# The cohesion of schools as intercultural communities in the management of COVID-19 pandemic.
# Reflections, narratives, fears and hopes from the voices of teachers and children in England and Italy.

Academic workshop
Dialogue with and among the existing, transforming and emerging communities
Journal of Dialogue Studies/Dialogue Society
London, 16 June 2021

Federico Farini,
*University of Northampton*

Claudio Baraldi,
*Università di Modena e Reggio Emilia*

Angela Scollan,
*Middlesex University*

# Context of the Research

Horizon 2020 Project

25 qualitative interviews with teachers

25 focus groups with children

in Italian and English primary and secondary schools

# Context of the Research

The consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and its management became a previously unforeseen topic of discussion during the interviews

# This presentation

engages with the voices of children and teachers presenting how the management of the pandemic:

- impacted on children's learning experience
- affected the networks of social relationships and intercultural dialogue that have the classroom as their substratum

…as both countries were facing a dilemma whether to keep schools open to secure minimal conditions of socialisation for children or closing schools to prioritise the containment of the pandemic

**Focus on emerging commonalities between the two contexts**

# Background

Classroom

- community of dialogic practices

- social space for the construction and negotiation of personal and cultural identities (Baraldi et al., 2018)

- conditions of superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007)

- crucial context for integration of children with migrant background


for the first time since WWII, children across Europe have been removed from their primary contexts of socialisation (lockdowns)

# Teachers' voices

# Theme 1:

impact on children's learning experience

# children's needs, aspirations and expectations

- home schooling generated new and unforeseen needs

- consequences of the pandemic associated to the socio-economic status of the family

- less affluent families more affected, doubling inequalities

*Not all children have the same pace and can enjoy the same support, this is so true these times where what they can do at home really depends on how much parents can help them whilst working from home themselves or even worse when parents are still working outside*

*This year the needs concern the possibility to transitioning to learning from home in a positive environment which is connected to quality of accommodation and resources and time that the parents can give them*

# children's participation and performance

- the pandemic may affect migrant children's participation and academic performances

- Quality of learning spaces at home

*The differences are connected to variables that no one could consider, e.g., access to devices, for instance families with 3 or 4 children of different ages, it is harder to look after them educationally. Is this more true for migrant families? It may be but although not exclusively true, the correlation is not with ethnicity but with the quality of spaces*

*Apart from language integration what I have noticed is that the quality of the living arrangements at home has come to make a difference which was not considered before. If there are many generations, individuals in the house at once and many agendas and needs crammed in the space for learning is reduced*

# Theme 2:

Effect on the networks of social relationships and intercultural dialogue

# peer-relationships

**The pandemic also affects peer-relationships**

- **negative consequences of prolonged periods of separation.**

- **optimism in the ability of children to reconstruct their networks of relationships**

*Of course, not being together for a long time does not help, does not help children's relationships and does not help our job*

*Network is a net a safety net of protection and trust which has been weakened this year and I think will need to be rebuilt*

*It is not possible to think about relationships without thinking about the situation this year we're living so we er we need to see how it pans out but with lots of faith in children's resilience*

# partnership with families

- **The pandemic hindered family-school partnership**
- **Affecting families with a migrant background more**

*As I have said many times, partnership with families is everything for the success of education, this has been made less diluted by the pandemic, closure and social distancing*

*It is always possible to have a few words when children are picked up, not much but it is important to give the idea of a continuing attention; this has been more difficult if not impossible for many months. So, maybe this was worse for those family coming from abroad without the support of grandparents who cannot attend parents' evening because they work or have other children to look after so it was a good change to have a chat as they were picking up children*

# children's voices

# Theme 1:

impact on children's learning experience

# children's participation

## Online home schooling

### Loss of autonomy

*The fact that some children are not able to access the computer and need the help of a parent is a mess*

*I didn't like to do the lessons online either because I was annoyed when my parents weren't home and the connection was down and I didn't know what to do*

### but for some participants, more responsibilities/empowerment

*In my opinion the biggest difference between the digital school and the school in presence is that the digital school, in my opinion, makes you grow, for example it makes you mature on certain things, for example on certain lessons that in class the teachers see if you follow, at home you can still escape through methods and relax or you can still have a growth of maturity to understand when you can do something or not*

*Int: so you're saying you're more empowered because it's up to you to decide if you're paying attention or not ?*

*Yes*

*Int: you can get out of control somehow so if you're paying attention it's because you know it's important to pay attention?*

*Yes, understand when you have to pay attention and when maybe you can relax a little bit*

*Int: so in your opinion even regular school should give you that option?*

*M: Let's say yes, leaving you more free*

# children's participation and performance

**Socially distanced schooling**

**difficulties related to new unsettling spatial arrangements**

**negative impact of social distancing rules in schools**

*Having the desks spaced out gives me a little more anxiety because during the lesson maybe you can talk less with your classmates and maybe you have less fun too*

*Because we are in a covid period they can't even meet the kids from the other classes*

*Int: Does the fact that you can't touch people bother you?*

*Yes it bothers me*

*I also miss physical contact a little bit*

*if we want to see each other we can still we don't have to hug*

# Theme 2:

effect on the networks of social relationships and intercultural dialogue

# peer-relationships

Online home schooling

Ambivalent position

- Breaking up network of relationships

- More conflicts

*It was bad because I didn't talk to anyone, that is, only with my family, but it's bad to be separated from your friends*

*It was bad to be away from your classmates because at home you don't do anything while at school you have fun with your classmates*

*When we were in distance learning we argued more often because there was no face-to-face dialogue, for everything, questions, homework, but also for our own behaviours*

## peer-relationships

**But for some participants**

**- bonds reinforced**

**- Creative use of social media and technology (videocalls, texts) also during online teaching to 'mimic' the classroom environment**

*After quarantine it was a closer bond because I could finally see my friends again.*

*I didn't like this situation of the Covid at all, for example when we did the didactics at a distance, but I think that thanks to the distance learning we had much more desire to see each other and when we returned to school we were closer*

*Int: what would have been different if there had been no Covid?*

*the relationships between people, so even friends etc. would have been different, then in the first quarantine I understood many things about relationships, that is, I understood the real relationships, the people who were there and the people who didn't care*

# peer-relationships

**Socially distanced schooling**

**Negative impact of public health measures on social relationships**

*So, the school as I see it, with Covid, is really sadder, there is a lack of contact with people, that is, you are always spaced out and closed on a desk, and I can't think of many positive aspects […] it's a bit sad and that's it*

*It wasn't nice because you couldn't get close, for example, we can go at the blackboard to write an operation only if we have our own chalk, we have to sanitize ourselves well it's not nice to be at a distance*

# conclusion

- Public health measures to contain the COVID-19 pandemic have affected the  quality of children's  learning experience

- Access to the classroom as  a space of socialisation and intercultural dialogue has been limited

- Families' socio-economic status may exacerbate the effects of the pandemic, and this appears to affect children with migrant background more

- Children display high degree of resilience, and home schooling seems to affect their well-being less than socially distanced schooling

# Thank you, grazie!

Federico Farini,
*federico.farini@northampton.ac.uk*

Claudio Baraldi,
*claudio.baraldi@unimore.it*

Angela Scollan,
*a.scollan@mdx.ac.uk*