in German but in fact, the teacher cannot rely on German solely and, even unconsciously, continually paraphrases his teaching in the Swiss German dialect, in Italian or Rumanstch or asks the students to help each other with a translating.

Yet, the consciousness of the linguistic diversity does not seem to be an automatic process as will be made evident in other chapters of this book that show how training that sustains an increased awareness of the linguistic diversity in the classroom has a deep impact on the efficiency of teachers. I myself was quite impressed when, one day, of the late sixties, as I was visiting a school behind the railway station in one of the major Swiss cities, a teacher spontaneously shared with me her despair: year after year, she said, in spite of her efforts, she was experiencing a growing difficulty in teaching spelling to her students and losing faith in her capacities as a teacher. She took me into her classroom and pulled out of her cupboard the students answers to the last spelling test to show me the ever more numerous mistakes that they were making. We looked at them together, perceived some similarities in the errors made, but then discovered, to her surprise (and mine, as a consequence of hers) that many of her students were Portuguese children of very recent immigration and that this could explain their difficulty with not only spelling French but also mastering the oral language and understanding the daily activities in the class. In conformity with her professional *ethos*, she had been “fair” with each child, but with no awareness (this was not part of teacher training in the sixties) that the linguistic and social background of the students might require special attention.

For researchers also, the first step has then been to acknowledge the linguistic difficulties of allophone students in a mono-linguistic environment (Gretler, Gurny, Perret-Clermont, & Poglia, 1981; Perregaux, 2008). These were then discussed in light of the recent advances in sociological research on social class differences, language and control (e.g., Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970; Bourdieu, Passeron, & de Saint Martin, 1975; Bernstein, 1973; Lautrey, 1980). Interesting pedagogical interventions were then designed, such as those of Cecchini, Tonucci, Pinto, and Dubs (1972) or Cecchini and Tonucci (1973) who explored the positive impact of teaching in dialect in infant schools in order to gradually introduce the rural children to the use of the official Italian language. Titone (1973) impressed researchers, parents and teachers with his demonstration that bilingualism was not necessarily a handicap for the child’s development. Studies such as that of Rey-Von Allmen (1989) called attention to the importance of a good mastery of the mother language as a linguistic pre-requisite to the successful learning of the official school language. In certain schools special classes were devised to teach the official language to immigrants before integrating them in mainstream classrooms. And, in countries like Switzerland (Cesari-Lusso, Cattacin, & Allemann-Ghionda, 1996), Italian, Spanish and Portuguese embassies organized

special courses for their emigrants to assure some basic schooling in their native language (or national language as many of them were speaking dialect at home).

In parallel, discussions were open as to the interdependency between linguistic and socialization processes in immigrants. Py (1982, 1986) described the development of “interlanguages” in the communities of immigrants as they adapt to the local life. The interlanguage is characterised by interferences between the first and second languages that are not only (or not always) linguistic “errors”. They are also a form of linguistic and social competence in relation to the contexts in which the languages are practiced. They are the result of (conscious or unconscious) interpretative processes within the conversation that create (or do not create) a sense of familiarity with the events, of proximity between the interlocutors, thereby contributing to their identity.

Siblings of immigrant families were observed using the local language as “a secret code” to manage their projects among themselves out of parental control, or invested by their parents with (adult) roles, as interpreters and mediators of their relations to the local society and in particular to the school. This is a heavy load on a child’s shoulders and complicates his or her relations with teachers and parents.

The development of social psychological studies of language and communication contributed to clarifying that language is not only a means of communication but also a marker of identity (Bell & Gurny, 1989; Forgas, 1983; Giles & Hewstone, 1982; Giles & Johnson, 1987; Robinson, 1983). In a nice experiment, Doise (1976) observed adolescents from two different cantons with different regional accents of the French speaking part of Switzerland. In one experimental condition pairs of adolescents (one from each canton) played a cooperative game, and in the other a competitive game. Their talk was recorded and their accents are evaluated by external judges unaware of the design of the experiment. The results show that during the cooperative game, their accents tended to converge to a common one, whereas, in the competitive condition, their accents diverged to become even more typical of their own regions. This research shows again that differences are not reified characteristics of the individuals and groups but signs of dynamic processes at work in intergroup relations and social positioning. Of course, these processes are also at work, besides homes and playgrounds, in the classrooms, both for students and for teachers.

