

# Representations of Integration, Cultural Differences and the Intercultural in Questionnaires Collected with Professionals and Parents

SARA AMADASI<sup>1</sup>

ORCID: [0000-0003-3939-6199](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3939-6199)

Department of Studies on Language and Culture (DSL),  
Università di Modena e Reggio Emilia

CHIARA BALLESTRI

Department of Studies on Language and Culture (DSL),  
Università di Modena e Reggio Emilia

In this article we present quantitative data collected in Italy for the CHILD-UP project, funded by the EU Horizon 2020 programme in the period 2019–2022.

The aim of this work is to focus on a specific topic which emerged during the analysis of the questionnaires collected within schools. This topic is the perceptions of professionals and parents on the issues of integration, cultural differences and the intercultural.

Starting from a theorization of these concepts, we focus on quantitative data collected in the first part of the project by means of questionnaires distributed in a number of schools in Modena, Reggio Emilia and Genova. These questionnaires were given to professionals, students, and parents in kindergartens, primary schools and lower and higher secondary schools. However, here we only focus on data collected from professionals and parents.

This data shows how participants express ambivalence and disorientation concerning representations of hybridization, celebration of cultural differences, understanding of problems related to intercultural differences and assimilation. Moreover, significant differences exist between professionals (teachers, mediators and social workers) and between professionals and parents, who seem more frequently interested in assimilation.

**Keywords:** integration, intercultural, cultural differences, parents, professionals, school

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<sup>1</sup> Contact: [sara.amadasi@unimore.it](mailto:sara.amadasi@unimore.it)

## 1. Introduction

This article discusses how parents and professionals involved in the Horizon 2020 project CHILD-UP, position themselves in relation to some important concepts related to migrant children and, more generally, connected to the debate around migration. These concepts are ethnocentrism, hybridity, and cultural differences.

The analysis of the representations invoked in relation to integration, cultural differences and the intercultural that this investigation permitted, is based on quantitative data collected through questionnaires in kindergartens, primary schools and lower and higher secondary schools of Genova, Reggio Emilia and Modena.<sup>2</sup> The overall aim of the survey was to collect quantitative data and analyse it to answer questions on the integration of children with a migration background.

In Italy, 856 questionnaires were collected from students, 829 among parents and 203 were obtained from professionals. Professionals included 84 teachers or educators, 83 social workers, 36 mediators.

However, in this paper, we focus only on the data collected with parents and professionals, since the responses of this group of participants express a significant ambivalence towards certain aspects investigated through the questionnaires.

Data highlights how both professionals and parents show disagreement with an ethnocentric attitude toward cultural diversity, an important signal of a move on from an ethnocentric understanding of cultural diversity.

In terms of the categories of participants, the data also shows that the cultural representation of teachers mostly developed around two apparently ambivalent factors: hybridity and celebration of cultural difference, of which the latter might be celebrated or denied. Therefore, on one side, teachers show appreciation of cultural *mélange* and personal and cultural trajectories (Holliday and Amadasi 2020), agreeing with a “hybrid” understanding of society and integration. On the other side, they highlight the relevance of cultural difference, which might indicate either a fluid view on cultural variety or an expression of cultural essentialism. Cultural essentialism means a reified understanding of bounded cultural blocks (Amadasi & Holliday 2017) which leads to an individual’s behaviour being seen as guided by their “culture” and national belonging. This is worth further investigation to understand how these representations affect the processes of inclusion of children with a migration background.

Similarly to teachers, social workers also expressed an appreciation of both cultural variety and hybridity, corresponding to *mélange* and mixing personal expression and cultural influences. These two aspects are thus both evaluated as relevant and interconnected. However, unlike teachers, social workers also manifested an interest in the possibility for members of different groups to keep their own way of life

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<sup>2</sup> See Baraldi’s contribution in this special issue for further details on the participants and objectives of this project.

alive. This result also represents a possible ambiguous representation, as it can lead to separation and essentialism as well as a form of multiculturalism which celebrates cultural varieties.

Among mediators, multiculturalism represents an important option, expressed through a notable appreciation of cultural variety. Moreover, if compared to teachers and social workers, mediators seem less interested in *mélange*, and thus, in hybridity. This can be related to their personal stories and/or on their type of work. Certainly, this perspective might result in the creation of a different cultural background for collaboration between different professionals.

According to questionnaires collected among parents, diversity is valued and associated with beliefs in culture boundaries, thus revealing a form of essentialist representation. However, preferences expressed by parents also support *mélange*, interpreted as an opportunity, together with cultural variety, for society.

In this paper we can observe that, according to the data, both parents and professionals seem to agree on a rejection of assimilation and ethnocentrism, giving greater weight to hybridization and a positive valorization of cultural diversity. However, we also claim that the decreasing of the relevance given to hybridization corresponds to an increase in the positive valorization of cultural diversity, which can lead to essentialist positions. This risk is seen more frequently amongst parents.

