

Migration processes and digital natives: tackling a gap

Francesca Soli, Walter Fornasa

1. Background

Human evolution have always been characterized by heavy displacements from one place to another of the globe for different reasons: famines, wars, desire to conquer or even desire of knowledge.

These processes, however, transformed deeply over last years, thanks to technological progresses: easier communications, travel times considerably reduced and the opportunity to know (and somehow "to watch") what happens in other countries are some of the facilities introduced.

Italian history integrates in a peculiar way in this frame, displaying many differences compared to other European countries (such as France, Great Britain or Spain) due largely to a different colonial past. Italy has experienced a long period (about one hundred year, from the unification of the Kingdom of Italy until the 1960s) of migration, that involved a very high number of italians and, only in the last decades, it has become a destination for migrants coming from other countries.

Migration in Italy is a quite "young" process and it's almost contemporaneous with the development of new technologies and their diffusion. This entail that, in this particular historical moment, we are living in Italy an overlap between so-called Digital Natives, or rather boys and girls who were born and who have grown up in a naturally digital context, and Second Generations of Immigration (1) (G2). By this definition we mean those who were born in an age in which migration processes have brought about a cohabitation (or only a coexistence) of different cultures in shared contexts. There are a lot of young boys and girls born in Italy or arrived in this country when they were children who are developing their lives there: they are living their school life (students without italian citizenship at the end of 2011 were 7,9% of students in italian schools), they are growing up in agreement with italians laws and they have to get knowledge about native culture and tradition to interact with their mates and friends.

"Digitalization" and "migrations", which in Italy are simultaneous processes, are usually observed and treated in literature as they were unrelated, without considering their connections and without *put them in relation with* (Morin, 1999) socio-economical-cultural context in which they are developing. But, if we focus on the cultural reflect of these two synchronized processes, we can feel how hard is it to split young citizen development (in term of personal development, group development and cultural references) in smaller pieces.

As we can read in literature (Balsamo, 2003; Valtolina, 2010b) immigrant families normally live, during their migration process, deep changes. Relationship between husband and wife and/or between parents and children can be destabilized and they have to reorganize and to create new equilibriums. This new organization can be really far from the original condition and sometimes people have to play a very different role. All the more so if children became more expert of their parents in regards on many aspect both of the new life context (i.e. language, costumes and traditions,...) and technological world (i.e. computer use).

Parents, especially mothers, which in their country would have guarded children education, now need them to do all basic daily actions: go to doctor, talk to teachers, etc. (Valtolina, 2010a). In this way they and their active role in development are marked down to children eyes because of their fault of experience.

This contribution moves from two action researches developed with kids and with mothers and it would like to present these "two sides of the moon" in a dialogic way.

Moreover this change has also heavy implications on educative systems, because there is a similar gap between teachers and students considering that G2 very often speak more than a language and that students are digital natives while there are still teachers unable to use a computer.

2. Parents and sons: the two sides of the moon

These two action researches were carried out in last years in the district of Bergamo, in the North of Italy.

As previously said we observed complex processes. Their (co)evolutive nature needs a particular methodological attention to respect ecological validity (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) of observation, relations, actors and tools.

The choice to carry out participatory action researches rises from the need to stay in the same context of the actors and to start working with them on same difficulty underlined by schools or actors themselves.

1.1. Being a Second Generation

This research involved young sons and daughters of immigrants with an age between fourteen and nineteen.

We decided to work with secondary school students for two reasons. First of all both technological and migration increase in Italy starting from the 1990s (Caronia, Caron, 2010; Ambrosini, 2005; Mantovani, 2004). It means that children born in those years have grown up as digital natives in a world characterized by the meeting (and sometimes the collision) between different macro-cultures. Secondly as we wanted to observe relations between different generations and between kids and life context we needed that they had a self-awareness difficultly present in younger people.

Kids (22 boys and 30 girls) participated to a school project which has the aim to better understand their parents culture and to build bridges between teachers and families. In a first time they were asked to reflect on themselves, then on their parents and finally on their teachers.

In regard of their parents most of them thinks that they are too attached to the past and that they could difficultly feel good in Italy. In their opinion especially mothers look to the past in a nostalgic way, they miss relatives and friends and they are all day long at home calling people in their country. The most part of them don't work and kids think that this is the principal reason they don't speak italian well, but some of them also think that their mother really don't want to learn a new language or can't do it because they don't have the capacity.

In general terms parents are seen as "far", unable to understand real needs: fathers are principally seen as hard-shell, but with an established role into the family, while mothers are seen as good and sensitive but unable to help them in daily life. A lot of kids think that they can help their mother more than vice versa and that they have to take care of them.

Kids with illiterate mothers say that sometimes they feel embarrassed, most of all when they talk to italian mates or teachers. There is an interesting gender difference about these theme: boys seem to be more protective and try to underline their mothers' qualities. They say that school education is important but they also justify their mothers by the social situation in their country ("My mother come from a place where girls normally don't go to school", "In my parents village girls normally do other things as take care of their brothers and sisters or help in the house. My mother would like to go to school but she couldn't"). Girls seem to be harder and underline that they will be different from their mothers: they say that they want to study and to find a work (someone also to travel) before marriage, because they don't want to depend from their future husband.