As a growing interest for social class and/or cultural differences as explanations for students’ successes and failures in schools was spreading among researchers and teachers, some authors called attention to the risk of distracting attention from the pedagogical processes at stake by offering simplistic external explanations to difficulties in the classroom. Prejudices and normative expectations of students’ performances are known to influence the teacher-students interactions (Gilly, 1980; Marc, 1984; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Benavente (1988, 1990) observed that teachers who had followed a course in sociology of education had transformed the sociological correlations observed between social class and school performances into predictors of school failure, which “excused” them in advance in the case of poor performances by their working class students. Likewise, Allemann-Ghionda, de Goumoëns and Perregaux (1999) remark that at some point the poor diffusion of

these sociological studies has become a source of difficulty: “What is considered the culture of the *other* (most often stereotyped), offers an inexpensive explanation to the difficulties encountered by immigrant students (...). It makes their situation worse rather than improve it. In doing so, the culture is defined as a group of closed, deterministic meanings, which are resistant to changes like other (sociological and psychological) variables as long as they are dealt with separately” (p. 419). Hence, it is important not to consider isolated variables, but to try to understand the communicational and identity related dynamics and the processes allowing people, engaged in an exchange, to negotiate its sense: “The cultural difference is not any more an absolute value. It becomes an aspect of a broader diversity that modifies the previous categorisations, themselves becoming fluctuant and open” (Allemann-Ghionda et al., p. 422). The classroom might then appear as a much more complex environment than previously imagined, but the counterpart is that a better understanding of this complexity opens possibilities for pedagogical action. This is what the present book does, taking the readers into very precise pedagogical scenes and offering them the possibility to see a display of the interactional and semiotic processes that allow for inclusive or exclusive practices.

If classrooms are more complex, then certainly daily life is also a very complex reality worthy of investigating to better understand the nature of the adjustments that immigrant or minority allophone children have to manage. Difficulties have been pointed out in the literature. But what are the resources that these children can draw upon and what are their successful strategies? In this perspective, Cesari-Lusso (1997, 2002) made in-depth interviews of second generation young adults revisiting their life trajectory. These interviews reveal the importance of the quality of interpersonal relationships outside the family, and of the meaning making processes around language as well as food, sport and other social practices that sustain identity formation, support in adverse situations, openness to novelty and, as a consequence, success at school. Zittoun (2006a) takes the reverse perspective and investigates how a successful team of teachers developed a school program to facilitate the transfer of school fostered knowledge and skills into daily life and first employment. It is a matter of language and communication skills, but also of self presentation, self assurance, respect for social codes (that have to be made quite explicit) and of mastering competencies that suddenly – in the face of a real job and thanks to the accompanying person who helps them to understand the situations met – become relevant. There is still a lot to learn about the (successful or unsuccessful) meetings of students’ lives with pedagogical offers. This book also presents explorations of the conflicts or synergies between school expectations and the social itinerary of the learners in search of self-assertion, meaning and time perspectives.

#### STUDIES OF SOCIAL INTERACTIONS IN MULTICULTURAL SETTINGS: A JOURNEY THROUGH IMPORTANT ISSUES RAISED IN THE BOOK

In light of the previous discussion, let us now turn to specific issues that are investigated in the coming chapters and point to interesting processes that they

shed light on. We will start with the consideration of the present debate on language in the classroom.

### *Language as a major mediation tool for learning*

Obviously, when immigrant children enter the classroom not knowing the local language, the communication between them and the teacher and peers will be difficult. Not only for reasons of not sharing a common linguistic code, but also because the child might feel threatened in his/her identity. In their chapter, Abreu and Hale give a nice example of this when they tell about the effects of the mispronunciation of the child's name and the way this discrepancy is being negotiated to save the gender marking, the feeling of continuity of the self or the social integration in the local community.

When considering schooling, it is especially important to remember that language is not only a social marker of identity, it is also, as Vygotsky (1934/1962) made so clear, the most important mediation tool for learning. If this is now obvious to psychologists, it was not always so in teachers' representations, as van Eerde and Hajer's chapter makes clear. The degree to which an inappropriate mastery of the classroom language can hinder learning is likely to be underestimated, especially in school subjects like mathematics. It is striking to see, in these authors' studies, that the mere fact of sustaining in teachers (through the active participation of the teachers in the research process) a growing awareness of the role of language lends to learning gains in students. Yeager, Green and Castanheira have compared monolingual vs. bilingual classrooms, the latter organized in a way that offers students the opportunity to use their own language not only in accessing knowledge but also in managing social relationships, building the community, and discussing multiple language use and its constraints. They can show that inclusion is a construction and not merely a given when one enters into a classroom. But, more important to the point we want to make here, they also show that the (properly managed) possibility of using one's own language to learn, can improve not only the access to the academic content but also the quality of the student's writing in the second language, i.e., the mastery of both languages.