## 2. Integration, cultural differences and intercultural

On a theoretical level, this paper aims to provide further reflections on the role that professionals engaged in the educational system and parents of children they deal with, have on children's integration processes. This is useful both to understand the perspectives of those who work with migrant children on a daily basis and can promote their well-being, and to understand how to improve communication among the several actors involved in the school system.

It has been underlined by Daher, Leonora and Gamuzza (2019), especially at a national level, that the official data on the population of students with a migration background included in the institutional educational system in Italy often does not investigate and provide empirical studies concerning the integration processes lived by children. Therefore, the complex role that professionals populating the school environment have on these processes is also rarely discussed.

A study conducted by Ricucci in 2010, on how students create their socio-integration, considered the socio-representations that teachers have of their students with a migration story as a complementary element of the experience of inclusion lived by students. Teachers' attitudes towards migrant students and the contemporary multicultural environment not only depends on the legal dispositions or the incidence percentage of students with a migration background, but it has been observed how

this is related to personal and professional habitus and the experiences that teachers have in dealing with diversity and intercultural influences (Colombo 2013).

On an international level, this topic is also discussed by Cardona et al. (2010) and Llurda & Lasagabaster (2010) for example reflect on how the strategies of inclusion and integration adopted by some teachers are not always driven by deliberately choices, but instead they seem to be linked to personal deep values or beliefs, or incidental factors related to specific circumstances. Moreover, the literature on this topic has usually developed mainly around multiculturalism and its effect on the school system (Banks and Banks 2010, Banks 2008; Race 2010), where multiculturalism concerns cultural diversity or differences which are culturally embedded (Race 2010: 2).

However, according to Holliday (2011), multiculturalism can be included within the neo-essentialist paradigm since its celebration of cultural diversity grounded on overgeneralizations which eliminate the complexity that people culturally experienced. As claimed by Baraldi (2015) while multiculturalism brings with it the idea of recognition of cultural diversity and rights for cultural groups who populate the Western society, it actually underscores Western values such as the value of individual rights. The risk for multiculturalism is that it might become a Western strategy to reaffirm its hegemony and this is an effect of its ethnocentric intercultural communication which cannot be ignored.

The concept of ethnocentrism is particularly relevant to define the conceptual domain which guides this study. According to Baraldi (2015: 57), in the history of human society, intercultural communication has developed on a system of communication characterized by being ethnocentric. This means that cultural difference usually has been interpreted as the difference between two cultural blocks (Amadasi and Holliday 2017) – Us and Them – and therefore a difference between two values – where Us has a positive connotation and Them a negative one (Baraldi 2015). A similar understanding of intercultural communication positions participants as members of pre-defined cultural groups with fixed cultural identities. These cultural groups thus bring specific assessments with them and particular expectations regarding their members' behaviour. Therefore, this ethnocentric construction of the cultural meanings of differences, enhanced an intercultural communication grounded on blocks and essentialist interpretations of cultures (Amadasi and Holliday 2017, 2018). According to Holliday (2011: 4) essentialism presents 'people's individual behavior as entirely defined and constrained by the cultures in which they live so that the stereotype becomes the essence of who they are'. Through essentialist discourses<sup>3</sup> the meaning of hierarchical differences is determined (Baraldi 2015) and reproduced. On a theoretical level, the CHILD-UP project proposes a non-essentialist framework, which starts from the assumption of culture as the process through which social actors co-construct

meanings, and thus dialogue as the place where negotiations concerning culture diversity and cultural identities take place.

Since ethnocentrism implies a negative treatment of cultural diversity, it has also generated the need for a positive and effective way of dealing with cultural differences in communication. Thus, ethnocentrism has promoted on one hand assimilation, and on the other the discursive production of multiculturalism as a reaction to the failure of assimilation (*Ibidem*).

The discursive construction of a society which aspires to homogeneity through the assimilation of diversity, proposes the hegemony of Western culture as a solution to the problem of diverse cultural identities (Holliday, 2011, 2018). Assimilation belongs to the model of acculturation strategies proposed by Berry (e.g. Berry, 1980). Bathia and Ram (2009), who criticize this established psychological framework, summarized Berry's concept of assimilation as the result of the individual decision not to maintain his or her cultural identity by totally diving into the culture of the dominant group. This implies that assimilation leads to progressive integration into a homogeneous society, thus eliminating the problem of cultural diversity. This type of discourse promotes a negative approach to cultural diversity and in the attempt to overcome it, it reinforces both ethnocentrism and the amplification of differences.

In recent years, as a result of global interdependencies, the concept of hybridity has attracted the interest of social scientists, becoming however an expression of different approaches to cultural diversity. Baraldi (2015 citing Pieterce 2004) speaks about hybridization, as a shift from the boundaries between cultural groups which creates a *mélange* of cultures in which it is no longer possible to distinguish the ethnocentric We-identities or the essentialist blocks Us and Them.