On the average kids use computers, phones, tablets and other technological instruments more than an hour and a half a day, mainly to connect to the internet and to communicate with their friend or relatives. The most part of them say that parents call (using both telephone and clients as skype or msn) their country every day to talk to uncles or grandparents, while they mainly use social-networks to keep in touch with their cousins or some friend. Internet is seen as a place where they can talk about themselves and about some aspects of their lives, ignoring others. Some of the kids use different social-networks to communicate with italian friends or non-italian ones. It's interesting to see that when they talk about "Italian friends" they means with this term "friends they know in Italy", also if they aren't italian citizens. A last interesting consideration is that a large part of kids imagine a future in Italy or in another European or USA country, they don't feel worried about travelling and starting a new life in a different place but they think they couldn't live in their parents' countries. There is a curious split: they feel Moroccans, Romanians, Senegalese and so on but they think they couldn't live in Morocco, Romania, Senegal,...

1.2. Being a mother in a new country

The aim of this second action research was to explore and to try to understand parents' needs and difficulties in relation with Italian school.

The context was that of a very particular area, characterized by a heavy presence of families (especially from Morocco, Senegal and Pakistan) in which men were the first migrants, and only in a second time their wives and children have arrived.

In the last few years a lot of women arrived in Italy with family reunion and this has modified a lot collective imagination on immigrants: no more men coming in the country to find a job but women, with new needs and new resources. A lot of them came from contexts in which they were a central figure in house but not very active outside it. When they arrive in the new country they have to recover their relation with a partner who was far away for a lot of time and to find a new place in society.

Normally in their countries children education is one of their tasks and they try to reproduce it in the new context, also because husbands work all day long. This is one of the reasons that make us choose to work mainly with women.

This research took place in a primary school, in which it was developed a linguistic project for mothers who would like to learn Italian better and it has involved 82 women coming from twelve different countries.

The first instrument of link and interface with territory are communication skills, meant as skill to understand possibilities and informations and also to state your own need. To ask and to give.

One of the main difficulties for just arrived adults, in fact, is that they can't correctly speak the language, which means that they can't talk to teachers, go to the doctor or somewhere without their children which, learning it at school, are more expert than their parents and often become their "linguistic prosthesis". This change on family tasks and roles often has a deep impact on the educative style although migrant parents often try to educate children consistently with their traditions and their ethnic identity (see also Bonizzoni, 2010).

The project wanted to promote linguistic learning starting from daily practices and, vice versa, to promote apprenticeship to cultural and local practices (Rogoff, 2004) starting from Italian language. In this dynamic and co-developed context it was possible to create a dialogic "place", open to confront each other, and also to investigate on mother's idea of education and on their life experiences.

All the mothers agree on the importance to speak their mother tongue with children and to grow them up according to their cultural values, where a very important place is given to religion, especially for Muslims. This seems to be even more important for people coming from the more represented cultural communities, in which there is a sort of internal control. For the most part of these women it's very important to find a new social acknowledgement, and it can be recreated only through the approval of people coming from their own country.

A lot of these mothers think that Italian life style is inappropriate, and that it's more difficult to educate their sons and daughters in a new country because they don't have good models.

Another interesting consideration is that there are two groups of women who live more difficultly than others their situation: very educated mothers (with one or more university degrees), which in their countries had a recognized social position, and no-educated mothers (that who have never gone to school), which in their countries based their social position on a model which isn't reproducible in the new life context.

These two groups live a higher feeling of inadequacy due mainly to the fact they can't help their children with homework.

Only few women can use a computer but almost all of them think that it's a very important instrument and would like to learn it, moreover to control what children do. A lot of them, thanks to children, use it to call relatives all over the world or to know what is happening in their countries but can't do it alone.

3. Conclusions

Second Generations of Immigrations feel a distance between them and their parents. This feeling, which it's typical of adolescence, it's amplified by the daily use of another language (the most of them can speak their parents' mother tongue but can't write it) and by the sense of being a key support for their parents, which need them to understand the context in which they are living. Parents are seen as too much linked to the past and unable to understand well them and their needs.

Parents (especially mothers) are also seen, in same case, as unable and this can be embarrassing.

Kids use the net to communicate and to talk about themselves as a key tool. It give them the sensation of being free, also because they can be out of their parents control.

On the other hand mothers often feel inadequate, and would like to help more their children. They need to find a new place in society and they look in a nostalgic way what they have left in their countries. A most part of them think that it's very important to learn both italian and computer use, because these are their children's tools, but they find it very difficult.

In this frame, in which we have parents on one side and sons and daughters on the other it's important to find new communication strategies, to build new bridges between these two communities. Kids need to underline their new identity, which is something different from that of their parents but also from that of their mates and they do it both on-line and off-line, and mothers need to understand social changes and need to learn how to “stay-in-them”.

Schools, which are recognized as educational places both from parents and children, can play a key role in their rapprochement. Italian schools don't have the possibility to work on adult education (most of all for economical reasons) but they can promote the active presence of parents and involve them to underline their characteristics and to encourage intercultural and intergenerational interaction.

At the same time working on adult education (particularly women education) in an “empowerment-oriented” way to give women new tools, can help to reduce the gap between parents and children and to re-establish their role in the eyes of their sons and daughters.

Notes

(1) We decided to use Second Generations of *Immigration* and not Second Generations of *Immigrants* to underline that migration can't be an hereditary condition (cfr. Moncusì Ferré, 2007).

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