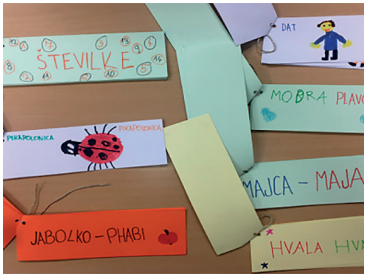

School Education, Minorities and Life Opportunities

Roma Inclusive School Experiences

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INDICE

CHAPTER 4. AN INCLUSIVE PERSPECTIVE ACROSS NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN ITALY

Maria Teresa Tagliaventi, Giovanna Guerzoni, Luca Ferrari, Marco Nenzioni and Licia Masoni[1]

1. Rethinking inclusive school education: Rise project, a model meant to be shared

As has been noted already, within a framework of general action that has been decided upon collectively, each partner in the project has presented its intervention, considering the regional context, local institutional policies, efforts completed before the Rise project, and the existing network of local services.

In Italy, the project was launched in Bologna and Bari in collaboration with their respective municipalities. Two different areas, one in the North (Emilia Romagna) and one in the South (Apulia), were chosen to broaden the study's perspectives. The two cities differ in terms of the degree of inclusion of Roma children and existing social policies. The Roma communities in each location are also different. In Bologna, the community is mainly Roma-Sinti (Italian citizens), while in Bari the majority is from Romania and from former Yugoslavia.

In Bologna, the Roma and Sinti community is estimated to have about 750-800 people, 300 of whom reside in three authorised camps (Erbosa, Bargellino, Savena) managed directly by the municipality of Bologna through collaboration with volunteer organisations. Many families reside in public housing provided by social services. Some groups also live in unauthorised settlements, some of which are supported by social service entities working to provide stable housing.

In Bari, the population is estimated to have about 350-400 Roma from Romania in particular, almost all of them residing in unauthorised,

1. Department of Education Studies 'G.M. Bertin', University of Bologna, Italy. Sections 1, 2, 4 and conclusion were written by Maria Teresa Tagliaventi; section 3 was written by Giovanna Guerzoni; section 5 was written by Luca Ferrari and Marco Nenzioni; and section 6 was written by Licia Masoni.

scattered settlements mainly in the peripheral areas of Japigia, Carbonara and Poggiofranco, or in an authorised camp (Japigia-Santa Teresa).

All settlements have many children of school age, who are not always given the opportunity to attend school regularly.

According to the latest Fondazione ISMU-MIUR report (2016, school year 2014-2015), 121 Roma children aged between 6 and 14, and 79 Roma children aged between 6 and 14 were enrolled in school. These figures might be underestimated, because families may not claim to belong to Roma or Sinti communities. Considering the number of children in the settlements, as recorded by both the local municipal administration and by the associations working with Roma communities, there is a high rate of evasion and early school drop-out. The percentage of pupils not admitted in subsequent school years is also very high.

In Italy, the social policies regarding Roma and Sinti communities are based on both national and regional regulations. The national framework of reference is the *National Roma, Sinti and Camminanti Inclusion Strategy 2012-2020*, which was adopted by the Council of Ministers on 24/02/2012, delivered to the European Commission on 28/02/2012, and approved on 22/05/2012.

On a regional level, the effort undertaken by Emilia Romagna compared to Apulia regarding Roma communities is a bit older, dating back to 1988 (Regional Law of November 23 1988, No. 47, "Norme per le minoranze nomadi in Emilia-Romagna"), and included the issuance of a specific law. It was followed by the approval of another law in 2015 (Regional Law of July 16 2015, No. 11, "Norme per l'inclusione sociale di rom e sinti"), aimed at aligning regional policies with European Union recommendations and with the aforementioned National Strategy.[2]

The Region of Apulia has still not issued its own law on the policies and interventions to be adopted regarding Roma communities. Instead, it has referred to Regional Law No. 32/2009, aimed at defining the areas of intervention that would benefit EU and non-EU citizens.

Since 2013, the cities of Bologna and Bari have participated in the National Project for the Inclusion and Integration of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti children promoted by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, currently financed through the PON (National Operation Policy) inclusion programme. That

2. Regional Law. 11/2015 is organized into four basic axes: living, school and training, work, and health.

project is aimed at further integrating Roma and Sinti children through activities related to school, camps and other areas of daily life, while also getting their families involved. In the city of Bari, this project was the first of its kind regarding Roma children. In Bologna, on the other hand, the project was preceded by various interventions organised by local services, and specific activities financed by European funds. The two settings (Bologna and Bari) are thus quite different: the first has a history of past interventions, while the second is almost a newcomer to the field.

Within the context of the Rise Project, and for both cities, the Italian team decided to work with schools and/or classes that were not involved in the project overseen by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, asking local administrations to continue the project, and to adopt it, if it is ultimately deemed effective.

The collaboration with local administrations, i.e. the municipalities of Bologna and Bari, was a good choice as it acted as an effort multiplier, and ensured that the project could work in synergy with the local social services staff.

1.1 Project details

Before examining the details of the project, it is important to remember that the context analysis was at the base of the definition of the various actions. It was carried out through a study on available statistical data, laws and qualitative research (with interviews to key stakeholders), which can already be considered part of the action research as described in previous chapters. The results were used as a starting point.

Ever since the beginning, the project has been defined by its complexity, caused by a multiplicity of actions, entailing the involvement of various professions, the need to work as a network and to have a long-term plan for all activities, shared as much as possible by all those involved. The work was then doubled, as it was carried out in two locations and adapted to each participant's different needs.

The idea of inclusion as a common good, aimed at building a receptive system that is inclusive for all, has been transformed into a series of initiatives. Many of these initiatives were identified when the Rise Project was drafted, while others were added later on, as they were considered as necessary.

The courses of action were:

- a training programme for teachers, social workers and ATA staff, on inclusive educational methods, and on discrimination, intercultural pedagogy, and the history of the Roma and Sinti communities;

- activation of action research throughout the entire process, used as a tool to observe, analyse, interpret, and refocus the activities of the group participating in the training sessions and the researchers (Figure 4.1.);

- meetings with the participation of local services that oversee actions geared towards Roma children and adolescents facing particular challenges and their families;

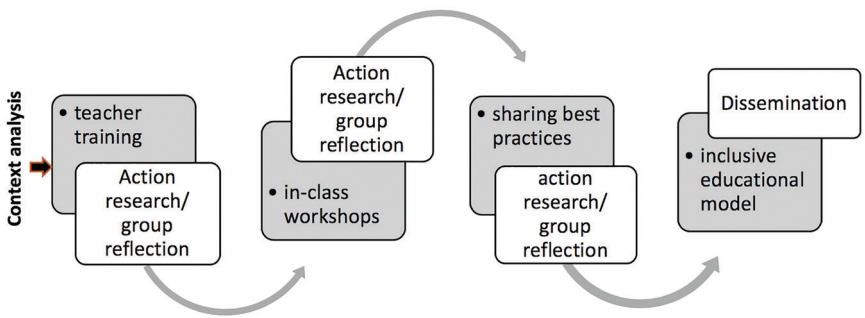
- promotion of educational workshops for all students in the classes involved, aimed at enhancing social skills, participation or know-how;

- implementation of storytelling workshops for all students in the classes involved, aimed at creating a story that deals with the topics of interculturalism, prejudice, or gender discrimination, through the use of animation techniques;

- organisation of a workshop entitled "Rise English: Connecting with the World" (see section 6 below);

- sharing of best practices aimed at creating a widespread, inclusive educational model. This point included the publication of a booklet entitled "For an inclusive school. Best practice proposals" , written by 24 teachers involved in the project and distributed to all teachers, social workers and schools taking part in the project.

Figure 4.1. Project Management



Before moving on to a discussion of the various action steps, we should highlight a few of the project's organisational strengths, and it should be noted that they have helped make the project useful and effective, impacting various activities:

constant co-planning of the project's various steps with all professionals involved, starting from school heads and local managers of social-educational services from both municipalities, teachers, children, pre-adolescents and, whenever possible, with their families and representatives of the Roma community. This has taken time and energy, especially during the initial organisational phase in which one had to explain the project and its overall structure multiple times, and support the active involvement of various actors;

the aforementioned *collaboration with local administrations*, i.e. the municipalities of Bologna and Bari – which have helped strengthen the project locally and helped make it an active part of the local network of services – aimed at supporting Roma and Sinti minors and their families in their respective municipalities. This synergy has made it possible for the research group at the University of Bologna to collaborate with social services and educational institutions, agreeing on each of the project's actions, through a clear definition of mutual responsibilities and shared choices;

the presence of *two tutors/researchers* whom, on a local level, have not only coordinated and organised various actions, but have also acted as an 'antenna' for special requests coming from teachers and other professionals, making it possible to amplify discussions on action research and intervene quickly when problems or requests were identified;

the *involvement of various experts*, both in-house and external to the Department of Education Studies at the University of Bologna. They were selected for their specific expertise and have taken part in various ways, either by guiding the entire project or just part of it, plus the formation of a research committee within the Department related to different fields: sociology, education, anthropology and foreign literature[3]. It is also worth mentioning the importance of the five interns from the 2nd-cycle degree in Education at the University of Bologna, who dedicated 300 hours each to the project. They supported the work of the teachers at school, carrying out

3. The Department of Education Studies of the University of Bologna team consists of Maria Teresa Tagliaventi (Coordinator), Emmanuel di Tommaso (Project manager), Giovanna Guerzoni, Ivana Bolognesi, Lisa Cerantola, Franco Fiore, Luca Ferrari, Marco Nenzioni, Licia Masoni, and Federica Tarabusi.

in-class observation, checking in with some boys and girls in particularly critical situations, and providing support to social works in the field. Through their contributions and the reading and subsequent discussions of their daily 'logbooks', the project has consistently been able to identify problems and prospects for change in real time, and to bring a different 'face' to the project;

a *robust programme of meetings* to check in on and monitor the project by the group of researchers, which included the involvement of local contacts or school heads, depending on the topic being addressed;

the use of a few assessment tools along the way, in addition to those programmed into the project's evaluation system, coordinated by Istituto degli Innocenti. Of all the tools used, it is worth mentioning the *sociometric test* (Moreno, 1980), adopted by various teachers in order to create a graphic map (sociogram) of relationships within the class and identify the position that individual students occupy within the social group at the time of administration, and the *focus groups* with teachers and other social actors.