According to Holliday and Amadasi (2020), an essentialist approach to hybridity has produced a reading of it as an in-between space between homogenous cultures (Fairclough 2006: 25) which differs from a non-essentialist understanding promoted by authors such as Bhabha (1994) or Delanty (2006). The former affirms that hybridity is the nature of culture *per se* (Holliday and Amadasi 2020: 2 citing Bhabha 1994), while the latter relate hybridity to the nature of cosmopolitanism (Holliday and Amadasi 2020: 2 citing Delanty 2006).

By following this last group of studies, in this article, and within CHILD-UP project more generally,<sup>4</sup> the concept of hybridity has to be intended as the result of the interactions in which participants contingently negotiate identities, and participants are conceived as unique, specific and autonomous persons. Cultural blocks are therefore substituted by personal, contingent, fluid and always in transition identities.

Taking the communicative system into consideration (Baraldi 2015 citing Luhmann 1995) means keeping in mind that intercultural communication takes place within a structure (form of communication) that, on the one hand, constrains certain

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<sup>4</sup> See Baraldi's contribution in this special issue.

aspects (information, participants, expectations and consequences) and, on the other, is modified by the participants through use. Within single interactions, in fact, participants may have a space of autonomy to negotiate their own narratives and identity, contributing over time to modifying the very structures that constrain communication. Dialogue is a form of communication that is based on the promotion of active participation, equity of opportunity for participation, decentralization of point of view, empowerment of participants' expression, and the production of new narratives (Bohm 1996, Bush and Folger 2005, Winslade and Monk 2008). Thus, dialogue is a form of communication that does not rely on normative expectations of belonging and through which identity can always be negotiated through the manifestation of personal cultural trajectories (Holliday and Amadasi 2020). Therefore, dialogue provides space for all cultural differences and manages them, since these are seen as personal cultural trajectories capable of producing personalized hybrid identities.

### 3. Methodology

In Italy, 856 questionnaires were collected among students, 829 from parents and 203 among professionals. Professionals included 84 teachers or educators, 83 social workers, 36 mediators.

Among parents, 45.2% had a migration background.

Details concerning participant selections and objectives of the project can be found in the introductory paper to this special issue.<sup>5</sup>

The questionnaires were distributed in paper form and were completed in the presence of the researcher, with the only exception being parents and some teachers and mediators in Genova. The number of collected questionnaires corresponds to the number of those administered. However, parents also represent an exception here, since, in some classes, the researchers faced some difficulties in having the questionnaires completed by them. Nevertheless, the number of questionnaires collected from parents is very close to the number of children involved in the project, although some parents filled the questionnaires in additional classes, maintaining the same schools and age of children.

Respondents were reached with the help of teachers and principals in schools, agencies for mediation, local administrations and agencies for social workers.

For the distribution and collection within schools, we had several meetings to pitch the project to the principals or delegates. At a later time, we met the teachers indicated by the principals and interested in the project to explain the project in detail, to schedule the administration of questionnaires and to provide information

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<sup>5</sup> See the paper written by Claudio Baraldi in this special issue.

sheets, consent forms and questionnaires for parents, children and other teachers. Finally, we went to the classes to inform the children directly about the research and ask for their permission, to collect parents' permissions and questionnaires, and to administer questionnaires to the children.

To reach language and cultural mediators (equivalent to Public Service Interpreters in other European countries), we were supported by local agencies in the organisation of meetings to administer the questionnaire to them. We met the mediators, explained the project, and distributed information sheets, consent forms and questionnaires that they filled in the presence of the researcher.

Concerning social workers, we organised meetings with the local authorities to explain the project and to ask permission and get in contact with the social workers who work in the public service dealing with children with migrant background, refugees and unaccompanied minors, as well as agencies that manage communities for unaccompanied minors. In particular, we contacted the coordinators of the communities either in person or via email and we participated to coordination meetings in public services and communities to explain the project, distribute the information sheet, the consent form and to administer the questionnaire to the two types of social workers. In the following sections, these two types are presented together under the label "social workers".

In this paper, we choose to focus only on the data collected from parents and professionals, thus excluding the results from the questionnaires collected among children. This decision is guided by the fact that we want to draw on the significant ambivalence shown by parents and professionals towards the representations of hybridization, the celebration of cultural differences, and the understanding of problems related to intercultural differences and assimilation.

## ***Challenges***

The first challenge that researchers had to face was accessing schools in areas that were new to their research (e.g. Reggio Emilia) and where contacts with teachers had still to be created. Researchers received some rejections of collaboration, in particular from those schools involved in many other projects. Nevertheless, they managed to involve some schools, which were particularly interested in the project, extending the research to the northern part of the province, where many migrants live. The second difficulty, which we mentioned above, concerned the parents' questionnaire which in some classes was not returned by parents. This problem was resolved by distributing questionnaires in other classes of the same school and age. The third difficulty was that in three classes only a few children could complete the questionnaire because their parents did not return the signed consent form in time; therefore, we chose other three classes of the same school and age to complete the distribution.