The language also mediates the social relationships of the students, and this is important because conversation types and behavioural styles deeply affect the learning possibilities offered by peer interactions (Psaltis, 2005a, 2005b). De Haan and Elbers' research illustrates how language creates asymmetries between minority students and their peers, and how these asymmetries can differently affect joint work. In the classrooms they study in the Netherlands, they observe that the majority of peer interactions in work groups are initiated by the native Dutch students. They also observe that most interactions are asymmetric. But interestingly, when the minority students of Moroccan education interact among themselves, their relations are more often symmetric than those of their other classmates. This allows them to better benefit from this progressive education based on group work. De Haan and Elbers also observe that during conversations about difficult and unfamiliar words in mathematics, symmetrical collaboration is

also more frequent, even in mixed groups. There is more to understanding the meaning of a word in the context of a math assignment than just applying knowledge of the language, and as a consequence, the minority students do not automatically turn to Dutch.

In a quite different perspective, Chronaki joins in this discussion by showing how an appropriate intervention can give Roma children motivation to learn math via opportunities to count in their own language. In fact, Chronaki goes far beyond the mere use of the Romany lexical repertoire. In her intervention, the children were into active roles (that reverse the low status and minority position that usually tend to reinforce their feeling of being outsiders), such as teaching the class to count in Romany and role-playing real-life situations selling and buying in the market-place. The Romany children are observed stepping timidly into such a shift of status, but then becoming enthusiastic and eager to progress. The other children were also very keen on continuing with these activities which they perceived as an opportunity to improve their own resources to interact at the market. This minutely documented example shows how much identity, identification with the teacher's role and modalities of peer interaction are important for learning. Socialization and learning are interdependent processes.

#### *Socialization, classroom participation and learning*

Beyond language competencies and status, the students' participation in the classroom is also formatted by the classroom culture and their own family education. Regarding knowledge and learning, different ways of acting are more or less legitimate according to gender, self-image, personal goals and time perspectives. Abreu and Hale observe self-imposed withdrawal and Remédios and Clarke describe students' silences that have different meanings according to their socio-cultural traditions: some have a preference for listening to the fount of knowledge (teacher); others have learned that they should be active and that they are expected to participate by asking questions and taking initiatives. They have different expectations towards the teacher's role. The cultural representations of what is instrumental to learn and succeed in school vary along these dimensions. Monteil (1990) shows that high achieving students do not fear displaying their performances in the classroom and that, when asked to, this boosts their performances. On the contrary, poorer students fear any public display of their thinking and are inhibited by any request to demonstrate their understanding in front of their peers. It is then particularly interesting to see how César and her group manage to create tasks that invert this trend for the low-achievers in the difficult school in which they work by implementing explicit and implicit "didactic contracts" (Schubauer-Leoni, 1996) that are more inclusive. This requires a lot of attention and designing because – Gorgorió and Prat also make a clear point on this – norms installed by the teachers shape actions but never directly because they are interpreted by the students through their own personal and cultural lenses. One of César's students, once used to the new expectations of the implemented didactic contract, goes so far as to comment that it is almost like starting a new life in

school, and he gives many examples of the consequences that this change has for him in many aspects of his life, even out of school.

Socialization is also a matter of appropriating and sharing power, a more or less legitimate behaviour not independent of social positions, including gender, even on cognitive matters as Psaltis' studies show (Psaltis, 2005a, 2005b) Teachers themselves are more or less eager to share their knowledge with all children and have their own representations of who "deserves" more attention or tolerance. In the way they manage their classroom they construct the role of a legitimate participant. For instance, Gorgorió and Prat report on what makes a valid math interlocutor according to some of the teachers in the study. They show that, as a consequence, non participation can be aligned with the classroom discourse hence jeopardizing some learning opportunities.

#### TEACHERS' ROLE, INSTITUTIONAL DEMANDS AND SPACE FOR THINKING AND LEARNING

We have just seen how the teachers' management of the classrooms defines who the legitimate participants are. The security and sense of respect offered by the pedagogical setting for self-image affect the possibility for students to engage into non-defensive reasoning (Perret-Clermont, 2005b; Perret-Clermont & Iannaccone, 2005). But the teachers are not always free to construct these settings, and they act according to different value systems. They are not independent but under contract with institutions that have different social and economical goals, and that might hold very different expectations.

Williams, Black, Hernandez-Martinez, Davis, Pampaka, and Wake compare the management strategies of teachers in two districts that assign different tasks to their staff, notably via the audit system. As a result, in the first district which has a competitively minded middle-class recruitment, the teacher is observed focusing on the preparation of exams and giving (procedural) tricks to succeed at these exams; whereas in the second district, the teaching is more subject oriented and fosters the joy of solving problems, testing one's reasoning, and learning to develop criteria for deciding who is right. The intellectual socialization of the children described by Williams and his associates is tightly dependent on the institutional rules that govern the school management.