1.2. Target and subjects

The need to reflect on an inclusive school starting from Roma and Sinti children's needs, and the desire for a scientific institutional framework in which to place the classroom activities in relation to a multitude of cultural affiliations, was quite clear by the number of comprehensive schools and teachers that participated in the Rise Project, exceeding our expectations.

The government that was in office for a significant part of the project did not seem favourable to its development. From June 1 2018 to September 5 2019, the Minister of the Interior and Deputy Prime Minister was in fact a member of the Lega Party (nationalist right-wing). Matteo Salvini is a politician known for having sided against the Roma population on many occasions, expressing his ideas through colourful wording and even making a formal request for an ethnic census. Despite this political context, requests to take part in the project increased gradually as it solidified, so much so that the data below do not include all the teachers and social workers who participated in the various training sessions – as some did not have Roma students in their class – but only those with Roma and Sinti students in their classes who were involved from the very beginning. The decision made by school officials to distribute Roma students through different class groups (i.e. to

avoid placing Roma students in the same class, even if they were of the same age), explains the high number of classes involved. The teachers of these classes voluntarily chose to be part of the project and, at times, explicitly requested to participate in the training.

As shown in Table 4.1., the project involved the participation of teachers and students from Comprehensive Schools 4, 5, 9, 10, 11 and 14 in Bologna, and those of the Japigia district in Bari: XVII (known as Poggiofranco), EL/7 (known as Montello-S.M. Mantomauro). In total, 15 schools were involved, with 38 class groups, 78 teachers, 779 primary and middle school (lower secondary school) pupils, 54 of whom were either Roma or Sinti. The number of teachers and social workers participating in the training events on Roma culture and history, not directly involved in the Rise project, was over 40.

In Bologna, the project was mostly aimed at middle schools, considered the weak link in the education system due to the high percentage of truancy among Roma students, and the lack of institutional intervention. In Bari, it took place mostly at primary schools due to the young age of the Roma students involved.

In Bari, all participating students resided in local settlements. One of these camps has been regularized by the municipality, while the other, located on a private plot of land, is not in compliance with the law. This settlement suffers from hygiene and health-related issues. The families live in self-made houses, built with recycled materials. In Bologna, the students involved lived in authorised caravan parks, in temporary housing solutions (campers) or in public housing structures.

Table 4.1. Teachers and students involved by city and type of school

		Number of classes	Number of students	Type of school	Number of Roma students	Number of teachers
Bari	Primary school	13	248	4	19	32
	Lower secondary school	6	128	1	7	15
	Total Bari	19	376	5	26	47

Bologna	Primary school	8	179	5	15	9
	Lower secondary school	11	224	5	13	22
	Total Bologna	19	403	10	28	31
	Total	38	779	15	54	78

2. Developing knowledge: Teachers', school staff and social workers' training

To better understand how teacher training was structured, we will need to briefly refer to the history of the integration of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti children in Italian schools over the last 50 years.

In Italy, between 1965 and 1982, and informally through the late 1980s, 'special classes for gypsies' were managed by the Opera Nomadi, a non-profit organisation. Their educational and training activities were defined by the Centro Studi Zingari (Roma Studies Centre) in Rome, and by Mirella Karpati in particular, the creator of 'gypsy pedagogy' (Bravi, 2013). These experiences were heavily criticised after their implementation, as they reinforced the idea that Roma and Sinti students had cognitive difficulties (Bravi, 2013; Piasere, 2010). In addition, they sanctioned a model of 'inclusive' schools that provided Roma students with a low-profile education, which was considered more suitable to them, and carried out in places that were physically separated from the class. Subsequently, schooling for younger Roma generations was governed by fragmented instructions or memos, or as part of policies regarding pupils without Italian citizenship facing issues with learning Italian as a second language, even if more than half of the students were Italian or coming from families residing in Italy for decades. Today's compulsory education system pays plenty of attention to multiculturalism, including through targeted projects. However, inclusion of Roma children is still seen as a problem, and often resolved through a teacher's aide who, in the best of cases, works with the class or with small heterogeneous groups, or in the worst of cases, with individual students outside of class.

The teacher training that was part of Rise took place against this backdrop. As per the project plan, it was split into two branches: one concerning Roma history and culture, the formation of prejudice, and various aspects

of intercultural education;[4] the second concerning knowledge about and in-class use of inclusive teaching methods, especially cooperative learning.[5]

The first training 'branch' was designed around the idea that, in order to promote change, we must intervene not only in the knowledge system, but also in more personal aspects. These have to do with the system in which reality is understood and constructed, with empathy, personal interrelationships, awareness of the ways in which one's social representations are constructed, and how they influence attitudes and opinions. With this in mind, the chosen trainers were experts belonging to the Roma and Sinti community who have grappled with the topics of prejudice, and Roma and Sinti history, by using their own personal life stories as a starting point. Two meetings with two Roma youths (a choreographer and a university student) were particularly important, describing and analysing their relationship with the school, the meaning attributed to being part of the Roma community, their close ties with their families of origin, and the prospects for cultural change present in all communities. These meetings were aimed at unpacking social representations; questioning the widespread belief that the Roma community is a group incapable of having a place in society and which posits 'gypsy students' as inherently problematic; and at generating change in the way the majority group perceives the minority. In addition, Roma history was covered through two theatre/ training performances on the Porajmos, carried out in Bologna and Bari. Through a reading of historic documents, two actor-trainers grappled with the historic process that led to the persecution of Roma and Sinti people, and to the eventual extermination of 23,000 Roma in the Zigeunerlager (Roma camp), spurring the teachers and social workers to reflect on the reasons why has Roma history disappeared from history books and from the cultural background of Europeans. In this case, training was also used as an attempt to recover a shared memory: the reading of a tragic event is enriched by a new point of view, founded upon an

4. In addition to the researchers belonging to the Department of Education Studies at the University of Bologna, other trainers were: Luca Bravi, researcher, University of Florence; Ernesto Grandini, representative of the Sinti community of Prato; Eva Rizzin, researcher, University of Verona; Antonio Ciniero, researcher, University of Salento; Pino Petruzzelli, director/actor, Teatro Stabile of Genoa; Stefania Pontrandolfo, researcher, University of Verona; Senada Ramovsky, university student; Denny Lanza, choreographer and art director; Tomas Fulli, cultural mediator, OpenGroup, Bologna; and Suzana Jovanovic, researcher, University of Verona.

5. The trainers for this curriculum were Stefania Lamberti, Claudia Ciampa, Nadia Olivieri of the InAgorà Research Group / CSI University of Verona.

encounter with the other through sharing and empathy (Bravi, 2009). This sort of 'pedagogy of memory' was tasked with stitching together the historical relationships between the two groups, highlighting the contribution that Roma people have made to Italian and European history.

Each teacher participated in at least 10 hours of training on these topics, and a few chose to take part in additional training events, exceeding the training hours established during the planning stage and that were agreed upon with the school heads.

Cooperative learning training sessions, led by the trainers at the Cooperative Learning Study-Research-Training Group of the Intercultural Studies Centre at the University of Verona, were split into three groups of teachers according to their educational needs: one in Bari and two in Bologna. In two groups (Bologna and Bari), the course was set up as basic training, although implemented according to the needs of the various school grades: more specific for middle-school teachers in Bologna (12 hours), and ad hoc for primary school teachers in Bari (12 hours). It included in-person classroom training (4 hours for each teacher, in addition to the 12 hours), truly a winning choice. At the end of the initial training programme, teachers were asked to design an educational module aimed at their students, based on their own teaching materials, and formulated according to cognitive objectives and the assessment system. They were then asked to implement it with the supervision of trainers. In so doing, the trainers provided the teaching staff with classroom support in the creation of learning spaces in which, encouraged by a positive relational climate, children and pre-adolescents were led to transform each activity into a 'group problem solving' process, achieving objectives that required the personal contribution of all involved (Lamberti, 2010).

This step with 'on the field' training was very much appreciated by teachers, as it helped even the most hesitant and sceptical of them feel confident and competent regarding the changes in perspective required by cooperative learning. During the training programme, particular attention was paid to improving the climate at school (effective in conditioning the learning process), in its two components linked to the interaction between different subjects (regarding emotional, affective and relational aspects) and the organisational/ managerial elements of the class (Chiari, 1997). Applying cooperative learning in class led all students, and especially Roma and Sinti students, to rediscover 'their place' – meaning their place within the class

group – through the knowledge that is essential for the entire educational community (i.e. other students and teaching staff). That frequently led to redefining the often tense or frayed relationships with the school's entire community (managers, ATA staff, families, etc.).

A third group of teachers – composed of primary school teachers who had already completed a basic training course – was given the option to participate in training for 'cooperative learning trainers' (12 hours). In this way, the Rise Project was a knowledge multiplier, as it trained a group of teachers to help promote and spread inclusive methodologies to other teachers, and thus become an inclusive education reference point for their schools.

The topics frequently covered in the training sessions were: the characteristics of and proposals for an inclusive school; the teacher's role; the fundamental elements of cooperative learning, class building and direct teaching of social skills for generating a positive climate in class; the relationship between social skills and positive interdependence, which includes theoretical foundations, direct experience, and planning activities with pupils.