## Options

To explore how the migration phenomenon impacts a school and its surrounding social environment, questionnaires delivered to professionals and parents included a specific section to investigate their representation of integration. This section aimed to give us an insight into the manner in which professionals and parents represent cultural differences, intercultural relations and integration.

Therefore, the following options were included in the questionnaire:

**1** = This country would be a better place, if members of different groups kept their own way of life alive (**positive cultural variety**).

**2** = People who come to this country, should change their way of life to be more like 'us'. (**assimilation to we-identity**).

**3** = If the members of different groups want to maintain their own culture, they should keep it to themselves, and not bother other people in this country (**assimilation as privatization of cultural difference**).

**4** = It would be good to see, if all the groups in this country retain their cultures. (**support of cultural difference**).

**5** = A society, which has a variety of groups, is more able to tackle new problems as they occur (**cultural variety as solution of problems**).

**6** = It is best for this country if all immigrants forget their cultural background as soon as possible (**negative representation of cultural difference**).

**7** = Mingling different cultures would be the best way of managing differences (**preference for cultural mélange**).

**8** = Cultural influences and personal expressions always mingle (**personal and cultural trajectories**).

**9** = Culture is not important to explain people's personal behaviour (**primacy of personal trajectories**).

**10** = Having many different cultural groups in this country makes it difficult to solve problems (**cultural difference as a problem**).

Options represent different aspects of the same factor: options 1, 4, 5 convey a celebration of cultural difference, while 2, 3, 6, 10 ethnocentrism; options 7, 8 represent hybridity; and 9 cultural irrelevance. Despite this, respondents often did not agree with the components of one factor by disagreeing with those of the others. As a result, this dynamic gave contradictions and thus a certain level of ambivalence. Moreover, as we mentioned above, some factors and options may convey ambiguous meanings. Cultural irrelevance (9) may represent the importance of personal trajectories but also the dismissal of the value of culture. The celebration of cultural difference, especially in options 1 and 4, may convey the importance of multiculturalism celebrating cultural differences or the idea of cultures as separated blocks and boundaries.



## 4. Professionals' representations of integration

Cultural representation of teachers mostly developed around two apparently ambivalent factors: hybridity and celebration of cultural difference. As shown in Table 1, the three options that received highest level of agreement are: (5) the fact that a variety of groups is more able to tackle new societal problems (56.4%; 38.5% agree), (7) mingling different cultures as the best way to manage differences (52.6%; 37.2% agree) and (8) cultural influences and personal expressions always mingle (45.3% + 41.3%). The strong agreement received by these three options shows that teachers both see hybridity as relevant, which means *mélange* and mixing personal expression and cultural influences (7 and 8), and that they observe it as compatible with an appreciation of cultural variety (5).

Even the fourth most agreed option, (4) It would be good to see, if all the groups in Italy retain their cultures (35.1% + 50.6%) presents a celebration of cultural difference, although in a more ambiguous way as it might indicate either positive variety or expression of cultural essentialism. Nevertheless, taken together with the other most frequently chosen answers, this mix of relevance given to *mélange* and cultural belonging seems coherent with teachers' hybrid attitude of *mélange* combined with a valorization of cultural variety as an enrichment.

This is also confirmed by the high disagreement for option (1) (Italy would be a better place, if members of different groups kept their own way of life alive) (84.8%), another possible ambiguous option, which can be interpreted as separation as well as a form of multiculturalism celebrating cultural differences, as well as for all those options evoking ethnocentrism and discrimination. Almost all teachers disagree with: (2) partial assimilation (people should change their way of life to be more like us) (76%); (6) total assimilation (it is best if all immigrants forget their cultural background as soon as possible) (97.5%); (3) negative assessment of public manifestation of cultural difference (if members should keep culture to themselves, and not bother other people) (85.9%); (10) difficulty to solve intercultural problems (having many different cultural groups makes it difficult to solve problems) (73%).

Cultural irrelevance is not chosen by teachers, as option 9 (culture is not important to explain people's personal behaviour) is disagreed with by 80.8% of teachers. This option can be interpreted in two different ways, i.e. either as giving value to culture or as dismissing the value of people. Considering the other choices, probably teachers interpreted it in the first way.

