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Title: School-Community Relations: Learning for Citizenship and Democracy

Abstract

The purpose of my paper is to present my PhD research about ethnicity and multilingual, multicultural identities and democratic participation in learning and communication networks between schools and the local community (parents, social services, cultural and educational agencies).

I conducted my empirical research in South Tirol at an educational hub, an Italian speaking school with linguistically mixed environment. There are three parallel school systems in South Tyrol which is trilingual and tricultural province in northern Italy. School pupils are taught in their mother tongue (German or Italian or Ladin). The other language is taught as the second language. The political policy maintains this strict separation between the language groups and does not recognize the bilingual or multiply identities.

The problems of this system arise particularly for mixed families and immigrants because they either feel affiliated to both systems, as is often the case for mixed families, or they do not feel affiliated to any of the systems, as is common among immigrants.

The school where I am conducting my research is one of the few initiatives which offers German and Italian as language of instruction.

This school was chosen because it promotes the establishment of a school community. In addition it has the primary aim of favouring the design and implementation of a vertically centred curriculum on skills rather than only on content and promotes a progressive cognitive, behavioural autonomy of pupils in social and civic attitudes and aims to promote positive interpersonal relationships, cultural coexistence, awareness of, respect for and protection of different ethnic identities.

The institute also recognises close contact with the local environment as a further priority. In order to achieve a greater sense of belonging it is necessary to know more about the history, the administrative reality of the region, and to participate in cultural, social life and work with the agencies of the local area.

The research methodology for this project was guided by qualitative research paradigm. My research is based on a case study and uses different types of data collection for qualitative studies, including: shadowing, in-depth interviews and document analysis.

My research is linked with the Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory and the studies of expansive learning developed by Engeström. The theory of expansive learning presents the concept of activity networks, the social relevance and embeddedness of knowledge and the power of the boundary zone, a place where is possible to realize the dynamic interaction between systems, between schools and community.

Keywords: Multicultural and multilingual citizenship, democratic partecipation, school-community relations, qualitative research.