Last but not least in this excursus, it is worth mentioning, within the Rise context, the training of ATA staff members (school staff, administrative secretaries, etc.), which content stemmed from the requirements expressed by some school heads. It was aimed at encouraging those involved to think not only about the Roma minority, but also about the inequalities and differences of all children and pre-adolescents that attend compulsory education. Lasting eight hours and attended by 16 people, who reported being quite satisfied at the end of the programme, the course covered: relationships with families and students; social representation and discrimination at school; communication between families and the school; critical issues and opportunities in intercultural relationships; and school staff and their role in the creation of an inclusive school.

3. Action research, a tool for enhancing teachers' skills

The action research method – by now quite widespread in social research with a focus on schools – is based on the creation of a process that begins by sharing an emerging issue, and on a type of reflexivity that can guide the development of educational actions, as well as on continuous co-planning, with the teacher's professional activities understood as a qualifying element.

This research method can help implement a "planning-reflexive process that proceeds via exploration and discussion, continuously questioning the knowledge, expertise and competencies of those involved" (Nuzzaci, 2018, p. 138). The decision to use this type of approach, shared since the kick-off meeting with the Rise Project partners, could be placed within the framework of two important debates found in all areas of research today: one concerning basic vs applied research (Colajanni, 2014), and one which has led – especially in recent years – to a debate around the methodological, deontological and ethical boundaries between research and engagement. That is, regarding the need for research to both reflect upon its applicational dimensions (in this case, on its impact on inclusive educational processes in school contexts) and, in particular, on the need and manner of 'choosing a side' regarding the very context(s) in which the research is being carried out. "We are facing knowledge that attempts to influence action, and collaborates for the stable construction (based on knowledge) of adequate know-how" (Colajanni, 2014, p. 32). In this sense, creating a complex action research programme, in order to promote truly inclusive schools for all – starting with Sinti and Roma minorities – means operating at scale. By so doing, participatory research projects in 'micro' contexts (the class, relationships in peer groups, the student/ teacher relationship, even the educational strategies adopted, and the school as an organisation) can be developed with the need for a broader view, which can grasp the relationships with 'meso' and 'macro' levels, turning the participatory action research experience into a tool that teachers can use to reflect on the role of schools in community development and, ultimately, their current role in society.

The action research programme for the Rise Project required innovative teacher training regarding the teachers' course structure and, in particular, it required reinforcing their ability to analyse the context (both in and out of school), and a professional reflection on their job as teachers. Nudging the protagonists of school contexts (teachers, administrators, students, educational collaborators) towards reflexive paths in which not everything is taken for granted (the way education is carried out, the lack of school success for some minorities, family absence, etc.) means re-examining school through a new lens, reflecting upon which organisational, educational, and curricular transformations are required in order to create a truly inclusive school. This reflective practice comes to terms with the right to education of minorities. In fact, it can't help but go beyond a process of cultural criticism of 'normality',

of the ability of those who work at school to look at their context and the practices within it 'from a proper distance'. In summary, the added value of the Rise Project perhaps lies more in the process than in its end results.

3.1 Knowing/recognising: 'rejection' as a reflexivity tool in educational professions

Reflexivity and recursivity at the centre of action research take advantage of a plurality of views, including actors that normally are not part of the school or institutional context being studied (academic researchers and educators in training). As such, they can bring out the implicit elements in academic actions: representations of otherness, efficacy and self-efficacy of teaching/ learning methods, the school structure itself, etc. In this way, a guided process of de-familiarisation with the view of the profession and the 'usual' work settings (such as schools) can take place. Education and schooling do not consist merely in supporting the full development of individual personalities, but also in complex, interrelated actions that depend on the development of the community.

According to the experience of anthropological thinking, decentralising the view that can trigger reflection, which starts 'from the side-lines' to deliberate on the processes that it is part of, nourishes the performative ability of critical thinking. In other words, in the dichotomies between centre/ periphery, sedentary/ nomadic cultures, integration/ exclusion (in/ from school), capturing the 'point of view' of the other, of his/her way of constructing and co-participating in the school experience (in our case) 'from the margins', including his/her (and our) failures, is a chance to critically examine the 'normality' that constructs, defines and solidifies the 'centre' of the school experience, its 'normality', thereby allowing us to question it (Aime, 2008).

Operationally speaking, participatory action research methods and the epistemological perspectives of social sciences share

> the goal of producing social change, the planning of a series of coordinated, consistent actions designed for that aim, and the mobilisation of concepts, categories, and targeted anthropological investigations that emerge as conditions specific to this field of action research, which has earned an important space in modern anthropology. The fundamental elements of this tendency are thus: 1. The desire for social change and the formulation of precise objectives and goals (which is all the result of a decision-making process); 2. Planning (drafting of models

> for change, availability of adequate tools, prediction of outcomes); 3. The social and cultural knowledge necessary to achieve the goals indicated (investigations into actions and reactions of the social subjects involved). (Colajanni, 2014, p. 33)

3.2 Why use action research methods at school: the Rise Project experience

As has already been highlighted, the educational activities and school experiences of the Rise Project were carried out according to an action research approach, sharing the goals of the study, its contexts, and the activities implemented with the heads and teachers of the schools involved from day one. That approach involved sending the working group on a path of reflexivity, which was analysed on an ongoing basis, sharing strengths and weaknesses and even identifying, when necessary, sub-objectives or new goals that emerged along the process, as well as the necessary 'adjustments' required for improvement. In effect, the Rise Project has developed the action research model in conjunction with the previously described training setting, making up three working groups[6] (two in Bologna and one in Bari), with teachers from different schools. The groups were entrusted with the task of monitoring the various activities of the project, implementing moments of reflexivity on the pathway and on its impact in the classroom, and considering the specificity of the biographical trajectories of Roma and Sinti children, compared to their backgrounds. The project's research approach was the same in Bari and Bologna, though adapted to each region's needs, both with respect to the participating schools and to the local socio-cultural reality of the Sinti and Roma communities. It is within this pathway that one can speak of research-training, which can be considered a tool for professional development: a situational approach to training that, through the problematisation of a part of the teaching/learning process, aims to change the conditions of the process, starting from the understanding of one's own

6. The action research programme for the Rise Project involved: for Bologna, two groups (one coordinated by Ivana Bolognesi, the other by Giovanna Guerzoni) composed of 18 teachers (middle school), 5 pedagogists in training (interns from the 2nd-cycle degree programme in Pedagogy at the Department of Education Studies of the University of Bologna), and a researcher (Lisa Cerantola). Each of the two groups held 4 meetings during the 2018-19 academic year, plus the first all-hands meeting at the beginning of the project. The Bari group, coordinated by Ivana Bolognesi and tutor Franco Fiore, consisted of 31 teachers. Like Bologna, the training programme was also divided into 4 meetings.

models of reference (implicit and explicit) and the learning conditions (of those involved) (Traverso, 2015, p. 245). Training and research, school procedures and reflexivity have shaped the educational activities in class that have been implemented and then recounted, highlighting the various dimensions that impact schools (from the construction of identity to relationships with others and even broader social dimensions).

What steps should thus be shared with the team of teachers, in order to implement inclusive practices? Presently, what has actually changed in the way of operating and in reflexivity to make schools and education more inclusive? Is individual educational success truly the only way to evaluate 'best practices' in schools? What is meant by an 'inclusive school' (i.e. do we share the same language)? What are the practices and the context that, during the process, prove to be most effective in terms of inclusion? Are there specific features that define the school experiences of Sinti and Roma children, understood as minorities that have historically been discriminated against?

The action research path was implemented through four meetings per group. In these meetings, participants focused their attention on the inclusion/ exclusion practices implemented in their classes or schools, on the addition of Rise laboratories on educational curricular activities, and on the activities of educators in training (interns) to support the inclusion of children and adolescents in the classes involved during normal school hours. For instance, we will take look at the action research project of the Bologna group during the 2018-2019 academic year.

As noted before, carrying out action research through a specific theoretical contribution involves analysing educational *practices starting from and along with the social actors that implement it*, sharing:

- the identification of a *situation-problem* that those involved consider important or pressing;
- the *co-construction* of the goals, method and activities of the intervention;
- *reflexivity* as an intrinsic action of the process and part of its goal;
- the aim of constructing, together, *changes for the better* in the *procedure* itself;
- *process*-related aspects of the project, thanks to the ability to receive *feedback* and use it to identify new actions;

- the *recursivity* (or recursive process[7]) of the study between theory and practice;
- the non-neutrality of the study, its necessarily (politically) engaged nature, which leads to including the repeatability of the project in other contexts or on the upper levels of the organisational structure;
- the need to work towards individual and community empowerment.

The meetings have made it possible to discuss the choices and experiences of each teacher, and the concrete reality of his/her class within the specific context of the school system that the class was part of, with those of other professionals from other contexts.[8] Action research "includes, however, a precondition for its assertion, i.e. that the teachers feel the need to spur change in their professional practice (Elliott, 1991a; 1991b), as their greatest hurdle is often being able to admit that there may be a problem in their way of acting, one that undermines their self-perception and their way of teaching (Elliott, 1991b, p. 141)" (Nuzzaci, 2018, p. 141).

The first step was to investigate the preconceptions that teachers have about their Roma and Sinti pupils. This theme has remained at the centre of the action research project, working as its common thread. Although taking on the biographical trajectory of each Roma student was at the centre of the meetings with teachers, their depictions of the school experience of Roma children were characterised by the use of 'objective' data. The first problematic piece of data mentioned by teachers regarded their irregular attendance, a matter that calls into question the relationships with families and their socio-economic background. The second regards their unsatisfactory, or often drastically insufficient school performance, in part because there is a tendency to 'limit' that evaluation to the fundamental subjects concerning

7. "Recursivity" is used as a qualifying dimension of action research, which consists in implementing a cyclical process, regarding both the dialogical relationship between theory and practice, and the processes of knowledge in the relationship and through the relationship.