Table 1.1 shows teachers working in kindergarten having a more variegated point of view and more commitment with intercultural issues. This is shown by the fact that these teachers agree more frequently on assimilation (2), on negative assessment of public manifestation of cultural difference (3) and on cultural differences making solution of problems more difficult (10). Nevertheless, they agree much more frequently with celebration of cultural difference (4) (each group should retain the same culture),

Table 1

Ways of living together in society (teachers)

		Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
		n.	%	n.	%	n.	%	n.	%	n.	%
1.	Italy would be a better place, if members of different groups kept their own way of life alive.	5	7.6	5	7.6	28	<b>42.4</b>	28	<b>42.4</b>	66	100
2.	People who come to Italy, should change their way of life to be more like 'us'.	6	7.6	13	16.5	37	<b>46.8</b>	23	<b>29.1</b>	79	100
3.	If the members of different groups want to maintain their own culture, they should keep it to themselves, and not bother other people in this country.	6	7.7	5	6.4	27	<b>34.6</b>	40	<b>51.3</b>	78	100
4.	It would be good to see, if all the groups in Italy retain their cultures.	27	35.1	39	50.6	8	10.4	3	3.9	77	100
5.	A society, which has a variety of groups, is more able to tackle new problems as they occur.	44	<b>56.4</b>	30	38.5	3	3.8	1	1.3	78	100
6.	It is best for Italy if all immigrants forget their cultural background as soon as possible.	2	2,6	-	-	13	<b>16.7</b>	63	<b>80.8</b>	78	100
7.	Mingling different cultures would be the best way of managing differences.	41	<b>52.6</b>	29	37.2	7	9.0	1	1.3	78	100
8.	Cultural influences and personal expressions always mingle.	34	<b>45.3</b>	31	41.3	9	12.0	1	1.3	75	100
9.	Culture is not important to explain people's personal behaviour.	4	5.1	11	14.1	28	<b>35.9</b>	35	<b>44.9</b>	78	100
10.	Having many different cultural groups in [country] makes it difficult to solve problems.	7	9.0	14	17.9	26	<b>33.3</b>	31	<b>39.7</b>	78	100

Table 1.1

Types of school – ISCED 0, ISCED 1, ISCED 2, ISCED 3<sup>6</sup> (% only)

		Strongly agree				Agree			
		0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
1.	Italy would be a better place, if members of different groups kept their own way of life alive.	5.3	8.7	<b>12.0</b>	–	<b>52.6</b>	39.1	31.3	15.8
2.	People who come to Italy, should change their way of life to be more like ‘us’.	<b>15.8</b>	<b>13.0</b>	–	–	15.8	13.0	18.8	<b>42.1</b>
3.	If the members of different groups want to maintain their own culture, they should keep it to themselves, and not bother other people in this country.	<b>15.8</b>	<b>13.0</b>	–	–	5.3	13.0	6.3	–
4.	It would be good to see, if all the groups in Italy retain their cultures.	<b>52.6</b>	<b>47.8</b>	<b>26.7</b>	<b>10.5</b>	47.4	47.8	53.3	52.6
5.	A society, which has a variety of groups, is more able to tackle new problems as they occur.	<b>78.9</b>	43.5	<b>66.7</b>	42.1	21.1	47.8	33.3	47.4
6.	It is best for Italy if all immigrants forget their cultural background as soon as possible.	–	<b>8.7</b>	–	–	–	–	–	–
7.	Mingling different cultures would be the best way of managing differences.	57.9	52.2	68.8	<b>33.3</b>	31.6	30.4	25.0	<b>61.1</b>
8.	Cultural influences and personal expressions always mingle.	<b>70.6</b>	18.2	<b>60.0</b>	36.8	23.5	54.5	40.0	47.4
9.	Culture is not important to explain people’s personal behaviour.	<b>21.1</b>	–	–	–	–	17.4	12.5	22.2
10.	Having many different cultural groups in [country] makes it difficult to solve problems.	<b>26.3</b>	–	–	5.3	<b>31.6</b>	8.7	20.0	15.8

<sup>6</sup> ISCED stands for International Standard Classification of Education. For further information <http://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/international-standard-classification-education-isced>.

(5) (coexistence of different groups is a good way of dealing with problems), hybridity (8) (cultural and personal characters mix), and cultural irrelevance (9) (culture is not relevant to explain individual behaviours). They also very frequently agree with the idea of mixing cultures (7), together with teachers working in lower secondary school. It is interesting to highlight that strong agreement with almost all aspects is more frequent for those in infant school, while it is less frequent in higher secondary school. This result displays that commitment with intercultural issues, expressed in different ways, is stronger in infant school and lower in higher secondary school.

In terms of social workers, their answers are similar to those of teachers in many aspects, even if with a slightly higher level of ambiguity. In fact, also for social workers appreciation of cultural variety and hybridity, that is *mélange* and mixing personal expression and cultural influences, are relevant and interconnected. Therefore, as shown in Table 2, they strongly agree that a society which has a variety of groups is more able to tackle new problems (5) (46.3% + 42.7%), that mingling different cultures is the best way of managing differences (7) (48.7% + 39.7%) and that cultural influences and personal expressions mingle (8) (45.7% + 44.4%).

As was the case with teachers, the fourth most agreed option is more ambiguous (4) (It would be good to see, if all the groups retain their cultures; 32.5% + 47.5%), representing a possible expression of positive variety or importance of cultural essentialism.

Disagreement is high for options evoking ethnocentrism and discrimination. However, the percentage of social workers who disagree is lower than that of teachers for relative assimilation (2) (people should change their way of life to be more like us; 68.8%) and negative assessment of public manifestation of cultural difference (3) (79.8%). Disagreement is almost generalized for total assimilation (6) (all immigrants should forget their cultural background; 97.6%).

