
*Unconscious government
assessment policy:
language tests for immigrant students in
Italian schools*

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Objectives

- **Describing the migratory phenomenon seen in Italy in the last thirty years**
- **Discussing results of a project carried out in schools**



Quantitative data on immigration in Italy

Foreign immigrants in 2008 amount around 4,000,000 people, which accounts for over 6% of the resident population

The average annual growth rate of foreign nationals is around 350,000 persons



Pupils of foreign origin

All foreigners of school-age must attend lessons

Italian law N°. 40/98 on immigration guarantees the right and obligation for minors, including the children of illegal immigrants, to enrol at school



Pupils of foreign origin

School year 2007/2008: 574,133 pupils with non-Italian citizenship attending school, accounting for almost 6.4% of the overall school population

40% of pupils of foreign origin are in primary school

191 different countries: top five countries (Romania, Albania, Morocco, China and Ecuador) account for 50% of all foreign pupils

The response of the Italian institutions

First memorandum

C.M. 8/9/1989, n° . 301

“Inclusion of foreign pupils in compulsory schooling. Promotion and coordination of initiatives for exercising the right to study”

C.M. 8/9/1989, n°. 301

- 1) the central importance of the language issue is recognised;**
- 2) respect for differences;**
- 3) recognition of pupil's previous knowledge;**
- 4) the necessity of training teachers;**
- 5) emphasis is placed on the importance of coordination on a local level, including non-institutional organisations.**

Other laws

- **1990 (CM 205/90): central nature of the language issue**
- **1994 (CM 73/1994): intercultural perspective**
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- **2006 “Guidelines for the reception and integration of foreign pupils”**

Proposal so-called 'Cota motion' (October 2008)

This motion want push the government to approve the creation of separate classes (in Italian 'classi ponte') for pupils of foreign origin



Proposal so-called 'Cota motion'

On the part of the proponents of this motion, the contents under discussion highlight

- **a lack of due consideration of existing legislation on the matter, and of research regarding language learning,**
- **the failure to indicate who would be involved in preparing and administering the tests,**
- **the lack of reference to professional figures such as Italian as a second language teachers,**
- **the lack of knowledge of the structural elements of foreign immigration in Italy and of the role of maintaining the languages of origin.**



Proposal so-called 'Cota motion'

It seems that the Cota motion reflects and corroborates the institutional lack of a language assessment culture, an *ethical milieu* (Davies 1997) which, as mentioned above, unfortunately seems to be typical of the Italian school system, and to some degree result of the same system.

The local context of the research

Results of a language learning, teaching and assessment experience performed in schools in the school years 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 by the University for Foreigners in Siena's CILS Italian language certification centre together with the City of Florence Public Education Department.

The local context of the research

The Municipality of Florence

- has established a strong policy for the support of pupils from foreign families
- has set up five literacy centres within its territory, one in each of the city's five administrative districts
- promotes teaching to assist foreign pupils in learning Italian as a second language

Results of the first phase

Creation of common and shared basis for literacy facilitators and teachers, so that they could work together to create instruments and 'products' for use in class.



The local context of the research

The second part of the project, seminar-based, aimed to devise reading comprehension tests using a passage from a history text

Reflection on:

- the difficulties of handling a history text in comprehension activities
- the elaboration of criteria and tools for the assessment of reading comprehension

Results of the second phase

Construction of tests for the assessment of reading comprehension

They were administered in plurilingual classes



The data

	Primary school		
	1st test	2nd test	3rd test
Score	4 points	8 points	8 points
Type of text	narrative	expository	expository
Topic	<i>The life story of grandma Lina</i>	<i>Life in the old stone age</i>	<i>Life in the new stone age</i>
Technique	transcoding	questions with multiple choice answers	multiple choice sentence completion
N° of questions	3	4	4

Table 1. Test format – Primary school

The data

		First year secondary school	
	1st test	2nd test	3rd test
Score	1A: 4 points 1B: 2.5 points 1C: 1.5 points	6 points	6 points
Type of text Topic	expository (descriptive) <i>Life in the castle</i>	expository (descriptive) <i>Medieval homes: from castles to huts</i>	expository (descriptive) <i>The Bayeux tapestry: a forerunner to comic strips</i>
Technique	1A: matching exercise 1B: questions with multiple choice answers 1C: open questions	multiple choice sentence completion	questions with multiple choice answers
N° of questions	1A: 4 1B: 5 1C: 3	12	6



The data

Analysis of the data regarding the type of school and class attended showed that foreigners accounted for:

- **11.7% of pupils in the third year of primary school;**
- **12.0% of pupils in the first year of secondary school;**
- **11.8% of pupils in the third year of secondary school.**

The data

Type of school	N° of classes	N° of pupils	N° of foreign pupils	% of foreign pupils
Primary	14	263	31	11.7%
1st year secondary school	15	258	31	12.0%
3rd year secondary school	10	158	22	11.8%
	39	679	84	12.4%



Results: in the entire test by each pupil

In the primary schools (3rd year) 98.5% of pupils passed the test, and 24.5% achieved full marks (20/20)

In the secondary schools (first year) 90.1% of students passed the test, and 4.0% achieved full marks (20/20)

Results: in the entire test by each class

The results show that the presence of foreign pupils in the classes does not determine a good or bad outcome in the tests.



Results: in the entire test by the foreign pupils

The results attained by the foreign pupils at primary school are very satisfactory, with a pass rate of over 90%

The results attained by the foreign students at secondary school are less encouraging, but 62.5% passing the test

Conclusions

The results show the positive effects of combined learning, teaching and assessment actions, addressed to Italian and foreign pupils, and in which assessment is seen more as a learning event than as a mere assessment of learning (Rea-Dickins, 2008)