8. As an example, we propose one of the 'tracks' followed to conduct the final moment of the action research project (Academic Year 2018/2019): 1. How did this year go with the Rise Project? 2. Do you think the actions (cooperative learning, laboratories, etc.) implemented as part of the Rise Project were helpful in improving your teaching (in relation to inclusion)? 3. What role did the introduction of cooperative learning play in this year's class work? (A. What does it reinforce? B. What did not work? C. What change(s) have you noticed?) 4. What role did the Rise Project workshops play? How did they fit into the curriculum (or how did they not)? 5. Thanks to the Rise Project, have you learned anything new about the RSC (Roma, Sinti and Caminanti) children in your class and their families? 6. In your opinion, what role did the presence of the intern play in the classroom? 7. Are there other aspects impacted by the Rise Project that you would like to bring to our attention?

primary literacy (reading/ writing and mathematics). Ultimately, teachers did not seem to be fully aware of the socialisation process in the peer group, described as an indicator to help demonstrate the advanced degree of acceptance of the class in addition to the relational skills of Roma and Sinti children. At times, even when their integration with the class was described positively, it was contrasted with the data collected by the sociogram, bringing to light the marginal position of most Roma and Sinti children in their peer group:

> Teacher1: we do that at school, but it isn't enough, because you always carry something inside you, and in some cases *maybe the problem is upstream*, meaning it is deeper, and so we can even create different, less traditional experiences...
> R: but *could we define this upstream problem*...
> Teacher2: *there's too big a difference* between their (Roma students) daily lives and the school. I see them as *two different worlds*, and then, in the camp (caravan park), there's no motivation. I mean, I study, I go to school, basically I'm even supported, but when I go home I know that my everyday life won't change. It's pointless for me to go to school and study, in part because I already know what my future is. It's the same future as 30 years ago, that my parents had, and that's hard to change. On the other hand, with the carnival operators, it's different, I mean, there's more familiarity than at school. They're more motivated.
> R. so *the problem could be everyday life*
> Teacher3: I get the impression that there's a rational level where everyone is nice and good, where everyone wants inclusion, and then there's a more unconscious, 'below the surface' level that is also thornier...
> Teacher6: but what my colleague said is interesting, *because it's like they have two parallel lives*. So, it's quite different to have a total lack of rules, to live outdoors, I don't know... to spend all day taking bicycles and scooters apart, *working with their hands*, and then school is indoors, seated at desks doing activities, 90% of which are *abstract activities*. Of course our model of school doesn't work for them.
> Teacher3: you'd need an apprenticeship like in the old days, to become an electrician, to fix scooters.
> Teacher1: In my opinion, however, *we have a prejudice that's upstream*. I have little experience in this area, which is what led me to want to participate in this course with the university and the Rise Project. I met this student that didn't live in a camp, but who lived with his family in a house and he didn't have the issues that we might imagine a Roma or Sinti kid having... And then we have, on the other hand, a Sinti girl this year who is really integrated. So, we try to provide answers, trying to fit Roma and Sinti students into the worst kinds of boxes, stereotypes that even we are mistaken in believing upstream, because they're kids that have the same issues as other pre-adolescents and adolescents living in today's world.[9]

9. From a recording of the work of the Bologna action research group – academic year 2018/2019; for an analysis of the content and process of the action research, see Bolognesi (2020).

Even if along the action research training path it was possible to deconstruct some of the bases upon which the notions held by teachers about the school experiences of Roma and Sinti children were structured, the implicit elements underlying these narratives refer to the idea that inconsistent attendance or dropping out of school are attributable to the 'cultural otherness' of Roma and Sinti students. As a result, their lack of success at school and their risk of marginalisation in peer relationships cannot help but be the result of their lives outside of school (living in a settlement, the inability to have friends from school over to their homes, etc.). This otherness is once again described in terms of cultural essentialism, as it refers to the topic of nomadism as a state considered 'incompatible' with the construction of the learning experience, an exercise that is necessarily stable, continuous, and negotiated by a hierarchical relationship between teacher and student. This 'culturalist' vision seems much stronger to the extent that it actually stops teachers from identifying empirically valid solutions regarding specific cases and situations. Throughout the action research project it was possible to discuss and propose more inclusive alternative solutions, and which often – and not by chance – were interpreted as 'exceptions to the rule' or as a sort of 'professional alibi' behind which teachers often entrenched themselves, namely by noting that 'we did everything we could' or 'we already did that'. In fact, after an analysis that was more attentive to the individual backgrounds of Roma and Sinti students (and thanks to the collaboration of the Municipality of Bologna, a partner in the project), one could identify solutions that have proven that it is possible to dynamically grapple with the school experience of the students, as well as with the interest and willingness of Roma and Sinti families to participate. The teachers' representation of the school experience of their Roma pupils (which often weaves in with other, previous 'cases' they have come across professionally), refers to the way they see the other, crystallised in a form that is much more static when compared to other 'minorities'. Ultimately, it reinforces the idea that their educational failure is an inevitable outcome attributable to their student status of belonging to a minority.

Ethnographic studies conducted by John Ogbu in the 1990s (Ogbu, 2008), on the schooling of voluntary and involuntary minorities in the United States, demonstrated that the ways in which each actor in the school context evaluates his/her own school experience, even the marks received, were not exclusively attributable to in-class teaching activities and their respective

rules, but were instead related to the students' belonging to minority groups. Students from involuntary minority groups in fact interpreted their lack of success using cultural models learned outside of school, which mediated the relationships between majority and minority, and between minorities. The representation of African Americans as inferior, in the American social context, influenced the forms of participation of African American students in the school experience. In particular, it influenced the way in which they made sense of their performance and, ultimately, their educational destiny.

During the central stage of the action research programme, teachers discussed the use of innovative teaching methods, such as cooperative learning, the subject of the teacher-training package for the project, as a tool for socio-educational inclusion. The reflection on didactics has brought forth different positions, while spotlighting, on the one hand, the weight of the 'classroom environment' (the sociocultural composition of the class group, the greater or lesser socio-cultural heterogeneity, the role of other teachers in terms of collaboration or, vice versa, 'resistance' to the inclusion of Roma and Sinti children, the role of school leadership, etc.); on the other, the still rather deeply 'disciplinarian' view of the act of teaching, which clearly distinguishes inclusive practices in primary and secondary schools, the latter being mostly focused on its subdivision into distinct subjects. Teachers who participated in the project considered cooperative learning to be an inclusive resource, though a few did not think it was applicable to all contents in their curricula, in addition to requiring substantial preparatory work. When all was 'said and done', when reflection on the use of cooperative learning in classroom teaching activities made it possible to talk about didactic effectiveness in terms of educational inclusion – considering the work one was doing along the way and taking advantage of the participatory observation of 'educators in training' – the action research meetings were not always sufficient in providing teachers with tools to collect quantitative-qualitative data, to evaluate efficacy, and to completely 'render' the entire path.

On the other hand, throughout the action research programme, it was possible to highlight the often-assimilationist 'micro politics' that often still pervade the school experience, and that are comparatively revealed by a small 'untamed' minority – the Roma and Sinti children. The action research programme has thus made it possible to put into practice the 'proper distance' that alone can demonstrate that which rejection (of the success of best practices where they work, as well as their failures) highlights, offering

a critical eye not only on the efficacy of inclusive actions but also on the very meaning of the school experience. As such, at the end of the 2018-19 academic year, the research group had to take on a position as mediator in negotiating shared reflections that would include the final evaluation (pass or fail) of Roma and Sinti students, which had to be an integral part of the RISE action research project.

3.3 Reflecting on inclusive processes at school

It is useful to rethink the experience of the RISE action research project in light of the new situation brought about by the coronavirus emergency. Not considering it would almost be paradoxical, as it would risk making the rendering of an experience focused on the idea of an inclusive school based on the participatory, reflective contribution of those working in it entirely in vain. Currently, for the first time in modern history, we are forced to face a situation in which many aspects of the best practices of inclusive education (dialogue, mutual recognition, participation, etc.) seem to break down, generating a certain degree of collective disorientation, including the very solutions of 'virtual learning' put into place, which must be assessed in terms of the merit of their inclusivity or exclusion, especially for the most disadvantaged or socially vulnerable classes. For this and other reasons, we believe that

> It is perhaps useful to remember that there are a few basic 'principles and values' that should guide all social promotion research and activities that use an anthropological approach: 1. The idea of cultural pluralism and 'equality of cultures'; 2. Respect for human rights (social and cultural); 3. Defence of minority rights; 4. The promotion, in every way possible, of the equality between human beings and justice; 5. Respect for, and the careful consideration of, the 'points of view' of social actors and the presence of mind to avoid them being damaged (in any way) by the researcher directly or indirectly. (Colajanni, 2014, p. 34).