Moreover, unlike teachers, half of social workers (50%) think it would be better if members of different groups kept their own way of life alive (1), another possible ambiguous option, which can be interpreted as separation as well as a form of multiculturalism celebrating cultural differences.

Two further choices that may underpin a more ethnocentric perspective deserve a comment here. The irrelevance of cultures to explain people's personal behaviour (9) is disagreed with by 88.9% of social workers and the difficulty of solving intercultural problems (10) is agreed with by 40.8% of social workers, both higher percentages than those collected among teachers.

Table 2.1 shows how females agree and/or strongly agree more than males on ambivalent options such as option 1, members of different groups should keep their own way of life alive (strongly agree + agree: 60% vs. 39.4%) and option 4, it would be good if all the groups retain their cultures (strongly agree: 41% vs. 25.6%). The interpretation of these options as a positive celebration of cultural difference instead of separation and boundaries is supported by the fact that almost all respondents for whom culture is not important to explain personal behaviour (9) are women. On the contrary, ethnocentric

Table 2

Ways of living together in society (social workers)

		Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total disagree	
		n.	%	n.	%	n.	%	n.	%	n.	%
1.	Italy would be a better place, if members of different groups kept their own way of life alive.	10	12.5	30	<b>37.5</b>	31	<b>38.8</b>	9	11.3	80	100
2.	People who come to Italy, should change their way of life to be more like 'us'.	2	2.5	23	28.8	33	<b>41.3</b>	22	<b>27.5</b>	80	100
3.	If the members of different groups want to maintain their own culture, they should keep it to themselves, and not bother other people in this country.	2	2.5	14	17.7	30	<b>38.0</b>	33	<b>41.8</b>	79	100
4.	It would be good to see, if all the groups in Italy retain their cultures.	26	<b>32.5</b>	38	<b>47.5</b>	14	17.5	2	2.5	80	100
5.	A society, which has a variety of groups, is more able to tackle new problems as they occur.	38	<b>46.3</b>	35	<b>42.7</b>	8	9.8	1	1.2	82	100
6.	It is best for Italy if all immigrants forget their cultural background as soon as possible.	1	1.3	1	1.3	15	<b>18.8</b>	63	<b>78.8</b>	80	100
7.	Mingling different cultures would be the best way of managing differences.	38	<b>48.7</b>	31	<b>39.7</b>	5	6.4	4	5.1	78	100
8.	Cultural influences and personal expressions always mingle.	37	<b>45.7</b>	36	<b>44.4</b>	7	8.6	1	1.2	81	100
9.	Culture is not important to explain people's personal behaviour.	3	3.7	6	7.4	21	<b>25.9</b>	51	<b>63.0</b>	81	100
10.	Having many different cultural groups in [country] makes it difficult to solve problems.	8	9.9	25	<b>30.9</b>	31	<b>38.3</b>	17	21.0	81	100

Table 2.1

Gender differences (relevant options)

		Strongly agree				Agree			
		Females		Males		Females		Males	
		n.	%	n.	%	n.	%	n.	%
1.	Italy would be a better place, if members of different groups kept their own way of life alive.	5	<b>12.5</b>	4	10.5	19	<b>47.5</b>	11	28.9
2.	People who come to Italy, should change their way of life to be more like 'us'.	1	2.5	1	2.6	5	12.5	17	<b>43.6</b>
3.	If the members of different groups want to maintain their own culture, they should keep it to themselves, and not bother other people in this country.	1	2.6	1	2.6	4	<b>10.5</b>	8	<b>20.5</b>
4.	It would be good to see, if all the groups in Italy retain their cultures.	16	<b>41.0</b>	10	25.6	15	38.5	22	56.4
5.	It is best for Italy if all immigrants forget their cultural background as soon as possible.	–	–	1	<b>2.6</b>	–	–	1	<b>2.6</b>
6.	Culture is not important to explain people's personal behaviour.	3	<b>7.5</b>	–	–	3	<b>7.5</b>	2	5.0
7.	Having many different cultural groups in Italy makes it difficult to solve problems.	4	10.0	4	10.0	9	22.5	16	<b>40.0</b>

options are more frequently chosen by men: the two respondents who thought that if the members of different groups want to maintain their own culture, they should keep it to themselves (3), are males; 50% of males (vs. 32,5% of females) agree that many different cultural groups make it difficult to solve problems (10).