These institutional (sometimes tacit) rules can also fail to provide support to teachers even when hired to fulfil specific goals. This is the case in the research presented by Hirst, Renshaw and Brown in which an Indonesian language teacher is seen having a very hard time gaining students' involvement. His lessons are considered very important for ideological reasons, but the pedagogical scene in which he intervenes does not give much value to his work and, in particular the head teacher does not support him in front of the students and even despises him at times. Beyond the weakness of his institutional position, a second problem arises that is not easy to negotiate in such a setting: the different cultural definitions of the role of the teacher as an educator. The Indonesian teacher expects self-control even from young students, while the Australian students and head teacher seem to be

used to having the teacher continuously in charge of controlling their desires to over-ride the rules and frames of action.

A quite different situation is the one observed by Kumpulainen, Toom, and Saalasti in which the set up foresees a special secure space for teachers to share their understandings, observe the effects of different practices and enhance the opportunities for reflexion around shared videorecordings of their teaching. Mutual respect among these adults, as in the case of respect towards students in César's research, is seen to enhance the person's availability for changes in attitudes and learning or professional development. Social recognition, both at the interpersonal and at the institutional levels, is a very important element for personal growth.

#### IDENTITY, MOTIVES AND AGENCY

Learning can be sustained by aspirations of the parents (see for instance the role of the father in the case reported by Alrø, Skovsmose, and Valero), and by vocational choices within a time perspective (Abreu & Hale; César). But these are not sufficient. The learners need to be able at each step to keep links with the past and a feeling of continuity. Some practices do not help at all because they are disruptive to language or other components of the self (Abreu & Hale). In this respect some students are caught in contradictory motives or even double-binds. This seems to be the case for the Muslim female student from the study by Alrø and her associates who was deeply committed to her studies and scholastic achievements, stimulated by her father who wants her to enter into "modernity" and in that perspective to succeed in school. But the school has no space to let this growing adolescent comply to her desire to imitate her mother's tradition in the public presentation of herself as a (veiled) woman. How can she deal with this contradiction in the very depths of her being? The religious group she belongs to makes this problem a question of faith. She is then entangled in contradictory forces active in herself, in her parents and emanating from both institutional frames (school and religion). The legitimacy as a learner has roots also outside the classroom and can be put at risk by the intergroup relations in society.

Alrø and her associates talk of a "process in which persons make the decision of engaging in getting to know". Activity must make sense. It should be compatible with the assigned roles in and out of school. It is important that the learning be meaningful not only in the classroom but also beyond for the young to become committed to these efforts. Moreira calls attention to the relations between school success and experiences of citizenship. The value of school for the parents is linked to their own experience of having taken successful responsibilities in the community, making therefore relevant a series of competencies that are enhanced by schooling. Similarly the Roma children studied by Chronaki involved their peers positively into the classroom activities once they had understood the newly created link between these and their daily lives. César enhanced the students agency by having them participate not only in the learning but also in the research process itself, an opportunity to feel respected, appreciated and a chance to develop metacognition in the learning strategies and their possible goals.

## ... BUT NEVER GIVE UP!

Agency in learning associated with discourse that creates room for initiatives and shared power is an important component of a learning scene both for students and for their teachers.

This book is full of descriptions of interesting cases in which children become actors of their own learning and lives, experiencing inner and outer conflicts and learning to deal with them. But as one of the students reported by Abreu and Hale so vividly states: “never give up!” Persistence seems to be a dominant trait. No magic stick ever definitely transforms a person into a successful learner: learning is at times an anxiety producing process that requires changes at all levels of the person (cognitive but also emotional, social and/or spiritual) within a timeperspective (Perret-Clermont, 2005a) that is partly dependent on societal changes but also on the capacity of the student to construct a sense of continuity (Zittoun, 2006b).

If the student in Abreu and Hale’s story is quite conscious of her aspiration to “never give up”, this might not suffice. Social support is required. Van Eerde and Hajer, Chronaki, and Kumpulainen and her associates and still others have all shown how their investigations are not only observations but that they have an impact on teachers and in children’s learning. César makes here a very important point: as researchers have an impact on students’ learning and projects, in close connection with their feeling of agency and life perspective, this also means that they have a responsibility in the long term. As a consequence, more should be learned about “the ethical awareness and care researchers need to have while they are studying minority cultures, being particularly sensitive to the ways in which they leave the stage when the research process is over” (César, 2009).

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