Nowadays, speaking about processes that have progressively transformed our school in a multicultural sense often engenders the idea that the issue is attributable to the impact of migratory processes upon Italian schools. This implies forgetting that the issue of cultural diversity has been a constant presence in Italian schools, starting from the construction of a national identity based on the assertion of a language and a national literary culture (Homi Bhaba, 1997), at the cost of the plurality of languages found in Italy, and the

subsequent fact that local cultures came to be considered as 'folk' or 'subordinate' cultures from that moment onwards. On the margins of this process, in a position of greater invisibility, we have the Sinti and Roma communities found in Italy in an official form at least from the 15th century, the target of inferiorising representations, and social, political and cultural discrimination. Such representations and cultural prejudice have paved the way for the persecutions that the Sinti and Roma communities (Piasere, 2009) have been subject to at various points in Italian and European history, up to their deportation to concentration camps, uniting their tragic destiny to that of the Jewish community and other groups and individuals persecuted by fascists and Nazis (Bravi, 2014). Despite the fact that diversity should be considered a structural condition of school practices, a shared field of reflection for those working in schools and who have much to learn from the action research of the Rise Project involves a critical analysis of integration/ inclusion processes and of the 'assimilatory' or 'accessory' risks that they imply. On the other hand, the innovative teaching and education methods that are attentive to the specificity of historical-cultural relationships with other cultures that characterise the school experience for teachers and students, as a necessary transformation in the plural sense of school work, must also become an arena for reflection. School is nourished by many scholastic integration experiences, many of which are quite innovative. However, what truly constitutes the qualifying field of education is the achievement of an inclusive culture in terms of: consideration for the background of students and their families; educational goals and their content; teaching methods as well as the tools used to verify and evaluate goals; and, in particular, teachers' reflective capabilities regarding inclusivity in multicultural school environments.

4. Didactic workshops as inclusion promoting tools

For many years, an internal debate has been sparked in Italian schools on how to mend the relationship between traditional deductive teaching methods and practical, situated learning methods. Workshop-based teaching is surely one such tool, and, even if not widely practised, it has nevertheless entered into ministerial programmes.

The use of workshops in the Rise Project went beyond the goal of fostering joint, theoretical and practical learning. Indeed, the workshops had multiple

purposes since they were also used to promote the active participation and integration of all students. Workshops often were the driving force behind the school attendance of Roma and Sinti children and pre-adolescents, as they fully piqued their interest through particularly appealing activities.

Moreover, school – and middle-school in particular – is intrinsically problematic due to dealing with increasingly complex, abstract subjects, often taught via traditional methods (as has emerged from the action research project). Workshop-based teaching can help 'deconstruct' that setting, offering a way of learning the subject matter that is less 'stereotyped', and in which listening, dialogue and action combine to create 'cultural artefacts', the result of collaboration between all members of the class.

As has already been highlighted, the close collaboration of the Department of Education Studies research group with the teaching staff and the representatives of the two municipalities involved has produced a quite detailed workshop system that met the needs of each class, with specific reference to the needs and backgrounds of the Roma and Sinti students present. The programme was calibrated according to the requirements discussed with the teachers and social workers, and co-constructed upon the interests of Roma and Sinti students, and on the difficulties within the class group in general.

Workshop experts were also informed of the true objectives of the programme and it was assured that they would keep an eye out for the Roma and Sinti children in class, creating an environment in which all students could actively participate and fully express their potential.

In general, beyond their specific subjects and topics, all workshops were used as tools to:

- promote social and ethical values such as respect for others, awareness of diversity and inequalities, an understanding of the multiplicity of choices and life paths, and solidarity;
- experience places for construction of knowledge and metacognition, i.e. aimed at a kind of learning that doesn't just define the acquisition of new information and abilities, but also the ways they are understood and used. In this sense, workshops were also used as a tool to define new learning styles on the part of the students;
- redesign teaching styles, experimenting with inclusive education methods, especially cooperative learning and group problem solving;

- change the roles and representations of some students in the class with respect to knowledge and competencies that are unable to emerge in traditionally-taught curricular subjects;
- sustain a positive classroom climate, understood as the atmosphere that, in a learning context, 'reflects the scholastic and socio-emotional life of the class and conditions the process of learning/ teaching through the subtle elements that engage teachers, students, families, the educational community and the social context' (Fisher, 2003, p. 264). A positive classroom climate, founded on intense social-emotional relational dynamics, improves the educational success of all students;
- train students in the practice of active, democratic citizenship.

All proposed workshops enhanced the creativity, imagination and curiosity of students, using art, music, theatre, photography and practical abilities. Depending on the needs and potential of single students and those of the class group, some specific ad hoc workshops were created, according to the requirements of each class. The storytelling workshop on the other hand, was implemented for all classes participating in the project. All workshops were carried out at school, during school hours, in coordination with and in the presence of the teachers involved in the project. Learning-by-doing workshops included a school trip.

4.1 The rap workshop: self-expression and reflections on inequality

I think the rap workshop was a hit, they really liked it and, reflecting on it with colleagues, it fit perfectly in the curriculum because there's this whole reflection on vocabulary, with rhymes and rhetorical figures...It was really great, the kids were really excited about it. [A., lower secondary school teacher, Bologna]

With the rap workshop, having the kids make a single product together, they really felt like part of a group. [C., lower secondary school teacher, Bologna]

The hip hop/rap workshop let the boys and girls express their own way of speaking, their own stories, and their own values, much more than any others. It was carried out in three middle-school classes for a total of about 20 hours per class.

Hip hop is an expression of street culture that arose in New York in the early 1970s, characterised by the practice of four art forms: MCing (the vocal side of rap music), turntablism (the art of DJing, which transforms turntables into a musical instrument), breaking (or breakdancing/b-boying) and writing (graffiti). The Rise Project offered a MCing workshop. The art of MCing is called rapping.

Due to its intense commercialisation, rap has become the most widely-known hip hop element, listened to by adolescents who are fascinated and engaged by it. Rap music is based on biographical narrations that young people identify with, that can help them 'find themselves' or that they can distance themselves from: a large part of rap lyrics are fragments of life stories told in the first person (Fant, 2015). The history of rap is particularly interesting because it came about as a criticism of social and racial inequality.

Through this workshop, even boys and girls who have a hard time writing, reading and communicating were engaged in composing lyrics with great satisfaction, using a communication channel that, on the one hand, encompasses the direct element of spoken language, and, on the other, requires the use of metric rules, rhyme and assonance.

Rap was used as an immediate tool to be shared by all, able to organise one's own language and reasoning. But most importantly, it was a tool through which students were able to talk about themselves, their lives, the way they are represented in the world, and their seeking and recognising themselves in it.

The workshop required the students involved to learn, to enrich their cultural knowledge, to expand their vocabulary as much as possible, and to work with others in order to create a collectively written piece, starting from their own personal stories (Figure 4.2.). It was an instrument to interpret their emotions through artistic expression, and to use music as a way to reflect on how they interact and express their ideas.

Figure 4.2. Rap lab pictures: writing and recording a lyric

The resulting lyrics are quite significant in demonstrating how the rap workshop was a communication space that integrated verbal and non-verbal languages, a landscape in which personal experiences intersect with the lives of others, thereby creating shared meaning[10]:

Intro: We are a passion, as united as a family.
Family, passion, nation... We have a massive mission
We are wild tornadoes
we are a union of different cultures (melting pot)
we are a smiling sun
like a burning star
and a shining moon
we are a tangle of languages
We are a mythical class
like in epic tales
we write our poetry

We are always together
even when we suffer pains and sorrows
we can solve matters pretty well
by meeting up every evening,
choosing the truest things
with the anger that keeps us going,
we all defend ourselves together
through the friendship that sustains us.

We are wandering stars,
traveling clouds
like mountains way up high
we are always together and never in solitude.
We are moody hills
like mathematical operations
we are fantastical cities
more or less friendly.
We are like schools full of students
and our teachers always congratulate us.
We are one person
with one mind,
and now we fly.

10. Students songs are available on www.projectrise.eu

REFRAIN:
Many different people, but one nation; many scattered ideas and one reason, one strength driven by a great mission: this is our opportunity, a new passion.
Many different people, but one nation; many scattered ideas and one reason, one strength driven by a great mission: this is our opportunity, a new passion [...]
[composed by I R Class, "Besta" lower secondary school, Bologna]

For the boys and girls involved, the lyrics became a vehicle, a way to talk about their daily lives, their relationships with others, their teachers, and their families.

The workshops were organised in such a way so that, by the end of the programme, the students would:

- be knowledgeable about the hip hop movement from the 1970s to the present (in America, Italy and locally), in order to understand its role in contemporary history, with specific reference to the use of rap as a tool to speak up against social inequality;
-
- understand the message contained in various songs and recognise the essential codes of verbal and non-verbal communication when interpreting musical works;
- grasp the logical relationships between the various components of oral texts;
- explain personal experiences, lyrics they have heard, and the content of the songs proposed in the classroom in a clear, logical and consistent way;
- -ecognise different musical communication registers;
- express their ideas and experiences on specific topics (e.g. gender differences, integration, etc.), and be able to present and express them in writing;
- use rhetorical figures, rhyme, assonance and consonance in a rap song;
- internalise the ideas of rhythm and metrics in the composition of a song;
- use the microphone and other musical equipment (speakers, the mixer, cables, etc.);
- understand the contexts, the purpose and the audience of the message conveyed.

In order to craft the lyrics, first each student wrote it on their own, then in small groups, then as a collective group. It should be mentioned that this workshop was a strategic tool in getting two Roma students who had stopped attending classes at other schools to start coming to class. In this sense, the fun of rapping won out over the hurdles faced by the students at school.

4.2 Theatre workshops: socialisation and conflict management

The most beautiful moment was when we did the theatre lab within Rise the project... Roma pupil X was great, he learned all his parts. And on the same day of the performance he said to me: No prof, I'm not coming. And I said: No, are you kidding? So imagine all the anxiety... But then he came, the performance was perfect, he was great and in the end he started crying and let himself be hugged. I saw he was another person. [L., secondary school teacher, Bologna]

In order to meet the socialisation needs, and to structure a more cohesive class group in the face of internal conflicts, a theatre workshop was implemented for two middle-school classes. In terms of socialisation, in fact, dramatization ensures communication between students and helps develop a group spirit via shared ideas and emotions, as they create, realise and portray a story. Due to its physical, expressive nature, theatre can be an effective way to enhance skills and abilities that are hard to tease out in classroom learning. Each class could benefit from a theatre course spread out over 22 hours, including a performance open to the public, attended by parents and other family members.