In Table 3 it can be seen how the majority of mediators only strongly agree with the fact that a society, which has a variety of groups is more able to tackle new problems (5) (53.8% + 34.6%). This strong appreciation of cultural difference partially combines with the value of hybridity: mingling different cultures as the best way of managing differences (7) (32.1% + 60.7%) and mingling cultural influences and personal expressions (8) (32.1% + 35.7%). However, these two choices are much less widespread than among teachers and social workers. Therefore, cultural variety here represents the most important choice. This is confirmed by agreement with separation (1) (members of different groups should keep their own way of life alive; 18.5% + 40.7%) and celebration of different cultures (4) (It would be good to see, if all the groups in Italy retain their cultures; 36.0% + 44.0%). This shows that multiculturalism may be an important option for mediators. Something which is confirmed by disagreement for absence of relevance of culture in explaining individual behaviours

Table 3

Ways of living together in society (mediators)

		Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
		n.	%	n.	%	n.	%	n.	%	n.	%
1.	Italy would be a better place, if members of different groups kept their own way of life alive.	5	<b>18.5</b>	11	<b>40.7</b>	8	29.6	3	11,1	27	100
2.	People who come to Italy, should change their way of life to be more like 'us'.	2	7.1	4	14.3	11	<b>39.3</b>	11	<b>39.3</b>	28	100
3.	If the members of different groups want to maintain their own culture, they should keep it to themselves, and not bother other people in this country.	4	14.3	4	14.3	6	<b>21.4</b>	14	<b>50.0</b>	28	100
4.	It would be good to see, if all the groups in Italy retain their cultures.	9	<b>36.0</b>	11	<b>44.0</b>	2	8.0	3	12.0	25	100
5.	A society, which has a variety of groups, is more able to tackle new problems as they occur.	14	<b>53.8</b>	9	<b>34.6</b>	3	11.5	–	–	26	100
6.	It is best for Italy if all immigrants forget their cultural background as soon as possible.	0	–	2	6.7	5	<b>16.7</b>	23	<b>76.7</b>	30	100
7.	Mingling different cultures would be the best way of managing differences.	9	<b>32.1</b>	17	<b>60.7</b>	1	3.6	1	3.6	28	100
8.	Cultural influences and personal expressions always mingle.	9	<b>32.1</b>	10	<b>35.7</b>	7	25.0	2	7.1	28	100
9.	Culture is not important to explain people's personal behaviour.	–	–	12	<b>41.4</b>	8	<b>27.6</b>	9	<b>31.0</b>	29	100
10.	Having many different cultural groups in Italy makes it difficult to solve problems.	1	3.3	4	13.3	14	<b>46.7</b>	11	<b>36.7</b>	30	100

(9). On the other hand, disagreement is very high for ethnocentric aspects as manifestations of assimilation (2) and the idea that cultural difference creates problems (10).

The higher interest of mediators in cultural differences and their weak interest in *mélange* compared to teachers and social workers might stem from their origins and/or on their type of work. Certainly, this attitude can create a different cultural background for collaboration between different professionals.

## 5. Parents' representations of integration

According to Table 4, parents agree that it would be good if different cultural groups retain their cultures (4) (42% + 34.3%). They also agree that a society in which different groups coexist is more effective in dealing with emerging problems (5) (32.4% + 40.7). This strong preference reveals a form of essentialism because valorization of diversity is mixed with belief in culture boundaries. Finally, they agree that cultural influences and personal expressions always mingle (8) (30.6% + 42.7%) and that mingling different cultures as an effective way to manage differences (7) (38.8% + 38.5%). Therefore, parent's choices support both cultural variety and *mélange*, as a source of richness for society.

Coherently, half of parents (54.6%) agree with cultural relevance (9) and the majority of them (59,3%) disagree that different cultural groups make problem solutions harder (10). Finally, the vast majority of parents (84.3%) do not agree that it would be better if migrants quickly forget their cultural past (6).

Although parents share the rejection of assimilation and ethnocentrism with professionals, their position on cultural essentialism is stronger and their observation of *mélange* is weaker.

Table 4.1 shows how migrant parents strongly agree with different and controversial positions, such as keeping their own way of life alive (1) (38.2% vs. 12.4% of native parents), changing to be more like natives (2) (33.6% vs. 21.5%), keeping culture to themselves (3) (47% vs. 29.6%), retaining cultures (4) (48.5% vs. 36.5%), forgetting cultural background (6) (11.2% vs. 5.7%), mingling cultures (7) (46% vs. 33.3%), and irrelevance of culture to explain personal behaviours (9) (33.4% vs. 18.5%). Native parents disagree more frequently with keeping groups' way of life alive (1) (65.7% vs. 34.5%). Also the irrelevance of culture to explain personal behaviours (9) (64.3% vs. 42.2%) and keeping culture to oneself (3) (44% vs. 29.2%) met with weak agreement among native parents compared to migrant ones.

This data shows that both native parents and migrant parents are divided. Migrant parents strongly agree more frequently with both retaining and mingling culture, but also with keeping culture to themselves. Native parents agree less frequently with almost everything and they strongly disagree more frequently with keeping culture alive and on the irrelevance of culture.