The heterogeneity of members in the two classes involved, due in part to their different language and cultural competencies, and to different personal backgrounds, led to defining the following workshop goals:

- embracing differences in the contribution that each one can make towards a shared project, and transforming conflict into collaboration;
- developing self-awareness and awareness of one's relationship with others;
- strengthening peer relationships;
- developing creative and expressive abilities, both individually and as a group;

- developing observation and critical abilities;
- promoting interdisciplinary learning as part of the school programme;
- acquiring basic stagecraft techniques.

The first part of the meetings was dedicated to illustrating and learning basic stagecraft techniques, which took place through propaedeutic theatre activities made up of games and exercises. The second part of the project was aimed at creating the screenplay and its staging, in a performance that allowed participants to use the tools they had learned during the course via a direct relationship with the audience. The script was written by a theatre expert along with the students, starting from a few ideas suggested by the teachers.

Each meeting began with games and exercises aimed at developing and improving listening abilities through the body and emotions, and to generate trust between the members of the group. The goal was to create a working environment in which everyone felt free to express him/herself without being judged in terms of merit and ability, in a context where mistakes were valued and seen as a necessary learning tool.

Analysis of gestures, the composition of an action, rhythm, and variations in the speed of movements were principles around which students explored the expressive abilities of the body, their breathing, the emission of sound, the articulation of words in syllables, and the possible variations in the timbre and rhythm of a sentence were all used to explore the voice.

Individual, paired or group improvisation was an effective tool in producing materials that subsequently were added to the scenes of the final performance.

One class created a performance starting from a reinterpretation of 'The Star of Andra and Tati', a novel by Alessandra Viola and Rosalba Vitellaro that recounts the experience of two young Jewish girls deported to Auschwitz during WWII. The topic was then connected by the literature teacher to an in-depth reflection on the Porajmos, carried out in class during school hours.

4.3 Learning by doing: envisioning one's future starting with practical skills

Have science or maths ever actually been useful to you? [M., Roma student, Bologna]

A workshop that students really liked, despite being apparently unrelated to their daily activities, was 'Learning by Doing', a broad category that included different courses. Five middle-school classes decided to participate in this workshop.

The main goal of the workshop can be inferred from the title, and consisted of introducing students to an artisan and his working methods by engaging the class in practical activities to help them discover 'new', little-known occupations. The artisans involved in these workshops were a male 'pasta maker' (*sfoglino*),[11] and a circus performer/director (Figures 4.3. and 4.4.).

The artisan's act of 'making' was used as a tool to experience a form of knowledge that is often quite distant from what is required by and offered in schools. It was also used to encourage reflection on the act of carrying out practical activities, which require both skill and effort. This workshop was designed in part to respond to students' need for guidance when choosing what secondary school to go to, which takes place at the age of 14 in Italy, after attending middle school. It was also meant to encourage reflection on the life paths of others, on the multiplicity of choices, and on individual interests and passions. Guidance is the process of accompanying students in gaining the ability to make decisions, which should be started early on in life, and which implies responsibility for one's own decisions and the awareness of the effort required by choice (Colombo, 2010). Choosing what secondary school to attend means projecting oneself into the future, based on knowledge of oneself in the present. Having to imagine one's future is not simple for any child, even more so for those who belong to vulnerable groups or who have families who are unable to support them.

Figure 4.3. Rolling out and making pasta by hand

11. A *sfoglina* is someone who, in and around Bologna, rolls out and makes pasta exclusively by hand, with a rolling pin. In Italian, the term generally ends in 'a', gendering it as female, as traditionally it is work done by women.

Figure 4.4. Learning the abilities of a circus actor

The workshop was divided into 3 meetings, in a total of 8 hours for each class.

In the first meeting, the artisan used his own life story to introduce himself, his job, and his training stages, speaking in-depth about the characteristics of his profession and his personal experiences. A time slot was intentionally left for students to ask questions. For the pasta maker, questions often intertwined with reflections on gender, and on familial and social recognition, as the job is often labelled as a female occupation.

The second meeting was mostly a practical experience, depending on the professional's craft: making fresh pasta or theatrical/ juggling training. This meeting was a chance to produce cognitive dissonance both regarding stereotypes about practical activities – on both male and female roles – and regarding the skills required to carry out the assigned task: students who struggle in school discovered that they are actually capable and talented when teaching their classmates and teachers strategies on how to roll pasta dough or how do a specific clown trick.

The third meeting was organised around a school trip. Students went out to visit various places and carry out activities similar to the occupations explored, albeit through rather unusual perspectives. According to the profession studied, the classes were taken on a visit to FICO, a large farmer's market where they could enter into the production of sweets or grapple with the topic of ethical tomatoes[12]; or they got to learn about the 'open' fields of Arvaia, a cooperative of organic farmers; or they got to see the other 'face' of theatre and the work done behind the scenes, carrying out an activity in the big tent used for the circus-theatre.

12. The students met a manager of Funky Tomato, an ethical organic canned tomato grower that does not exploit its workers at any phase in the production chain, from picking the tomatoes to the final product.

Both classes were able to expand upon the workshop with two activities proposed by an education studies intern, which would then become part of her thesis (Micheletto, 2019). The first activity, called 'Taking pictures of our skills', consisted of thinking about one's abilities starting from photographs that the artisan and the students brought to class, which they considered representative of their skills (Figure 4.5.).

Figure 4.5. *Students' skills with their own considerations*

The second activity was aimed at investigating the positive atmosphere of the classroom in general and in carrying out the RISE educational workshop. The latter was designed, as has been mentioned, to create a welcoming, inclusive setting at school, in line with one of the quality points of the 'Feeling good at school while learning' workshop-based teaching. Two simple questions were asked,[13] which students answered independently, on their own; then the answers were put into two boxes and drawn randomly. The teachers and students reflected on teaching methods, on what contributes to the

13. The questions were:
1. Can you think of a time when you felt good or were happy in class? What was it? Can you briefly describe it?
2. Can you write down what 'a positive classroom climate' means to you?

pleasure of being in class, and on the ways in which personal and collective well-being can be encouraged.

A 'learning by doing' workshop was also conducted in two primary school classes (with students in their last year of primary school). It was an experience involving carpentry activities (6 hours per class). By building a wooden object and using carpentry tools, students learned how to turn an abstract idea into something concrete, gaining confidence in their ability to make or build things. It also created the emotional premise for a spirit of sharing in the future through the satisfaction of designing and building something together. The keywords for this laboratory were: manual skills, design, creativity, knowledge of raw materials, ecology of resources and respect for them, respect and sharing.

4.4 Music: dialogue among cultures

I will never forget how S.'s eyes [Roma student] lit up when she realized that the excellent musician who was teaching her class was a Roma. [E., primary school teacher, Bari]

The music workshop was carried out in the primary schools of Bari, and involved an exceptional musician of Roma origin, Claudio 'Cavallo' Giagnotti, the leader of Mascarimirì, an internationally-famous music band. This Roma artist was chosen to encourage a positive image of the Roma community in a context that, before the Rise Project, was anything but welcoming. Various families had in fact objected to the enrolment of Roma children in a school system that, for the first time, pushed by local social services, had to welcome students living in an illegal parking area near the school. The workshop aimed to engage children during school hours, and also involve their families (Roma and non-Roma families) outside of school through the organisation of a music party.

Teachers and social workers used the presence of the artist – who was incredibly popular among kids and adults alike – to work on the low self-esteem of some Roma children, whose self-image is probably a reflection of the image of a community that often feels inferior and unable to address the challenges of the interaction required by the school system.

By using his tambourine, Mr Giagnotti explained how, over the centuries, music has been influenced by different sources, borrowing from them, and making it one of the main channels of integration between different cultures. In fact, the harmonies and melodies of different musical traditions from the Balkans, Portugal, Spain and Naples have fused in a universal language now known as 'pizzica'. Though currently considered to be Apulian folk music, this genre is shared, loved and understood by all its listeners (Figure 4.6.).

Figure 4.6. *Making collective music with hands and tambourine*

5. Digital Storytelling for reducing stereotypes and prejudice in the classroom

When considering the educational value of Digital Storytelling (DST) experiences at school, one must understand both the context and the conditions that may facilitate, or hinder, the implementation of a participatory approach conveyed by the use of digital technology. It is with this purpose in mind that the DST laboratory – described in the following paragraphs – was carried out within the Italian context and, in particular, in the Emilia-Romagna and Puglia regions. The first data we investigated concerned the frequency (in %) with which teachers carried out teaching and learning activities with the use of digital technologies. The AGCOM data (2019) underline an important "split" among Italian teachers. Approximately 50% of them use digital technologies daily, 27% weekly, 13% once a month, 7% sometimes during the year, 5% stated they never use it. Furthermore, those data underline that Italian teachers not only use digital technologies with different frequencies, but they also do it in different ways. A 'worrying' finding shows, for example,

that among the types of activities carried out with digital technology by teachers, most of them are related to "Consultation of sources" (48%) and, only a few to sustain "collaborative work and interaction in the classroom" (20%). Technologies represent a "reinforcement" or "replication" of the frontal lesson. The scenario of collaborative or co-construction of knowledge, through stimulating active learning approaches, seems to be lacking. However, considering these obstacles, both linked to the low use of digital technologies in the classroom, the DST experience promoted within the framework of RISE project, and carried out by the pilot schools, tried to stimulate an active, inclusive, collaborative approach to knowledge.

This contribution presents a synthesis of the guidelines supporting the methodological implementation – in the 18 pilot classes in the city of Bologna, and in eight classes in the city of Bari – of the DST activities; on the other hand, it outlines the first results of an exploratory survey of the activity conducted in Bologna.

The RISE project strongly takes up the challenge posed by the right to inclusion and education, in the educational field, of Roma children, on which, for some years, there has been an ongoing debate within the European Union (European Union, 2011, 2012). Promoting a culture of inclusion also means breaking down all discriminatory attitudes and prejudice that cause not only a rate of school disaffection, but also exclusion from social life. Indeed, as described above, the DST laboratory was developed in this direction.

In order to ensure greater participation by each student in the work process, an educational setting of their own (also) cooperative learning was used. In all three work stages (drafting the story text, creating the graphics, and final editing of the digital clip) the class was divided into small, heterogeneous work groups, both from the point of view of behavioural characteristics and cultural affiliation. Within the work teams, a precise role was assigned to each participant (writer, graphic-designer, coordinator, time-manager) to foster the dynamics of 'positive interdependence': each member should perceive that he/she was essential for the whole group, in order to understand that without his/her contribution the team could not achieve its objectives, and vice versa. All this, then, implies comparison with social skills, such as: respecting different opinions; learning how to make decisions; helping colleagues by supporting them in activities that affect their role, and many other dynamics within the set of social and emotional skills (Goleman, 2015; Marani & Schiralli, 2012).

5.1 DST for inclusive education

The rapid and pervasive diffusion of digital technologies in our global society is contributing (with 'lights and shadows') to amplifying the possibilities every human has of also being heard and of representing themselves through new media. DST consists in using multimedia software (online and/or offline) and Internet resources in order to build, tell and publish a story. What sets it apart from the mere practice of assembling multimedia materials for making a video is its characteristic of relying on *storytelling*, that is, on personal stories with strong emotional connotations, and above all, told with the precise intention of being shared with other people through specific online environments (Petrucco & De Rossi, 2009). Not only is DST a multimedia product, but it is also a real process in and of itself, which does not end with its production, as it lives in a "without-end chain" formed by social actors, technology and cultural artefacts. DST, in the context of this publication, can represent a lever capable of promoting the active participation of individual pupils within an individual and social dimension of learning. The inclusive perspective interprets education as an agent of change, rather than a reproducer of social inequalities (Oliver, 1992).

5.2 Students' perception on the DST laboratory

This part describes how the work process was articulated in the DST laboratory.

The first meeting: after a general introduction to the activities and concept of DST, the class was divided into working groups (heterogeneous), and the narrative was written by beginning to find its main parts, that is, introduction, core of the story, conclusion and final message. In this step, the groups had three types of potential scenarios (animal environment, unknown planet, world of inanimate objects) from which to draw up the story.

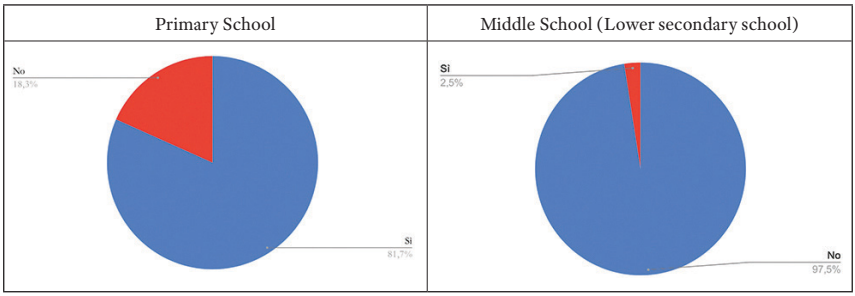
Second meeting: taking back what was written in the first day and producing a graphic translation (freehand drawings) of the text of the story. During the activity, the conductor, assisted by class tutors, supports the groups in organizing the work of creating the "Storyboard".

Third meeting: graphic creations were digitally collected and, after inserting them sequentially into a video editing software, each member of the group

recorded his/her voice by reading parts of the story they had created in order to generate a vocal track that acted as an external narrator.

At the end of the project process within the schools, a semi-structured questionnaire was administered with the aim of stimulating a meta-reflection among students on the activities carried out in the classroom. The data reported in this chapter refer to the Emilia-Romagna context. The dimensions investigated were: their appreciation of the experience, how used they were to working in a group, their commitment to carry out the activity, and their skills in using digital technologies. In general, pupils rated their DST experience as quite positive and did not report any particular difficulties in doing the work required. The main 'critical' aspect that emerged from the questionnaire concerns their not being used to carrying out group assignments, and therefore to abandon the traditional training setting typical of one-to-many teaching and to stress the meeting between peers. In fact, to the question *had you done group work before?* students answered as shown in Graph 4.1.

Graph 4.1. Students who had some experience in group assignments before the DST Lab



As can be seen from the Graph 4.1., the primary school classes involved seemed to be more used to group work, as opposed to middle school students, where only 2.5% of students say they had already engaged in group work in the past.

Taking into account the question "What difficulties did you encounter working in a group?", the students highlighted two types of difficulties. The first concerns mutual help and the involvement of all team members; the second regards the difficulties in the graphic realization of the drawings. Some students underlined that "not everyone collaborated", "the males did not give us [to the girls] the floor", "most members did not write, draw

and propose anything", "we were undecided and disagreed". Instead, when asked, "What's the most important thing you learned with your group?" the students firmly highlighted that what they learned during the co-working experience concerned the "respect for the other person", his/her diversity, and the importance of suspending judgment without first knowing people. Most respondents sustained that "we must accept everyone, because we are all special in our own way", "we must not judge people who do not know each other", "diversity is a value, not a weakness", "difference in culture doesn't matter, you don't have to be racist" (Figure 4.7.).

Figure 4.7. Storytelling Title and Slogan ("Strange friends"; "We are all trees from the same garden")

Being focused on the topic of inclusion of other ethnic groups, at the end of the lab we collected the final messages conveyed by the digital narrations (84 stories). By analysing the many final messages, one can draw a general picture on the positive impact, or not, of DST activities. Most of the stories recall the importance of being different but, at the same time, "all the same"; the need of getting away from racist thoughts; and the beauty of discovering other cultures. In this regard, some students stressed that "even if we are different, we can still get along", "we must not judge people without knowing them", "even if we are different, we must love each other", "we must show our particularities with courage and without fear", "the colour of the skin doesn't matter, the important thing is to be friends".

These are just some of the many answers received, but, even if with different words and through stories with different protagonists and settings, all the groups in both school levels have very carefully grasped the value of this

laboratory by creating digital video-narratives centred on erasing stereotypes and prejudice concerning 'those different' from oneself.

5.3 Recommendations

Taking in account the 'in progress' data shortly presented, the DST activities have fostered knowledge and socialization processes between different cultures, through the promotion of cooperative learning practices. Mediators – such as DST – play a key role as they can be considered facilitators in the teaching-learning and socialisation processes (Ferrari, 2015). Furthermore, students' motivation and commitment have been recognized as fundamental elements for the success of our laboratory experience. It is quite clear that when the use of DST is supported by collaborative teaching approaches, the horizon of possibilities can be broadened, both for the expression of one's self and for the development of cognitive, social and relational skills (Garzotto & Bordogna, 2010). Thus, digital technologies should accompany accessible and inclusive teaching practices, in particular when they follow the Universal Design for Learning approach (Cast, 2011; Fogarolo & Campagna, 2012).

However, despite the excellent feedback received from the students who participated in our labs, we have to consider that – as underlined by international literature – most DST educational projects "are largely based on episodic and short-lived experiences involving a limited number of teachers and students for a short period of time" (Di Blas, Garzotto, Paolini & Sabiescu, 2009).

For these reasons, today more than ever, investments are needed to support "initial and continuous teachers training aimed at experimenting new [teaching-learning] models which go beyond the traditional frontal and unidirectional lesson, also useful for understanding the potential of technology and translating it into didactic paradigms [widespread on a large scale and sustainable over time]" (AGCOM, 2019, p. 42).

6. Reaching Out to International Peers through English

The module "RISE ENGLISH: Connecting with the world" is a component of the RISE project designed to enable students to virtually interact through a dedicated communication platform, as a symbolic conclusion of their

participation in the project. What follows describes the communicational input that was initially given by the researcher, how teachers tailored it to their students to guide preparatory work in class and, ultimately, how then students transformed it through their communicational power during their video calls.

The exchanges took place once, in the month of January 2020, and involved a little over 100 pupils aged 8 to 13, distributed over four classes in Italy, Slovenia and Portugal. Third grade children attending 'Japigia Verga' Primary School (Bari) communicated with fourth grade children in 'Grm' Primary School (Novo Mesto), while second year students attending 'Besta' Middle School (Bologna), interacted with their peers in the Braga District school.

6.1 General Guidelines

Guidelines for this communicational activity had to take into account affective filters deriving from English being the medium of communication. Aside from emotional barriers, due to naturally occurring shyness caused by having to speak live in an unfamiliar context, these virtual communications could potentially suffer from the use of a foreign language many of them knew only at an elementary level, and which also coincided with it being a sometimes dreaded school subject. In order to avoid fears related to academic performance, the guidelines emphasised the communicative nature of this assignment: the focus was on successful, fulfilling communication, rather than on language learning and linguistic performance.

In line with the general spirit of RISE, and with the aim of bypassing affective filters (Du, 2009), students were asked to present themselves as a group, describing their strengths and peculiarities, using mixed media and making ample use of visual and non-verbal aural communication. Consistent with a communicative approach (Littlewood & William, 1981), the guidelines were based on Task-Based Learning, which makes students fully responsible for finding and modulating the language they need in order to fulfil their tasks and produce meaningful linguistic experiences in the foreign language (Ellis, 2003).