Table 4

Ways of living together in society (parents)

		Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
		n.	%	n.	%	n.	%	n.	%	n.	%
1.	Italy would be a better place, if members of different groups kept their own way of life alive.	176	24.1	179	24.5	174	<b>23.8</b>	202	<b>27.6</b>	731	100
2.	People who come to Italy, should change their way of life to be more like 'us'.	205	27.0	280	36.9	137	18.1	136	17.9	758	100
3.	If the members of different groups want to maintain their own culture, they should keep it to themselves, and not bother other people in this country.	282	<b>37.3</b>	191	25.3	133	17.6	150	19.8	756	100
4.	It would be good to see, if all the groups in Italy retain their cultures.	318	<b>42.0</b>	260	34.3	105	13.9	75	9.9	758	100
5.	A society, which has a variety of groups, is more able to tackle new problems as they occur.	236	32.4	296	40.7	121	16.6	75	10.3	728	100
6.	It is best for Italy if all immigrants forget their cultural background as soon as possible.	63	8.4	55	7.3	172	<b>22.9</b>	462	<b>61.4</b>	752	100
7.	Mingling different cultures would be the best way of managing differences.	294	<b>38.8</b>	292	38.5	100	13.2	72	9.5	758	100
8.	Cultural influences and personal expressions always mingle.	226	30.6	315	42.7	129	17.5	68	9.2	738	100
9.	Culture is not important to explain people's personal behaviour.	185	25.2	149	20.3	171	<b>23.3</b>	230	<b>31.3</b>	735	100
10.	Having many different cultural groups in [country] makes it difficult to solve problems.	128	17.2	175	23.5	189	<b>25.3</b>	254	<b>34.0</b>	746	100

Table 4.1

Migrant parents (% only)

		Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree	
		N	M	N	M	N	M
		%	%	%	%	%	%
1.	Italy would be a better place, if members of different groups kept their own way of life alive.	12.4	<b>38.2</b>	21.9	27.4	<b>65.7</b>	34.5
2.	People who come to Italy, should change their way of life to be more like 'us'.	21.5	<b>33.6</b>	39.5	33.9	<b>39.0</b>	32.5
3.	If the members of different groups want to maintain their own culture, they should keep it to themselves, and not bother other people in this country.	29.6	<b>47.0</b>	26.4	23.8	<b>44.0</b>	29.2
4.	It would be good to see, if all the groups in Italy retain their cultures.	36.5	<b>48.5</b>	37.9	30.2	<b>25.7</b>	21.3
5.	A society, which has a variety of groups, is more able to tackle new problems as they occur.	30.5	<b>34.8</b>	39.7	42.2	<b>29.8</b>	23.0
6.	It is best for Italy if all immigrants forget their cultural background as soon as possible.	5.7	<b>11.2</b>	7.7	7.0	<b>86.6</b>	81.9
7.	Mingling different cultures would be the best way of managing differences.	33.3	<b>46.0</b>	41.9	34.5	<b>24.8</b>	19.5
8.	Cultural influences and personal expressions always mingle.	29.4	32.5	45.4	38.7	25.2	28.8
9.	Culture is not important to explain people's personal behaviour.	18.5	<b>33.4</b>	17.2	24.4	<b>64.3</b>	42.2
10.	Having many different cultural groups in Italy makes it difficult to solve problems.	16.0	18.5	25.4	20.6	58.6	60.9

## 6. Conclusions

In this article we have presented quantitative data collected in Italy for the CHILD-UP project, focusing on the specific topic of the analysis of the questionnaires collected within schools: the perceptions of professionals and parents on the issues of integration, cultural differences and the intercultural. We have focused on data collected from professionals and parents, and this has highlighted some interesting elements.

The first is that both professionals and parents show disagreement with options that indicate an ethnocentric attitude toward cultural diversity. This shows signals of an important shift from an ethnocentric understanding of cultural diversity.

This is linked to the second result shown by these questionnaires, which is an emerging greater weight given to hybridization and a positive valorization of cultural diversity. Although these elements are consistent with the aim of the project, it is important to avoid a reading of the valorization of cultural identity from a multicultural perspective, as a reification of differences which creates bounded cultural blocks.

Against this background, it is also worth noting that the weight of hybridization decreases with an increase in the positive valorization of cultural diversity, thus showing the risk of essentialist positions. Teachers are less involved in this dynamic, while among mediators and social workers this tendency toward an essentialist understanding of cultural diversity is more evident. However, it is among parents that these essentialist positions acquire the highest agreement.

This might indicate that the treatment of cultural diversity among teachers has already been realized on an interactional level, therefore creating spaces of dialogue where personal and cultural trajectories are creatively elaborated generating forms of hybrid integration. This might not be the case among parents, where different professional and personal backgrounds probably generated less frequent conditions of cultural encounters and negotiations.

Therefore, the data shows how participants often express ambivalence concerning representations of hybridization, positive valorization of cultural differences, understanding of problems related to intercultural differences and assimilation. Also, it shows that communication among professionals working in schools and between those professionals and parents of students can sometimes be made difficult by the differences existing in the representation of these issues.

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