The two general tasks submitted to both teachers and students were the following:

a) Describe your class to students of other countries during video chats. In particular, in the spirit of interconnectedness (with regards to identity), the students were required to create slogans and mottos with which they could all identify. Slogans could be verbal or visual, and children could choose to work on whatever aspect, including a list of class values or class rules, balancing individual and collective perspectives (ex. "When I enter this class, I am..."). Slogans relied on simple but effective language structures (easy enough to handle), and seemed to provide a sufficient amount of constraints which could make children feel supported in their production, while at the same time granting them full creative power (with the extra support of non-verbal inputs they were encouraged to maximise).
b) Produce your own mixed-media TIME CAPSULE: a box you will leave for future generations, in order to show them what is special about your class today. The contents of this box, which could range from drawings to music and dancing, would then be revealed to and commented with their international peers during the call.

These tasks implied a balance between individual and collective contributions. Studies confirm that "task-based [...] activities may be more conducive to creating a more collaborative learning environment and also providing opportunities for real life-like language use" (Erten & Altay, 2009, p. 33). Students involved in this module were already accustomed to cooperating and working in groups, and they were likewise familiar with the production of slogans and mottos which they had devised during various RISE stages. Transferring this knowledge into English could provide them with an opportunity to employ natural, current language to express their thoughts, thus moving away from the view of English as a totally foreign language.

In terms of language support, researchers and teachers agreed on giving participants enough language guidance so as to enable them to freely design their slogans and introductions, but to avoid correcting them when errors did not hamper comprehension. Primary pupils needed more language support, which at times meant translating from their mother tongues whatever they wished to express. Middle school students were generally more independent, although their teachers provided constant support and scaffolding when asked.

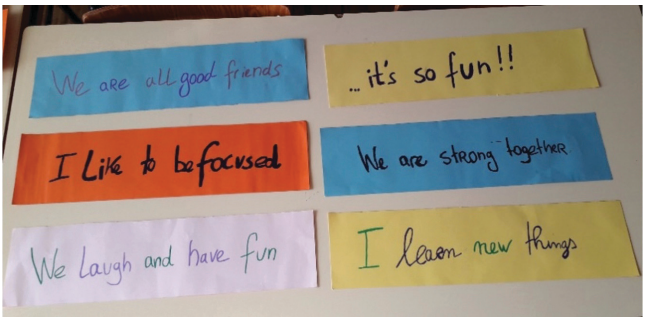
6.2 Classroom Work: teachers and students

Teachers introduced the tasks to their classes and helped them tailor the content to context and communication needs. The Bologna students had incidentally been working on a time capsule in the past, and so they decided to replicate the experience in English. The Bari children had been researching and visiting apiaries and beehives, fully experiencing the integration of individual and group identity, and therefore decided to develop this metaphor, by showing their individual roles within the 'school hive' (Figure 4.8.), and conveying how individual strengths can benefit the cohesion of the group.

All the students engaged with enthusiasm in the task, and produced very impressive collective self-representations, through fine examples of art and wordplay. The Novo Mesto children conceived a dance and a song, which described their class and their school life in terms of collaboration and collective effort: "more time to play, if we follow the rules". The Braga District school students focussed on how they felt as a group (and in the group), and what each individual added to it. Examples included: "I am free to be creative", "I am happy here", "I love this class", "I learn new things", "We make our future", "We laugh and have fun", "We are all good friends", "We are strong together" (Figure 4.9.). Alternating between 'I' and 'we' statements, students were able to portray themselves as a cohesive entity where individuals have freedom of expression, and where they feel free to be who they are, while at the same time reinforcing their collective identity.

Figure 4.8. Bari: "We are like bees"

Figure 4.9. Braga district: Signs designed by the students



The students' reflections in this leading up phase where very impressive. One such case was in Bologna, where the symbolism the class created to represent itself was impressive. The class was highly multicultural, and some students in the past had moved permanently to other cities or countries: for this reason, they thought of themselves as a railway station, where people come and people go. However, even being distant, they felt that their friendship would never end, and hence adopted the symbol of infinity; as well as a sun, to represent their positive and 'sunny' nature. All of these symbols were skilfully drawn and included in their time capsule.

6.3 The calls

The calls were extremely successful, and all students said they were fully satisfied. They agreed to take turns in presenting their materials, taking roughly 15 minutes each, then allowing time for free questions. Despite some natural shyness, almost all students came forward to the camera and said something, holding up written signs, photos or drawings, of which all the classes made ample use. All participants watched and listened attentively to what their peers said and did.

The Novo Mesto dance was highly appreciated, and so were all the colourful bee-hive posters and classroom activities presented by their peers in Bari. The lasting impression from this call was one of joy, natural curiosity and colourful enthusiasm, which ended with a big sign held up by the Slovenian children, "Have a nice day!", and with the promise of repeating the same experience again next year.

The middle school children said they fully enjoyed the experience, despite technical issues they overcame through their enthusiasm and their will to interact. They shared their thoughts through signs, drawings and music, and they succeeded in communicating who they are.

This phase of previously structured interaction provided a sort of safe icebreaker, which facilitated a very meaningful subsequent phase of spontaneous, free questions. Had there been enough time, there would have been no end to the questions all four classes wanted to ask. Some had been anticipated and prepared, but most of them were triggered by actually seeing their peers, their classrooms or library, and by interacting with them. A few questions were asked in English (with teacher support), while many were formulated in their mother tongue and translated by their teachers. There was a great deal of curiosity about their peers: the students acted as real ethnographers, and provided a vivid idea of what kind of information mattered to them. Examples of questions were: "Do you get homework?", "Have you got a school library?", "Do you like school?", "How much time do you spend at school every day?", "What music do you listen to?". An interesting case was the conversation between the two primary classes. Novo Mesto children were particularly interested in where the Italian children kept their school material, given that Bari had described a "without a backpack" approach (Orsi, 2006): What did that mean? Were they really spared from having to carry a school bag? Did they share pencils and books? The answers were mostly physical/visual: the children kept bringing objects close to the camera or pointing at places, containers, drawers, posters and corners in their classroom. They were literally hosting their international peers in their school spaces.

6.4 Implications for language learning

All along, teachers acted as interpreters, giving their students a most valuable example of effective second language users and successful communicators. In terms of language learning, there were two main results. One was a strive for language and communicational independence. Many children wanted to ask their questions in English – with a little help. When words were lacking, many of them made use of body language, mime actions and objects, thus succeeding in getting their messages across. This led them to say that they wanted to improve their English skills in order to communicate independently,

rather than relying on someone else's translation. Thus, providing children with an opportunity to interact in real life boosted their motivation to learn. Allowing students to foresee practical communication uses can help them and their teachers come together to design meaningful, effective learning environments. With a goal in mind, foreign languages becomes less foreign, and learning them makes much more sense (Masoni, 2018).

But there was also another important aspect related to language. Students used English to talk about their own mother tongues. This was quite clear in requests such as "We'd like to hear you count to 10 in Italian". English acquired the extra meaning of pivot/ bridge language, an intermediary which enabled them to explore other languages and cultures. This is especially important in multi-cultural classes, where a pivot language can sometimes help clarify meaning and avoiding misunderstandings (Stille, 2015).

Overall, this experience cries out for replication, to the point of turning it into a routine (see e-Twinning network). Children proved how much they need to reach out to their international peers, discover similarities and differences through their own questions and answers, find like-minded people in another country, and even a home away from home, as in the case of two Brazilian students, one in Bologna and one in Braga, who were able to come together in that virtual space and speak in their mother tongue.

There is a very strong case for boosting these virtual interactions in the school environment. Schools can provide safe virtual spaces (where students can come together as groups and benefit from the guidance and language support of their teachers), thus promoting a positive, constructive use of communication platforms to reach out to the Other.

Conclusion

As shown above, so far, the RISE project in Italy has been extremely articulated and designed to respond to specific needs, in order to promote change towards a more inclusive school. For some of the schools involved, it was a pilot and a pioneering project, where innovation was implemented in the methodological approach used, which was deconstructed and reconstructed on the basis of needs, problems, and suggestions that emerged through action–research, as well as during training sessions for teachers and other

social actors – in the workshop techniques applied, in the articulation of proposals, and in the use of a multiple evaluation system.

The concept of inclusion, understood as a resource that can be shared by all students, has brought tangible results in the classroom, creating a positive classroom climate, promoting constructive relationships among pupils, and between pupils and teachers, and improving collaboration among teachers, school staff, and Roma families.

Positive results were also measured by the evaluation system set up by the Istituto degli Innocenti through a combination of tools: i) *an attendance timetable*, monitoring children's presence at school and their success rate; ii) an *inclusion index* that detected the point of view of teachers and students, in order to record the project's effect upon schools; and iii) a *satisfaction survey* submitted to teachers to understand which kind of skills they acquired through training and to record their opinion on the workshops.

But the benefits of the project reached far beyond tangible outputs.

There are outcomes that are difficult to translate into indicators. Such as those produced by the work in progress, for example relational outcomes, which emerged during the debates between teachers and social workers involved in action research. These results concern, for instance, the transformation of relationships between different cultures within the same society.

This project has certainly implemented processes aimed at rethinking (1) the role of social actors such as teachers, students, school staff and parents within a school designed to be more welcoming for all, and also (2) the management of social representations and stereotypes towards diversity in everyday life. But the challenge remains for schools and local contexts. The impact of all this will develop over time, beyond the Rise project.

Nevertheless, we must be aware that this project also has its limitations, the first of which is represented by its implementation time: it was far too short to support a process that is in itself long and difficult, because it requires structural changes to remove inclusive actions from the field of discretion. The second is that in Italy there have been unresolved issues, for years now, concerning Roma people and their younger generations.

This project cannot solve various problems that need to be approached at a political level and that concern housing, work, health protection and citizenship rights of the Roma population, which are essential for the full realization of an inclusive path.

But the 'lesson learned' from the strategy adopted so far remains: Roma and Sinti children can be transformed from 'problems' into resources for the whole community, and this project has indeed transformed the inclusion of Roma children and pre-adolescents in schools from a problem to a resource.

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